

WELLINGTON.

Wellington, 31st March, 1882.

SIR,—

I beg to present my eighth annual report on the condition of primary education in the Wellington District. This report bears on the working results of forty-eight public schools, all of which I have examined in the standards. I had previously visited all but Tenui for the purpose of inspection, and without previous notice being given.

MORAL INSTRUCTION.—I have generally had some special object in view in my accidental visits to schools. Last year the subject of intellectual teaching was dealt with. This year my special mission was to ascertain whether, and to what extent, any definite instruction was imparted in rules of life and action, in moral rectitude, wholesome habits, and generally in such wise counsels as a parent should give to his child. In approaching the subject with the teachers I pointed out that, although the education in the public schools was strictly secular, it was not the intention of the Legislature to exclude moral teaching, and it was clearly the duty of every teacher, as far as he could, to act the part of the parent in the school, and to give as much specific instruction as time would permit in subjects which, perhaps above all others, educate and exalt the mind, and which tend to improve discipline and manners, and to repress the spirit of lawlessness too common in the youth of the colony. I was met by the teachers in a very kindly and sympathizing spirit. They informed me that, when any breach of discipline, any rudeness, or any case of impropriety occurred, they took occasion not only to reprove, but also to point out, as a lesson to others, the gravity of the offence. In some few schools, I found that specific instruction was given regularly in subjects of moral training. In others the subject-matter of the reading-books was so enlarged upon by the teachers that the lesson became practically one bearing on the whole duty of man to man. The reading-books certainly abound in material of the kind, so much so that I think, if the matter of the readers were well expounded in every school, the children would not be lacking in moral precept. Now, although it is in home and out-door life that good manners, good habits, and high principles are mostly acquired, yet it must be an immense gain to the community that the youth of the colony are constantly directed and schooled to what is right. I have, therefore, advised teachers of large schools to make due provision in the time-tables for regular and specific teaching in suitable subjects, for which lessons should be carefully prepared; and, in small schools, I have suggested that the teacher should address all the children collectively, say twice a week, on such subjects as I have indicated to him. On my second visit of examination I was pleased to notice in the time-tables that provision was already made to give moral instruction in small schools, in which the matter had not hitherto received attention; and I think most of the teachers of other schools are giving the subject due consideration. In order to make my meaning clear both to the Board and to the teachers as to what is intended by moral duties to be taught in schools, I have appended to this report a small list of subjects suitable for lessons. I also made an entry in each school log-book asking the teachers to give due attention to this branch.

NUMBERS ATTENDING.—The number of children who came up for examination this year is 5,763, being 275 in excess of last year's number. The total number of children on the books, 6,269, remains about the same. There are six new schools in operation—at Te Aro, Wallace, Kaitoke, Wadestown, Taueru, and Waihakeke; but one small aided school in the Upper Taueru has been closed. During the past year many families have left the district, some for employment in mines or on railways in Australia, and some for new settlement in the Patea country. With an increase of five small schools, there is no appreciable increase in the total number on the rolls. The compulsory Act is in force in only one or two school districts, and there appear to be hundreds of children within easy reach of schools who do not attend. Where a healthy public spirit is manifested in favour of educational progress, indifferent parents are influenced by the popular voice, and the children apparently catch the infection; but in some districts there is no leading spirit among the community, the greatest apathy prevails, and, unless the teacher (as is sometimes the case) is a host in himself, education languishes. I have known the greatest enthusiasm in school matters manifested during the time a new school is being started, and as time goes by popular interest appears to wane and the attendance falls off.

EXAMINATION RESULTS.—Of the actual work done in the schools during the past year I am happy to be able to speak very favourably. The classification in the schools is considerably raised, the percentage number of passes made in the standards is satisfactory, and there is evidence that many children are remaining longer at school than heretofore, and receiving a complete and thorough education. The examination was made a little more difficult in the Third Standard, and perhaps a little less difficult in the fourth. Except in a few schools the work in the two highest standards was particularly good this year. A reference to the table of results attached to this report will show that 3,755 children came up for examination in the standards, and that 2,772 passed, being 73·8 per cent. of those presented. Last year 3,595 came up for examination, and 2,750, being 76·5 per cent., passed. Although there is a falling-off of 2·7 per cent. in the number of passes made, the classification this year shows an increase in all standards except the third, and this arises from the comparatively large number of failures this year in that standard. The increased results in the Fifth Standard have more than made up for the comparative failure in that standard last year. Taken as a whole, the examination results in schools vary directly as the size of the school, the largest schools doing the best work. There are altogether 4,051 children who are over eight years of age attending; and it is satisfactory to find that 3,887, or within 164 of the number qualified by age, are actually classed in some standard.

WELLINGTON CITY SCHOOLS.—There are now in the city six graded schools containing 2,325 pupils, and three infant schools with 1,024 children. I have never known the work of these schools to be so satisfactory, on the whole, as it is this year. All of them appear to be under good management; and, although there were decidedly weak classes in the Mount Cook Girls' School, and rather a large number of failures in the Mount Cook Boys' School, there was nothing which seriously reflected on the management; for the former school has previously ranked high among the city schools, and in the latter the attendance is far from good. In the other schools there was little to find fault with, and much to commend. In all of them the work of the Fifth and Sixth Standards was much improved, and positively good; in most of them the work of the Third Standard proved the weakest. The Thorndon,