

WELLINGTON.

SIR,—

Wellington, 31st March, 1902.

I have the honour to submit the following report of the proceedings of the Education Board of Wellington for the year ended the 31st December, 1901:—

BOARD.—At the beginning of the year the Board was composed of Messrs. J. R. Blair (Chairman), F. Bradey, A. W. Hogg, J. Kebbell, J. Robertson, W. C. Buchanan, W. W. McCardle, E. Feist, and J. Young. Three members—Messrs. J. R. Blair, F. Bradey, and E. Feist—retired at the end of March, and were re-elected. Mr. Blair was re-elected Chairman and appointed Treasurer. During the year thirteen meetings have been held.

SCHOOLS.—At the end of the year there were 143 schools under the control of the Board, ten of these being subsidised to the extent of the statutory capitation grant. In addition to the subsidy on the average attendance, the Board furnishes all aided schools and materially contributes towards the cost of erection. Where buildings are provided, the Board in most instances continues to pay a liberal rent for the accommodation placed at its disposal.

ATTENDANCE.—The numbers at the end of the year were: On rolls, 14,893; average attendance, 12,655. A comparison of the quarterly returns for the year show somewhat exceptional results: Compared with 1900 returns, March quarter had an increase of 39 in average attendance on a decrease of 67 in roll-numbers. June showed that the roll-number had decreased by 139, while the average had a phenomenal increase of 527. September roll-number gave an increase of 17, but the prevailing epidemic caused a serious fall of 285 in the average attendance as compared with the figures for the corresponding period in the preceding year, and a difference of 812 on the figures for the previous quarter. December gave promise of an approaching return to the steady progress recorded in earlier years, the children on the registers having increased by 226, with a still more marked improvement in the average attendance, those figures having increased by 310. The hopes of a more satisfactory financial year were, however, dispelled when the September returns were recorded.

TEACHERS.—The number of teachers in the Board's service at the end of the year was 129 males and 276 females. The classification of the 162 pupil-teachers was,—First year, 9; second year, 11; third year, 25; fourth year, 14; fifth year, 19; ex-pupil-teachers, 84.

BUILDINGS.—New schools have been completed at Manuhera, Huia Road, Makomako, and Ihuraua, and a new building at Thorndon (Wellington City) to replace the building destroyed by fire; and residences have been provided at Waione and Dreyerton. Additions have been made to the schools at Hukanui and Gladstone. Considerable additions and improvements have been made to the school buildings in many other localities.

At the beginning of the year the Building Account showed an overdraft of £2,846 11s. 4d. In addition to the Government grant of £5,200 to meet general expenditure on account of school buildings, a special payment of £3,853 3s. was received on account of buildings destroyed by fire. £71 13s. 9d. was received for rents, &c. The expenditure on account of buildings amounted to £9,382 0s. 11d., made up as follows: New buildings, £698 8s. 10d.; additions and improvements, £1,685 6s. 2d.; furniture and appliances, £856 3s. 7d.; sites, £401 1s. 10d.; plans and supervision, £150 16s.; and £4,677 18s. 2d. for rebuilding schools destroyed by fire. The sum of £912 6s. 4d. was expended for rents of schoolrooms.

The total expenditure for the year was £63,357 17s. 8d.; of this amount, £42,270 3s. 9d. was for teachers' salaries and allowances, £3,690 10s. 4d. for incidental expenses of schools, and £9,382 0s. 11d. on account of school buildings.

On the 24th June the Terrace School (Wellington City) was destroyed by fire while placed at the disposal of the Government for the accommodation of Volunteers during the celebrations in connection with the visit of their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. Temporary buildings were rented from the trustees of St. John's Church, and considerable expenditure for new furniture and fittings became necessary. A sum of nearly £700 had to be expended to provide concrete walls to protect the face of the land at the back of the school-ground, and the street-frontage, the fire having completely destroyed the wooden face of the protection-wall and rendered the concrete walls a necessity. Every effort was made to induce the Government to restore the property in terms of the conditions under which it was placed at their disposal, but without success, and the Board's finances have consequently been unfairly hampered to a very considerable extent.

The annual vote for buildings is quite inadequate to enable the Board to keep pace with the requirements of this district, and, further, it is quite impossible for the Board to do the necessary repairs, painting, &c., required to be done annually on a considerable number of the 143 schools now existing. As the new Teachers' Salaries Act deprives the Board of any margin, it was only reasonable to expect that the Department would have made arrangements by which the overdrafts of the Board would have been wiped out, and thus enable the Board to start fair with a clean sheet; but, as this has not been done, the Board will have to realise the position, and out of any surplus which can be saved out of the 11s. 3d. grant proceed to liquidate the overdraft, a result requiring time. The position of the Board may be summarised thus: (1.) An overdraft at the bank of £5,532 7s. (2.) The possible margin of the income of the Board having been cut off by the new Teachers' Salaries Act, the Board has no means of liquidating the same other than by the exercise of most rigid economy, and that out of the 11s. 3d. capitation grant. (3.) That the annual building grant for new buildings is quite inadequate, and great dissatisfaction with the Board will result. (4.) That no provision appears to be made for the upkeep of existing buildings. (5.) Under existing circumstances Boards of Education will be overwhelmed by public dissatisfaction through their inability to adequately carry out their duties. That the failure arises from no fault of the Board, but of the Government in failing to provide the necessary means, will not mitigate the feeling. The Education Board is the visible body, and will be held responsible.

SCHOLARSHIPS.—The annual scholarship examination was held in October, centres being established, as at last examination, at Otaki, Masterton, Pahiatua and Wellington. One hundred and eighty candidates presented themselves, and of these eighty-three qualified for a place on the list according to the regulations. Scholarships were awarded to twelve boys and twelve girls.