

SOUTHLAND.

SIR,—

Invercargill, 31st March, 1880.

In accordance with section 102 of the Education Act I have the honor to submit the following report of the proceedings of the Education Board of the District of Southland for the year ending 31st December, 1879:—

THE BOARD.—At the beginning of the year the Board consisted of Thomas M. Macdonald, Esq. (Chairman), the Hon. Dr. Menzies, George Lumsden, Esq., E. C. Sproull, Esq., Thos. Denniston, Esq., Alfred Baldey, Esq., James S. Shanks, Esq., John Morrison, Esq., and John O. McArdell, Esq. The retiring members for the next year, as decided by ballot, are Messrs. Macdonald, Denniston, and Sproull. The Board holds its meetings on the first Friday in each month. It has, therefore, held twelve meetings during the year, the average attendance at which was 6.25, an average by no means small when it is taken into account that two members were necessarily absent during the whole of the Parliamentary session.

SCHOOLS.—During the year ten new schools have been opened, namely, South School, Invercargill, North Invercargill, Gladstone, South Forest Hill, Ryal Bush, Lumsden, Fairlight, Knapdale, Hedgehope, and Otatara Bush. Schools have also been erected at Chatton, Waikaia, and Pembroke, which are now completed and will be in operation early in the year. New school districts have, on the petition of the residents, been constituted at Heddon Bush and Pukerau, but the Board has not yet seen its way to erect schools in these localities. Applications for the defining of new districts and the erection of schools have been received from Waikaka, Waimea Plains, Otamea, Oreti Plains, and Wrey's Bush, all of which are under the consideration of the Board. The schools at Kingston and Waikaia Flat have been closed on account of the small attendance and the unwillingness of the residents to subsidize the teacher's salary. Owing to the removal of almost all the inhabitants at Switzers to the adjacent plains, the school there has been closed, and as, has already been stated, a new school has been erected at the township of Waikaia, where there is now a large settled population. The schools at Riverton, Woodlands, Limehills, and Groper's Bush, having been found on inspection to be so dilapidated as to be incapable of repair, new buildings were found to be necessary. At Riverton, after the closing of the South School, the accommodation at the old school was found to be quite inadequate and ill-adapted to the educational requirements of this rising town. The erection of a new school capable of accommodating 300 pupils was therefore resolved on; it was completed some months ago at a cost of £1,130. Several important alterations on the furniture, and arrangement of the classrooms, in order to improve the organization and distribute more equally the work of the staff, are being made at the District High School. The over-crowded state of the South School has rendered necessary an extension capable of accommodating 100 pupils. The works at both schools are in satisfactory progress, and it is expected that the rooms will be ready for occupation at the close of the holidays. Some of the older schools of the district are rapidly falling into decay, and to execute extensive permanent repairs on them would be spending money to no good purpose. Next year it will, no doubt, be found necessary to replace the oldest and most dilapidated of them by new erections. The numerous and urgent demands made upon the Board have exhausted the means at its disposal, and many applications have been left to be dealt with during the next financial year. It is evident that a large expenditure will annually be required to make satisfactory provision for the wants of the increasing population. The total amount expended on school buildings during the year was £8,927 15s. 8d., of which a detailed statement of the exact amount spent in each school district is shown in Table I.

SCHOOL STATISTICS.—A complete abstract of the school statistics of the district is presented in table II, appended to this report, in which are shown the area of each school, the number of children at the beginning and end of the year, the number on the roll, and the strict and working average attendance for each quarter. The following comparative table of school statistics shows the numbers on the roll and the average attendance at the end of 1878 and 1879.

ATTENDANCE.

		Schools in Boroughs.		All other Schools.	
		On Roll.	Average.	On Roll.	Average.
1878	1,338	1,128	1,562	1,379
1879	2,092	1,701	2,087	1,747
Increase	...	754	573	515	368

The increase in the number on the roll and in average attendance at the schools in boroughs is 56 and 50.8 per cent. respectively; and that in the number on the roll, and in average attendance at all the other schools is 59 and 27 per cent. respectively. The increase in the number of children in attendance is chiefly in the junior division of the schools, the per centage under and above 10 years of age, being 48 and 33 respectively..

The increase in the three lower standards of education, including infants, is 57 per cent., while that in the three upper standards is only 13 per cent.

In all the subjects of instruction, with the exception of domestic economy, the increase of scholars is very marked. From reading to history inclusive, the increase is 40.5 per cent, while in all the other subjects the increase is no less than 204 per cent. From the great increase in the number of children learning the last six subjects prescribed by section 84 of the Act, (viz., science, drawing, object lessons, vocal music, needlework, and domestic economy) it may be inferred that the teachers are now alive to