

bined with the regularly recurring hop-picking, which this year spread over a much longer time than usual. Though pea-picking and the industries already referred to are confined only to parts of the educational district, they are seriously affecting the attendance of the children and the progress of the scholars, so that the general condition of the schools concerned is falling distinctly behind that of the best schools on the West Coast, for example, which are not so affected. If the use of child labour in these pursuits meant merely the lengthening of the school holidays, involving the loss of a week or two more of school time, the trouble would not be so much felt, but it means more than this. In very many school districts the attendance during the weeks that the school is open before and after the holidays is lamentably poor. One school, for example, during the first quarter of this year recorded an average attendance of only about eight out of twenty-eight on the days that the school was open, in spite of the fact that the usual hop-picking holidays were given. Such a state of things is not a necessity—it is the result of indifference and neglect of duty. It shows that the parents are treating their children's education as a thing of minor importance, and betokens, in one direction at least, a weakening of moral fibre that must have an injurious effect upon the development of the children. Truant Inspectors have in one or two districts been appointed, and in Nelson City some improvement in the average attendance has apparently been effected, but, as yet, we have seen no report concerning the enforced attendance of those children, if there are any such, who were not previously on any school roll.

On the 31st December there were in the employ of the Board 154 teachers, graded as follows:—

				Certificated or Licensed.	Uncertifi- cated.	Total.
Head teachers	...	...	...	41	0	41
Assistants	...	...	...	26	5	31
Sole teachers	...	...	...	45	37	82
Total	...	...	...	112	42	154
Total for 1898	...	...	...	110	41	151

The figures are almost the same as last year's, but considerable improvement is shown in the proportion of certificated teachers when they are compared with those of six years ago, as given in the Minister's report: For 1894—Certificated or licensed teachers, 87; uncertificated, 54: total, 141.

There were besides fifty-four pupil-teachers, of whom eleven had passed the E or D Certificate examination, and one had obtained the M.A. degree. In addition to the number given above, a kindergarten instructor, who is also certificated, was employed. The Board's regulation that requires uncertificated teachers of district or aided schools to sit for the pupil-teachers' examination is having a good effect, by inducing many to study for the certificate examination.

During the year five experienced and certificated pupil-teachers have been selected for appointment either as assistants or sole teachers, and the greater willingness to take responsible positions when accompanied, as it has been in these cases, by the necessary ability, is an indication of the increased efficiency of the junior division of our teaching staff.

In twenty schools this year the examination results were unsatisfactory. In five of these cases we consider that the excuse offered was sufficient, viz.: Loss of time and break in school routine, owing to the schools being closed on account of the resignation of teachers, or from some other cause. In eight, irregularity of attendance prevails, and this, rightly or wrongly, may be urged in palliation. The teachers of five schools were newly appointed, and owing to their short tenure of office cannot themselves be held entirely responsible for the shortcomings of their scholars. In the case of the remaining two, which failed for the first time, no excuse or explanation has been offered. One important factor in producing poor results, the large proportion of very small schools in this district, should not be overlooked. There are this year thirty-six schools with an average attendance of less than fifteen scholars each, and consequently it is necessary, in many cases, to employ uncertificated and inexperienced teachers. Yet highly creditable work is done in some of even our smallest schools, and this is, in itself, a recompense for the liberality of a Board which has made it possible for many a struggling settler in isolated bay or distant valley to obtain an elementary education for his children.

As usual, we attach a general summary of results for the whole district as extracted from the annual return:—

Standard Classes.	Presented.	Examined in Standards.	Passed.	Average Age of those that passed.
Above Standard VI. ...	206	...	...	Yrs. mos.
Standard VI. ...	434	427	280	13 10
" V. ...	647	622	414	12 10
" IV. ...	804	778	552	11 10
" III. ...	785	765	549	10 10
" II. ...	712	697	619	9 11
" I. ...	605	597	566	8 5
Preparatory ...	1,714	...	...	...
Totals, 1899 ...	5,907	3,886	2,980	11 3*
Totals, 1898 ...	5,973	4,008	3,317	11 4*

* Mean of average ages.