

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Education Board Office, Wanganui, February, 1886.

I have the honour to submit my second annual report on primary education in the Wanganui District.

In my last report I pointed out that of the sixty-nine schools examined eight were taken in February and March of 1885; so the report treated of all schools examined before the 31st of last March. As such a course, however, materially interfered with my visits of inspection, I think it better that the examination year should in future terminate with the calendar year. Accordingly, the results obtained last February and March by the eight schools that stand highest on the list in point of date are included in the calculations in this report as well as in those of last year.

All schools in the district open for twelve months were examined, with the exception of the aided schools of Maramara Totara and Kimbolton Road, which will be taken next month. Over ninety visits of inspection were paid, one or more to each school, as occasion demanded and opportunity offered. During the year 1884 new regulations regarding pupil-teachers were drawn up; and they were passed in their entirety by the Minister of Education. The first examination under the new syllabus took place last June, when thirty-one pupil-teachers and ten candidates and cadets presented themselves. The work showed a marked improvement upon that of the previous year, more especially in spelling and general neatness and arrangement. The want of soundness was, however, still apparent. Questions asking for explanations such as should be given to pupils were often shirked or badly answered. Also, more attention in future to the requirements of the syllabus would be advantageous. On the 5th of August and the two following days I conducted the examination for scholarships. Six scholarships, tenable now for the first time for two years, were offered by the Board for competition to all children in the educational district complying with the usual conditions. The head-master of the Wanganui Collegiate School also offered a scholarship to the pupils attending the Wanganui Boys' District School. It was disappointing to find only twenty-five candidates—fifteen for the senior and ten for the junior scholarships—while only eight of the Board's schools were represented, though the syllabus embraced chiefly standard work. Scholarships cannot be considered to fulfil the purpose for which they are established until they draw pupils from all parts of the district, and from large and small schools alike. For further information respecting scholarships and pupil-teachers' examinations I beg to refer you to my special reports thereon. On the 11th of August last I commenced the examination in standards, and was engaged in this work until the 16th December, when I took charge of the teachers' examination. I may here state that if the examinations in standards were extended over the greater part of the year, in place of occupying nearly every consecutive day of the last five months, not only would the work be lighter to the examiner, but more time could be devoted to visits of inspection, and more attention be given to the general affairs of the district.

Schools, Accommodation, &c.—At the close of the school year ended the 31st December, seventy-three schools were in active operation, having an average weekly roll-number of 5,970, and a working average of 4,433, or 74 per cent. The numbers for the corresponding quarter in 1884 were, average weekly roll-number 5,708; working average, 4,278; percentage, 75 nearly. Of the seventy-three schools ten are "aided," having an average attendance of 132, and three of these ten are conducted in houses not belonging to the Board. During the year a fine building capable of accommodating 160 pupils (present average 130) was erected at Terrace End. Extensive and much-needed alterations and additions, embracing commodious and well-lighted infants' rooms, were made to the buildings at Hawera, Waverley, Marton, Bulls, and Normanby. Some improvements are urgently needed at Foxton and Sanson, as also in the gallery and lighting of the infants' room at Palmerston; and when these are effected all the larger buildings will be in a creditable state. In March last the Board voted £250 for the erection of a building near Eltham. So much feeling and diversity of opinion have, however, been shown by the settlers with regard to the site that, in place of their having enjoyed the benefits of a school in full operation for the last six months, in a building erected by the Board, an aided school was started only last December. The settlers in the northernmost portion of the district have shown a commendable desire for the establishment of schools, to enable them to take advantage of the Education Act, and several new districts have accordingly been formed, and aided schools are about to be opened. Unless considerable care is taken in obtaining teachers for these schools, more harm than good may result. And here I may say, great caution should be exercised in arranging the boundaries of new districts. As long as schools are very small, so long will it be difficult to obtain competent teachers at the low salaries available. In some portions of the district the schools on the main roads are far too close. In the Paraekaretu a schoolhouse to accommodate sixty children has just been completed, and will shortly be opened. At Woodville a new building is much needed.

My remarks in last year's report with reference to the appearance of the class-rooms have borne good fruit. As I foretold, children, and some Committees, have shown a desire to help the teachers in improving the rooms; and now growing plants, framed time-tables, and such like are frequently to be found. Trim flower-gardens, also, are to be seen at some schools. During the year a good deal of apparatus, chiefly blackboards, easels, and infants' cards, has been supplied, as also dual desks where most urgently needed. I am glad to say that at many places children now take a pride in keeping their desks clean.

Registers are in general well kept, but I regret to say I had to report two cases of falsification during the year. Log-books should throw more light upon the organization and working of the schools. It would be well for a teacher leaving any particular school to remember that a copy of his late time-table should be left behind.

Teachers.—In the seventy-three schools in the district 136 teachers are employed—viz., seventy-three principal teachers, twenty-three assistants, and thirty-nine pupil-teachers. There are also six cadets. All the teachers in charge of aided schools are uncertificated, and of the remaining