

2. REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF SCHOOLS.

THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF SCHOOLS TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION.

As will be seen from the tables published in this report, the numbers of pupils being instructed in district high schools and in secondary schools showed marked increase last year, the increase in the case of the former being 542, and in the latter 874. The increase in the number of free pupils during the year was—in secondary schools, 311; in district high schools, 543: total, 854. If to these figures we add the increase in the number of holders of free places in technical schools, 443, we have a total of 1,297 more pupils receiving free secondary education in one form or another during 1905 than there were in 1904.

It has been said that the vast increase of our free-place system in this colony has led to an increase of "cram," and of "overpressure," the two terms being often used as if they were synonymous, which, of course, they are not: "cram" is a term which seems to have reference to a method of instruction in which too great a reliance is placed upon the powers of memory, and too little is done to develop the intelligence of the pupils; "cramming" is the mistake of the unskilled teacher, but it is often fostered by such examinations as lay stress upon mere book-knowledge in preference to evidence of mental training.

Careful inspection of the methods of instruction adopted in our secondary schools does not show an increase of "cram," but, on the contrary, a very marked advance in the direction of the improvement of the teaching in nearly all the schools: languages are being taught, generally speaking, in a more rational manner; in mathematics the teaching is somewhat more practical than it was, the complicated algebraical formula and the geometrical conundrum are slowly (all too slowly) disappearing in favour of problems more closely akin to the boys' or girls' experience and powers; the science text-book is gradually being relegated to its proper position, and the work of observation and experiment done by each pupil with his own hands and eyes is now a feature of the science-teaching in nearly every school, although there are still one or two large schools whose equipment for such work is seriously inadequate. It is true that in very few instances has the principle been adopted of choosing a branch of science in accordance with a pupil's surroundings, or with his probable future wants—to wit, in country districts, elementary agricultural instruction, the study of plant-life, elementary dairying. Neglect of the same principle is to some extent answerable for the persistence of a course of study resembling very closely what would have been found some years ago in a small grammar school in England. Indeed, some of the authorities seem to think or to fear that secondary education would disappear if Latin grammar, algebra, and Euclid no longer found a place in the work of every pupil of a secondary school; they probably forget that secondary education is more a question of method than of matter, that almost any subject may be made the vehicle of secondary education if it is one that leaves room for teaching which will promote the natural mental development of the youth from, say, fourteen to eighteen years of age.

The Matriculation Examination and the University Junior Scholarship Examination still exert too large an influence upon the curriculum of the secondary schools, although a comparatively small number of the pupils ever see the inside of the walls of a university college. Unfortunately the University of New Zealand can scarcely be said to be keeping pace with modern reforms in education, perhaps least of all in its entrance examinations. It is chiefly due to the influence of the University that in most of the secondary schools the mistake is still made of teaching, or, rather, attempting to teach, the elements of two foreign languages to the majority of the pupils. I have pointed out this mistake in previous reports; the results of thus giving a pupil, whose secondary-school life may not extend over more than three or four years, the task of learning two foreign languages are (1) that he learns neither of them well enough to be able to use it—that is, to read, write, or speak it; (2) that, therefore, he does not gain the best intellectual advantage the acquirement of a new language should give him—namely, the extension of his thought, and of his power of expressing that thought; and (3) possibly, although not necessarily, overpressure. One foreign language should surely suffice for all but a few of the brightest pupils in our secondary schools.

Another circumstance that may lead to overpressure is the prescription of excessive "home work." As far as my inquiries have gone, the practice in this regard differs somewhat in the various secondary schools of the colony; but I think there can be little doubt that the average amount of home work set is excessive. The average time required for home work is probably about two hours; in some cases it reaches three hours. I may be prejudiced—in fact, I go so far as to profess a profound disbelief in the utility of setting growing boys and girls any serious intellectual work to do at all in the hours when body and brain are tired, as they naturally are after some five hours of strenuous work in school. I do not think anything is gained by it; indeed, the testing of home work in school the next day seriously curtails the time that might be available for real teaching—"hearing lessons" is not teaching, as every one knows. The habit of working independently should be cultivated in the schoolroom; I doubt whether home lessons secure the formation of such a habit. It is certainly good, again, to encourage the habit of reading good books for recreation; by all means let us encourage the habit, but let the books be books that will attract