

mainly due to the exceedingly good work of the large schools of Class A* of the appendix to this report; for these schools include fully one-half of all the candidates of the district presented for examination, of whom 94 per cent. passed. The thirty-three schools of Class B† also contributed in a fair degree to this result, for they proved quite self-reliant, and scored a total return of 90 per cent. of passes.

It should be noted that the average age at which children now pass the several standards remains fairly constant as compared with last year. Assuming eight as the age for Standard I., nine for Standard II., and so on, the average age at which standards are now passed is from nine to eleven months above that normal age. Now, as many brighter children, whose attendance is regular, pass the standards at least six months under the specified age, and as there appears no difficulty in children of average ability and good attendance passing at the normal age, it follows there are yet very many irregular children who fail to reap the full advantage of the present State system of education. If the system were as compulsory in practice as it is in theory, then the average age at which the standards could be passed would be lowered by at least six months; and this would probably mean that every child of the irregular class would reach a standard higher than that now attained.

The truant officer is doing much-needed and useful work in compelling neglectful parents to do their duty in at least some degree. His ministrations no doubt have a far-reaching effect in maintaining a better attendance on the part of others; and yet there is a widespread feeling of indifference as to the value of school-time, to which so many parents lend themselves, with the result that the irregular attendance of a section of any class is a constant drawback to its progress.

We find that the more essential parts of the school course, the pass-subjects, are for the most part very satisfactorily taught, and more especially in schools and classes under experienced teachers. The quality of the reading and writing is fully maintained; composition and spelling show improvement in many schools; arithmetic and drawing give still greater satisfaction; and geography is admirably taught in the best schools. Geography varies much in value, according to the way in which it is taught. We do not find that the dry bones of some geographical text-books now in use afford any intellectual pabulum; and we have all along discountenanced the old-time plan of cramming with mere names of localities, a method never attempted in the best schools. Then, again, at times both examiners and teachers fail to see that it is the importance of a place from any given local standpoint which makes its name worth memory-room. Thus there is every excuse for a boy in an English school or even one in a Dunedin school not knowing where Ngahauranga is, but that excuse can hardly be extended to a Wellington school-boy. Everything in political geography is a question of degree of importance; and, measured by such a standard, we are generally satisfied with what is known; and in many cases we have been highly pleased, for again and again we have met with classes in which it was difficult to puzzle children with fair questions. Moreover, in one-half of our best schools a wide range of physical geography is successfully covered, including such elementary knowledge of physiography as is necessary to explain the causes of ordinary natural phenomena.

Referring to our notes on the class-subjects, we find that grammar and mental arithmetic continue to receive more moderate marks than the other subjects. The successful treatment of these subjects certainly indicates skill on the part of the teacher and the exercise of trained thought on the part of the pupil. It is more than probable that under a system of free classification such as we advocated in our last report these subjects would deservedly get more consideration. The teaching of history year by year becomes more satisfactory, and the new class-books, such as the "Victorian Era" are more suitable. It is a subject of which too much cannot be expected of children of tender age; but in Standards V. and VI. we have generally found an intelligent and satisfactory knowledge of the period studied.

Science instruction year by year becomes more comprehensively taught, more experimentally illustrated, and more appreciated by the pupils. A great feature of the year has been the establishment of cookery classes as a part of the domestic-economy programme. These classes are taken by two specially trained teachers at Wellington, Masterton, and Pahiatua as centres; and at present fifteen large schools and a few smaller ones benefit by the instruction. As classes are also held on Saturdays for teachers; the work will soon be extended to other schools.

Certain alterations have lately been made in scholarship work, and it may be found necessary during the coming year to revise our existing science programme by separating physiology from domestic economy, and also amending the chemistry syllabus by way of compensation. In this, as well as in drill, and in many other matters pertaining to the interpretation of the syllabus, the time has now come when the whole colony should be put on the same footing, and the plan of work fully defined by the Education Department.

Touching the additional subjects, recitation is nearly always prepared and said with fair taste and expression; and in many schools it is an interesting feature of the work. In the lower standards the pieces selected are sometimes too difficult of comprehension, and for Standard I. and infant classes we prefer nursery rhymes and ditties. In all standards selections might be made from books not in the hands of the children, as such a selection imparts freshness to the exercise. In many schools this is now done.

In the past year the subject of drill has been much discussed; and suggestions were made by us to the Board recommending the adoption of company drill, which might develop into battalion drill on the lines now adopted in New South Wales. This proposal at first found much favour; but imaginary difficulties presented themselves, and other considerations prevailed for a time, the upshot being the appointment of a drill-instructor whose duty it will be to form companies and extend the system on military lines much in accordance with the original suggestions. In the discussion, injustice was done to the existing work, for it was assumed that the present

* Eleven schools, each presenting 300 or more.

† Twenty-one schools, each presenting from 100 to 300 children.