

MARLBOROUGH.

SIR,—

Blenheim, 22nd January, 1894.

I have the honour to present my third annual report on the public schools of the Marlborough Education District.

During the year just passed forty-eight schools have been at work in this district, an increase of four since my last report. Six new aided schools have been started, but one of these—Opua Bay—enjoyed an ephemeral existence of one quarter. Another, at Beatrix Bay, opened last year, was almost as short lived, and does not appear on this year's list. In addition to Opua Bay, aided schools were subsidised at Vernon, Wilson's Bay, Watamonga, Blackball, and Rai Valley, but one, or perhaps two, of these will, I fear, prove to be as temporary as the Beatrix Bay and Opua Schools. In such cases the Board's grant may be regarded as having been almost thrown away; and some plan should be devised to put a stop to this waste of public money. In two cases the closing of the schools was caused by the family leaving the neighbourhood, and in the others by the departure of the teachers. Even under the new and more liberal scale of payments to such schools the difficulty of obtaining the services of competent teachers is very great, and the position of such teachers, who generally have to live with the family, is often one requiring considerable tact, and adaptability to more or less uncongenial surroundings; but, though it may be difficult to say who is to blame in the cases referred to, it is not the less necessary to prevent the funds of the Board from being dissipated in such abortive experiments. Some guarantee of the permanence of any school should be required before the capitation is granted. Four of the aided schools, which were opened shortly before the examination, were not examined. Two others, Kaiuma and Flaxbourne, were temporarily closed; and one school, Waikakaho, neglected to present any scholars for examination at either of two places appointed for the purpose.

There were 1978 children on the rolls of the district at the date of the examination, a decrease of thirteen since last year. The proportion of children below Standard I. is, however, $3\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. less, and the number presented in standards has increased about 6 per cent. In 1892 the number of children above eight years old in Class P. was 161. This year the number is reduced to 108, or about 6 per cent. less than in the previous year. In the four largest schools in this district the percentage of children in Class P. who were above eight years old was, at Blenheim 18 per cent., Picton 32 per cent., Havelock 28 per cent., and Grovetown $17\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. The reasons assigned for the retention of these children in Class P. are mainly four—namely, weak intellect, late entrance, irregularity of attendance, and sickness—and I have no doubt that in the majority of cases these reasons are valid.

The mean of the average ages at which the several standards are passed in this district remains steady at eleven years and eleven months, and this is about the highest in the colony. This may be partly explained by reference to the proportion of small aided schools in remote localities, where the children have generally reached a somewhat advanced age before their school days commence. A family generally consists of five or six children above five years of age before the Board's subsidy is applied for; and it is a very common experience to find children well advanced in their teens before passing the First or Second Standard. In one recently-established school a child (?) of twenty years succeeded, with difficulty, in passing Standard II.; but this represented less than a year's work.

For the convenience of comparison, I give the summary of results for last year and for this together:—

			Presented.	Absent.	Excepted.	Failed.	Passed.
1892	...	...	1,991	55	52	240	943
1893	...	...	1,978	118	38	144	1,055

The above table shows that the absentees were more than double in number this year, the failures nearly 100 less, and the passes over 100 more. Of those who failed last year, eighty-two were re-presented in the standards they then failed to pass, and, deducting these from this year's passes, there remains a net increase of thirty passes, with a decrease of ninety-six failures. Of the eighty-two scholars re-presented, thirteen were in Standard I., eight in Standard II., twenty-nine in Standard III., nineteen in Standard IV., eleven in Standard V., and two in Standard VI.

The great increase in the number of absentees is almost entirely due to the prevalence of measles at the time of the examination. At Picton, for instance, the epidemic was in full swing when the examination took place, and as many as forty-eight children in Standards I. to VI. were absent on that account.

In last year's report I directed the attention of the Board to seventeen schools that had recorded against them upwards of 25 per cent. of failures. This year there are ten recorded; two of these are schools only recently opened, two others are small aided schools, and another was without a teacher for a part of the year. Three of the remainder are for a second time in the same category, but the year's work has been so much interrupted by sickness and bad weather that any very great improvement could scarcely be expected, and in two of these there is about to be a change of teachers. Notwithstanding the drawbacks just referred to, three of the four schools specially reported on last year have greatly improved their positions. These are Blenheim Girls', Springlands, and Birchwood. The teacher of another has resigned; and the children attending the Waikakaho School were not present at the place appointed, a matter that calls for some explanation. I am particularly pleased to have to be able to report so marked an improvement in the results of the Blenheim Girls' School, which was examined this year by itself, and though, as regards order and discipline, there is still much to be desired, I am led to believe, from the improvement that has been effected in other directions, that in this respect also a change for the better will soon appear.

The number of half-days on which the several schools were open during the three quarters preceding that in which the examination was held seems a somewhat important factor in