

The percentage of pupils passed in Standards I. and II. by head-teachers is almost the same as that for last year.

The number of pupils over eight years of age who were returned as belonging to the Preparatory Class is 2,100. This number is slightly below that recorded in recent years, but is still high.

The following table shows the number of pupils examined in each of the standard classes, and the number of passes gained in each of the pass-subjects for each standard. The results in Standards I. and II. are still determined by head-teachers:—

TABLE II.

Showing the results of examination in the several pass-subjects of the various standards:—

Standard.	Number examined.	Passes in									
		Reading.	Spelling and Dictation.	Writing.	Drawing.	Arithmetic.		Composition.		Geography.	
							P. cent.		P. cent.		P. cent.
VI. ...	1,631	1,572	1,484	1,523	1,544	1,160	71	1,323	81	1,410	86
V. ...	2,502	2,170	1,938	2,216	2,229	1,531	61	1,954	78	1,903	76
IV. ...	3,767	3,241	2,929	3,276	3,320	2,752	73	2,706	72	2,575	68
III. ...	3,737	3,249	2,960	3,242	3,357	2,950	79	2,975	80	2,928	78
II. ...	3,504	3,151	3,165	3,211	3,190	2,905	83
I. ...	3,362	3,115	3,112	3,215	3,144	3,101	92
Totals ...	18,503	16,498	15,588	16,683	16,784	14,399	...	*8,958	...	*8,816	...

The numbers in this table compare, on the whole, favourably with those for last year. In reading the percentage of passes is higher by 1, in arithmetic by 3, and in geography by 2; it is lower by 1 in writing, drawing, and composition; in spelling and dictation it is unchanged. As to the results in single standards, there is an improvement of 13 per cent. in the passes in arithmetic in Standard VI., and of 10 per cent. in that of Standard IV. The tests in arithmetic for the Sixth Standard have, however, been easier than those issued by the Minister in recent years.

The teaching of reading continues to improve, though slowly enough, and it is in general satisfactory. In the larger schools it is very generally good; in the smaller, and especially in the rural schools, the need for improvement is still very noticeable, though even here there are a good many exceptions to this statement. Writing of the latter, Mr. Goodwin complains of the "monotonous, low, and sometimes almost inaudible manner in which the pupils utter the words of the text." "It is not surprising," he adds, "that children do not generally read with a proper regard to expression and inflection; but it ought not to be too much to expect them to read with sufficient distinctness, fluency, and attention to stops to enable the hearer to understand what is being read. I should like to see a knowledge of the passage read taken into account in determining a 'pass' in this subject." With the last remark most Inspectors will, I think, agree. The alteration by which comprehension was separated from reading and set up as an independent additional subject, when the syllabus was last revised, has certainly not tended to make the reading of the higher classes grow in intelligence, and has reacted unfavourably on the cultivation of rhetorical expression. To class a department of study among the "additional subjects" is to affirm officially its comparative insignificance. But surely comprehension of the matter and language of reading-lessons is a matter of the highest importance, and one to be cultivated by every means available. "Children," says a recent high authority† on teaching, "cannot by reading increase their stock of knowledge if they do not understand what they read. Questions on the matter should therefore form part of every reading-lesson, and when the answers show that there is not a full comprehension of the meaning the necessary explanations should be given. Answers consisting of a single word should never be accepted. From the youngest child complete sentences should be required, and from older children a continuous narrative or statement, which should sometimes be in writing."

Mr. Grierson's impression as to the teaching of reading in the North Central District, in which the schools are mostly small, and the attendance frequently very irregular, is more in accord with my own. "Reading," he says, "continues to improve all round. Though much of it is lacking in expression, and nearly all of it is far from being 'rhetorical in the best sense,' it is generally accurate and distinctly delivered, and can be followed without the book. In the smaller schools I do not think much more than this can reasonably be expected." Writing of the Northern District, in which during the winter months the attendance is extremely irregular, Mr. Crowe says, "I think there has been some improvement in this subject. The reading was, on the whole, fluent, but too frequently it was not accurate. The other prevailing faults were indistinctness and disregard of stops. Indistinct reading is, fortunately, much more rare than formerly." Mr. Mulgan says, "Reading in most of the schools (of the Waikato district), especially in the upper classes, lacks that fluency and ease which might reasonably be expected when each class is examined in a special book. It is difficult to conceive that a pupil has an intelligent grasp of the matter of the lessons when the reading of the actual words present such difficulty." In most of the schools to which Mr. Mulgan here refers, pupils who have passed the Fourth Standard are every second year advanced into the Sixth Reading-book, so that Standards V. and VI. may, for the sake of economy of time, be taught together in this subject. This is, no doubt, in part the cause of the defect he notices. But it

* Out of a total of 11,637.

† "The Art of Teaching," by D. Salmon, pages 113 and 114.