

temporarily closed at the time of the annual visit—viz., Beatrix Bay, Cape Campbell, Crail Bay, and Te Puru; and one (Waikawa Bay) was not visited on account of the tempestuous weather on the day appointed for voyaging to that place. The report therefore refers to the remaining fifty-five schools. Three private schools were also examined.

The roll number of the public schools in the district at the end of the September quarter was 1,992, and the aggregate roll number of the schools that were examined was 1,970 at the time of the annual visits. Of these 1,925 were present, and 1,270 passed the examinations in Standards I. to VI. The number passed represents 64.4 per cent. of the total roll number, and 91.7 per cent. of the number actually examined. This shows an increase of 4 per cent on the roll number, and about 3 per cent. on the number examined, as compared with the results of 1902. These figures compare favourably with the average results for the whole colony, as given in the Minister's twenty-sixth annual report, which shows that 54.5 per cent. of the roll number and 86.1 per cent. of the number examined passed the several standards.

The average ages of the scholars in the several standard classes, when compared with the same for 1902, show for Standard VI. the same, 14 years 2 months; for Standard V., 13 years 2 months, or one month younger; for Standard IV., 12 years, or one month older; for Standard III., 10 years 11 months, or the same as last year; for Standard II., 9 years 7 months, or one month older; for Standard I., 8 years 7 months, or one month younger; and for Class P, 6 years 8 months, or four months younger. The mean average age for the district has fallen from 11 years 7 months in 1899 to 11 years 3 months in 1903.

The summary of results for the whole district will be found in the appendix to this report.

*Quality of the "Passes."*—In pursuance of the plan adopted at the last examination, I have again classified the passes obtained in Standards III., IV., V., and VI. in schools above Grade 0 as "strong," "fair," or "weak." The average percentages of these passes were—strong, 40.2 per cent.; fair, 39.5 per cent.; and weak, 20.2 per cent.: showing a decrease of 10 per cent. in the strong passes, an increase of 5.5 per cent. in the fair, and an increase of 4 per cent. in the weak passes. This result is very much what might have been expected, and had the late regulations remained in force for a few years longer the "strong" passes would probably have gradually disappeared, as the effect of the absurd leniency of the conditions for passing would have been constantly accumulating. The new regulations, however, will prevent (or disguise) this deterioration by almost entirely abolishing the "pass" system.

Speaking generally as to the condition of your schools, I am confident that the majority of them are doing all that can reasonably be expected when all unfavourable circumstances are taken into consideration.

This year sickness has been more than usually prevalent. At one school the attendance fell below one-half the roll number on 119 half-days out of the 431 comprising the school year, and others have suffered in the same manner, although not showing so many "excepted" half-days.

I will now make a few remarks upon the treatment of some subjects of the syllabus in the schools of the district.

*Reading.*—The importance of this subject, though undoubtedly very great, is, in my opinion, considerably exaggerated when failure in reading alone is made a bar to promotion; although it requires failure in three other subjects to produce the same effect. A child may fail, say, in spelling and composition, or in composition or arithmetic, and yet must be promoted to a higher standard; but failure in reading is fatal. No doubt this fact is steadily impressed upon the minds of the scholars throughout the year, with the result that in the case of nervous or timid children (and these are very numerous) failure is a foregone conclusion, unless the judgment of the examiner is largely tempered with mercy. I, therefore, do not regard a slight hesitation at a long word, or the occasional omission of a small one, as a ground of condemnation. The chief faults in this district arise from the common idea amongst most children, and perhaps some teachers, that fast reading is good reading; whereas, as a rule, the very opposite is the case. On the whole, the reading, gauged by the amount of intelligent expression, distinct enunciation, and moderate fluency, seems to me to be quite as good as can be expected, considering the small amount of time that it is possible to devote to this one out of the fifteen subjects that have to receive some amount of attention in the twenty-five hours of the school week. As I remarked last year, I do not think that sufficient use is always made of the second reading-book supplied some years since to all the chief schools. Henceforth, however, two books at least must be used in the schools, either one of which may be chosen by the examiner at the annual visit. After all, reading aloud, after school is over, is nowadays almost entirely confined to the occupants of the reading-desks in the churches, and whatever lack of expression may be noticeable there cannot yet be attributed to defective teaching in our primary schools.

*Writing.*—As far as the production of easily legible, clean, and sightly copy-book writing is concerned, this subject is fairly well taught in most schools, and specially so in a few, in which good writing seems to have become almost a tradition. There is, however, far from sufficient attention paid throughout the district to the proper manner of holding the pen, and the written work of the upper standards, at the examination, falls very far short, as a rule, of the quality displayed in the copy-books. This is easily accounted for. The written work of the examination is necessarily somewhat hurried, while the copy-book work may be, and in many cases undoubtedly is, performed at the slowest possible rate. The number of lines contained in a Standard IV. copy-book is seventy-two, and in many schools certainly not more than four books are filled during the year. Assuming the number of school days in the year to be 400 and that copy-book writing is practised only twice in a week, the average lesson would consist of 1.8 lines for half an hour's work. Seeing that in business affairs rapidity is (next to legibility) the most desirable characteristic of handwriting, it is questionable whether such extreme deliberation is conducive to success in this department of primary education. This year I judged the writing of some of the larger schools by a special test, in the shape of transcription from the reading-books, and was quite satisfied, on