

As was reported last year, teachers as a whole exercised sound judgment in promoting pupils in Standards I. to V., and in comparatively few instances was it necessary to substitute the Inspector's results for those of the teacher, though more frequently the teacher's results were modified. The system of promotion of the pupils on examinations held by the teacher is the outcome of a revolt against the excessive examinations which formerly prevailed. In New Zealand the change was initiated in the lower standards. In 1894 teachers were given the sole control of the promotions in Standard I. and Standard II., and, no matter how unsatisfactory an Inspector might consider the promotions, he had no powers of revision. In 1900 a further step was taken, and teachers examined for promotion pupils in Standard I. to Standard V., but power of revision was given to the Inspector. Records of passes were, however, still kept; but in the regulations recently issued standard passes are practically abolished, and examination by an Inspector is demanded only in certain cases—viz., when a pupil desires to obtain a "certificate of competency" to enable him (1) to enter some branch of the public service, (2) to obtain exemption under the School-attendance Act, and (3) to enter a secondary school. An examination for a "certificate of proficiency" in Standard VI. is provided for, and if the condition regarding age is fulfilled this entitles the holder to free tuition at a secondary school or at a district high school. An Inspector may, however, examine all the pupils in a class or school, and for a stated time may substitute his classification for that of the teacher. In order to test whether the system of promotion by the teacher had worked well so far as the children were concerned, in all classes of schools we examined a proportion of the pupils larger than in the two previous years. The impression left was that there was a slight falling-off in the thoroughness of the work. In many schools there were noticed compensations in the broader and more intelligent treatment of the subjects. Freedom of classification by the teacher, or the substitution of inspection for combined inspection and examination, can be carried beyond the limits of safety. Of late years the question has been widely discussed, and, as is usually the case in similar circumstances, antipathy against an old system has tended to make the pendulum of opinion swing from one extreme to the other. Many advocate the entire abolition of examination, and the substitution of inspection only, and in some countries this has been adopted. We consider that examination has advantages that cannot be overlooked. It is searching in its results, and, as a pupil is thrown on his own resources, he must exercise self-reliance, concentration, and application, which are by no means valueless. We believe that without disadvantage it can be minimised, but the minimum must be determined by the circumstances of each school. In a well-organized and well-governed large school much can be left to the head teacher, and in a school with a strong, earnest, and skilful staff examination is necessary only in so far as it may serve an important end in guiding the Inspector in offering suggestions and in giving assistance to the staff. In other schools less favourably circumstanced—and we venture to consider these are the majority—more examination is necessary, but still with the same end in view—suggestion of remedies after discovery of defects. Take the case of a young and earnest but inexperienced teacher. At a visit of inspection the Inspector may watch the teaching, give encouragement, suggest improvement, or teach classes or divisions. He can find out whether the teacher is following the right or the wrong path, but very little of the work, as a whole, comes under review. One, or possibly two lessons, in, say, arithmetic, may have been seen. These may have been well taught, but how, except by examination, is one to find out if the whole of the arithmetic is well taught? In this subject (and in others) we get the teacher to mark the work, and find out the nature of the errors. We then go over it with the teacher, and, taking into consideration the methods adopted, the neatness of the setting-out, the character of any errors made, assign marks. If any defect is general the teacher sees it at once, and can apply the remedy. Such an examination has a high educative value, and the insight given into the work is deeper than could possibly be obtained by any system of inspection alone. In the case of the country teacher who has no experienced head teacher or colleague at hand from whom to get advice and assistance, the greatest benefit is derived. Moreover, the success of a teacher depends upon factors other than skill in giving single lessons. He must display ability in linking the lessons of a subject into a continuous whole, in co-ordinating one subject with another, in leading the pupils to grasp the principles underlying the lessons, and in treating the whole work in such a way that the pupil assimilates the lessons, and is not stuffed with indigestible scraps. By means of the instruction-book, which contains a record of the work done in a school throughout the year, we are enabled to combine the advantages of both inspection and examination at all visits, and can thus render the maximum of assistance to the earnest teachers, and stimulate the less earnest ones. The importance of the subject must excuse our noticing the following case of an inspection: In the report of the recent Commission appointed by New South Wales, one of the Commissioners states that in London he saw a school—and not a satisfactory one—of three hundred pupils inspected by two Inspectors who left "after a visit of a little more than two hours." The senior Inspector "was good enough to give his views on inspection and examination," and discussed the work and organization of the school with the head teacher, adversely criticizing the work of the teacher of Standard V. "There was no examination in grammar, object lessons, drawing, or singing" in any class. The Commissioner says, "It appeared to the Commissioner, when seeing the school inspected, that if the system of testing school-work erred too much on the side of mechanical results, the system in the Board schools of London did not show satisfactory results with a free standard. The actual standard sufficient to satisfy the Inspector was of course known only to that official, but the conclusion formed from observation was that it was low." The regulations in this colony have struck a happier mean between two extremes. Examination alone is pernicious, but inspection alone is certainly superficial and misleading. Either or both should be used as judgment dictates with regard to the best interests of the pupils and the teacher.

The third Conference of School Inspectors was held in January last, and the new regulations for the inspection and examination were discussed at length, and then submitted to a joint con-