

With the same number of schools as last year, there were on the rolls at the time of examination 4,610 children, an increase of 105 for the year. Deducting the preparatory pupils and those who had passed Standard VI., there remained 3,004 to be examined in the standard classes. Of these 136 were absent from the examination, the percentage of absentees being 4.5. For 1887 the percentage was 6.4, and for 1886 it was 8.5. The steady improvement which these figures indicate is deserving of special mention, and the teachers of this district can quote them as evidence that they are freeing themselves from the suspicion of conniving at the absence of those who are unprepared for the test of examination by reason of their irregularity, their laziness, or even their mental weakness. There are really very few children in good health who of their own free will would stay away from school on the examination day. It is a general remark that the worst attenders on the roll make a point of turning up on that day.

A fall in the number of "exceptions" from 135 to 123, and in the number of those "entitled to exception" from 346 to 306, is a result to be expected from the greater regularity shown in the quarterly returns of attendance. For this year the average attendance, stated as a percentage of the mean average weekly roll number for the four quarters, is 77.7—that is to say, out of every 100 children on the rolls there were 77.7 present every school day. The percentage, similarly calculated, for 1887 was 74.9, and for 1886 it was 72.8. The steadiness of this rise promises well for its continuance, and we must see that it does continue, for it has not reached the stage when we are to be satisfied with it. In past years the district as a whole has kept about the average of the colony; but it may well be asked why we have been so far behind the neighbouring district of Otago. Will the people of South Canterbury plead that they experience worse weather than they have across the Waitaki? Or will they assert that the children there are of less value than they are here in helping their mothers on washing days, in picking potatoes, in minding the baby, or in keeping the birds from the strawberries? Are we to be forced to the conclusion that the parents in this district do not so keenly realise to what extent their children suffer in their progress and their education in its widest sense from the unsteadiness of their attendance? No doubt a great deal of blame attaches to the parents for their apathy in this respect; but many of the teachers who find in this an excuse for their bad results had better consider how much of this irregularity is due to themselves. Assuredly I do not attach the extreme importance to this excuse which some teachers would seem, from the bitterness of their complaining, to expect me to do. I would have them bear in mind that it is a matter of experience that good teaching secures a good attendance, and that it is a common way of complimenting the teacher on his management of the school for parents to declare that they can scarcely keep their children at home when they really want them.

On the rolls there were 3,004 belonging to the standard classes, and 2,224 obtained passes. The official percentage of passes, estimated on the roll number of the schools examined, is 48; and the official percentage of failures, estimated on the standard class roll, exclusive of absentees and exceptions, is 19. The corresponding percentages for 1887 were 43 and 24. So great an improvement as the fall in the percentage of failures from 24 to 19 indicates must be gratifying to all interested in the welfare of our schools. It would have been still more gratifying had the proportion of schools whose results contributed to the lowering of this percentage been greater. As it happens, the four largest schools—whose united rolls fall short of half the number of all the children in the district by less than 250—have each been credited with a percentage of failures of less than 20; and there are sixteen schools in the same list. This leaves twenty-nine schools with a percentage of failures of over 20, as against eighteen schools for last year. It is remarkable, however, that the number of schools—thirty-three—whose percentage of failures ranges from 0 to 30 is the same as last year. It will be found that if we take the child as the unit this percentage has fallen from 24 to 19, but if we take the school as the unit it has risen from 24 to 25.

In Standards II., III., IV., V., and VI. the percentage of passes on the number examined shows a decided improvement, the most noticeable advance being in Standard V., but this has not been sufficient to raise it from holding the worst position among the standards, as it did last year. Next to it, but slightly better, is Standard III. My own opinion is that these are the hardest standards to pass, and I think this opinion will be supported by a comparison of the results obtained throughout the colony. In Standard I. the percentage has gone back from 91 to 89. For all the standards together—with 2,224 passes out of 2,863 examined—the percentage is 77, as against 72 for last year. The average percentage in class subjects is 55, the same as last year; and the average of additional marks is 57, as against 56 for 1887.

All the pupils of Class S 7 were examined in the work of Standard VI., and their papers showed that they had made good use of their time in revising the work of the previous year. In several schools algebra, Euclid, and Latin had been taken up by this class as additional subjects. The children in the preparatory classes were examined in whatever work they were reported to have overtaken during the year.

READING.—Taken all round the statistics of the year show that the efficiency of the instruction in the standard classes has reached a higher level than in any past year. This remark holds good, too, with regard to each subject. In my former reports I have laid stress upon the necessity of cultivating a better style of reading in all the classes, and that it was to what could be done in the lower classes, among those who had not yet fallen into a bad style, or, at least, to whom a bad style had not become a habit, that the teachers were to direct their best energies. From the improvement I have found in the grouping of the words, in the distinctness of utterance, and in the tone of the reading in most of the lower classes, I am satisfied that the teachers have not been appealed to in vain. There are still some small schools, and one large one, where a monotonous singsong prevails. In one large infant department I found the modulation of voice rather overdone; but for this the teacher is deserving of praise if we look to the future of the children, for this tendency will most likely disappear as they grow older without leaving any bad effects. In the higher classes good reading is by no means exceptional, but still it is not as prevalent as it might be. In the important matter of intelligent explanation of passages from the reading lessons there is still