

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 29TH SEPTEMBER, 1904.

H. HILL, Inspector of Schools for Hawke's Bay District, examined. (No. 1.)

Mr. J. Allen: Perhaps I had better explain to Mr. Hill what the Committee particularly desire to get at. Some trouble has arisen, Mr. Hill, owing to the action that has been taken by the Department—following the report of the Education Committee of last year—with respect to the moneys devoted to maintenance, repairs, small alterations, rebuilding, and so on, of school buildings. The particular trouble has arisen with respect to the grant for additions and new school buildings. Complaints come from some districts that the Education Boards are now limited in their sphere of action, because the maintenance-money is allotted purely for maintenance and can be used for nothing else, and the Boards have nothing wherewith to carry out small alterations, such as the erection of a porch or new class-room or closet; the only means they have of carrying out those works are by making application to the Government to get moneys out of the additions and new school buildings vote. That is the difficulty. Does the Committee desire that Mr. Hill should make a statement with respect to his experience regarding the matter, or do members wish to examine him?

Sir W. R. Russell: I might mention, without its being irrelevant, that Mr. Hill was, in the days of the smallness of the Education Board in Hawke's Bay, our Secretary as well as our Inspector. As it is a wide district, we have continually got him to report to us upon the necessity for new schools or for additions to schools; and therefore he has had a great experience of a sparsely settled district and an increasing district, so he ought to be able to give us his own impressions upon the subject.

1. *Mr. J. Allen:* I do not know whether you have seen this table with respect to votes for school buildings, Mr. Hill [Table shown to witness]?—No.

2. Perhaps you had better deal with your own Board and your own experience?—I may say that I did not see even the report of the Education Committee until Sunday.

Mr. Buddo: Might I ask you, Mr. Chairman, to show Mr. Hill the North Canterbury Board's letter? It will perhaps open the field for him.

Mr. J. Allen: I do not see it here just at the moment. Perhaps you could explain what it is about.

Mr. Buddo: I think I could cover the ground in a few minutes. The difficulty is this, Mr. Hill: At several of the schools in North Canterbury it has been found that owing to altered circumstances the class-rooms as originally constructed are most unsuitable for the purpose they were intended to serve. The number of pupils in the higher standards went down, while the infant classes kept up their numbers, and by-and-by the infant portion of the school—that, we will say, the other class-room—became totally inadequate. In one case forty infants had to be accommodated in a room built for twenty; and another case, I believe, though not quite as bad as that, was nearly so. The Board therefore came to the conclusion that this was a state of affairs that ought to be remedied at once, and they made representations to the Department that they desired a sum for making additions to the buildings. But the Department stated that the floor-space at these schools was sufficient for the number of pupils, and that therefore no grant could be made for the purpose. That, I think, covers practically the whole of the ground. There are other circumstances which would take a long time to explain; but the two schools I refer to were both on the same footing.

3. *Mr. J. Allen:* Perhaps you will make a statement now, Mr. Hill?—Thank you. It is a curious thing that I have, as one of the leading points in connection with the present defects that in my opinion exist regarding school buildings, this fact, that although our education system has been in operation twenty-five years no effort has yet been put forward by the central Department or the central authorities to direct Education Boards and to give them suggestions with regard to types of schools and characteristics, and types of furniture and characteristics, with a view not merely to the most efficient form of school and the most efficient form of working, but to their future alterations in case of need. It seems to me that a Council such as this Committee should really make some very vital modifications with regard to this matter, especially now that the Salaries Act has really fixed the size of school in the various districts. Then, again, it seems to me that one of the most serious defects in connection with school buildings is the irregular way in which applications for improvements, additions, and new buildings can be made. An Inspector of Schools, in order to test the efficiency of a school, goes to that school twice a year—once for inspection and once for examination. The Inspector knows everything about that school, if he is an observant man. He knows the quality of the teaching, whether the school building is in a proper state, whether the building wants painting, whether the different offices are in good condition, and the fences, and so on. He has records of all these matters. But in school affairs dealing with upkeep the School Committees send in applications at irregular times. This system is carried on under the Central Department. My point is that there should be no application sent to the central office, or even to an education office, except once in six months. There should be a time for making specific applications for grants, whether for new buildings or upkeep. The experience of twenty-five years should have taught these things, especially to the central Department, and they should have said, "Your applications must be made periodically—every six months."