

The Roman Catholic schools had a roll-number of 1,813, and 1,743 were present at the annual visit. At the Parnell Orphan Home the roll number was eighty, and all the pupils were present at the annual visit.

At the public schools 1,512 pupils gained certificates of proficiency, and 171 gained certificates of competency in Standard VI. At the Roman Catholic schools seventy-one certificates of proficiency were gained, and sixteen certificates of competency.

The roll-number at the public schools shows for the year the unusually large increase of 1,377, and the number present at the annual visit increased by 1,792.

The promotions from class to class have in nearly all schools been determined by the head teachers, and the classification has been made for the most part with satisfactory care and discretion. In a few cases the Inspectors have felt that it may be necessary to modify the head teacher's classification, in accordance with the results of the Inspector's next examination of the schools, under clause 10 of the regulations. With one or two exceptions, the schools here referred to are small ones.

Promotions of pupils have been very rarely made except immediately after the annual visit, and this practice is likely to obtain for the future. In determining promotions from class to class head teachers need, in many cases, to insist more strenuously on satisfactory facility in reading the various books into which those promoted are to be advanced. Unless these books can be read with considerable readiness and the matter be fairly understood, the work taken up on promotion cannot be satisfactorily utilised as a means of intelligent training, but must remain an unsatisfying or even a depressing grind. This is a matter of no small importance, and I would earnestly invite all head teachers to give it serious consideration. Pronounced backwardness in composition and arithmetic should in general be considered a bar to promotion, though decided weakness in any single subject other than reading need not be so regarded. Under the present regulations the passing of standards has been abolished in all classes below Standard VI. In certain circumstances certificates of competency can be gained for any lower standard. These have been awarded on the head teacher's classification of pupils. The certificate of proficiency is practically the equivalent of the former pass certificate for Standard VI. The level of attainments required for gaining this certificate has proved much lower than was desirable; in some cases, indeed, pupils who failed to qualify for the lower certificate of competency for Standard VI could not be prevented from gaining a certificate of proficiency. In the course of the year the standard required for gaining the latter was very properly raised. It was not, however, deemed advisable to introduce the application of this higher standard except at the beginning of a year, and, in accordance with the option allowed by the amended regulation, the Board wisely directed that the change should be brought into force at the beginning of 1906.

The examination schedules now in use show the classification of pupils according to standards, but do not show how head teachers propose to deal with the promotion of their pupils. A separate column to show this might well have been provided, though it may quite well be shown in the column for head teacher's remarks. The Inspectors would like all head teachers to indicate definitely for each pupil in each class, whether he is "promoted," "conditionally promoted," or "not promoted." The initial letters of these words would form a sufficient entry. By "conditional promotions" I mean cases where somewhat backward pupils are promoted, on the distinct understanding that they will earnestly apply themselves to make good their shortcomings, failing which they will be put back after sufficient trial.

Head-teachers need to realise that, under the new examination arrangements, the efficiency of their schools will be more and more definitely indicated by the work done by their Standard VI pupils. The promotions in all classes are now placed in their hands, and as their control is practically untrammelled, no pupil should get into a higher class, and especially into the Standard VI class, unless the head teacher considers him competent to undertake the work with an assured prospect of making satisfactory headway. Under these circumstances the public and the Inspectors may justly look for a high level of proficiency in the work of the Standard VI class. This class is, moreover, the only one the individual pupils of which undergo a full and careful examination, and thus have their attainments gauged with considerable thoroughness and accuracy. I dwell on this, not to encourage head teachers to give a disproportionate share of time and attention to the Standard VI class, to do which there may sometimes be a very real temptation, but to emphasise the paramount importance of exercising a due discretion in making promotions throughout the lower classes. Unmerited promotions at any stage will most probably involve comparative failure in the Standard VI class, and may in general be justly inferred from that fact.

Those concerned in the work of elementary education have now had some considerable experience of the working of the new syllabus. There exists among teachers a very general feeling that it is still overloaded, but on this point it would be premature to express any decided opinion. For part of the year it was in many cases impossible to get class-books suited to the new courses of study, more especially in the subjects of arithmetic, geography, and history; this difficulty has doubtless helped to foster the impression that the syllabus may prove too heavy.

The Education Department might, with great advantage to teachers and Inspectors, have afforded them more definite guidance in dealing with such subjects as nature-study and the various branches of handwork that are so ardently recommended as additional means of educative training. Suggestive courses in nature-study suited to the needs of country schools and also of town schools, and similar courses in stick-laying, brick-building, paper-folding, carton-work, and brush drawing, would have been both welcome and helpful, and might well have been prepared and issued by the Department, whose resources can readily command the services of experts in these subjects. It is easy to prescribe in a syllabus the teaching of a definite course of nature-study, but it is a difficult and onerous task for teachers, who have so many other calls on their time and thought, to do this satisfactorily in a short time. In a land where teachers move from school to school, and from one type of school to another