

To show in a definite way how the depletion of our staffs through enlistment has affected the schools it may be stated that in most of our largest schools where there are to be found from two hundred to four hundred boys there is only one male class teacher, and very few have more than two. In one purely boys' school six assistants out of seven are women. The thanks of the parents of the Dominion are due to the large number of ex-teachers, some of them superannuated, who have come back to the schools to keep the work going.

In common with officers of the Public Service, public-school teachers, who are in effect public servants, received a war bonus during the year, the amount paid to single teachers being £7 10s., and to married teachers £15, provided the salary did not exceed £315.

SPECIAL TOPICS.

Special reference should be made to some of the more important questions that are presented or suggested by information given in the report. The various tables of statistics, with explanations and detailed comments, will for the most part be found at the end of the section to which they relate.

MAINTENANCE AND REBUILDING OF SCHOOLS.

The administration of the funds granted for the above-mentioned purpose to Education Boards since the present system of providing grants for school buildings was inaugurated in 1903 has not worked satisfactorily. Out of the annual grants the Boards were expected not only to maintain the school buildings in good repair, but also to set aside reserve funds sufficient to meet the cost of rebuilding such schools as become worn out. The present neglected and dilapidated condition of many school buildings shows that some of the Boards have not carried out their duties with respect to maintenance, with the result that buildings are regarded as worn out which, had a reasonable sum been spent upon their upkeep, would have an extended period of utility. Again, most of the Boards have failed to make the required provision by way of reserve fund for the rebuilding of worn-out schools, and, indeed, a large proportion of the money appropriated for this purpose has been expended in other directions, and is not available to meet rebuilding liabilities, present or prospective. So far as can be ascertained from the annual returns submitted to the Department the total funds in hand for rebuilding alone should be approximately £220,000, whereas at the end of the year 1916 the Boards' total credit balances for both maintenance and rebuilding were only £143,000. Even if the whole of this sum—viz., £143,000—be regarded as available for rebuilding there is a deficit of £77,000 in the rebuilding fund, the money having been expended on purposes other than that for which it was appropriated. As a matter of fact, however, the sum of £143,000 shown to the credit of the Boards' building funds is not represented by money lying to the credit of the Boards. In many cases the credit balances are merely paper ones, the expenditure producing deficits on other accounts having been met by drawing upon the maintenance and rebuilding fund. One Board, for example, has used practically the whole of its nominal balance of £16,000 of maintenance and rebuilding money for other purposes; another Board has similarly used £5,000, and yet another £4,000. Again, in the case of two Boards recently incorporated in another district, £10,600 should have been in hand for rebuilding purposes, yet when their accounts were closed one Board, on all accounts, had a credit balance of only £250, and the other a debit balance of £500. The total sum of money provided originally for rebuilding and not now available is therefore well over £100,000.

The position, therefore, is somewhat serious, and in consequence the Government may be asked to provide twice over some of the money for rebuilding schools. It should be pointed out, however, that this result is not altogether due to the administration of Education Boards, but that it is in some measure due to inherent defects in the system itself, which has not worked so well as was anticipated. Indeed, there are so many inherent and administrative