

aided and household schools has to be met, besides the general expenses of the district as a whole. As a further illustration of the immense advantage enjoyed by the larger districts, it may be seen from the report above mentioned (on pages 12, 13, 14, and 15) there are fourteen schools in and about Auckland at which the capitation earned exceeds the total expenditure (exclusive of buildings) by the handsome sum of £10,591, or nearly £1,700 more than the entire revenue of this Board for the same year. Auckland is taken merely because it stands first on the list. A similar comparison would doubtless hold good with North Canterbury, Otago, and Wellington.

It is not intended to intimate that the grants to these important districts are in the smallest degree excessive, or that they could be materially reduced without serious injury; but what must be evident to any impartial person is that the small districts are at immense disadvantage, and should receive a more liberal capitation than the larger. It cannot be said that the salaries paid in Marlborough are excessive; on the contrary, I am sorry to say they are amongst the lowest in the colony. Neither are the expenses of management greater in proportion to revenue than is inevitable in a small district. As a proof of the Board's desire to transact its business in as economical a manner as possible, I may remind the Government of the fact that for the last twenty-two years this Board has rendered its services gratuitously, not a single shilling having been paid as travelling-expenses to members, notwithstanding that some of them have had to travel a considerable distance every month to attend to their duties. Now, as the average amount charged for travelling-expenses of members in the five districts in which such expenses are charged (in the report quoted) is £117 3s. 8d., the Board may fairly claim to have saved the department the respectable sum of £2,578 during the twenty-two years that have elapsed since the passing of the Act.

**ATTENDANCE.**—The average weekly roll for the year 1898 was 2,162·5 and the (working) average attendance for the same period was 1,764·75—about 81·6 per cent., or 1 per cent. less than in 1897, and to the same extent below the average of the colony for that year. This would appear to indicate a slight though doubtless temporary decrease both in the roll-number and the average attendance. Taking into consideration the frequent occurrence of various epidemics (which nowadays seem to cause so much more apprehension than formerly), together with the influence of the weather in some parts of the colony, the percentage of attendance on the whole is quite satisfactory, and is not likely to be greatly increased by the School Attendance Act. The children who are not on the roll of any school are those that require looking up, and this cannot be satisfactorily done excepting by the police, who are not now allowed to act as Truant Officers under the Boards.

**BUILDINGS.**—Commencing the year with a debit balance of £1,406 14s. 8d. on Building Account, it is not surprising that the Board's expenditure on this account has been very limited. The Board took advantage of a favourable opportunity to purchase four acres of land close to the Springlands School, with a good house upon it; and, by selling two acres of it, the actual cost to the Board was somewhat less than the cost of erecting a similar building would have been, so that the land practically cost the Board nothing. Advantage was also taken to enlarge the school grounds at Blenheim—which are very confined in area for so large a school—by the purchase of another contiguous allotment; and when this additional area shall have been cleared and rendered fit for the purpose a very respectable playground will be available for the 570 children belonging to this school. The purchase of a small but suitable building, with the surrender of one acre of the seller's leasehold round the same, for the moderate sum of £35, has provided accommodation for several families at Mahau Sounds. These expenses, together with repairs, and addition to furniture and appliances, amounting, in the aggregate, to £805 4s. 3d., leave the Building Account in debt to the General Account to the amount of £1,623 6s. 11d.; and, for the first time in the history of the Board's transactions, there is, on the whole, a small debit balance. The Board desires to thank the Minister for granting an advance of the building vote at a time when the funds were at a very low ebb, and an overdraft loomed ominously in the near future. As the Board's accounts show, the building vote was practically exhausted before it was received.

**SHORTHAND.**—Classes for instruction in this useful art were established, under the provisions of the Manual and Technical Elementary Instruction Act, at Blenheim and Renwick, and have been highly appreciated. The number of scholars on the rolls for the year, at the two centres, was seventy-one, and the average attendance was 59·8; and it was with the greatest regret that the Board received a circular from the department notifying the discontinuance of the grant for this subject at the end of the year. Much as the Board would like to avail itself of the provisions of the Act in other directions, the expense attending the establishment of almost any other class is quite beyond its means, which are already insufficient for the ordinary requirements of the district. At the time of writing the Board is in receipt of a report from two independent "experts," who were asked to examine these classes with the object of ascertaining the amount of progress made by the scholars, and the report was of so encouraging a nature that the regret of the Board at the cessation of the grant (without which the subject must be dropped) has been greatly increased. Several of the Board's teachers have been students in these classes, with the intention of qualifying themselves to teach the subject, if required, in the schools.

**PUPIL-TEACHERS.**—The number of pupil-teachers at present in the service of the Board is thirteen, all females. There is no difficulty in obtaining any number of girls for these positions, but it is very difficult to induce boys to offer themselves. There is not at the present moment a solitary male pupil-teacher in the service of the Board. The reason is to be found not so much in the small remuneration which the Board can offer them as in the fact that, when their term of service expires, they have but little chance of promotion outside their own small district. The number of pupil-teachers employed by the Board is regulated not by the prospective demands for teachers in the district, but by the exigencies of a cramped financial position, which compels the Board to avail itself of the "cheap labour" of these young persons, although, when their term of service expires, there is very little prospect of their promotion to more remunerative positions.