

Contents and information for teachers



# Victorian Schools



# VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

**For transforming the classroom:**

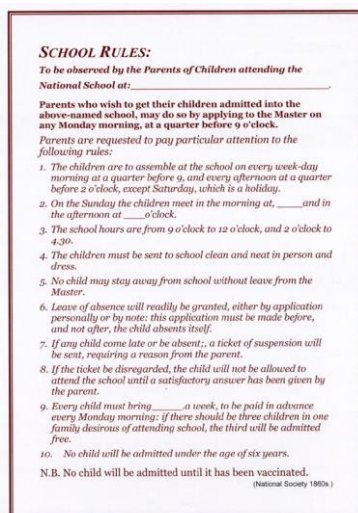
Framed picture of Queen Victoria



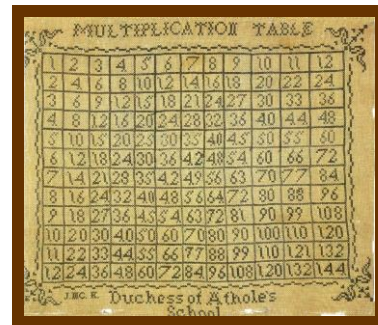
Empire map (A3 laminated)



School Rules 1860s



Framed multiplication sampler (facsimile)



School timetable 1872 (facsimile)



Two different timetables are provided. You may wish to base your Victorian school day on one of them. You may need to explain what some of the lessons were, such as 'catechism' and 'recitation'. (We have also included a transcript of the timetable above as the copperplate writing makes the original almost unintelligible).

Class photos (2 x A4 laminated)



Some schools taught boys and girls separately. Most had separate playgrounds.

These photos can be used to illustrate what pupils should wear if you plan a Victorian school day. The girls lace collars and boys Eton collars can be made from templates included in the case.



**For teacher in role as Master/  
Mistress:**

Teacher's Gown and cane



School bell



Monitor's Ink Bottle



Pince-nez spectacles



(Pinch-nose spectacles) You can peer over the top of these to make you seem even more formidable!

Teacher's ink stand with dip and quill pens



Rolling ruler



These allowed lines to be drawn without smudging the ink, provided the ruler was rolled away from the line, not over it!

Teacher's tea can



Classrooms often had a stove for heating. The tea can would have sat on that keeping the tea warm.

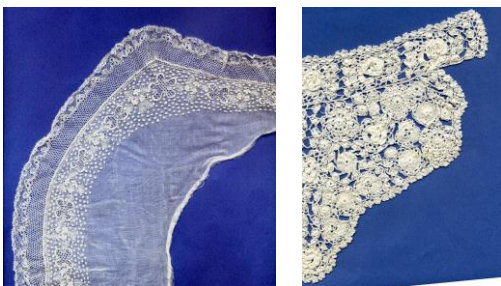
## Pupils in role:

### Girl's Pinafore

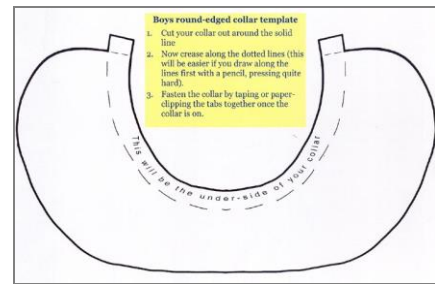


Pinafores were worn to protect girl's dresses. You may have something similar in the school's role play resources, if so they can be commandeered for your Victorian school day.

### Girl's lace collars/jabot and boy's Eton collars – templates



In the two class photos provided, most of the girls are wearing fancy lace collars and most of the boys wore Eton collars. If you intend having a Victorian school day, the photos can be used to show what pupils should wear. If you have lace in school that can be used for the girls collars. If not we have included 4 scanned images of lace collars/a jabot which can simply be enlarged on a photocopier to A3 (black and white is fine) then cut out and pinned around girl's the necklines. There is also 2 templates that can be copied, cut out and creased to make simple replicas of the collars boys at the time would have worn.



Here's some boys collars we made earlier!!



## Class equipment:

### Slates and slate pencils



### Pupils' dip pens and ink bottle



### Alphabet cards



## Alphabet blocks



## Cowrie shell counters



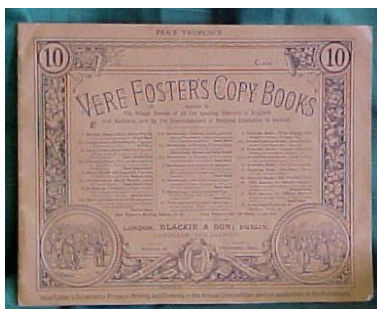
For calculations, not use as games counters.

## Abacus



Again, a tool for performing calculations.

## Copy Book (facsimile)



We include a copy of a page from the copy book to photocopy to use on your Victorian school day.

## Building blocks



The use of building blocks in schools is explained by the text of this advertisement from 1879.

### *Many happy hours*

Building blocks are among the most pleasing and instructive toys ever invented for children.

The structures provide many happy hours for boys and girls, do not readily fall apart, and can be carried about

Children do not soon become tired of the blocks, as their ingenuity is constantly being called into exercise.

(Advertisement, England, 1879)

## Playground equipment/ games:

### Diablo



### Whip and top



### Skipping rope



## Rewards:

### Attendance Reward Card (facsimile) and Attendance Medal



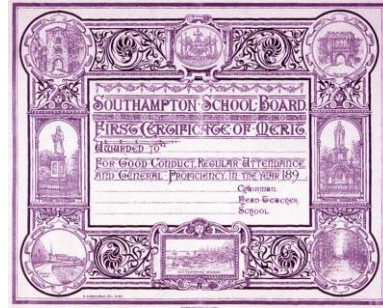
The school system relied as much on the 'carrots' of such items as on the stick (literally). However these carrots were aimed as much at parents as pupils. Even when schools became entirely free, some families could not afford to lose the wages their children were earning in factories, so still kept them out of school. Schools lost grant money if there were too many absences, so reward certificates and medals were introduced to improve attendance and raise the profile of education.

### Proficiency Certificates (facsimiles)



Another method of raising education's profile was the awarding of merit certificates for progression through the 'standards'. Pupils that passed the inspectors examination were awarded such certificates and entered the next standard. Those

who failed had to repeat the year and try to pass again at the end of that year – hence most classes had children of varying ages.



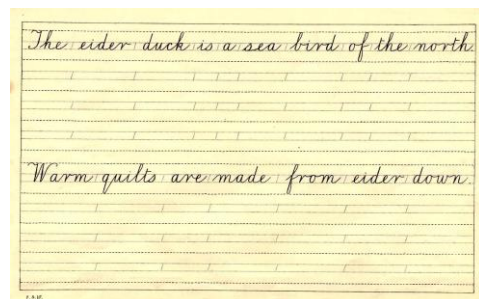
Two laminated copies of this blank merit certificate are provided so that you can issue them on your Victorian school day. Please **use photocopies or non-permanent markers** to enter your school and pupil's names on them.

## Work sheets and classroom activities:

These materials are included to help you reproduce the type of lessons Victorian children would have experienced.

### Writing exercise

Writing meant handwriting practice, copying from the board on slates or in copy books. The repetition of words and phrases in copy books, may have assisted reading and spelling skills. Writing had to be copperplate, sloping 60° forwards. All pupils had to write with their right hand, regardless of their actual needs and blots and smudges when using ink, were not tolerated.



We have included a typical page from a copy book to photocopy and issue for pupils to practice (2 copies per A4 sheet).

## Object Lesson on the potato

Object lessons were the closest equivalent of today's science lessons.

However they included no exploration at all, as with all other subjects it was just 'chalk and talk' as this will amply illustrate.

**Object Lesson: The Potato**

The lesson met the requirements of District 1 (equivalent to Year 2 in today's schools). Resources: eight large prints with eyes, cut to show (one enough without names to each class), books, pens. Teachers should begin by instructing children to sit up straight, with eyes facing the front and hands on desks.

Announce that today they will study the potato. Hold up a potato and point out its features - shape, eyes, scars etc.

Then draw the potato on the blackboard, with eyes etc. labeled. The teacher should then write, in appropriate, on the blackboard:

The potato belongs to the nightshade family.  
It is part of a thick stem called a tuber.  
It grows above and below ground.  
Its 'eyes' are the undeveloped buds.  
The children must then repeat these facts in unison.

The teacher should then write:

The buds or 'eyes' grow into new plants.  
The plants grow to a height of 1 to 2 feet, 30 - 40 cm.  
The flowers are white or purple.  
The crop is ready when the tops of the plants wither.

The children must now repeat these facts.

The children can then be asked, *Why are potatoes an important food? When do you eat potatoes? Where are potatoes grown? What do you do with potatoes?*

Potatoes are eaten every day.  
Potatoes are grown in our gardens. After the lesson, you might discuss if these 2 facts are still true.  
Potatoes are good for us.

Once again, the children repeat these facts.

Finally the teacher can add that people in Ireland depend on the potato crop for most of their food. Very recently, in 1845 (known as the famine), the potato blight destroyed most of the crop and between 200,000 and 300,000 people died of famine the following winter. Then write that on the blackboard and get pupils to repeat it.

Mothers may pass potatoes to each class at this point.

Instruct pupils to draw their potato to copy the board on the top half of a new page in their books. After say, 5 minutes order them to stop and raise their work for you to inspect - issue praise and acknowledgment as you see fit.

Then instruct pupils to copy all the facts about potatoes from the board into their books below their drawings in their best cursive writing. On completion of the task, the teacher will say, 'Pencil down', and all children must replace their pencils above their work on the desk. The teacher will then say, 'Work up'. The children will raise their work, holding it by the top corners, for the teacher's inspection. Again the teacher issues praise and acknowledgment as appropriate.

Adapted from materials from the Vortbridge George Museum

Instructions for delivering an object lesson on the potato.

## Drill photo and exercises



There are exercises to perform with your class on the reverse of the photograph.

## Recitation texts (transcript)

You will see the timetable includes 'Recitation', Victorian school-children were expected to learn poems and the like by heart. This is partly because books were too expensive to provide for individual pupils.

**THE INFANT RECITATION BOOK.**  
(Part III.)

No. 101. **LITTLE BY LITTLE.**  
One step and then another,  
And the longest wall is ended;  
One stitch and then another;  
And the largest rent is mended;  
One flake upon another, -  
And the deepest snow is laid;  
One brick upon another,  
And the highest wall is made.

•••••

No. 102. **BATHING.**  
He didn't like bathing, oh dear! oh dear!  
The sea was so cold, and the waves came so near,  
But sister was gentle, oh, sister was kind,  
She whispered of beautiful shells they would find.  
She told him the waves sing a wonderful song,  
That only to wavelets and ripples belong.  
"So, will you not bathe, and come with me  
And learn, if you can, the song of the sea?"  
Then slowly the frown faded out of his face,  
And a smile like a ripple came back in its place.

•••••

No. 103. **THE LETTER COOK**  
Oh, I can make a pudding,  
And I can bake a bun,  
And I can make a pie,  
Oh, I could do so many things,  
If only I might try!

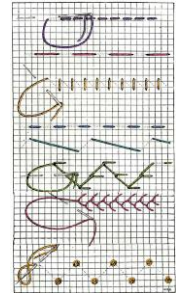
But I can't learn my spelling,  
And I can't do my sums -  
Still, I can make a pudding,  
And I can show the plums,  
For I have useful little fingers  
And clever little thumbs,  
And so for that I sigh.

I wonder why do each thing  
Mamma won't let me try,  
And says that birds must learn  
to walk  
Before they try to fly,  
I'm not a bird - I long to cook,  
And so for that I sigh.

The poems are on our sheet are copied from a contemporary book of texts for such lessons. How quickly can your class learn each poem by rote (just as Victorian children would have), so that they can recite it without help?

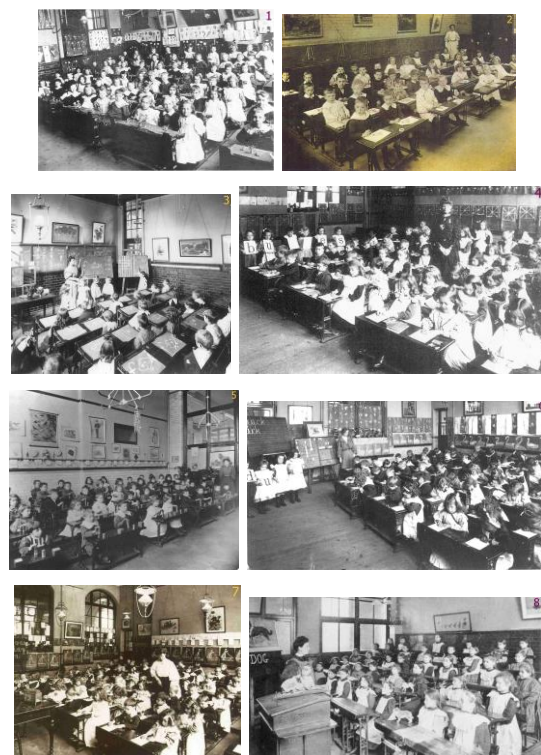
## Needlework worksheet and samplers

At the time, older pupils had some vocational training. Girls were taught needlework stitches, knitting etc. and how to do housework. Boys learned woodwork or gardening. You should discuss why girls and boys were taught different skills.



Pupils could try some stitches from the worksheet - do they think they could produce samplers as fine as the Victorian examples? They may also find Margaret's age surprising!

## Eight images of Victorian classes



# Reproducing a Victorian school day

The resources in this collection are intended to help schools reproduce the Victorian school experience on their own premises. They include artefacts and clothing to set the scene in the classroom, have the teacher and pupils in role and resource some class activities and lessons. The pictures included in this file identify what items fit each of these categories.

There are two timetables included in the collection which you may wish to base your day upon. One timetable is from a large primary school in 1872, with each classes subjects identified. The other, dated 1889, is for a Standard III class - equivalent to Year 5 in today's schools.

## On receipt of the box

You can explore the artefacts with your pupils in the normal way – each pupil/pair receiving an item, exploring it still wrapped in tissue paper and trying to guess what it might be then revealing it and discussing what it is, who used it and what it tells us about Victorian school life. There is also a story to read (included later in this file) that you might share to give a flavour of what Victorian school life was like.

## Prior to your Victorian school day

You could send home letters requesting that pupils wear suitable clothing on the day – **not** Victorian street urchins like the cast of Oliver!! but similar attire to the children in the class photos

- dark dresses/skirts and tops for girls and *if possible* something that looks like the white pinafores Victorian girls wore over their clothes or with lace collars round the neck. If you/pupils cannot get either, you can use the templates in the case to make 'lace collars'(see below).
- For boys, dark shorts (grey flannel school shorts are ideal) with dark jackets or jumpers and white shirts (again we have provided templates for making paper 'collars' if your pupils don't wear traditional shirts).
- there are four different styles of lace collars/jabots for the girls. These simply need enlarging to A3 on a photocopier (black and white copies are fine). The girls can choose one, cut the 'collar' or 'jabot out' and pin it to the neckline of their dress/top. Alternatively curved collars can be made in paper or white sheeting decorated with either lace or cut up doilies
- there are two styles of boys collars which can be photocopied and cut out.

## Classroom

You will need to rearrange your classroom before the day:

- arrange all the tables in straight rows facing the front – preferably with room for 5 or more pupils at each, either side of a central aisle
- blackboard at the front - hopefully you still have a blackboard or can find a free-standing one somewhere. If not, an easel holding a plain board painted with blackboard paint would work
- put the framed picture of Queen Victoria, the Empire map, multiplication sampler, timetable, class photos and school rules up on the wall (plus any other suitable pictures/notices you have)
- place the school bell, teacher's inkwell and tea can on/near the teachers desk and hang the cane where it can be seen by all!
- Place slates, ink bottle, pens, building block set, counters, abacus etc prominently around the room (pack away as much modern equipment as is feasible)



## On the day

You and the pupils are in suitable attire and pupils should be treated as if they are at a Victorian school from the outset. Hence your routine should begin like this:

### Entrance (commencing in the playground if fit, in the hall if not)

The children should line up, boys and girls separately, with the smallest in front and the tallest at the back. They should measure distance with their hands on the shoulder of the child in front. The teacher then gives the command, 'Enter'. The children march, 'Left right', 'Left right', initially on the spot and, progressively, into school. (This routine can be repeated for any change of venue e.g. moving outside/to hall for drill.)

Once in the classroom, they should stand in silence by their desks, boys with hands behind their back and girls with hands clasped in front. The teacher inspects everyone for cleanliness. The teacher then greets the children by saying, 'Good morning'. The children should respond saying, 'Good morning Ma'am' or 'Sir'. The boys should bow and the girls curtsy. On the command 'In', the children step in front of the seat.

### Registration

The teacher will call the names on the register, questioning yesterday's absentees and any siblings of today's absentees. When their name is called each child bows or curtsies and answers 'Ma'am' or 'Sir' and then sits down. The teacher may remark on punctuality with reference to future employment and could threaten use of the cane should unpunctuality occur again.

### Lessons

As stated earlier, several resources (artefacts and/or worksheets) are provided to enable you to deliver 'authentic' Victorian lessons in **writing** (handwriting practice sheet), **recitation** (poems to learn & recite), **drill** (drill exercises) and **science** (object lesson on a potato), and **sewing** (diagram of stitches and samples of samplers).

Other subjects need few special resources, it is more about how the subject is delivered. Also you are best to gauge the level of work to suit your age group in subjects such as Maths or English. For **arithmetic** you can be chanting tables or writing sums on the board and picking pupils to explain each step of the calculation, or using the abacus from the collection to solve a sum. **Reading** merely entails finding a suitable text for reading out loud in unison and spelling practice in the form of building words letter by letter on the board e.g. C A T, M A T etc.

### Prayers

Prayers were said at the beginning and end of the day, it is up to you whether you include them in your day depending on the school's policy.

### Teacher and pupils in role

#### The teacher should:

- teach by rote in a drill-like manner
- address children by using their Christian names
- never turn his/her back on the class
- instil obedience, discipline and punctuality
- punish unpunctuality, bad behaviour and poor work talking and fidgeting
- forbid counting on fingers
- insist on uniform, copperplate handwriting, sloping (60°)
- remind children of their place within the social hierarchy and that education is provided as a means to gaining employment
- instil respect for the Church, the rich, employers and other people considered to be important

### *Monitors:*

- distribute slates and books
  - fill inkwells
  - clean the blackboard
  - hear groups reciting multiplication tables
  - hear spelling lists recited
  - teach the names of letters to the youngest infants
  - teach infants how to form pot hooks\* and letters on their slates
  - carry out supervisory and organisational duties
- \* 'Pot hooks' were the basic strokes and curves associated with the development of writing.

### *Children should:*

- be respectful and obedient, kind, obliging, polite and courteous

- be seen and not heard
- speak correct English
- not speak unless spoken to
- rise to answer questions and await permission to speak
- ask only for materials such as ink but not for information
- address the teacher with respect and humility and as 'Sir' or 'Ma'am'
- sit and stand with straight backs
- use the right hand at all times for writing
- use the left hand for steadying paper or slates
- use ink with considerable care
- girls should wear their hair tied back with string or plain ribbons. Jewellery and other forms of finery are forbidden.

## Victorian Schools- Background notes for teachers

For the first half of Queen Victoria's reign, there was no national system of education. In those days many children from working families did not go to school at all, mainly because they spent most of their time at work. Some rich people believed this was right, because schooling might lead poor young people to disagree with their 'elders and betters'.

The free schools that did exist were run by churches and charities. Church Sunday schools had started before Victorian times. In 1844 laws were passed that made factories give children working there six half-day's schooling a week. At the same time **ragged schools** were established in some towns to offer free education to the poorest children. The name for these schools came from the ragged appearance of their poor pupils. The reformer Anthony Ashley Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-85), was chairman of the Ragged Schools Union.

Some families paid a few pence to send their children to **dame schools**, so called because they were run by elderly ladies. Although some of the women who ran these could not even read themselves! Most schools understandably concentrated on teaching the three Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic.

By the 1850s, far more children were going to school but most only attended for a year or less. Schools had cold, overcrowded classrooms with few books and little equipment. The teacher was often an older pupil called a **monitor, or pupil teacher**. Many adult teachers were untrained and relied on the cane to keep order.

In the 1860s it became clear that Britain needed more and better schools. People were worried that adults who were allowed to vote, could not read. They thought that men and women would be more useful workers if they could read instructions, write letters and keep accounts. At last, change began to come about.

### Board Schools

In 1870, a new Education Act was passed by parliament. All areas had to provide school places for children aged from 5 to 10. School Boards were set up all over the country. They opened new schools where there was not already a church school.

Although the 1870 Education Act said that all children aged 5 to 10 should attend school, initially Board Schools were not free. Parents had to pay a few pence each week, and this was enough to keep the children of poorer families away. Also, if parents wanted their children to learn more than reading, writing, arithmetic and religion, they usually had to pay extra.

Even before the 1870 Education Act, the government sent round school inspectors to check on the progress of schools, teachers and pupils. Pupils had to pass tests before they could move up to the next **standard**, or class.

In 1880, the school-leaving age was raised from 10 to 13. This caused problems for parents who relied on their children's income, so 10 to 13 year-olds were allowed to work part-time. This meant that some children arrived at school very tired. They might work from five in the morning on a farm or in a factory, and then go back to work after school until 10 o'clock at night. In 1891 schools were made free and gradually many parents began to take pride in their children's learning.

### Subjects and lessons

**Items mentioned that are included in this collection are indicated by blue tint.**

Victorian lessons would seem very odd to today's children. Learning was mostly by rote – repeating, reciting, copying - whether it be letters, words, sums or facts. There was no exploration or finding out for themselves. As classes were so large, all children had to do the same tasks at the same time, to the point of all children opening their books at the same instant at the command of the teacher and beginning to copy out what he/she had written on the board upon the next instruction.

## Reading and Writing

Letters and words were learnt by continuous repetition – e.g. *cat, mat, sat, hat* chanted by the entire class as the teacher pointed to each word on the board in turn. The alphabet was learnt in the same way although **alphabet cards** and **blocks** were also used in schools. Initially, for writing young children drew the letter in sand with their fingers. Later they moved on to writing on **slates**, scratching on them with sharpened **slate pencils** – these were much cheaper than pencils and paper as the slates could be wiped clean and reused endlessly. Older children learned to use pen and ink by copying copperplate handwriting in **copy books**. These often featured common proverbs and sayings e.g. waste not, want not as phrases to be copied on the lines below. **Monitors** filled the classes' inkwells daily from a **large ink bottle** and pupils wrote with **dip pens** that often had scratchy, leaky nibs that meant pupils frequently 'blotted their copybooks'.

## Arithmetic

Arithmetic was also taught by rote. Times tables had to be learned by heart and sums were copied from the board. **Abacuses** were the only tool for assisting calculation and **cowrie shells** were used as counters (use of the fingers was banned). Pupils were given maths problems to solve. These were made more complicated by the imperial measuring systems for everything – money, weight, volume, distance – pupils had to learn the relative values of each unit of measure in each case, with no simple decimal equivalents to make life easy.

## Science

Science was often taught through **object lessons**. During object lessons objects (or pictures) - animals, plants, household items etc. were displayed for pupils to observe while the teacher read out or wrote a list of facts about the subject on the blackboard. Our collection includes instructions for delivering an **object lesson on the potato**.

Even before the 1870 Education Act, the government sent round school inspectors to check on the progress of schools, teachers and pupils. Pupils had to pass tests before they could move up to the next **standard**, or class.

## Practical subjects

Boys and girls were taught practical subjects to prepare them for employment and adult life. Boys might be taught woodwork, technical drawing, gardening, even shoemaking. Girls were taught needlework, knitting, how to do housework tasks and cook meals cheaply. Many girls produced beautiful **samplers** to show prospective employers their talents.

## Drill

Drill was the Victorian equivalent of PE and games. It was a series of regimented exercises and marching designed to teach pupils to obey orders quickly without thinking as well as to provide exercise. If the weather was fine, drill took place outside in the schoolyard. If the weather was bad drill would be inside, sometimes in time to piano music. We have included some **examples of drill exercises** to use with your class.

## School inspections

When the government began funding education they began inspecting schools to ensure their money was being well spent. Inspectors visited schools every year and checked the standard of teaching by the staff. They also looked at the school building, the equipment and checked the **timetable**, registers and attendance. If attendance was poor school grants could be cut so rewards such as **attendance certificates or medals** were used by schools to improve attendance.

Finally the inspector examined all the children, one by one, testing their reading, writing and arithmetic. Those who passed the inspector's test were allowed to move up to the next standard (i.e. the next class or year). **Merit certificates** were awarded to show pupils had passed a particular standard. However, pupils that failed the inspector's examination remained in the same standard for another year. This meant classes had pupils of varying ages as the less able might remain in a given standard for two or more years whilst other pupils moved on.