

responsible. The decline first showed itself in 1897 with a drop of 290 children, though in that year five new schools were added; 1898 witnessed a further drop of 138; and 1899 another fall of 462; making a total loss in the three years of 890. To speculate on the causes of the decline, which is even more marked in some other parts of the colony, is not within the scope of our duty, but we may add our regrets to those elsewhere expressed that the steady movement upward which marked each succeeding year up to 1897 has been succeeded by so serious a reversal.

The most interesting and important feature of the year has undoubtedly been the issue, after a considerable amount of discussion, of amended regulations to come into force immediately. On a number of the topics involved we have already expressed opinions pretty fully, and it is therefore scarcely necessary here to do more than review the prospective changes in their relation to the Inspector's duties, and in one or two other closely related aspects. For some years past the Home authorities have been gradually substituting inspection for examination in judging the efficiency of schools, and the change has been received with a chorus of congratulation broken only by a few solitary voices of warning. Inspection as understood, however, in English schools at present is hedged in with elaborate precautions which our form of control would find difficult of enforcement in New Zealand, and one vastly important consideration is ever present, that in England the payments from the public funds made to the school managers for the purposes of the school vary with the degree of efficiency, and may be withdrawn altogether under exceptional circumstances. Nothing like this power of the purse exists in New Zealand, and the greatest caution has therefore to be exercised in any attempt to transplant arrangements which have met with approval under widely different conditions. We are ourselves of opinion that, whatever be the ultimate form of an Inspector's duties, inspection pure and simple can never prove sufficient, and we fully expect that a few years more will see an English reaction in favour of a greater element of examination than is now the practice. The Inspector, especially when he takes the form of an examiner, we all know is a nuisance, and we can hardly suppose that any place will be found for him in the general scheme of things in the happy millennial days, but in the meantime he is necessary, and necessary not only as the observer and reporter of the ordinary course of school work, but as the inquirer by means of special tests into the mental progress made by the pupils under the teachers' instruction. It does not by any means follow, however, that the Inspector as an examiner should conceive it his duty to ascertain and record with a view to promotion the individual proficiency of every child subject to his inspection. That is the conception that has for many years determined the practice in New Zealand, and it may be a surprise to some people to learn that such an undertaking belongs properly to the head teachers of the schools themselves, and forms no part of an Inspector's legitimate function. The conception has had, however, advantages as well as disadvantages, and if it is a wrong one, the Inspector has probably been as great a sufferer as any person concerned. In future the head teachers will exercise this, their proper function, with certain precautions which we think are wisely provided, and the Inspectors, while not exempt from the obligation of examination in the formation of judgments, will save in the larger schools at least a certain amount of time and labour which might profitably be otherwise bestowed.

It is this alteration in the respective duties of Inspector and head master that has probably been most prominent hitherto in the minds of teachers when they have urged a claim for "freedom of classification," but the expression has also been used in an authoritative way to summarise with a somewhat different connotation the changes at present contemplated. The expression is a fine mouth-filling phrase with a pleasant suggestion of tyranny subverted, and the different meanings it may bear will repay inquiry. In one sense the teachers have enjoyed the privilege for a number of years, as it has long been expressly laid down that "for the purposes of instruction the principal teacher of a school shall have full discretion to arrange his pupils in different classes for different subjects, according to their ability and proficiency in the several subjects, and according to the number of available teachers," &c. This recognises for instruction purposes a subject classification, and that little or no use has ever been made of the permission given is set down with more or less truth to the fact that at the same time "for purposes of inspection and examination every pupil in the school must be considered to belong to one of the standard classes" as previously defined. The amended regulations in their original form as first proposed abolished the standard of average attainment with a view to the encouragement of a greater use of a classification by subjects. In doing so, however, it seemed to us to be opening the door to very serious abuses, and this subject classification on further examination was found to be by no means the entirely desirable thing it had appeared to be. It is open primarily to the objection that in the elementary school, so far at least as the commonly understood elementary subjects are concerned, specialisation on the part of the pupil is by no means desirable, and, secondly, it is in a large measure impracticable. In the small school, where several classes have to be taught by the same teacher, the necessities of the time-table arrangements forbid a subject classification; and in the large school, with a large number of classes, and a separate room for each class, considerations of discipline stand in the way. If, then, a subject classification, which at first sight appears so attractive, is impracticable in the smaller school, and to be sparingly resorted to in the larger, and to be, further, from an educational point of view at the least of very doubtful expediency, we have found ourselves unable to see why the very substantial guarantee that a standard arrangement provides should be abandoned in its favour. As the outcome of the objections accordingly made, some modifications in the first proposals have been made, affecting a compromise. A standard of average attainment at the several stages has been recognised in a limited number of subjects, while outside this group the teacher is at liberty to classify his children in the different subjects as he pleases, and the Inspector is bound to examine them as they are so classified for instruction. The newer arrangement is, we think, quite a workable one, and has capabilities for fruitful developments; but the value of the whole appears to us to be en-