

OTAGO.

SIR,—

Education Office, 31st March, 1904.

We have the honour to present our general report for the year 1903.

TABLE SHOWING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOLS IN TERMS OF STANDARD PASSES.

Classes.				Number on Roll.	Present at Inspector's Annual Visit.	Passed.	Average Age of Pupils in each Class.
							Yrs. mos.
Standard VII.	...	...	...	508	432	...	15 2
" VI.	...	...	...	1,576	1,521	1,069	13 9
" V.	...	...	...	2,089	2,020	1,535	12 9
" IV.	...	...	...	2,417	2,331	1,874	12 0
" III.	...	...	...	2,444	2,362	1,935	10 10
" II.	...	...	...	2,273	2,230	2,035	9 11
" I.	...	...	...	2,211	2,147	2,019	8 11
Preparatory...	...	...	...	6,455	5,816	...	6 7
Totals	...	...	...	19,968	18,859	10,467	11 3*

* Mean of average age.

If the numbers of this table are compared with the corresponding numbers of last year's table, it will be seen that there is a decline (a) of nearly $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. in the number of pupils on the roll, and (b) in the ratio of passes in every standard, the decline in passes being largest in Standards IV. and V. In Standard IV. it is about 4 per cent., and in Standard V. about $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. These are precisely the classes in which passing has, in many schools, been made too easy for the interest of Standard VI.; and the lower ratio of passes indicates, we think, not that the teaching has deteriorated, but that teachers are realising more and more that unless full measure is exacted from Standards IV. and V. good work in Standard VI. is impossible. Under a system in which teachers are responsible for the classification of their pupils, schools must in large measure be judged by the efficiency of the highest class, the class that represents the finished product of the school life of the pupils; and if a teacher fails here his work must be considered unsatisfactory. Judged by this criterion, many schools, some of them large ones, failed to do satisfactory work during the year the work of which is now under review, and it is our deliberate judgment that in some cases the failure was due to too low ideals as to what should be the mental equipment of children passing on to Standard VI. In many cases, no doubt, the ideals were right, but the teachers were not strong enough to resist the pressure of parents for the promotion of their children, and thus a system the keynote of which is freedom of classification by the teacher was marred by those the interest of the children of whom it is intended to serve. It would be a great gain to the intellectual life of the schools if parents could be made to realise not only that passing the standards is not identical with education, but that passing them with inadequate equipment is a formidable hindrance to it.

The decline in the number of children in attendance is, no doubt, part of the great question at present occupying the attention of moralists, statisticians, and statesmen.

The average age of the pupils who passed Standard VI. is 13 years 9 months, and the average age at which Dunedin City and suburban pupils passed it is 13 years 8 months. The average age at which country children passed this standard is therefore but a trifle above that at which the city and suburban children passed it. The sole purpose of the age column seems to be to furnish data for a comparison of the average ages at which the standards are passed in the several education districts. We confess we would rather be among the highest than among the lowest; for we feel sure that, where no provision is made for evening continuation schools and compulsory attendance thereat, it is of advantage to the children that they should be kept at school as long as possible.

EFFICIENCY-MARKS IN SUBJECTS.

Pass Subjects.—Reading, satisfactory; dictation and spelling, good; writing, satisfactory; arithmetic, satisfactory; composition, fair; mean result, satisfactory.

Class Subjects.—*Geography, satisfactory; *drawing, satisfactory; grammar, fair; history, satisfactory; science and object lessons, fair; recitation, satisfactory; mean result, satisfactory.

Additional Subjects.—Singing, satisfactory; needlework, good; drill, satisfactory; mean result, satisfactory.

These details vary little from the corresponding ones of our last report, and the mean marks for the pass and class subjects remain unchanged. The mean mark for the additional subjects has dropped from good to satisfactory, a result due probably to two causes—(1) the great severity of the winter and the prevalence of sickness all over the district during a large part of the year, and (2) the circumstance of a large increase in the number of inexperienced and unclassified teachers employed in small schools.

From the point of view of efficiency, we class the schools as follows: Weak, 3 per cent.; fair, 12 per cent.; satisfactory, 44 per cent.; good to very good, 41 per cent. This classification is based not on the standard passes, which from S1 to S5, both included, are for the most part the teachers',

* Geography and drawing are pass subjects in the Sixth Standard.