

From this it will be seen that in New Zealand the practice of establishing huge schools under one headmaster has not been favoured. Out of 1,708 schools only seven have an average attendance of more than 700, and only two have an attendance of over 800. In Victoria, at the present time, out of a total of 1,882 schools forty-eight have an attendance of over 800. All educationists will see the wisdom of the New Zealand plan of restricting the size of schools within manageable limits. If a school is to be an efficient organism its size should be such as will allow the controlling mind of the head teacher to make itself felt upon every detail of the school-work. A true head teacher should know each of the children of his school, and be able to gauge the educational health of each class. This cannot be done effectually in our large schools of from 1,000 to 1,400 pupils in average attendance. In these schools the head teacher knows no more of the mental physiognomy of the individual scholars than a squatter does of the physiognomy of the sheep he is running through his drafting-yards. It should be mentioned that a few years ago it was the policy of the then Minister (Professor Pearson) to limit the size of new schools, and this was kept in view in the buildings provided, but from motives of economy a policy of amalgamating two schools under the one head teacher and staff has been followed since 1892, with very unsatisfactory results.

As regards the staffing of schools, the Victorian system is far behind that of New Zealand. Efficient education demands the trained adult teacher. It is a truism to say that the strength of a school system is the professional ability of the rank and file of the teachers.

The 1,708 schools of New Zealand give employment to the following staff:—

Head teachers of schools with more than one teacher	..	..	..	668
Sole teachers	..	..	..	1,040
Assistant teachers	..	..	..	1,249
Total adult teachers	..	..	..	2,957

Pupil-teachers	..	..	..	747
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The 1,882 schools of Victoria give employment to the following staff:—

Head teachers of schools with more than one teacher	..	..	..	900
Sole teachers	..	..	..	982
Assistant teachers (including relieving teachers)	..	..	..	1,039
Total adult teachers	..	..	..	2,921

Pupil-teachers	..	..	..	1,392
Monitors	..	..	..	271

1,663

The proportion of pupil-teachers to adult teachers in New Zealand is 1 to 3.95. The proportion of monitors and pupil-teachers to adult teachers in Victoria is 1 to 1.75. The defects in the Victorian staffing are seen most plainly when the number of assistants (1,039) is compared with the number of pupil-teachers and monitors (1,663). It is of the essence of an efficient pupil-teacher system that the pupil-teacher shall work not as an independent class-teacher, but under the direction and supervision of a skilled assistant, and that, moreover, he shall have time during school hours for preparation. It is, however, only fair to point out, as I have done in my recent annual report, that, owing to the fact that a large proportion of our so-called pupil-teachers have served long periods after the completion of their courses, many young women are really doing the work of junior assistants although graded and paid as pupil-teachers.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE.

THE WORKING OF THE COMPULSORY CLAUSE.—It should be fully understood that the New Zealand system of primary instruction is, as in Victoria, free, secular, and compulsory. The Board schools number 1,708, and there are, in addition, primary schools for Maori children, which are directly controlled by the central Department. The period during which attendance at school is compulsory is between the ages of seven and fourteen. Children begin to attend at five years of age. In Victoria the period is from six to thirteen years of age. As in Victoria, provision is made for the issue of "certificates of exemption from compulsory attendance," but these certificates are not issued unless application has been made by the parents for a special examination. As a result, attendance is far more regular in the senior classes than with us. In Victoria the practice hitherto has been to grant these certificates of exemption from compulsory attendance to every child who passed in the prescribed subjects in the Fourth Class, whether it was expected that his parents were desirous of removing him from school or not, so that the certificate became in the eyes of the public a certificate of proficiency rather than a certificate of exemption from further attendance in case of need. There is no doubt in my mind that the New Zealand plan, backed up by the popular belief in the desirability of giving children a really efficient preparation in the schools, is a wise one. The indiscriminate granting of certificates representing proficiency in the minimum standard demanded by law has had a distinctly bad effect both upon the attendance of the senior children and upon the popular ideal of what should constitute a course of primary instruction. Satisfactory action has been taken in the amended regulations for the inspection and examination of schools to remedy this defect in our practice.

A perusal of the statistics of attendance in the New Zealand schools reveals the fact that attendance in that colony is far more regular than in any of the Australian States. I attribute this to two causes—(1) the very great interest taken in the work of the schools by the New Zealand public and the high