

TARANAKI.

SIR,— Education Office, New Plymouth, 18th February, 1914.
We have the honour to submit our annual report for the year ending 31st December, 1913.

At the beginning of the year ninety-four schools (including two half-time schools) were in operation, and during the year new schools were established at Ihaia, Rerekapa, Waingongora, and Patua, and the school at Opua was closed.

The following table contains a summary of the numbers and average age of pupils:—

Classes.						Number on Roll.	Present at the Annual Examination.	Average Age of Pupils in each Class.
								Yrs. mos.
Standard VII	...	...	...	...	...	127	119	15 3
" VI	...	...	...	...	...	344	338	13 11
" V	...	...	...	...	...	544	530	13 10
" IV	...	...	...	...	...	654	632	12 4
" III	...	...	...	...	...	702	685	11 4
" II	...	...	...	...	...	803	779	10 2
" I	...	...	...	...	...	794	762	9 3
Preparatory	...	...	...	...	...	2,251	2,067	7 2
Totals						6,219	5,912	9 11

* Mean of average age.

Compared with the return for 1912 the roll number shows a slight increase of fifty-nine, while there has also been an increase of thirty-nine in the number present at the annual examination.

Punctuality and Regularity of Attendance.—That our remarks made under this heading in our last annual report were well warranted will be evident from the following extract from the Department's 1912 report on primary education: "The average attendance for the year 1912 increased by 2·9 per cent., as compared with an increase of 3·3 per cent. in the roll number. Increases of percentage were recorded in the Wellington, Hawke's Bay, Nelson, and Grey Education Districts. The percentage remained stationary in the Auckland District, while the remaining eight districts showed a slight decrease. The decrease was most marked in the Marlborough, Otago, Wanganui, and Taranaki Districts. Otago and Wellington, each with a percentage of 90·2, headed the list for regularity of attendance. Taranaki shows the lowest percentage of average attendance—87·1—a falling-off of 1·2 per cent. from last year."

We are well aware that during the year referred to the attendance of the schools in Taranaki was somewhat seriously affected by the prevalence of epidemics, but even during the previous year, when the conditions were normal, the percentage of attendance was one of the three lowest in the Dominion. It need not be pointed out that this irregularity of attendance must have a detrimental effect on the efficiency of the school-work. Teachers who are keenly alive to this aspect of the question adopt various devices to remedy this evil, but unfortunately when parents are apathetic the efforts of the teacher in this direction are in a great measure rendered futile. Many teachers by the exercise of a strong personality and the employment of strenuous efforts for bettering the attendance have done much to overcome the apathy and indifference of parents and to arouse them to a true sense of their responsibility. One device commonly employed to stimulate regularity is the working out and publicly recording the average weekly percentage of attendance in each class. In several schools the attendance is further stimulated by giving to the class that has the highest attendance the privilege of holding for the ensuing week a banner or shield. Further, any class that is fortunate to hold the shield for four consecutive weeks is granted certain concessions, such as being dismissed an hour or so earlier. By this and other means these teachers develop a friendly rivalry amongst the classes, and the pupils make earnest efforts to maintain the prestige of their own particular group. A few teachers, however, take late arrival and irregular attendance too much as a matter of course. Instead of taking some steps to induce children to attend regularly they are inclined to throw the whole of the responsibility on the parents. It should also be noted that the finances of the Board also suffer materially, and it therefore behoves the Board to take more stringent measures to enforce the compulsory clauses of the Act.

Private Schools.—In addition to the five Catholic schools of the district we paid visits of inspection to all of the private schools in New Plymouth and Stratford with the exception of one. Some of these private schools have applied for and received from the Board a general certificate of exemption from attendance for their pupils at a public school. It will be necessary, however, for them to apply yearly as this certificate holds good for one year only.

Observation Schools, or Schools of Method.—We are pleased to report that the representatives of the teaching profession at their annual conference recently held in Auckland gave their unanimous support to the establishment of these schools on the lines laid down in our report of last year. As showing the benefit that may be derived from the establishment of such schools,