

During the year the Board held twelve ordinary and three special meetings, and the Executive Committee met twenty-four times. The attendance of members continues to be very satisfactory.

SCHOOLS AND ATTENDANCE.—At the end of the preceding year there were in existence 150 schools. During the year to which this report has reference one school (Te Anau Household) was closed, and six new schools in the Districts of Benmore, Waicola, Morton Mains, Burwood, Centre Island, and Dog Island were opened, the three last-named being "household" schools established in the interest of families at Burwood Station, and Centre Island and Dog Island Lighthouses respectively. It speaks well for the earnestness and enthusiasm of our young people, that some are found willing to endure the monotony incidental to life in such isolated positions in the service.

There are in this district six schools worked on the half-time principle, and the Board is gratified to note that provision for a somewhat more liberal scale of payment to the teachers of such schools has been made in the Teachers' Salaries Act. Such provision is only a just recognition of extra labour undertaken by the teachers in working six days per week, and in providing for the additional expense involved in travelling from school to school.

With reference to the attendance there is little out of the ordinary to report. As compared with the previous year (a record for this district), the average attendance has slightly decreased, but this is not a matter of surprise when the abnormal amount of sickness prevalent during the greater portion of the year is taken into account. Many parts of the district were visited by epidemics, and, in consequence, not only has the average attendance been reduced, but many schools have been altogether closed for lengthened periods of the school year when usually the amount of work undertaken is at its maximum.

The average weekly roll-number and average attendance for the year were respectively 9,642.5 and 8,200.2, as against 9,594 and 8,241 for the year 1902; and the percentage of the latter to the former was 85, as against 85.9 for the corresponding periods. The regulation of the Board requiring from the teachers a monthly statement (on a form provided for the purpose, of the attendance at each school has contributed in no small degree to the creditable record of attendance during the past two years. No serious falling-off in the regularity of attendance at any school is, or can be, overlooked under such a system, and thus only can full advantage be taken of the services of an officer whose sole duty it is to see that every child in the district attends some school, unless good and sufficient reason is shown for non-attendance.

THE BOARD'S TEACHING STAFF.—As in past years, the Board has reason to congratulate itself on the possession of a fairly efficient staff of teachers. In most schools the work of educating the youth of the district is carried on with a due sense of the responsibility involved, and in not a few with much enthusiasm and conspicuous success. There were in the service of the Board at the close of the year 266 primary-school teachers of various grades, and four district high school special assistants. There is a preponderance of female teachers employed in this district. Two years ago the numbers of the sexes were about equal, but one effect of the operation of the Teachers' Salaries Act seems to be an increase in the number of female teachers. This is explained, in part at least, by the employment of extra mistresses in a number of schools where previously the appointment of a pupil-teacher (male or female, as circumstances might require) was the first addition made to the staff.

The Board regrets to report that there is great difficulty in securing the services of fully trained teachers to fill the less remunerative appointments. The increase of the adult staff of the schools of the colony created by the introduction of the Teachers' Salaries Act no doubt accounts in some measure for the dearth of qualified teachers. The smaller number of pupil-teachers now in training tends also to produce a similar result. There are in the service of this Board at the present time a greater number of uncertificated teachers than at any period during the past ten or fifteen years. To enable Boards to overcome this difficulty the reorganization of the normal schools of the colony on more than the merely provincial basis is imperative. Whether such a reorganization as is now proposed will benefit this district is open to very serious question.

PUPIL-TEACHERS.—Under this heading there is very little to report. The usual examination was held at midwinter, when 28 candidates presented themselves, of whom 26 passed the test prescribed for the promotion to a higher grade in this branch of the service. At the date of the examination there were 42 pupil-teachers in the Board's employment. The number who did not come forward for examination is accounted for by the absence of those who had too recently entered the service, or who claimed exemption by reason of having passed the final or some equivalent or higher examination.

The Inspectors reported that the work done by the candidates was of uniformly good quality, special mention being made of several who distinguished themselves by gaining an unusually high percentage of marks in their respective classes. The Board would impress on the Department that, if the future supply of eligible male teachers is to be maintained, more inducement in the way of an increased rate of salary for boys entering the service must be provided. Only thus will an adequate supply of suitable male candidates be encouraged to enter the service. It is not enough that proper provision be made for the training of finished pupil-teachers in our normal schools—the question of primary importance is the securing of the right stamp of material to work upon. Neither is it adequate to make provision for liberal treatment in the matter of remuneration to pupil-teachers, the salaries of male assistants in our larger schools—the positions to which our pupil-teachers who have completed their course of training may reasonably be expected to aspire—should be substantially increased.

The one defect in the colonial scale of salaries that stands out most prominently above all others is the insufficiency of the salary set down for the first (male) assistant in schools of Grade 9, and for the second (male) assistants in schools of higher grades. It is surely self-evident that, if a salary of £155 is considered not excessive for the first assistant of a school whose average attendance is from 201 to 250, then the salary of £80 per annum for a similar position in schools