

Conclusion.—The relations of the Board with the Education Department, its official and teaching staff, and with the School Committees, have been most cordial and pleasant throughout the year.

HAROLD TRIMBLE, Chairman.

The Hon. the Minister of Education. Wellington.

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Education Office, Wanganui, 31st March, 1913.

I have the honour to submit a report of the proceedings of this Board for the year 1912.

Board.—At the end of the year the Board consisted of Messrs. Fred. Pirani (Chairman), A. Fraser, and G. H. Bennett (Southern Ward), D. H. Guthrie, M.P., F. Purnell, and J. P. Aldridge (Central Ward), and P. O'Dea, E. Dixon, and F. M. Spurdle (Northern Ward). There was no change in the *personnel* of the Board during the year, the retiring members—Messrs. Bennett, Purnell, and Dixon—all being re-elected. Mr. Pirani was elected Chairman for the seventh successive term. Fourteen meetings were held, the average attendance of members being seven.

Schools.—New schools were opened at Hiwi, Koeke, Mangoihe (Grade 0), Ngutuwera (Grade II), Te Ara Kura (Grade IV), Durie Hill (Grade V), and Central Infants', Wanganui (Grade VIIA). Pine Creek School (Grade 0) was reopened. The schools at Omoana and Mars Hill were closed, Durie Hill taking the place of the last-named school. There were open at the close of the year 203 main and three side schools. At the beginning of June the status of the Hunterville School was raised to that of a district high school, and there were twenty-three pupils in attendance in the secondary classes at the end of the year.

Private Schools.—During the year the Board's Inspectors visited fifteen private schools, the number of pupils present on the occasion of the visits being 1,085. The terms of the Education Act governing the conduct of these schools do not appear to be sufficiently exacting. From the point of view of modern education it is not enough that a pupil should be receiving efficient and regular instruction. The school environment, the apparatus, furniture, buildings, and sanitary arrangements, as well as the details of lighting, heating, and ventilation, should also be effective, and no certificate of general exemption should be given till the Board's Inspector is satisfied regarding each and all of these points. It is a question, too, whether persons desirous of conducting private schools should not be required to submit to educational tests evidencing qualifications adequate for the nature of the teaching undertaken. If efficiency be the ultimate test of the value of the institutions in an organized state, there should be no exceptions making inefficiency possible.

Wanganui Central Infants' School.—The completion of this school made it possible for the Board to place infant instruction on a higher plane than had previously been possible in this district. A kindergarten department for children under five has been added, the amount of the special teacher's salary being found partly by voluntary subscriptions subsidized by the Department and partly by the Board. The school is under the direction of Miss Alexander, one of the Board's teachers, who studied at the Froebel Institute, London, for two years, and every member of the staff has specialized in infant work. The school, as well as the building, will be the model for the district, and it is proposed that each of the infant-mistresses of the large schools in the district shall spend two weeks in observing how the school is conducted, by what methods the children are taught, and how a desirable infant-school atmosphere may be secured. The school is regularly visited by the parents, who take a great interest in the work and play of the children. The kindergarten room is supplied with pictures, toys, and live birds, and the little people enjoy a morning cup of milk with all the courtesy and ceremony that should attend an event so important. The Board has ordered a set of Montessori appliances, and hopes to have that branch of infant-teaching included in the course at this school.

Attendance.—The total roll number on the 31st December was 15,103, and the average attendance for the last quarter of the year 13,585. These figures show an increase of 308 in the roll number and 362 in the average attendance over the figures for the corresponding quarter of 1911. The average weekly roll number for the year was 15,045, and the average attendance 13,322. The average attendance expressed as a percentage of the average weekly roll was 88·5, as compared with 88·9 for the previous year. The Board's Truant Officer continues to do useful work in the direction of inducing parents to send their children to school regularly. The attendance may be considered satisfactory when the nature of the outlying parts of the district, the difficulty experienced by the children in these places in reaching school, and the fact that epidemics were prevalent during the winter months, are taken into account. In cases of irregular attendance summonses are issued only when other means of impressing on parents the necessity for sending their children to school regularly fail. During the year 1,250 notices were posted by the Truant Officer to parents and teachers in connexion with absentee pupils, and 300 visits were paid to schools; 242 summonses were issued, 183 convictions being recorded; fifty cases were withdrawn, four were struck out, four were dismissed, and one returned *sine die*. It is a remarkable fact that there is an increase in attendance of only 2·5 per cent. for the year as compared with the year 1910, although attendance on five days a week is now compulsory, as against four days a week hitherto prescribed. This must be taken as a proof that the attendance in the past has been very nearly as great as could be expected, when bad roads, epidemics, and unfavourable weather-conditions are taken into consideration.

Conveyance of Children to School.—The new regulations which were issued at the end of the year should help to popularize the system of conveying children to school. They are certainly an improvement on the conditions which previously obtained. The regulations provide a fair rate of capitation.