

Wanganui and Pokororo from being examined. Two new schools, Owen Junction and McWha's, had been opened such a short time that in their case it was deemed inadvisable to hold our examination. Consequently the list of public schools examined by us this year is reduced to 110. It is worthy of note that the amalgamation of the Nelson City schools cannot continue unless in each group an average attendance of 201 is maintained.

Six schools not under the supervision of the Board have also been examined, as well as the junior forms of Nelson College and Nelson Girls' College. The total number concerned in these schools was 395, of whom 380 were present at examination and 220 passed. One hundred and seven public schools, the highest number yet recorded, were also inspected during the year.

The average weekly number on the rolls for the September quarter was 5,590, or seventy-eight lower than for the corresponding quarter of last year. The closing of so many schools, in some cases for more than a quarter, has reduced the total roll this year, and the average attendance has suffered severely from the prevalence of epidemics. Scarletina, measles, whooping-cough, chicken-pox, and mumps have each and all had their turn, and in some ill-fated school districts we found the whole five prevailing at the same time.

The number on the rolls when we examined amounted to 5,581, as compared with 5,698 of the previous year. The deficiency was most evident in the Nelson City schools, but there was marked increase at Westport, Millerton, and Coal Creek. Some loss in numbers has been experienced by the draft of free pupils (forty-seven) from the Seventh Standard to the colleges. We find that in Nelson and the Waimeas fifty-eight are eligible this year, and probably about forty will avail themselves of the privilege. In Nelson City the Seventh Standard class has almost entirely disappeared, and our whole roll for the district shows only 157, compared with 215 last year; but we notice that the proposed new syllabus, by providing a separate course of work for this standard, will in future encourage the pupils, especially in country districts, to remain longer at school.

The average attendance for the year has been only 4,593. This is 216 lower than last year, and gives an average of but 82 per cent. Irregular attendance, accentuated by the troubles already enumerated, has been more than ever in evidence. The question of bad attendance is a difficult one to deal with. Some of the worst schools might be closed as a punishment to the parents, but it is not the duty of the Board to assume the functions of Providence and visit the sins of the parent on the child. Necessity compels the State to educate these children, for its own safety is imperilled by the ignorance of sometime voters. Local opinion is often so lax on this subject that the School Committees dare not take action, and, as they do not directly provide the funds, they are not so directly interested as the State is in seeing that there is no wasteful expenditure. It is wonderful how much false sentiment is imported into this question—sentiment that should rather be on the side of the children whose future is being blighted. To keep the little ones from school in order to put them to work is to return to the time before the Factory Acts. We are pleased to find one of our head teachers with so high a public spirit that he has undertaken the duties of truant officer. We curiously await results. Nevertheless, we consider that these duties more directly concern the State, and should be undertaken by the police. Again, we fail to see why even a large school should be closed although the attendance drops as low as twenty. The suggested closing or semi-closing of a school leads many not to trouble about assembling, as they do not expect the school to open. If the teaching of twenty by the normal staff means a loss of power, how much more is it to have all the staff idle! From the point of view of the children's interests it is a matter for extreme regret that, as in the case of Motueka and others, the school should have been closed for the whole of the first quarter. The new regulations dated the 16th March, 1903, making provision for days when less than two-thirds of the roll are present, are of so liberal a nature that there is really no excuse whatever for closing the school except at the regular holidays as defined by the Board's by-laws. The children's interests demand that their opportunities for receiving training should be always available. Except for fixed holidays, the working of the schools should be as regular as that of any other State Department, say, the railway service, and school times should run at least as regularly as the trains. Omitting household schools, of which only five as compared with fifteen last year return 100 per cent., we are glad to see that some twelve still show a high percentage.

There were in the employ of the Board on the 31st December 167 teachers, classified as follows: Head teachers—certificated or licensed 35, uncertificated nil, total 35; assistants—certificated or licensed 39, uncertificated 7, total 46; secondary assistants—certificated or licensed 3, uncertificated 1, total 4; sole teachers—certificated or licensed 43, uncertificated 39, total 82: totals—certificated or licensed 120, uncertificated 47, total 167; totals for 1902—certificated or licensed 117, uncertificated 44, total 161.

Nearly half of our sole teachers are uncertificated, and as in over forty of our smallest schools the salary offered is below £80 a year, one cannot reasonably expect it to attract a certificated teacher. "The Public-school Teachers' Salaries Act, 1901," allows an assistant to be employed in all schools where the average daily attendance is forty-one, therefore the number of assistants has been increased from thirty-nine to forty-six, and those that are uncertificated should understand that their positions are, strictly speaking, only temporary, being so held till certificated teachers are available. The number of pupil-teachers, only one of whom is a male, has been further reduced from thirty-nine to twenty-nine, and on account of the fall in attendance the services of three of these are no longer required. Four pupil-teachers are fully certificated. At the beginning of 1904 our staffs are as provided for in the colonial scale. The number of pupil-teachers is now so small that the supply of those who have finished their training is apparently inadequate to fill the vacancies in the teaching staffs.

At the Pupil-teachers' Entrance Examination in July last only nineteen presented themselves, and eight succeeded in passing. Three of these have already received appointments. Arithmetic and spelling produced the most failures.