

"Auckland, 20th June, 1905.—The Chief Inspector of Schools, Auckland.—SIR,—I have the honour to request your attention to a scheme for the better organization and teaching of the pupils in Standards IV, V, and VI of the primary schools in large centres of population. The chief difficulty met with by teachers of the higher classes in large schools is not so much the largeness of their classes, as the difference in mental attainment and mental capacity of the pupils nominally in each class. Generally speaking, each large class contains at least three main subdivisions, consisting severally of the dull, the mediocre, and the bright. These children, differing widely, as I have indicated, in mental attainment and capacity, have the one objective. The curriculum of each class seems to have been based upon the absurd assumption that children are about equally equipped in mental capacity, and that they progress at about the same rate. The result is, in my opinion, that the dull are made stupid, the bright become somewhat lazy, and the mediocre are well taught. And under the system at present prevailing no blame can be attached to any one. The teachers work hard and skilfully, but the conditions under which they are working make it impossible that the best can be made of the innate faculty of every child. From a national point of view, this is lamentable. It is especially desirable that the best possible should be made of every bright child. This, under present conditions is but rarely attempted, and, indeed, cannot be done at all. I therefore advocate a change in the conditions. Omitting Devonport and Northcote Schools (because of the intervening waterway), there are at present in the city and suburban schools (according to last quarter's returns) 656 pupils, taught by nineteen teachers in nineteen schools; about 900 in S5, taught by twenty-three teachers in nineteen schools; and about 1,200 in S4, taught by twenty-four teachers in nineteen schools. There are thus in the upper standards about 2,850 pupils, taught in nineteen schools by sixty-six teachers—an average of about forty-four pupils to every teacher. The numbers actually taught by each of the various teachers ranges from fifty-five to thirty-nine in S6, from sixty-nine to thirty-two in S5, and from seventy-four to thirty-three in S4. (Note.—I have included in the total in every standard the pupils who are grouped in S4, S5, and S6, or in S5 and S6 for teaching purposes, but have not done so in the varying numbers taught by one teacher of grouped classes. In any such case the evil to which I am drawing attention is accentuated, not diminished, by the grouping.) Omitting for a moment the injustice to the pupils by such varying range, it would seem that some teachers are working under much more onerous conditions than others. Remuneration by no means coincides with onerousness of conditions. In 1904, for teaching sixty-five pupils in S4 one teacher received £235. In another school in the same year one assistant and pupil-teacher, for teaching ninety-four pupils, received between them £160; in the same year one teacher with vicarious assistance taught eighty-six pupils in S4 for £120. Anomalies such as these are inseparable from present conditions. At the risk of repetition, I should like to emphasize the fact that the condition that most injuriously affects teaching in our large schools is the difficulty of correctly grading the pupils. The remedy is clear: it is, however, exceedingly difficult to carry into operation. The pupils of S4, S5, and S6 are not sufficiently concentrated. Were they concentrated in, say, three centres there would be in each an average of 220 in S6, of 300 in S5, and of 400 in S4. Five teachers could then teach S6 in each school, six could teach S5, and seven could teach S4. This would result in an economy of twelve teachers. Were this done, it is manifested that the grading of pupils could be so uniform (having regard to attainments and capacity) that progress would be made much more rapid and sound than it is now. The dull boy now has a weary life. He is constantly being urged beyond his powers; he is too often the subject of 'odious' comparisons with his brighter classmates; with the result that he loses effort—he accepts his dullness, and loses confidence in himself. The bright boy, on the other hand, is unduly elated. He can overtake the work with the greatest ease. The constant iteration of the work rendered necessary by the presence of his duller classmate wearies him. He too often becomes conceited or lazy, or both. It is a fact that in the subsequent battle for life the bright boy is often worsted. Is it not worth while, at least, to consider whether his easy school career is not to some extent the cause? Place him in a class where all are bright—where all must use their best endeavour—and he will better find his level and better realize that there are in the world others besides himself with faculty for learning and for thinking. He will do much better work. It is my conviction that he could do at least twice as much as he now does. The energy thus released and, as it were, given scope might be devoted to incursions into other realms of knowledge. Again, the dull child would progress upon sounder lines. He need not be urged beyond his powers. If advisable, he need not be required to undertake the study of all the subjects specified in the syllabus. Subjects that appealed to him—woodwork, for instance—might receive greater prominence. He might thus be taught to believe in himself—a lesson more valuable than all the books can teach. He might learn, too, that ability does not lie solely in the power to assimilate the written word, but that the boy who can do things is as likely to succeed as the scholar in abstractions. And so varying through the different grades. (b.) The teacher's work would be much more agreeable than it is now. It may be thought that the teacher of a 'dull' class would have an unhappy existence. That is by no means the case. It is the effort to bring into one objective children of varying attainments and capacity that renders the teacher's life burdensome. If a teacher had to teach only pupils of approximately uniform attainments and capacity, no matter whether they were dull or bright, his work would be pleasant and not too onerous. (c.) A loss of time at present accrues from pupils attending manual-training schools. Such would not occur if the pupils were centralized as herein indicated. (d.) Better provision could be made for the teaching of science. The equipment of laboratories for three schools would not unduly strain the Board's finance; the equipment of nineteen would do so. Without a laboratory the teaching of science is little better than farcical. (e.) By the adoption of the scheme I herein suggest, a more healthy spirit of effort than now obtains would be created. No ordinary boy of eleven, for instance, would be satisfied to attend a junior school when he saw another of the same age going to a senior. (f.) The scheme would tend to economy. At present the actual cost of teaching