

The following summary is taken from the annual return forwarded to the Education Department:—

Classes.						Number on Roll.	Present at Inspector's Annual Visit.	Average Age.
Standard VII	...	...	...	...	...	573	541	Yrs. mos. 14 7
" VI	...	...	...	...	...	1,386	1,343	13 8
" V	...	...	...	...	...	1,680	1,638	12 9
" IV	...	...	...	...	...	1,948	1,872	11 11
" III	...	...	...	...	...	2,017	1,946	10 11
" II	...	...	...	...	...	2,032	1,953	9 10
" I	...	...	...	...	...	1,957	1,859	8 8
Preparatory	...	...	...	...	...	5,216	4,589	6 11
Totals ...						16,809	15,741	11 2*

* Mean of average age.

These totals show an increase for the year of 304 on the roll-number, and of 231 present at the Inspector's annual visit. There is a very slight shrinkage in Standard IV, but with this exception the increase is spread over all the classes, the greatest advance being in the Preparatory classes, in which there was a slight falling-off last year.

In the nine Catholic schools visited, the roll-number was 1,296, and the number present at the annual visit was 1,186. This brings the total number of children inspected during the year to 18,105.

We are pleased to be able to report a steady improvement in the average attendance.

	Average Roll.	Average Attendance.	Percentage.
1903	15,496	12,801	82.6
1904	15,886	13,462	84.7
1905	16,235	14,071	86.6
1906	16,415	14,356	87.4

There has been an increase of nearly 5 per cent. since the appointment of a Truant Inspector, and, though the improvement is very satisfactory, we have reason to hope that a further increase will be recorded next year. There is still a large percentage of parents who are injuring the prospects of their children by want of interest in their educational welfare. The effect of the dairying industry on the attendance and work in the school has been referred to in previous reports, and if no remedy can be found in legislation, the rousing of public opinion should not fail to improve the condition of many of those children who have to do hard work in the morning and evening on the farm or dairy as well as attend school during the day. Cases of boys playing truant to go round with the drivers of tradesmen's carts are not so frequent as formerly in the larger towns. In many country schools, owing to bad roads, more especially in the winter, the average attendance is low; but there are signs of improvement as the districts become more settled, and as the roads are improved by metalling. This appears to us a proper occasion again to refer to the anomalous and unfair system of payment on average attendance. Reference to the Truant Inspector's report shows a variation of from 65 to 91 per cent. of attendance—that is, while some teachers are paid for nine-tenths of the children in the school, some, through no fault of their own, are paid for only about two-thirds of those they have to present to the Inspector at his annual visit.

Additional accommodation has been provided for the secondary classes at Masterton and Carterton; and in order to replace schools burnt down new buildings have been erected at Hukanui, Wellington South, and Alfredton. Northland has been made a separate school district, and provided with a school of its own. Two other cases—Muhunua and Dyer—call for particular notice, as provision should be made at once for the education of the children in these two settlements. They furnish as good opportunities as can be found anywhere for putting into practice the plan of conveying children to a central school, for the roads are good, the distances reasonably short, and the numbers such as would gain a liberal subsidy.

In other countries, notably in the United States and Canada, the experiment seems to have been successful, and admitting that it does not follow that it would therefore be successful in New Zealand, still it should receive a fair trial. We are not aware that the experiment has been tried with success in the colony, but we believe that this is owing to the fact that the regulations issued by the Department in the first instance did not give the Boards an allowance sufficiently liberal, and although this allowance was increased it still left the Boards to take the risk of any deficit. The Department's latest offer, however, appears to us so liberal as to practically free the Board from any risk of financial loss.

We feel that the time has now come when all our larger schools should be provided with caretakers' residences. In recent years three of our largest city schools have been destroyed by fire. On each occasion the fire might have been prevented had someone been living on the premises. The new buildings at South Wellington and Thorndon must each be worth something like £10,000, and it cannot but be evident that greater care should be taken of such valuable property. This would probably mean some initial expenditure, but we think any money spent in the erection of such buildings could