

The number of pupils absent from the examination in standards shows a considerable falling-off (130 in 1895 to 84 in 1898, or 35 per cent.). During the latter part of the year measles were very prevalent or the number of absentees would have been still lower; indeed, of the eighty-four one school was responsible for thirty-two, thirty of whom were in Standards I. to III. The number of passes has increased by 410. Taking the percentage of passes on the number of pupils presented in Standard I. to Standard VI., the increase has been from 62.4 to 71.4.

So far as statistics can be an indication of educational progress, the above figures all point to increased efficiency; but what to my mind is of much greater importance is the fact that the quality of the work received (and therefore the quality of the passes), which is a better test of progress, has greatly improved. In satisfactorily taught schools an Inspector has seldom to hesitate about passing the pupils, but in badly taught schools many, if not most, of the passes are weak and even doubtful. Where many such cases occur the work cannot be considered satisfactory, for a pass does not imply that the child obtaining it shows full proficiency in the work prescribed for the standard, but that he has been able to grasp a certain portion of it. Good work in the school must therefore be judged by the quality of the work or passes, rather than by the percentage of passes, which I have always maintained to be a most misleading test of a teacher's success; indeed, in respect of the individual schools a percentage of passes is never calculated. A good school will obtain a high proportion of passes, but so also may a badly taught school, for in the latter the pupils may be crammed to a certain point, while much of the work may be badly taught or neglected altogether.

To exemplify this we may take as an instance arithmetic, say, in Standard III. The syllabus prescribes some of the simple rules, and compound addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, with simple problems. Now, as the regulations fix as a pass three sums correct for boys and two and a half (two correct and one partly correct) for girls, and as last year the cards contained three sums in simple rules and two in compound rules, it would be possible for every child in the class to pass in arithmetic and yet be unable to work a sum in compound addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division. Although I have not found this occurring in a whole class, I have not infrequently found it hold good for a large proportion of a class. For a school where such results as the above are found a numerical estimate of the passes would make it appear that the teaching was just as good as in one in which every pupil worked all the sums correctly. The same principle may be applied to the other subjects.

Now, one object in examining a school is to reclassify the pupils—that is, to indicate who shall pass and who shall fail—and in deciding this I consider a pupil's work as a whole, allowing good work in one subject to weigh against weak work in another. Thus, of two boys, suppose one obtains five sums correct and the other only three, more allowance for weakness in other subjects would be made to the former than to the latter. The passes having been determined, a general report on the work has to be written, and in so doing I scarcely consider the number of passes, but estimate the quality of the teaching by the quality of the passes, and by the quality of the work in the several subjects. Take, for example, two schools or classes—A and B—each containing, say, twenty pupils. In A seventeen out of the twenty pass, five getting excellent passes, seven getting good or very good passes, and five getting fair passes. In B, eighteen out of the twenty pass, two getting good passes, nine getting fair passes, and seven getting weak or doubtful passes. Now, B gets a better percentage of passes than A, though the work on the whole is much inferior. The teacher of A has educated his pupils, the teacher of B may have crammed his pupils, and some of the subjects may be quite unsatisfactory. With these facts kept in mind one can easily conceive a case where the proportion of passes and the written report on the work may seem contradictory, but a reference to the schedules showing the pupils' work will reconcile the two.

In the pass-subjects steady progress is being made, and the adoption of better and modern methods is producing improved educational results. Indeed, without hesitation I may say that the work done in a few of our schools would do credit to any district, even the most favoured. Such results can be obtained only by continuous effort throughout the year (not "jogging along" in the early part of the year, and cramming-up for examination, as, I am afraid, is too often the case), and by careful and intelligent planning, systematizing, and organizing of the work. In other cases, however, teachers have made little effort to improve the quality of their work; indeed, some seem to think that it is quite unnecessary to keep pace with the times in their methods, and the same faults and defects have to be pointed out year after year. As is the case with every other employment or profession, experts are using their best endeavours to improve the means by which their labours may be rendered more efficient, and methods of teaching are becoming more rational and less empirical. Every detail of method is carefully thought out, criticized, and tested practically, and the teacher who fails to keep himself up to the mark must inevitably prove a failure. I am afraid we have some such in the service, and when lack of ability to control or to teach be added the results to the children are disastrous. These teachers are very good at attributing their non-success to any cause other than their own incompetency, though year after year their results may be unsatisfactory, while other schools, examined under exactly the same conditions, with similar, or it may be the same, cards, do uniformly satisfactory work.

I cannot but speak favourably of the energy, earnestness, and intelligence displayed by many of the younger teachers, some of whom have been comparatively only a short time in responsible positions requiring considerable organizing power in arranging work for several standards, or it may be for all the standards. The pupil-teachers on the whole are doing good work.

Of the class-subjects I cannot speak favourably. Grammar in particular is frequently very unsatisfactory in the upper standards, pupils in Standards V. and VI. being unable to parse the simplest parts of speech.

Though during the past year the progress in some schools has been unsatisfactory, in the district as a whole steady and sound progress has been made. The success of our pupil-teachers at the certificate examinations must be gratifying to the Board, and I am pleased to see that some, while still serving their apprenticeships, have been successful at the matriculation examination.

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