

SOUTHLAND.

SIR,—

Education Office, Invercargill, 21st March, 1903.

In accordance with the provisions of section 102 of "The Education Act, 1877," the Southland Board of Education has the honour to submit the following report of its proceedings for the year 1902 :—

THE BOARD AND ITS MEETINGS.—At the commencement of the year the Board was composed of the following members : Messrs. I. W. Raymond (Chairman), James Copland, M.A., M.D., Ph.D., William Macalister, B.A., LL.B., George McLeod, M.A., Alfred Baldey, John Cowie, Thomas MacGibbon, William B. Scandrett, and John C. Thomson, M.H.R. During the year the *personnel* of the Board underwent no change, the retiring members, Messrs. A. Baldey, I. W. Raymond, and George McLeod being re-elected for another term. At its September meeting Mr. John C. Thomson was unanimously elected Chairman of the Board for the ensuing year. Towards the close of the year the Board, and, it might also be said, the cause of Education in Southland suffered a serious loss by the death of Dr. James Copland, of Gore. The following resolution was adopted : "That this Board desires to place on record its deep regret at the death of Dr. James Copland, one of its colleagues, and its very high appreciation of his scholarly attainments and ripe judgment as a member of this Board, whose place it will be most difficult to fill." The election of a member to fill the vacancy so caused was held on the 29th December, 1902. From the four candidates nominated by members of School Committees Mr. Duncan Gilchrist, of Waikaka Valley, was duly elected as Dr. Copland's successor. The interest in these elections, under the new Acts of 1900 and 1901 respectively, appears to be more manifest than under the previous system whereby School Committees as a body, and not individual members thereof, exercised the privilege of voters. In the working of these Acts there is one point worthy of special note. As was the case in the first election in this district, so in the elections held during the past year, there was a very considerable number of informal votes, the informality chiefly consisting in the omission to sign the voting-papers, or in neglecting to post them so as to reach the Board's office within the time prescribed by the Act. These informalities occurred in spite of the fact that a special circular emphasizing the various points of importance to be attended to in recording votes was sent to each School Committee, and an indorsement to the same effect made on each voting-paper issued.

Messrs. W. Macalister and J. C. Thomson were elected as representatives of the Board on the Southland High Schools Board of Governors for the current year; and Mr. T. MacGibbon was re-elected to act in a similar capacity on the Board of the School Commissioners for the Otago District.

Throughout the year twelve ordinary and two special meetings of the Board were held.

SCHOOLS.—At the close of the preceding year (1901) the number of schools in existence was 149. During the year to which this report refers two schools—one at Skipper's Reefs, the other at Kaiwera (half-time)—were closed, each for lack of an attendance sufficient to warrant its continuance; and three new schools were opened at Holmsdale, near Lumsden, at Bushy Park Station, near Maitara, and at Lynwood Station, near Lake Te Anau. The two last mentioned are "household" schools, established for the sole benefit of children residing on these stations who otherwise would be deprived of all educational privileges. The manager of the station in each case contributes £20 per annum (with free board) towards the teacher's support, the Board paying over the capita-tion earned by the average attendance. There were thus at the close of the year 150 schools in operation.

ATTENDANCE AND TRUANCY.—Although the number of schools in the district has practically remained stationary, the attendance, more especially the average attendance, has shown a gratifying increase. The average weekly roll-number and average attendance for the present and preceding years are as follows : 1901—average roll, 9,521; average attendance, 7,910; 1902—average roll, 9,594; average attendance, 8,241. These figures indicate that while the roll-number has increased by seventy-three the average has during the same period increased by 331. The latter is the most satisfactory feature concerning the attendance at our schools during the year. The percentage of average attendance to average weekly roll now stands at nearly 85·9, a record for this educational district. Last year (then a record for the district) the percentage was 83.

It would, perhaps, be scarcely accurate to ascribe these gratifying results to the increasing interest of parents in the educational welfare of their children. It would probably be nearer the mark to say that the greater stringency of the School Attendance Act, and the provisions whereby its requirements may be more vigorously enforced, contribute in large measure to the higher percentage of average attendance now recorded. It is at any rate undeniable that the Board may claim credit for the vigorous and systematic manner in which it has—especially during the past year—set itself to check the evil of irregular attendance in the district. Early in the year the Board required each teacher in charge of a school to furnish a monthly statement (on a form provided for the purpose) of the general attendance, with specific and detailed information concerning every defaulter under the School Attendance Act. These forms, duly filled up, were sent to the Board's office at the end of each month, a copy also being supplied to the School Committee of the district, whose co-operation was in some measure thus secured. On the information thus supplied, the Board's Truant Officer was able to take action to secure due compliance with the law. In order that no one might plead ignorance of the statute, a circular was prepared explaining the provisions of the School Attendance Act and pointing out the existing responsibilities of both teachers and parents, and a copy thereof sent to every parent or guardian in the education district.

When it is considered that the percentage of average attendance to roll-number in this district stood as low as 74 or 75 some years ago, it will be seen how great an advance has been made, representing as it does some eight or nine hundred additional pupils in attendance at our public schools every day.