

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Education Office, 31st January, 1906.

We have the honour to present our report on the primary schools of the district for the year ended 1905.

SCHOOLS AND ATTENDANCE.—Compared with last year the number of schools examined and the attendance of pupils on the day of examination both show a slight increase. In 1904 the number of schools examined was 169; in 1905, 176. The total roll-number for the district as shown on the day of examination was 12,295, as against 12,249 for 1904; while the actual number present on the day of examination was 11,752 for 1905, and 11,560 for 1904. Thus it will be seen that while the roll shows an increase of only forty-six, the number present shows an increase of 192. The following table gives the roll and the average age for each standard. For the sake of comparison the corresponding figures for 1904 are also given:—

Classes.	Roll.		Present.		Average Age.	
	1904.	1905.	1904.	1905.	1904.	1905.
Standard VII ...	251	257	241	240	Yrs. mos. 14 6	Yrs. mos. 15 6
" VI ...	818	849	802	833	13 10	13 9
" V ...	1,187	1,169	1,155	1,149	12 11	12 10
" IV ...	1,402	1,398	1,357	1,371	12 1	11 11
" III ...	1,580	1,569	1,534	1,527	11 0	10 11
" II ...	1,558	1,474	1,514	1,445	9 11	9 11
" I ...	1,466	1,457	1,419	1,427	8 10	8 11
Preparatory ...	3,987	4,122	3,538	3,760	6 11	6 11
Totals ...	12,249	12,295	11,560	11,752	...	...

NOTE.—The above figures do not include the Catholic schools.

It will be seen that the gain in attendance to the district is practically confined to the primer classes. Indeed all the other classes except Standards VI and VII show a decrease. Notably is this the case with Standard II, in which class the roll is eighty-four less than in the previous year. There is, however, nothing surprising in the fact that there should be a decrease in any one class. It very often happens that the numbers in a standard vary from year to year; but it is somewhat puzzling to find a decrease in all the intermediate standards. It may mean that the tendency to withdraw children from school as soon as they are old enough to join in the ranks of the wage-earners has been in operation to a greater extent than hitherto; or it may mean, though this is somewhat unlikely, that the net result of the migration that is going on between one part of the colony and another has left us on the wrong side of the ledger so far as Standards I to V are concerned. There is no doubt that the gross and almost criminal indifference of many parents leads them to place a higher value on the products and gains of their farms than upon the training and welfare of their children. In another place we refer to some of the difficulties which teachers have to contend against, and at the risk of repetition we would emphasize here the carelessness of many parents in the matter of the education of their children. Perhaps we are wrong in supposing that the tendency we have noted above is becoming stronger; but leaving out of account altogether the slight decreases in the roll of Standards I to V, the loss of over five hundred pupils between Standards IV and VI is quite sufficient to justify us in making a protest against the practice of withdrawing children as soon as they have reached the limit of school age prescribed by the law. We cannot think that the stress of existence and the task of making ends meet in this colony at the present juncture of its history are so pressing as to make it necessary to rob children of their just due in the matter of education. Every child should have its rights in this matter, and the serious question emerges in the presence of some facts that are constantly meeting us, whether some stricter measures should not be taken with those who wilfully, and from no good cause, neglect to give their children the full benefit of the training afforded them by the State. We are persuaded that it is not so much poverty and necessity as downright greed of gain that is the operating cause with many of those whose action has been censured in the paragraph just written. The time has surely come for making it compulsory that every child shall be educated up to a certain standard, without regard to his age. Why should a boy, simply because he has reached the age of fourteen, be exempted from school attendance? The time must come when those who leave school, be they fourteen years or more, to enter the ranks of the workers will be required to pursue their studies at evening schools. If it is deemed right and proper that a youth of fourteen may leave school while still uneducated, then it should be the duty of the State to provide future means for continuing his education, and to insist that he shall continue it. In the working of our present scheme of continuation classes we have over and over again come face to face with lads who would willingly continue their studies, but who cannot afford to do so. For such the conditions of continuing their studies should be made absolutely free.

The figures for Standard VII are practically the same as for last year. Of the 247 pupils on the roll on the examination day, 177 belonged to the district high schools. This leaves eighty to be supplied by the remaining schools—a very fair proportion.