

REPORT.

ACCORDING to the returns sent in by the teachers in September last, I find on the nominal rolls the names of only 685 children, and the daily attendance appears to be only about 441. In some cases pupils attended only one and a half days in a week, and even only half a day, and one week per month. Great unpunctuality in attendance at the appointed hours exists, the pupils dropping in at any time between half-past nine and eleven in the morning. The same irregularity exists in the afternoons. I was surprised to find a frequent truant in the son of the Chairman of one of the Local Committees. This state of things is very unsatisfactory, and I do not see how it is to be remedied without the assistance of the parents, and attendance enforced by law. From conversations with parents in the country districts, I find that the assistance of their elder boys is absolutely necessary to them in many cases; and, consequently, I find the average age of the children attending school reduced, the fourth classes entirely broken up, and the junior classes greatly modified.

In some cases I find pupils returned to school who have been absent a quarter or half a year, and expecting to be admitted into the class they were in before. The teachers have endeavoured to meet the confusion caused by their return and expectation by spending a great deal too much time in individual instruction, of course to the detriment of the regular attendants. I have recommended the teachers to put these pupils in the class they are fit for on their return, and let them work themselves up to the class they were in before, notwithstanding the pain it must cause them through no fault of theirs.

I am glad to be able to report a decided improvement in the silence and order maintained in the schools generally; copy-books are less smeared and blotted, and the general behaviour of the pupils in school and out somewhat approaches the polish which education ought always to produce. The writing throughout the schools is inferior to what I found elsewhere.

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SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT.

No system of inspection having been introduced prior to my undertaking the office of Inspector eighteen months ago, and, none of the teachers having had regular training, I found it necessary to commence by enforcing good manners (even teaching the boys how to salute their teachers) and clean habits, insisting on a personal inspection each morning and a desk drill on taking or leaving their places in school. Punctual attendance was the next habit to be taught, but the efforts of the teachers have not been by any means successful. I have found it necessary, as often as possible, to be present at the hour for assembling. If I was expected there was a good muster, but not otherwise; so now I never, except for a special reason, warn either masters or pupils of my visits.

The classification of the pupils has been, and still is, a matter of difficulty, on account of the various stages of ignorance and disparity in age. Too much time has hitherto been spent by the teachers in individual teaching, owing to the very great irregularity in attendance, the ignorance of the pupils, the practice of many parents sending one or two children on alternate weeks, or keeping them at home altogether for months at a time to work on their farms.

The standards laid down by the rules of the Board have only been partially applied, because I have rarely found the same pupils in a class two consecutive quarters. I visit the schools as much as possible during the year, to watch the mode of instruction and general conduct of the pupils. When I examine the pupils for my half-yearly report, I take each class in turn: first, to read aloud, according to their proficiency, a passage in English history or some of the reading books furnished by the Board; then follow questions on what has been read, on grammar and grammatical analysis, spelling, with meanings and derivations of words, all taken from the passages just read. I dictate a passage to be written on paper or slate, and also a passage to be reduced to writing from memory. I am very particular as to the writing, to avoid a habit of scribbling. Then I take some map (generally of New Zealand, and in some cases, of the Continents), and introduce questions in physical and political geography, with the necessary questions in topography. I then proceed to arithmetic, in which few are beyond the rules of proportion. As much as possible I require the sums to be worked on paper. Owing, I suspect, to the occupations and modes of thought among the children when at home, I find it difficult for the masters to make progress in mental arithmetic. The boys especially seem to be deficient in memory and imagination. To obviate if possible the first defect, I am gradually introducing recitations of poetry, and with some success. The object-lessons have been virtually neglected, so much of the teachers' time being occupied in lessons, and from want of appliances. Music and drawing are not taught as yet. I have only one teacher who really knows how to teach drawing.

Each of the pupils presents me in turn with his or her copy-books, on which I comment.

PATEA.

SIR,—

Wellington, 6th February, 1878.

For the fifth time I have the honor to report to your Board on the schools of your district. I think it may now be fairly said that they are the leading institutions of the Patea County, and that elementary education has been placed on a good footing throughout the district. All the six schools in operation are fairly established, well attended, well appointed, in good working order, and completely provided with suitable school buildings, teachers' residences, and sufficient well-fenced playgrounds. Your Board may therefore be congratulated on having done a good work in thus laying the foundation of six elementary schools. Great interest is also now being taken in education not only by the parents of children, but also by the children themselves. This, I think, is shown by the fact that altogether only seventeen children were absent from my last examination of the six schools; and the earnestness and carefulness generally displayed in the examination work were very commendable. I remember well the impression produced in my mind on my first visit to your district, when you had no school property, and had only just started your plans by opening two schools in temporary buildings. The