

APPENDIX A.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

I have the honour to present the following report for the year ended 31st December, 1929 :—

There has been considerable alteration in the personnel of the Inspectorate during the year. Four Inspectors—Messrs. Porteous, Strachan, Richardson, and Evans—retired on superannuation; five new appointments were made from teachers in the primary-school service, while consequential changes followed in the Senior Inspectorships of Wellington and Southland. Mr. N. T. Lambourne, M.A., Senior Inspector of Schools, Wanganui, was transferred to the Head Office for special duty.

It is with deep regret that I have to record the death of Mr. C. W. Garrard, B.A., late Senior Inspector of Schools, Auckland. Mr. Garrard, who had completed forty-seven years' service, and was to retire upon superannuation at the end of March, had just finished the year's work by completing the annual report and the grading of teachers when he was overtaken by a sudden and fatal illness. Appointed Inspector of Schools, Auckland, in 1906, and Senior Inspector in 1921, Mr. Garrard had done much in the cause of education in the northern province. His natural kindness and his outstanding ability as a teacher made him a welcome visitor in every school. As Senior Inspector, he gained the willing co-operation and unswerving loyalty of his colleagues, while as the Department's responsible officer in the largest education district he proved a capable administrator, a wise adviser, and loyal colleague. Mr. Garrard also gave valuable service as a member of the Council of Education, to which position he had been appointed by the Minister. His loss, at a time when he was just to enter upon a well-earned leisure, is deplored by his fellow Inspectors and by the large body of teachers with whom he was associated.

The new syllabus has now been in operation for a full year, and it is too much to expect that a radical change in the general system has resulted from it in a short time. Teachers will require to have a much closer personal experience with it before they can fully appreciate its aims, and put into practice its contents. It has been remarked that the syllabus does not involve drastic alteration in methods. It does, however, go further than any previous syllabus in extending to teachers freedom in the methods of teaching. The reports of the Inspectors show that few teachers have so far availed themselves of the privilege thus offered, and that they have been content to follow the courses as outlined in the syllabus, instead of using their own initiative. There may be a conservative tendency on the part of some teachers to keep to the traditional paths, and this is pardonable in the case of teachers less experienced or competent: for freedom carries with it a responsibility that must be accepted by the teacher who would exercise it. There is good reason to think that as the aims of the syllabus become more appreciated teachers will strike out on independent lines, and they should receive every encouragement in their venture. The Inspectors' reports indicate that they are looking for development along these lines, and the teacher who has the opportunity and skill to carry his schemes to a definite conclusion can proceed without trepidation.

The reports of the Inspectors show that the work in the various subjects shows improvement and, in cases, a marked improvement. The one subject in which there is most cause for adverse comment is spelling, the quality of which, in such written exercises as composition, is, on the whole, disappointing. Although spelling has received more attention in recent years in method and treatment, the results are still unsatisfactory. Indeed, in the largest school district, Auckland, the Senior Inspector reports that to judge by the proficiency test and the answers to scholarship papers, correct spelling is in danger of becoming a lost art. On his leaving school a child tenders in his spelling direct evidence to the public of the efficiency of the teaching he has received during the eight years of his primary-school course, and it is evidently necessary that steps be taken to remedy the present state of the subject.

In writing, too, there appears to be need for improvement. A uniform system has been adopted, designed, as far as possible, to meet the opinions of business men and, while in the period of transition there may be some temporary falling-off, it certainly seems as if a better quality should be sought. The attention of all concerned should be directed to the suggestions for the teaching of writing contained in the appendix to the syllabus. A scale for the guidance of teachers in the marking of writing is now in course of preparation.

Proficiency Examination.—In view of the fact that the course in arithmetic had been materially reduced in the new syllabus, and that greater time was, therefore, available for English subjects, which, after all, constitute the cardinal subjects of the primary instruction, it was decided to require a somewhat higher standard of attainment in English and arithmetic in the examination for certificates of proficiency. The minimum percentage in each subject was, therefore, raised by 5 per cent., the aggregate number of marks required for a pass remaining unaltered. It was represented, however, that the notice of the change was insufficient, and that hardship might ensue, with the result that the operation of the new rule was postponed. Investigations have shown that the higher demand would have made a comparatively small decrease in the award of certificates of proficiency and a corresponding