

much the amount would be I cannot well say, but I may roughly state two items: (a.) The expense of labour saved by using one series of examination papers throughout the colony, instead of a different series in each district, would fall little short of £500. (b.) The Inspectors being graded in some such order as Inspector-General, Senior Inspectors, and Assistant Inspectors, and one Inspector with two assistants being put in charge of a district containing from 18,000 to 20,000 pupils, a reduction of about £2,000 could be effected in salaries. Assistants, acting under the supervision of Senior Inspectors, would thus be employed to do a considerable portion of the work at present intrusted to higher-salaried officials—a change that would prove beneficial, especially to the country schools, if the assistants were chosen from the ranks of the most promising young teachers.

(2.) A local authority would have to be established somewhat similar to the present School Committees, but shorn of a great deal of the power which these bodies have hitherto been allowed to exercise. This body might, I think, with advantage, be made to correspond in constitution and functions to the Boards of Advice in Victoria.

(3.) The school buildings would be erected under the direct control of the department. A check would thus be given to all tendency to extravagance under this head.

4. Alterations to improve the Syllabus: I think the Syllabus capable of great improvement:—

(a.) By reducing the number of pass subjects to four in Standards I. and II., and to five in the higher Standards, viz.:—Standards I., II.: 1. Reading; 2. Spelling and dictation; 3. Writing; 4. Arithmetic. Standards III. to VI.: The same, with the addition of (5) Grammar and composition.

(b.) By adopting the present group of class subjects, but restricting geography and drawing entirely to this group.

(c.) By grading the schools so as to relieve the smaller schools from the over-pressure put upon them: (1) Grade school, in which two class subjects shall be compulsory; (2) grade school, in which three class subjects shall be compulsory; (3) grade school, in which all subjects shall be compulsory.

(d.) By making provision for grouping standards in the first grade school for instruction in class subjects.

According to this scheme geography and drawing are withdrawn from the pass group, and in small schools fewer subjects are taken up and greater facilities are afforded for grouping classes. By this means I would hope to obtain a much higher standard of proficiency in the real elementary subjects. At present the Inspector, keeping in view the fact that the results of his examination must give a classification of the school that will prove suitable for purposes of instruction, is frequently compelled to ignore the regulation that makes failing in one subject a failure for the standard; and in some of the most important subjects, notably reading and writing, he has to reduce his pass-mark to a very low level of merit indeed. That is, he rewards the imperfect treatment of a subject by giving the pass, and thus he perpetuates teaching which produces work of very indifferent quality.

By the adoption of (c) and (d) it would be possible to effect a considerable reduction in the teaching staff in most of the districts. In this district alone a saving in salaries, amounting to between £2,200 and £2,500, could be made without in any way impairing the efficiency of the schools.

I have, &c.,

James G. Wilson, Esq., M.H.R.,
Chairman, Education Committee,
House of Representatives, Wellington.

L. B. Wood, M.A.,
Inspector of Schools.

Mr. W. FIDLER to the CHAIRMAN, Education Committee.

SIR,—

Board of Education, Auckland, 25th November, 1887.

I have the honour to reply to yours of the 10th instant, containing four questions *re* the working of the Education Act.

Answer to Question 1: I consider it cruelty to children to keep them in school for about four hours a day at such a tender age as that from five to six. The kindergarten system, where the children are not under such physical restraint as when they are taught, as at present, in the infant-rooms, is best suited for the teaching of such young children; but it is impracticable for the State to adopt this method generally in its schools without great expense.

A child will, in my opinion, learn quite as much from six to nine as from five to six, and will on entering his tenth year be a healthier child if he has not been sent to school before six.

The attempt to stimulate too soon the intellectual faculties, and to bring to nerve what should be shared by the whole system, is especially disastrous to those children whose muscular powers are most likely to be called on in later life.

Answer to Question 2: In the abstract, I believe that the primary-school curriculum should be free throughout to all, and that this matter of education is one in which a State might well err on the side of liberality; but justice should precede liberality.

In the present state of the finances of the colony, when it is evident that some reduction should be made in the cost of education, and when it seems that the sooner a reasonable adjustment takes place the less will the whole fabric be likely to be seriously affected, I am inclined to express my opinion in favour of the imposition of fees in Standards V. and VI. as one of the means by which a reduction in the cost may be made. The fee-system in these standards could be done away with when the cause which brought about its introduction ceased.

Those who will be able to allow their children to remain at school until they reach Standard V. will for the most part be able to pay fees for the education of such of their children as they wish to have taught in these higher standards, so that there would be little difficulty in the matter of the recovery of fees in such classes (Standards V. and VI.).