OTAGO.

Sir,—   Education Office, Dunedin, 31st March, 1898.

We have the honour to submit the following general report for the year 1897.

Most of the schools were inspected and all were examined. The standard results of the examination are summarised in the following table :—

Classes.	Presented.	Examined in Standards.	Passed.	Average Age.
				Yrs. mos.
Above Standard VI.	651	...	...	...
Standard VI.	1,562	1,535	1,398	13 10
„ V.	2,269	2,204	1,813	12 10
„ IV.	2,796	2,710	2,157	12 0
„ III.	2,884	2,829	2,477	11 2
„ II.	2,705	2,654	2,567	9 9
„ I.	2,543	2,508	2,474	8 8
Preparatory	6,550	...	...	...
Totals	21,960	14,440	12,886	11 4½*

* Mean of average age.

This table is given for what it is worth. It brings together the statistics given for the several schools in the department's Form 22, and is of value only as showing the proportion of children considered as fit to pass to the next higher standard. It gives results to which we attach little importance, but from which, unfortunately, the public judge the efficiency of the schools. With them the percentage of standard passes is everything, with us it is of little significance. We seldom think of it when reporting on the efficiency of the teaching as disclosed by examination. Our estimate of the condition of a school is based upon efficiency in subjects, not upon standard passes. One teacher may "pass" all his pupils and get but a fair report, while another may have 10 or 15 per cent. of failures and get a good one. Committees and the general public, however, appraise the work of the former as superior to that of the latter. They judge efficiency from the point of view of standard passes ; we judge it from the point of view of marks won out of the maximum assigned.

Every well-taught school gains a high standard pass ; but not every school that gains a high standard pass is a well-taught school. A few examples will suffice to make this clear. If a pupil reads the sight-test well he gets 3 marks ; if he reads it fairly he gets 2 ; if he fails in this test, but passes in the class reading-book, he gets 1, and is credited with a "pass" in reading. The difference in the quality of the passes earned under these conditions is obviously very great. A comparison of hypothetical cases will serve for further illustration. Suppose two classes, A and B, each of twenty pupils :—

READING.

Class A.				*Class B.*		
10 pupils gain 3 marks	=	30		4 pupils gain 3 marks	=	12
5 „ 2 „	=	10		6 „ 2 „	=	12
3 „ 1 mark	=	3		10 „ 1 mark	=	10
2 „ 0 „	=	0				—
		—		Total marks gained	=	34
Total marks gained	=	43		Total marks attainable	=	60
Total marks attainable	=	60		Efficiency mark = $\frac{34}{60}$ = 57 p.c. = fair.		

Efficiency mark = $\frac{43}{60}$ = 72 p.c. = good.

In A 10 per cent. of the pupils fail ; in B all pass ; the former earn the mark "Good," and the latter the mark "Fair." These marks would be reversed by Committees and the public if not by members of the Board.

In spelling all pupils having not more than three errors in the text (about six lines and six selected words taken from the class reading-book) are awarded a pass in the standard. We desire to call particular attention to the number of errors allowed, for it is sometimes represented that a child failed because he had spelt a certain word incorrectly. Such a result is impossible : there must be at least four errors to cause failure.

SPELLING.

Class A.				*Class B.*		
10 pupils with 0 error	=	0		2 pupils with 0 error	=	0
4 „ 1 „	=	4		3 „ 1 „	=	3
2 „ 2 errors	=	4		7 „ 2 errors	=	14
2 „ 3 „	=	6		8 „ 3 „	=	24
2 „ 4 „	=	8				—
		—		Total errors	=	41
Total errors	=	22		Mean errors per pupil = $\frac{41}{20}$ = $2\frac{1}{20}$ = fair.		

Mean errors per pupil = $\frac{22}{20}$ = $1\frac{1}{10}$ = good.

That is to say, the spelling of the class in which two pupils fail is nearly 100 per cent. better than that in which all pass the standard test.