

There stands disclosed this startling fact: THAT IF THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS, UNDER THEIR EDUCATION SYSTEMS, HAD SPENT NO MONEY WHATEVER UPON THE ERECTION OF SCHOOL-BUILDINGS, THE GOVERNMENT OF THE COLONY, SINCE THE PASSING OF THE EDUCATION ACT, HAS PROVIDED £90,000 MORE THAN WAS NECESSARY TO ERECT BUILDINGS OF A LASTING AND DURABLE CHARACTER (IN BRICK OR STONE), AND SUFFICIENT IN NUMBER AND CAPACITY, TO ACCOMMODATE THE LARGEST ATTENDANCE OF CHILDREN YET RECORDED IN THE PUBLIC-SCHOOL HISTORY OF THIS COUNTRY. It will be asked, What has been done with the money? It forms no part of this analysis to furnish an answer to that question. All that is sought to be established is that the Government of the country has provided sufficient means to meet all the educational building requirements of the colony. That it has done so is indubitable. But it is not desired to apply the deduction with undue severity, or to subject these too-evident conclusions to an unnatural strain. As has been before stated, New Zealand is a country difficult to deal with educationally, just as it is difficult to deal with in regard to roads, railways, post-offices, and telegraph-offices. In addition to the difficulties which the physical features of the country present, prices of material and labour vary in different districts. But these are not the causes which account for the excessive waste in the administration of the building grants; for that there has been excessive waste nobody will venture to deny. The causes are want of some general plan to govern the erection of school-buildings throughout the colony; want of system in the expenditure; want of general supervision over the erection of buildings by some competent and experienced person whose business it should be to see that school-buildings are placed where they are required, and only where they are required, and that they are erected upon a model plan to be furnished by the Central Department, so that the schools may be erected at a standard minimum cost. It is clear that the Central Department, which provides the finance, should possess more effective control. These figures for the past year (1887) illustrate the unsystematic manner in which schools have been erected:—

	Schools open, 1887.	Number of Pupils, 1887.
Auckland	221	17,219
Taranaki	35	1,800
Wanganui	76	5,265
Wellington	71	7,417
Hawke's Bay	45	4,453
Marlborough	31	1,311
Nelson	88	4,186
Grey	20	1,241
Westland	24	1,532
North Canterbury	154	15,935
South Canterbury	49	3,632
Otago	183	19,479
Southland	96	6,119
	<hr/> 1,093	<hr/> 89,589

Clearly, in the case of Auckland it must be a waste of money to erect so many small schools, to say nothing of the waste of teaching-power which the creation of so many schools must involve. And it must be equally clear that, loud as is the cry for more school accommodation in some districts, there is a vast amount of school space provided (taking the colony as a whole) which is not and cannot be utilised; for the square-foot measure of flooring in school- and class-rooms at the 31st December, 1887, is reported (according to the returns furnished to the department) as 1,270,614 square feet—sufficient floor-space to accommodate 127,061 children, with the liberal allowance of 10 square feet per child. Yet, according to the “working average” for the year (1887), the number to be accommodated was 89,589. Thus we have this extraordinary position: that, although there is in some districts a loud cry for increased accommodation, it is known to the department that there actually exists accommodation for 37,472 children more than there are children to be accommodated. But it is in the wrong place. It is not in the place where it is wanted. A system which permits this condition of things is seriously defective. It indicates a want of consecutive and consistent plan—a plan which means central building supervision, and central control over building expenditure.

There has to be answered, then, the question originally asked, “What financial provision is required to meet future building requirements?” To that question I answer that by the adoption, as suggested, of a model plan or design for school-buildings of various sizes—such plan or design to be prepared by the Central Department—and allowing for an increase of 5,000 children, that being the normal rate of increase shown by both the “strict average” and the “working average,” £20,000 to £30,000 a year should be sufficient to meet all ordinary building requirements. £20,000, with a building estimate of £4 per head, would provide wooden buildings for 5,000 children; and £30,000, with a building estimate of £6 per head, would provide brick and stone buildings for the same number. It is admitted that it would be impossible to apply any hard-and-fast rule of the kind to all districts; but by erecting brick buildings, where possible, upon an approved model design, and wooden buildings where wooden buildings only were possible, also upon a model design, it should be possible to keep pace with the building requirements of the education system upon an annual vote of £25,000. Of course there are districts whose educational requirements were sadly neglected in the days of Provincial Governments, and which never have reached anything like a perfect state of building equipment. In any future provision special regard must be had to the necessities of these districts.

The question as to how this £25,000 or £30,000 should be provided has involved much deep and anxious consideration. I am clear upon the point that it ought not to be provided out of borrowed money. But to decide upon the means by which it should be provided was a matter not easy of settlement. The American State-school system is maintained throughout by direct taxa-