

B.

SIR,—

Education Department, Wellington, 28th October, 1904.

As requested by you, I have the honour to append brief notes on the evidence of Messrs. Hill and Lane, in regard to the allocation of the votes for school buildings.

I regret to say that I do not find in the evidence of Mr. Hill much that would help me to make practical suggestions to the Committee, except in respect of one matter which the Department already has in hand—namely, the preparation of plans and specifications for different types of schools, to be available for use of the Boards.

I find myself in agreement with Mr. Lane in two main points—(1.) That it is necessary that the Boards should be allowed to use some of the ordinary building grants for small alterations and minor additions; but I think that the total amount so used by any Board should not exceed, say, one-fifteenth of its ordinary building grant, with the further limitation that the cost of any additions for more than 200 square feet of class-room floor-space should not be paid out of this grant in any one year for any school of Grade 8 or under, and that of not more than 400 square feet in any school over Grade 8. (2.) I agree further with Mr. Lane that while the different items—repairs, rebuilding, re-painting, and so on—of schools and residences should be carefully taken into account in assessing the amount of the ordinary building grants payable to the several Boards on the basis employed last year, yet discretion should be allowed to the Boards in expending the money granted for the several purposes named. If a Board does not repair its buildings, it will have to rebuild them sooner; if it repairs them carefully, it may make them last longer than the average time.

Special building: I do not agree with the opinion that the Boards should determine whether a grant should be given out of the special votes for new schools, and for additions rendered necessary by increase of population. My emphatic belief, based upon experience, is that it would lead to an enormous waste of public money. It must be remembered that the Inspectors are officers of the Boards (and not, as they should be, of the central Department), a fact which also suggests the existence of a defect in the present system—namely, that the Department finds it difficult to arrive at the true merits of any case that is brought before it.

It is very difficult to provide proper education in remote districts without excessive expenditure.

I am strongly of opinion that very much more should be done in conveying children to central schools than is done at present. Where this is not possible, it would in most cases be far better for both economy and efficiency to have two half-time schools under one good teacher than one ordinary school under two poorly paid and probably inefficient teachers.

There still remain some cases in which it is not possible to use either of these expedients. I am not sure that it would not be wise to have some such safeguard as the following: "That no new school with a probable average attendance of less than twenty or twenty-five children shall be established within six (? ten) miles of any school, unless it is first shown to the satisfaction of the Minister that there is no other means of providing efficient and regular instruction for the children concerned.

The obvious objection to the above is that it is an interference with the discretion of the Education Boards. Legislation, moreover, would be required. In any case I would not recommend that any grant should be given for building such a school.

Schools destroyed by fire: In regard to schools destroyed by fire it should be remembered that the Boards for many years have been receiving certain amounts as ordinary building grants, including in the purposes of such grants presumably the means to rebuild worn-out schools. Therefore, if a school that is partly worn out were destroyed by fire, the Board could not equitably claim the whole of the cost of rebuilding from the Government, from whom it has already received part of the cost. This argument would be quite complete if the ordinary building grants in the past had been sufficient. As, however, they were not, in my opinion some relaxation of the rule set up last year might be desirable, although I cannot say that I think it absolutely necessary except in very small education districts. It was not contemplated, either in my recommendations or, I believe, in the Committee's report last year, that any sinking fund should be established by Boards, nor is it necessary. Each Board should look far enough ahead to be able to say what schools would require rebuilding, say, within five years; the grants given are sufficient to enable the due proportion of these schools to be rebuilt each year. If a school is burnt down the payment out of the year's building grant of part of the cost of rebuilding the school that was burnt down may postpone for a short time the rebuilding of some other school, but the Board will not receive any less money on the whole; indeed, it will generally receive a little more than if the school had not been burnt down.

I have, &c.,

G. HOGGEN,

Secretary for Education.

The Chairman, Education Committee, House of Representatives.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given; printing (1,425 copies), £17 4s. 6d.

By Authority: JOHN MACKAY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1904.

Price 9d.]