

AUCKLAND, MONDAY, 10TH JUNE.

RICHARD CROWE examined on oath. (No. 18.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am Secretary of the Auckland Education Board, which position I have occupied for three years, including a year of temporary secretaryship prior to my regular appointment. I have been in the service of the Board for twenty-nine years.

2. What are the points upon which you wish to address the Commission?—The first point to which I wish to address myself is the staffing of the schools, and intimately connected with that is the question of the scarcity of teachers. There is at present a great scarcity of teachers in the Auckland District. Some sixty-four students were released from the Training College after their course of training at the beginning of the present year. Of these, fifty-eight were absorbed and in employment before the end of February, and before the end of March the remainder were all employed. We have at least 250 uncertificated teachers in the employment of the Board. One of the chief causes of this condition of affairs is what I must call the generous staffing of the Grade 4 schools at one end of the grade. At the other end of the grade the staffing is not at all generous. A school with an average of thirty-six children for the year is entitled to an assistant beginning at £90 a year. We have a number of schools where the average is always about thirty-six—running from thirty-six to forty. Altogether we have 135 Grade 4 schools, and I should say that in the great majority of these the average is less than fifty. One of the greatest causes of the difficulty of finding teachers is the position which was created three years ago by the Act of 1908. Another point that I would like to emphasize is the fact that we have a rapidly growing district, and the regulations make no provision for the case that I mention. I will take a typical case—that of Waihi South. The Board found it necessary to enlarge the school, and the average roll, I think, was from 150 to 190 at the beginning of one quarter. A telegram to this effect came to us from the head teacher, and we proceeded to appoint an additional teacher, and we asked the Department to find a salary for that teacher. The Department informed me that it could not be done, so we had to pay that extra teacher out of the relieving fund. That sort of thing has happened in three other instances. We find very great difficulty in getting suitable teachers for district high schools. The salaries are not sufficiently attractive to get teachers who are really qualified to do the work of these schools. Coming to the question of the size of the district, it is now so large that it is fairly difficult to administer. There is a considerable area of newly settled country between Te Kuiti and Owango. Settlement is extending on both sides of the railway towards the east and west, and for want of roads the country is exceedingly difficult of access. Several grants have been made for the erection of schools in that district, but we have found it impossible to build the schools for anything like the amount available. In one or two instances the prices exceeded the grants by fully 75 per cent. On account of the want of roads the material has to be packed at a cost of something like 12s. or 14s. per cwt. In one case we found it impossible to build even a shelter-shed school. This is a new idea—a school with a lean-to roof and windows and sarking, fairly comfortable for temporary use, which would ultimately be used as a shelter-shed when they come to build a proper school. It was estimated that these shelter-shed schools could be built for about £80 each, but on endeavouring to carry out the idea we found that in that district it could not be done for the money.

3. *Mr. Hogben.*] What would that school cost to build?—Something like £120 or £130, or possibly £150. The grant of the Department would under ordinary conditions have been a splendid one, but this year the weather broke up early, and we found it impossible to get the material in. Another difficulty to which I wish to refer is that of the free school-books. We found it exceedingly difficult in this district, though we got very fair terms from the contractors, to have the books supplied to the schools within a reasonable time after the beginning of the year. The system also entails a considerable amount of work in our treasury department. The Central Department is not satisfied with a general statement or a grouping of the cost of the books, and altogether the thing is not working at all satisfactorily. We find considerable difficulty in the office in complying with the requests of the Department for returns. It is difficult to get from the teachers the information upon which these returns are based. Take, for instance, the annual examination return. The examinations are to be held in November and December, and the returns forwarded to our office. They are examined by the Inspector, and one copy is returned to the teacher to be kept as a school document. It is frequently the end of March before we have these returns completed in the office. The teachers make very many errors in filling up the returns, and consequently they have to be returned to the teachers for correction. It is nothing uncommon to have a return sent back two or three times. Sometimes as many as three or four letters have to be written to the teachers asking for the returns. Part of the trouble, of course, is due to the fact that the annual holiday occurs in December and January, and we cannot get at the teachers sometimes until the middle of February. These are all the points I propose to bring before the Commission.

4. *Mr. Pirani.*] Are there any other returns with which you have difficulty?—The quarterly return under the heading of "Number according to Age and Classification" gives more trouble than any other, on account of the amount of detail to be filled in, and the small amount of space given in the form for writing those details. Some of the teachers do not write microscopically, and there is difficulty in finding room for the particulars required.

5. Is there any necessity for giving these details every quarter?—As far as I understand there is no necessity in the first three quarters of the year. The figures are required for the parliamentary return at the end of the year. I should think that if a special return were made for the December quarter that would give the Department sufficient information.

5A. Is there any other part of the return that you think is unduly harassing?—I do not think so.

6. Is not the return of salary that is forwarded to the Department unduly extensive?—It entails a considerable amount of work.