

grant is not sufficient for the legitimate requirements of Committees, and, unless the grant can be augmented by Government or supplemented by the residents themselves, the efficiency and tone of the schools must continue to suffer.

No provision has yet been made by the Board for uniformly enforcing the provisions of clause 85 of the Act, which relates to military drill and physical education. The Board cannot, probably, follow the course adopted by some of the larger Boards, and appoint a drill instructor for the district; but it appears desirable that suitable gymnastic apparatus should be supplied to all schools, and that a short code of regulations should be issued for the guidance of teachers.

All classes of teachers feel keenly the difficulties occasioned by irregular attendance, and anxiously await the institution of active measures for bringing the compulsory clauses of the Act into operation. At present irregular attendance is the great hindrance to progress. I can fully indorse the opinion of an Inspector of Schools in England—where matters appear to be little better—thus expressed: "The evil exists everywhere, and its consequences are most serious. It contributes more than any other cause towards keeping down the standard of attainment, and preventing the realization of those better results which from year to year we have been looking for in vain."

Before closing my report, I wish to record my appreciation of the valuable work done by School Committees. Their efforts are considerably cramped from insufficiency of funds, but their onerous duties have been carried out with considerable energy. Their absence would be seriously felt, especially in new districts, and their presence creates an active interest in the education of the district which otherwise would be almost entirely wanting.

H. Belfield, Esq., Chairman,
South Canterbury Education Board.

I have, &c,
HENRY W. HAMMOND,
Inspector of Schools.

WESTLAND.

SIR,—

Hokitika, 15th January, 1879.

I have the honor to submit my report for the year ending 31st December, 1878.

All the schools in the district, with the exception of those south of the Waitaha, have been thoroughly examined twice during the past year. A full account of the midwinter examination was given in my report to the Board on 9th August. During the past year I have held fifty-nine full examinations of schools, each examination having occupied from one to four days, exclusive of the time employed in travelling. I have also made numerous casual visits to schools, and accompanied the Inspector-General on his tour through the district, when we visited the principal schools between Ross and Greymouth. In the month of March I travelled through the Grey Valley—then about to be added to the Westland Education District—for the purpose of ascertaining the nature and extent of school accommodation then existing, as well as the probable requirements of the district. Upon this subject I prepared and submitted a full report, which was adopted; and the estimates and recommendations therein contained were incorporated with your last annual report. I have also conducted one examination of candidates for teachers' certificates, and one of pupil-teachers. The remainder of my time has been occupied in the preparation of examination papers, in examining the work of candidates and pupils, in compiling the tables of results, in preparing reports on various matters, in travelling and detention by floods, and in rendering occasional assistance to the Secretary.

The weather during the past year has operated very unfavourably upon educational matters in this district. The almost constant rainfall that has prevailed has materially reduced the average daily attendance, and consequently affected to some extent the progress of the children, while it has also seriously diminished the anticipated income of the Board, since the increase in the average daily attendance has been much less than there was good reason to expect. Admitting that the weather during the past year has been more than usually wet, yet the fact that the meteorological returns show the rainfall of the West Coast to be about five times as great as the average of all the other stations in New Zealand would surely justify the Board in urging upon the Government the necessity of modifying, in the case of this district, the present method of calculating the amount receivable for educational purposes. The present concession of every day on which the attendance falls below 50 per cent. of the number on the roll is practically useless, as it produces very little difference in the average attendance for the quarter; and it may become mischievous if it should induce Committees or teachers to discourage the presence of children on wet days, in order that the attendance on those days may fall below the 50 per cent., and thus entitle them to exclusion from the "working average." A glance at the quarterly returns will show how seldom this happens at present, and how small is the effect produced on the returns by the omission of such days. Taking the September quarter of the past year, the difference between the "actual average" and the "working average" for all the schools in the district is approximately 29·8, while at three of the largest schools—namely, Hokitika, Greymouth, and Ross—there is no difference whatever, although the attendance frequently fell very nearly, but not quite, 50 per cent. I therefore venture to suggest that the Government be requested, in the case of Westland, to raise the percentage entitling to exclusion from the calculation for the working average from 50 to 75 per cent.; and, when it is remembered that the staff employed at any school must really be determined more by the number on the roll than by the average attendance, I do not think this would be asking too much, if due consideration is given to the peculiar circumstances of the district. Next, and in addition to the unfavourable weather, irregularity of attendance from other causes helps to produce a low average.

Although all the School Committees have professedly adopted the compulsory clauses (89-92) of the Act, they remain, virtually, a dead-letter; and, from the manner in which clause 89 is worded, it can scarcely be otherwise. It provides that children shall attend school for at least one-half of the period in each year during which the school is open, so that children may be kept away from school for six months without their parents being liable to prosecution under the Act. If, however, a certain number