

year. Twenty-four ordinary and three special meetings were held, the attendance at which has been as follows: Miss Heywood, 26; Mr. Bauchope, 27; Mr. Adam, 26; Mr. Allsworth, 25; Mr. Ambury, 23; Mr. Faull, 27; Mr. Hill, 25; Mr. Mackay, 25; and Mr. Wade, 27. In addition committee meetings have been frequent and onerous. The revision of the finance of the Board, and, of the scholarship and pupil-teachers' regulations, the necessity for establishing new schools, the establishment of a District High School at Stratford, school discipline, corporal punishment, and technical education have all been carefully considered and reported on by committees before being dealt with by the Board.

SCHOOLS.—There were fifty-four schools open in January, 1896, and three have been opened during the year—viz., Denbigh Road, Mangaere, and Purangi. Three others—Huiroa, Tongaporutu, and Kaiaua—are now nearing completion, and will be opened almost immediately, bringing the number of schools which will be in operation during the current year up to sixty. None of the new schools will be self-supporting, and to carry them on efficiently means a curtailment of the already scanty surplus from the schools in the more populous centres. The Board again respectfully urges on the Minister the necessity for making an additional capitation grant to districts like this, which are being rapidly settled, and where the towns are few in number and comparatively small.

TEACHERS.—The number of teachers in the Board's service at the 31st December, 1896, was 126, classified as follows: Head teachers—19 males, 2 females; sole teachers—18 males, 18 females; assistant teachers—4 males, 13 females; pupil-teachers—5 males, 21 females; sewing teachers, 26 females: total, 126.

The Board has from time to time, as the increase in its revenue warranted it doing so, revised the regulations so as to increase the salaries paid to its teachers. This was again done last year, and £450 was apportioned among the staff, care being taken that all the teachers in the Board's service participated in the distribution. While the Board is thus improving the pecuniary condition of its teachers, it takes this opportunity of impressing upon them the necessity of carrying on their duties diligently and efficiently. The Board regrets to notice a falling-off in these respects. Several teachers were cautioned, and notified that better work would be expected from them this year.

As an illustration of the growth of the district, I may here mention that in 1877, when the present Education Act came into force, £1,606 12s. 7d. was paid to teachers for teaching 496 pupils; while in 1896 £9,181 1s. 11d. was paid for teaching 3,091 pupils. The Board is of opinion that the system of examining Standards I. and II. by the teachers has not worked satisfactorily, and that it would be an improvement if Inspectors were allowed to revise the passes.

ATTENDANCE.—The number on the roll at the end of the year was 3,827, showing an increase of fifty-eight for the year. The Board is gratified to find that the percentage of pupils who attend regularly showed a further increase during the year. In 1895 the percentage was 75·8, and it rose to 77·5 in 1896. Since the passing of the School Attendance Act the Board has granted a small sum annually to those Committees which put the compulsory clauses into force. Seeing that many of the Committees in the country districts do not avail themselves of these clauses the Board will soon have to consider the propriety of appointing a Truant Inspector for the district.

BUILDINGS.—The new school at Mangaere was completed and opened during the year, but owing to the bad state of the roads, which were unfit for wheeled traffic during the winter months, the Huiroa and Tongaporutu buildings are only now nearing completion. The Board anticipates meeting the same difficulty at Whangamomona. The works completed during the year in addition to the foregoing were removal and additions at Waipuku School, additions to Rahotu School, and residences at Cardiff and Kaimata. The Board made a thorough inspection of its buildings, and found it necessary to paint externally and internally and to repair a great number, at a cost of £500. Contracts are let for a new school at Kaiaia, for additions to Frankley Road School, for alterations to Midhurst School, for new residences at Inglewood and Oaonui, and for additions to the residence at Rahotu.

SCHOLARSHIPS.—Owing to the increase of population in the south-eastern part of the district, the Board held the examination for the first time at Stratford, as well as at New Plymouth. Thirty-four candidates entered, and twenty-four presented themselves for examination. The work showed a marked improvement on previous years.

COMMITTEES.—There are now forty-two Committees, an increase of six. One new district, Whangamomona, was constituted during the year; the other five have been formed by subdividing some of the larger districts, thus creating a more extensive personal responsibility on the part of the parents in carrying out the provisions of the Act. The Committees show an increasing interest in performing the duties devolving upon them. As mentioned in a former part of this report, several of the Committees have made applications for grants to enable them to enforce the compulsory clauses, and, doubtless, the improved average attendance is greatly due to the efforts made by the Committees in this direction. The Board, having been to a considerable expense in repairing and painting the school buildings, would impress on Committees the advisability of clearing and keeping the school grounds in a tidy condition. A few of the grounds are well kept, but in most cases there is great room for improvement. The suggestion made by the Inspector, that "working bees" be established for this purpose, is worthy of consideration by Committees.

FINANCE.—The income of the Board from all sources, including £2,738 18s. 6d. balance on 31st December, 1895, was £14,258 16s. 6d., and the expenditure £13,216 9s. 5d., leaving a credit balance of £1,042 7s. 1d. Against this balance are liabilities nearly covering the amount.

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The Hon. the Minister of Education.

ROBT. G. BAUCHOPE, Chairman.