

NELSON.

SIR,—

Nelson, May, 1917.

In accordance with the provisions of the Education Act, the Nelson Education Board has the honour to submit the following report for the year 1916:—

The Board.—The members of the Board are Messrs. G. H. Gothard and D. J. Williams, representing the West Ward; Messrs. F. W. O. Smith and E. J. Scantlebury, representing the Eastern Ward; Messrs. W. C. Baigent and T. Symes, representing the North Ward; and Messrs. W. Lock and E. E. Boyes, representing the Nelson City Urban Area. The redistribution of the rural wards was attended with some difficulty in view of the necessity of equalizing the roll number of children in the schools. Mr. Gothard was elected Chairman of the Board, and twelve meetings were held during the year.

Primary Schools.—The number of schools at the end of the year was 114, a decrease of seven—all small household schools. A side school to Karamea was opened at Oparara, and a school at Woodstock was reopened after being closed for some years. Included in the number of schools are nine household schools. The number of these schools is being greatly reduced; some of the schools have reached Grade I, and in several cases settlers in the backblocks avail themselves of the grant provided towards the cost of boarding children who have to live away from home in order to attend school.

District High Schools.—[See E.—6, Report on Secondary Education.]

Scholarships.—The raising of the standard of the National Scholarship Examination and the abolition of Education Board Scholarships were responsible for a reduction in the number of successful candidates. Only three candidates were successful in securing Junior National Scholarships, and five candidates Senior National Scholarships.

Attendance.—The total number of children on the roll of the public schools at the end of the year was 6,734, and the average attendance for the year 5,909. The decrease in the average attendance for the year, 107, is wholly attributable to the large number of epidemics of an infectious character. Early in the year a great many schools were closed for quite long periods on this account. Never before have epidemics been so largely responsible for the poor attendance.

Buildings.—The number of school buildings belonging to the Board is 117, while fifteen schools are conducted in buildings not belonging to the Board. There are fifty-one schools with teachers' residences. New schools were erected at Motueka (side) and at Owen Junction. Two residences were written off during the year. The repair and maintenance of buildings is now costing considerably more owing to high prices of material and labour. In a number of instances School Committees have exercised a proper oversight over properties under their control, and generally speaking the condition of the buildings may be regarded as satisfactory. The Board has refrained from authorizing new works of any consequence, and particular attention has been paid during the year to the matter of repairs. Unfortunately, in many instances there appears to be little attention directed to minor repairs, which School Committees are asked to undertake on their own responsibility. The Inspectors have had occasion to refer a number of such cases to the Board. Outbuildings are frequently found to be in a neglected condition and not properly looked after. To secure more effective oversight over all buildings the inspection reports are now taken as the basis of all matters requiring attention, and a more general improvement in the condition of the buildings will, I hope, be the result.

Manual Instruction.—Good progress is being maintained with respect to instruction in manual work and handwork. The principal manual classes are conducted at three centres—Nelson, Westport, and Wakefield. Woodwork and cookery are the chief subjects, but an interesting course of metal-work is taken in the place of woodwork at the Westport centre. Owing to inability to secure the services of a competent instructor to take cookery classes at Reefton the Board was unable to arrange for classes to be held at that centre during the year, a fact much regretted. This year the appointment of an additional instructress at Westport enables a very complete course to be conducted at all centres. Instruction in agriculture or dairy-work is carried on in the majority of the country schools above Grade I under the supervision of the Board's itinerant instructor. Satisfactory progress was reported from a number of schools. This year the whole of this work has been reorganized and a more systematic inspection of the classes arranged for. A gift of some thousands of yearly *Pinus insignis* trees was made to the Board by Mr. Kingsland, of Appleby, and the trees were distributed to a large number of schools to be planted and cared for by the children, the intention being later on to transplant the trees on the waste lands. Swimming was not so extensively taught, and it is a matter of regret that more opportunity is not afforded for instruction in swimming and life-saving. Various branches of handwork were undertaken in the majority of schools, but the failure of teachers to conduct their classes according to the regulations deprived the Board of a certain amount of capitation, but I am glad to say that such a state of affairs will not occur in future.

Technical Instruction.—[See E.—5, Report on Technical Instruction.]

Finance.—The credit balance on all accounts at the end of the year was £608 12s. 9d. Generally speaking, the Board's financial position has improved considerably. Inclusive of all money assets and liabilities on the 31st December the General Account was in debit £1,337 7s. 1d., the Technical Account in debit £512 9s. 9d., and the Building Account in credit £4,955 18s. 6d. The payment of manual and technical capitation more promptly is a matter for congratulation. The General Account is not entirely satisfactory, and the Board has taken steps to reduce the deficit as much as possible this year. The expenses of administration have been heavy during the year, but they include some non-recurring items. The Technical Account is greatly improved, and I hope that in the course of a year or two this deficit will be entirely wiped off.

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GEO. H. GOTHARD, Chairman.

The Hon. the Minister of Education, Wellington.