

SOUTH CANTERBURY

Timaru, March, 1884.

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit the general report of the Education Board of the District of South Canterbury for the year ending 31st December, 1883.

THE BOARD.—At the annual election for three members in March, Messrs. Edward Wakefield, Samuel W Goldsmith, and W U Slack were the retiring members. Messrs. Wakefield and Goldsmith were re-elected, and the Rev George Barclay was elected in the place of Mr W U Slack, who did not stand for re-election. Mr John Talbot having been elected to fill the extraordinary vacancy caused by the resignation of Mr Herbert Belfield, the Board then consisted of Messrs. Edward Wakefield, Richard A. Barker, Samuel W Goldsmith, Melville Gray, William Jukes Steward, M.H.R., Robson B. Walcot, Dr. Charles J Foster, and Mr John Talbot. On the 21st April Mr Wakefield, who, on the resignation of Mr Herbert Belfield, had been elected Chairman, resigned that office, and the Rev George Barclay was elected in his stead. During the year eleven ordinary monthly and two special meetings were held, the average attendance of members being 7 1.

SCHOOLS.—A new school has been opened at Sutherland's, and new school districts have been proclaimed at Belfield, Kakahu Bush, and South Rangitata. During the currency of the year several applications for new schools have been submitted to and considered by the Board; but, unfortunately, in the great majority of cases—from lack of funds and the inability of the people in the small and scattered districts to take advantage of the Aided Schools Regulations—these applications had to be refused. Arrangements have been made to reopen the school at North Orari under the name of South Rangitata, instead of removing the buildings, as at one time intended, to Belfield, and to erect a new school there, tenders for which are about to be required. At the close of the year there were thirty-nine schools in operation. Eight schools, having less than twenty-five pupils in average attendance, were carried on by the local Committees under the Board's Aided Schools Regulations.

ATTENDANCE.—The attendance of scholars shows a slight increase, the average for the year being 91 above that of 1882 but the average as compared with the roll-number is still far from satisfactory. The number of children attending school at the end of the year was 3,920, while the average attendance for the December quarter was 3,045, or 77·6 per cent. In connection with this fact it must be taken into consideration that in many of the schools—in fact throughout the entire district—the children have suffered greatly from an epidemic of whooping-cough, which very materially affected both the attendance and results. Further, the compulsory clauses are not generally enforced, and the Committees as a rule object to incur the odium and trouble of fully carrying out the provisions in this behalf of the Education Act. The most effective compulsion, we are persuaded, would be the legal obligation on the part of the parents to pay something direct to the education fund. If this principle could be harmonized with the other provisions of the Act—that in respect of all children of school age something should be paid direct to the Committees or Boards—then the average attendance all over the country would go up at once. In order to show that the obligation referred to would work out this result, there is no necessity to philosophize.

TEACHERS.—At the close of the year there were employed by the Board ninety-five teachers and twelve sewing-mistresses, being an increase on the previous year of six teachers and one sewing-mistress.

BUILDINGS.—The principal work undertaken by the Board during the past year has been the erection of new school buildings in Temuka, Sutherland's, and Waimataitai, at a cost of over £5,000. In addition to the foregoing, several other works have been carried out in the shape of enlargements, repairs, porches, lavatories, gymnastic apparatus, fencing, &c. New furniture has had to be provided for Temuka, Waimataitai, and Sutherland's, and on the whole a very considerable sum has been expended in this way. Many of the claims of an urgent character including requests for some dozen teachers' residences and four or five new schools, have had to be indefinitely postponed. So pressing the need that exists in some of these cases, and so eager are the people to have something done for them, that, in more than one instance, the money by the people interested, would be placed at once in the hands of the Board to go on with. Offers of this kind, however, for obvious reasons, the Board must deal with very cautiously. On the whole, we may remark that so much of each year's vote is expended in repairs, or in replacing, by more substantial structures, the old wooden buildings erected by the Canterbury Provincial Government, that the Board must, for several years to come, experience great difficulties in allocating their building grants, unless some specially liberal vote be made by Government in order to enable it more fully to meet the exigencies of the situation.

FINANCIAL.—The annual balance-sheet, duly certified by the Provincial Auditor, is appended. The Building Account shows receipts £4,913 11s. 4d., and an expenditure of £6,547 6s. 2d., necessitating a temporary draft on the Maintenance Account of £1,633 14s. 10d. The Maintenance Account shows receipts £13,543 6s. 7d., and an expenditure of £11,909 11s. 9d., leaving a credit balance of £1,633 14s. 10d. from which the sum of £678 14s. 9d. must be deducted on account of money received from the School Commissioners for the purposes of primary education. The Board has been drawing largely it will be seen, from the Maintenance in favour of the Building Account, but, from time to time, as it can be managed, the Board will endeavour to place these funds in a better relation with one another. The Board feels grateful for the addition of the 5s. capitation grant, which has been utilized chiefly in increasing its disbursements under the head of salaries and incidentals.

DEPOT.—An inventory of the stock, and a statement of the receipts and expenditure of the stationery department of the Board to the end of the year having been made, shows a balance credit on its working of £59. There is still due to the Maintenance Account the amount transferred on loan for the purchase of stock, viz., £375 15s. 9d., of which amount a sum of £200 has been received and is available as a part refund to the Maintenance Account.