

infant-school teaching in this district will be much benefited by the knowledge of its principles and methods imparted by the series of lessons just given.

INSPECTION OF SCHOOLS.—The Inspectors' report furnishes full information respecting the progress of education generally, and, in addition, contains a detailed summary of results obtained by individual schools as well as for the whole district.

TRUANCY.—The duties of the Board's Truant Officer have been carried out during the year with, the Board believes, beneficial results. Some doubt has arisen as to the powers conferred on Truant Officers by "The School Attendance Act, 1894," more especially as to his right to prosecute defaulting parents for the non-attendance of their children without the authority of the School Committee of the district being first obtained. This point was submitted to the Board's solicitor, who gave it as his opinion that in the case of non-attendance of pupils whose names have been enrolled in the records of any school a Truant Officer can institute proceedings under the Act without the express consent or authority of the School Committee of the district. The Board thereupon instructed its officer to carry out the provisions of the Act in all cases where he found it necessary to do so. This interpretation of the law will doubtless be received by School Committees with satisfaction. In many instances since the passing of the School Attendance Act the only difficulty attending its administration has been the diffidence felt by School Committees in being the direct cause of the institution of legal proceedings against their friends and neighbours. There is another point about which the various Stipendiary Magistrates, in the hearing of such cases, do not agree. By some Magistrates it is held that the onus of proof that a child is not well enough to attend school lies with the parent or guardian; by others that proof to the contrary lies with the prosecution. If the latter interpretation of the law be correct, then an amendment of the Act is an imperative necessity, to enable Boards and their officers to give effect to the intention of the Legislature. It is obviously impossible for Truant Officers to possess information respecting the physical condition of children in all parts of an education district on any given date, and it is correspondingly easy for parents or guardians to obtain from School Committees an exemption certificate in every case where the health of their children may be such as to justify absence from school. In section 3 of the Act there is provision for every possible contingency which may justify the absence of a child from school, and no parent who has the educational welfare of his children at heart need fear in the slightest any undue interference with his liberty in the matter of compulsory attendance. The only persons who have cause to dread the presence of a Truant Inspector are those who are habitually careless or indifferent to the future well-being of their offspring, for the benefit of whom the Act was framed.

SCHOOL COMMITTEES.—The relations between the Board and the School Committees in its district have continued to be harmonious throughout the past year. In the month of September the Board amended its regulations affecting allowances to School Committees, the general effect of which was to increase the School Fund allowance from 2s. 6d. to 3s. 6d. for each pupil in excess of twenty-five of an average attendance at any school, and to double the allowance payable in respect of schools whose average is below twenty. The fixed allowance of £10 payable under the old regulation to all schools having an average attendance of twenty to twenty-five (inclusive) or upwards remains unaltered. The amended scale of payments, which comes into operation for the quarter ending on the 31st December, does not affect the finance of the year 1898. The extra amount payable to School Committees by virtue of this alteration will be approximately £350 per annum. In consideration of the additional sum thus granted it is expected that Committees will assist in executing certain small repairs and other works previously undertaken at the sole expense of the Board.

BUILDING OPERATIONS.—The Board has to acknowledge the increased liberality displayed by Government in the matter of grants for school buildings. In a district such as Southland, where, on account of the rapid progress of settlement, the demand for increased school accommodation shows no abatement, it has been well-nigh impossible to make adequate provision for the requirements of the people, and especially has this been the case in districts where, on account of new settlement, some altogether unexpected claims have arisen. The special vote made by Parliament for the purpose of assisting in the erection of school buildings in newly settled districts has rendered this Board substantial assistance in making proper provision for the educational requirements of settlers in remote parts. A special grant of £1,630 for this purpose appears amongst this Board's receipts for the year. The ordinary grant for buildings was £3,300, an increase on the previous year's vote of £300. Notwithstanding the substantial aggregate increase in the Board's revenue for building purposes, it has been found very difficult to meet all legitimate demands. This is due—in part, at least—to the fact that the drain on the Board's resources for painting, repairs, &c., still continues to increase. During the year new schools were erected in the districts of Merrivale, Benio, Te Tua, Otakau, Hamilton Burn, and Oteramika, the first five being in districts recently opened up for settlement; new residences were provided for the use of the teachers at Invercargill Park, Wendon, Greenhills, Haldane, Maitland Village, and Te Tua; while additions to the residences at Wyndham, Otautau, Hillend South, Ardlussa, Wairio, and Seaward Moss were also completed.

The erection of these new buildings and additions, with other minor payments, involved an expenditure of £2,712. In addition to this amount, improvements and repairs to buildings were effected at a cost of £1,249, while a sum of about £560 was disbursed in connection with providing furniture and apparatus; in survey, transfer, and purchase of school sites; and in payment for plans and inspection of buildings in course of erection. The general effect of this year's operations on the Building Account has been to decrease the debit balance (£863) of the preceding year to £422 7s. 3d. This result could not have been achieved but for the receipt of the special vote previously referred to, or, as an alternative, the postponement of many of the works above specified.