

48. That would result in this: that the children would permanently suffer from attending for the sake of keeping up these schools. Rather than that should be the case, would it not be better to give a differential rate?—I think it might be better to give a differential rate. But I should like to point out that those children who may so suffer are afterwards the gainers by the existence of a school which would not have been in existence if the capitation for their attendance had not been paid.

49. Would it not be better to lower the number requisite for the opening of the school?—I cannot say that I understand the question; but I may state that there is no Government rule as to the number of children necessary to constitute a school. The boards differ in their practice in this respect. There are boards which recognise four children as constituting a school, and there are others which will not establish a school unless there is an attendance of twenty-five. In the case of a district that would not be allowed to have a school unless there were an attendance of twenty-five, that number can sometimes only be made up by the attendance of five or six children of the age to which some of the questions put to me have referred. Those children, if they suffer something during the early years of school-age life, are, on the whole, gainers by having a school in their district which would not be there unless their attendance had been counted when they were young. It is a difficult matter to put clearly before the Committee, but I hope my meaning is clear. I may here refer to another question. I have been asked whether it would be impossible to have a differential rate. I think it is very difficult. It might be possible, but there are great difficulties in the way of the application of a differential rate.

50. *Mr. Ormond.*] As to the proportionate cost to the department of the several establishments for children under seven years, have you any means of arriving at an opinion about that?—I do not think I can say more than I said just now. I have referred to a list of several schools called infant schools, pointing out that there were cases where the cost was considerably less than the capitation allowance.

51. Our Inspector puts it at 30s.?—I have said 25s.

52. *Mr. Walker.*] You stated that of about 20 per cent. of the children between the ages of five and seven, one-half that number would be over six?—I said that I did not know how to get an estimate except by halving that number.

53. Do you think that there are 10 per cent., or less or more, attending country schools?—I have no reason to think that there is any great difference in the proportions. There is one cause of the early attendance in country schools that I should refer to, it is this: that the parents in some districts fear that, unless the attendance is kept up, they may be deprived of their school. On that account they send their children to school at an earlier age than they would otherwise care to do; but whether the distances make attendance at country schools more difficult, I cannot say; I cannot find anything to go upon. I have made inquiry, but I cannot find anything to enable me to say positively whether it is so. I cannot get anything further than that there is a tendency to send the children earlier so as to keep up the required number of attendances.

54. You have stated that there is no general rule observed by Boards in establishing these small country schools; that one Board differed from another in the practice with regard to that?—There is a great difference. I was Secretary at one time to the Board of Education for the Canterbury District. At that time the North Canterbury Board would not entertain proposals for the establishment of a school unless there was a prospective average attendance of twenty-five.

55. A "prospective" attendance?—They would not shut up a school because it had fallen to twenty-four, but they were willing to give a substantial subsidy, considerably exceeding the capitation paid by Government, to people who would establish a school on a private basis. In the Nelson District there are some so-called schools consisting of three or four children each. I believe these are not schools in the sense of being gatherings of children, but practically they are household schools, each one instituted on the basis of a particular family. At Elmsley Bay there is a school of three, receiving an allowance from the Board of £12. At Blue Glen there is a school of four, receiving an allowance also of £12. In Marlborough District there is a school at Robin Hood Bay consisting of five children, and receiving a subsidy of £15. At McMahon's there is a school of five children, receiving a subsidy also of £15.

56. *Mr. Ormond.*] Are the teachers members of these families?—I have no means of knowing.

57. *Mr. Walker.*] Does the department interfere with the Board's discretionary powers in the matter of regulations?—On this particular subject the matter is placed by the Act within the discretion of the Board, so that the department can have no voice upon it.

58. *Mr. Ormond.*] Is there any general system of "aided" schools under the different Boards, that is, special schools for a small number of children?—There is a section of the Act which authorises the Boards to dispense aid to such schools.

59. Is there any general system applied by the different Boards under which that aid is given "under conditions"?—The Act leaves the administration of this aid solely in the discretion of the Boards, and the Boards are not called upon to report on the matter.

60. But surely each Board reports in regard to its aided schools?—The Board can make a statement as to the number of such schools. I find that at the end of December, 1886, the number of such schools was 119. There is no general system applied to them. Each Board has its own system.

61. Are these systems analogous or not?—I should like to have time to see what I can find in the reports.

62. The Committee, I think, would like to find out what the aid is in different districts, and the rate per head at which these districts give aid. Will you also be good enough to give the average attendance at such schools?—A return will be made of these 119 schools, of their attendance, and of the amounts received by each, and their capitation.