

I have the authority of the Minister for saying that in all probability a new School Attendance Bill will be introduced at the next session of Parliament. The new regulations have already raised the standard of exemption to Standard V. It has been proposed to raise the age of exemption to fourteen; and other amendments in the present Act seem desirable, if not absolutely necessary.

Besides the subjects specially named in the circular convening the Conference, there are others which the Minister has been requested by some of the Education Boards to bring under your notice. These relate principally to the centralisation of the inspectorate, to the granting of railway-passes to poor pupils attending district high schools and of special assistance to country teachers attending classes for instruction in the large towns, to the issue of standard certificates to pupils of private schools, and to the employment of the police as truant officers.

Further, I have been asked to lay before you, for your consideration, the following summary of recommendations made by the Council of the New Zealand Educational Institute with regard to the syllabus and standard regulations: I. That, in view of the probable introduction into the syllabus of such new subjects as manual instruction, there is need of a revision of the syllabus. II. That the Minister of Education be asked to admit representatives of the New Zealand Educational Institute to any Conference held to consider the syllabus. III. That the Institute is of opinion that in the past the syllabus has been overweighted with arithmetic, and that the work of the six standards ought to be distributed over seven. That in compiling a new syllabus these general principles should be kept in mind: (a.) That a wide choice of work in such subjects as geography, grammar, history, science, drawing, and the like should be allowed, so that within certain limits each teacher might lay out his own syllabus for the year's work. The present English Code runs on these lines. (b.) That the privilege of grouping standard classes for certain subjects should be retained and extended. IV. By recent alterations in the plan of examining and classifying, teachers have been given full power to pass or to keep back any child; but to keep back any child who was really fit to pass would be unjust. V. That in the opinion of this Institute the retention of the annual pass-examination and the issue of standard certificates, except in the form of exemption certificates and certificates of proficiency, tend to prevent that freedom of classification which is the aim and object of the new regulations.

In addition to the Inspectors of the several Boards the Minister has invited to the Conference the Inspectors of the Central Department—Mr. J. H. Pope, Inspector of Native Schools; Mr. H. B. Kirk, Assistant Inspector of Native Schools; and Messrs. E. C. Isaac and M. H. Browne, Organizing Inspectors of Manual and Technical Instruction—all of whom are present to-day, except Mr. Kirk, who is absent on official business at the Chatham Islands.

I have, gentlemen, to thank you most cordially for so large an attendance on this occasion. We have, I believe, only one absentee, Mr. Ladley of Nelson, and you will, I am sure, unite with me in expressing regret at the cause of his absence.

I trust that our labours may result in a considerable advantage to the cause of education in this colony.

It will be necessary for the expeditious despatch of business that you should elect a Standing Orders Committee, whose principal duty will be to decide what business is to be brought before the Conference each day. You should also elect a secretary; Mr. F. D. Thomson, of the Education Department, will, if you desire it, act as assistant secretary and shorthand-writer. Further, it will be for you to decide whether or not the public shall be admitted to the meetings of the Conference.

A unanimous vote of thanks was accorded to the Chairman for his address. The Inspector-General promised that it should be printed and circulated among members of the Conference.

The Minister of Education here entered the chamber and cordially welcomed the Inspectors, intimating his intention of being present as often as possible.

The ordinary business was then proceeded with.

Mr. Purdie moved, and Mr. Morton seconded, "That, in the opinion of the members of this Conference, it is desirable that the individual recorded pass in Standards I., II., III., and IV. be abolished."

Mr. Fitzgerald moved, as an amendment, "That pass examinations be restricted to the Fourth and Sixth Standards; and that merit certificates be awarded to pupils who with credit pass the Sixth Standard examination."—Amendment lost on the voices.

Mr. Richardson moved, as an amendment, "That the words 'and IV.' be struck out, and the words 'IV. and V.' substituted."—Carried.

The original motion in its amended form was then passed: Ayes, 21; noes, 7.

On the motion of Mr. Richardson, it was resolved that all voting should be taken by a show of hands.

On Mr. Petrie's motion, it was resolved that notices of motion should be handed in during the morning sitting.

Leave was granted Messrs. Fitzgerald and Smyth to withdraw Motions 2 and 3 on the Order Paper, standing in their names.

Mr. Petrie moved, and Mr. Lee seconded, "That the Minister be asked to curtail the syllabus of instruction so as to allow of two hours a week being devoted in all schools to the teaching of science and of singing; that the curtailment required might be secured—(a) By making the geography course shorter and more precise; (b) by making history a reading subject only, and no longer liable to special examination, oral or other; (c) by rearranging the course of instruction in arithmetic, omitting altogether the study of the metric system of weights and measures, discount and present worth, stocks, and compound interest, and limiting the treatment of decimal fractions substantially to finite decimals; and (d) by omitting the geometrical drawing now prescribed for Standards IV. and V." It was resolved to discuss and to vote on each section of the motion separately.