

free from any local or general epidemic, such as has so frequently been made accountable for irregular attendance. The practice of closing a school upon the slightest indication of any infectious disease in the neighbourhood seems to me to be very undesirable on many accounts, and would certainly be unnecessary if parents would have more regard for the public safety than for their own convenience, and would keep all their children from school when any member of the family appeared to be suffering from an infectious disease. As a rule, the sanitary conditions of the public schools and offices are, to say the least, quite equal to those of any of the children's homes, and, perhaps, superior to most; and there would probably be far less risk if the children of healthy families continued their attendance at school, instead of idling their time away at home, or, possibly, running from house to house and mixing up with children from infected families. At one period of the year the Kumara School was kept open during the prevalence of an infectious disease, and no evil consequences resulted; but the average attendance was reduced considerably during the time the epidemic prevailed, and probably the results of the examination were thereby affected, since it will be observed that they are slightly lower than last year. There is little doubt that Committees, in closing schools under the circumstances referred to, are actuated as much by the fear of a great falling-off in the average attendance as by any real apprehensions of danger; and, as their incomes are affected by the fluctuations in the attendance, it would be unreasonable to expect teachers to offer any great objection to the course usually followed.

*Furniture and Buildings.*—The furniture generally is in a fair state of preservation. In some schools the teachers take a laudable pride in preserving the desks, &c., clean and uninjured: this is particularly noticeable at Bluespur and Arahura Road; but the desks used by the Fifth and Sixth Standards at the Hokitika School are a standing disgrace to all concerned. They are carved and hacked about in a manner which defies description, and show either that the scholars have been very imperfectly overlooked while in school, or, which is equally culpable, that they have been left for long intervals without any supervision whatever. The cupboards or presses provided for the teachers' use are too frequently allowed to remain in a very untidy condition. This may appear to some to be a very trifling matter to allude to in a report of this nature; but those who remember how far more powerful example is than precept will readily perceive how slovenly habits may be unconsciously developed from a constant association with such examples at school. The school buildings throughout the district, which had fallen into a sad state of disrepair, have been mostly put into a decent condition, and now present a very creditable appearance. There are exceptions to this—notably the South Spit School, which is, and long has been, in a very disgraceful state. The school at the Upper Kokatahi is much overcrowded, and additional accommodation will have to be provided, unless the Board should decide to adopt the plan recommended in my original report on that district, and establish one central school in place of the two small ones now existing. The buildings could be removed to some central spot, and a school of between fifty and sixty children would be created, which would enable the Board to offer a salary acceptable to an efficient teacher, as well as to provide a female assistant, whose services would also be available as teacher of needle-work.

The destruction of the Hokitika School by fire early in the present year was a great calamity for the town and district; but, if it should result in the erection of a more durable structure, it may ultimately prove a benefit. Whatever material may be employed, I would suggest that, if the same ground plan be adhered to, the eastern wing should be without a partition, so as to enable two classes to be accommodated in the one room, under the charge of one of the chief teachers.

*Registers.*—The registers are, on the whole, very neatly and carefully kept. Occasionally I find the admission register not posted up to date, or the weekly totals not entered up, as they ought to be, on Friday after school time; but it is long since I discovered any serious error in the keeping of the attendance registers. The quarterly returns are sometimes delayed unnecessarily, and considerable trouble is caused thereby. One teacher neglected to forward the return for December until the end of the Christmas vacation, and, consequently, the "Summary of Attendance Returns" could not be transmitted to Wellington until the end of the following month.

*Pupil-teachers.*—Seventeen pupil-teachers were examined this year, as heretofore, at the schools wherein they are employed. Of these, six passed into the first class, four of them passing with credit; two into the second class; six into the third class, one with credit; and three into the fourth class, one with credit. A pupil-teacher who gains 75 per cent. and upwards of the possible marks obtainable on the whole examination is said to pass with credit. Notwithstanding the frequent recommendations made by most of the Education Boards, there seems to be some insuperable objection on the part of the Department to its undertaking the examination and classification of pupil-teachers throughout the colony; I will therefore repeat the recommendation I have already made on several occasions—namely, that all the pupil-teachers in the district should be examined at the same time and place, which might be made to coincide with the annual examination of teachers. Of course this would entail some expense to the Board, as it would hardly be fair to put pupil-teachers who reside at a distance from Hokitika to the expense of four or five days' stay in town whilst attending the examination; but, as nearly half of them reside in Hokitika, the expense would not be very great—probably under £30—whilst the advantages are obvious. The employment of stipendiary monitors, which was provisionally sanctioned by the Minister of Education, has so far answered my expectations; and I believe the system, with some slight modifications, might in time be made to supersede the employment of pupil-teachers at all but the four largest schools. There are now eight such monitors employed at four schools, which, judging from the result of the examination, have certainly not suffered by the change; whilst the saving to the Board will amount to £450 in the five years during which most pupil-teachers serve—an average saving of £90 per annum. This estimate includes the cost of instruction and the maximum annual bonuses for passing with credit payable under the present regulations. This saving in a scattered district with so large a proportion of small schools is by no means to be despised, and might be applied to the increase