

A comparison of the results in the above tables with those contained in last year's report shows a considerable improvement in the percentage of passes in nearly every subject, and affords evidence of substantial progress. The proportion of passes in spelling has risen in a marked manner, especially in Standards III. and IV.; reading and writing, though examined more strictly than in any former year, have in no way declined; while arithmetic and grammar have advanced considerably, though in both the percentage is short of what I hope to see attained.

ORGANIZATION.—Fewer cases of faulty organization have been encountered during the past year than for any former period of like duration. In most schools the work is suitably arranged, the classification correct, and the time-table satisfactorily laid out and duly adhered to. In former years there was great laxity in regulating and superintending the desk work of pupils in small schools, and it has taken a long time to get better arrangements and superintendence introduced, but at length the difficulty is getting fairly surmounted. In a very few schools the same time-table has adorned the walls for two or three years together, in spite of considerable changes of circumstances and repeated remonstrances. Generally, however, time-tables are promptly revised if changes in the number of classes or in their relative proportions render it needful. It has always been a matter of serious difficulty in small schools having five or six classes to assign a fair division of the teacher's time for each class and subject, and I fear that in such schools, with the enlarged course of instruction required under the new Act, this difficulty will become all but insoluble. Experience may suggest expedients that cannot at present be foreseen.

INSTRUCTION.—The gradual increase in the percentage of passes affords unequivocal proof that the instruction in the Board's schools is becoming more and more efficient. Apart from this tangible proof, I am satisfied that failures to come up to the standard are becoming year by year less and less frequent. Furthermore, in the parts of the district I have lately visited, the number of well-managed and efficiently-taught schools appears to be steadily increasing. At the same time there are not a few in which little or no progress can be noted. The majority of the schools of this character are the victims of untoward circumstances, though some owe their lowly position to inattention or incompetence, or both, on the part of their teachers. The year just past has witnessed an unusual dearth of qualified teachers. There has been in consequence an extraordinary frequency of changes in the mastership of many small rural schools, while not a few have been temporarily closed for a longer or shorter period. These frequent changes in the master and occasional breaks in the continuity of the school work, combined with the forced employment as teachers of persons deficient in practical experience in the work of education, appear to me sufficient to account for the unsatisfactory condition of a large proportion of the more backward schools.

As regards the subjects of instruction, I have noted considerable improvement in reading, spelling, writing, and arithmetic. Reading is now more generally taught with care, and not merely practised as an accomplishment natural to every one. Comprehension continues much short of being satisfactory, and in a good many schools the necessity for aiming at intelligence in the work is as urgent as ever. The introduction of Foster's copy-books has given a great stimulus to writing, and in some schools the improvement in the work has surpassed my expectations. On the whole, however, the teaching of writing continues to be less satisfactory than it should be, and in a good many schools the superintendence remains lax and unmethodical, and the use of the black-board is greatly neglected. In small schools having a good many classes it is very difficult to have the writing lesson taken by itself, unaccompanied by some other lesson; but this every teacher should arrange to do, if not every day, at least every alternate day. The teaching of grammar has improved slightly since I last reported, but it is still not infrequently marked by a want of accuracy and intelligence. The results of the examination of the highest classes were, on the whole, disappointing, and in some cases discreditable. The geography of New Zealand is becoming more carefully taught, and in most cases it is very fairly known, though sometimes too minute and detailed a knowledge is attempted. I think the thick type in my text-book on New Zealand sufficient for almost any school, with a more minute acquaintance, however, with Otago. As regards the general geography of the world, I cannot say that the instruction has improved greatly. The chief difficulty in the subject is the want of a suitable text-book, and I believe that in the average school little improvement can be looked for until a suitable book is in the hands of the scholars. Should my leisure permit, I purpose to make an effort to supply this great want.

Singing continues to be taught in a fair number of schools, in some very efficiently. It is strange that so few teachers qualify themselves to give instruction on this subject. I am confident that many more could, with a little attention and study, fit themselves to give useful and interesting lessons; and, to stimulate them to do so, I would recommend the payment to teachers giving efficient instruction in singing of a small bonus of £5 or £10 a year, according to the Inspector's judgment of the work.

The needlework submitted for examination during the year has been superior to anything I have previously seen, and the attention of the teachers to this branch of the school work has been, with rare exceptions, most satisfactory. Several complaints have been made, especially in the larger schools, of the amount of extra time that is required for the preparation and fixing up of the work. There can be no doubt that many mistresses have devoted a great deal of their own time to this, and that the strain upon their energies which this addition to their regular work produced was sufficient to justify loud complaints. But this extra work has almost wholly arisen from a mistaken and injurious system of teaching sewing—in fact, from the teachers doing for their pupils what it was, and is, intended these should do for themselves. To fold down a hem is surely not a very difficult operation for a pupil to learn, yet much of a mistress's over-time is spent in doing this. No doubt, if very young children are receiving instruction in sewing, much, if not all, of their work will have to be fixed for them, but the proper remedy for that is not to begin the subject until the pupils are fit to take it up with fair prospects of doing it successfully. I believe that no children below six years of age should receive lessons of any kind in sewing, and that the attempt to teach mere infants to sew costs an infinite deal more time and money than it is worth. With girls over that age, what fixing up