

NELSON.

SIR,—

Education Office, Nelson.

We have the honour to present our annual report on the schools of the Nelson Educational District for the year 1908.

One hundred and ten schools were at work during the last quarter of the year, nine very small ones (mostly household schools) having been closed since our last report was handed in, whilst three others have been established or reopened.

The new buildings for the Nelson Girls' Central, the four additional rooms at Westport, the additional room for the secondary class at Takaka District High School, the enlarged room at Pigeon Valley, and the new schoolroom at Marahau to serve both Sandy Bay and Marahau children, have been in use during the year, and have proved of decided benefit by adding materially to the comfort and convenience of both the teachers and the taught. A small building at Hector for a side school to Granity has also been erected, and will be utilised during the coming year. Other very necessary improvements contemplated or in course of erection are new school buildings for Summerlea, Wangapeka, Rockville, Globe Hill, and Rahui (side school), and additional rooms at Birchfield, Cape Foulwind, Brooklyn, Karamea, and Neudorf. When these are completed but little extra expenditure should be required to place our schools, so far as buildings are concerned, under satisfactory working-conditions.

As the grouping of the Standard VI scholars for examination this year involved more travelling, since some of the larger centres were visited twice, and the pupils of St. Mary's Industrial Schools were also (at the request of the Education Department) examined by us, we were unable to finish the whole of the Education Board's schools before Christmas, two small ones being left unvisited. Two recently opened household schools were also unvisited.

Of schools under other control than that of the Board, the following have this year been examined: Sacred Heart, Reefton (104 pupils); St. Canice's, Westport (225); St. Mary's, Nelson (142); St. Mary's Boys' Orphanage, Stoke (85); St. Mary's Girls' Orphanage, Nelson (70); Miss Hooper's, Nelson (15); Cabragh House, Nelson (5); Nelson College Preparatory Boys' (21); Nelson Girls' College Preparatory (12). The total number of scholars was 679, of whom 651 were present. The work at two of these schools was classed "good," at two "satisfactory to good," and at five "satisfactory." The number of certificates awarded was, of proficiency 36, of Standard VI competency 20, and of Standard V competency 12. Though in all schools written notice should be given to the head teacher, at least three days before the Inspector's visit, of the desire of any pupil to obtain a certificate, we have as hitherto examined irrespective of notice every pupil whose name was on the school roll for Standard VI, lest through the omission of such application hardship should afterwards be caused.

Two special examinations—that is, examinations for certificates held at the request of candidates, whether of school age or not—were conducted in Nelson, when twenty-six presented themselves. Twelve of these obtained proficiency certificates, eight Standard VI competency, and one Standard V competency. At various school examinations twenty-one pupils not on the roll of the school undergoing examination also sat for certificates.

Ninety-one public and five private schools were also inspected by us during the first half of the school year. By the regulations now in force greater importance is attached to this part of an Inspector's duty than to that of examination, as he is no longer compelled to hold any individual examination, and evidently no examination report will in future be required for a school, though an inspection report must be furnished. In Section II of the inspection report, however, matter formerly included in the examination reports is introduced—viz., "the Inspector's opinion of the degree of discretion displayed in the grouping of the classes, in the classification of the pupils, and in the determining of the promotions from class to class." We propose to deal with the matters referred to in this section, at the visit of which notice must be given, and at which candidates for certificates may be examined, as some individual examination is, in our opinion, unavoidable.

The average weekly number on the rolls for September quarter was 5,693, 87 higher than for the corresponding quarter of last year. The number on the rolls of the schools examined by us was 5,689, of whom 5,424 were present, and the average attendance for the year is 4,867, or 85·7 per cent. of the average weekly number on the rolls. Though the percentage is not so high as in 1906, great improvement is shown when compared with last year's returns. For the Dominion in 1907 it was, on account of the prevalence of epidemics in most of the educational districts, exceptionally low, 84·6 per cent. (for 1906, 86·9 per cent.). The increase in numbers is a very pleasing feature, the number in average attendance having of late years steadily grown, though it has not yet reached the limit attained in 1896 of 4,906, the highest ever recorded for this district.

Considerable improvement is to be noted in the amount of working-time allowed to the children. Twenty-six schools have been kept open over 420 half-days in the year, though the great majority fail to reach that number, and twenty-two that have been working every quarter have held school less than 400 times. It may be possible to furnish an explanation in the case of some of those schools that show a deficiency; but, in spite of the general improvement, the matter is not altogether satisfactory, and in future, at the end of each quarter, it would be advisable for the Board to demand an explanation from the teacher and from the School Committee in every case in which the "number of times open" is abnormally low for the quarter.

It is a general complaint throughout the Dominion that the proportion of certificated teachers has of late years, for various reasons, declined. Among them may be mentioned the general dearth of professional and skilled labour, the partial abolition of the pupil-teacher system, the higher standard of attainment required, as evidenced by the abolition of the lowest, or E, certificate, the comparatively early retirement of female teachers under the original Superannuation