

1. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

Wellington, 12th June, 1931.

I have the honour to present the report for the year 1930.

With regard to the routine work of the Inspectorate there has been little deviation from the customary practice. In the earlier part of the year eighteen departmental and eighteen private registered secondary schools were fully inspected, as well as the secondary departments of twenty-five district high schools. In the period following mid-July all the departmental schools were visited in connection with the annual classification of teachers and the award of senior free places and leaving certificates. The system of partial accrediting for free places that has been followed for several years past has been retained with slight modifications; candidates who are not considered by the Inspectors ready to enter upon a senior course are allowed to sit the Intermediate Examination in November upon payment of a fee of 10s.

During part of the year Mr. T. R. Cresswell, M.A., formerly Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools, was temporarily employed by the Department as an Inspector, chiefly in connection with Technical High Schools. During his period of engagement he also inspected the West Christchurch District High School and four district high schools in the Hawke's Bay and Taranaki Districts.

The number of departmental secondary schools has remained stationary at forty-four. The aggregate roll on the 1st March was 17,127. The corresponding numbers in 1928 and 1929 were 15,943 and 16,867 respectively. It is evident that the rate of increase in the secondary-school population has begun to be affected by the low birth-rate of the war period. Were it not for the disturbing effect of the present financial depression it is almost certain that the roll numbers for 1931 would have had difficulty in maintaining themselves at the 1930 level. When suitable avenues of employment are closed to so many of the boys and girls in our secondary schools it is only to be expected that many pupils will remain at school longer than they had intended to, and will so help to swell the roll of the upper forms. The tendency of pupils to remain at school was noticeable in the larger towns towards the close of the year, and, as a consequence, the big town schools maintained their end-of-year rolls at a higher level than was their custom. In country districts the opposite tendency was observed, boys being taken away from school to assist on the farms.

During the year Dilworth School, Auckland, was added to the list of registered private secondary schools; these now number forty-eight, with an aggregate roll of 4,107, approximately 1,750 boys and 2,350 girls.

Only two sittings of the Teachers' Appeal Board were necessary, one at Dunedin and the other at Hamilton. Five teachers appealed against their classification; three of the appeals were subsequently withdrawn, one was allowed, and the remaining one disallowed.

The number of senior free places granted to pupils from departmental secondary schools on the Principals' recommendations remained almost stationary, 3,489 being granted, as against 3,448 in 1929. Pupils who fail to obtain these free places by accrediting may secure them by passing the Intermediate Examination; in actual practice, however, only about 40 per cent. of the possible number of candidates think it worth their while to sit the examination. Of the 621 who actually did sit in November only sixty-two succeeded in passing.

Higher leaving certificates, which entitle the holder to a University Bursary, provided he has not attained the age of nineteen years at the close of the year in which he qualifies for his certificate, were granted to 718 pupils from departmental and to 159 from endowed and registered private secondary schools on the recommendation of the Secondary School Inspectors. The corresponding numbers in 1928 were 674 and 104, and in 1929 they were 708 and 126. The remarkable increase in the numbers coming from endowed and private schools is somewhat surprising. Lower leaving certificates, for which there is now a very limited demand, except from a few girls' schools, were awarded by a similar system of accrediting; only forty-two were granted, including ten to pupils in private secondary schools. In 1928 and 1929 there were awarded eighty-five and sixty-six respectively. It is obvious, therefore, that under the present conditions of qualification and issue this certificate has outlived its period of usefulness.

The general question of leaving certificates has again been considered by the Department during the year, and a conference was held with representatives of the secondary, technical, and registered private schools in December. The arguments submitted in my last report in favour of a school certificate examination to be held synchronously with the University Entrance Examination still appear to me as cogent as hitherto. There is no doubt that if the standard of the school certificate were once established at a satisfactory level by means of an independent examination, and if employers and the public generally were given the opportunity to learn to assess the certificate so obtained at its true value, the time would soon arrive, probably within three or four years, when a system of partial accrediting for the certificate could safely and profitably be introduced. There is a natural inclination to avoid the institution of an additional examination, even though its establishment would divert from another public examination scores of candidates for whom the latter was not intended, and whose school courses have been hampered or even mangled in an endeavour to prepare for it. In a time of unprecedented financial stress, moreover, the expense of conducting an additional public examination is not to be lightly undertaken by any public authority. A decision on the question of leaving certificates has for various reasons been postponed, but it is hoped that it will shortly be found practicable to devise some satisfactory solution, and so free many of our secondary pupils from the necessity of following the more or less rigid professional course based upon the requirements of the University Entrance Examination.