

SESS. II.—1891.
NEW ZEALAND.

THE COST OF SCHOOL-BOOKS

(REPLIES TO CIRCULAR SENT TO EDUCATION BOARDS RESPECTING).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

SIR,—

Education Department, Wellington, 24th June, 1890.

I have the honour, by direction of the Minister of Education, to inform you that it has been represented to him that the parents of the children that attend the public schools are commonly required to purchase a large number of school-books, and that the payment thus required of them in many cases amounts to the equivalent of a substantial fee, so that the promise of free education is practically unfulfilled.

After making inquiry, the Minister considers that there is ground for the complaint, and he believes that excessive requirements have arisen partly from the wide option afforded in the list of books set forth in the regulation made by Order in Council, and partly from the frequency of changes made or allowed by the Boards with respect to the selecting of books from the list.

He is also of opinion that such books as are required to be used only in class, and need not be taken home, might reasonably be provided as part of the apparatus of the school. Books used in this way would last for years in a school under good discipline.

The Minister would be glad to assist in bringing about a state of things in which a child removed from one school to another would not require a new set of books, and in which a book, after an elder child had done with it, could be passed on to a younger member of the same family. He therefore has it in contemplation to propose a revision of the regulation, in order that the number of authorised books may be considerably diminished. But before taking any decisive action in this direction he is desirous of ascertaining the views of the several Education Boards on the whole question to which this letter relates. I am, therefore, to ask you to be so good as to favour him at some early date with an expression of your opinion on the subject.

I have, &c.,

The Chairman, Education Board, _____

WM. JAS. HABENS.

ABSTRACT OF THE REPLIES OF EDUCATION BOARDS TO CIRCULAR OF 24TH JUNE, 1890.

AUCKLAND.

THE Board is of opinion that too great a variety of choice is allowed in the list of books prescribed by Order in Council, and that the number of authorised books can, with advantage, be considerably reduced as proposed by the Minister. Very few text-books need be used by the scholars; and a multiplicity of books indicates a want of teaching-power. On the other hand, the Board sees no advantage to be gained by the proposal to provide as part of the apparatus of a school such books as are required to be used only in class. Very few books are used only during school-hours, and the proposal would, therefore, be practically inoperative in this district.

With regard to reading-books, there can be no ground for complaint here. The same Readers are used in all schools throughout the Auckland Education District, and the Board has for some time past resisted any attempt to introduce a change.

TARANAKI.

The Board is of opinion that no change is required in the present system by which the parents provide school-books; that any system by which the Board or Committee would provide part of the books would be costly and practically unworkable. In this education district the school-books are practically uniform and interchangeable in the schools, and the Board is of opinion that the school-books throughout the colony should, as soon as possible, be made uniform, when differences of opinions among Boards can be reconciled.

WANGANUI.

Drawing- and copy-books are the only ones that do not require to be taken home by children. Books are passed from one child to another, and a child removed from one school can use the same books at any other school in this district.

NAPIER.

The present arrangements have been found favourable to education in the district without any severe strain to parents in the way of expense, and the Board would prefer that the present arrangements should continue.

NELSON.

The Board is not aware of any complaints having been made in its district arising from the present arrangements for the supply of books to scholars.

The Board purchases books in large quantities by public tender, and supplies them to Committees at cost price. The average cost to each scholar for books is about 2s. The Board makes very liberal grants to School Committees, varying from 5s. 6d. to 11s. 6d. per head, according to the attendance, thus enabling the Committee to defray not only the usual incidental expenses, but also, in cases of need, to supply books free of cost. The Board is of opinion that books bought by the scholars are taken more care of than when supplied free.

For the above reasons the Board does not consider it desirable to alter the existing law *re* supply of books.

The Board approves of the proposal to reduce the number of school-books, but recommends that, in making such reduction, the Inspectors of the colony be consulted thereon, and their advice, as far as possible, acted on.

GREYMOUTH.

The Board is not at present prepared to advise as to revision of regulations.

With reference to books for use only in class, the Board approves of the suggestion to provide them as part of the school apparatus; but its funds do not admit of the expense. Changes in the books used in this district have lately been made for the purpose of preventing unnecessary expense to parents.

NORTH CANTERBURY.

The Board, having appointed a Committee to consider the question, has adopted its recommendation to authorise a short list of books for use in the district. The Board proposes that the books named shall be the only books allowed to be used in the schools under its control for a term of years to be agreed upon.

SOUTH CANTERBURY.

In 1889 the Board made certain regulations regarding school-books, which prescribe the books to be used in the district for three years from 1st January, 1890. The same editions of all books (as far as possible) are to be used in the schools. The Board will, however, give full consideration to any proposal that may be made by a head-teacher, with the concurrence of his School Committee, for the introduction, in addition to the abovenamed, of any text-book or text-books that the requirements of the school may appear to warrant. Teachers are enjoined to introduce no fresh books from the present time into their schools other than those hereinbefore specified, and, so far as may be consistent with efficiency, so to act in regard to the changing of books as to make the charge upon parents as light as possible.

OTAGO.

The Board has dealt very thoroughly with the question of school-books in the direction indicated by the circular-letter, so far as the Education District of Otago is concerned.

The Board would greatly deprecate any regulation by the Education Department which would necessitate the Board to bring about any change of the school-books now in use in the schools of the Otago District, and would respectfully submit that if similar regulations to those of this Board were made by the Boards of the several education districts, or by the Boards within the same provincial district, the just grounds of complaint referred to in the circular-letter would be wholly or almost wholly removed, seeing that the number of school children removing from one education district or provincial district to another is very trifling.

SOUTHLAND.

The Board has prescribed a list of books for the district, but considers it advisable to keep such list open for the introduction of suitable text-books of acknowledged merit as they are published from time to time, so long as such books are uniformly adopted throughout the colony.

[Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, nil; printing (1,300 copies), £1 6s.]

By Authority: GEORGE DIDSBURY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1891.

Price, 3d.]