

IRREGULAR ATTENDANCE.—During the year summonses were issued with respect to 324 children, a large increase as compared with the number in the previous year. Convictions were recorded in 275 cases, and of the remaining 49, 33 were dismissed, 14 were withdrawn on production of medical certificate, while in 2 cases the children proved to be over age. Fines to the amount of £36 5s. 6d. were recovered during the year. While in most cases it is pleasing to note the Bench is now dealing with irregular attendance in a manner calculated to remind parents of their duty to their children, yet it is a regrettable fact that on some occasions cases have been dismissed in a wholesale fashion, apparently quite regardless of the circumstances.

PUBLIC-SCHOOL TEACHERS' SALARIES ACT.—Since the 1st January, 1902, teachers' salaries have been paid in accordance with the new Act. To meet all ordinary expenditure incidental to the maintenance of its schools, the Board has now to rely entirely on the capitation allowance of 11s. 3d. and the annual grant of £250. As indicated in last year's report, this revenue leaves so narrow a margin for contingencies that in many ways the Board has felt itself crippled for want of funds; while the wiping-off of the £2,379 19s. 1d. debit balance on the Maintenance Account is quite out of the question. Hitherto the Board has made its allowances to Committees on a more generous scale than is the case in some of the other larger education districts. The question now arises as to whether the Board is justified in a continuance of this policy, seeing that its capitation grant is neither more nor less than that of other Boards. The only logical course, and the one that would relieve the Board of serious embarrassment, is for the Government to say what proportion of the 11s. 3d. capitation grant shall be paid to Committees for incidental expenses. The preparation of salary schedules, the adjusting of salaries consequent upon changes in the school staffs, and the correspondence arising therefrom, have of necessity added to the work of the office staff.

MANUAL AND TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION.—The subject of manual and technical instruction has occupied a prominent position during the past year. Teachers in considerable numbers have attended the Saturday classes held at Ashburton and Christchurch. Public technical classes have also been started at Ashburton and Rangiora under the management of the local Technical Committees. At the Normal School, at the School of Domestic Instruction, and at Lyttelton and Leeston technical classes have continued in operation. At the date of this report the steps taken by the Christchurch Technical Classes Association promise developments on a larger scale than has hitherto been attempted. With the substantial contributions made by the several local bodies, augmented by the Government pound-for-pound subsidy, the association is now in a position to commence technical classes with every prospect of success.

In regard to school classes, some headway has been made during the year, thirty-two schools having qualified for capitation with respect to classes already held; while for the present year about eighty schools will be represented. It is satisfactory to note that the returns required are gradually assuming a less complex form. It would be a matter for additional congratulation if the Minister could see his way to still further modify the requirements of his Department. So far it has not been soundly demonstrated why instruction in manual occupations should not follow more closely upon the lines on which ordinary primary subjects are conducted. The observance of minute detail in the matter of filling up returns, whether of particulars of classes or of work done, is no guarantee of efficiency, which is much more likely to be safeguarded by the influence of direct reports from the Board's Inspectors, or, if need be, from the Department's own officers, on the quality of the instruction given. The introduction of manual and technical instruction under the existing regulations has further added to the duties of the Board's office staff, which is now severely taxed in its efforts to keep pace with the ever-increasing work.

DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS.—Except in the case of Akaroa, the maintenance of which presented no difficulty owing to the annual grant from the local High School Board, hitherto there has been no district high school in operation in North Canterbury. But towards the close of the year, on the application of the respective Committees, steps were taken to convert the Amberley and Darfield public schools into district high schools; and at the date of this report both schools and also Kaiapoi are provided with secondary departments under specially qualified assistants. It cannot be too plainly pointed out that, having regard to its restricted funds in providing teachers for district high schools and in fixing their salaries, the Board is not in a position to exceed the grants made by the Department.*

SCHOOL CADET CORPS.—The formation of cadet corps in connection with public schools has proceeded apace in North Canterbury during the past year. On the 31st December, 1902, there were twelve such corps or detachments, and two others have been established this year. The following schools have joined in the movement: Addington, Ashburton, Christchurch East, Christchurch West, Hampstead, Kaiapoi, Normal School, Rangiora, Richmond, St. Albans, Southbrook, Sydenham, Waltham, and Woolston. In this connection it may not be out of place to express the Board's appreciation of the good work done by Major Loveday, the Officer Commanding School Cadets, whose efforts to arouse the enthusiasm of pupils and teachers have met with so ready a response.

PHYSICAL DRILL.—The manner in which the requirements of the Physical Drill in Public and Native Schools Act have been carried out is fully dealt with in the report of the Board's Inspectors.

I have, &c.,

C. A. C. HARDY, Chairman.

The Hon. the Minister of Education, Wellington.

* Details of the work, attendance, &c., at these schools are given in a separate paper.