

A marked reduction is to be noted in the average age at which Standard VI. was passed. In this class the younger pupils have evidently passed more readily than their older class-mates, a fact which speaks well for their preparation in the lower standards. In Standard IV. the average age of passing is two months lower, while in Standard II. this age has gone up one month. In the other standard classes there is no change.

The percentage of pupils passed in Standards I. and II. by head teachers is slightly below that for last year. In nearly every case these passes have been determined with satisfactory care.

The pupils in preparatory classes who were over eight years of age and were not presented for Standard I. numbered 2,115, a total still higher than might be expected. The main reasons given for the backwardness of these older primer pupils are lateness in entering as pupils, and dullness. The latter reason figures very prominently in the statements submitted in some of the larger schools.

In view of the radical changes made by the new standard regulations, I have not thought it necessary to compile a statement of the passes in the several pass subjects of the various standards.

The past year has been singularly unfavourable to efficient work in the public schools of this district, and indeed of the whole colony. A succession of epidemics—now measles, now whooping cough, now influenza—swept over nearly the whole of the district, and caused an amount of broken and irregular attendance that has greatly retarded progress, and aggravated the difficulties that teachers have to battle with. I need not dwell on this unfortunate experience, as the Board has had its effects brought forcibly under its notice by reason of its grave consequences from a financial point of view. After making allowance for the unusually unfavourable conditions of the year, and the fact that great numbers of pupils underwent the ordeal of examination when they were more fit for the nursery than the schoolroom, the results of the year's work are quite as encouraging as they have been in recent years, and indeed they are better than I had looked for.

The examination of eleven schools in the Raglan district was altered from early spring to the end of autumn, that being a much more favourable season for this event. The pupils of these schools had only about six months' instruction in the programme of examination for the year, and naturally only a small proportion managed to pass. I should like to see the dates of examination in a large part of the northern peninsula changed from the wet spring season to the drier time that we experience in the autumn and early winter, but as yet I have not been able to arrange for it. In many rural districts I recognise it as a great disadvantage that school examinations should take place during or soon after a protracted spell of wet weather, with its accompaniments of almost impassable roads and very broken attendance.

As the past year proves to be the last of the old educational *régime*, I may take a cursory glance at its merits and defects. The standard-pass system as heretofore organized certainly secured a very considerable measure of accuracy and thoroughness of instruction all round. It encouraged teachers to do their best to advance the duller scholars, and kept up a very fair average of attainments throughout every class of every school. These are all good ends in their way. The system had, however, grave inherent defects. It tended to foster a mechanical spirit in the teaching, by making teachers and pupils think more of passing an examination, of attaining a medium average of proficiency, than of the mental training and discipline to be gained by the teaching processes applied. It tended to concentrate effort and attention in the backward or irregular pupils, to the comparative neglect of the brighter spirits, whose training might easily have reached a higher pitch under more genial conditions. It also created a period of forced study, of stress and strain, during the few months preceding the examinations, that was at once hurtful to true education, and undoubtedly lent colour to the outcry against "cram." To pupils the system was in some respects unfair, for it gave an importance and finality to a single examination that could not be warranted, and above all created a grossly exaggerated distinction between the merits of pupils who passed and those who failed. For it should be clearly understood that the great majority of those who failed at the standard examinations were not greatly inferior in attainments to many of those who passed. I am glad that the standard-pass system has now been so greatly curtailed, and may take to myself some credit for having been the first to advocate this change. When the Hon. T. W. Hislop was Minister of Education I brought the objections to the standard-pass system under his notice as forcibly as I could, and at the first conference of Inspectors I took ineffective action in the direction of a change. In recent years I said little on the subject because I felt it to be discourteous for Inspectors to be continually opposing the settled, though (as I believed) the mistaken, policy of the Education Department. The battle had to be fought out by others, whose action was less open to misunderstanding.

Time and experience will tell how far the new arrangements are suitable, and likely to foster a true spirit of education in the public schools. Their success will depend more than ever on the ability, skill, and fidelity of head teachers, and I trust they will as a body rise to the height of their enhanced responsibilities. It is, however, clear that the evils of the old standard-pass system have not been removed, they have only been mitigated. So long as the passing of the standards depended on an Inspector's examination, it had to depend on the application of a single test with all its uncertain issues, for he could not possibly examine each school two or three times a year. But as soon as the determination of passes in Standards I. to V. is intrusted to head teachers, there is no longer any reason why the passing of these standards should depend on the issue of a single examination. It would surely have been wiser to make all promotions depend on the results of a series of periodical—say, quarterly—examinations. This course would get rid of all the objectionable features of the old standard-pass system. The element of accident or chance would be eliminated as far as practicable, the period of stress and strain and the encouragement to cramming would be removed, and both pupils and teachers would be encouraged to show equal