

increase in the number of certificates of competency. As, however, the new regulations extended the privilege of free secondary instruction in district high schools, technical high schools, and approved secondary schools, the winners of competency certificates would have suffered no great disability.

The examination was conducted on the same lines as in previous years, a considerable number of pupils being accredited on the recommendation of the head teacher, the remainder being examined by the Inspectors either in their own schools or at centres. The percentage of proficiency passes shows a further decrease on that of 1928, being 77.6 this year, as compared with 80.3. The percentages of passes in the various districts range from 68.8 to 86.2. This cannot, of course, be definitely interpreted as showing a corresponding range in efficiency. Varying standards of appraisal probably form part of the explanation, and, as the tests in spelling, arithmetic, and grammar are marked on a uniform basis, it would seem that the marking of reading and composition should be carefully investigated by the Inspectors.

Thanks to the more generous provisions made this year for secondary education, any variation in standard has a less serious effect on the pupil than it formerly had.

The following opinions in respect to the Proficiency Examinations, on various subjects of the curriculum, and on other matters are expressed by Senior Inspectors in their reports to the Department :—

#### *Proficiency Examination.*

*Auckland.*—It has been objected that the Proficiency Examination dominates and unduly conditions the whole of the primary-school system. That it has been permitted to do so must be admitted, but that it need not do so is also true. A certain standard of attainment is demanded in English and arithmetic, but it cannot reasonably be asserted that attainment to that standard makes such inordinate demands upon the pupils' time and attention that no time is left for the development of the more æsthetic aspects of education. It appears to us that some form of investigation, be it the Proficiency Examination or something else, will always be necessary at the end of the primary course to determine the type of post-primary training from which the pupil is most likely to derive the maximum benefit. The stimulus to be obtained from striving towards a definite objective, the training to be derived from the overcoming of difficulties by continuous persistent effort, instead of pursuing the pleasant paths of preference, are aspects more important, perhaps, than the actual attainment of the objective itself. It may also be urged that the training and information acquired at school are of little service unless they can be marshalled to meet the situations that arise in life, and the examination is merely a preliminary test of the child's ability to do this. We would, therefore, urge caution in abolishing all forms of examination, as some would have us do. Cram and undue strain are to be deprecated, but to legislate entirely for the weakling is to do irreparable harm to the strong, and to loosen the moral fibre of the nation.

*Nelson.*—Last year, our percentage of proficiency passes was 76.5, the second lowest in the Dominion. This year, in spite of the disorganization due to the earthquake, the schools throughout the district have done exceptionally well. The fact, too, that a good many of last year's failures came up for a second time helped to swell the number of passes to the high total of 86.2 per cent. As regards the basis of marks assigned under the new regulations, we found that the raising of the standard would have affected a few, probably about 2 per cent. of the candidates, but it could not be said to "seriously affect" children sitting this year. And, moreover, the concession made of allowing even competency holders to enter secondary schools would more than counterbalance this disadvantage, except, perhaps, in the case of those who desired a proficiency certificate for the purpose of entering the Public Service or other employment.

#### *Accrediting for Standard VI Proficiency Certificates.*

*Auckland.*—The accrediting system was this year again adopted in all Grade V, VI, and VII schools, and our experience leads us to the conclusion that the results were on the whole soundly determined. One or two aspects of the situation, however, give cause for consideration. In the first place, there seems to be a danger that the headmasters place too much reliance on the results of one, or at most two, formal tests applied at the end of the year. This introduces into the accrediting method just the very element it was designed to eliminate. A further danger lies in the fact that there is a possibility of the standard adopted by the head teachers becoming too low. For the purpose of readjusting such standard it appears to us to be desirable that once in every few years the proficiency passes should be determined "in whole" by the Inspectors. Moreover, while the right to accredit might be granted to Grade IV headmasters, we are not at present prepared to recommend its extension to all teachers of lower-grade schools. We do not doubt the teachers' honesty of purpose, but it is quite evident that many do not know the standard of the examination. Where the pupils of small schools are gathered to a centre for examination by the Inspector, a perusal of the teachers' estimates not infrequently shows that from 90 to 100 per cent. are considered by them worthy of proficiency certificates. The departmental tests, however, reveal quite a different state of affairs, as many as half of the candidates sometimes falling below the requisite standard.

*Canterbury.*—Our thanks are due to head teachers who again carried out for us tests in writing, spelling, and number work. We recognize that this work imposed an additional burden upon those who are already heavily weighted with the details of management of the larger schools, but we value their co-operation and the generous spirit which accompanied it. Their services, too, in preparing the recommendations for the accrediting of Standard VI pupils for proficiency certificates are also acknowledged. Much of this was done excellently, but there were some head teachers from Grade III to VII whose standard of marking hampered rather than helped the work of accrediting. Some were far too lenient, and their pupils scored ridiculously high marks. Others went to the other extreme,