

TECHNICAL SCHOOL.—The work successfully inaugurated during the preceding year has been continued with marked success. The Saturday carpentry classes have been attended by fifty-four students, sixteen of that number being teachers employed by the Board, the others being pupils of the public schools of the district. Should this attendance continue or increase, the question of appointing an assistant-instructor will have to be considered, as it is quite impossible for one instructor, even with a suitable subdivision of classes, to efficiently supervise the efforts of such a large number of students meeting on one day. The Instructor reports that, on the whole, he was very well pleased with the work done during the session by the various classes; in some cases the results obtained were excellent. It is further reported that for the coming year the programme of work sketched out by the Government for manual instruction in technical schools will be taken up, and the Board asked to appoint competent examiners, with the view of granting certificates to successful competitors at the close of the term.

BUILDING OPERATIONS.—During the year the Board has undertaken the erection of new school buildings at Waikiwi, Maitland Village, Croydon Siding, Caroline, and Wallacetown, the last-mentioned work being necessary to replace the old school building which had done duty for a period of thirty years or more. Residences for the teachers were also provided for the districts of Wendon-side, Greenvale, Pyramid Siding, and Waituna, while additions to the school at Otautau and to the residences at Drummond and Oreti Plains respectively were carried out, the former work being absolutely necessary in consequence of the increased attendance at the school. Notwithstanding all that the Board can undertake year by year by a judicious expenditure of its surplus funds, many districts yet remain without suitable accommodation for their teachers. It is not possible out of the limited means at its disposal to provide for every want, but the Board endeavours to make the most of the funds at its command. In a district where it is impracticable, by reason of its cost, to erect buildings in brick or stone the annually-recurring expenditure in respect of maintenance is a very serious matter. Many of the school buildings and residences have been erected for considerable periods, and, owing to the process of natural decay, the cost of painting and repairs forms a heavy drain on the Board's annual receipts for building purposes. The Government grant for buildings (though not actually received till after the close of the year, and therefore not shown in the Board's balance-sheet) should be noted in this report of the Board's proceedings. The amount was £3,000, with a supplementary vote of £420 in respect of schools the erection of which had been rendered necessary in consequence of the extension of settlement in new districts. This amount is somewhat in excess of that granted for some years past, and for the increased liberality displayed towards this district the Board desires to express its grateful appreciation.

The expenditure on account of new buildings, repairs, furniture, &c., during the year has been £3,776 16s., so that the outgoings in this connection exceeds the income by £356. The amount standing to debit of the Building Account in the annual balance-sheet is £1,223 1s. 9d. Had the building grant been paid in December, as has usually been the case, this fund would have shown a credit balance of about £2,197. Obligations have been entered into, however, up to the 31st December, 1896, which will absorb at least three-fourths of this amount, leaving only about £600 available for expenditure on works still to be authorised during the year 1897.

FINANCE: BOARD'S INCOME AND EXPENDITURE.—A statement, certified by the Auditor-General, of the income and expenditure of this Board for the year just closed has been already forwarded to your department. The aggregate receipts, inclusive of a credit balance at the commencement of the year of £5,061 0s. 10d., were £35,781 10s. 6d. The total expenditure for the year was £33,860 1s. 7d., leaving a credit balance of £1,921 8s. 11d. To institute a fair comparison with the financial statement of previous years the amount due in respect of parliamentary grant for school buildings should be taken into account. Were this done, the financial position of the Board would present a more favourable aspect. Seeing, however, that the annual allocation by Parliament for building purposes is intended to provide for the expenditure of the coming year, it is perhaps just as well that its amount does not appear in the accounts of a year to which it has no special reference. Undoubtedly, the statement of the Board's financial position is more accurately set forth by the omission of this item, and there appears to be no good reason why payment of such a grant should be made at the close instead of the beginning of the financial year, unless it be to represent the accounts of the Board in a more favourable light than is consistent with strict accuracy. The chief items of expenditure (omitting shillings and pence) for the year are as follow: Teachers' salaries and allowances, £25,900; Committee's allowances, £1,796; new buildings, additions to buildings, repairs, appliances, and sites, £3,776; scholarships, £500. The foregoing, with various other smaller sums, particulars of which are fully set forth in departmental returns, constitute the aggregate disbursements during the year.

The statement of the Board's assets and liabilities shows that against a balance of £3,144 10s. 8d. to credit of ordinary account there stand liabilities amounting to £602 12s. 1d.; while in the Building Account the assets are set down at £4,246 3s. 6d., and the liabilities show obligations amounting to £3,658 6s. 8d., leaving only an available balance of £587 16s. 10d. to meet fresh demands during the coming year.

The Hon. the Minister of Education.

By order of the Board.

JOHN NEILL, Secretary.