

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE.

The percentage of regularity of attendance during the year 1906 is 85·2, as against 83·6 during 1905. Reference to Table No. 4 shows that in thirty-two schools it was over 90 per cent. The long distances Maori children often travel, the absence of any kind of road, and the fact that they are in many instances poorly clad and fed make their regularity all the more creditable to them and to their teachers.

In the case of European children (and of Maori children also) attending Board schools situated at a distance from their homes, the Government is prepared to arrange wherever possible for their conveyance. No such provision has been made in the case of Maori children attending Maori schools, and only in a very few instances has it ever occurred to the Maoris to ask for aid in this direction. In not a few places where there is no school the parents arrange to board their children with relatives who live near a school, and this sometimes falls rather hardly upon the latter. Surely this goes to show that, in spite of what one often hears said to the contrary, the Maori appreciates the value of education. It has therefore been necessary in only a very few cases to take steps to compel attendance, and the lesson taught in these has proved salutary.

The coming of a new prophet amongst the Urewera Maoris has led to the withdrawal of many children whose parents have adopted the new faith, and the effect is likely to become more serious in time until the new idol is shattered. * 222.

In the other districts, however, there has been a gratifying increase in the attendance, and already applications for increased accommodation are before the Department.

ORDER AND CLEANLINESS.

Maori children are, as a rule, well behaved and not difficult to manage. It follows that the order in the schools as a whole is very satisfactory, and I have every reason to think highly of the general behaviour of the children. The discipline is mild, and there is no doubt that the vast majority of the teachers exert a good moral influence which forms an effective instrument in the formation of character.

As regards the cleanliness of the children, I may say that there have been very few cases in which it has been found necessary to complain. Though on the occasion of unannounced visits paid during the year the children may not have presented that trim appearance as to dress which characterizes the examination-day, no great fault has been observed as to the cleanliness of their persons or their habits. Further confirmation of this fact is lent by the cleanliness which prevails in nearly all the schools without exception, a state of things which a small amount of reflection will show cannot be produced at a moment's or a week's notice. Visits paid to schools by disinterested persons, some of them thoroughly competent judges, have earned high commendation for the school as regards cleanliness. Indeed, one of our highest educational authorities has stated that, though he had visited hundreds of schools in New Zealand, he had seen none equal to a Native school which he had seen on a recent journey. On this account I feel it my duty to express my gratitude to the teachers and children for their efforts in the past in this direction, and to express the hope that they will continue to maintain the good reputation they have gained.

In December, 1906, the Department decided to award certificates of good attendance in terms of the provisions of section 129 of the Education Act. As teachers have been asked to refer all claims to the Inspector on his visit, many schools have not yet had the opportunity of doing so. At one school having a roll number of less than thirty, twelve first-class and five second-class certificates were granted. I have no doubt that very many children will qualify for certificates this year.

SCHOOL COMMITTEES.

Various opinions are held as to the value of the School Committees composed mainly of Maoris, elected annually in connection with each Native school. One finds it very commonly believed that they are of no account whatever. Of course, instances are not wanting where similar opinions have been held regarding Public School Committees. It is probably only those who have had experience of both kinds who are in a position to say what really valuable assistance may be rendered to the teacher by his Committee.

With special regard, however, to the Maori School Committees, I can say from fairly intimate knowledge of the case that the Department owes a great deal to their enthusiasm, interest, and support. I grant that there are Committees who seem to be altogether inert, but this is not so in the majority of cases; indeed, one has to put a restraining hand on some.

I have before me at present a letter, the writer of which informs me that some of the members of his committee are lazy and set a bad example, as their children are irregular in attendance. He asks that they may, therefore, be removed without further delay, and that he and a friend of his who is noted for his energy may take their place. In another school, the Chairman, to whom I am greatly indebted for valuable assistance in many ways, acted first and reported afterwards. The Committee that had been duly elected at the end of the year proved to be lazy; he had therefore dissolved it, and elected a new one, which was working much better.

I have already mentioned cases in which the erection of workshops has been voluntarily carried out by the School Committee; there are other cases where assistance has been given in other directions, such as fencing, erection of bridges, &c.

From such evidence, one can conclude that it is quite possible in almost every case for teachers to find their Chairman and his Committee very valuable allies, and the tactful teacher is not slow to recognise this fact.

The duties of Native School Committees are not very extensive, consisting chiefly of making arrangements for a supply of fuel, and for the cleaning of the school, and, in addition, seeing that the attendance of the children is regular. No capitation is payable to the Committees for any