

SOUTH CANTERBURY.

SIR,—

Education Office, Timaru, 26th March, 1901.

We have the honour to present the following report for the year 1900 :—

Sixty-seven schools were in operation throughout the year, and all were examined between July and December. In the earlier part of the year visits of inspection were paid to all the schools except one of the smallest. In the month of May we examined the five Roman Catholic schools, which together have a roll-number of 704. The annual examination of pupil-teachers was conducted as usual in June, and the scholarship examination in December. The secondary work of the district high schools was taken at the time of our annual visit to these schools. The Board has had reports of all our work read at the regular meetings; and we have to thank the members for the attention they have given to the consideration of these reports, while the pressure of other business has been steadily increasing and making greater demands on their time. The intimate knowledge the Board thus acquires of every school and its work is a source of satisfaction to us; and it should be an encouragement to teachers to know that the quality of their teaching and the successful accomplishment of the work assigned to them, so far as we are able to form an estimate of these things and to express our judgment on them, are matters that come under the notice of every member of the Board. In respect of closeness of touch between Boards, Inspectors, and teachers, we think the smaller education districts have had a decided advantage over the larger districts, though at the same time we are well aware that, so far as teachers' salaries are concerned, the smaller districts have in the past laboured under serious disadvantages that are probably soon to be removed by the adoption of a colonial scale of salaries.

It is usual to give in tabular form the examination results of the Board's schools for the whole district. In submitting this table we wish to point out that, except in Standard VI., the passes are those awarded by the teachers, who under the regulations in force during the year determined the passes in Standards I. to V., leaving the results in Standard VI. to be determined by the Inspector. The following is the table :—

Classes.				Presented.	Examined in Standards.	Passed.	Average Age of Pupils in each Class.
							Yrs. mos.
Above Standard VI. ...	...	...	...	156	...	...	...
Standard VI. ...	...	...	...	391	380	262	13 8
" V. ...	...	...	...	618	577	481	12 9
" IV. ...	...	...	...	690	656	575	11 11
" III. ...	...	...	...	717	693	627	10 8
" II. ...	...	...	...	616	593	560	9 7
" I. ...	...	...	...	540	527	495	8 6
Preparatory ...	...	...	...	1,431	...	...	...
Totals for 1900 ...	...	...	...	5,159	3,426	3,000	11 2*
Totals for 1899 ...	...	...	...	5,102	3,445	2,988	11 1*

* Mean of average age.

The table shows an increase in the number on the roll from 5,102 to 5,159. Since 1896, when the roll-number reached 5,291, there has been a yearly decrease to record; and, though we are still 132 short of the highest point reached, the closer settlement that is taking place in many parts of the district should in a few years bring a considerable increase. The number of pupils present at our examinations and examined in Standard I. to VI. is 3,426 out of a roll-number in these classes of 3,572. As there was no change in the form of examination report, in which were to be recorded the numbers of children presented, present, and passed, we counted as present only those that were present at our examinations, and marked as absent those that absented themselves at the time of our visit, though they had been present and had passed the teachers' examinations. We have since learned that it was intended that those that passed the teachers' examinations should have been recorded as present on the examination-report form. Our way of marking, though perhaps not quite in order, reveals a state of matters that might otherwise have escaped notice: we refer to the large increase in the number of those that absented themselves from the Inspectors' examinations. This number has gone up from ninety-nine in all standards last year to 146 this year. Some of these were absent from the teachers' examinations as well as from ours, but of the others a very large proportion were those that the teachers were not prepared to promote to the next higher class. The hope of promotion being thus taken away, the information that they had not passed having been conveyed to them before our visit, they felt they might as well stay away from our examination, and they did so. Like many others, they thought the pass was all they went to school for. We have all along contended that it was a mistake to require the teacher to hold a pass examination immediately preceding our visit; the estimate formed of his pupils by periodical testing and by his daily intercourse with them should have been sufficiently definite to enable him to say who should be promoted and who should not. Even though the teacher might not directly communicate to the pupils the results of his examination, very few children would have doubts as to their success or failure. We do not know from what point of view the pass examination by the teacher was not objectionable, but that it should prove the means of preventing some children from attending school at our annual visit is an objection that we did not anticipate.