

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Education Office, Wanganui, 1st March, 1899.

In pursuance of the provisions of the Education Act, I have the honour to present the usual annual report of this Board for the year ending 31st December, 1898.

BOARD.—The Board consists of Mr. George S. Bridge, of Wanganui, Chairman; Mr. James W. Baker, of Warrengate; Rev. John Ross, of Turakina; Mr. F. M. Spurdle, of Wanganui; Mr. B. C. Robbins, of Hawera; Mr. Frederick Pirani, M.H.R., of Palmerston North; Mr. Frank Y. Lethbridge, M.H.R., of Feilding; Mr. Henry Sanson, of Rongotea; and Mr. Robert A. Adams, of Patea.

The Board has met once a month, and has been much assisted in the interim by the Building Committee and the Technical School Committee. There was also a special meeting of the Board in April for the purpose of receiving the Hon. the Minister of Education, who very courteously visited the Board at its invitation with some of the members for the coast, for the purpose of personally ascertaining the requirements of the district.

SCHOOLS—The number of schools in operation in this district at the end of December, 1898, was 132. Those opened during the year were Komako, Orangipongo, Papanui, Wangaeahu, and two half-time schools (counting as one), Marohema and Kaimoho, the five having an aggregate average attendance of sixty-nine and a roll-number of eighty-two pupils.

Of the 132 schools in operation at the close of the year, eighty-five have an average attendance of under fifty pupils, and these are a continual drain upon the Board's funds, as they do not pay their way. The roll-number for the last quarter of the year was 10,205. Of this number, 238 are Maoris and half-castes attending thirty-two of the schools. The strict average attendance for the same period was 8,110, which gives a percentage of 79·47 of the roll. This is a fall of 1·75 as compared with the same period of last year, and is accounted for by sickness prevailing in the district. For the whole year, however, there was an increase of 0·81 as compared with last year.

TRUANT INSPECTION.—Referring to the appointment of Truant Officers, which was mentioned in last year's report, the Board has been at some trouble in ascertaining how far their services have been effectual. It is, however, often difficult to estimate the real value of a Truant Officer's work. An epidemic of sickness will often seriously affect the attendance. The Truant Officers were appointed during the latter part of the year 1897, and the following table gives the percentage of attendance of the roll for each quarter from the beginning of 1896 to the end of 1898, and for the whole year:—

| Year. | First Quarter. | Second Quarter. | Third Quarter. | Fourth Quarter. | Whole Year. |
|---------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1896... | 80·54 | 79·45 | 80·01 | 78·82 | 79·70 |
| 1897... | 78·34 | 80·79 | 81·29 | 81·22 | 80·41 |
| 1898... | 79·84 | 83·02 | 82·61 | 79·47 | 81·22 |

From this it will be seen that there is an average increase of 1·52 per cent. between 1896 and 1898 for the year. The Truant Officers complain that not only is "The School Attendance Act, 1894," defective in several particulars, but that the Magistrates, as a rule, lean towards the defendants. That truancy is a widespread evil is undoubted, and the Board would recommend that any defects in the School Attendance Act should receive the careful attention of Government in the event of any amendments being contemplated.

BUILDINGS AND SCHOOL SITES.—Many pressing calls have been made upon the Board during the year for schools in newly settled districts, but until advised of the allocation of the special vote in September last they were unable to take any action, and they were then hampered by the restriction that residences were not to be erected out of the vote. The Board desires to point out that in some newly settled districts a school without a teacher's residence would be useless, inasmuch as there is often no place for a teacher to live. Apart from this, also, the drain upon the General Account for house-allowance is becoming a very serious item.

The principal contracts undertaken during the year were for new schools at Riverlea, Rangitoto, and Taihape; extensive additions to the schools at Hawera, Anderson Road, Kawhatau, Matapu, Mangatoki, and Mangaweka. New residences were erected at Riverlea, Anderson Road, Taihape, and Raetihi; and two small residences at Hurleyville and Alton; and the Pihama residence, which was burnt down, has been re-erected. Repairs, additions, and improvements have also been effected by the carpenter more or less all over the district, principally at Kelvin Grove, Awahuri, Mars Hill, Manaia, Kakaramea, Manutahi, Patea, Porewa, Wanganui Boys', Makino Road, Terrace End, Ashurst, and Jackeytown. The Feilding School was, unfortunately, burnt down in December, and the pupils are now being taught in three different hired buildings, at a great inconvenience. The old building, which had been added to considerably from time to time during the past twenty-one years, and was very unsuitable for so large a school, was valued at £900 for insurance. According to the form of return made to the department the valuation was an estimate of the old building as it stood, and not the cost of a new one. A wooden building depreciates from year to year, and to enter the value of a new building upon a return requiring the value of an old one would be to make a false return. It is therefore manifestly impossible to erect a new building upon the insurance valuation of an old one. It is deemed necessary to point out these matters because the Board is asked from time to time to make a return of the estimated value, and not the cost, of its old buildings, as well as the new ones.

Additional school sites have been procured at Longburn, Millburn (Kaitoke), and at Lytton Street, Feilding. The former was kindly transferred by the Wellington School Commissioners. The Millburn site was acquired by a grant of £1 for £1 on the cost to the settlers, and that at Feilding—3 acres—was purchased by the Board, and it is now treating for an addition to the Te Roti site.

TECHNICAL EDUCATION.—There has been a very fair attendance at some of the classes in the Technical School, especially those conducted by the science master, and the Board hopes that the public may ere long appreciate the value of the art classes which are now open to them. For the work done at the school the Board begs to refer you to the Director's report. The inhabitants