

and salaries that does not recognise the necessities of the remote settlers will fail to meet the most pressing needs of the very class that is doing so much towards the opening-up and the closer settlement of the waste places of the colony. I feel confident that the sympathies of the Government are entirely with the view taken by this Board with regard to the placing of some means of education within reach of every single child in the district, however far removed from the chief centres of population. The fact that of the sixty-seven schools that have been in operation during the past year as many as forty had an attendance of less than ten scholars, and that fourteen had less than five, is a sufficient proof that the requirements of the more closely settled districts have not been allowed to override those of the remote and thinly populated parts of the country. Whatever may be the case elsewhere, the settlers in the Sounds County can be brought under the beneficent provisions of the Act only by means of household or aided schools; and although the cost to the Board per head of these schools is largely in excess of that of the schools in more closely settled districts, it must be remembered that in all cases the cost of boarding the teacher is borne by the parents, and in a few some addition is made by the parents to the capitation allowed by the Board. There are within this district forty-four schools having fewer than fifteen scholars on the roll, and, although nine of these were not open all the year, their cost in salaries only was £1,185, or about £4 5s. per head, in addition to blackboards, maps, and (in three cases) the cost of the materials for the school buildings, the erection being provided for by the parents interested. The outcry occasionally heard with regard to the insufficient representation of country schools on the Boards must, in view of the facts just mentioned, be regarded as quite inapplicable to this district. The members, having been elected by the Committees generally, have shown by their liberal treatment of the outlying and unrepresented districts that they have regarded themselves as trustees for the whole, and not for any particular portion, of the Education District. The new method of electing members of Boards, whilst more expensive and cumbersome than the old, can hardly prove more satisfactory, at least in this district.

ATTENDANCE.—The average daily attendance for the years 1898, 1899, and 1900 was 81 per cent., 81·2 per cent., and 81·4 per cent. respectively of the roll-numbers, showing a gradual though slow improvement. The highest average given in the Minister's last report was 87·2 per cent., in the Grey District; and, with the assistance of the police in enforcing the provisions of the School Attendance Act, there is no reason why the average should not be as good in other districts.

SALARIES.—The working average attendance being the basis upon which the grant from Government is received, it is interesting to note the cost per head in salaries, especially in view of a proposed colonial scale. In 1899 the average cost per head in salaries for the whole of New Zealand was £3 6s. 8d. The average cost per head in Marlborough for the same year was £3 5s. 8d., and this notwithstanding the existence of so many small aided and household schools. Again, in the same year, there were altogether in the colony seventy-seven schools having an average attendance of 300 and upwards. The cost per head for salaries at these schools was £2 9s. 6½d. There is no school in Marlborough coming under this head, but the combined average attendance at the Blenheim boys' and girls' school amounted to 421, and the salaries paid to £1,067—about £2 10s. 8d. per head, or 1s. 1½d above the average of such schools. The average salaries of all teachers in the colony, according to the Minister's report for 1899, was £93 15s. 5d., and for the same year the average salary in Marlborough was £64 12s. 2d. The true significance of these figures will, no doubt, be fully considered when the Government is compiling the permanent scale of staffs and salaries for the colony. The Board trusts that the Government will adopt the recommendation of the Education Conference of 1899, to the effect that the annual payments to Boards be not less than £4 per pupil, and that the smaller districts receive "special consideration over and above the £4 capitation."

SCHOLARSHIPS.—The new scholarship regulations, rendered necessary by the establishment of a high school in Marlborough, were drawn up and submitted for the approval of the Department, and, after some alteration, were duly sanctioned. The first competition for the scholarships took place in December, the results of which will be found in the Inspector's report. There are still two scholarships current for the year 1901 at Nelson College, but henceforth all scholarships will be held at the Marlborough High School. The parent of the winner of one of the "country" scholarships, with rare generosity, offered to accept a "town" scholarship instead of that to which his son was entitled, so that others who, owing to the lowering of the age-limit, would not have another chance of competing might receive the benefits of secondary education. This enabled the Board to grant three extra scholarships this year, so that the number now current is ten, including two still held at Nelson College.

CHILDREN'S PATRIOTIC FUND.—Acting upon a suggestion from the Otago Education Board, early in the year this Board afforded the school-children of Marlborough an opportunity of contributing their mites to this laudable object; and, although many of them had already contributed to the same fund under other forms, the sum of £24 7s. 1d. was forwarded to the Colonial Treasury, being at the rate of 2½d. for every child on the roll. Considering the smallness of the district, and the fact that the majority of the parents of the children are far from wealthy, the Board considers that they have shown their patriotism in a very creditable manner.

SIDE SCHOOL.—In response to a petition from parents in the outskirts of Blenheim, the Board resolved to try the experiment of a side school to the Blenheim Borough School, at Redwood Street, near the southern boundary of the school district. Until the success or otherwise of this school is established the Board has rented a cottage for one year, and fitted it up for the purpose; and, should the result be satisfactory, the question of procuring a site and erecting a small building to accommodate children too young to attend with regularity at the main school will be taken into consideration.

BUILDINGS.—At the end of the year 1899 the Building Fund was in debt to the General Fund to the extent of £1,623 6s. 11d. This balance was reduced by the receipt, in the month of January,