

were to plume himself on having paid 19s. in the pound. The best that can be said for either teacher or tradesman (so far as regards the isolated fact in question) is that each has nearly, but not quite, fulfilled his engagements.

I append a brief summary of my opinion as to the present state of each school.

It will be observed that my report on the aided schools is uniformly favourable. It is not easy to over-estimate the good that is being done by these well-taught and well-conducted establishments, in remote spots where the school is almost the only humanizing and refining agent.

The Chairman of the Education Board.

W. C. HODGSON,
Inspector.

NELSON.

SIR,—

22nd December, 1881.

I have the honor to lay before you my report on the public schools in this district for the year 1881. Sixty-nine schools are now at work, 66 of which have been visited twice during the year, my examination being made at the second visit. The number of scholars on the rolls of these schools when they were examined last year was 3,963, the number present being 3,354. These figures correspond very closely to those obtained last year. As the returns for the December quarter will not all be in for some time, I have thought it best to complete my report without waiting for them, especially as they will not differ materially from those sent in at the end of September, which show 4,062 on the roll, and 3,109 in daily average attendance. The proportion of passes for the district is less by 10 per cent. than it was last year. I do not attribute this to any general falling-off in the quality of the teaching, but rather to the fact that many very young children were pushed through the First and Second Standards two years ago, who, as I anticipated, are now found unequal to the work of the higher standards. The penalties for this kind of mistake, in the shape of disappointment and loss of reputation, are so sharp and so certain that I do not think they will be incurred by many of our teachers, after the disagreeable experiences of this year.

AIDED SCHOOLS.—These are becoming an increasingly important feature in our system. Eight are now at work, several more being nearly ready for opening. That they have done good work in remote districts, where no other means are possible of getting the children taught at all, cannot be denied. But they should be regarded only as the pioneers of something better—as makeshifts, in short, until the neighbourhoods in which they are placed are constituted school districts. Nor do the arrangements by which the teachers of aided schools are appointed seem to be quite satisfactory. Looking to the character of the appointments that have been made in some of these schools, I am of opinion that the Board ought not to entirely surrender the power of selecting teachers, as at present, to the parents of the scholars. So long as the school-work is of the most elementary description, the mischief done by the employment of a comparatively ill-educated teacher is not very apparent (though it still exists), but as the children advance their progress must necessarily be arrested by the limited powers of their instructor. And this may well come to pass long before a neighbourhood is populous enough to be made a school district. It is true that a certain check upon gross incompetence is imposed by the knowledge that the grant will be withdrawn if the scholars are not taught to the satisfaction of the Inspector; but prevention would, for many reasons, be preferable to a remedy that, in practice, is found to be slow, and not always easy of application. I suggest that, in future, no one be appointed to an aided school who has not undergone an examination which, without being at all severe, shall at least be a safeguard against absolute incompetence. It is surely not unreasonable to require that a person to whom the instruction of some twenty children is intrusted shall be not inferior, in point of literary attainment, to our probationers.

PROBATIONERS.—A modification of the plan of employing probationers recommended in my last report has been adopted by the Board, and is now getting a fair trial, three appointments having been made in town, two in country schools. The former only have been long enough at work to enable me to form an opinion as the probable success of the scheme. In point of aptitude at learning the practical part of their business, and of ready compliance with the directions of the head-teachers under whose charge they are placed, these girls have fulfilled my expectations. As to another essential part of the scheme—failing which, indeed, the whole fabric falls to the ground—their home preparation for the E examination of teachers at the expirations of the three years' trial, I cannot speak with the same degree of confidence. It is to be hoped that probationers will clearly understand that assiduous study must go hand in hand with increase of skill in the art of teaching, if they are ever to rise above the mere drudgery of the service. The leisure left them by their present occupation is so ample, and the demand made upon their intellectual faculties so slight, that no excuse for unpreparedness at the end of their time ought to be accepted. It would be humiliating if the experiment of voluntary self-improvement were to break down from sheer indolence, and it should become necessary, after all, to resort to the system of enforced study.

POSITION OF TEACHERS—REMOVALS.—After what must have appeared, in several instances, to those more immediately interested, a tedious delay, a change has been made in the teaching staff of the six schools that certainly stood at the bottom of the list in point of efficiency. In three of these—Appley, Collingwood, and Addison's Flat—the good effects of the new appointments are already conspicuous, and there is no reason for anticipating a less favourable result in the remaining three, to which fresh teachers have been only recently appointed. The occasion seems opportune for showing what is the present practice as regards the removal of negligent or incompetent teachers, and for estimating its effects on the welfare of our schools. It is the more necessary to do this because an idea has been industriously disseminated, and has gained pretty general credence, that teachers of public schools are harshly treated, and are at the mercy of the caprices of School Committees. Such a belief, if unchallenged, must have a deterrent effect on persons wishing to enter the service. As a matter of fact, there are few classes of people whose tenure of office is hedged in by so many safeguards, both of