

1852.

VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM THE DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOL BOARD OF WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE THE
EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS OF THIS COLONY.

*Laid upon the Council Table by the Colonial Secretary, by command of His Excellency
the Lieutenant Governor, and ordered by the Council to be printed, 7th December, 1852.*

[COPY.]

Denominational School Office,
Melbourne, 13th September, 1852.

SIR,

I have the honor, on behalf of the Denominational School Board, to transmit to you, for the consideration of His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, a statement of what they believe to be the actual Educational requirements of this Colony at the present juncture, in the hope that some adequate provision may be made out of the revenues of the Colony to meet the pressing emergency of the case.

The Board would wish to point out, that the present deficiencies in the Educational arrangements of this Colony, arise in a great measure, from the smallness of the amounts applied to the support of its Schools during the time when Port Phillip was a province of New South Wales.

It appears from official returns, that the sum of £14,603 18s. 4d. only, was applied to the support of all our Schools, out of the public revenues, from 1839 to 1st July, 1851; of which sum an amount of £1,768 was expended on National Schools, leaving £12,835 for Denominational Schools during twelve years and a half, no portion of which has ever been available for giving assistance in the erection of School Buildings.

Since Separation, an amount of £7,247 15s. has been appropriated for the establishment and support of Denominational Schools during the present year, out of which, about £1,000 will probably be devoted to the erection of School Buildings. During the administration of the Board for the years 1849-50-51, the average payment to each School (in which more than one Teacher was frequently employed) was about £40 per annum, and during the present year the allowances to Schools have averaged about £55, while the cost of living appears to have been doubled. The School Fees are calculated to realize about an equal amount. The Board, therefore, respectfully submit, that Teachers in this Colony, never have been placed in such a position as would warrant the expectation of their being generally efficient and experienced preceptors. Accordingly a large proportion of those who are now employed as Teachers in Denominational Schools, are deficient in skill and in general intelligence; although there are at the same time, many pleasing exceptions. The evil alluded to has, it is believed, arisen from the inferior position in which the Schoolmaster has been all along placed, and from the want of encouragement thus afforded to superior Teachers, to emigrate from the Mother Country, and engage in tuition here.

The Board are aware that Schoolmasters have been sent out in Emigrant Ships to this Colony, and have received a free passage and a gratuity of £5, in return for their services; but it appears from the records of the Emigration Office, that out of fourteen Schoolmasters who have arrived in as many different vessels, since the beginning of this year, only two have been engaged as Teachers in Schools, while twelve are entered as having gone on their own account.

The suggestion which the Board have therefore to make, is that arrangements should be made for bringing out Teachers who have been trained in Normal Establishments at home, at the public expense, with a view to their services being made available in the first place on board of Emigrant Vessels, and in the second place in the Schools of this Colony. In order to procure suitable persons it might be necessary to authorize an expenditure of £50 on the passage and outfit of such Teachers, and also to make a provision for their maintenance on their arrival, at the rate of say £75 per annum for male and £50 for female Teachers, from the public funds, to be met by an equal amount derived from local contributions.

An income of £150 or £100 would thus be guaranteed, and the course which the Board would take in this case, would be to communicate with the different denominations and ascertain from them what Teachers they were likely to require, and could engage to make certain provision for, on their arrival. At the same time the Heads of Denominations could give references to suitable agents at home, and the Board, on the part of Government, could take steps for having arrangements connected with the transmission of Teachers carried into effect.

In this way, it is conceived great practical improvement might be effected in the education of the Colony and superior instruction provided for the Children, whose number is being rapidly increased by Immigration.*

In connexion with this subject, the Board have another suggestion to make, of equal importance with reference to Schoolhouses;—up to the present date no public money whatever, has been expended on School Buildings, under the Denominational system, because the available funds were always absorbed in the support of Teachers, and the want of the means of encouraging the erection of suitable buildings has been very injurious.

Out of eighty-five Schools at present in connexion with the Board, it is ascertained that fifty-seven are in some measure provided with suitable buildings; but of these some are rented, while about twenty have been erected as much for Church as for School purposes.

There remain twenty-eight Schools unprovided with buildings at all fit for the purposes of education, many of them being held in huts of the roughest description.

Accommodation for the Teachers is provided in the case of only thirteen Schools; but, except in two or three cases, this consists of one or two rooms attached to the building, rather than of decent dwelling houses. The Board, therefore, propose that suitable School Buildings should be imported from England, of the most approved model, framed of galvanized iron, with Teachers houses in corresponding number.

From data furnished at the Colonial Architect's Office, they are led to estimate the expense of an iron Schoolhouse, 50 × 20 × 15, adapted also for a Church, and capable of containing one hundred and twenty children, delivered in London at £200, or with suitable fittings, at £250; and they conceive that it might be erected in Melbourne for £300, where a similar building of brick, or even of wood, at present prices would cost above £600.

It has also been ascertained that four roomed Cottages, of a comfortable description, could be delivered in London, at from £150 to £200, and would be available, as well as the Schoolhouses, for the use of such Teachers as might be imported, who would thus be put in the position accorded to them in England, where they are generally in the receipt of about £100 per annum, with a free house, of a comfortable description, under the provisions made by the Committee of the Privy Council on Education.

The Board need scarcely point out the great benefits which the adoption of such arrangements would confer upon Education here; the progress of which, they believe, depends more upon such practical measures, than on theory or system. They are, at the same time aware, that the Legislature have now the subject of Education under their serious consideration, and that changes may be made with regard to the general management of Schools.

The importation of Teachers however, and of School buildings, must, under all circumstances be desirable, and the application of public money to such purposes, will of course, be under such public control as may be deemed requisite.

The Board therefore, beg to submit to His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, the expediency of placing a sum of £6000 upon the Estimates for 1853, for defraying the expense of importing twenty iron Schoolhouses, at an average cost of £300 each, and a sum of £4000 to meet the expense of twenty Teachers' houses, at £200 each.

The principal, however, on which assistance is now given towards the erection of Schoolhouses by both the Denominational and National School Boards, as at present constituted, is to require not less than one third of the cost of School buildings to be defrayed from Local sources; so that it may be anticipated with certainty, that persons interested in Schools in different localities, will gladly repay to Government at least one third of the cost of such imported Schoolhouses and Cottages, so that the public outlay would be reduced from £10,000 to £6666 13s. 4d.

The expense of importing Teachers appears to have been hitherto, in some measure, made a charge upon the funds devoted to Emigration; but the Board suggest that this arrangement might be carried out to a larger extent, and on a system more permanently beneficial to the Colony.

The selection of Teachers at home, the Denominational Board, as far as they are concerned, would willingly leave to the different Denominations in this Colony; but it would be necessary to have a certain provision made for their maintenance on their arrival here, at once from public and from local funds in the manner which has been already pointed out.

* The number of Children between the ages of one and fourteen years who arrived coastwise from 1st January, 1852, to 30th November, was 8887.

The Board, however, beg to call His Excellency's attention to the Estimates which they have already sent in for their Department for the ensuing year. In these Estimates, the sum of £7635 12s. is available for the payment of Teachers and the erection of School Buildings, the remaining sums being applicable to special purposes and the expenses of management.

That sum however, would not be more than sufficient to secure the services of from one hundred to one hundred and twenty really efficient Teachers, who ought to be employed in Schools during the ensuing year, and there would be no balance in this case, left for the Erection of School buildings, without which, good Teachers will be of little avail.

The necessity of providing for such an expenditure, in the manner suggested, is therefore, very great, and it will, it is believed, meet with the cordial support of the Members of the Legislature. It is scarcely necessary to say, that the subject is now urged by the Denominational School Board, without reference to the constitution of their own body, but solely with a view to the promotion of Education in this Colony, on which its future prospects so greatly depend.

I have the honor to be,

SIR,

Your most obedient Servant,

(Signed) ROBERT WILLIAMS POULMAN,

Chairman.

The Honorable
The Colonial Secretary,
Melbourne.