

In addition to the requirements of the school buildings proper, many of the teachers' residences are in a most unsatisfactory condition as regards repair. Residences for teachers have to be provided for out of the Board's building grant, and, moreover, the Board has to pay the cost of keeping them in repair. If there is no residence the Department grants a house allowance according to scale. The natural result of this has been that of late years the Board has practically built no residences at all. This is a small matter in the older-settled districts, but it is having a very serious effect on the efficiency of the schools in the back blocks. A house allowance is not of much use to a teacher if he is unable to find any house to rent, and in the bush districts, as a rule, not only are there no houses available, but the greatest difficulty is experienced in procuring even board and lodging. In such circumstances desirable teachers are deterred from applying for vacancies, and the result is that candidates of little experience or standing in the profession are appointed. Mangatiti School was closed for months owing to the difficulty of finding lodgings for the teacher. Horoeka has already been advertised twice within the last few months, and we understand that unless some accommodation can be provided for the present teacher it will have to be advertised again. At Rakanui the teacher and his family are living in what was the only available cottage in the whole district, and that may be sold any day, as the section on which it stands is in the market.

At Kahautara the teacher has to live eight miles away, and a journey of sixteen miles every day must prove detrimental to the work of the school. At Nikau and other places there is the same difficulty. If we are to get our town teachers—especially female teachers—to go into the country, it is absolutely necessary that something better than slab whares or crowded three-room cottages be provided for them in the shape of accommodation.

An application for a school from the Kingston Road settlers was referred to the Department, and a reply was received to the effect that where settlers were situated at no great distance from an established school arrangements should be made to convey the children to that school, in order to prevent the multiplication of small schools. The children at Paremata were formerly conveyed by the Board to the Pahautanui School, but this arrangement seems to have fallen through. An application from Waitohu was recommended to the favourable consideration of the Department for a subsidy for a conveyance. In some of the Eastern States of America, and in Ohio, the central-school system seems to have been a success. This plan has also been adopted lately in Victoria, and in some cases small schools already in operation have been closed, to enable the children to obtain education at a larger and more fully equipped school. This system is also much cheaper for the country. Mr. Turner, one of the New South Wales Commissioners, has considered the whole question very carefully. In his report he says, "On the mere question of cost, the central-school system would prove cheaper than the present arrangement of separate small schools, because the Department would be relieved of the necessity of building and repairing small schools as well as of paying salaries to teachers and providing school material. Even if the scheme cost more, the great benefit conferred upon the children in the matter of providing a higher education would warrant the change." This is true in districts where it would be practicable, but the whole environment of every district must be taken into consideration in dealing with such applications in the future.

The percentage of promotions shows a slight decrease. In all classes for 1903 it fell about 1 per cent. (from 88 to 87), but where there are nearly ten thousand children presented for examination in standards this decrease cannot be taken to indicate any falling-off in efficiency. It is probably due to the advice given by us to teachers not to promote doubtful cases who were irregular in attendance if that irregularity at all interfered with their work in class subjects. We have given full particulars as to the condition and circumstances of each school in our reports submitted to the Board.

We have this year classified the 151 schools examined as—satisfactory 119; fair, 21; and inferior, 11. Grades 1 and 2 contain the larger number of the inferior schools. In most of these changes have been made during the year, and a few are working under very unfavourable conditions. Of the schools classed as satisfactory, many of them show good work in all departments. Most of these are large schools, but many country schools under sole teachers are also doing very good work.

The loss of time through sickness has this year been exceptional. In parts of the district there have been as many as three and four epidemics, necessitating the closing of the schools, in some instances twice during the year. A reference to our reports will, however, show that there has been no falling-off in the efficiency of the schools as a whole. This is not to say that there are not many matters in which an improvement is desirable, but that is only to recognise the fact that we have our proportion of weak teachers as well as of skilful ones; that there are some schools favourably circumstanced, and others, on the other hand, that by reason of unsuitable accommodation, changes in the staff, or sickness and consequent bad attendance are working under disadvantages. Cases of reprehensible neglect, however, are rare, and the rule is to find at least honest and persistent endeavour, though at times there may be lack of satisfactory method.

The general results in English are satisfactory. Spelling is marked good, but the schools in which reading and recitation earn as high commendation are fewer than we hope to see in the future. Mechanical accuracy, and even fluency, may be there, but the true comprehension and interpretation of the thought of the writer are too often wanting. As we pointed out in our last report, the main fault lies in the excessive use of simultaneous reading, but the excuse is very obvious, and as long as teachers are required to push large classes of fifty, and even seventy, children through the same amount of reading-matter in a given time it is, perhaps, unreasonable to expect any great improvement on the present results. When the principles of the new "scientific method" are more fully appreciated and understood we hope to see them applied to the study of English, as well as to science and natural study. Reading and spoken language generally suffer