

HAWKE'S BAY.

SIR,—

Inspector's Office, Napier, 26th March, 1902.

The year ended the 31st December, 1901, has been, from an educational point of view, one of much importance to teachers and to the future welfare of the country. The coming into operation of the Manual and Technical Instruction Act, the adoption of a teachers' colonial scale of salaries, and the offer of special grants by the Government for the furtherance of secondary education by means of district high schools, will characterize the year as significant of impending educational changes.

It would be premature to deal with these matters in their initial stage, more particularly with regard to their probable effects upon the future educational work of the colony; but already there are signs that advantage will be taken by teachers and those interested in the extension of public education to avail themselves of every benefit the Government may offer for the advancement of education in the country.

The opening of technical classes by the Board for the benefit of teachers shows how alive the teachers themselves are to gain an insight into those aspects of art and science that are daily forcing themselves into recognition as subjects of instruction in the public school. From the remotest parts of the education district teachers have come to attend the classes in Napier, Gisborne, and Dannevirke, at heavy cost, and, although six months have passed since the classes were first established, there is no sign of slackness or loss of interest in the work that is being done for the future benefit of education in the schools of the district.

As yet the question of district high schools has only arisen at Gisborne and Dannevirke. For a number of years such a school has been successfully working in the former town, but the recent decision by the Board to make the secondary classes free to all pupils who have passed the Sixth Standard is likely to have an important effect in the work of secondary education in the Poverty Bay district. By means of maintenance scholarships the country children, equally with those of Gisborne, would be able to enter the secondary classes; and should the Board establish such scholarships the course of instruction will require some amendment in the direction of introducing subjects like advanced model and freehand drawing, type-writing, shorthand, and the elements of agriculture. Dannevirke has only reached the initial stage in its claim for secondary classes. No doubt a school where secondary subjects could be taught is wanted somewhere between Woodville and Takapau, and Dannevirke is certainly the town best suited for the purpose. But the question of maintenance is one of some difficulty. The special grant from the Government, even when fees are charged, will not suffice for the extra cost of staffing such a school, and unless further help can be obtained, as in the case of the Gisborne School, it is difficult to see how a district high school can be maintained for the benefit of bush settlers.

The adoption of a colonial scale of teachers' salaries needs no remark, as the Act under which the scale was adopted only came into operation at the beginning of 1902.

In my previous report the statement was made that the schools in the district were ready for a forward movement. By this was meant that the great body of teachers were ready to advance in the educational work as soon as opportunities allowed them to do so. It was not intended to convey the impression that the schools established by the Board were so built and equipped as to be pronounced satisfactory. Unfortunately, such is not the case. After nearly twenty-five years of administrative work it is much to be regretted that the Board, under what is known as a free public scheme of education, is so hampered for funds that proper school provision cannot be made. Apart from the question of teachers' residences, the erection and completion of school buildings has at no time sufficed for the necessities of the children for whom the Board are supposed to make provision. Out of eighty-one school buildings in the district fourteen do not belong to the Board, and twenty-six schools are without a residence. Apart from these serious deficiencies, several schools are sadly overcrowded, and are a menace to the health of the children. Then, there are Hatuma, near Waipukurau, Mahora, near Hastings, and Whatatutu, some ten miles from Te Karaka, where schools are being called for, so that a large sum of money is needed to provide for the present educational requirements of the district.

Attention has so often been drawn by me to the unsatisfactory condition of the school buildings along the East Coast, but without avail, that I am constrained to suggest to the Board the advisability of asking the Department to take over schools in Native districts mainly made up of Native pupils. At Mohaka, although less than sixty children are attending the present school, the building is far too small for this number. There are nine pupils belonging to European parents, so that whatever school provision is made it will be mainly for Natives. The same disproportion exists between the Native and European children in other districts, and it seems but reasonable either that these schools should be taken over by the Department, or that sufficient funds be provided to erect the necessary buildings to enable the Board to have the children properly instructed under fair working conditions. Strong discontent exists among the coast settlers at the seeming neglect shown towards them in the matter of suitable school buildings, for, whilst they see well-ordered schools for the Native children, the so-called Board schools are merely makeshifts, having nothing that characterizes them as places for the training of children. Men who go out into the remoter parts of the district to establish a home feel strongly on this question, and it will be a good day in the interests of settlement when more consideration is given to the question of proper school provision for the children of settlers whose life is too often one long hard round of profitless toil. £8,000 is certainly not too high an estimate of what is necessary for school buildings alone; but I would impress on the Board the fact that a teacher's residence is almost a necessity in country districts, as teachers are often placed under great disadvantages where no house is provided.

Although certain of the schools are overcrowded, the past year has not added largely to the attendance results compared with the returns for the previous year. No new school was opened,