

*General Remarks.*—Most of the schools in the district, including those situated in Pelorus and Queen Charlotte Sounds, were visited at some time during the year for inspection, and the inspection reports were duly laid before your Board. Through the courtesy of the Marine Department, in giving me a passage by the “Hinemoa,” I was enabled to visit and examine the school at Stephen’s Island, which I could not otherwise have done.

The greater part of the kindergarten material obtained from England was distributed amongst ten of the smaller Board schools, and with undoubted benefit to the preparatory classes. It is not claimed that anything approaching the full benefits of the kindergarten system is enjoyed by the children of these schools. The absence of appropriate furniture, want of space, and of course, at present, the inexperience of the teachers, all combine to limit the advantages derivable from its employment; but the intelligence of the little ones has been aroused and quickened, the dreary monotony of the country school infant classes has been relieved, and a large portion of the school hours, formerly passed in listless but unavoidable inactivity, is now occupied in instructive and interesting occupations. As soon as the Board can see its way to incur the expense, I hope that the Blenheim Infant School will be completed, and the new wing furnished and fitted up expressly for kindergarten work. One (if not more) of the present staff of teachers is, I believe, sufficiently well acquainted with its methods and requirements to conduct the teaching of the new department; and a small outlay would supply all the apparatus required to commence with.

*Additional Reading-books.*—The three lower standard classes, and the preparatory classes of the Board’s schools, have been supplied with Longmans’ Ship Literary Readers. Unfortunately, through the neglect of the bookseller to send Home my order for Geographical Readers, with which it was intended to supply the three upper standards, these are still without a second reading-book. I hope, however, to be able to supply this want before long, and I trust that their use will have the effect of improving the results in geography at future examinations. The examination in reading will hereafter be taken from one or both of the two reading-books, but the spelling will, at present, be limited to the Royal Star Series.

A late Order in Council having withdrawn the limitation of the spelling test introduced a few years ago, I intend to revert to my former practice of giving a large number of words in each standard for that purpose.

*Writing.*—The upright style of writing has not been extensively adopted in this district, though Whitecombe and Tombs’s “erect” series has been placed on the Board’s list of books. I cannot say that I regret the fact, as in the few schools that have taken it up there are many examples of the well known tendency of this style of writing to assume a backward slope, which is far from desirable. If the proper manner of holding the pen were more generally insisted upon, and class teaching with plenty of blackboard illustrations of merits and defects practised at all as it is at some of our schools, there would be no need to depart from the style which has been so long in use, and has in certain schools produced such admirable writers. As a rule, the copybooks throughout the district are remarkably clean and free from blots, and in most schools show signs of careful supervision and correction.

*Technical Education.*—There are indications of a reaction setting in with regard to this matter in the Old Country, but that is probably due to causes which are not likely to affect us here, and the introduction of some kind of technical education into the district is a matter that should receive consideration. Although any elaborate scheme for general adoption throughout Marlborough is not possible, nor perhaps desirable, there is no reason why the boys at the larger centres should not have some kind of instruction suited to their probable future requirements, and at least equal to that already (in the shape of needlework) enjoyed by the girls. In almost every walk of life, but particularly in rural occupations, the ability to use carpenter’s tools with skill, and to keep them in good order is a most useful acquirement, and in places such as Blenheim, Picton, Havelock, &c., it should not be difficult to organize a system of instruction in wood-working without any great expense to the Board. A successful effort in this direction has been lately made at Greymouth through the enthusiasm and public spirit of a local builder, who placed a workshop and his own assistance at the service of the Board. I do not know the precise terms upon which these services are rendered, but I shall shortly be in possession of full particulars, when, if similar arrangements can be made in any of our larger centres, the Board may be able to judge as to the possibility of taking some steps in the same direction. One fact must, however, be borne in mind—viz., that as long as the requirements of the Government syllabus remain as they are no time can be spared within the ordinary school-hours (except perhaps in the case of boys who have passed Standard VI.), and any classes established for the purpose must meet for instruction before or after those hours.

Although shorthand writing can scarcely be said to come within the scope of technical education as generally understood, yet its rapidly-increasing importance in almost all kinds of business might justify the inclusion of this useful art in any place where competent instructors can be found; and it might be as well to ascertain whether the grant available under “The Manual and Technical Elementary Instruction Act, 1895,” can be utilised for this purpose, and, if so, no time should be lost in taking advantage of that Act in the district.

*The Education System.*—At the end of the present year the Education Act will have completed the second decade of its existence, and it seems to be a suitable time for its revisal. The education system as a whole has certainly gained the favour of the community, and there need now be no fear that any well-considered reforms would in any way loosen the hold upon public estimation which it has so unmistakeably and deservedly acquired, or endanger in any way its existence. That, with all its undoubted merits, there are many points in which it might be greatly improved is generally admitted; and it seems to me that the present time is a peculiarly suitable one for such reforms. Many of the original promoters of the system, including Mr. Bowen, the father of the original Education Bill, and the Inspector-General of Schools, are happily still with us, as well as a few of the inspectorate, and of the prominent teachers who have continued all along to assist in its administration. On almost all our Education Boards, again, there are