

Meetings of householders in connection with the establishment of new schools were held at Skipton, Chamberlain, and Willowbridge, and, as the petition of the householders was in each case favourably received by the Board, the building of the schools is now proceeding. The Rosewill Settlement, formerly known as the Levels Estate, having been acquired by the Government, there is every probability that several schools will require to be established in the near future. The settlement extends to over 37,000 acres, and in anticipation of the demand for schools in this large area the Government has reserved four school-sites, each about 5 acres in extent. Great care has been taken to have the sites reserved in the most advantageous positions.

The following is a summary of examination results for the whole district:—

Classes.				Number on Roll.	Present at Inspector's Annual Visit.	Passed.	Average Age of Pupils in each Class.
							Yrs. mos.
Standard VII.	...	...	...	158	140	...	15 0
" VI.	...	...	...	428	408	279	13 8
" V.	...	...	...	572	539	417	12 9
" IV.	...	...	...	621	601	491	11 10
" III.	...	...	...	604	566	490	10 9
" II.	...	...	...	547	517	475	9 9
" I.	...	...	...	593	529	491	8 10
Preparatory	...	...	...	1,472	1,221	...	6 11
Totals	...	...	...	4,995	4,521	2,643	11 2*

* Mean of average age.

The schools show for the year a decrease of seventy-six in the roll number. The number of those that passed in standards is 2,643, a decrease of 157 from last year. Of 3,160 pupils in Standards I. to VI. present at our annual visit, 2,643 passed, a percentage of 83.6. The number of pupils examined in Standard VI. was 408, of whom 279 passed, giving a percentage of 68.4 as against 73.5 for last year; that is to say, nearly one-third of those that we examined in Standard VI. failed to obtain "certificates of proficiency." We regret to have caused disappointment to so many pupils; but however pleasant it would have been to have recorded a much larger number of passes, we must insist on work of such a kind at this stage as will make the possession of a "certificate of proficiency" something to be valued.

In 1892, with fifty-eight schools in operation, we had a roll number of 5,002. Four years later we reached 5,291, but in 1898 we dropped back to 5,094. Since then the fluctuation from year to year has not been great. This year, with seventy schools, our roll number has gone down to 4,995.

At the present time, when the question of the decrease in the birth-rate is being so widely discussed, the figures showing the roll number are not without interest. Leaving this to be seriously pondered over by all who have any concern for the welfare of the colony, we wish to draw attention to the notable increase in the number of pupils in Standards VI. and VII., in the former the rise being from 225 in 1892 to 428 in 1903, and in the latter from 84 to 158.

In our last report we noted the loss of time that had been caused by the prevalence of children's ailments. This year the schools have suffered in a still greater degree, epidemics of scarlatina, measles, and mumps having swept through the district, scarcely one school escaping. Further, the great snowstorm of last July broke into the attendance, the schools losing from a few days in the seaward portion of the district to a month or more in the higher-lying parts. The absentees at the time of our annual visit numbered 474, as against 298 last year, and many of those that were present were not in a fit state of health to do justice to themselves or their teachers. With everything favourable as far as attendance and health are concerned, it requires all a teacher's skill and energy to maintain the efficiency of his school, so that there is no wonder we have found the preparation of the pupils this year less satisfactory than in the past. It has been especially difficult for teachers to come to a decision as to which pupils should be promoted to a higher standard, and though there were many cases in which we should not have been prepared to grant promotion on the performances of the pupils during our visit, we took the extreme step of substituting the results of our examination for the teacher's in only one or two schools. More frequently than in the past it was left an open question till the day of our visit whether a pupil should be promoted or not, and the settling of the matter has been come to after consultation with us. The large proportion of failures in Standard VI., in some measure attributable to the exceptionally adverse conditions of working that have been referred to, must in the main be set down to the weakness displayed by many teachers in unwisely promoting ill-prepared children from standard to standard, thereby conferring no real benefit on the children themselves, however it may please their parents. By placing such children in a class for which they are unfit the teachers are doing an injustice to those that are fit for a higher class, the presence in which of the unfit retards the progress of all.

Through the resignations of teachers, who have either retired from the service or taken up new positions, we have had vacancies in over one-fourth of our schools, without reckoning changes in the positions of assistants. The places to be filled have been, with one or two exceptions, in schools