

*Riverton.*—The Riverton School was first opened at the latter end of 1868, under a Mr. Wardrop, the then teacher of the local school, who was ultimately succeeded by Mr. Ireland, the present master, on the 18th April, 1870. The school has been conducted from the first on the "half time" system, the nominal time devoted to instruction being from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. This plan, combined with the irregular attendance of the children, has operated very unfavourably, and should be superseded by making the hours of instruction the same as in the local schools. There are a sufficient number of half-caste and Native children living at and near the settlement to warrant the step being taken, and I would beg to recommend that a master be permanently appointed with that view, at a minimum salary of £100 per annum. The present master, Mr. Ireland, would be willing to undertake the duty for the above-mentioned sum, if the Government deem it advisable to approve the recommendation.

The school was inspected on the 18th March. There are 21 children now on the roll, 15 of whom were present on the occasion. The attainments of the pupils may be summed up as follows, viz.:—Reading: Two could read lessons of three and four syllables well, and seven fairly; three could read monosyllables; and three were learning the alphabet. Spelling: Two could spell very well, and ten imperfectly. Arithmetic: Two were good in the advanced rules, and ten were fair in simple addition; the others were learning figures. Writing: Nine submitted very fair writing on slates, and three were forming letters: there were no copy-books in use in the school. Geography: Two could answer questions in elementary geography; the others had not been taught.

A want of proper system and order is manifest in the school. The discipline is lax in the extreme, owing to the timidity of the master in enforcing it, fearing lest the children might desert. Some allowance is certainly due on those grounds, as the master has had a very difficult task to perform to keep the school together, owing to the indifference of the parents on the one hand, and the uncertain attendance of the children on the other; the irregular attendance being further increased by the system alluded to, as by the time the school is open in the afternoon the children have got dispersed all over the place, and both the parents and master are ignorant of their whereabouts, the former supposing that they are attending school, and the latter that the absent ones have been kept at home. Remonstrance is frequently made by the master, on the true state of affairs becoming known; but the parents have so little control over their children, that any rebuke from them is of no avail. I regret, however, that I am compelled to report that the Riverton School is in a very inefficient state, and very far in its present condition from bringing about the reformation in the social habits of the Natives which the Government desire to effect, as the unmethodical style of instruction alluded to confirms the Natives in their irregular and unsystematic habits.

A new Committee has been elected by the Natives, who will, it is to be hoped, display more energy in the cause of education than the former one. I took advantage of the occasion to impress on all concerned that although the Government is anxious to use every means at command to encourage and promote the education of the Maori children, without assistance is rendered by the Natives themselves to further the cause, little benefit can be expected from the attempt, as many difficulties are met with in teaching their children, without having to encounter the apathy and indifference of parents. It was highly necessary, therefore, if the Natives were alive to their own interests, that they should secure the advantages to be gained, not only by the children themselves, but indirectly by the whole community, by facilitating the efforts of the Government in that direction, for it must be obvious to every one who has given consideration to the subject that education must prove a powerful means of civilization, and tend efficiently to make good British subjects of all who are brought under its influence.

I also took the opportunity of pointing out to the Committee that all complaints of the parents should be heard by them, and that really all matters pertaining to the efficiency of the school rested in their hands. It was also part of their duty to see that all the children who can attend do attend, and that, in furtherance of the plan, a system of checks should be instituted to rectify the present irregular attendance of the children; to which end the parents should be directed to make a point of notifying to the master on every occasion that a child was kept at home by sickness or other reasonable cause, and that the absence of such notice should be sufficient proof that the child was absent without leave, whereupon punishment should follow.

With regard to the vacations, it was proposed that the December and June holidays should be limited to a week's duration each, and that the principal holidays should be appointed at the mutton-bird season, towards the end of April, when the majority of the children are absent with their parents on the annual bird-catching expeditions, otherwise a serious interruption would be caused in the attendance, and the master's time during these periods entirely wasted.

The building in which the school is held is not very well adapted for the purpose. The main part was originally built for a church, at the joint expense of the Government and the Natives, the former paying the cost of erection (£120), and the latter the cost of the material. An addition of 22 x 12 with a porch 8 x 9 has since been added by the Government, at a cost of £119, inclusive of a chimney, and it is in this portion that the children are taught. The room is very confined, and when fully attended leaves little space to move about. There is a great want also of interior accommodation, and the school is badly supplied with books and other requisites.