

WESTLAND.

SIR,—

Hokitika, 20th February, 1888.

I have the honour to submit my thirteenth annual report upon the schools in the Education District of Westland.

The number of schools in operation in the district at the date of this report is twenty-four as against twenty-three at the end of 1886. The new school added to the list is a small aided school situated at the Waikukupa River, half-way between Okarito and Gillespie's, and therefore twelve miles from the nearest school. The number of children at present benefited by the establishment of this school is five, and the total expense to the Board is £25 per annum. There are now five schools of this description in the district, and there is every probability of more being required, although it is doubtful whether, under the new system of payment to Boards, it will be possible to meet the demand or even to keep up the present number.

All the schools in the district have been examined according to the regulations, and the results of the examination are given in the tables which will accompany, and for this year constitute the chief part of, my report. All the schools north of the Miconui River have also received the usual visits of inspection, and in each case the whole or the greater part of a school day has been devoted to this purpose.

The past year has been a very trying time for the schools in this district; almost every school has suffered severely either from a very meagre attendance during a considerable portion of the year, or from an entire closing of the school for many weeks, both of these drawbacks being occasioned by the prevalence of some epidemic (in most cases measles). It was therefore with somewhat gloomy forebodings that I commenced my examination tour, fully expecting to find a serious falling off in the year's results. I am glad, however, to be able to report that the deterioration has been very slight on the whole, and not more, indeed in most cases considerably less, than might reasonably have been expected. The number of scholars presented was 1,936 as against 1,829 last year, an increase of nearly 6 per cent., while the number of passes has increased from 827 to 886, or about 7 per cent. Taking, however, the number actually examined in standards (excluding the "exceptions," in both cases we find that the passes have increased from 76.6 per cent. to 81.6 per cent. While, therefore, the roll number has increased 6 per cent. the passes have only increased 5 per cent., and this may be taken to be about the extent to which the aggregate results have been affected by the unfavourable circumstances that have prevailed in the district. Comparing the results in the "pass" subjects for the two years it will be seen that there has been an increase in the passes in reading, writing, arithmetic and geography, and a decrease for those in spelling and grammar. This last subject has fallen off to the extent of 19 per cent., while arithmetic has advanced 10 per cent.

I am glad to be able to report that, notwithstanding the drawbacks referred to above, the "class" and "additional" subjects have evidently received much more attention this year than in former years, all of the schools showing some advance, and a few of them very considerable improvement upon last year's results. Indeed at one school there seems to have been almost too much prominence given to these at the expenses of the pass subjects, the latter having fallen 8 per cent. and the former risen 31 per cent., showing that at all events the teacher was not working for a large percentage of passes. The number of scholars above Standard VI. examined this year was forty-five, and the accompanying table [not reprinted] shows the percentage of marks gained by this class for the ordinary pass subjects and for the class subjects at the schools named, from which it will be seen that there is on the whole a marked improvement this year in the work of S 7. In fact the work of the standard classes in the class and additional subjects shows that an earnest endeavour has been made by the teachers in this district to accomplish the well nigh impossible task imposed upon them in the syllabus.

Owing to various circumstances well known to the Board, so much work devolved upon me during the first two months of the present year that I have no time to spare for anything more than a bare record of the performance of the schools at the examination, and the compilation of the various tables which are given in connection therewith. Perhaps on the whole this is not a subject for serious regret, seeing the growing tendency to convert Inspectors' "reports" into annual essays on school method published at the expense of the country. I shall not therefore give expression this year to any opinion as to the treatment of the several parts of the syllabus. Having nothing fresh to say on the subject, to express the same views in other words would answer no useful purpose, whilst their omission will help to reduce the Government Printer's account.

The condition of the preparatory classes at all the principal schools is quite satisfactory, and it is a matter for sincere congratulation in this district that the idea of raising the age for admission to the public schools was abandoned. If the original proposal had been adopted the effect here would have been well nigh fatal to the system unless some special relief could have been provided to meet the peculiar circumstances of the district. All the small schools must have been closed and the children of remote settlers must have been condemned to grow up in ignorance of the simplest rudiments of learning. Even in their modified form it is to be feared that the retrenchments will have this effect in some cases.

For the benefit of those who do not care to study tabulated statements, I may say broadly that the general condition of elementary education in Westland is probably as satisfactory as it is in any other part of New Zealand. That there is no school having a certificated head teacher that has to any serious extent fallen away from its former position, excepting the Blue Spur School, and here the falling off is accounted for in a manner which reflects no reproach upon the late or the present teacher. There are still twelve uncertificated teachers in charge of schools in this district, and, in justice to those who have qualified themselves for the service by passing the required examination, and still more in justice to the children attending these schools, the Board should endeavour to comply with section 45 of the Act, wherever the amount of the salary is sufficient to