

INTERIM REPORT.—In the month of June last the Board forwarded to the Minister of Education an interim report of its proceedings from the commencement of the year, the substance of which was as follows:—

“After providing for the election of new School Committees, and for filling vacancies at the Board to be caused by the retirement of two members at the end of March, as required under the Subdivision Act, the Board proceeded to consider its financial position and prospects.

“A sub-committee was accordingly appointed to prepare an estimate of receipts and expenditure for the year. In order to keep well within the probable limits of the former, the committee's estimate of income was based on the average attendance for the September quarter (which was the lowest) of the previous year. Upon estimating the probable requirements of the Board, the committee found that it would be necessary to make very considerable reductions in the expenditure as authorised by the old Board in order to keep it well within the anticipated revenue. After long and careful consideration, the committee recommended certain alterations in the regulations previously in force, which should have the effect of reducing the expenditure without decreasing the salaries of the teachers or seriously impairing the efficiency of the schools. The principal of these were—(1) The adoption of a new and uniformly-graduated scale of staffs for schools; (2) the reduction by 25 per cent. of the grants formerly paid to School Committees; (3) the reduction of the house-allowance to teachers of small country schools; and (4) the introduction of stipendiary monitors in the place of pupil-teachers in schools of a certain class. In dealing with very small schools under the 88th clause the committee recommended that the average attendance which placed a school in that category should be reduced from below thirty to below twenty-five, and proposed to aid all such schools at the uniform rate of £4 10s. per head per annum on the average daily attendance.

“The committee's recommendations were reported to the Board on the 16th of January, and adopted with a few trifling amendments. Starting on the assumption that, as an entirely new Board, it was without either teachers or officers, the Board considered that it was in no way bound by the engagements entered into by the former Board, and tacitly recognised by the Government, during the year 1884. The several School Committees were therefore requested to recommend teachers for appointment to their respective schools in accordance with the new scale of staffs; and the teachers so nominated were appointed subject to the amended regulations. So far, the new order of things appears to have given pretty general satisfaction. No teachers' salaries have been reduced; but the services of some pupil-teachers who had served their full time were dispensed with, and at one school, which during the year 1884 had ceased to be entitled to the staff employed under the old regulations, owing to a falling-off in the attendance, an assistant master was not re-engaged. These persons have doubtless suffered some loss and inconvenience, but it was impossible to avoid this without a departure from regulations adopted after careful and mature consideration—a departure which would have served as a dangerous precedent on future occasions. Perhaps the greatest inconvenience arising from the retrenchment effected by the Board will be felt for a time by the local Committees, some of whom have always found a difficulty in meeting the requirements of their districts, even with the allowance formerly made to them; but their difficulties might be easily removed by the adoption of some system of local contribution, such as is now in operation in the Hokitika District.

“*Buildings.*—The proportion of the building vote allotted to Westland for the year just about to expire was so much reduced by the amount absorbed by the old Board's liabilities that the task of distributing it throughout the district in anything like a fair proportion to the requirements of the different Committees was one of considerable difficulty. The dwellers in less humid localities would scarcely credit the rapidity with which wooden buildings deteriorate in this, by far the wettest district in the colony. The total cessation of all expenditure in repairing or preserving the buildings for upwards of a year threw an increased burden upon the Board, which the funds available for the purpose were insufficient to support. The Board therefore addressed all the Committees on the subject, and requested them to furnish statements in detail, showing their most urgent requirements in this direction; and a special meeting was called on the 17th March to consider the applications received. Upon examining these, it appeared that the amount required for the most urgent works in the shape of additions, improvements, and repairs to buildings nearly reached the sum of £2,000, whilst the amount accruing to the Board from the building vote was only £1,126. The Board therefore went carefully through the applications, and, by cutting out whatever they thought might be temporarily postponed, ultimately reduced this amount to £1,047, which, with the contingent expenses connected with plans, specifications, and supervision, will more than cover the amount at the Board's disposal. To accomplish this reduction, however, the Board was compelled to ignore all applications from the Committees of schools under the 88th clause; but, as the question of affording increased support to these schools has already been submitted to the Minister in the secretary's letter of the 15th instant, it is not necessary to say more on this occasion beyond expressing a hope that Government will see its way to giving special consideration on educational matters to these remote and thinly-populated localities. The statements attached will show that the Board has succeeded in maintaining the education system in the district in a satisfactory state of efficiency without exceeding its income; and there is no doubt that with moderate prudence there will be no difficulty in keeping the balance on the right side of the ledger.

“*Schools and Attendance.*—The number of schools in operation in the Westland District at present—June, 1885—is nineteen, and of these eight are treated as under the 88th clause. Two other small aided schools are about to be opened—one at Okuru River, Jackson's Bay, and the other at Bruce Bay. The Board also has it in contemplation to subsidise an itinerant teacher for the benefit of some settlers on the Christchurch Road. These will bring the number up to twenty-two. The number of teachers in the service of the Board is fifty, including pupil-teachers, of whom twenty-one are males and twenty-nine females. The salaries of head teachers or sole teachers vary