

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Education Board Office, Wanganui, 20th February, 1896.

We have the honour to submit our report on public education in the Wanganui District for the year ending the 31st December, 1895.

SCHOOLS.—At the close of the school-year 116 schools were in active operation, of which nineteen had average attendances of under 20 pupils during the last quarter of the year—that is, were “aided schools.” Of these nineteen schools, three had averages of under 10 pupils, nine had averages of over 10 and under 15 pupils, and seven had averages of over 15 and under 20 pupils. Some of these aided schools, as Mount View, Turakina Valley, and Glen Nevis, are in districts settled for many years, and so are conducted in buildings belonging to the Board. The majority, however, as Upper Pohangina, Mangaweka (when started), and Maungahoe, are situated in newly-opened country, and the buildings are of the poorest possible description. Upon one inspection visit a room was found with calico doing duty for glass in the window-frames; but it is only fair to say that this was a temporary arrangement. Frequently the rooms, while fairly watertight, are very inconvenient for school purposes on account of their shape and the relative position of door, fireplace, and windows; and much more convenient rooms might be got for the money spent. We would, therefore, impress upon the Board the importance of having every building, however small, or however roughly put together, made according to a suitable plan issued from the office. This is a matter the importance of which has been pointed out to, and universally acknowledged by, members of the Board for years; nevertheless, as yet attention to it has been honoured more in the breach than in the observance. We see no reason why a small, light building, which could readily be taken to pieces, should not be designed. This building would be conveyed in sections to the proposed school site, and could readily be put up—without skilled labour should occasion require; and when the district advanced sufficiently for the erection of a Board school it could be taken down and made use of elsewhere. How necessary it is to have the school material for the back districts easily portable is shown by the fact that more than one Committee of these small aided schools has asked that even the little dual desks *be sent in sections*. The Waipuru School material and furniture had to be carried on pack-horses up the almost perpendicular cliff of the Rangitikei River near Ohingaiti. That sometimes the little portable building mentioned would not long be required, but would soon have to give place to a permanent and more substantial structure, is shown in the case of Mangaweka. Here the school was started in a rough slab where put up by the settlers, but in a very short time an average of over thirty pupils was reached, and now a building to accommodate sixty pupils has just been erected by the Board.

ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS.—Early in the year the Roman Catholic authorities requested the Board to allow its Inspectors to visit and report upon their schools, and, the Board having agreed to grant such request, the four Roman Catholic schools in the district—namely, two at Wanganui, one at Palmerston North, and one at Hawera—were duly inspected and examined, though it was difficult to find the fortnight necessary for the work.

The inspections were made very full and thorough indeed, for we recognised that the teachers were starting upon a syllabus and regulations somewhat new to them. We desired, therefore, not only to make everything as clear as we possibly could, but also to help the teachers as far as lay in our power in matters of method and class-management. And we were all the more anxious in our endeavours because the teachers showed the greatest eagerness to receive any hints or suggestions we were able to give them, and, in fact, heartily co-operated with us in every way. To the principal teacher of each school we sent samples of examination-tests and of worked papers, written descriptions of certain class-lessons and of school methods, and various school forms; and our examination visits showed that the trouble taken in this respect bore good fruit.

The examinations in standards were conducted in the usual manner, but, as we were of course unable to examine the four schools at the same time of year as they had hitherto been accustomed to, it followed that all had not received by the date of our examination a full year's instruction (Palmerston had about seven months). Considering this circumstance, and the fact that the schools were last year for the first time inspected and examined by public-school Inspectors, we do not purpose to comment in this report upon the examination results. We think, however, it is due to the teachers to say that, in the case of each school, our examination visit showed that they had loyally endeavoured to carry out any suggestions or instructions given at our inspection visit; and that the improvement for the five months interval between the two visits was very marked.

Before leaving this subject, we desire to place on record our thanks to the authorities and teachers for the cordial manner in which they received us into their schools and accepted and acted upon our criticisms and advice.

INSPECTION.—As we attach great importance to full and proper inspection (as distinguished from examination), we endeavoured to visit every school in the district open for a fair portion of the year, and we would have succeeded had it not been for some accidental circumstances over which we had no control. In all, 118 visits were paid, the highest number as yet accomplished. Six schools were found closed upon the Inspector's arrival, owing to the lately-initiated “train-excursions”: five of these were inspected by subsequent visits, and an attempt was made to reach the sixth—Oroua Bridge—but the road was found impassable through floods. Rata School was closed on the two occasions when we were engaged in its neighbourhood, and on the day set apart for Hiwinui the Inspector had to give up work for a time owing to illness. Three schools were visited twice, with a view of giving extra help to new teachers.

With regard to school train-excursions, we may say that we are heartily in favour of them, for, apart from the pleasure they give, they must be distinctly valuable from an educational point of view. We would, however, point out that teachers ought to notify the Board's secretary as early as they can of the date of proposed excursions, and so save us purposeless travelling, and waste of time that can ill be spared.