

2. MR. TAYLOR'S REPORT.

Dunedin, March, 1881.

SIR,—

I have the honor to present my report for the year ended the 31st December, 1880.

During the second quarter of the year I made visits of inspection to 40 schools. The other nine months were occupied with the examination of the 67 schools shown in the appendix ; in assisting Mr. Petrie with the examination of the larger schools in the district ; and with office-work.

The statistics referring to the schools examined by me will be found in the appendix to this report, where a detailed statement is given for each. The summaries for the different standards are included in those given by Mr. Petrie.

Of the 67 schools, eleven show a percentage of passes of 90 and over ; thirty-one, from 70 to 90 ; sixteen, from 50 to 70 ; and eight, below 50. These results may be considered excellent, good, fair, very moderate respectively. In the case of the eight schools having less than 50 per cent. of passes, the poor results in five of them were attributable, in some measure, either to frequent changes of teachers, or to the fact that a considerable proportion of the pupils were the children of foreigners who had a very slight acquaintance with English. In the other three, although their circumstances were not the most favourable, yet better results might have been produced. Every school that failed to gain 50 per cent. of passes was, according to the Board's regulation, specially reported on. Where it was evident that the unsatisfactory condition of the school was due to the incapacity or negligence of the teacher, his removal to a less important position or dismissal altogether followed.

By a comparison of the results of this year with those of last, the average age for the different standards will be found to be very much the same. The percentages of passes, though a trifle lower than last year, are higher than were expected. Last year's examinations being the first under the new order of things, teachers had the option of presenting their pupils in any standard they pleased, and they, especially those of them who made themselves well acquainted with the capabilities of their pupils, presented them in standards the work of which they were more than fully able to overtake. The consequence was that a high percentage of passes was often the result. This year all those who formerly passed a standard had to be presented in a higher ; and, as the passing of a standard in one year taxes the energies and abilities of both teachers and scholars to the utmost, lower results were naturally expected. It is gratifying, therefore, to find that the results this year are in so small a degree lower than last, and to have satisfactory evidence that the schools, with very few exceptions, are efficiently conducted.

The passes in Standards III. and IV. are not quite so numerous as in the others, and it is most likely that such will always be the case, for the work of these standards under the circumstances they have to be passed will always be attended with considerable difficulty unless the syllabus of instruction is modified. In Standard III. the pupils have to face for the first time the seven separate subjects of the examination schedule, six of which they must show a satisfactory acquaintance with before they can gain a pass. Here, history first presents itself in the school course, and in a more extended and indefinite form than in the standards above it. Pupils must have a knowledge of the seven periods in their chronological order, and a few of the leading events connected with each period. The first division is easy enough ; but the second, which necessitates a knowledge of about twenty events scattered over the whole range of English history, is not so easily mastered. It might be managed, however, with plenty of time and skilful teaching, were it known what list of events the examination questions would be selected from. Without this, questions may be asked to which the attention of the pupils has never been drawn, for the examiners and the examined may differ widely in the measure of importance they attach to certain events. The results are not likely to be at all satisfactory, unless the history of events for Standard III. are distinctly specified. I do not think that much or any loss would ensue from the excision of history altogether from the work of Standard III., for this subject is taken up in definite and distinct portions by succeeding standards, and the benefit derived from the knowledge of a number of disconnected events cannot be very great. A mistake was made, I consider, in the adoption of the text-book of history so generally used throughout this district. It is called "The Brief History of England," and was adopted solely, I believe, on account of its brevity, which was supposed to render the mastery of its contents a matter of less difficulty than that of a larger work. It contains but a bald statement of facts, the dry bones of history, uninvested with anything calculated to excite interest in them, or to assist the pupils to a recollection of them. If it is to continue in use, and be of profit, it must be supplemented by the teacher from information gathered from a larger book.

In Standard IV. the difficult subjects are arithmetic and geography. In the former the sums set for examination do not partake so much of the straightforward character as in the lower standards, where the processes to be employed are plainly indicated in words ; but are so expressed as to require for their solution some thought and a power of reasoning-out the methods for themselves on the part of the pupils, whose chief difficulty at this stage is to determine which process or processes to apply, whether to add, subtract, multiply, or divide, unless expressed in so many words. In order to pass the arithmetic of this standard more successfully, pupils require to be frequently plied with problems connected with their every-day experiences, proposed to them in all varieties of expression, and suited to their different grades from Standard I. upwards. The solving of problems mentally merely ought not to be considered sufficient—the mental process by which the answer was arrived at, the pupils should be required to give clear expression to by a methodical arrangement of figures, or words, or both. This they will find at first no easy matter. The pupil who passes well the arithmetic of Standard IV. shows that he is in possession of powers and a knowledge of principles that, suitably exercised, will enable him to pass with ease the same subject in the higher standards, and is fairly equipped for the commerce of life, although he should never proceed to a higher grade. The geography laid down for the Fourth Standard is very comprehensive, and a complete knowledge of it is, no doubt, difficult to acquire and retain, but it must be faced with determination and diligence, for it cannot be well curtailed, seeing that there is a sufficient amount of this subject allotted to other standards to fully occupy the time at disposal for it.

Reading has improved considerably in most schools. Although there is still room for more improvement, especially in respect of taste and intelligent expression, and although defects require to be pointed out where they exist, yet in very few schools is it positively bad, and in many it is very good.