

school a good report it would have been simply because he had not the courage to do his duty. As I said in my report for 1891, this percentage of 74 may be interpreted to mean that every second child stays away from school every second day, with what disastrous results to his education may be easily guessed.

The mean ratio of attendance to roll-number for the whole district this year is 83·4, as against 81·7 last year, thus showing a general improvement of nearly 2 per cent. As the average for the colony generally for 1891 was 80·3, it is plain that the attendance in Westland as a whole, unsatisfactory as I cannot but think it, is at least as good as that in other places.

As a contribution towards the solution of the difficult problem of securing a better attendance at school, I think it is only right to call public attention to a plan brought under my notice by one of the teachers of this district—a plan which I am assured is highly successful in the locality in which it is in operation—viz., the North of Ireland. It seems that there is a regulation of the Education Department—first, that no child shall be promoted to a higher standard in the school who does not pass the Inspector's annual examination; and secondly and chiefly, that no child shall be allowed to sit at that examination who has not made at least three-fourths of the possible number of attendances, i.e., who has not been present at least three-fourths the times the school has been open, and this whatever the cause of absence may have been. The efficacy of this plan of course depends on the interest felt by children and their parents in school-life and school standing, and some may think that the principle of emulation is not sufficiently strong in our colonial communities to hope much from this source; but if the experiment at Home is as successful as it is reported to be, where it is said to have turned all the parents into truant officers and the teachers have no difficulty on the score of attendance, so simple a plan seems at least worth a trial amongst ourselves.

**AIDED AND OTHER SMALL SCHOOLS.**—I do not like to close this report without a word on the number of small schools, most of them merely aided schools as they are called, under this Board. These schools, situated for the most part in remote and sparsely-peopled districts, receive larger grants than the Board can well afford, yet exist notwithstanding under conditions most unfavourable for the work they have to do. Held not unfrequently in settlers' houses, usually in one of the family rooms, ill-equipped with school furniture, in fact hardly equipped at all, without maps, and often with the merest apology for a blackboard, the State school, forsooth, with its half a dozen scholars, feebly attempts to discharge its functions, and to keep the torch of learning alight for the next generation. The teachers of these schools I need hardly say deserve the fullest sympathy and encouragement the Board can give them. Necessarily young persons of slender attainments, their own education is often merely that of the school standards they are required to teach, and their own experience of school work just what they have gained a few years ago when themselves pupils in the same small country school. Uncertificated of course, and, what is worse, untrained, they do their best to interpret the syllabus and carry out its requirements as they understand them, or, at least, some of them. Nor is this all. The quiet so necessary to school work cannot be obtained in the immediate neighbourhood of the settlers' barn-yard fowls, who first make the walls resound with their din, and then startle the scholars, and once a year the Inspector, by making a hurried though erratic rush through the apartment; and, in order, perhaps, that the school may not suffer from monotony, the noises and incursions of the settlers' fowls are pleasingly varied by visits from the rising generation of his dogs and pigs, whilst the drone of the domestic scrubbing-brush at work on the floor of the next room, or the squalling of the family baby, or more frequently both together, complete the charm of scholastic peace and order. A few years of this, assisted by the circumstance that the school-room windows never open from the top, wear out the nerves of the teacher and give her a chronic headache, so that she is no longer able to pass her scholars at the Inspector's annual examination. She is then told by the local authority that she is no longer fit for her post, and must resign to make way for the correspondent's son, who has just passed the Sixth Standard.

This is no fancy picture; every word of it can be fully substantiated, and I have drawn attention to these facts to show—

1. The absolute need there is for securing greater comfort and privacy for these little schools, which can only be done by the erection in every instance of a small schoolhouse, entirely separate from the settler's dwellinghouse, and, if possible, some distance removed from it. It might even be made the indispensable and preliminary condition of Board help that this should be done, as the expense to the settler himself need be but small. And

2. The comparative inefficiency of the teaching in many small schools, whether merely aided schools or not, shows how mistaken was the policy that abolished the training colleges for teachers, and left the colony without any means of assisting candidates for the humbler school appointments to qualify themselves for their work. Small schools and small salaries for them there must ever be, and it is vital to the best interests of the colony that the children of outlying settlements in which alone these schools are found should receive sound and efficient teaching. Young teachers of exceptional ability who have attended University classes and write D.I after their names will never accept such appointments, and hence some provision is indispensable by which young persons of small attainments and inferior abilities, who alone will accept them, should be initiated into their life-work, as well as receive some little additional stimulus to mental activity. For this purpose it is not examinations that are wanted—we have too many of them already—but teaching, instruction in the subjects the trainees will have to teach, and practical acquaintance with the routine of a large and first-class school in actual work. This can only be attained under present circumstances by residence at a training college free to *bona fide* candidates—even a residence of six months only would be better than nothing—whilst if such institutions existed it might be made illegal to appoint to the smallest school receiving State aid any teacher destitute of professional training. This is what ought to be, and our smaller schools at all events will never be fully efficient till something of this sort is done.

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The Chairman, Education Board, Westland.

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