

In general, the results in the class and additional subjects compared with those of the previous year show a slight advance. The most satisfactory improvement is shown in drill. The issue of a text-book has led in several schools to the beginning of instruction in physical exercises and company drill. The wand drill for both girls and boys is found practicable and beneficial, and is suitable to the needs of both small and large schools.

MANUAL INSTRUCTION.

In addition to certain branches of the ordinary school course that come under the head of manual training, instruction in woodwork has been given to a class connected with the Kumara School. This class is composed of twenty-three pupils, three of these being scholars of a private school. The class is held after the ordinary school-hours. The first year's course consists of part of the exercises in woodwork set by the Education Department, and that of the second year includes instruction in the making of various articles. Good progress has been made by the various pupils, but it is a matter for regret that the number of those taking advantage of the class has decreased.

THE NEW REGULATIONS.

The work of the ensuing year will have special interest owing to the new conditions under which it will be carried on. In the large schools of the colony the change will be very welcome to both teachers and Inspectors. The former will possess greater control in regard to irregularity of attendance and to the effect of very backward pupils on the various classes, which will become more homogeneous. The Inspectors will be spared time and energy for more important duties. In smaller schools, too, where the responsibility of the promotions of pupils will fall to a larger extent on the Inspector, more freedom is allowed under the new regulations. It will be possible, in cases of irregular attendance and backwardness in one or more subjects, to arrange that the work of other pupils shall not be retarded by the necessity, formerly existing, of presenting every pupil in the standard succeeding the one already passed.

While these valuable benefits exist, there is no doubt that in most cases where a school is in charge of a sole teacher, and occasionally even in others, it will be necessary for the Inspector to assume the responsibility, granted by one of the regulations, of the promotion of the pupils. In such schools the danger is always present that teachers will allow parental influence to induce them to promote pupils unduly. Those in charge of the aided and other small schools have frequently had, before appointment, no training whatever, and their attainments are confined to a pass in the Sixth Standard. It is therefore very advisable to allow the passing of the scholars to remain in the hands of the Inspector. Indeed, as in this district the schools are mostly small, the system of testing individually the progress of the pupils will be modified to a very small extent.

Opportunity has been taken to introduce some improvements in the syllabus, chiefly in the classification of the branches of study, such as the removal to the class subjects of drawing and geography (Standard I. to V.) from the pass group, and of recitation from the additional group. Much can be urged in support of the opinion that the present syllabus should be retained until opportunity has been granted to test its efficiency under the new regulations. It is a matter of regret, however, that grammar has not been better defined and included with composition. The syllabus, moreover, is in some degree burdened with objects of study that impede the efforts of teachers to secure thoroughness in the instruction and efficiency in the education of the pupils.

I have, &c.,

The Chairman, Education Board, Westland.

A. J. MORTON, B.A., Inspector.

NORTH CANTERBURY.

SIR,—

Christchurch, 27th January, 1900.

We have the honour to submit our annual report on the schools of the district for the year ending the 31st December, 1899.

The usual routine of inspection and examination was pursued during the year, the inspections being undertaken chiefly in the earlier half, though not fully occupying that period or confined to it, while the examinations of schools, pupil-teachers, and scholarship candidates supplied the main body of our work from June to December, the two last also taking up the greater part of the month of January. To Mr. C. S. Howard, who took Mr. Wood's place during a six months' leave, we are indebted for able co-operation, which we now have pleasure in acknowledging.

The schools are in general in an efficient condition. The buildings are good and well maintained, and the space only too ample in many cases for the number of pupils in attendance. The teaching appliances, though in some features a further expenditure in this direction might form the subject of a recommendation, are sufficient for the ordinary purposes of instruction. The staffing is liberal, and the teachers themselves in all but a very few cases show themselves in character, ability, and industry worthy of the positions they occupy. As without good teachers nothing else matters, we are particularly grateful to the Board for initiating and carrying out during the last year or two an improved system of appointment which cannot fail to be of great service in assisting local committees to make their choice among candidates, and in securing reasonable chances of promotion to the most deserving.

The usual statistics of examination are included or appended. Subsequent returns under the amended regulations now coming into force will necessarily be different in form, but for the purposes of comparison with earlier years we have not attempted to anticipate any contemplated change.