

In the second group, consisting of twenty-seven schools, fourteen passed all the scholars presented, three others were good, three were fair, two were poor, and five were bad. It must be remembered, however, that these figures refer solely to the pass subjects, and do not in all cases give a fair idea of the relative or absolute efficiency of the schools; for, besides the class and additional subjects (which are referred to below), there are more important though far less obvious factors which have to be taken into account in estimating the true value of the teaching and training received by the scholars who are attending our primary schools. In after years much of the mere book-learning will be forgotten, and whether the scholar has passed through the Standard "mill" in six or eight years will have very little effect upon his moral or material welfare; and I am disposed to regard with much leniency the literary failures in a school if it show evidence of good training and influence in many directions not specified (or, indeed, capable of specification) in the syllabus, but which are sometimes collectively alluded to as the "tone" of the school. This does not necessarily consist with severity of discipline; on the contrary, an apparent lax discipline sometimes conceals an influence far more powerful for good than that of the sternest and strictest disciplinarian; and when this is the case the apparent laxity disappears at the slightest word or even look of the teacher. And, after all, what does this so-called failure really mean? This merely: that on one day in the year a scholar has not answered correctly three out of five questions in two subjects, upon each of which perhaps fifty questions could be put, all within the limit prescribed by the syllabus. He might have been able to answer many of the forty questions that were not put to him, but that cannot avail him, and he must submit to an implied reproof of which he may be most undeserving. On the other hand, Fortune, who has frowned upon him, may favour a (comparative) dunce by suiting three out of the five questions to his more limited acquirements. It is a common experience at most schools for teachers to tell me that A and B, who have passed, are far inferior scholars to C and D, who have failed.

In fact, the whole system of passing by standards as formerly understood and practised is obnoxious to the principles of true education, and as a test of the efficiency of the teaching, most delusive. Notwithstanding all that has been said and written about the futility of a judgment based upon the percentage of passes, the opinion still largely prevails amongst the general public that the gaining of a large percentage is a reliable criterion of the merits of teachers. An influential northern paper published a leading article criticising the last report of the Inspector for that district, in which this passage occurred: "Of the total number of children examined, 86 per cent. passed. No doubt, from the teacher's point of view, this is gratifying enough. But it is, in reality, the least pleasing feature of our education system. It means that our public schools are becoming mere cramming institutions, and that a sound and solid education is being sacrificed for the sake of rushing the pupils through cursory and superficial examinations, and obtaining the largest number of passes. Such a system must of necessity be inimical to all real education." And further on: "In almost every branch of instruction he (the Inspector) complains of want of thoroughness and of clear comprehension. What other results can be possible when the clear object of the majority of teachers is not to ground the children in a sound knowledge of the subjects taught, but merely to cram them enough to pass the kind of examination they know by experience and an acquaintance with inspectorial methods they will have to undergo?" Although there is doubtless much exaggeration of the evil referred to in the article quoted, yet assuming the writer to be in touch with the opinions of his readers, and consequently to voice their sentiments, it is evident that in the northern part of the colony the public mind is awakening, though somewhat late in the day, to the demerits of the system, and is endeavouring to escape from the thralldom of the percentage craze. Probably the same feeling prevails more or less generally throughout the colony. For these and other reasons I view with much hopeful anticipation such of the recent alterations in the regulations for the inspection and examination of schools as will enable the teacher to give some consideration to the natural capabilities and requirements of his various scholars, and to classify them in accordance therewith. How far the welfare of the scholars and the comfort of the teachers will be promoted by the other important alteration—i.e., the examination of their own scholars by the teachers—time alone will show. The latter change is not generally regarded by the teachers of this district as a welcome one, especially by those in charge of the smaller schools. Clause 6, however, provides a sufficient safeguard from any danger or difficulty that may arise in consequence of the change.

#### PASS-SUBJECTS.

On the whole, the pass-subjects, when compared with last year's work, show a slight improvement in reading, writing, drawing, and geography, and a falling off in composition, arithmetic, and dictation. In explanation of the last-named deficiency, I must explain that the pieces chosen for the dictation of the two higher standards (V. and VI.) were taken from books of the same standard, but not from the book in use in the schools. This was, of course, a much more severe test than that hitherto applied, and necessarily makes the results compare unfavourably with those of former years. But making all due allowance for this, there is no doubt in my mind that this troublesome but necessary subject was not quite up to the level of former years. Many of the mistakes in the dictation referred to were in words continually occurring in the reading-books used in the schools.

Arithmetic and geography are again the weakest subjects throughout the district, the former occupying the lowest place on the list, nearly half the scholars having failed in this subject. It is again noticeable that the smaller Board schools have been more successful in this subject than the larger. One of the larger schools stands lowest in this respect. The arithmetic tests for the four higher standards being supplied by the department, it must be assumed that they were strictly within the limits of the syllabus, though there is no doubt that they varied considerably in difficulty. The most difficult, however, should have been productive of better results than were