

WELLINGTON.

SIR,—

Education Office, Wellington, March 26, 1879.

I have the honor to present my fifth annual report on the state of education in the primary schools of the Wellington District.

SCHOOL ACCOMMODATION.—In this district, as at present constituted, there are now 37 schools in operation, containing 4,590 children, of whom 4,119 were present on the days of examination. In the previous year there were 38 schools, numbering 3,595 children, of whom 3,094 were examined. Although the number of schools this year remains about the same as last year, the attendance has increased in one year by a thousand children; and I have actually seen and examined within the same area a thousand more children this year than last year. As I have pointed out in previous reports, this large increase in the work to be undertaken should be well borne in mind in estimating the value of the work done, as the increase in the attendance consists at present for the most part of children whose education is in a backward state. As the settlement of the country proceeds, we may expect to find for years to come not only a normal increase arising from natural increase in the settled population, but also an abnormal influx of children from without the district. As, however, the state of education is improving in the mother-country and throughout this and the other Australian Colonies, we may hope that the progress of education will meet with less check year by year. I believe the country districts are now fairly supplied with schools, and no great increase in the number of schools need be looked for until the natural increase in settlement demands it. In Wellington City the case is different. This year there are 2,425 on the books in the city schools alone, as compared with 1,704 last year, showing an increase of 721 attending. But the Registrar-General informs us that there are 4,400 children of school age in Wellington City, and therefore 2,000 children are to be accounted for. The number of pupils in high schools and private schools cannot exceed seven or eight hundred. Accommodation is therefore required for another thousand children at least. Moreover, the Thorndon schools are much too crowded, and all the other city schools are quite full. It has not been the aim of your Board to unnecessarily multiply schools, and the benefit of having large schools is apparent, both as to efficiency and economy of working. It is not now desirable that other schools should be erected in Wellington, including Newtown, than those already proposed by your Board, but that the new schools should be large and capable of extension if required.

RESULTS OF THE LATE EXAMINATION.—The examination just completed has been made in the six standards, the schedule of which was prepared in my last report, and adopted by your Board. Pass cards have been issued to all the pupils classed in the standards. This is the first examination made in six standards, covering six years' work, so that results cannot well be compared with the results of former years classed in four standards, covering eight years' work. I am, however, satisfied that the results generally show a great improvement on those of last year, and that the work is improved by an extension of programme, as well as by the progress of the classes in last year's subjects. There are now 2,868 children over eight years of age, and 2,530, exclusive of 471 absentees, classed in standards. It is presumed that a child is not able to pass a standard until he is eight years of age. The number therefore passed in any standard closely approximates the number of age to take up the work. Of the 2,530 classed in the standards, about 1,000 are classed higher than Standard II., and 85 are passed in Standard VI. The number passed in old Standard IV. last year was 31—a standard harder than Standard VI. in some respects, but less comprehensive. I am not willing to make any close comparison between the old four standards and this year's six standards, as they differ in construction; but I am certain in my own mind that the results shown during the work of examination, and the general management of the schools, are, taken as a whole, much improved, and that the improvement is more marked this year than in any former year. But in order to show this to the satisfaction of your Board, I shall now give in detail (1) a statement showing the extent to which each of the subjects is taught, with some observations on the methods employed; and (2) a separate report of the working and condition of each school. Next year the means of testing the work done will be much more simple, as the standards of examination this year sufficiently approach in calibre the new standards prescribed by Order in Council to permit of passes in the one being assumed to be of equal value to those to be made in the other. At the next examination all children now classed in any standard will be expected to pass the next higher standard, according to the schedule of the Education Department. Practically, then, we are now in a position not only to take up the Government standards, so far as is possible, without loss of time, but to assume that the schools are already classed in them. I have not attempted this year to show how many children have passed from a lower to a higher standard; nor do I think it advisable to give this year the percentage of expected passes made in each school, owing to the change in the standards, and consequently to the fewness of expected passes as compared with the number presented for examination. Such a statement would, for many reasons, be misleading.

READING.—The longer I am acquainted with educational work the more I am persuaded of the vast importance of this subject. Reading, if properly cultured, is an art useful and æsthetic. In many cases, if pupils in primary schools are only able to read intelligently, they hold, in these days of cheap literature, the keys of knowledge. I make these remarks simply with the view of impressing the importance of the subject upon some teachers, who continue to take a commonplace view of reading, teaching it more or less mechanically. In a large proportion of the schools of the Wellington District reading is well taught first by blocks or sheets, then by simultaneous reading from cards in lower classes, the words being grouped in delivery; and afterwards from the Royal Reader series of six well-arranged books. Instruction is given partly on the simultaneous plan, and partly by individual class-reading, the teacher often reading a passage as a model. Reading has always been marked high in our standard examinations; and I think the results in this subject are very much improved. In a late report I characterized the reading in the Wairarapa schools as a wretched mumble throughout. It is now much improved in most of the schools, and is positively good at Masterton, Waihenga, Featherston, Clareville, and Fernridge. In the City of Wellington schools the reading is generally a very good feature, especially in the Mount Cook Girls', Terrace, and Thorndon schools. All our schools are fairly well supplied with books; but more perfect copies—a school set—should be found