

REGULATIONS.—Towards the end of the year the question of school holidays engaged the Board's attention. From a return called for in September it was apparent that the then-existing regulation, made many years since, had practically become obsolete, and the holidays given by the different School Committees varied in a very considerable degree. To insure a greater uniformity in this matter, as well as to check the practice of allowing holidays of an unreasonable length, the Board decided (the alteration was not finally agreed upon till 8th January of this year) to increase by two weeks the minimum and maximum number of weeks allowed under the old regulations. The School Committees have been requested, when fixing upon the length of regular holidays, to take into consideration the number of irregular holidays necessitated by any cause whatsoever. Two other questions of importance brought under the Board's notice were those bearing upon the conditions under which the teachers at present occupy the schoolhouses, and the necessity for defining more exactly the purposes for which the incidental allowances granted to School Committees are intended to be used. There had been so many occasions on which these matters had forced themselves into prominent notice that it was considered advisable to refer them to the Buildings Committee for their consideration and report. The recommendations of that Committee have been formulated, but, owing to the pressure of other business, have been held over: the two questions will have the Board's consideration at an early date.

INSPECTION.—The Inspectors' annual report for the year 1895, which is appended, with the accompanying statistical returns, gives complete information as to the numbers of children examined, their classification and general proficiency. The number of children present for examination was 20,028, the number of those who failed, with or without the explanation of insufficient attendance, being less by 188 than in the preceding year; the return also shows an increase of the proportion of children presented in the higher standards. The Inspectors' remarks on the zeal and efficiency with which the Board's teachers carry out their duties cannot but be regarded as gratifying evidence of the care taken both by the Board and School Committees in the selection of applicants for appointments, and, seeing that the large majority of the schools in North Canterbury are staffed by teachers who entered the Board's service as pupil-teachers, must be a matter of congratulation to all those who have assisted in the preparation of our young teachers for their professional career. Early in the year the Board had under consideration a request from the Roman Catholic archbishop and bishops, asking the Board to authorise the inspection of any school in this district under their control; to which the Board replied that in its opinion it was not desirable that any portion of the funds voted by Parliament for the support of our national schools should be diverted to the inspection of any denominational schools.

It is with much regret that the Board learns from its Inspectors' report that under the operation of the existing syllabus the education of the higher classes in English grammar "has gone sadly backward," and that "blunders in concords are much too frequent," even "when the evidences of literary ability and of other technical details are most satisfactory." A defect so important and so conspicuous cannot fail to greatly lessen our satisfaction with the general result of our national educational efforts, and must everywhere seriously discount the high estimation in which the result of our New Zealand system has been so generally held. Presuming the opinion of the Board's Inspectors to be well founded, the Board has no doubt that the serious attention of the Minister of Education will be directed to the correction of such an undesirable result, and especially that no attempt to extend the syllabus in other directions will be permitted at the risk of producing such a glaring defect in the power to speak and to write their own language with creditable accuracy, even in those pupils who stay long enough in our schools to pass through the higher standards.

TRUANCY.—During the past year applications for the Board to appoint truant officers were received from several School Committees; but, as the funds at the Board's disposal for building purposes were not sufficient to meet the ordinary demands made upon them, and the General Account was considerably overdrawn, the Board was unable to incur further expenditure, with the view of increasing the attendance, by the appointment of a truant officer. At the date of this report several plans for dealing with the question of irregular attendance are under consideration; and the Committees which applied to the Board in this matter have meanwhile been recommended to hold a conference of Chairmen of School Committees before the opening of the next parliamentary session, for the purpose of considering the best means to be adopted for dealing with the difficulty. But the Board is of opinion that, in districts where the schools will conveniently accommodate a larger number of children than at present attend, the provisions of "The School Attendance Act, 1894," might well be put in force by the School Committees interested.

NORMAL SCHOOL.—Owing to the death of the late Principal of the Normal School (referred to under a separate paragraph, and also by the Principal in his report on the Normal School), it became necessary to make new arrangements for the efficient supervision of the training and practising departments. In August, as a temporary measure, and to allow of the whole question being considered by a full Board (several members were then absent in Wellington), Mr. E. Watkins, B.A., who for many years had acted as tutor, was appointed Principal of the Normal School for three months; and later on in the year, when the continued satisfactory working of both departments had proved the wisdom of such an arrangement, Mr. Watkins was permanently appointed to the position. To enable the new Principal to give the necessary supervision to the whole school, it was decided to allow him some assistance in the training department. Mr. W. A. Robinson, B.A., of whose ability and suitableness for the special work required the Board had excellent testimonials, was appointed as part-time lecturer, as from the 1st February, 1896. The Principal's report, which is appended, gives the number of students admitted to the Normal School in 1895, and other details connected with its working.

SCHOLARSHIPS.—The annual examination for scholarships was held on 17th December and following days. The number of competitors for the junior scholarships was 159 (107 boys and 52 girls), and for the senior scholarships the number was 11 (8 boys and 3 girls). The