

NELSON.

SIR,—

Nelson, 25th January, 1898.

We have the honour to submit to you our annual report on the Nelson public schools.

One hundred and eighteen schools have been at work during the year, the number showing an increase of four as compared with last year's list, and all of these except four have been examined. Of those omitted, three were established too late in the year for the scholars to be prepared for examination, and one small household school was temporarily closed during the Inspector's visit to the district. The establishment of a school at Millerton, which may soon become an important centre, has been authorised. We are informed that the Native Schools Department is about to establish a school for Maori children at Whangarae, in the Croiselles. This, we believe, will be the first experiment of the kind within this district. The names of two schools—Hardy Street and Top House—which were on last year's list, have disappeared from this one. The former has been amalgamated with Tasman Street, and the latter, a small household school, has been closed. A third, at Cable Bay, has been closed since its examination in July.

Visits of inspection have been paid to 102 schools. This year we can with pleasure report that time-tables are being more strictly followed, at any rate during the Inspector's visits, and that fewer general faults have been revealed, though there is still considerable room for improvement in the methods of work adopted by many teachers. A change in the staff has often disclosed a state of things most damaging to the professional reputation of the departing teacher. In one instance a new teacher, on taking charge at the latter end of the school year, complained that she could find no evidence that the teaching of more than four subjects had been even attempted. The practice of omitting subjects from the school course till a week or two before the examination is a most pernicious one, and when by the time-table the lessons have been professedly given the practice is simply dishonest. The plea of inability to follow the time-table is a plain confession of incapacity, as it is the duty of every teacher to frame one that can be followed. If the work is being systematically carried on by a capable teacher, another equally capable should find no difficulty in taking up the duty at any stage of progress, and yet in almost every case we find that the examination following a change of teachers has been a disastrous one. In some instances we fear that the cause of failure is that outgoing teachers who are leaving the service or being promoted to other posts have for some time prior to their removal relaxed their efforts. If these failings are not remedied, teachers must consider themselves to blame if the facilities at present afforded for obtaining a change of situation are withdrawn and promotion is made less easily procurable.

As some misunderstanding appears to exist concerning the management of a school during examination, we desire to make it thoroughly clear to teachers that we expect them to retain the control of all the scholars as on ordinary school days, and to issue for class-drill the necessary executive words of command, the only difference from the usual routine being that the children are expected to do their tasks without any assistance. To examine all the pupils orally, and mark all their written papers besides, is a sufficiently heavy task for an Inspector, without attempting class supervision, the special duty of the teacher. If the Inspector is called away from more important work to rearrange a disorganized class or to reprimand a scholar, as occasionally though rarely happens, this should be considered a grave reflection upon the management of the teacher, who should make a breach of discipline impossible, or check it himself.

The value of outdoor training as a benefit to health and an aid to mental development is being recognised by some Committees, who have supplied their schools with gymnastic apparatus. In another direction they might render great assistance to the intellectual training of the children. The interior walls of the schoolrooms usually present an unattractive and uninteresting aspect, being too often bare, or, at best, adorned with a few maps. Little children may readily acquire much useful information from pictures, and in some few schools the wall decorations are such as interest and instruct even adults. The natural history plates that are supplied by the Board at half cost price are particularly useful for this purpose, and afford valuable aid to teachers in giving object-lessons, for which Oliver and Boyd's boxes are also especially intended. Although all of these have been on the Board's list for many years past it would be difficult to find a single school yet supplied with a complete set.

The total number on the school rolls at our examinations was 6,054, and we were pleased to find a larger number than usual present—viz., 5,757. To the list of absentees, who numbered 297, the schools which contributed the largest proportions were: Eighty-eight Valley, Spring Grove, Panga-totara, Granity Creek, Wakefield Boys, and Lower Moutere. In forty-four schools, nearly double the number recorded last year, every child on the rolls was present at examination, the largest of these being: Richmond Girls', 74; Waimea West, 49; River Terrace, 46; and Little Grey, 44.

The number on the rolls at the end of the September quarter was 6,069, the average attendance of the first three quarters of the year being 4,927. In last year's report we directed special attention to the low average attendance in this district. From the report of the Minister of Education for 1896 we find that Nelson in this respect still holds the same relatively low position, the tenth on the list of the thirteen educational districts of the colony, though our average attendance for that year, 80.5 per cent., was higher than it had previously been. Otago and Westland, at the head of the list, both show the same average, 86.5 per cent., which practically means that of every 100 children in any of the districts mentioned from every lesson six more were absent in Nelson than in either of the two other districts. Omitting household schools, we find this year that only twelve in this district have exceeded the average maintained by all the schools of Westland and Otago. The best of these are Win's Valley, 96.1 per cent.; Awaroa, 94.4 per cent.; Kongahu, 89.6 per cent.; Brook Street, 89.4 per cent.; and Hampden Street, 89 per cent. The attendance at many schools in this district is still discreditable, several of the most unsatisfactory showing less than 70 per cent. We take this opportunity of calling the attention of teachers, committees, and