

WELLINGTON.

SIR,—

Education Board Office, Wellington, 31st March, 1909.

In accordance with the requirements of "The Education Act, 1908," I beg to submit the following report of the Education Board of the District of Wellington for the year 1908:—

The ballot held in compliance with the requirements of "The Education Act, 1908," resulted in the retirement of Messrs. Aitken (City), McDonald (Manawatu-Hutt), and Vile (Wairarapa), who were re-elected, the first unopposed. The membership of the Board at the end of the year was thus: Wellington City Ward—Messrs. J. G. W. Aitken, W. Allan, R. Lee; Manawatu-Hutt—Messrs. W. H. Field, M.P., J. Kebbell, Captain McDonald; Wairarapa Ward—Mr. W. C. Buchanan, M.P., Hon. A. W. Hogg, M.P., Mr. A. H. Vile. At the August meeting Mr. R. Lee was unanimously re-elected Chairman. The Board's representative Managers of Technical Schools were: Wellington—Messrs. Aitken, Allan, and Field, M.P.; Petone—the Chairman and Captain McDonald; Pahiatua—Messrs. W. C. Buchanan, M.P., and A. H. Vile. Mr. J. R. Blair continued to represent the Board on the Wellington School Commissioners.

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS.—At the beginning of 1908 158 schools were in operation. During the year there were opened new schools at Muhunoa East, Ngaio (Crofton), Admiral Run, Glencrieff, and Stronvar, and there were closed Akitio, Waiohine, Limehills, and Glencrieff, leaving 159 in operation at the end of the year.

ATTENDANCE.—The average roll and attendance for the respective quarters and the year were:—

						Average Roll.	Average Attendance.
March	...	...	...	...	...	16,834	14,907
June	...	...	...	...	...	16,919	14,839
September	...	...	...	...	...	17,052	14,832
December	...	...	...	...	...	17,348	15,468
Year	...	...	...	...	...	17,038	15,012

The average attendance was thus 88.1 per cent. of the average roll, the highest numerical and the highest average attendance in the history of the district. Compared with the figures of 1907 the increase was 1,005; with those of 1906, 656. The attendance-conditions were last year much more favourable than in the previous year. The Board's powers of compelling attendance were exercised with firmness and discretion. The following figures summarise the work of the Truant Officer: Visits to schools, 561; breaches of the law reported by head teachers and dealt with, 3,700; proceedings taken in 226 cases, in 190 of which a conviction was recorded, 8 were dismissed, and in 28, proceedings were discontinued owing to improved attendance or other sufficient reason. There were enrolled 30 children, mostly new arrivals, who were not attending school. Making every allowance for misfortune and extreme poverty, there still remain a very considerable number of parents who, from indifference or actual greed, would deny their children the full advantages of education offered by the State.

While the figures quoted above appear to show a satisfactory regularity of attendance, there are two features of the attendance problem which merit more careful attention than they receive. The following figures, which are the total enrolment at the time of the Inspector's visit in the standards named, show that, notwithstanding the existence of a compulsory attendance law up to the Fifth Standard, of the children who enter the Third Standard in this district nearly 6 per cent. are withdrawn before they reach the Fourth Standard, 20 per cent. before they reach the Fifth Standard, and 35 per cent. before they reach the Sixth Standard.

Average.	Year.	Standard III.	Standard IV.	Standard V.	Standard VI.
13,462	... 1904	2,076	1,879	1,552	1,091
14,071	... 1905	2,016	1,983	1,665	1,344
14,356	... 1906	2,017	1,948	1,680	1,386
14,007	... 1907	2,087	1,931	1,704	1,379
15,012	... 1908	2,148	2,012	1,737	1,307
		10,344	9,753	8,338	6,507

Thus the Third Standard fell from 2,016 in 1905 to a Fourth Standard of 1,948 in 1906, a Fifth Standard of 1,704 in 1907, and a Sixth Standard of 1,307 in 1908, at a time when the average of all pupils attending had increased from 14,071 to 15,012. An examination of your reports shows a similar shrinkage in numbers throughout the Dominion, as the pupils advance from the Third to the Sixth Standard.

A second unsatisfactory feature of our school life is the growth in numbers of what may be called the legal attender, who knows so well what the law requires that he absents himself regularly two half-days a week. The case of the legal attender will, in the opinion of my Board, and, as it has been ascertained of nearly every other Board in the Dominion, be best met by an amendment of section 149, "Education Act, 1908," with a view to compel the attendance every day of all pupils of compulsory age, except where satisfactory reason for absence is given. The increase in the numbers of pupils of this somewhat unsatisfactory class justifies the Boards in this recommendation. With tactful administration and proper exemption safeguards, such an amendment of the law would not involve hardship. As you are aware, the amendment here recommended is already in operation in the more progressive of the United States. The Board commends to your favourable consideration its recommendation that a penalty should be imposed on employers of children who are below the standard of exemption.