

opportunity have thus been afforded for the correction of any mistake as to matters of fact or for the withdrawal of anything that could be shown to have reflected unfairly on any teacher. One Committee only has availed itself of this opportunity. Although it would be rash to take it for granted that silence invariably implies entire assent, it may fairly be assumed that both Committees and teachers are, on the whole, satisfied with the representations made and the estimates given in what follows.

It has been found necessary to rearrange the time for examining the town schools, some of which were formerly taken in October, and the rest in December. This alteration has considerably shortened the interval since the previous examination, ten months only having been allowed for preparation in the case of most of these schools. In drawing up my estimate of the state of each school, however, I have endeavoured to make due allowance for this fact, although I have not seen my way to construe more leniently the requirements of the standards, to attempt which would lead to endless complications. A pass in a town school, therefore, in 1884 means just what it did in 1883.

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I am conscious that throughout this report I have made free use of what to many must appear to be the jargon of the standards. I can only deplore the existence of a defect that seems unavoidable. It is true that, by going a long way about, I could have made myself understood, but, on the whole, the slang of the school is perhaps preferable to a series of periphrases. The system of examination by standards—which is of quite recent origin, and is due, I believe, together with the system of “payment by results,” to the not uniformly well-directed ingenuity of the statesman who was then known as Mr. Robert Lowe—has brought into currency a set of words coined to meet the exigencies of the case. When the present fashion of standards passes away, as will probably happen in a few years, it will be a matter of small consequence that reports like this, which will then have served its time, should be almost unintelligible.

The Chairman, Education Board, Nelson.

I have, &c.,  
W. C. HODGSON, Inspector.

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#### MARLBOROUGH.

SIR,—

Blenheim, 19th March, 1885.

I have the honour to lay before you my annual report on the public schools of the District of Marlborough for 1884.

Twenty-six schools have been examined, 1,303 scholars being present on examination day. The number on the roll, 1,530, has increased by only forty since the previous examination. This circumstance will facilitate comparison between the results obtained at my former examination and that just completed. With a few striking exceptions, which will be specially noted, there is a slight but unmistakable falling-off in this year's work. I have not been brought to this conclusion merely by applying the crude and insufficient test of percentage of passes. A diminution of 4 per cent. still leaves a rate which compares favourably with the results obtained in other districts. But whatever other measure be applied, the comparison of the past year's work with that of its predecessor is, to a certain extent, unfavourable. The number of passes in some of the upper standards has fallen off—in the Fourth Standard by nearly one-half. Many of the passes were also very barely won, the candidate doing just the minimum of work that would justify an examiner in granting a pass. The record of failures has also increased in every subject. Those in arithmetic and spelling especially are more numerous than they ought to be. On the other hand, both the handwriting and the neatness and arrangement of the paper-work continue to improve steadily, and the letters written by the older scholars are better expressed and more to the point than they were formerly. The loss of several excellent teachers during the year may account, to some extent, for the falling-off in several schools, though the places of those who have left seem, on the whole, to have been well filled up. When it is considered, however, that only thirty out of more than fifteen hundred scholars have this year advanced so far as to be able to pass the Sixth Standard, the danger of over-educating the mass of the people, about which so much has been foolishly said and written, seems very remote. Nor does the risk of over-crowding those occupations which demand some literary ability, or even much clerky dexterity, appear very imminent.

It will, happily, not be necessary for me to allude—except in one instance, and that briefly—to what is amiss in the construction of the present standards. A reform of some kind is clearly at hand. Public opinion and the Education Department are now apparently at one on this point. But there are some other matters that need reforming in Marlborough, if its schools are to do all the good of which they are really capable. The first of these is the system, or rather absence of system, of providing the scholars with reading- and copy-books. This important matter is at present left entirely to the operation of what is conveniently termed “the natural law of supply and demand,” the total breakdown of which in furnishing the children of New Zealand with anything like a decent education brought about the present system of public education. The teacher, it seems, buys such books as he sees fit, if he can get them, from the local bookseller, who in turn supplies them in such quantities, at such prices, and of such kinds as he also sees fit; the result is that the scholars, as a rule, are miserably equipped with the necessary implements for their work. The copy-books used, even in the same school, are often of two or three quite different styles, and are not seldom too far advanced and otherwise unsuitable for those who use them. The reading-books are dear, too little varied, and so scarce that two or three scholars are often to be seen poring over the same tattered volume. In suggesting a remedy I shall avail myself of the experience gained in a neighbouring district. Whatever objections may be urged against the employment of a non-resident Inspector—and I fully recognize the force of some of them—it ought to count for something on the other side to have the benefit of a wider knowledge of the subject than could well be gained in a very small district, to say nothing of the presumption in favour of an