

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Wanganui, 1st March, 1901.

I have the honour to present the usual annual report of this Board's proceedings for the year ending 31st December, 1900.

BOARD.—At the annual election of members in February, 1900, Mr. G. S. Bridge and Mr. R. A. Adams were re-elected, and Mr. Wm. Corry, of Wanganui, was elected in place of Mr. James W. Baker. In January, 1900, Mr. Henry Sanson resigned his seat on the Board in consequence of leaving the district, and Mr. W. T. Wood, of Palmerston North, was elected in his place. In April Mr. G. S. Bridge was re-elected Chairman of the Board. The Board is therefore now composed of the following members: Mr. G. S. Bridge (Chairman), Rev. John Ross, Mr. F. Pirani, M.H.R., Mr. F. Y. Lethbridge, M.H.R., Mr. F. M. Spurdle, Mr. B. C. Robbins, Mr. R. A. Adams, Mr. William Corry, and Mr. W. T. Wood.

ATTENDANCE.—For the last quarter of the year the strict average attendance was 8,776, with a roll-number of 10,800, being 81·25 per cent. of the average to the roll. The average roll-number for the whole year was 10,817, and the strict average attendance 8,773, being 81·1 per cent. average attendance to the roll.

Four Truant Officers were appointed in 1897, each taking a portion of the district; but they were subsequently replaced by one for the whole district, who is now in office. During the year the Truant Officer prosecuted in 73 cases for non-attendance. In these, 421 persons were fined, and fifty-nine convicted without fine; 157 cases were dismissed, and ninety-nine withdrawn. The Truant Officer alleges that the number of cases dismissed and withdrawn is owing to a conflict between sections 3 and 7 of the School Attendance Act. Section 3 requires that an exemption certificate, signed by the Chairman of the School Committee, should be produced by the parent or guardian of the absentee; whilst section 7 permits the Magistrate to dismiss the case upon the defendant's own statement. The Truant Officer makes a regular monthly report of the schools visited, also acts as sanitary inspector, and reports upon the drainage and sanitary arrangements of the several schools. Whenever it is found necessary, the Board directs the attention of the School Committees to any defects which may exist in connection with these matters.

TEACHING STAFF.—There are now 293 teachers in the Board's service, 139 being males and 154 females. Of these, fifty-eight are head male teachers, eight head female teachers; thirty-nine sole male and thirty-six sole female teachers; eleven are assistant male teachers, and forty assistant female teachers; thirty-seven are male pupil-teachers, and seventy female pupil-teachers. There are, besides, nineteen cadets training for pupil-teachers. Speaking generally, the Board has every reason to be satisfied with its teachers.

SCHOOLS.—At the close of the year the Board had 143 schools in operation. Of these twenty-five were aided or subsidised schools and one a half-time school; fourteen had under 14 pupils; eleven had 15 and under 20; fourteen had 20 and under 25; fifty-four had 25 and under 50; twenty-one had 50 and under 75; nine had 75 and under 100; eight had 100 and under 150; seven had 150 and under 300; and five had 300 and under 500. It will be noticed by these figures that the Board has to maintain a very large proportion of small schools.

BUILDINGS.—Tenders have been accepted during the year for new schools at Pakihikura, Poukiore, and Opaku, and for extensive additions to the schools at Aramoho, Taihape, and Castle-cliff. Teachers' residences have been erected at Mangatoki, Kiwitea, and Opaku. Repairs and improvements of various kinds have been made to the buildings and grounds at Feilding, Marton, Patea, Wangaeahu, Raetihi, Table Flat, Pukerua, Hawera, Maungahoe, Crofton, Ohakea, Riverlea, Ruahine, Stoney Creek, Rangiwahia, Rewa, Foxton, Awahuri, Stanway, Kaponga, Upper Taonui, Kimbolton, Turakina, Ohingaiti, Manaia, Waverley, and Maxwell. The sum of £500 was also voted and expended in painting some of the schools, a work which was much needed. At Aramoho it was found necessary to acquire an addition to the school site at a cost of £150. The carpenter, who had been for some years in the Board's service, and who had proved himself very useful, resigned, and the Board has not filled the vacancy. A large amount of administrative work, under the heading of "Building," is now referred to a Building Committee, and the time of the Board is thus considerably economised.

COMMITTEES' SCHOOL FUND.—A number of Committees applied to the Board to increase the amount of the School Fund allowance. The Board replied that they were unable to do so, without making a further reduction in teachers' salaries, unless the Government grant to the Board was augmented, in which case the Board would increase the Committees' allowance. All the Committees accepted the Board's decision, excepting one, which refused to dispense the fund. It is to be regretted that the Minister has not been able to give the Board the extra capitation grant of 5s. per annum suggested by the Conference, as this would have enabled them to increase the salaries of teachers, and augment the capitation grant to Committees, which is so small at present that in most districts money has to be raised locally for ordinary current expenses.

CHANGE OF NAME.—The Rangitoto School will in future be found under the head of "Ohakea."

WANGANUI TECHNICAL SCHOOL.—The staff of the Wanganui Technical School has been remodelled, with a view of bringing the expenditure as near as possible within the receipts. One of the former assistant masters has been transferred to Palmerston North, where it is proposed to erect a technical school, and the other assistant master has been transferred to Hawera, where he has continued the art classes ever since.

The Board regrets that the Wanganui School has not met with the support it anticipated, but hopes that with the change above referred to a considerable saving will be made.

For the purpose of building a technical school at Palmerston North the inhabitants subscribed £200, which will be supplemented by £200 from the Board, and a like sum has been applied for from Government, making a total of £600, which sum, it is thought, will be sufficient to commence with. Plans for the building will be prepared at once and tenders invited for its erection.

DRILL.—Cadet corps have been established at several of the Board's larger schools, and the Board will arrange for teachers to assemble at Wanganui, Palmerston North and Hawera centres