

SOUTHLAND.

SIR,—

Education Office, Invercargill, 6th March, 1896.

In compliance with the provisions of section 102 of "The Education Act, 1877," the Education Board of the District of Southland has the honour to submit the following report of its proceedings, and of the progress of education within its bounds, for the year ending 31st December, 1895:—

THE BOARD.—During the year just closed the constitution of the Board has undergone no change. The retiring members were Messrs. George Froggatt, James Mackintosh, and Thomas MacGibbon. Four candidates were nominated by the School Committees to fill the vacancies so caused, and the voting resulted in the re-election of the three gentlemen named. At the Board's meeting in April, Mr. J. Walker Bain was elected Chairman for the ensuing year. The Board met twelve times during the year. The executive committee met twenty-two times, and dealt with a large proportion of the Board's ordinary business, thus obviating the necessity for protracted sittings at the usual monthly meetings. As in past years, the attendance of members at meetings of the Board and executive committee respectively has been extremely satisfactory, as is evidenced by the following record: Board meetings—Messrs. Bain (Chairman), Baldey, Froggatt, MacGibbon, and Matheson, 12 meetings each; Mr. McLeod, 11; Mr. Lumsden, 10; Mr. Mackintosh, 7; and Mr. McNab, 6. Executive committee—Messrs. Bain, Baldey, and Matheson, 22 meetings each; Mr. Froggatt, 21; Messrs. Lumsden, MacGibbon, and McLeod, 19; Mr. McNab, 10; and Mr. Mackintosh, 9. The average attendance was thus—for meetings of the Board, 8 (nearly); and for the executive committee, 7·4. The two last-mentioned members were necessarily absent from all meetings for a period of about five months during the late session of Parliament.

Messrs. J. Walker Bain and Robert McNab, M.A., LL.B., still continue to act as representatives of the Board on the Southland High Schools Board of Governors, the former also acting in the Board's interests as one of the School Commissioners of the Otago and Southland Education Reserves.

SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS.—At the commencement of the year there were in operation 132 schools. Only one new school—that at Clifden—has been opened during the year, so that there were on the 31st December last 133 schools under the Board's control. Numerous applications for the establishment of new schools were received towards the close of the year, final consideration of which will occupy the Board's attention early in the year 1896. The new school opened as an experiment during the previous year at Fairfax has justified its existence, and now it has been resolved to establish a permanent school in the district. This action, it is feared, will have the effect of closing the school at Groper's Bush, as the attendance there has fallen below the minimum necessary to afford fair support to a teacher. Of the 133 schools in operation in this district, twenty-two registered an average attendance of less than 20 pupils, and are consequently classed as aided schools; sixty-seven had an average between 20 and 50; while twenty-nine had an average varying from 50 to 150; and, of the remainder, nine averaged between 150 and 300, and two had an attendance of over 500 pupils. In the foregoing calculation, two half-time schools, where they exist, are reckoned as one. In order to provide against probable loss when establishing schools in thinly-populated localities, the Board, in some cases where the attendance is not likely to reach the minimum—twenty—for a regularly-established school, requires that the petitioners provide at their own cost a temporary school-building. In other cases the settlers are required to enter into a bond to make good any deficiency in a teacher's salary should the promised attendance not realise expectations. Such precautionary measures are adopted merely to safeguard the interests of the Board and the prospective teachers of such class of schools.

TEACHERS.—As compared with the previous year the number of teachers in the district has increased by six: there are now 232 teachers of all ranks in the Board's service. These were classified as follows: Principal teacher, 14; head of department, 14; head of school, 31 males and 2 females; sole teacher, 52 males and 30 females; assistant, 12 males and 17 females; pupil-teacher, 8 males and 52 females; total, males 117, females 115. From these figures it will be seen that the numbers of males and females employed in this education district are at the present time, as nearly as may be, equal. The following table, compiled from statistics for the past ten years, is instructive as showing not only the rapid increase in the number of teachers employed by the Board, but more especially the abnormal increase in the female teaching-staff during that period:—

Year.						Males.	Females.	Totals.
1886 ...	...	...	...	...	...	97	64	161
1889 ...	...	...	...	...	...	103	82	185
1892 ...	...	...	...	...	...	107	104	211
1895 ...	...	...	...	...	...	117	115	232

These figures (from 1886 to 1895 inclusive) indicate an increase of 20·6 per cent. in the number of male teachers employed, but an increase of nearly 80 per cent. when applied to females. This result has been anticipated; and, so far as this district is concerned, the Board has no reason to feel dissatisfied, but, on the contrary, to congratulate itself on a really satisfactory performance of duty by a very large majority of the female members of its teaching-staff.

The spirit of unrest so manifest amongst teachers a few years ago appears to have almost subsided. This is doubtless due to the fact that there is now no lack of thoroughly-qualified candidates to fill all ordinary vacancies; indeed, as reported last year, the supply is now in excess of the demand. In view of this excess in the supply of teachers it becomes a question whether the production of the manufactured article should not be regulated in some way: probably the easiest solution of what promises to develop a real difficulty would be to restrict the examination of persons other than those who are undergoing special training either as pupil-teachers or as normal-