

1905.
NEW ZEALAND.

EDUCATION : SECONDARY EDUCATION.

(CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO A PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE REGULATIONS REGARDING
FREE PLACES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS BY ABOLISHING THE AGE-LIMIT.)

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency

No. 1.

CIRCULAR LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION TO ALL ENDOWED SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN OPERATION.

SIR,—

Education Department, Wellington, 26th May, 1904.

I have the honour, by direction of the Minister of Education, to forward to you a copy of a letter he has received from the Board of Governors of the Otago High Schools, and to ask for an expression of your opinion as to the advisability of carrying out the proposal contained therein. There are, as you will doubtless see at once, many points to be taken into consideration before a decision can be arrived at; among others, the following points may be named:—

1. The average age of passing Standard VI. is 13 years 10 months: Would not a boy or girl with ability above the average—for it is for such that these free places are intended—pass Standard VI. before the age of fourteen, especially under the new syllabus, whereby the number of subjects in small schools is less than formerly?

2. Does not the fixing of the Junior Scholarship age by most of the Education Boards and by educational authorities in other parts of the Empire at fourteen, thirteen, or even twelve years point to a belief that a boy or a girl deserving of free secondary education would generally show merit before such an age was reached? Is this widespread implied belief founded upon error?

3. Is it desirable from the point of view of the pupils to postpone the commencement of secondary education until they are fourteen or fifteen?

4. How would the admission of a large number of pupils fourteen or fifteen years of age, who had only just passed Standard VI., affect the organization of the secondary schools?

5. If the age-limit were removed or raised, should the test for admission be made more strict for those of advanced years? If so, would the object asked for be gained?

6. If there are some who, from late mental development or inferior advantages, could not pass Standard VI. before fourteen, and yet give promise in other ways, would not their case be met by free places given under clause 3 (d), which, subject to the approval of the Minister, are more or less at the discretion of the governing bodies of the secondary schools? It might even be possible to extend the discretion given under this clause to a somewhat larger proportion of the free places.

7. Are there many cases of hardship—that is, of really deserving boys or girls who cannot fulfil the conditions laid down in the present regulations? No regulations, of course, can avoid hardship altogether.

8. There is at present no limit of age for those admitted to free places at district high schools, most of whom remain at the same school at which they gained their certificate of proficiency.

There are other points to be considered, especially that of finance, but the Minister will be glad to have the opinions of your Board of Governors on the matter.

I have, &c.,

G. HOGGEN,

Secretary for Education.

The Chairman of the Board of Governors.

Enclosure.

SIR,—

Otago High Schools Office, Dunedin, 5th February, 1904.

By direction of the Board of Governors of the Otago Boys' and Girls' High Schools, I have the honour most respectfully to bring under your notice the grave disability under which many deserving pupils in primary schools in country districts throughout Otago suffer by reason of the age-limit of fourteen years imposed by clause 3 (*d*) of the regulations.

It is manifest that these pupils have not the same educational facilities as their town brethren. It is only reasonable to conclude that a large number of promising children are unable to pass the Sixth Standard under fourteen years of age, and are therefore precluded from taking advantage of the liberal provisions of the Secondary Schools Act of last session, which was, no doubt, introduced by your Government for the purpose of securing the benefits of a secondary education to all classes of the community.

In view of the foregoing, and believing it is the wish and intention of the Government to bring the benefits of the high schools within reach of residents in the country districts, my Board ventures to express the hope that you will see your way to remove the age-limit.

I may say that my Board has resolved to come under the provisions of section 5 of "The Secondary Schools Act, 1903."

I have, &c.,

J. R. SINCLAIR, Chairman.

The Right Hon. R. J. Seddon, Minister of Education, Wellington.

No. 2.

SUMMARY OF REPLIES TO CIRCULAR RECEIVED FROM GOVERNING BODIES OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

THE governing bodies of nine institutions, controlling thirteen schools, desire to retain the age-limit, namely: The Whangarei High School, the Auckland Grammar School, the Wanganui Collegiate School (for Boys), the Napier High Schools (separate Boys' and Girls'), the Marlborough High School, the Nelson Colleges (Boys' and Girls'), the Christchurch High Schools (Boys' and Girls'), Christ's College Grammar School (Boys'), the Southland High Schools (Boys' and Girls').

The following six bodies would retain it with the modification indicated in brackets: The Thames High School (special provision for country children); the New Plymouth High School and the Waitaki High School (pupils passing the standard when under fourteen years to be allowed to enter next 1st January); the Palmerston North High School (two years tenure to be given to holder of free place from term when admitted); the Timaru High School (14½ years to be substituted for 14); the Governors of Wellington College express no opinion of their own, but forward that of the headmaster, who thinks the limit not strict enough.

The remaining three high schools desire to have the age-limit abolished entirely: The Wanganui Girls' High School (also that the standard of proficiency should be lowered to Standard V.); the Rangiora High School; and the Ashburton High School (but that the standard of proficiency should be made higher than Standard VI.).

No. 3.

REPLIES IN FULL OF THE SEVERAL GOVERNING BODIES.

WHANGAREI HIGH SCHOOL.

SIR,—

Whangarei, 8th July, 1904.

I have the honour to own receipt of yours of the 26th May, covering a circular letter received from the Chairman of the Otago High School regarding the age-limit of free-place scholars, and in reply beg to state that my Board has discussed the matter carefully, and considers the age-limit fixed in the secondary regulations satisfactory.

Yours, &c.,

The Secretary, Education Department, Wellington.

J. McKINNON, Secretary.

AUCKLAND GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

SIR,—

Secretary's Office, Auckland, 5th June, 1904.

In reply to your circular letter of the 26th May last *re* the age-limit of fourteen years under clause 3 (*d*) of the regulations of "The Secondary Schools Act, 1903," I have the honour to inform you that the Board of Governors of this school recommends the adherence of the age-limit of fourteen years in such regulations for the following reasons:—

1. The average age of passing Standard VI. being 13 years 10 months it is evident that the privileges are not reserved for the exceptional child, but are open to all of average ability.
2. The privileges will be most valued when some slight effort is needed to win them.
3. The retention of the age-limit will have the effect of making the idler children of the primary schools put forth an effort, and so will raise the standard of primary education.

4. The admission into the secondary schools of a number of dull or idle children above the average age as free pupils will certainly lower the standard of higher education.

5. It is the opinion of this Board that any one who cannot win a free place under the present liberal regulations would be better employed learning a trade than attempting secondary education.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

W. WALLACE KIDD, Secretary.

THAMES HIGH SCHOOL.

SIR,—

Office of the Board of Governors, Thames, 7th July, 1904.

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your circular letter of the 26th May last, forwarding copy of a letter from the Otago High Schools Board, with reference to the age-limit for admission to free places under the Secondary Schools Regulations.

The Board has given the matter its consideration, and I am instructed to convey to you its opinion thereon as follows: "That this Board is of opinion that the regulations with regard to the admission of free scholars are entirely satisfactory as applied to town schools, but that special regulations should be framed by the Education Department to meet the disability under which pupils of country schools are no doubt placed with regard to the age-limit."

Yours, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

JAS. KERNICK, Secretary.

NEW PLYMOUTH HIGH SCHOOL.

SIR,—

New Plymouth, 2nd June, 1904.

In reply to your circular dated the 26th May, I have pleasure in handing you the following resolution which was passed at the meeting of the Board on the 1st instant: "That, in reply to the letter from the Secretary for Education, the Board has no recommendation to make extending the age beyond fourteen; but would suggest that the regulations be altered so as to allow a child to enter who has passed Standard VI. under the age of fourteen, though it may be over the age of fourteen on the 31st of the following December."

Yours, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

WALTER BEWLEY, Secretary.

WANGANUI HIGH SCHOOL.

SIR,—

Office of the Board of Governors, Wanganui, 22nd July, 1904.

I have the honour to state that your letter of the 26th May, and the copy of a letter received from the Board of Governors of the Otago High Schools, were considered by this Board at its meeting on the 18th instant.

In reply thereto, I am directed to inform you that the Board passed the resolutions a copy of which is sent herewith.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary, Education Department, Wellington.

W. J. CARSON, Secretary.

[Enclosure.]

COPY OF RESOLUTIONS PASSED BY THE BOARD AT ITS MEETING ON THE 18TH INSTANT.

(1.) That the standard of proficiency for admission to secondary or district high schools should be Standard V., and not Standard VI, as at present.

(2.) That with regard to gaining the certificate for this standard, and hence with regard to admission to secondary or district high schools, no age-limit should be imposed; and that whether the child pass late or early it should be eligible for admission.

(3.) That in respect of pupils who gain the certificate of proficiency for Standard V., and who are desirous of entering a secondary or district high school, their parents should enter into an agreement with the controlling authority to allow their children to remain at some secondary or district high school for a period of not less than two years.

WANGANUI COLLEGIATE SCHOOL.

SIR,—

Bishopscourt, Wellington, 27th July, 1904.

I wish to apologize sincerely for the long delay that has taken place with regard to your letter of the 26th May last, enclosing a copy of a communication from the Board of Governors of the Otago High Schools.

Your letter appears to have been sent to Wanganui, to the headmaster. It did not reach me until four or five days ago.

The headmaster, Mr. W. Empson, writes as follows: "The enclosed circular I mislaid, and have recently rediscovered. I had better send it on to you with my opinion, which is not worth very much. Of course it does not actually concern us at present, as we have no free scholars under the Act, but if we were interested I should say that fourteen was a very reasonable age, and that any possible cases of hardship would be amply met by the suggestion under head 6 in the circular."

May I ask you to be so good as to regard this as the answer of our Board of Governors to your inquiries.

I have, &c.,

FREDERIC WELLINGTON,

Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Wanganui Collegiate School.

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

PALMERSTON NORTH HIGH SCHOOL.

SIR,—

High School Board, Palmerston North, 6th July, 1904.

Your circular letter of the 26th May, with copy of letter from the Board of Otago High Schools, has been before us, and I was directed to reply to the different points whereon you solicit opinion:—

1. Yes; but there are many with more than average ability who are over fourteen years when they pass. Then, in this district they would have to pass Standard VI. under 13 years 7 months.

2. No; but hardships exist.

3. Not as a rule.

4. Our building is capable of holding more and our staff of teaching more.

5. No.

6. Certainly; clause 3 (*d*) will meet some cases—in our school two or three.

7. In this district, yes; about half of those gaining certificates of proficiency. This conclusion has been arrived at by taking last year's numbers.

With respect to age-limit: I am directed to write on this point that it will certainly be a hardship to some children, especially to country children who are often rather older than town children when they pass Standard VI. An age-limit will tend to make teachers push the children through the standards, and that is not desirable.

If the age-limit had been in force after last examination, as well as the addition to clause 12, only about one-half of those who were admitted free to the district high school would have received the privilege.

The age-limit would not act so harshly if Regulation 12 were amended as suggested in my letter of the 25th May.

If the Minister cannot see his way to amend (as suggested by us) to "the 1st of January *nearest* date of admission," there will at least be no objection to an amendment as follows: "The two years' tenure of a free place to count from the beginning of the term in which the pupil is admitted."

On the point of finance, a secondary pupil at a district high school costs the colony about £10 per year. The same boy if sent to a high school will cost the country at the very most 15s. more, but generally less.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

G. HIRSCH, Secretary.

WELLINGTON COLLEGE AND GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL.

SIR,—

Secretary's Office, Wellington, 26th August, 1904.

With reference to your letter of the 26th May on the matter of the representation made by the Otago High Schools Board, I am directed to enclose a copy of the letter received from the headmaster of Wellington College, to whom it was referred, giving his opinion upon the points raised. The Board in sending this expresses no opinion.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

CHAS. P. POWLES, Secretary.

[Enclosure.]

SIR,—

Wellington College, Wellington, 2nd August, 1904.

In answer to your request that I should give my opinion on the questions set forth in the enclosed circular from the Secretary for Education, I send you the following:—

1. I think the limit of fourteen years is too high. The boy who cannot pass Standard VI. before that age is to a large extent wasting his time by continuing work at a secondary school.

2. The scholarship limit of age should not be over fourteen years.

3. At the time of beginning secondary work a boy should be under fourteen.

4. Provided the school had room for them, I do not think the admission of a large number of dull boys would interfere with the organization of the work. They would form a separate class, and would make but little progress.

5. If the test for admission be made more strict for the higher age-limit, the object to be sought will, it seems to me, be defeated.

6 and 7. The cases in which really deserving boys are unable to pass the Sixth Standard before fourteen are so few—if there are any—that it is far better to deal with those cases in a special way.

8. The answer given by the Secretary for Education must meet most of the cases referred to by the Otago High Schools Board.

Yours, &c.,

The Secretary to the Board of Governors, Wellington College.

J. P. FIRTH.

THE NAPIER HIGH SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

Napier, 3rd June, 1904.

Your memorandum, regarding the letter from the Dunedin High Schools Board, asking for an extension of the age-limit at which children could be received into the high schools, was laid before the Governors of Napier High School on the 2nd instant. I have been instructed to reply as follows:—

1. As it is quite clear that free places are intended for those whose ability is above the average, and as the average age of passing Standard VI. (for the whole colony) is 13 years 10 months, all deserving and capable of acquiring secondary education should pass Standard VI. before fourteen.

2. The widespread belief indicated by the fixing of the Junior Scholarship age at fourteen, thirteen, or twelve is founded upon the fact, attested by experience, that a boy or a girl deserving of free education does show merit before such an age.

3. It is not desirable to postpone the commencement of secondary education until fourteen or fifteen years of age. We do not doubt that some boys or girls would do good work even then, under great disadvantages, if they would continue long enough at school. Experience has shown, however, that such pupils rarely contemplate remaining long at school, and are generally non-progressive. It would be much better to commence secondary work, if possible, at twelve.

4. The admission of a large number of pupils fourteen or fifteen years of age, who had only just passed Standard VI., would cause considerable difficulty in the organization of a secondary school. Being mere beginners in all secondary subjects they could not be classified along with younger pupils who had made some progress in secondary work, and they would require special teaching. In fact, whether they were few or many this would be necessary, and would be unfavourable to general good work.

5. The raising of the standard of examination, together with the raising of the age, would not further the object asked for. If a child could not pass Standard VI. under fourteen he would not be any more likely to pass a harder examination under fifteen.

6. As it is intended to make provision by senior, junior, and residential scholarships for our own high-school pupils practically to the full limit of 3 (d) of the regulations, the suggestion of section 6 should not be entertained, especially as it opens up a very difficult and dangerous question. If entertained at all, we should still have to safeguard ourselves by an examination test, and that would be a return to the *status quo ante*.

7. No case of hardship under the age-limit of the regulations has come under our notice, but there have been many country children who have not accepted the scholarships for which they have qualified, because of the insufficient provision for board. This may affect other country children also.

8. With regard to district high schools, we are of the opinion that the existing anomaly would be removed, and all placed on an equality, if the age-limit, for the reasons given in sections 1 and 2 of this report, were made to apply to district high schools also. If this, for any unknown reason, be deemed impracticable, then the syllabus of the district high school should be of a continuation-school or technical character, according to the local requirements.

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

I have, &c.,

DAVID SIDEX, Secretary.

MARLBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL.

SIR,—

High School, Blenheim, 15th June, 1904.

With reference to your circular dated the 26th May, I am directed to forward a copy of a letter received from the principal of the high school, in reply to a request for his opinion of the proposal contained in the said circular, and to recommend his remarks to the favourable consideration of the Department.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

JOHN SMITH, Secretary.

[Enclosure.]

THE removal of the age-limit would, in my opinion, have a prejudicial effect upon the organization of the secondary schools and upon their standard of work. The present limit of age does not press severely, for the child who was unable to pass Standard VI. when under fourteen would gain little advantage from a secondary school. Indeed, I am of opinion that many of those who do pass under fourteen might very well have been excluded. I have had to place nearly half of the free pupils admitted this year in a lower division with a separate teacher, in certain subjects, as it is extremely unlikely that they will be able to pass the Civil Service Junior Examination in two years from their admission, and their presence in the class impeded the progress of the others. Next year, when a new body of pupils of unequal attainments and industry is admitted, this difficulty of classification will be intensified. For this reason I should welcome a scheme for selecting the best of those who pass Standard VI. If this were done, and only those who obtained a certain proportion of marks (not necessarily high) received free places, I for my part should offer no objection to removing the age-limit. Of the free pupils admitted this year, some are wholly undeserving of their places, and their exclusion would be an advantage.

The proposal to remove the age-limit is made largely in the interests of country children, but the real difficulty in their case, unless they are near a railway-station, is the provision of board and lodging in town. If money is to be spent in the interests of country children, it should be in the direction of providing scholarships for the brightest among them to enable them to board in town. This principle is the basis of our own scheme, and I believe it might well be extended by the Government. I suggest an addition of, say, £1 to the capitation now granted, conditional on this extra capitation being employed by the Boards in giving scholarships of not less than £25 to country scholars not within reach of a high school by rail. The retention of an age-limit, or the substitution of a limit of attainment within the standard, might have a beneficial effect in stimulating to greater energy of work and regularity of attendance than could be expected from parents and pupils who knew that easy-going negligence would give a right to free places at whatever age the pupils passed.

JOHN INNES.

NELSON COLLEGE.

SIR,—

College Office, Nelson, 23rd June, 1904.

I have the honour to acknowledge due receipt of your letter of the 26th ultimo, enclosing a copy of another dated the 5th February, addressed to the Hon. the Minister of Education by Mr. Sinclair, Chairman of the Otago High Schools Board. Both of these have been carefully considered by the Council of Governors of Nelson College, with the result that they have come to the unanimous conclusion that the age-limit of fourteen years required by clause 3 (b) of the regulations (not 3 (d) as in type-written copy) should certainly be maintained for the following, amongst other, reasons :—

1. They do not find that deserving pupils in primary schools in country districts are under any greater disability from the age-limit than are the pupils of town schools ; on the contrary, a large proportion of the distinctions open to all primary scholars in the Nelson District have been gained by country pupils.

2. Except in rare cases, which may be accounted for by some special reason, and which may be met by clause 3 (d), the Governors consider that no pupil who has not passed the Sixth Standard examination within the prescribed limit of age is deserving of State aid towards secondary education. Your suggestion *re* the extension of the privilege of granting scholarships under this clause should, if acted upon, meet all requirements.

3. In the opinion of the Governors, the course of education given by the secondary schools should be begun early, and the longer it is delayed the less advantage the pupils gain from it ; moreover, secondary education beginning late and lasting for a year or so is of little practical value, and may in some cases be time wasted.

4. The admission of any considerable number of pupils of fourteen or fifteen years of age or more, and so backward as to have only just passed the Sixth Standard, would greatly disorganize any secondary school, as it would tend to create a set apart from the rest of the school (a condition which the Governors have earnestly and, so far, successfully striven to avoid), and their lack of ability would tend to bring the whole of the free pupils into contempt.

5. To raise the standard of qualification for older pupils would serve no useful purpose. The pupils would merely be kept so much longer at the primary school, trying under a less efficient system to do work which it is the part of the secondary school to teach.

6. The Governors based their decision to come under the Act (which they believe they were the first school in the colony to do) upon the average number of pupils annually qualifying, and for which they can see their way to provide sufficient teaching-power. If this number were greatly exceeded, the assistance which they have been already compelled to ask towards cost of buildings would be needed still more urgently and to a greater extent. In fact, without aid the Governors could not provide more accommodation than at present exists at the Nelson College.

To sum up—(a.) The Governors do not consider that the evil referred to by Mr. Sinclair exists in this district. (b.) Whether this be so or not, free places were meant for deserving pupils, not for idlers or incapable children. (c.) The admission of backward pupils of advanced age will be useless to themselves and demoralising to the rest of the school.

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

I have, &c.,

JAS. BLAIR, Secretary.

RANGIORA HIGH SCHOOL.

SIR,—

Rangiora, 14th July, 1904.

In reply to your letter of the 26th May, covering a memorandum to the Department from the Chairman of the Otago High Schools Board, I have to state that your letter was forwarded to the headmaster of the school under our management.

I append his report, which was considered at a meeting of the Board last evening, and adopted as an expression of the Board's views on the matter.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary for Education Wellington.

ROBERT BALL, Secretary.

[Enclosure.]

SIR,—

Rangiora High School, 14th July, 1904.

I beg to acknowledge the receipt through you of a memorandum from the Education Department, covering a copy of a letter sent to the Department by the Governors of the Otago High Schools. The said letter contains a suggestion that the age-limit for free pupils be abolished. The Department's memorandum invites the opinion of the governing bodies on the matter, and I have the honour to forward herewith a statement of my views on the question.

I shall first deal seriatim with the special points noted in the memorandum.

1. It is quite true that any child with ability above the average should pass the Sixth Standard under the age of fourteen. But if a boy's birthday is in June, and the primary school examination in August, he must either pass at the age of 13 years 2 months or lose his chance of a free place ; whereas, if his birthday is in December, he must pass at 12 years 8 months. In either case he might, of course, get into the secondary school by waiting until the next annual examination, and entering the secondary school at the commencement of the last term. But to this course there are two decided objections—(a) the secondary school authorities may object to an influx of free scholars during the last term, on account of the consequent dislocation of work ; (b) and, in any case, at the end of fifteen months at the secondary school the pupil, if desirous of continuing there, is asked to pass the same examination as those who have had the full term of two years.

As some indication of the extent to which this holds good, I may mention that in this school last year, out of forty-eight children who were granted free places, no less than eight, or about 16 per cent., entered during the last term for the reasons above stated, and were thus compelled to accept a fifteen months' instead of a two years' course, with little likelihood of being able to qualify for a further term.

2. The fact that Education Boards fix their Junior Scholarship age at fourteen, thirteen, or twelve certainly proves that, in their opinion, children deserving of secondary education show merit before that age. But it must be remembered that—(a) in every education district there exists hardships and anomalies arising from the age-limit; (b) and these scholarships are comparatively very few, and are gained by only the very brightest children, who, in most cases, have been specially prepared for the examination; (c) and the full powers of many children develop at a later age.

3. The important point, from the view of the small secondary schools, is that pupils before entering shall have passed Standard VI. I am of opinion that the admission of any children below that standard militates against the organization of such schools by increasing the number of classes under the direction of the individual teacher.

4. The age of admission seems unimportant; the standard of attainment, measured by a Sixth Standard pass, is all-important.

6. Yes. But in the case of this school, which, on account of the smallness of its revenue, is allowed only three free places, the proportion would have to be largely increased to meet all cases of hardship in connection with the age-limit.

In conclusion, it is my firm conviction that the abolition of the age-limit is the only way of doing away with the existing anomalies. That these anomalies are not unimportant is proved by the fact that out of sixty-three pupils admitted last year twenty-one were adversely affected by the age-limit; of these, some were admitted during the third term, in order to get free places for fifteen months instead of two years, some were granted exhibitions, the remainder paid the ordinary school fees.

For all these reasons I am strongly of opinion that the age-limit should be abolished.

Yours, &c.,

T. R. CRESSWELL, M.A., Headmaster.

The Chairman, Board of Governors, Rangiora High School.

CHRISTCHURCH BOYS' AND CHRISTCHURCH GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

Canterbury College, Christchurch, 29th June, 1904.

I have the honour, by direction of the Chairman, to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 26th May, which was placed before the Board at a meeting held on the 27th instant, when the following resolution was passed: "That with respect to 'The Secondary Schools Act, 1903,' and clause 3 thereof, it is inadvisable at present to make the alteration suggested by the Board of Governors of the Otago High Schools, in the direction of doing away with the age-limit of fourteen years."

I have, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

A. CRACROFT WILSON, Registrar.

CHRIST'S COLLEGE GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

SIR,—

Christ's College, Christchurch, 16th June, 1904.

I have the honour, by direction of the governing body of Christ's College, to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 26th May last, enclosing copy of a letter received by the Education Department from the Board of Governors of the Otago High Schools.

After consultation with the headmaster of Christ's College Grammar School, I have the honour to reply with respect to clause 1 of your letter: From the fact that the average age of passing Standard VI. is 13 years 10 months, it seems plain that a boy or girl with ability above the average would probably pass Standard VI. before reaching the age of fourteen, not improbably before the age of thirteen.

With respect to clause 2: The widespread implied belief, that a boy or girl deserving of free secondary education would generally show merit before the age of fourteen, thirteen, or even twelve years was reached, seems to be founded upon good reason.

With respect to clause 3: The governing body of this College is of opinion that it would not be desirable to postpone the commencement of secondary education until a boy has reached the age of fourteen or fifteen years.

With respect to clause 4: The admission of a large number of pupils of fourteen or fifteen years of age who had only just passed Standard VI. would prejudicially affect the organization of this school.

With respect to clause 5: The test for admission to this school is made more strict for those of advanced years.

Clause 6: I have no remark to make.

Clause 7: No case of hardship under the present regulations has come under the notice of the governing body of this College.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

WALTER HARPER, Sub-Warden.

ASHBURTON HIGH SCHOOL.

REPLIES to Department's circular letter of the 26th May, 1904:—

1. Admitting the fact that a bright pupil should pass the Sixth Standard under fourteen years of age, there are likely to be always a few who, owing to accidents, have not been able to do so. The age

test seems to set a premium on precocity which a purely merit test appears to obviate. We are also of opinion that the standard of the certificate of proficiency is too low, and the supply of free-place pupils might be more reasonably regulated by raising the standard.

2. The fixing of the age-limit for scholarships is largely a matter of expediency.

3. We are of opinion that the wish and the capability to take advantage of a high-school course is more important than any age question. The subordinate position now taken by Latin also obviates the necessity of getting the high-school pupil at the earliest possible age.

4. The number cannot be very large if the average of passing is 13 years 10 months, and it could, moreover, be regulated by a more searching educational test.

5. There seems to be no pressing necessity to regulate any admission test by age.

6. Question 4 rather presupposes a number which Boards could not deal with under the endowment scholarship regulation.

7. The number of cases of real hardship may be few, but that does not remove the responsibility of trying to relieve them.

8. The merit test might relieve the financial difficulty as efficiently as the present age test.

9. Although we have answered the questions seriatim, we think it sufficient to say that we are unanimously of opinion that the age test should not be the determining factor in the admission of a child to a secondary school.

JOHN DAVISON, Secretary.

TIMARU HIGH SCHOOL.

SIR,—

High School Board Office, 27th June, 1904.

The enclosed is a copy of the Board's reply to the various queries contained in the circular of the 26th May, 1904.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

J. H. BAMFIELD, Secretary.

[Enclosure.]

SIR,—

Timaru, 27th June, 1904.

In reply to the various queries contained in your circular of the 26th May, I am instructed to note as follows :—

1. The age-limit of fourteen years should undoubtedly be abolished, or, if not abolished, it should be raised at least to fourteen years and a half. This latter would serve two ends—leaving a larger margin for country children, and a larger interval to cover the delay between the date of examination and that of joining the school.

2. In the case of this Board the standard for the Junior Scholarships co-ordinates pretty well with the Fifth Standard; besides, the Junior Scholarship standard is not always a test of what resources and aptitudes a boy or girl may exhibit some time after.

3. It is not desirable to postpone it longer than can be helped, but by insisting on a low age-limit you may shut out pupils who, if they had the chance, might prove themselves well worthy of the advantage extended to them.

4. Not seriously in any case, but the Board would gladly take the risk.

5. If the scholastic conditions of entrance should be raised much higher—say, the Seventh Standard—the number of candidates, it is feared, would be considerably reduced; Seventh Standard qualifications are not to be attained in every school.

6. This, of course, in certain cases would be a considerate and generous way out of the difficulty, but we shrink from the round-about way of referring every such case to the Minister, involving both delay and uncertainty.

7. The possibility of hardship in not a few instances is obvious—at the present moment this Board can point to six or seven such instances.

8. This concession to district high schools we have reason to believe suits them admirably, and we would be pleased to have the same concession extended to us.

9. As to finance, taking into account all the possible contingencies open to us to imagine, any larger but still moderate expenditure would be more than counterbalanced by the advantages to be gained.

GEORGE BARCLAY,

Convener of Exhibition Committee Acting for Board.

The Secretary for Education.

WAITAKI HIGH SCHOOL.

SIR,—

Oamaru, 22nd June, 1904.

I am in receipt of your letter of the 26th May, in which you ask my opinion on several points raised by the Governors of the Otago Boys' and Girls' High Schools in a letter to the Hon. the Minister of Education dated the 5th February last, in which they ask the Minister to consider if he can see his way clear to remove the age-limit for pupils entering the high schools under fourteen years of age.

I shall endeavour to give you my opinion on the various points asked for in their order.

1. I have no belief in the argument often used, that a pupil may not show any ability till thirteen or fourteen years of age, but may afterwards become a brilliant scholar. My experience is entirely in the opposite direction; and I also find, on looking up the records of the Otago Education Board, that

as a rule the pupils in most of our small country schools pass the Sixth Standard at an earlier age than they do in the large town and city schools. Besides, I do not think the State should be called on to pay for secondary education to any pupils who do not show at least average ability in the primary schools before they pass the Sixth Standard.

As the Secondary Schools Regulations read at present there are cases of hardships, as the standard examinations in Otago are begun about the month of June and are not ended till December. Some pupils easily pass the Sixth Standard before they are fourteen years of age, but if they at once enter the secondary schools on passing Standard VI. they may only get five or even four terms as free pupils, instead of six terms as intended by the Secondary School Regulations. (See your letter to the Chairman of the Otago Education Board dated 7th April, 1904.)

I think if the regulations were altered so as to allow any pupil who had passed the Sixth Standard under the age of fourteen years at any time of the year to enter as a free pupil either during the year they pass Standard VI. or not later than the beginning of the next high-school year. There are a number of cases where pupils pass the Sixth Standard under fourteen years of age, but are over fourteen by the 31st December next, and therefore cannot enter the high school in the beginning of the following year as free pupils because they were over fourteen years on the previous 31st December, and if they enter, say, in September of the year in which they passed the Sixth Standard they are only entitled to four terms as free pupils. As you state in your letters to the Education Board of Otago before referred to, "The intention is that the tenure of a free place in a secondary school shall date from 31st December preceding the date of the pupil's admission to the secondary school." You will see that any pupil entering a secondary school in the second or third terms in any year will only be entitled to another full year, and in some cases if they wait till the beginning of the following year they may be over fourteen years of age on the 31st December preceding.

2. The great majority of children who will do credit either to the school or themselves will, in my opinion, show merit before they are thirteen or fourteen years of age. I think that the widespread belief is founded on fact.

3. Certainly not; they should begin at thirteen years of age or even earlier.

4. I am not aware that a large number of pupils fifteen years of age would affect the organization of a secondary school, but I think it would seriously affect the good results which should be shown by secondary schools at the end of each year, as a pupil who could not pass Standard VI. till over fourteen could not be expected to do as much credit to the school as one who could pass the standard test at twelve or thirteen years of age.

5. I think if the age-limit was raised, and the test for admission made more strict, the result would be very much the same as at present, as any pupil who cannot pass the Sixth Standard at fourteen years of age would not be able to pass an entrance examination higher than Sixth Standard subjects, as he could not pass in subjects which he had never been taught.

6. I think if the regulations were amended so as to authorise High School Boards, under clause 3 (d), to give a free place for every £30 or even £40 instead of £50 as at present, each School Board would be able to meet all cases of deserving pupils who might be excluded by the age-limit of fourteen years. There are two or three cases in this district of children of poor parents, who show considerable merit, who are precluded from taking advantage of secondary education as free pupils on account of the age-limit, but if the regulations were amended in the direction I have indicated in answering queries 1 and 6 these cases would be met. You will see that, having allotted the full number of free places allowed by the regulations under clause 3 (d), we are unable to give relief to any more, and unless some of the pupils who are now in the school as free pupils under clause 3 (d) drop out we may not have any openings for any pupils under clause 3 (d) next year.

The foregoing are my opinions on the whole subject, and I have to apologize for being so long in answering your letter, as I have been so busy with other matters that I had not the time until now to give your inquiry the consideration that it required.

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

I have, &c.,

DONALD BORRIE, Chairman.

SOUTHLAND BOYS' AND GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOLS BOARD.

SIR,—

Invercargill, 23rd June, 1904.

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 26th ultimo, covering a copy of letter of the 5th February from the Chairman of the Otago High Schools Board.

In reply I have to inform you that this Board is of opinion that the present regulations should have a fair trial before further alterations are made in them, as the Board approves on the whole of the regulations now in force.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary for Education, Wellington.

CHARLES ROUT, Secretary.

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