

1877.

NEW ZEALAND.

BOYS' AND GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOLS, DUNEDIN.

(REPORT OF COMMISSION OF INQUIRY.)

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.*TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE MOST HONORABLE THE MARQUIS OF NORMANBY, GOVERNOR
OF NEW ZEALAND.

MY LORD,—

In pursuance of the Royal Commission issued by Your Excellency on the twentieth of September of the present year, appointing us to be Commissioners to examine and inquire into various matters and things therein specified relating to the Boys' and Girls' High Schools established in Dunedin, we have the honor to submit the following Report:—

We are enjoined by the terms of the above-mentioned Royal Commission to inquire into—

- (a.) The circumstances and causes which led to William Norrie, the late Rector of the said Boys' High School, resigning his said office as Rector.
- (b.) The condition and state of the said Boys' and Girls' High Schools, and the management and proposed management thereof by the Board of Education or by the Committee thereof, and generally into the management of the said schools and the proposed alteration in such management.
- (c.) Representations made that the action of the Board of the Education District of Otago (under whose control the said high schools are placed) has been arbitrary and unjust towards the Rector of the Boys' High School, and that the arrangements purposed respecting the future arrangements of the Girls' High School are such as to shake confidence in its future success.

The Commissioners have, in the performance of the duties imposed upon them, and in the exercise of the powers conferred upon them, examined the witnesses whose evidence is hereto appended. Those witnesses who testified to matters of fact were examined on oath; those who merely stated their opinions were not so examined.

Besides the evidence thus formally recorded, the Commissioners have had the advantage of hearing the opinions of various gentlemen interested in the success of the High Schools, who have, at informal interviews, furnished them with valuable suggestions upon the general subject not immediately within the scope of the inquiry.

The Commissioners, before opening the Commission, invited, by advertisement inserted in the local newspapers, those upon whose request your Excellency was pleased to issue the Commission to give any information which they might possess relating to the subject. In answer to this invitation a deputation from these memorialists waited on the Commissioners, and with them it was arranged that, with a view of putting the points at issue in a precise form, and in order to bring out distinctly the points of the case, the memorialists should be represented by a gentleman of the legal profession. At the request of the Education Board, a gentleman of the legal profession was also present to watch the case on its behalf. It was thought by the Commissioners that, under the circumstances, the inquiry would be more searching and the true facts more easily elicited if the investigation, during its continuance, were not altogether open to the public. It was the opinion of the Commissioners that the witnesses would speak more unreservedly if this method were adopted, and it was accordingly determined not to admit the reporters for the Press. Assurances were at the same time given, to all whose proceedings might be called in question, that they should have every opportunity of disproving or of explaining any evidence which might seem to impute blame to them.

There was, moreover, this further reason for not allowing the proceedings of the Commission to be published during the course of the inquiry. The Commissioners are charged with the duty of reporting direct to your Excellency, and they considered that there would be a certain impropriety in allowing the proceedings and evidence to go forth to the public in anticipation of the presentation of the report.

Besides taking oral evidence, the Commissioners devoted the whole of one day and the greater part of another day to inspecting the High Schools, so as to make themselves personally familiar with the practical work of the schools and the general arrangements for the accommodation of the pupils.

A certain amount of difficulty has been experienced in conducting the inquiry, owing to the want of precision in the representations made to your Excellency, and in the complaints brought forward. No definite statement of facts was before the Commissioners either in the Commission or in the memorial presented to your Excellency, and consequently a considerable portion of the evidence was taken rather for the purpose of ascertaining the exact points of the controversy than for enabling the Commissioners to decide upon them. Taking the questions referred to them in the order adopted in the Commission, the Commissioners proceed, firstly, to report upon the action of the Board towards the Rector.

The specific complaint against the Board may be summed up briefly as follows:—One of the masters (Mr. A. T. Smith) of the Boys' High School, early in July of the present year, having been selected as one of the football team in a match with the other cities of the colony, applied to Mr. Norrie for three weeks' leave of absence for the purpose of proceeding on this tour. Mr. Norrie acceded to this application, but at the same time requested Mr. Smith to inform Mr. Hislop, the Secretary of the Education Board, of the fact. It seems a question, perhaps not a very material one, whether this instruction was meant as an admission on the part of Mr. Norrie that he had no independent power of giving leave of absence without the concurrence of the Board, or whether it was a mere act of courtesy. Mr. Smith appears to have looked upon it in the latter sense. However, on going to Mr. Hislop's office for the purpose of reporting his intended absence, Mr. Smith was unable to meet him, and on the following day Mr. Hislop left for Wellington; but Mr. Smith did not think it necessary to inform Mr. Norrie of his failure to see the Secretary.

In Mr. Hislop's absence Mr. P. G. Pryde was appointed Acting Secretary, and, when the name of Mr. Smith appeared in the list of passengers for Auckland, he received instructions from two members of the Board to write to Mr. Norrie and ask whether the Mr. Smith mentioned in that list was the commercial master of the High School. The date of this letter was August 10. Mr. Norrie replied that it was; whereupon Mr. Pryde wrote again, as "by instructions," without stating who had instructed him, to inquire whether Mr. Smith had obtained leave of absence, and if so, from whom. Mr. Norrie replied that, before giving the information required, he wished to know by whose instruction Mr. Pryde acted in the matter. Mr. Pryde, in acknowledging this letter, merely said that it should be laid before the Board.

A special meeting of the Board was held on 15th August, at which Mr. Norrie's last letter, dated 13th August, was considered, and at that meeting a resolution was passed in the following terms:— "That Mr. Norrie be informed that the Education Board considers the contents of his letter of the 13th instant to be wanting in courtesy both to the Education Board and its Secretary; and that Mr. Norrie be again requested to furnish the information desired."

It is to be observed, in reference to this meeting of the Board, in the first place, that it was a special meeting, and as such, under the existing Act, could only "be convened by seven days' previous notice, to be given and published as the Board shall direct." Secondly, it does not appear that the Board has given any directions, as contemplated by the Act, for convening special meetings. Thirdly, this special meeting, inasmuch as it was held only two days after the occurrence considered at it, could not have been convened for the purpose of considering that occurrence. Fourthly, the reporters for the newspapers, who are generally in attendance at the meetings of the Board, seem not to have known beforehand of this particular meeting, consequently no report appears to have been given of it in the newspapers, and the first intimation to Mr. Norrie of the censure passed upon him was through the Acting-Secretary's letter.

It will probably be desirable, in order properly to judge of the Rector's position, and to estimate the influences at work in bringing about the present unsatisfactory state of affairs, to direct attention to some incidents in the previous history of the institution with which he is connected, and particularly to his previous relations with the Education Board and the Provincial Government. It appears that, on the resignation of his office as Rector by Mr. Norrie's predecessor, the Superintendent, acting on a resolution of the Provincial Council adopted on the previous vacancy, sent instructions to the Home Agent of the province, directing him, with as little delay as possible, to select and send out a gentleman properly qualified to fill the post. After considering the applications, which appear to have been numerous, the Home Agent selected Mr. Norrie, who had produced very satisfactory testimonials from gentlemen belonging to distinguished educational establishments in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

It may be here remarked that a variety of methods appears to have been adopted at different times for filling the post of Rector of the High School. In the year 1862 it was determined by the provincial authorities to remodel the Dunedin High School. In its earlier stages this institution appears to have been but little, if at all, superior to some of the existing district schools. It was proposed, therefore, on the occasion of the Rector vacating his office, to establish an institution to be called the High School of Otago, and to appoint to it masters qualified to impart instruction in those branches of knowledge the acquirement of which constitutes a liberal education. With this object in view, the selection of a thoroughly competent staff was intrusted to three gentlemen who were considered authorities in educational matters in the United Kingdom: the Provost of Eton, the Rector of the Edinburgh High School, and the Rector of the Edinburgh Academy. It appears that the first two Rectors were appointed by this machinery. The third Rector was selected in a different way, viz., "by advertisement or otherwise in the colonies;" failing which, the Home Agent was to "be instructed to select one without delay."—[Interim report presented to Provincial Council, 12th May, 1868, and agreed to.] Under the former of these methods Mr. Norrie's predecessor was appointed. Mr. Norrie himself was selected, as already mentioned, by the latter of these methods, namely—through the Home Agent. The terms of Mr. Norrie's appointment were somewhat different from those under which the former Rectors had been appointed. His

remuneration was fixed at a salary of £400 per annum, together with one-eighth of the fees; free residence, containing full accommodation for himself and his family, and also for about forty boarders, for whose board and lodging he was authorized to charge £40 per annum. His engagement was to continue for three years from the date of his landing in Dunedin; afterwards, the engagement to be terminable by six months' notice on either side.

It appears from Mr. Norrie's statement that he had been led to believe that the boarding establishment would produce a very large additional income. The provision to be made for forty boarders seems to imply an expectation that the boarding establishment would be a very important feature in the arrangement. It was a considerable disappointment to him to find on his arrival that there were no boarders at all, and the number seems never to have exceeded thirteen.

Mr. Norrie entered upon his duties on 13th April, 1875. He seems soon to have found that his expectations as to an addition to his income from the boarding establishment were not likely to be realized. On the contrary, he found that the boarding establishment, so far from being a source of income, caused him a positive loss. Upon this he proposed that he should be authorized to charge £60 instead of £40, or that his salary should be increased by £200. The Board agreed to authorize the charge of £52 10s on 3rd December, 1875. On the 16th May, 1876, in consequence of a private conversation between Mr. Norrie and Mr. Macandrew upon the loss incurred by the boarding establishment, a formal minute of the Board was passed to the effect that Mr. Norrie might, if he desired it, relinquish the boarding establishment, but that he was not to have any claim against the Government. On the 10th June, 1876, Mr. Norrie formally addressed the Board, referring to his understanding with the Home Agent, which had led him to believe that his total profit from salary and boarders would be about £1,000 per annum. He requested the Board to relieve him of the duty of keeping boarders and, as a compensation for the loss of anticipated profit, to increase his salary by £100 per annum. No decision appears to have been come to on this application till August following, when it was determined that the sum of £100 would be granted as "contribution to alleged loss up to 31st March, 1877."

On 27th June of the present year, Mr. Norrie, finding the boarding establishment still resulting in loss to himself, addressed a letter to the Board requesting to be relieved at once from the duty of keeping boarders. This letter appears to have been received at the Board room during or immediately after a meeting of the Board, while the members were still present, and it was agreed that it should be considered at a meeting to be held on the 10th July following. Accordingly on that date Mr. Gillies, Chairman of the Board, brought forward a scheme whereby arrangements could be made in view of Mr. Norrie's relinquishment of the boarding establishment.

Up to this time, it appears that the relations of Mr. Norrie and the Board were of a perfectly friendly nature. At least, Mr. Norrie does not seem to have had any specific cause of complaint against the Board, or against any of its members. There can, however, be little doubt that there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction in his mind with his position, and probably some feeling that he had been misled at Home as to his prospects here, and that the Board had not done its utmost to compensate him.

On 10th July, according to the arrangement made at the previous meeting, the Chairman of the Education Board brought forward his scheme for supplying Mr. Norrie's place in the boarding establishment, the material part of which was, that one of the teachers in the school should be charged with this part of the Rector's duty; that Mr. Norrie should vacate the Rectory; and that he should receive for house rent £120 per annum.

There is a slight discrepancy here in the evidence as to the occasion on which the name of the gentleman who was to take Mr. Norrie's place was first mentioned. It will be seen that this is not altogether an unimportant point, in considering the feelings and motives of the respective persons. One member of the Board states that this gentleman's name was not even mentioned until the 9th of July, that is, the day immediately preceding the meeting of the Board. Another says the name was suggested at the meeting held on the 27th of June. It seems quite clear that the former of these gentlemen is mistaken, for Mr. Norrie heard of the proposal on the 8th of July from the gentleman himself who it was proposed should succeed him. Mr. Norrie seems not unnaturally to have felt himself aggrieved that members of the Board, with whom he thought himself on friendly terms, and with whom he had had conversations in the interval, should have studiously, as he thought, kept him in the dark about the proposed future arrangements, and should not even have informed him whether his request to be relieved of the boarding-house would be agreed to.

But this passing feeling of irritation became very much intensified when the report of the proceedings of the Board appeared in the public prints. One member was reported to have made use of some very offensive expressions, and the whole tone of the speeches, as reported, was calculated to give pain. From the date of the appearance of that report the attitude of the Rector towards the Board was one of irritation and distrust. The Board itself, though not assuming an equally hostile position, can hardly be supposed to have felt itself on the same terms as before.

It is, however, only fair to the Board to state that, so soon as they became aware of the pain which the expressions used had given, they, or at least, individual members, took every means privately to remove the impression produced on Mr. Norrie's mind. It appears almost certain that the actual words complained of were, in fact, never used; and at the subsequent meeting of the Board the member who was reported to have made use of them submitted a written statement denying the accuracy of the reports in the papers, and handed it over to the reporters. Unfortunately, only a portion of this statement appeared in print, and it did not convey the idea of explaining the words specially complained of. In fact, the discussion, as reported, that followed the reading of this statement had rather the appearance of amounting to a reiteration of the objectionable phrases. It was in the heat of this irritation that inquiries were addressed to Mr. Norrie as to the authority by which leave was granted to one of the masters. Here, again, by an unfortunate accident, the Acting Secretary questioned Mr. Norrie, not simply in his capacity as Secretary, but as acting under instructions. Mr. Norrie, aware that the Board had had no meeting at which such instructions could have been

given, and being persuaded that these instructions could only have been given by an individual member or members of the Board, whose authority in their private capacity he did not recognize, was not disposed to give the explanations required. To use his own words, he "suspected a trap," and he was strengthened in this suspicion by the fact that he had instructed the master to whom leave was given to report the matter to the Secretary, and he had every reason to suppose that this had been done.

It is hardly necessary to go into the details of this quarrel, or to apportion exactly the praise or blame. The essential point is that, from a series of unfortunate accidents, a state of antagonism arose between the Board and the Rector, which completely put an end to all feelings of cordiality or desire of co-operation.

The Board, at its next meeting, caused a letter to be written to Mr. Norrie, of a somewhat intemperate and irritating character, to the effect that he was wanting in courtesy both to the Board and its Secretary, and this not because he had used discourteous language to the Board or its Secretary, but because he had questioned the right of the Secretary, without authority from the Board itself, to interfere in his administration of the school.

While, therefore, it appears that Mr. Norrie was unnecessarily suspicious, it can hardly be denied that the action on the part of the Board, and of some of its members, had a tendency (the Commissioners believe unintentionally) to keep up the irritation. Perhaps some part of the mischief is due to the laxity with which the proceedings of the Board were managed. The business was practically done, for the most part, by one or two members who happen to reside in or near Dunedin. During the sitting of the General Assembly a large proportion of the Board have been attending to their duties as members of the House of Representatives, and from various causes there are, out of eight members, only four available for meetings. Of these, two reside in Dunedin, and are, it appears, in the habit of giving directions to the Secretary and preparing the business to be transacted at the meetings. One of the other two comes into Dunedin on a Wednesday, and it seems to be understood that, whenever any business is to be transacted, a special meeting may be held on that day of the week. This understanding appears to serve in lieu of the notice required by the Act. Those who are not generally in the habit of attending do not, apparently, get any notice at all.

Thus special meetings are frequently held without the required notice having been given, and with no intimation of the special business for which the meeting is to be held. In short, although the ordinary meeting of the Board, as prescribed by the Act, is fixed for the last Wednesday in every month, yet a special meeting may be held and business of which no proper notices have been given may be transacted thereat on any Wednesday.

It appears that a Committee of the Board is in existence, which goes by the name of the High School Committee. This Committee, originally appointed for a special purpose, seems gradually to have become charged informally with the general administration of the High School. But, as this body is composed exclusively of those members of the Board who take an active share in the proceedings of the Board itself, it is not always easy to distinguish the action of the Board sitting as a Board from the action of the High School Committee sitting as a Committee. The only tangible distinction between the Board and the High School Committee appears to be that, while the Board's meetings are held in public and the discussions reported in the papers, the meetings of the Committee are not open to the public. This may possibly explain a feeling which prevails in some quarters, that the proceedings of the Board, and the discussions which there take place do not disclose the real grounds upon which the decisions are arrived at, nor the real arguments by which they are supported.

In the course of their inquiries the Commissioners have had incidentally brought to their notice circumstances connected with the relations between the Board and the teaching staff which point to the conclusion that there is a certain feeling of insecurity among those under engagement with the Board. Such a feeling, whether justified by facts or purely imaginary, cannot fail to have a detrimental effect upon the prosperity of the school.

It is alleged that one of the masters originally selected in England felt aggrieved because the Provincial Government had, as he considered, arbitrarily varied the terms of his agreement and placed him in a less advantageous position than that to which the agreement entered into in England entitled him. It is also alleged that that agreement was represented to him as not binding, and that the Government could cancel it without any compensation, should he refuse voluntarily to surrender his claim and accept the compensation offered. This, in conjunction with other minor matters occurring at a subsequent date, led to his resignation.

The truth of this allegation seems hardly to admit of a doubt from the fact that one of the masters appointed under the very same terms of engagement and at the same time was offered a similar alternative. The proposal made to this gentlemen was, to accept an appointment terminable upon notice, in lieu of his appointment for life, to submit to a reduction of his fixed salary in consideration of receiving a part of the fees, which it was assumed would be an equivalent for the amount lost in fixed salary, and to accept £450 as compensation. In this case, however, the gentleman concerned took legal advice, and, finding that his contract with the Government could be enforced, he refused to accede to the proposal.

Another source of disquietude seems to have been the political character of the Board. The Education Board, under the Provincial Government, was almost identical with the Provincial Government itself. It consisted of the Superintendent and his Executive Council, together with the Speaker of the Provincial Council. The Board, so constituted, laboured under two disadvantages which prevented it from effectively administering the High Schools or prescribing their operations. First, it was a political body, and as such liable to frequent changes. Second, the members who composed it, however useful as administrators, or however well fitted to act as heads of a political party, may reasonably be supposed not to have been specially fitted in all cases to organize and direct the system best adapted for imparting a liberal education.

As a matter of fact, it appears that, except in cases where political feeling was brought to bear, the Board did not, as a general rule, assume the functions of a governing body, but for the most part

left the entire management, so far as regards the High Schools, in the hands of the Rector and Lady Principal respectively. The result was, that these head teachers were made practically responsible for the success of the institutions intrusted to their care, although theoretically that responsibility rested with the Executive. Thus they were not under the control, at least not under any beneficial control, of an outside governing body, nor—what is equally important—were they subject to periodical inspections. In fact, they may be said to have been left altogether to themselves. The public had no means of knowing what their excellencies or defects might be, and there was no authority which could record the former or correct the latter. The consequence of this state of things appears to be that the public, in the absence of authoritative judgment upon the subject, formed its own opinion as to the merits of these institutions.

The Commissioners have been much struck with a fact which seems to bear out this assertion. In the interviews which they have had with those interested in the success of the High Schools they have observed that the main source from which these persons have derived their information as to the state of the High Schools is the report of the children attending them. They have no official document to appeal to, beyond the annual report furnished by the Rector, and are therefore compelled, in forming their judgment, to rely upon what they can pick up indirectly. Thus the public at large may be said to have gradually taken the place of a governing body.

But this censorship of the public has been attended with very lamentable results. It has not only been an annoyance to the teachers, and imputed blame where no blame was due, but it has also had the effect of actually standing in the way of beneficial reforms, from a fear that the motives for introducing those reforms might be misconstrued. The above remarks, though relating to the Boys' High School, are, except where they relate to special cases, applicable to the Girls' High School, and will probably explain much of the dissatisfaction which has been expressed with regard to that institution.

The Commissioners are of opinion that one great cause of alarm and anxiety on the part of the public is the dislike to the occurrence of constant changes, and the fear that every fresh emergency will be met by a general reorganization.

The Boys' High School, as has already been mentioned, has suffered greatly from a frequent change of Rectors, and now the Girls' School, which until lately has enjoyed some stability in its system, has also undergone, within the last eighteen months, two radical transformations, or, speaking more exactly, one transformation has taken effect, and the other is in contemplation. In both cases, the health of the Lady Principal has been the chief cause.

The circumstances which have given rise to the present state of embarrassment are, shortly, as follows:—The first break of continuity in the management of the Girls' High School took place in the year 1874, when the Lady Principal was compelled for a short time to obtain leave of absence, the temporary vacancy being filled by that lady's sister; but this slight interruption appears to have been of no material importance. The second change was one of more consequence. In the early part of last year (14th March, 1876), Mrs. Burn, finding that her strength was not equal to the discharge of her multifarious duties—the management of the boarding establishment, the superintendence of the school, and the teaching of her class—requested the Board to relieve her of the boarding establishment, and to appoint a competent person in her stead. On Mrs. Burn's recommendation, Mrs. Martin was appointed, and has continued to carry on the duties to the present time. At the above date, it appears that there were thirty-five boarders. Towards the end of the year (1876) Mrs. Burn recommended and the Board agreed to a further change. Till then it appears that there was no sewing-mistress in the school specially charged with the teaching of this branch. The duty was performed by the teaching-staff generally. Mrs. Burn desired to relieve the more experienced teachers of this duty, in order that they should devote themselves exclusively to the work of tuition properly so called. This plan would enable her to dispense with the services of the junior assistant, so that there would be no increase in the number of the staff. Mrs. Burn strongly recommended the appointment of Mrs. Browne as sewing mistress.

The relief afforded to Mrs. Burn by the transfer of the boarding establishment to Mrs. Martin seems to have been rendered nugatory by disadvantages hereinafter referred to.

In June of the present year Mrs. Burn resigned altogether. This resignation, on becoming generally known, seems to have had an injurious effect upon the school, for, whereas in the first quarter of 1877 the attendance was 173, it is now only 148; while the number of boarders in the former of these periods was 25, in the latter it was reduced to 16. This serious falling off in the number of her boarders induced Mrs. Martin to apply to the Board for some assistance, on the ground that she was a loser by the boarding establishment, at the same time intimating that, in case this application should not be acceded to, she would reluctantly be compelled to resign at Christmas. Thus the Board found itself confronted by a twofold difficulty of a very serious nature. It was required, in a comparatively short space of time, to find two ladies, with special qualifications, to fill the post, one of Lady Principal and the other of Lady Superintendent, hitherto occupied by Mrs. Burn and Mrs. Martin respectively.

The reasons which led to Mrs. Burn's final resignation were as follows:—First, shortly after Mrs. Martin's assumption of the care of the boarding establishment, Mr. Pope, on whose assistance as a teacher and organizer she specially relied, resigned his connection with the school; secondly, without in any way reflecting on Mrs. Martin's management, the separation of the boarding and teaching establishments under two independent leaders, yet under one roof, was not productive of satisfactory results as regards discipline; thirdly, having ceased to reside at the school, she was unable to exercise that constant and watchful supervision which had been customary, while the immediate proximity of the Boys' High School increased her anxiety in this respect. The scheme propounded by the Board contained the following main provisions:—

1. To reinstate Mr. Pope.
2. To appoint an efficient assistant, who should relieve the Lady Principal of all special class work.
3. To remove the Boys' High School to a more suitable position.
4. To place the boarding establishment again under the charge of the Lady Principal.

It will thus be seen that the carrying into effect of the first three of the provisions would not only remove the chief causes which had led to Mrs. Burn's resignation, but would also enable her to undertake the sole control of both departments of the school. This arrangement appears to offer a fair prospect of success, and to impose upon the Lady Principal duties not too onerous for one person.

The Commissioners are satisfied that the work originally undertaken by Mrs. Burn was too much for any one individual, and caused an over-straining of the energies, both mental and physical, such as could hardly be continued permanently. On the other hand, with the boarding and teaching departments under one roof, the discipline appears more likely to be maintained under an undivided authority than under two heads.

The Commissioners are therefore of opinion that, inasmuch as some change is inevitable, the arrangements proposed by the Board, in its main features, is the only one, under existing circumstances, that can effectually meet the emergency which has arisen.

Under a different phase of circumstances possibly it might be found beneficial to adopt the principle which, based on enlarged experience and enlightened culture, is gaining ground at Home, of having boarding establishments entirely apart from the school and presided over by lady superintendents appointed by the governing body. The advantages of this system are fully described in Miss Dalrymple's evidence.

The Commissioners, however, think that the system now established, or rather proposed to be established, apart from any consideration as to the persons who are to work it out, offers a reasonable expectation of permanence, and will thus obviate one great evil complained of—the necessity for radical changes in the future.

With regard to the condition of the High Schools, the Commissioners find that in both the number of pupils has fallen off very considerably within the last twelve months, for, whereas in the Boys' School the number had risen during 1876 from 159 to 194, they have, since December of that year to the present time, fallen from 194 to 174. In the Girls' School the highest number during 1876 was 195, while at the date of the Commissioners' visit the number was 148. This falling off, it is stated, may partly be accounted for by illness among the pupils, and, in the case of the Girls' School, is said to be attributable to Mrs. Burn's resignation. Still, in the opinion of the Commissioners, these causes do not account entirely for the whole of the loss. A similar falling off has taken place in the resident boarders, more particularly in the Girls' Department, where, from 28 in 1876, they have been reduced to 13. It is necessary to state this fact, but without drawing from it any inference to the prejudice of the teachers. On the contrary, the Commissioners believe that the work of the schools is being very efficiently performed.

So far as regards the Girls' School, the public generally appears to be contented with the results obtained in the teaching, and the Commissioners have been able to ascertain that a large number of the pupils who have passed through the school have done credit to their teachers in after life.

The buildings and accommodation, though not altogether large enough for the numbers in attendance, are not badly adapted for the work of the school. If the Boys' School were removed and the whole building devoted to the purposes of the Girls' School, the accommodation would be ample.

Here the Commissioners desire to draw your Excellency's special attention to a matter of most serious importance, and one which should be attended to with no unavoidable delay. In going over these buildings, a portion of which is used as the sleeping apartments for the girls, we were much struck with the length, narrowness, and intricacy of the passages from one part of the building to the other. It occurred to us that, should a fire break out while the girls were in their bedrooms, or, indeed, in any of the rooms not in the immediate neighbourhood of the entrance hall, the consequences might be most lamentable, and the loss of life very great, owing to the difficulty which the inmates would experience in threading their way through the passages, probably in a suffocating smoke, before they would be able to extricate themselves. We recommend that, if no better plan can be devised for removing this source of danger, a proper system of fire escapes should be provided, so as to give a more speedy egress than the entrance door, in the case supposed, would afford.

The building used for the purposes of the boys' day-school stands immediately adjoining the girls' boarding-house and day-school, or, rather the two establishments are in one and the same building, only divided from each other by a partition inside and a high fence outside. The two together are hardly sufficiently commodious for both, but would be admirably adapted for the Girls' School and boarding-house.

There is one very noticeable feature in connexion with the composition of the Boys' School. It is this: The great majority of the boys who attend it are those belonging to the lower forms, and learning elementary subjects. The upper school is supposed to consist of three forms, the sixth, the fifth, and fourth forms; but of these the sixth is altogether wanting, and out of a total of 174 boys there are only 20 in the fifth and fourth forms—6 boys in the fifth form and 14 in the fourth form. Even these are not doing very advanced work. The remaining 154 boys belong to the lower school, and the work which they are doing is not much, if at all, higher than that which is done in the better class district schools.

We have examined a return showing the number of boys attending the school in 1873, and their distribution into forms, and we find, on a comparison of the numbers there given with those at present in the school, that the highest standard then reached was much higher than it is now. At that time the total number of boys on the roll was 103; of these there were 36 in what then corresponded to the present upper school, or a little more than one-third, of whom 4 were in the sixth form, whereas, at the present time, there is no sixth form, and the number of boys in the upper school is a little more than one-ninth of the whole school.

It is said that one advantage of having a large number of boys in the lower classes is that, inasmuch as the fees paid by them more than cover the expenses of this part of the school, the surplus thus obtained goes to reduce the deficiency in the upper school. The fact, however, remains, that the school affords a high class education to a very small proportion of those who attend.

This preponderance of boys engaged in elementary studies, and the small proportion under instruction in higher subjects, is attributed, by those whom the Commissioners have questioned, to a variety of causes. The general opinion, with which the Commissioners are inclined to agree, appears to be that the early age at which students are admitted to the classes in the University of Otago induces those who wish to proceed to a higher course of study to obtain their instruction at that institution, and thus that many of those who would in former times have remained at the High School, now pursue their studies at that University. It is said that one great inducement to do this is that, as many of the University classes are held in the morning and in the evening, or at times which do not interfere with business, those who wish to enter employment may do so, and yet not give up their studies.

Besides this, it is alleged that the establishment of grammar schools in various parts of the country, which are supposed to give nearly, if not quite, as good an education as that obtained in the High School, prevents many from attending who would otherwise probably do so.

It is right to state, however, that Dr. Stuart, whose opinions are entitled to the highest respect, does not agree with the above view. He thinks that the High School should not be considered and does not, in fact, act as a feeder to the University. His opinion is, that the two work, and ought to work, independently of each other. In Scotland, as he states, one-half of the students at the universities come from the country, and have had no opportunities of attending other than parish schools. But these parish schools, in many cases, are under masters who have graduated at the universities, and are thus capable of giving to their scholars a liberal education. The parish schools, he says, feed the Scotch universities, and he thinks that we should look to the same source here. The High School, in his opinion, should only aim at giving a good school education, apart from the ulterior object of preparing young men for the University.

Mr. George Bell, Chairman of the Dunedin School Committee, in the letter attached to this report, dated 24th October, 1877, on the other hand, suggests that the district schools should act as educational feeders to the High School, which in its turn should train its students for the University; and the same text books and class of instruction, leading up to this result, should be adopted by all the district schools. This suggestion presents matter for serious consideration, for it appears, as a matter of fact, that the High School is, so to say, overlapped in its teaching at both ends—by the Grammar and District Schools from below and by the University from above.

The present site of the Boys' School is another disadvantage under which it labours. There is no provision worthy of the name for a playground for the boys when out of school, and the consequence is that, when not occupied by their lessons, they lounge about, without having anything to interest or amuse them. It is hardly to be expected that they can, under such wearying influences, acquire a liking for the school, or feel any pride or pleasure in connection with it.

We could not help observing that the masters seem to think that after they have done their teaching work in the classes all their duties are accomplished, and that they have nothing further to do with the boys. We think that the intercourse between the boys and the masters should not end here, and that, if the masters mixed more with the boys and showed themselves interested in their pleasures and amusements, as well as in their school work, they would, supposing them to be men of refined minds, exercise an influence for good which could not fail to have a beneficial effect.

There is one hour in the middle of the day allowed for luncheon and relaxation. The boys, during this interval, are left entirely to themselves. They may do what they like, and go where they like. It seems very desirable that some order and regularity should be observed, and we think that this would be promoted if a regular luncheon were prepared, at a trifling cost, by the caretaker of the establishment, or some other suitable person, and that the boys should sit down to a decent table. It might also be arranged that one of the masters should be on the spot with the boys when out of school.

These matters may appear of trivial importance in themselves, but we cannot help thinking that trifles such as these have much to do with the tone of the school, and that the observance of some decorum conduces greatly to that sense of propriety and good feeling which, judging from the evidence on this point, appears to be wanting. While on this point the Commissioners may mention that, though it might not be considered an essential part of their instructions under the Commission, they considered it advisable to visit the Dunedin Normal School, under the control of Mr. W. Fitzgerald, and were much struck by the discipline and demeanour of the boys and girls at this establishment, in recording their appreciation of which they have no doubt that the pleasure and satisfaction they experienced in visiting an educational institution so ably conducted is shared by the parents whose children possess the advantage of Mr. Fitzgerald's instruction and supervision.

Proceeding from the internal arrangements to the question of outside control and management, it will be seen from what has been said above that the present system is, for many reasons, defective.

In the first place there is no such thing as a regular periodical inspection, and consequently faults in the organization and teaching very rarely come to the ears of those intrusted with the duty of supervision otherwise than by common rumour.

There is one difficulty in the way of thorough inspection, at least of that part of it which consists in examination. The variety of subjects taught and the high standard attained, or proposed to be attained, in these subjects by the upper school renders it necessary that the Inspector should be proficient in all, but this can hardly be expected, under ordinary circumstances, if the duty is performed by a single person. For this reason, it appears desirable that, instead of one Inspector, there should be appointed a Board of Inspectors, or at least examiners, who would be able to speak with authority as to the attainments of the pupils in each branch.

The present Board which now acts as a governing body is, for several reasons, not well fitted for the work.

In the first place, it appears to us that special qualifications are required for directing the course of studies and guiding the whole system of a higher education, which are not necessarily possessed by members of an Education Board constituted as the present one is.

In the second place, the governing body should have the means and qualifications necessary for appointing Inspectors, and judging from their reports as to the measures best fitted for increasing the efficiency of the school.

In the third place, there should be no doubt in the public mind as to the thorough acquaintance of the governing body with the nature of the work to be required.

Fourthly, the governing body should be able to act independently on its own convictions, and should therefore not have in any way a political character, so as to be bound by political ties.

Fifthly, the governing body should be so constituted as to be qualified to sympathize and advise with the headmaster in any doubts or difficulties which he might encounter in his school work.

We do not enter into the question of the mode in which the governing body should be constituted, but we think that in creating such a body principles of the nature here sketched out should be kept in view.

It has, however, been suggested that the services of the University officers—either of the Professorial Board, or of a Board appointed by the authorities of the University—would possess the requirements here mentioned, and would be able to give such a direction to the course of study in the school as would lead up to the University.

Another important consideration would be the precise definition of the headmaster's position in relation to the governing body. It would probably be desirable that the headmaster should alone be responsible for the efficiency of the school, and consequently that his authority in the work of the school, the classification of the pupils, and the whole internal management should not be questioned by the governing body. We think that even the appointment and dismissal of assistant masters should be in his hands.

On the other hand, the governing body should prescribe the general course of studies to be pursued, and possibly decide upon the branches to which the greatest attention should be devoted; but, having done this, they should hold the headmaster responsible for the results, and leave him to work them out.

This strict definition of powers would have the effect of preventing petty interferences and consequent bickerings, inasmuch as it would prevent either party from trenching on the province of the other.

It would be well, too, that in case any collision should occur, or in case of exception being taken by the governing body to any thing done by the master, the boys and the public generally should not have cognizance of the occurrence, so that the headmaster's consideration in the school should not be lowered. In order to effect this the discussions of the governing body on the affairs of the school should not be held in public, nor, of course, should the reporters for the newspapers be admitted.

The present Rector having resigned his charge the office will become vacant in about six months. It will therefore be necessary to fix upon some plan for appointing a successor. The Commissioners would strongly recommend that a plan similar to that by which the first two Rectors were chosen should be adopted in the present case, and that a Board should be appointed in the United Kingdom who should select some properly qualified person. This Board should consist of persons thoroughly conversant with the management of public school work, and they should be instructed to select a Rector possessing some such qualifications as the following:—

1. He should be a gentleman of refined taste and manners.
2. He should be a graduate of some distinction.
3. He should have had experience in the work of a public school.
4. He should have tact and judgment sufficient to enable him to keep the school under proper control, and to adapt the experience gained at Home to the altered circumstances in which he would find himself.

At the present time the schools are supported by grants received from the Education Board and by the fees of the pupils. The sum required for their maintenance is somewhat over £5,000, and the revenue by fees is a little less than £3,000, so that a little more than £2,000 over and above the fees is required to be granted by the Education Board. But it appears that the Girls' School is very nearly, if not entirely, self-supporting; therefore, the whole excess of expenditure over the income derived from fees must be debited to the Boys' School.

It would probably be desirable, in case our recommendations to put these schools under a separate control should be adopted, that they should also have a separate and independent source of revenue. At present grants are made to them out of the general fund available for education purposes. Part of that fund, we are informed, consists of the revenue from endowments. It might be worth considering whether a part of these endowments might not be permanently allocated to the High Schools, and put under an independent management, the governing body being the trustees.

There are various matters of detail which would have to be considered by the governing body, the determination of which would very much depend upon the character to be impressed on the school.

If, for instance, it is decided that the Boys' High School should be more distinctly an institution for superior education, and that the course of study should be essentially different from and superior to that pursued at district schools, then it would be desirable that provision should be made for excluding boys who had not reached a certain standard of attainments. In this case the entrance examination, which at one time applied to the whole school, would be reverted to, and admission to the upper school would be guarded by a more severe examination than that which at present obtains.

The fees at present payable are exceptionally low, being only forty shillings a quarter, and provide a very small proportion of the whole expenditure. We are inclined to think that if the scale of fees were raised there would, in the long run, be no sensible falling off in the attendance, because those who left on account of the expense would probably be replaced by others of a class whose parents would be willing to make the sacrifice in order to keep their sons at a well-conducted school. Probably in time the numbers would greatly increase, because admission to the High School would become an object of ambition, if the tone of the school were raised.

In order to effect this, however, the greatest care should be exercised in the selection of the Rector, whose duty it ought to be to place on the staff teachers who would not only impart instruction, but would also introduce into the school that important part of education—

self-restraint and propriety of demeanour. It must be remembered that no time should be lost in taking steps to reorganize the school. Whatever plan may be devised it is essential that it should be given effect to at once. The Girls' High School will, at Christmas, have hardly any teachers at all, for they have nearly all resigned, in consequence of some anonymous letters in the newspapers. There will be no Lady Principal, Mrs. Burn having obtained leave of absence, absolutely necessary on account of her health; while the Rector's engagement ceases in April next.

Another important matter for consideration, and one which requires an early decision, relates to the site of the Boys' High School. It is very desirable that this portion of the High School should be removed to a more suitable site, with sufficient land surrounding it to allow of a proper playground being laid out. It has already been said that this removal is very essential to the well-being of the Boys' School itself, but it is almost if not quite as important to the proper conduct of the Girls' School.

It is hardly within our province to point out a site, but we may state that we have heard it suggested that the ground now occupied for the purposes of the Lunatic Asylum will soon be available, owing to the removal of that institution, and that that site would fulfil every requirement.

In concluding this report, we think it due to the authorities of the school to express our opinion that the defects which we have pointed out, as well as the unpleasant state of affairs which has arisen, are to be attributed not so much to shortcomings in individuals as to faults inherent in the system. Any defects in discipline are probably due (where the great bulk of the scholars are day scholars) rather to influences outside the school than to any bad management in the school itself, which makes it more imperative that the internal conduct of the school—its social amenities and its general tone—should be matters of grave consideration for those intrusted with its charge.

Witness our hands this 3rd day of November, 1877.

HENRY JOHN TANCRED,	} Commissioners.
W. FRASER,	
WALTER H. PEARSON,	

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