

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE.—At the beginning of the school year 2,907 children were returned as attending school. During the year there were admitted 1,874 children, and 1,418 left, thus leaving 3,363 children as belonging to the schools in December last. Compared with the number of children returned as attending at the end of December, 1881, there is a difference of 257 pupils in favour of the past year. The average attendance shows a slight increase compared with the previous year, but the attendance at school has been very unsteady, and many of the teachers have been severely tried in preparing for the standard examination by the prolonged existence of sickness among their pupils. In the latter part of the year an improvement took place in the school attendance, but both the average attendance and the number on the school rolls are far below what they ought to be. During the year 1881 the average attendance at school throughout New Zealand amounted to 76·4 per cent. of the roll number, but for the past year the attendance in the schools of this district was only 74·7 per cent. of the roll number. Last year I took occasion to refer to the fewness of girls as compared with the boys attending the district schools, and I also pointed out the great irregularity which prevails among the girls who attend school. This inequality in school attendance of nearly three hundred between the boys and girls still continues, although, from the admirable statistics of population, to which reference has already been made, it appears that there are in the district actually more girls than boys of school age. But this is not all, nor even is it the worst phase of the school attendance question. The statistics have brought to light the fact that there is a large number of children scattered throughout the district who have not yet been brought within the beneficial operations of the Education Act. To make this clear, I have compiled a table showing, according to the census returns, the population and children of school age in each county and borough under my inspection, alongside of which I have placed the number of children who were actually attending school in December last. The following is the table* :—Population : Males, 11,755 ; females, 9,233 : total, 20,988. Children of school age in the district : Males, 2,693 ; females, 2,702 : total, 5,395. Children on school-roll, 31st December, 1882 : Males, 1,830 ; females, 1,533 : total, 3,363. Percentage of children attending school : 62. Number of children not attending district schools : Males, 863 ; females, 1,169 : total, 2,032. Percentage of such : 38. From this table these somewhat remarkable results are obtained : First. That, whilst the total population of the district includes 2,522 more males than females, there are more females than males of school age. Second. That altogether there are 5,395 children of school age in the district, exclusive of Maoris. Third. That of this number only 3,363 are accounted for as attending the district schools in December last. Fourth. That 863 males, or 32 per cent., and 1,169 females, or 43 per cent. (or in all 2,032 children), of those of school age in the district do not attend any of the Board schools. I am aware that there is a goodly number of children attending the Catholic schools in Napier, kept by the Sisters and Christian Brothers, and there is also a number of small private and adventure schools scattered throughout the district ; but, if 540 children, or 10 per cent. of those of school age, are considered as belonging to those schools, there still remain 1,492 children, or more than 27 per cent. of the total number, unaccounted for in this education district. With these facts before me, and knowing well what efforts have been made by some School Committees to enforce attendance at school under section 89, I am inclined to doubt the efficacy of the so-called “ compulsory clause ” of the Education Act ; and, further, I am of the opinion that irregularity at school will continue to prevail until a purely compulsory attendance clause is introduced for children between the ages of seven and twelve years, and until the beneficial legislation of last session relating to the “ employment of females and others ” is made operative equally in the country district as in towns, and equally in houses as in workshops.

SCHOOL ACCOMMODATION.—But, even were the conditions as to school attendance modified as here suggested, another great difficulty and educational hindrance at once presents itself. All the school-buildings in my district are full, and in some places even overcrowded, and further accommodation must be supplied before attendance can be enforced. Strange as it may appear, the right of education which has been conferred upon every child in New Zealand by the passing of the Education Act is certainly curtailed in this district, for children cannot be educated unless school accommodation is provided ; and that it has not been provided for present requirements is evident from the fact that the school attendance in December was greater than the accommodation provided. But I do not see how the needful provision can possibly be made so long as the rule operates of Government voting a small building grant for the supply of schoolhouses, and then dividing the amount *pro rata* of the population, irrespective of the school requirements of the several education districts. In such districts as Auckland, Taranaki, Wanganui, Westland, and Canterbury, the accommodation last year was greatly in excess of the requirements, but not so in Hawke's Bay. I have stated that there are 5,395 children of school age in the district, and, after deducting 10 per cent. for those children attending other than district schools, there still remain 4,855 children for whom accommodation ought to be provided. Now, the present school accommodation, including the schoolhouses at Patutahi, Takapau, Tamumu, Mohaka, Waerengahika, and Te Ongaonga, all of which have been erected or provided at the sole expense of the people in those districts, is only sufficient for the accommodation of 3,280 children, so that there is an actual deficiency of school accommodation for 1,575 children, even when the accommodation is included in the six buildings which do not belong to the Board. This deficiency is general throughout the district, as the following table will show :—

* Totals of the entire education district only are reprinted.