

The approaching termination of the second septenniad of my inspectorship naturally suggests a retrospective glance at the educational condition of the district at the commencement of my tenure of office, and a comparison of the nature of the school work during the earlier portion of that period and at the present time. My earliest report having reference to a full year's work was that for 1876, when there were only twenty-two schools in the whole district (exclusive of those under the 40th clause of the old Westland Education Ordinance), and the roll number was 1,795. This, as you are aware, includes the whole of the Provincial District of Westland, since unfortunately divided into two, so that in the present small district we have two schools more than the whole province then possessed, with an attendance about the same. The average daily attendance, which was then only 71 per cent., is 78 per cent. of the roll number, the increase being no doubt partly due to some extent to the erection of bridges and improvements in roads and tracks. It is not, however, to such statistics that I wish to direct your attention, but to the state of elementary education before the Act of 1877 came into force and at the present time. In my report for 1878 I expressed a doubt as to the possibility of introducing the new syllabus in its entirety without danger of considerable deterioration in the work of the ordinary subjects of the Board's old programme, and my experience since has fully confirmed the opinion then expressed as far as the falling off in the results is concerned. The following table shows the percentage of passes in standards for the year 1879—the year after the introduction of the new standards—and 1888:—

						1879.	1888.
S 6	...	...	...	...	...	85	75
S 5	...	...	...	...	...	89	74
S 4	...	...	...	...	...	91	75
S 3	...	...	...	...	...	89	71
S 2	...	...	...	...	...	97	81
S 1	...	...	...	...	...	97	92

The difference in the percentages is of itself remarkable, but in addition to this a comparison of the examination papers then set, particularly in the higher standards, with those used this year, would show that a much higher state of efficiency was expected in 1879 than we could venture to hope for at the present time. I am confident that if the same papers were put before the several standards at the next examination the results would fall far below those recorded this year. The work then required from the scholars was limited in the number of subjects as compared with the standards of to-day, and the whole time of the teachers and scholars could be devoted to those subjects with a thoroughness that it is vain to expect in any but the very largest and best schools, and under the most favourable circumstances, at the present day. It is only fair, however, to remind you that the increase of the syllabus was followed by a large diminution of the Board's income, and that this necessitated a considerable reduction in the staff at the larger schools, and in salaries at all. As a consequence, many excellent teachers, who had been attracted to Westland by the liberal salaries then offered, soon sought and obtained situations elsewhere. The services of pupil-teachers were substituted for those of an assistant teacher at most of the large schools; and all these circumstances, in conjunction with the increased demands of the syllabus, operated in gradually weakening the results of the teachers' efforts in the "pass" subjects, without, in my opinion, affording anything like an equivalent for the thoroughness which was once undoubtedly the characteristic of standard work in Westland.

I do not know how far my experience resembles or differs from that of the other Inspectors who had charge of school districts before the Act of 1877 came into force, but I have very little doubt that the same result, though perhaps in a minor degree, has followed throughout the colony. I do not wish it to be supposed that the difference is as great at the few largest schools as it is in the district generally. Such schools, having several adult teachers and a corresponding staff of pupil-teachers, have been better able to bear the additional burden by division of labour. Nor do I think the depression will be permanent. No doubt, in the course of a few years, when all teachers will probably be holding certificates in D and upwards, and when the pupil-teacher system (as well as the general tendency of the whole course of instruction in public schools) shall have filled to overflowing the teaching profession, very able teachers will be found willing—or unwilling—to take charge of even the very small schools, which are at present necessarily in the hands of young, inexperienced, and inefficient teachers, and then perhaps it will be possible in such schools to give a smattering of elementary science, drawing, &c., without the sacrifice of solid attainments in the remainder of the programme. At all events, we can but hope and strive for the best, and wait until a reflux of public opinion shall bring about a reconstruction of the standard syllabus on lines better calculated to equip the future generations for the industrial occupations of life, for which the great majority of the children attending our public schools are in all probability destined.

Since the foregoing report was written, the question of adopting a uniform series of text books for the whole of New Zealand has been brought under the notice of your Board by a circular from the Southland Board, which refers to one issued by the Education Department, calling attention to complaints of frequent changes of books in the public schools. The Board's opinion is asked, first, as to the desirableness of adopting a uniform set of books; second, whether the Board approves of certain books recommended by the Southland Inspector. With regard to the first question, I am of opinion that a stereotyped uniformity in the educational work of the colony is on many accounts by no means desirable, and as long as Boards are in existence is, as a matter of fact, fortunately well nigh impossible. The efforts of intelligent teachers are already sufficiently cramped by the hard and fast rules of the standard, and, in addition, to compel them all to use exactly the same reading books, for instance, would deprive the youth of the colony of the manifest benefits of variety, and would be