

REPORTS OF EDUCATION BOARDS.

AUCKLAND.

SIR,—

Auckland, March, 1903.

In accordance with section 102 of "The Education Act, 1877," the Board presents the following report of its proceedings during the year 1902:—

BOARD.—The members in office at the beginning of the year were Messrs. L. J. Bagnall (Chairman), J. Blades, R. Hobbs, W. Lambe, S. Luke, J. D. McKenzie, N. A. McLeod, J. Muir, and J. G. Rutherford. Mr. McLeod resigned his seat in March, and Mr. P. M. Mackay was elected in May to fill the vacancy. Messrs. Blades, Luke, and Muir retired from office in August. Mr. Luke and Mr. Muir were re-elected for a further term of three years. Mr. A. R. Harris was elected in place of Mr. Blades, who did not offer himself for re-election. Mr. Muir was elected in August to succeed Mr. Bagnall as Chairman.

Twenty-five meetings of the Board were held during the year, with an average attendance of eight members. The finance and teachers' selection committee, consisting of four members, met twenty-six times.

SCHOOLS.—There were 414 schools in operation at the end of the year, including 76 schools taught half-time. According to the departmental reckoning of every two half-time schools as one the number is 376. Most of the half-time schools receive three days' teaching in each week, an addition being made to the teacher's salary for the extra day's work.

Five schools were closed owing to the withdrawal of population—viz., Mahoenui, Poro-o-tarao, Whangamata, Manukau North Head, and Fern Flat. Fifteen new schools were opened during the year—viz., Goodwood, Komokorau, Te Rau-a-moa (reopened), Kawhia, Ongarue, Te Oruru, Oparau, Whangaparaoa, Awanga and Haratonga, Whenuakite, Otoroa, Purua No. 2, Matakoho No. 2, Waiheke Hook's and Fleming's, and Tiritiri. All these schools are situated in remote districts, and all except two have less than twenty scholars in average attendance.

The grading of the schools is summarised as follows: Under 21 average attendance, 104; from 21 to 40 average, 140; from 41 to 90, 75; from 91 to 150, 22; from 151 to 250, 17; above 250, 18: total, 376.

TEACHERS.—The number of teachers employed at the end of the year was 815, classified as follows: Head or sole teachers, 261 male, 115 female—total, 376; assistant teachers, 51 male, 213 female—total, 264; pupil-teachers, 41 male, 134 female—total, 175: totals, 353 male, 462 female—total, 815.

The effect of the colonial scale has been to reduce the number of pupil-teachers by seventy-five, and to increase the number of assistant teachers by sixty-eight. There are twelve schools in Grade III. (31–40) which continue to receive the help of a pupil-teacher under authority of the proviso to the colonial scale. That help will be withdrawn at the end of this year, unless the scale shall be so altered as to provide for the employment of a pupil-teacher in schools from thirty-five to forty average attendance. These schools afforded an excellent training-ground for young teachers. Through the introduction of the scale the Board has already been compelled to give notice to eighteen teachers of the termination of their engagements; but nine of that number have been re-engaged in other positions. The operation of the scale deprives the Board of that discretionary power which has hitherto existed of retaining salaries in excess of scale under exceptional circumstances, and similarly of retaining a teacher on the staff of a school notwithstanding a temporary decrease of attendance. It may now happen that the absence of one scholar may necessitate the withdrawal of a teacher from the school.

The smaller country schools in charge of male teachers, more than 120 in number, have been deprived of the small allowance hitherto available for the teaching of sewing to girls. The Board has recorded its protest against this retrenchment, which is strangely inconsistent with the evident desire to foster the extension of technical education throughout the colony.

The Board took immediate action at the beginning of the year to bring the teaching staff into conformity with the colonial scale. It is gratifying to state that this was done with little or no hardship to individual teachers, and that the fullest indulgence was conceded to the Board by the Minister in regard to staff and salaries. It is also satisfactory to report that a liberal allowance has been provided by the Government for the employment of relieving-teachers. But it is feared that the regulations defining the conditions under which it becomes necessary to reduce, or permissible to increase, the staff of a school, will have a prejudicial effect in some instances, as, for example, where the normal attendance is suddenly reduced by an epidemic, such as that which visited the schools of this district during the latter part of the past year, thereby bringing the "yearly average" below the minimum of the grade to which the school properly belongs. Unless this state of things shall be remedied, there will be a growing tendency to close schools directly an epidemic appears—an extreme step, which should be authorised only upon the recommendation of the District Health Officer.