

WESTLAND.

SIR,—

Hokitika, 20th February, 1892.

I have the honour to submit the report of the Westland Board of Education for the year 1891, as required by the 102nd clause of the Education Act.

THE BOARD.—At the commencement of the year the Board consisted of the following gentlemen Messrs. Jack, Seddon, and Will, elected members and Messrs. Bevan, Grimmond, Mueller (Chairman and McWhirter, nominated by the Government. In the month of May and consequent on his removal to another part of the colony, Mr Mueller severed his long and useful connection with the Board by resignation, and John R. Hudson, Esq., was nominated by the Government to fill the vacancy thus caused, Mr Bevan succeeding Mr Mueller as chairman. Mr Will, having also left the district, did not attend the Board's meetings after October. In January Mr Bevan was elected the Board's representative on the High School Board of Governors, and in June Mr Grimmond was appointed School Commissioner in succession to Mr Mueller.

The Board held twenty-six sittings in all in the course of the year—viz., twelve ordinary, seven special, and seven meetings of special committees. The following shows the attendance of individual members at these sittings Mr Bevan, 22, Mr Grimmond, 14; Mr Hudson, 12, Mr Jack, 23 Mr Mueller, 9 Mr Seddon, 1 Mr McWhirter, 14, and Mr Will, 24.

SCHOOLS.—The number of schools under the jurisdiction of the Board this year has been thirty-one, being one less than the previous year. This was in consequence of a small aided school at the Upper Otira, worked as a half-time school with that of the Lower Otira, having been discontinued at the close of last year. Of the thirty-one, ten are aided schools, and four including two of the aided ones, are half-time schools, whilst, as one of the remainder is simply a side school, the number of schools appearing in the Board's return is only twenty-eight. It should be added that six of the aided schools are held in the private houses of settlers, an arrangement which, though not the best, is the best the case has hitherto admitted of. For one of these, however the Wanganui School, the Board has now been able to erect a proper schoolhouse, on a site midway between the two Wanganui Rivers, and it will thus begin the new year under better auspices as the Inter-Wanganui School.

HOKITIKA DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL.—As far as the experience of the last twelvemonth goes, the Board has every reason to be satisfied with the result of the change made at the close of 1890 in the status of the Hokitika School, by which it was converted into a district high school. A class of nearly a score has been in full work at matriculation subjects throughout the year, and, as the Inspector's report shows, with satisfactory results. Nor have the primary classes of the school suffered at all by the change, as the Board, through the increased income derived from the High School Board and the fees of pupils, has been enabled to strengthen the general staff of the school to the extent of two more assistant teachers, so that the elementary classes have profited rather than lost by the new arrangement.

ATTENDANCE.—In regard to the number of children attending the schools, the number on the school-roll at the end of the year was 1,625, as against 1,665 of 1890. Similarly the average attendance for the year was 1,362, as against 1,386 in the previous year. With respect to regularity of attendance, the ratio of daily attendance to weekly roll-number for the year shows a slight improvement, being 81·7 or a fraction better than last year. Of course this is not regarded by the Board as a satisfactory ratio, but an efficient method of securing regularity of attendance on the part of scholars seems still one of the unsolved problems of educational science.

TEACHERS.—At the present time the teaching staff of the Board consists in all of sixty-five teachers, forty-one of whom are above the rank of pupil-teachers. These forty-one may be divided into twenty-eight who are either head teachers or sole teachers of schools, four male assistants, and nine female assistants. Of the twenty-eight first mentioned twelve are females, making therefore in all twenty-one female teachers and twenty male teachers in the employ of the Board. It should be added that eighteen of the number are still unclassified. Lastly, the remainder of the staff consists of one sewing-teacher, three monitors, and twenty pupil-teachers, of whom fourteen are females.

BUILDINGS.—In respect of new buildings not much has been done. One small schoolroom has been erected between the two Wanganui Rivers, as already stated, and a much-needed residence for the teacher has been built at Goldsborough, as also a very small one purchased for the use of the teacher of the Kawhaka School. Other expenditure has been the erection of outhouses at Stafford and Woodstock, and the addition of a class-room to the Humphrey's School, whilst sums, smaller or larger, have been devoted to repairs, painting, or fencing, in connection with all the Board's schools except three. Five schools are still without residences—viz., Humphrey's, Donoghue's, Wanganui, Bruce Bay, and Arawata. The most pressing need at the present time, however, is that of a building for a side-school in the rising townships of Dillman's and Larrikins' where, of younger children alone, there are no less than seventy-two of school-age, whilst forty-five of these are practically cut off by distance, in this climate, from all school opportunities. The building vote for the year being, however, already bespoken twice over, the Board has no funds at its disposal to meet this new claim.

INSPECTORSHIP.—A new appointment has again had to be made to the office of Inspector, in consequence of the demise of the gentleman appointed last year, Mr E. B. Dixon. The Board placed on record its sincere regret at the loss of Mr Dixon's services, and its recognition of the work he had done in the cause of education. Mr John Gammell, B.A., the recently-appointed Rector of the Hokitika District High School, was promoted to the vacant office of Inspector and Secretary, and was succeeded at the High School by Mr T. H. Gill, M.A., of Dunedin.

SCHOLARSHIPS.—The new arrangements for scholarships consequent on the establishment of the District High School appear to work well, and enable the Board to greatly extend the usefulness of the scholarship grant. At the scholarship examination held in January, three candidates—two from the country and one from Hokitika—were the recipients of scholarships, instead of one as