

14. The area of secondary instruction, which reaches from the standard of the primary schools to the standard of the University Entrance Examination, was enlarged during the year by the establishment of the new class of intermediate schools. The present returns include 1,501 intermediate vernacular schools with 52,650 pupils, and 112 intermediate English schools with 4,328 pupils. These intermediate schools are principally improved pathsalas; in some cases they are reduced middle schools, and in a few instances they are newly-founded schools. But it is generally agreed that the vernacular schools of this class have been much more useful than those which attempt to give instruction in English. While the vernacular schools have in general risen from a lower grade, the English schools have, with scarcely an exception, been brought down from a higher class. This result, indeed, is the natural consequence of the low standard which at present prevails in the middle English schools; and it may be confidently asserted that until the teaching, and especially the English teaching, in schools of this class shall have been generally improved, no room will be found for the establishment of an intermediate class between the middle and the primary schools. After full consideration, the Lieutenant-Governor has lately determined to discontinue the award of the special scholarship for intermediate English schools, and this will no doubt be followed by the disappearance of this class of schools from the returns.

15. As the examination for intermediate scholarships was held for the first time during the year, the Lieutenant-Governor thinks it sufficient to notice, rather than to censure, the laxity with which the rules upon the subject were enforced. It was the intention of Government that primary schools should be allowed to elect whether they would compete for the primary or for the intermediate scholarship. But it appears that these orders were generally interpreted to mean that any school which pleased might send up candidates for the intermediate scholarships, and the natural result was that the majority of these scholarships were awarded to students from middle schools—a class of pupils for whom the scholarships were not designed, and to whose attainments the prescribed standard was not adapted. For the intermediate vernacular scholarship 723 schools sent up 1,645 candidates, of whom 867 passed and 185 obtained scholarships: for the English scholarship the number of schools was 76, and that of candidates 201. Of these, 146 passed and 39 obtained scholarships. The Director has since issued a circular calling attention to the true meaning of the Government orders on this subject, and it is hoped that all possibility of misapprehension will now have been removed.

16. The number of middle vernacular schools decreased during the year from 1,259 schools with 59,304 pupils to 1,045 schools with 51,718 pupils. The causes of this decrease have already been explained: some schools have been abolished in consequence of the reduction of the grant, and others have fallen to the intermediate standard. The decrease was in the aided and private schools: the Government schools maintained their numbers, but showed no appreciable increase. The results of the vernacular scholarship examination, which is the recognized test of the education given in these schools, contrast very unfavourably with those of the preceding year. In 1876, 824 middle schools sent up 3,003 candidates, of whom 1,359 passed and 218 obtained scholarships. In 1875, 2,521 candidates passed out of 4,062 who presented themselves for examination. It is suggested in the report that this is due in some measure to the recent modifications introduced into the scholarship course. But this explanation is insufficient to account for so serious a decline, and the fact that more than one-fifth of the schools failed to send up any candidates at all affords a proof that middle school teaching requires to be actively stimulated and carefully supervised.

17. The returns for middle English schools point to a similar conclusion. In 1875-76 these schools numbered 623 with 34,072 pupils: in 1876-77 the numbers fell to 511 schools and 30,072 pupils. The progress in these schools is tested by the minor scholarship examination; and it appears that in the year under report 292 middle English schools sent up 923 candidates for this scholarship, and that of these 486 passed and 108 obtained scholarships. It follows that only three schools in every five compete at all for the scholarship, and that there are 220 schools shown in the returns as middle English schools which

are unable to send up any candidates for the examination which is the recognized standard of their class. In the previous year there were 1,140 candidates for the minor scholarship, and of these 816, or 72 per cent., passed; whereas in the present year the proportion of successful candidates is only about 53 per cent. The returns do not show what proportion of the competing schools succeeded in passing any of their candidates; and the Lieutenant-Governor would ask that this may be stated in future reports, as regards both vernacular and English middle schools.

18. It is easy to trace the causes of this decline both in the numbers of middle schools and in the character of the instruction given in them; but it is a matter of more difficulty to suggest a remedy. The fact appears to be that, though the middle vernacular schools in many cases retain much of the stamp of excellence originally impressed upon them, they have in general ceased to be popular institutions. To a promising or ambitious boy, vernacular education, however excellent, seems to hold out little prospect of a successful career. He feels that, even if he obtains a scholarship, he will compete on disadvantageous terms in the struggle for the coveted prize of Government service with rivals who began the study of English at an earlier age. But if, in the vernacular middle schools, the decline is owing to the falling off of pupils, the low standard of English middle schools arises from the deficiency of the teaching staff. The Director remarks that schools of this class are very popular; it must be added that in general they are also very worthless. The teaching which they give is in no sense education, and can scarcely even be called instruction. Its prominent feature is the attempt made by untrained masters, themselves very imperfectly acquainted with English, to impart a smattering of English to boys who have never studied their own vernacular, and have never been grounded in any useful branches of learning. In his recent tours of inspection, the Lieutenant-Governor noticed with much concern the waste of time and money expended in producing these unprofitable results, and the social mischief of encouraging lads to aim at a class of education which was only within their reach in a very inefficient form, and which certainly exposed them to the probability of *hearing* disappointments when their school career is finished.

19. The policy which the Government desires to adopt in reference to this matter has been explained in orders which have recently been issued. In all Government middle schools it is intended that sound vernacular training shall be made the preliminary to English education, and in aided schools the acceptance of a similar principle will be a condition of the receipt of a Government grant. With this object, candidates for the minor scholarship examination will be required to pass the full vernacular tests, and, if the necessary books shall be forthcoming, it will also be required that English grammar shall be taught in the vernacular. It is also intended to increase the number of Government middle schools, as it is found that a Government school usually serves as a model to aided and private schools in its neighbourhood. The Government vernacular middle schools at the sudder stations of districts are for the most part of excellent quality, and similar schools will now be established in subdivisions. The working of these orders will require to be very carefully watched by the inspecting officers of the department, and it must be clearly understood that the Government has no desire to prohibit, or even to discourage, the study of English in middle schools, but only to require that the teaching shall conform to the object with which the schools were founded—namely, the imparting of sound vernacular instruction.

20. The vitality of the higher English schools, teaching up to the standard of the Entrance Examination, is shown by the fact that, under all the difficulties of the year, they increased both in number and pupils, the figures for the last two years being as follows:—

	1875-76.		1876-77.	
	Schools.	Pupils.	Schools.	Pupils.
Government schools	45	11,952	48	12,235
Aided schools	85	9,550	88	10,365
Private schools	43	11,027	44	10,357
Total	173	32,529	180	32,957