

they would have completed their standard course. Notwithstanding the fact that the schools show such a large increase in the attendance during the period, the 532 children who were in the Second Standard in 1883 were represented by 486 in Standard III. in 1884, by 373 in Standard IV. in 1885, by 252 in Standard V. in 1886, and by 102 in Standard VI. for the year under notice. These figures point out in no uncertain manner how short the average duration of the school life of a child really is in this district, and how very few of those who attend school remain after the Third or Fourth Standard has been reached. Even to-day, after ten years' work under the Education Act, there are not more than eight children in every hundred attending the Board schools who have passed the Fourth Standard. I do not pretend to know the cause of this early withdrawal from the schools of so many young children who are certainly below the exemption age of thirteen years, as stated in the Education Act, but the question is too important to pass by without calling the Board's attention to it. In England home necessities too often call for the older children in a family to enter at an early age the factory, the brickyard, or the farmyard, in order to add a few shillings to the weekly income of a home; but I am not aware that cases like this have any existence here. It is difficult to estimate the great pecuniary and educational loss to the country by the early withdrawal of the children from school, but I estimate that at the present time half the effective teaching power in the schools is absolutely lost in consequence of parents not availing themselves of the many opportunities offered for the instruction of their children in the public schools.

REGULARITY NOT SATISFACTORY.—The regularity of children at school has not shown any improvement whatever in this district for the last three years; indeed, the tendency in the attendance at some of the schools has been a retrograde one. Two years ago, for every hundred children on the school rolls 78·8 were in daily attendance each time the schools were opened. Last year there were only 78·3 in daily attendance for each hundred names on the rolls; so that the regularity shows a falling-off of 0·5 per cent. since the year 1885. The school-attendance clause of the Education Act Amendment Act of 1885 requires all children between seven and thirteen years of age to make at least sixty attendances during each "quarterly term;" but there is really no machinery in operation to enforce either the attendance clause or the age clause of the Act. Some Committees there are who nominally enforce attendance; some there are who object to a police officer and a Magistrate being called in to decide a question relating to education; some find that a Police Court case disturbs the relations existing between business men and their customers; and there are other Committees who consider that the question of compulsion should not be relegated to Committees at all. The question of school attendance is certainly beset with difficulties, and in some of the school districts compulsion is not needed; but there are districts where something should be done to improve what is at present a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. Take the case of the schools in the four boroughs in the district—viz., Woodville, Hastings, Napier, and Gisborne. Last year, at Woodville, out of every hundred children attending school sixty-eight were in average attendance; at Hastings the average was 74·1 per cent. of the roll number; at the Central School, Napier, it was 79·4 per cent.; and at the Hastings Street School, Napier, it was 73·6 per cent. At Gisborne, however, the remarkable regularity is shown by the fact that 86·3 children in every hundred on the rolls were in daily attendance throughout the year. Thus the difference in the regularity of the children attending the borough schools is shown by the fact that in every hundred children attending the several schools, Gisborne had 18·3 more in attendance throughout the year than were present at the Woodville School, 12·2 more than were present at Hastings, nearly seven more than were present at the Napier Central, and 12·7 more than were present at the Hastings Street School. The difference in the regularity of the children attending these schools tells its own tale in the wide difference between them in the thoroughness and general efficiency of the standard work. It appears to me that the whole difficulty which now besets the working of the age and attendance clauses of the Act could easily be met if the Inspector or Inspectors in each district had the necessary powers to deal with cases of irregular attendance in each school district on their half-yearly visits of inspection. Were this plan adopted I am satisfied that the attendance at the schools would be greatly improved, and this without the exercise of harsh or unnecessary punishments, such as are certain to follow the enforcement of the attendance and age clauses through the Police Court of the district.

CHARACTER OF SCHOOLS.—Considered as a whole, I am able to report that there has been a steady improvement in the tone and general management of the schools during the year. Several capable teachers have lately come to the district, and the schools under their charge give great promise of success; but the losses by the deaths of Mrs. Bull, for some years head mistress of the Gisborne School, and of Mr. Corker, who was master of the Waerenga-ahika School, have marred and in some measure have counterbalanced the gains.

PREPARATORY CLASSES.—The improvement in the work of the preparatory classes to which I referred in my previous report still continues. It is in the junior departments of the schools where the individuality of a teacher has free play, and where the "State's writ" in the matter of a fixed and unbending syllabus of instruction has no existence. It is here also where one sees intelligent and educative methods adopted in the instruction and training of the children. As long as this plan continues I have hope that at least some of the elementary work in the standard course will be satisfactory. The infants' schools at Gisborne, Napier, Hastings, Waipukurau, Norsewood, Clive, and Waipawa are in an efficient state; but the teachers in several other schools are doing well, and in all cases where a separate infants' department is at work I may say that, if not always successful, at least faithful work is being done by the teachers. In some schools kindergarten training of a kind is adopted, and, although Froebel's Gifts are not always available, a knowledge of things occupies a most prominent place in the instruction of the little ones. Without exception, the upper preparatory classes in each school receive instruction in form, colour (primary, secondary, and tertiary), drawing, recitation, singing, and physical exercises, and some of the kindergarten games, such as are taught at Waipawa, are carried out with much care and precision. These subjects are in addition to the instruction given in reading, writing, and arithmetic, which form a portion of the work of all children attending the schools.