

HAWKE'S BAY.

SIR,—

Education Office, Napier, 31st January, 1887.

At the close of the ninth year of my inspection of the schools in this education district I have again the honour to submit, for your information, a summary report upon the progress of education generally, but more particularly upon the work done in the schools under my inspection during the year ended the 31st December ultimo.

SCHOOLS IN DISTRICT.—The number of schools open for inspection remains the same as at the date of my last report. Of the thirty-nine schools established, five are in the Patangata County, fourteen in Waipawa, ten in Hawke's Bay, three in Wairoa, and seven in the County of Cook. Twenty-nine of the schools are in charge of head masters, and the remaining ten have each a competent mistress as principal teacher. In twenty-two schools the average attendance warrants the appointment of either assistant teachers or pupil-teachers, or of both. At the close of the school year ten assistant masters, twenty-five assistant mistresses, and fifty-five pupil-teachers were employed in the schools.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS.—With few exceptions I am able to report that the school buildings are in excellent repair, many improvements of a substantial character having been carried out during the year by the School Committees, partly at their own expense, and partly by means of special grants. It is seldom that I have had occasion to complain of the untidiness of a schoolroom, and I find that much more care is being taken by teachers than was formerly the case with the school apparatus and appliances which are so bountifully provided for all schools. As remarked by me last year, some of the teachers take pleasure in making their rooms models of neatness and arrangement, and I am at one with them in their aspirations in this direction, for it seems to me that few things have a more lasting effect upon children than neatness, good order, and arrangement. They are school virtues which, though not measurable by percentages, have yet a high moral and social effect, and this is no small matter in the training and bringing up of a nation of children. Among the best ordered and arranged schools I would name Makatoku, Waipukurau, Waipawa, Wairoa, Napier Infants', Gisborne Infants', Taradale, and Hastings Infants', as being worthy of special praise.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE.—Although there has been no increase in the number of Board schools, the increase in the school attendance is very marked, the attendance for the year having averaged 8·3 per cent. over that of 1885; and, had not sickness caused the absence of many children from school during the second half of the year, the increase in the attendance would have reached a much higher rate. At the close of the school year 5,052 names were returned as attending school, or an increase of nearly four hundred compared with the corresponding quarter of 1885. The accommodation provided for this number of children amounted to 46,320 square feet, or an average, if equally distributed through the schools, of nine square feet for each pupil. This, of course, is much below the actual school needs of the district, but, further provision having recently been authorised, the overcrowding in several of the larger schools will soon be materially lessened, if not actually met. Compared with the school attendance, the accommodation which will shortly be provided will place the district in a better position, relatively, than it has occupied since the passing of the Education Act; but even then it will still be lower than I think it should be, considering the school population for which the Board is responsible. There are now five districts where the number of children of school age warrants the erection of schools—viz., Tolaga Bay and Te Karaka, in Cook County; and Blackburn, Upper Maunga-atua, and West Maunga-atua, in Waipawa County. But, in addition to these places, it would seem that there are large numbers of children scattered through the several school districts who have never yet been influenced by the establishment of Board or other schools. According to the census of population taken during the year, there are 7,500 children of school age in this education district, exclusive of Maoris; but, as pointed out above, only 5,052 names were enrolled as attending school at the end of the year, and it is certain that less than five hundred were attending private schools at the same date. The two thousand absentees are not so situated that they cannot attend school; but the fact is, that the compulsory attendance clause of the amended Education Act of 1885 is practically dead, for the reason that, all the larger schools being full, the School Committees have realised the incongruity of a position which requires them to enforce attendance when, at the same time, barely sufficient room is obtainable for the children who are already attending school. In any case it is to be regretted that, after the lapse of so many years of education work, only eleven out of every fifteen of the school population in the education district can be accounted for as attending school, whilst at the same time school provision has only been made for forty-six out of every seventy-five of the children liable to attend.

MAORIS AT SCHOOL.—I am pleased to report the continued increase in the attendance of Maori pupils at the district schools during the year, and, as far as I can gather, the increase is likely to continue. It would appear that the Maoris do not take kindly to the purely Native schools, and when the more intelligent among the Maori parents have the opportunity of sending their children to the district schools they gladly do so. In nineteen districts Maori pupils are to be found in the schools working as diligently and, on the whole, as successfully as the European children. From careful observation I am convinced that the attendance of Maori pupils at the district schools is greatly to their advantage, and it is certainly no disadvantage to the European children, as some persons seem to imagine; besides, it is a phase of Maori progress which, in my judgment, is worthy of encouragement. At the close of the year 5 per cent. of the children attending the district schools belonged to the Maori race.

PAST YEAR IMPORTANT.—Considered from an educational point of view, the past year has been one of special interest and importance to those engaged in school work. For the first time since the passing of the Education Act in 1877, great and important changes have been made in the standard syllabus of instruction, as authorised to be taught in the district schools. The new standards came into operation at the beginning of the year, and all schools throughout the colony