

I have been well satisfied with the diligence and fidelity with which my colleagues have discharged their responsible and onerous duties, and am much indebted to them for advice and assistance in many matters of administration in the course of the year.

I have, &c.,

D. PETRIE, M.A., Chief Inspector.

The Secretary, Auckland Board of Education.

TARANAKI.

SIR,—

Education Office, New Plymouth, 11th March, 1896.

I have the honour to submit my first annual report on the public schools in the Taranaki District for the year ending December, 1895.

I commenced duty on the 1st March, 1895, and during the year paid sixty-one visits of inspection, on fifty of which reports were written, and I examined fifty-two schools. Considerable time was occupied in drafting the new regulations for pupil-teachers, and in examining scholarship-candidates and pupil-teachers.

The Schools of the District.—At the close of the year there were fifty-four schools in active operation, and three more will soon be completed. Most of the schools are very small, and are by no means self-supporting—that is to say, the revenue derived by the Board on account of the average attendance is inadequate for their maintenance. From returns prepared by the Board's secretary, Mr. Veale, I find that in the year 1894, for only seventeen schools did the income exceed the expenditure, and nine of these gave a balance of less than £17, some yielding only a few shillings. It will thus be seen that districts such as this, in which education has to be provided for a comparatively large rural population, and in which there are few large schools, are placed at a great disadvantage when compared with districts containing large towns.

Where there is a preponderance of small schools the average rate of pay, the allowances to Committees, and the general equipment of the schools must necessarily be on a lower scale than will prevail in districts in which there are large centres of population. This is a blot upon our system of education, for, while a teacher at one school may receive £160 or more per annum for his services, a teacher at an adjacent school, merely because he happens to be in another district, may receive only £120 for exactly the same services. This is manifestly unfair, and does not tend to encourage conscientious and progressive effort on the part of the teacher. Moreover, the evil effects are far-reaching. Speaking generally, the best teachers and those who are most promising among the young teachers strive to obtain employment in other districts where their labours meet with greater reward; those who remain may try to augment their salaries by undertaking work outside of the profession, and too frequently the primary object of their appointment is lost sight of in the struggle, and the farm, &c., as the case may be, receives more attention than the school. Again, when vacancies occur, positions of equivalent responsibility do not attract applications of equal merit. I must say this pernicious system of low and unequal payments is baneful and unjust in the extreme, and one wonders how teachers can be found for small country schools when one considers the petty annoyances to which a teacher is liable to be subjected, the inconveniences of the position, and, at the same time, the small remuneration upon which he is expected to live, to provide possibly for a family, and to lay up some provision for old age. The Education Boards are powerless in the matter, for they must not let their expenditure exceed their income, and the most practicable remedy seems to be a more equitable distribution of the capitation grant. A graduated system of capitation would overcome the difficulty, and such districts as I have referred to would be on a much better footing if the payment per head for small schools were proportionally greater than for schools with a large average attendance.

Buildings and Apparatus.—Some of the older buildings are by no means suitable for schools, as they are too low, poorly ventilated, and often badly lighted, there being too little glass for the size of the rooms, and the windows being too low and misplaced. On entering, one is frequently struck by the very dingy and cheerless appearance of the walls, which absorb the light instead of reflecting it, and on dull days in winter the rooms become quite obscured. I think it is a pity that each interior is not painted as the school is built, for on educational, hygienic, and moral grounds it is essential that the surroundings of the pupils should be bright, cheerful, and stimulating. I have invariably found that in the schools with painted interiors the teachers take a greater pride in what one may term the æsthetic environment of the pupils, and that the maps, diagrams, charts, &c., are hung tastefully and tidily. As a rule also the teachers go to considerable trouble to obtain illustrations and pictures which are interesting and instructive, and which moreover add greatly to the appearance of the rooms. In this respect the teachers at Okato and Tikorangi deserve special commendation.

I regret to say that many of the teachers have not taken care of the apparatus and appliances in their schools, and in some cases there has been gross and culpable neglect on the part of past or present teachers. Too frequently I have found the desks cut and defaced to such an extent as to render them unfit for use, the pupils being under the necessity of taking out atlases, drawing-books, &c., to obtain a level surface on which to write. Inking, scribbling, and drawing on the desk seem to have been favourite pastimes, and have evidently been unchecked. Maps are often thrown carelessly over blackboards instead of being hung in the proper fashion, with the result that the rollers are torn off and the varnished surface is broken.

During my first visits I found that the books of many of the pupils were very dilapidated, and fully 30 per cent. of the copy-books I saw on my first round of visits must have had the covers torn off, and the majority were besmeared and disfigured to a reprehensible extent. During the visits for examination purposes I found that more care was being taken with the furniture and apparatus, and that the pupils' books were being neatly covered.