

The total number of teachers in the Board's service at the end of the year (exclusive of thirty-six sewing mistresses) was 535—viz., heads of schools or departments, or in sole charge, 149 males, 82 females; assistants, 35 males, 133 females. There were 136 pupil-teachers, 38 males and 98 females. A comparison of these figures with those of the previous year shows an increase of seven in the number of certificated teachers, and a reduction of nine as regards pupil-teachers.

PUPIL-TEACHERS' EXAMINATION.—The annual examination of pupil-teachers was held on the 20th December, and following days. Of the 126 who presented themselves for examination, 114 passed and 12 failed.

The following table gives the total number of children on the rolls, the number in average attendance, and the percentage of attendance at the close of each year since the Education Act came into force [not all reprinted]:—

Quarter ended Dec. 31.	District Schools.	Aided Schools.	Total of Schools.	On Roll.	Average Attendance.	Percentage.
1878 ...	106	4	110	13,647	10,076	73·83
1888 ...	155	1	156	20,388	16,395	80·42
1896 ...	182	13	195	21,300	17,938	84·21
1897 ...	184	16	200	20,820	17,708	85·05

It will be noticed that, notwithstanding the increase in the number of new schools, the number of children on the rolls at the end of December, 1897, was nearly 500 less than at the close of the previous year.

INSPECTION.—The Inspectors' report for the year has been forwarded. In addition to the usual statistical information, reference is made to several subjects of instruction. In reading, both as regards its treatment as a pass subject and in point of comprehension, an improvement is noted. With regard to arithmetic, it is satisfactory to know that the want of uniformity in the tests supplied by the department—a matter which last year formed the subject of some unfavourable comment—has almost disappeared. It is, however, not so reassuring to learn that, so far as the two highest standards are concerned, this subject has not been well done in quite a number of schools, and that sums of a similar type to those worked throughout the year have proved to be stumbling-blocks.

In view of the generally unsatisfactory progress made in grammar, as indicated in the examination reports, the Board requested its Inspectors to consider and report upon the matter. In their memorandum, already forwarded to the department, the Inspectors state that "The remedy is to be found, we think, in the re-union of grammar and composition as a subject in which individual proficiency is to be regarded as a condition of promotion, but the contemplated re-union should recognise, as the older syllabus did not, the strictly subordinate position of the first member of the partnership, and the programme of work prescribed in it should be so adjusted as to retain only those features which have the most intimate bearing on the teaching of composition. . . . At the same time we are much opposed to any increase in the subjects of individual attainment of which the Inspector will expect evidence at the several stages of progress. Our views, on the contrary, are in favour of a reduction, and we cannot see how a reduction could be better made than by allowing geography as a whole to take the place of grammar among subjects of the class group."

During the year the Inspectors drew attention to the omission of "Drill and exercises" from the subjects of instruction at several schools, and a circular has since been issued notifying the teachers concerned that the Board requires that this subject shall be included. In very small schools, with one teacher in charge, and where, perhaps, the infant department is strongly represented, beyond attention to the movements in connection with opening and dismissing school, full treatment of this subject can hardly be looked for; but from schools having not less than two teachers the Board will expect it to be thoroughly and efficiently dealt with.

NORMAL SCHOOL.—The number of students admitted during the year was thirty-seven, twelve males and twenty-five females. In his report, which is appended, the Principal gives full information with regard to the work of the training department. The only change to record in the staff is the retirement of Mr. W. A. Robinson, B.A., from the position of part-time lecturer. During his engagement Mr. Robinson discharged his duties with ability and zeal, and general regret was expressed when it became known that the Board would be unable to secure his services for a further period. At the close of the year, with the view of completing the necessary arrangements for 1898, the vacancy was filled by the appointment of Mr. F. J. Wilkes, B.A., to whom the responsibility of lecturing on several subjects has now been entrusted.

SCHOLARSHIPS.—At its meeting on the 21st July, after referring the matter to the Appointments Committee, who carefully considered the proposed alterations, the Board adopted new regulations for scholarships. The chief changes were (1) the throwing open of the senior class to all children who have made the required attendance at a primary school, but restricting the competition to those who have not attended a secondary school for a longer period than two years; (2) altering the condition of attendance from one to two years. The annual examinations took place on the 20th December and following days. The number of competitors in the junior class was 133 (seventy-four boys and fifty-nine girls), being forty-three less than in 1896. This reduction was no doubt due to the fact that the Board had previously drawn the attention of Committees and head-teachers to the Inspectors' remarks upon the advisableness of more discretion being used in sending up only those children who might be considered fairly prepared in the subjects of examination. For the senior class there were twenty-five entries, sixteen from boys and nine from girls, an increase of six compared with the previous year. Of the 133 competitors for junior scholarships, sixty-six entered from schools defined by the regulations as town schools, and sixty-seven from country schools. Four were won by candidates from schools of the former class, and eight by