

to shorten the Christmas holidays; but I fear a very large proportion of the children would be allowed to absent themselves during January, thus causing a serious loss of income to the district. January is a festive month here, and people do not settle down till after Anniversary Day. To the number of teachers who come up for examination in January a week's freedom from toil at Easter is an absolute necessity, for Christmas has brought no holiday to them. When the teacher's health suffers the progress of the pupil suffers, and otherwise much inconvenience is caused. The education of a nation is not confined to the four walls of a schoolroom. Judicious parents can contrive that education shall not cease, though the school ceases. The interval should give time for much valuable mental and physical training. If the idea that school hours should be the same as the ordinary hours of labour is right, the consensus on this point of the whole habitable globe is wrong. One advantage of adopting the proposal there is no gainsaying—a considerable saving would eventually be brought about in the estimates of the Minister of Education. I may add that the holidays were fixed by the Board after much deliberation and discussion, in which the delegates from certain School Committees took a part. The holidays are specified in the rules and regulations. It is too often forgotten that country Committees have the fixing of the beginning and length of holidays a good deal in their own hands, as will be seen by reference to the Board's rules. Some country teachers have come to town at Christmas without ascertaining what holidays had been settled on by the Committee and sanctioned by the Board. An abuse seemed likely to spring up, but I think that has been stopped.

What has been just said leads to the consideration of the time when the teachers' examination is held. It is held at the end of January, thus robbing the teachers who have to come up of all that recreation which they so much need, especially in this climate. Instead of healthy recreation, which clears the brain and invigorates the frame, they have toil and perplexity. They begin the work of the year with dulled intellects and relaxed frames. It is needless to say that many of them are utterly unfit for work. I think this thing has gone on quite long enough, and ought, in the interests of education and in the interests of humanity, to be put a stop to at once.

I fear that many children under five years obtain admission to the schools. There is a strong tendency in some parents to use the schools as nurseries. Parents presenting children represented as being from five to six years should be required to put their statements in writing. It has been found from experience that this acts as a considerable check.

The pupil-teacher system, as in practice here, is working, on the whole, satisfactorily. The Board has in a few instances been obliged to employ pupils, otherwise qualified, who were some months under sixteen years old. In the future there will be, I think, little or no need to employ any under sixteen. The immense advantage of beginning with pupil-teachers of sixteen who have passed the Sixth Standard must be obvious. The strain of teaching and studying is minimized. The painful sight of the little teacher of thirteen years toiling and teaching is happily got rid of.

The question of district high schools has been more than once considered by the Board during the past year. The Board propose to establish two of these schools in the Waikato District. It is to be hoped that the experiment will prove successful. I append reports I have made to the Board on this subject.

The results of the examination of the Girls' High School, held in December, were satisfactory. The Board, in conjunction with the Headmaster, have made several modifications in the course of instruction, which are likely to be advantageous. There is extreme need for a new building, the one at present in use being utterly unsuitable.

In my last year's report I wrote as follows: "I regret to say that a tendency has begun to show itself here which should not be allowed to grow into a practice. We have been happily free from it hitherto. In more than one case teachers have sought to obtain appointment or promotion by bringing outward pressure to bear. It is easy to see how pernicious may be the results of this tendency. Fitness may cease to be considered. Not the man who has most qualifications, but the man who has most friends, may be he who will get appointments. The possible disastrous results to pupils and parents may come to be left out of sight altogether. This is no vague apprehension. A Royal Commission is now sitting in Victoria to examine into, amongst other things, the causes of the unsatisfactory state of many of the Victorian schools. It has already been made plain enough that many of the schools are in a wretched condition, and it has also been made plain enough that this disastrous state of things has been brought about by patronage. Ministers of Education have repeatedly passed over teachers of whose fitness they were assured in favour of men whose chief qualifications were the good word of a Ministerial supporter. It is, of course, not very likely that things will come to this pass here; but the evil principle is the same when favour and not fitness is allowed to be made the road to appointments. All efficient teachers should resent this; all who have the good of education at heart should resist it." I wish I could say that this tendency has lessened; I know that it has increased and is increasing.

I have, &c.,

RICHARD J. O'SULLIVAN,
Inspector of Schools.

The Chairman, Education Board.

02. MR. O'SULLIVAN'S REPORT ON DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

I have the honour to report on the subject of the establishment of district high schools, referred to me by the Board.

I am convinced that it is desirable to encourage the establishment of high schools in the country districts, under the provisions of clauses 55 and 56 of the Education Act. I was at one time of a somewhat different opinion. I feared that the attaching of a high school to an elementary school would be injurious to the latter. I now think that it is worth running some risk for the sake of the diffusion of culture which these high schools should bring about, and which can be brought about by them only.