

SCHOOLS.—At the close of the year 1893 there were in active operation in this district 125 schools. During the year 1894 six new schools were established, at Ardlussa, Koromiko, Pyramid Siding, Waipounamu, Waikawa Valley (a half-time school, worked in conjunction with Quarry Hills), and Fairfax, the last mentioned as an experiment for a period of twelve months. The school formerly in operation at South Forest Hill, but closed in the year 1892 on account of meagre attendance, has been reopened. The operation of these changes increases the number of schools in this education district to 132 at the close of the year to which this report has reference.

According to the average attendance at each, the schools under the Board were classified as follows, two half-time schools being reckoned as one Under 15 pupils, nine, 15 and under 20 pupils, nine 20 and under 25 pupils, twenty 25 and under 50 pupils, forty-eight, 50 and under 75 pupils, fifteen 75 and under 100 pupils, nine, 100 and under 150 pupils, seven, 150 and under 300 pupils, eight, 300 and under 500 pupils, nil, 500 and upwards, two total, 127

In consequence of the sparse and scattered nature of the population in many places, eighteen schools have an average attendance below twenty, the teachers of which are supported by a capitation grant of £4 per pupil, while, of the total number of schools in operation, ten are worked on the half-time principle, the teacher in such cases working six days a week—*i.e.*, three days at each school.

The demand for the extension of educational privileges continues as urgent as in past years. Since the year 1885 forty-seven new schools have been opened in this district, and it may be said that in every instance the result has fully justified their establishment. The present steady progress of settlement gives indication that not yet has the end come, the Board must therefore prepare for still further demands on its resources.

ATTENDANCE.—It is, perhaps, difficult to overestimate the importance of the subject of regular attendance at our public schools. So much, both from a financial and educational standpoint, depends on the degree to which the parents of pupils manifest a practical interest in this subject. It is indeed but a truism to state that at least moderately regular attendance is an indispensable condition to progress in school work. The Act of last session of Parliament to promote regular attendance at public schools is certainly a step in advance of previous legislation on this subject, but, in the opinion of this Board, it does not yet go far enough. The responsibility of prosecuting parents and guardians for the non-attendance of their children at school is still virtually left in the hands of School Committees. The initial steps to compel attendance require to be instituted by the Committee of the district, or its duly-accredited agent, which fact simply means that no action will be taken in the vast majority of cases, no matter how flagrant the breaches of the law which may occur. Committees will not, as a rule, undertake the disagreeable duty of instituting legal proceedings against, it may be, some of their nearest neighbours, and least of all against their personal friends, and would, the Board is well assured, gladly be rid of such a responsibility. Not until this duty is cast on some authority outside the pale of merely local influences will the intention of the Legislature be realised in this matter. The benefits to be derived from the appointment of truant officers, unless such officers are endowed, under direction of their employers, with the power of prosecution, will be to a large extent nullified.

The mean number on the school rolls in this district for the four quarters of the year 1893 was 9,280, with a strict average attendance for that period of 7,117. For the year to which this report refers the mean number had increased to 9,460, and the strict average to 7,465, the record for this educational district. This statement shows an increase in the roll-number of 180, and in the average attendance of 348 pupils, the latter a most satisfactory feature. The percentage of average attendance to roll-number is thus almost 79, as against 76·7 for the preceding year. These results may be considered as fairly satisfactory when we take into account the extensive area comprised within the boundaries of this education district, and, in the majority of rural districts, the difficulties with which the pupils have to contend, especially during the winter season. To register an absolutely regular attendance under existing circumstances is for many country pupils probably impracticable, but, while this may be true of some pupils, much more might be done towards the attainment of a higher ideal by many parents who are at present careless or indifferent. It should ever be borne in mind that, though the education system is entirely free, it is none the less efficient and valuable on that account. If parents would but realise how heavily the illiterate are handicapped in the present-day struggle for existence, they would require but little stimulus in the direction of securing for their offspring, by a regular attendance at school, the maximum of benefits derivable from our public-school system.

The reinstitution of the working average as the basis of payment of capitation grants to Education Boards will, it is hoped, be permanently adhered to by the department. This Board has consistently paid its teachers on such a basis during the past year, and trusts that the necessity will not again arise for a return to the less equitable method of payment according to strict average.

TEACHING STAFF.—At the close of the year there were 226 teachers in the service of the Board, of whom 112 were males and 114 females. These figures indicate an increase of six over the number reported for the preceding year. These, according to the appointments held, were classified as follows: Principals—13 males; heads of departments—13 females, heads of schools—35 males, 2 females, sole teachers—45 males, 32 females, assistants—11 males, 16 females, pupil-teachers—8 males, 51 females.

Generally speaking, the supply of certificated teachers is now fully equal to the demand, and, with the clearly expressed intention of the law as a guide, it is a question whether the Board can consistently retain in its service any but fully qualified teachers in the future. There are still a few in this district to whom this note of warning is specially applicable, and who, if they be wise, and desirous of retaining their positions in the service, will lose no time in securing by examination a legal status to be permitted to pursue their present avocation.