

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE.—An encouraging feature in the work of the past year was the fewness of pupils who absented themselves from the standard examination. During the year several cases were brought under my notice of pupils who had not absented themselves from school once in three years, and in one instance a boy had not been absent for a period of seven years. Considering the character of the roads and bush tracks which are to be found in some of the outlying districts, and the long distances many of the pupils have to walk, it appears to me that the absence from examination of only sixty-six pupils out of the whole number presented in standards is creditable alike to the children, their parents, and teachers. As showing the strong desire of some parents to have their children taught, I would mention that when examining at the Blackburn district school a few weeks ago my attention was called by the lady teacher to three boys and a girl who travelled eight miles every morning to the school, and who were usually in time for the opening. Assuming the school to be opened only two hundred days in a year, the distance those young people would travel to and from school in the course of a year might be roughly represented by a line drawn from Cape Maria Van Dieman in the north of New Zealand to the Bluff Harbour in the south, thence to Sydney, and back again to the starting place—a journey worthy of the most devoted pilgrims who worship at the education shrine set up by the State. Very few complaints have come under my notice with reference to the irregularity of children at school. Woodville still occupies the unenviable position of having the worst attendance in the district, whilst Gisborne has the best. I have not heard whether the compulsory clause has been or is to be enforced in the former district, but it seems to me that something in this direction is much wanted. The Chairman of the School Committee at Ormond proceeded against several parents a few months since, and it would seem that the Resident Magistrate of the district taught them a wholesome lesson as to their parental duties. I have not heard of any other instances where School Committees have deemed it necessary to summon parents under section 7 of the Education Act Amendment Act, although notices to parents of children who are in default are now in general use. But, even without the enforcement of the compulsory clause, the signs are many that the school attendance is improving, and that the parents take a much livelier interest in the education of their children than they seemed to do a few years ago. As pointed out in my last year's report, the abolition of what was known as the "working average" has been a very effective means of improving the regularity of children at school, and, although complaints were made at the time by teachers and Committees of the hardship likely to ensue, especially to the smaller schools, I am convinced that the course adopted by the central department has been of beneficial service as well to the eventual interests of teachers as to the cause of education. The regularity of children in this district in 1887, when the "working average" rule was in operation, was 78·3 for every 100 children returned as attending school. In 1888 the "working average" rule was abolished, and the regularity improved to 78·7 per cent., whilst for the year under notice the regularity shows still further improvement, more than eighty pupils having attended school throughout the year for every hundred pupils whose names were entered on the school rolls.

ORGANIZATION.—My last general report dealt in some detail with the standard and additional subjects as they are now taught in the schools. Little change has taken place since that report was published, as with one or two exceptions the same teachers are at work, and in a great measure the same plans and methods are being followed in the preparation of the children in the district in order to meet departmental requirements. In most of the larger schools trained and experienced teachers are in charge, but in no two could it be said that the type of the work is the same. Each school has an individuality of its own, and the mark of that individuality is characteristic of the mind, the capacity, and the power of the master or mistress in charge, as the case may be. That old though wise saying, "As the teacher so the school," often presents itself to my mind when visiting the schools for inspection purposes, as one sees at this time what may be termed the inner life of the school—its spirit, its motives for action, its ideals, both mental and moral. Of necessity teachers have different views of school keeping; nor would I have it otherwise in a district where the social and industrial aspects of life are so varying and marked.

SCHOOL ARRANGEMENTS.—As to the internal arrangements of the schools, I have to report that most of them are in a praiseworthy condition. The apparatus and appliances are mostly in commendable order, and are sufficient for ordinary purposes of instruction. Comparatively little scientific apparatus is to be found at present, nor will such apparatus be necessary, at least in the country schools, until the standard requirements shall have been curtailed in other directions. The cleanliness of the schoolrooms, the neatness and careful arrangement of the school grounds, and the erection of divisional fences separating the boys' and girls' offices, appear to receive the careful attention of Committees, and the exceptions are few where these phases of school administration are not satisfactory. The influence for good which clean and well-arranged buildings, grounds, and schoolrooms have upon the public taste is very great, and I could wish that teachers generally interested themselves more in these phases of school keeping. Where teachers take a pride in making their schools attractive by means of pictures and the many devices by which effects are produced by contrasts, I always find an improved tone among the children, for the results correspond to the ideals of their instructors and their surroundings. One unacquainted with the characteristics of different teachers is unable to fully comprehend the wide gulf which separates schools from each other in what may be termed the moral aspects of school life. Among some few it would almost seem that a good percentage of standard passes constitutes the "be all and end all" of their desires, but this is only what must be expected so long as the public are taught to look upon percentages and standard results as the highest phases of school keeping and training. But, after all, education is only a growth in the social development of a people, and when annual standard examinations—those drawbacks to true education—have become things of the past, percentages will cease to harass the true teacher, and a higher life, more cultured and more human, will pervade the working of our schools. I am often surprised at the amount of real good done by