

from want of energy on the part of Committees, the district is placed in an undesirable position at the foot of the list. I am pleased to note, however, that during 1894 and 1895 the average, as computed in the departmental returns, increased from 71·5 to 75·8, this being the highest ever reached, though still under that of any other district for 1894. No doubt the steps taken by the Board and by some Committees for carrying out the compulsory clauses of the Act are bearing good fruit, and exercising a beneficial effect. I have, however, I regret to say, found that in the country schools the Act is practically a dead letter, and the pupils of school age absent themselves or are detained at home by their parents with impunity. The best results are obtained where independent truant inspectors have been appointed.

*Preparatory Classes.*—Of the 3,714 pupils on the rolls at examination, 1,374, or 37 per cent., were in the preparatory classes. The largest infant departments were at the Central School, 174 (31 per cent. of a roll of 548), Stratford 160 (42 per cent., roll 366), Inglewood 79 (36 per cent., roll 219), Midhurst 58 (43 per cent., roll 133), Opunake 56 (44 per cent., roll 126), Ngaire 55 (31 per cent., roll 175), West Infants' 49 (38 per cent., roll 124, with only three standards), and Waitara 49 (30 per cent., roll 159). Thus, of the larger schools to which all standards are admitted, Opunake, Midhurst, Stratford, and Inglewood had, in the order named, the largest percentages of pupils in the infant rooms, while Waitara, with 30 per cent., had the lowest, the Central and Ngaire being next with 31 per cent.

Of the 1,374 pupils in the preparatory classes, no less than 475, or 34 per cent., were over eight years of age, and for the non-presentation of these in Standard I. the teachers were required to give written reasons. In most cases the reasons were satisfactory, being (1) the advanced age at which the pupils began school life, and (2) the irregular attendance. In some schools, however, pupils had undoubtedly been kept back without just cause, and some who should have been in Standard I. or Standard II. were to be found among the infants, though they had come to school comparatively early. To carry out the spirit of the regulations, every pupil seven years of age in the preparatory classes must, after each annual examination, be transferred to Standard I.; but there are cases, especially in new schools, where this is inadvisable, and where, indeed, it would be extremely injudicious to present pupils in Standard I. at eight years of age, for in the country districts they come to school much later in life than they do in towns. To force on such children without a thorough grounding in the elementary work would be most unwise.

The quality of the work in the infant classes varies very much indeed. In schools where a teacher has to manage, unaided, probably five or six classes in addition to the infants, not much time can be given to the little ones, though much can be done by systematic and careful preparation of the work, but in large schools where the infants are in charge of assistants who have the help of pupil-teachers, good work is expected. I should like to see more variety introduced into the work of the infant classes, for lessons which are too long, or in which there is insufficient variety, prove uninteresting and irksome to the pupils. Action-songs and musical drill might be used to greater advantage, as they serve as a pleasant relief from the ordinary routine.

Multiplication tables were as a rule well known, but addition tables were often weak. In arithmetic and tables the pupils should have a very fair knowledge of the requirements for Standard I. before leaving the infant classes, for what is learned as play by the infants becomes work in the upper classes, owing to the pressure of subjects. Reading and spelling were fairly taught. The phonic system of teaching word-building is being adopted in the lower classes, and with good results. Writing is generally very fair. I should like to see the writing strong throughout, for where pupils have wide lines to write between, and have plenty of time to practise, the correct impressions of form are very readily received, and if the letters are not well formed in the lower classes much has to be unlearned in the higher classes.

*Average Ages of Pupils.*—In this district the average ages of the pupils for passing standards are very high. Table A (not printed) shows the average ages in the various standards since 1890. In thirty cases (six standards for five years) Taranaki reaches the highest age no less than nineteen times, and the ages, as a rule, are much above the average age for the colony. From the table and from the Government returns it will be seen that the adjoining district of Wanganui approaches us very closely in the average ages of the pupils passed. This would tend to show that the same causes are at work in both districts, and undoubtedly this is the case in some respects, for the growth of settlement, with the consequent increase in the number of bush-schools, raises the average age, for the pupils do not come to school till they are comparatively old, and at twelve and thirteen years of age may be found in the preparatory classes. But, as I have written elsewhere, some of the teachers have kept in the infant classes pupils who should have been presented in Standard I.

*The Examination of Standards I. and II.*—In Regulation 6 the teachers are instructed to determine the pupils in Standard I. and Standard II. that are fit to pass, and on their examinations certificates are issued to successful pupils, provided only that such must be present at the Inspector's examination. The Inspector is required to report on the teacher's examination, but has no power to alter the results. Of course, if the results of the teacher and the Inspector differ greatly, a mutual understanding may be arrived at, and either of the results or both may be modified; but if the teacher adhere to his results, these must be accepted by the Inspector, though in his opinion they may be unsatisfactory. As I wished to obtain an intimate knowledge of the working of all the standards, I examined nearly all the pupils in Standard I. and Standard II., in only a few cases taking out sections or divisions, and I regret to say the system of examination by the teacher has not worked well. Though some of the teachers conscientiously required a fair standard of excellence for a pass, on the whole, too lenient a view was taken, and I found all, or nearly all, in a class passed when scarcely a single pupil merited promotion. The difficulty in such cases lies, not with the earnest teacher who may have made an error in judgment, or who, as I not infrequently found, may have misread the regulations, but with the incompetent teacher about whom unfavourable reports have been sent in probably year after year. In one such case every