

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Education Board Office, Wanganui, 20th February, 1899.

We have the honour to submit our report on public education in the Wanganui District for the year ending 31st December, 1898.

Number of Schools.—At the close of the school-year 132 schools, including two half-time schools in the Ngamatapouri Block, were in active operation, as against 127 at the close of 1897.

Attendance.—The average number of pupils on the rolls during the year, taking one week with another, was 10,454, and the strict average attendance for the year was 8,451, so that 80·8 represents the degree of the regularity of the attendance. This percentage, we are pleased to see, has again improved, by 0·4 for the year; but it is still 2·1 below the mean of the colony. It would probably have been higher had it not been for an outbreak of measles during the December quarter.

Roman Catholic Schools.—The four Roman Catholic Schools in the district were duly examined. The following are the examination results:—

School.	Number on Roll.	Presented in Standards.	Present in Standards.	Failed in Standards.	Passed in Standards.
Marist Brothers', Wanganui	68	68	68	18	50
St. Joseph's, Wanganui ...	111	55	51	12	39
Hawera... ..	90	56	54	8	46
Palmerston North ...	98	59	50	4	46
Totals	367	238	223	42	181

The work of these schools, especially of those in Wanganui, continues to improve. Paper work generally was characterized by extreme neatness, but frequently bore evidence of purely *memoriter* teaching. The oral work, as a rule, pointed to mere instruction, not, as it should, to educative teaching. The manners of the pupils were particularly pleasing.

Inspection.—Recognising as we do the great importance of thorough inspection, we made strenuous efforts to visit all the schools. We were, however, able to overtake only 102, but we unfortunately lost a fortnight early in the year through illness. The preparation of examination-papers for standards, for pupil-teachers, and for scholarships takes up a considerable portion of our time. For standards we make out 112 papers, for pupil-teachers thirty papers, and for scholarships fifteen papers. Then the clerical work necessitated by the various examination returns devolves upon us, and consumes time that surely might be more advantageously spent. It seems absurd that Inspectors should have to spend days transcribing and adding figures, when such work could be done as efficiently by a boy. The schools in the back-country take more time for inspection than their number and average attendance appear to warrant, owing to the long distances they are apart; but we do not on that account like to neglect them. One thing is quite certain: we could not have inspected so many schools did we not work a great deal of overtime at night.

With the methods and quality of instruction seen at our inspection visits we were often very pleased. Many of the sole teachers, especially ex-pupil-teachers, show considerable skill in keeping all classes engaged, and at the same time giving educative oral teaching. Still a few teachers neglect to map out their day's work beforehand, and so much time is wasted. The number of schools at which oral answers are well expressed in statements yearly increases, but still many teachers do themselves too much of the thinking, and give their pupils too much aid. They neglect to get the pupils to give clearly their reasons for certain steps, and to state in their own words explanations given; and they do not generalise the principles applied. While the lessons are carefully prepared and intelligently given, the teaching is not driven home: a brush is used, not a graver. We will write some further remarks on methods under "Instruction."

The attendance registers, diaries, log-books, &c., we generally found at these visits well kept. The exercise-books at several schools were not as carefully marked as they should have been.

Preparatory Classes.—The teaching in the preparatory classes in the majority of schools is very sound, and in some of the larger schools really excellent work is done. In very few schools did we fail to find a class sufficiently advanced to begin the work of Standard I. Multiplication tables were generally well known, but in the addition tables more systematic instruction is needed. Pupils should be thoroughly trained in the addition of numbers involving an advance from a lower group of tens to a higher. Little sums in addition and multiplication were at many schools neatly put down, and accurately worked; while in oral treatment of the same sums the pupils were very ready in saying aloud all the working without any prompting. At some schools the teachers, when using the blackboard for such sums, do too much for their pupils. Reading varied from poor to excellent: it was often far too low in tone. The bad effects of low speaking in reading and oral answering are so self-evident that particular care should be taken that pupils do not form such a habit at the beginning of their school-life. Spelling often was excellent, especially in the schools where the phonic system was well taught. Writing seldom was poor, while it often was excellent. At some schools it might be remembered that what is wanted is a fairly accurate copy of the letters set, not a number of scribbled letters bearing no resemblance to the model given. Object-lessons were taken at the larger schools, but both the matter and the method were generally unsuitable.