

SOUTHLAND.

SIR,—

Education Office, Invercargill, 26th March, 1909.

In compliance with the provisions of the Education Act, 1908, the Education Board of the District of Southland has the honour to submit this report of its proceedings for the year ended 31st December, 1908.

THE BOARD.—At the beginning of the year the Board consisted of the following members: Mr. John Fisher (Chairman), and Messrs. John Cowie, D. Gilchrist, W. Macalister, T. MacGibbon, I. W. Raymond, John C. Thomson, J. Crosby Smith, and W. N. Stirling. The members retiring by rotation in the month of August were Messrs. I. W. Raymond, John Fisher, and W. N. Stirling. At the election held in the same month, Messrs. John Fisher, West Ward (unopposed); George James Anderson, East Ward; and Harold F. S. King, Central Ward, were duly elected. It may be noted that, owing to his prolonged absence from the Dominion, Mr. I. W. Raymond did not stand for re-election. At the subsequent meeting of the Board a resolution appreciative of the efficient services rendered to the Board and to the cause of education in the district by Mr. I. W. Raymond and Mr. W. N. Stirling respectively was unanimously adopted. The Board held thirteen meetings (twelve ordinary and one special) during the year, and the Executive Committee, which consists of all the members of the Board, met twenty-five times. At the meetings, almost without exception, the attendance of members was most satisfactory, the average for meetings of the Board being 7 (nearly), and for meetings of the Executive Committee 6·7; and this notwithstanding the fact that two members were absent on leave for a period of about six months. Messrs. W. Macalister and I. W. Raymond were duly re-elected as the representatives of the Board on the Board of Governors of the Southland High Schools. Consequent on his departure for Great Britain, Mr. I. W. Raymond resigned his position as a member of the High Schools Board, and Mr. J. Crosby Smith was elected to fill the vacancy. In the month of April Mr. Thomas MacGibbon was re-elected to represent the Board in the Trust of the School Commissioners of Otago and Southland for the ensuing period of three years.

SCHOOLS.—At the close of the preceding year there were in operation 170 schools. A new school was established at Minaret (on the shores of Lake Wanaka) and the school at the Neck (Stewart Island), previously controlled by the Native Department, was on certain conditions taken over by request on the 1st October last.

The small schools (chiefly household) at Slopedown, Maori Point, Caroline, Glencairn, and Centre Island were closed during the year, thus leaving the number in operation in December last as 167. The greater proportion of the schools in the district belong to the lower and middle grades.

With the concurrence of this Board, the application of the School Committee at Gore for the disratement of their district high school and the establishment of a high school under section 88 of the Act of 1908 to carry on the work of secondary education in that town and district was granted by your Department. The change in status took effect on the 1st September last, on which date the school as a district high school ceased to exist. By mutual arrangement between the Boards, the headmaster and secondary assistants of the late district high school continued to carry on the work of secondary education till the close of the year.

ATTENDANCE OF PUPILS.—In the matter of school attendance there is but little to report, beyond the fact that the average, as compared with the roll-number, has shown a satisfactory increase. The average attendance for the year was 8,679, an increase of 198, and a record for this education district. The average weekly roll-number was 9,910. The percentage of average attendance to roll-number is therefore 87·5, an increase of 1·3 over the record of the previous year. The supervision of the monthly returns of attendance furnished by the teachers in terms of the Board's regulations on the subject has been carefully attended to by the Truant Officer, with the result that a fairly efficient check on truancy has thus been maintained. It may here be noted that an effort, supported by this Board, has been made to increase the stringency of the provisions of the School Attendance Act by making it obligatory on the part of parents to send their children to school ten times (five days) a week, instead of eight times as the law now requires, unless a good and sufficient cause for absence can be shown. The contention of those who have sought to bring about this amendment of the Act is that some parents are so careless of the educational progress of their children that they systematically detain them in rotation one day in each week from school, and that on the most frivolous pretexts. Cases of hardship occasionally happen, when to enforce absolute compliance with the Act would not be only unjust but cruel, and care is taken in this district to consider each such case on its merits, and to relax judiciously, wherever possible, the application of the very strict letter of the law.

THE TEACHING STAFF.—As in recent years, the Board has to report that the educational status of its teaching staff as a whole has not risen in any appreciable degree. This is perhaps only to be expected from the existing condition of things, and till the efforts of the Department, through its normal schools and training colleges, begin to bear fruit by the production of an ample supply of fully trained teachers. During recent years a very considerable percentage of the teachers in this district has left the service, some (of the gentler sex) for higher service elsewhere, and a lesser number of male teachers for other spheres of activity. With the advent of a much-improved scale of salaries, as provided in the Education Act Amendment Act of last session of Parliament, and the establishment of a beneficent superannuation provision for old age, there are signs of a turn in the tide. The commercial and farming prosperity of recent years has doubtless operated to some extent in the withdrawal of some of our promising young men from the ranks of the teaching profession. Should a period of industrial and commercial depression eventuate, as some predict, it is fairly safe to say that the improved condition of the teacher's position would act as an incentive to many to join the service who have hitherto turned their attention to other and perhaps more profitable pursuits. In the service of the Board at the close of the year there were 286 teachers—