

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Education Board Office, Wanganui, 10th February, 1891.

I have the honour to submit my report on public education in the Wanganui District for the year ending the 31st December, 1890.

WORK OF THE YEAR.—The work of the year consisted of the inspection and examination of schools, together with the compilation of results and the writing of a report for the Education Department; the examination of pupil-teachers, candidates for scholarships, and scholarship-holders; the drawing-up of eighty-six different standard examination cards and thirty-six advanced examination papers for pupil-teachers, candidates for scholarships, &c.; and the ordinary office work, which during the year was unusually heavy.

Owing to my absence on leave (rendered absolutely necessary through my being thoroughly worn out after the great pressure of work in 1889), I did not resume the duties of my office until the 18th of February, from which until the 23rd December I was continuously engaged. The actual number of days between these dates is 307, or, omitting Sundays, 263 working-days. Upon reference to my diary I find that during those days I devoted 3,166 hours to the Board's service, or over twelve hours per day. If from this calculation some enforced holidays (such as Good Friday, Easter Monday, Queen's Birthday, &c.) were omitted—I say nothing of the ordinary workman's half-holiday on Saturday, for during at least two-thirds of the year such a luxury was unknown to me—the average would be higher; while, if it were calculated on five school days in each week, it would reach nearly fourteen hours and a half per day. During examination time, owing to a school being taken daily, all the paper work had to be examined and valued, percentages had to be calculated, reports had to be written, &c., *after* a late dinner following a hard day's work from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., not to mention long rides in all kinds of weather before and after these hours. To give some idea of the amount of paper work to be examined and valued at night, I may say that at one large school over five reams of foolscap were used. Now, it must be perfectly plain that an Inspector working for so many hours and so late in the night can have little refreshing sleep—that he has no time for absolutely necessary relaxation, for ordinary social duties, and for self-improvement and keeping himself conversant with the educational topics of the day, and that a break-down in health must inevitably follow sooner or later. Also, when such hours are necessary to get the work done even without full inspection, it is clear that the district is too large for one Inspector to manage to the best advantage of those under him, and with ordinary justice to himself. The district, I may say, extends from Foxton and Linton in the south to the Taungatara River (near Opunake), Mount Egmont, and the Patea River at Stratford in the north. The number of miles I travelled, chiefly on horseback, was nearly 2,500. On Saturdays I never returned to Wanganui during examination time, and very seldom during inspection time, or the number would be much larger.

PUPIL-TEACHERS.—During the first week of the midwinter school holidays I examined the pupil-teachers of the district, with the following results: First Class, or end-of-third-year candidates, 9 examined, 9 passed with percentages of possible marks varying from 75·8 to 63·3; Second Class, or end-of-second-year candidates, 11 examined, 10 passed with percentages of possible marks varying from 93·4 to 62·4; Third Class, or end-of-first-year candidates, 14 examined, 9 passed, with percentages of possible marks varying from 83·4 to 61·9. The work on the whole was good, and it generally was characterized by neatness and nice arrangement. Arithmetic was not strong in the Third Class: in the Second Class and in the First Class it was very good indeed, the total percentages in the subject being 77 and 79·5 respectively, and six candidates—three in each class—obtaining full marks. Reading in not a few cases was very moderate: reading aloud should be practised. For further information with regard to the work done at the examination I beg to refer you to my special report thereon.

SCHOLARSHIPS.— . . . It is worthy of note that many scholarship-holders resign their scholarships before the allotted two years have expired, when some opportunity occurs for their making a start in life—generally, I notice, either as pupil-teachers or as clerks. Perhaps the fact that several of the Board's scholarships are held at purely primary schools has something to do with this, for some of my examinations of scholarship-holders showed that very little progress indeed had been made in anything worthy of the name of secondary work, while in absolutely necessary primary work the pupils had degenerated into a thoroughly unsound state.

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS; STAFF.—At the close of the last quarter of 1890 eighty-seven schools (including ten aided schools) were in active operation, having an average weekly roll-number of 7,889, and an average attendance of 5,761, or 73 per cent. These eighty-seven schools were officered by 174 teachers, made up as follows: 33 principal teachers, 53 sole teachers in charge of schools, 29 assistant teachers, and 59 pupil-teachers. With regard to the classification of assistant teachers (mentioned in my last report) nothing has as yet been done.

AVERAGE WEEKLY ROLL-NUMBER; ATTENDANCE.—For the four quarters of the year the mean average weekly roll-number was 7,778, and the mean average attendance 5,745, the former showing an increase of 463 and the latter an increase of 315 for the twelve months. This average attendance expressed as a percentage of the roll-number shows only 73·8, and on comparing this percentage with the percentages of the districts in 1889 I find that, as regards this district, it has decreased by 0·5 during the year; that it is the lowest in the colony except in Taranaki; and that it is 5·9 lower than in Hawke's Bay District, 6·6 lower than in Auckland District, 11·5 lower than in Otago District (85·7, the highest in the colony), and 6·5 lower than the mean average of the thirteen districts (80·3). Now, as the success of the schools depends in a large measure upon the regular attendance of the pupils, I find myself frequently confronted with the following question: Why is the percentage of attendance so low in this district? "Bad roads," is the usual excuse. But this does not satisfy me, for bad roads are comparatively few—not nearly so many nor so bad as in the Auckland District—and the average attendance is higher at several bush schools than at several town schools. "Many small schools" is another excuse. But this district is particularly