

ATTENDANCE.—The roll-number of scholars shows a slight decrease, from 27,683 at the end of 1897 to 27,557 at the end of 1898. The working-average attendance for the year was 23,153, as compared with 22,983 for the year 1897. But for an epidemic of measles in the last quarter of 1898 the increase would have been larger. The Board regrets to observe that in some districts the provisions of "The School Attendance Act, 1894," are allowed to become almost a dead-letter. The State has determined that every child between the age of seven and thirteen shall attend some public school a certain number of times in each week, and a penalty is imposed under the Act for any breach of its provisions, except under certain stated conditions. There is evidence of an impression still existing that the enforcement of "compulsory attendance" rests at the option of the School Committee of the district. Apart from the pecuniary loss entailed upon the Board through irregular attendance, the efficiency of the teaching is marred, and the efforts of the teacher are discouraged, through habitual irregularity in some districts.

SCHOLARSHIPS.—Fifty-six junior and twenty-four senior scholarships were held at the end of 1898. The schools attended by the scholars are the Auckland College and Grammar School, the Thames High School, and the Whangarei High School. The reports of the headmasters upon their conduct and progress are satisfactory, and the results of higher competitive examinations afford abundant evidence of the good use which many of the district scholars make of the means of higher education afforded them. Special scholarships for girls attending the public primary schools have been established, the cost of which will be defrayed out of the interest accruing from the investment of the proceeds of the Auckland Girls' High School endowment.

TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION.—Classes in manual instruction are held at Devonport and Remuera Schools. Until adequate funds shall be voted for the purpose it is not likely that there will be any extension of the means of technical instruction. Application was made by the Board for a special grant towards the erection of a technical and training college upon a suitable site in the City of Auckland, but no provision was made by the Legislature at last session for such a purpose.

FINANCE.—The income from all sources during the year was £103,950 15s., and the expenditure was £103,459 1s. 6d. In 1897 a saving of 1s. 2d. per head was made upon the statutory capitation grant of £3 15s. for maintenance. In 1898 the expenditure on maintenance amounted (approximately) to £3 16s. 7d. per head, as follows: Teachers' salaries, £3 3s. 10d. per head; grants to School Committees (including painting and repairs), 8s 11d. per head; inspection and examination, 1s. 11d. per head; cost of Board's management, 1s. 11d. per head. The excess of expenditure during 1898 consisted chiefly in the painting of school buildings and formation of school grounds, which amounted altogether to more than £3,000. Notwithstanding this large outlay, there was at the end of 1898, a net credit balance of £1,541 5s. 7d. on Maintenance Account, after providing for all liabilities thereon to that date. The expenditure on buildings during the year amounted to £11,875 6s. 8d. At the end of 1898 the liabilities on this account amounted to £2,020, and the Board had authorised further works to the extent of £6,735, for which, however, no contracts had been let. The Board is thus placed at a great disadvantage through want of necessary funds to build and enlarge schools. Many urgent works have to be delayed for lack of funds. The annual grants for school buildings are inadequate. Representations on this subject have been frequently made, but with little or no avail. Unless a more liberal provision be made by Parliament, the task of providing suitable school accommodation throughout this extensive district cannot be satisfactorily overtaken.

BUILDINGS.—The increasing demand for buildings, and for repairs and restoration of existing buildings, still engages the attention of the Board. Teachers' residences are needed in many country places, where the accommodation is both insufficient and unsuitable. Appeals are made for grants to improve school grounds, to erect out-buildings, and other necessary adjuncts. It is satisfactory to report that much has been done to improve the accommodation in several schools, and to give the schools a more cheerful and healthy appearance. Greater attention is required to local supervision of the school properties, which must suffer from misuse or neglect. Committees and teachers may exercise a wholesome influence in this matter, and any indifference on their part to the care of the school premises and fittings will lead to carelessness (if not to wanton damage) on the part of the pupils and others having access thereto. Two foremen are constantly employed by the Board in visiting schools and making repairs of a varied kind, some of them indicating a want of efficient supervision in the use of the schools and appliances. The painting of the school buildings has been satisfactorily carried out under the direction of two foremen who are employed for the purpose as occasion may require.

MISCELLANEOUS.—Among the matters engaging attention during the past year are the revision of reading- and copy-books, the consideration of a motion to abolish the standard pass system, and of a report from the Chief Inspector (Mr. Petrie) on the subject of curtailing the present syllabus. A notice of appeal from one of the teaching staff was lodged against the Board under the provisions of the Teachers' Court of Appeal Act, but was subsequently abandoned, not, however, before considerable expense had been incurred in an application which the Board was compelled to make to the Supreme Court to prohibit a teacher and officer of the incorporated Institute from adjudicating upon the appeal. The Board has declined to accede to a request for the inspection of private schools in this district. The cordial relations hitherto subsisting between the School Committees and the Board have been maintained almost without exception, and the Board is glad to record its appreciation of their valued co-operation during the past year.

The Hon. the Minister of Education.

RICHARD HOBBS, Chairman.