

ments have been formed at Petone and Kuripuni, which are extensions of the larger townships, schools should be built within these extensions at Petone and Kuripuni, to meet the requirements of the increasing populations. Had the present Masterton School been more centrally situated, or had Petone been near the Lower Hutt School, I should in either case have recommended the enlargement of the present schools; but, under the existing circumstances, it would be better to meet the wishes of the settlers, and, in both cases, to erect other new schools. Public schools have been established in all districts where an average attendance of 25 children could be maintained, the centres of such districts being more than three miles from existing public schools. The Board have done more than this, for there are nine schools in the district, each with an average attendance of less than 25, seven of them being wholly supported by the Board, and two of them assisted by a grant of £4 per head on the attendance. It would appear to me that additional assisted schools might be established in the following places: Wadestown, Whiteman's Valley, Kaitoki, and the Taueru. By removing the Park Vale School near Waihakeke, that school would be convenient for the children of both the Park Vale and Waihakeke Districts. In the establishment of small schools in outlying country districts, very great care should be exercised, as the representations of the settlers are seldom realized. The very existence of a school is often jeopardized by the refusal of one or two settlers to associate with others in its management, or to contribute towards the support of an aided school. Sometimes the removal of one or two families from a district impoverishes the school. There should be 40 children in a district to warrant the Board undertaking the entire expense of building and supporting a school. On 40 children, an average of 25 may be relied on. I do not think the liberal offer made by the Board of £4 per head in aid of schools in outlying districts is generally known by settlers living in districts where made roads do not exist. There are comparatively poor settlers with five or seven children in each house living six or eight miles apart in the broken country of the Teramea and Moroa, for example, who are paying teachers 10s. per week to instruct their children. It seems a hard case that these settlers should be compelled to put up with such inferior instruction and to pay for it, without receiving any assistance from the State, although they contribute equally with others to the cost of education throughout the colony. I have been often impressed by the social influence which a school exercises in an up-country district. Children, whose lives heretofore seemed aimless, are brought together, they are dressed daily for school, they have set occupation, the school life interests alike pupils and parents. An educated person is an acquisition to the small community, and the school-building is the Areopagus of the district. Occasionally, however, there are men who manifest such utter indifference to mental development and social progress that they care nothing for their children except for the labour they can get out of them. Another generation, I feel sure, will not tolerate such crass ignorance, and the State will compel the performance of duties which a parent has no right to neglect.

ATTENDANCE.—The attendance continues largely on the increase. At the date of my visit 5,525 children were enrolled on the books, and 5,020 presented themselves for examination. This shows an increase since last examination of 935 on the rolls, and of 901 present at the examinations. I have examined during the past year nearly 2,000 more children than I examined two years ago within the same district. The average daily attendance compares favourably with that of other districts in or out of the colony, and yet it cannot be said that much more than one-half of the children attend really well, and fully reap the benefits which the schools afford them. The attendance at my visits on the examination days is exceedingly good, amounting to 91 per cent. of the whole. Still, one-half of the children are, more or less, irregular in their ordinary attendance; and in some school districts the evil is a considerable one. Next to bad teaching, there is no greater hindrance to the work of education; and I am persuaded that a large amount of public money is wasted so long as the attendance of children—for say at least 250 half-days in the year—is not made compulsory by the State. I have carefully collected a few statistics to show how badly some pupils attend who have been at school a year or two, who are of good age, in good schools, and in higher-standard work. The following are the results for nine such schools:—

	Number presented in Higher Standards.				Number who attended over 250 half-days.			
Mount Cook Boys' School	...	...	201	...	...	...	...	157
Mount Cook Girls' School	...	...	180	...	...	...	...	118
Thorndon	...	...	235	...	...	...	...	170
Greytown	...	...	69	...	...	...	...	53
Pauatahanui	...	...	23	...	...	...	...	10
Fernridge	...	...	25	...	...	...	...	13
Waihinga	...	...	18	...	...	...	...	13
Featherston	...	...	84	...	...	...	...	65
Taita	...	...	36	...	...	...	...	25
Total	...	...	871	...	...	...	...	629

In these nine schools, 242 children out of 871 in the very prime of school life had made such poor attendances that no teacher could be expected to prepare them in the work of the year; and their work would necessarily be so broken as to be practically valueless. Except in the Hutt District, there are not many children in the country who do not attend school at all. But in the City of Wellington a number of children could be picked up from the streets any day sufficient to fill a large school. The compulsory clause is not put into force by the School Committees, who have hitherto had this excuse: that the school accommodation has never been large enough for the number who voluntarily attend. The abolition of school-fees has not tended to improve the attendance at school. When people paid for their education they valued it more. I have never been able to see why in this country education should either be free or the attendance voluntary. A fee might be charged, and attendance made compulsory. So strong is the popular sense of the value and necessity of education in the present day, that there is no fear of our present school system collapsing for want of popular support. The people, as a whole, demand education for their children, and are willing to pay for it. I am much pleased to observe, year by year, that the State schools are becoming more and more the common schools for the