

1. REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

I have the honour to present the following report on the primary schools of New Zealand for the year ending 31st December, 1934 :—

THE INSPECTORATE.

The Primary Inspectorate comprises thirty-seven officers. During the year the Service suffered a severe loss in the sudden death of Mr. W. G. Blackie, Senior Inspector of Schools, Auckland. His position was filled by Mr. M. Priestley, Inspector of Schools, Auckland, whose place was taken for the same period by Mr. G. K. Hamilton, Headmaster of the Auckland Normal School. No other staff changes took place. Owing, however, to the temporary closing of the training colleges in Auckland and Christchurch, Mr. J. G. Polson, Principal of the Christchurch Training College, was attached temporarily as Inspector to the Christchurch Inspectorate; Mr. F. C. Brew, Vice-Principal of the Christchurch Training College, and Mr. F. C. Lopdell, Vice-Principal of the Auckland Training College, were similarly attached to the Auckland Inspectorate. This temporary increase of staff enabled some assistance to be given to district inspectorates where the burden of work is relatively heavy.

One of the disadvantages of the existing system is the very uneven size of the Education districts in which the number of Inspectors varies from one to eleven. This makes it difficult to distribute equitably the load of inspection except by the Inspectors of the more favoured districts rendering assistance to their neighbouring colleagues.

I must pay a tribute to the enthusiasm and thoroughness with which the Inspectors have met the exigencies of the situation.

During the year the system of finding employment for all trained certificated teachers not yet in permanent positions was continued. This privilege was much appreciated and was of no small advantage to the schools. The reports on the teachers themselves indicate that they entered whole-heartedly into their work. One beneficial result of the present supply of certificated teachers is that there is hardly a school so remote as to be without a certificated staff. Whereas in 1913 no fewer than 29 per cent. and in 1920 no fewer than 28 per cent. of all teachers employed in public schools were uncertificated, the number now amounts to only a quarter of 1 per cent., and even the latter would disappear entirely were it not for the fact that in a few districts there is accommodation available for a local resident only. In such circumstances a higher and more even level of efficiency is naturally expected.

EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOLS.

The reports of the Inspectors indicate that the schools continue to maintain their efficiency. The tone and spirit of work are very good. The sterner form of discipline imposed from without is giving way to the orderliness that comes from a more scientific knowledge of child nature and a more perfect adaptation of work to the capacity and interests of the pupils. The preparatory (infant) and lower standard departments keep well abreast of best modern practice; in the upper school there is a tendency to cling to the more traditional methods. The ground-work in most subjects, especially in English and arithmetic, is well done, but there is an inclination to concentrate too exclusively on the work that can be tested by written examination. The liberty of planning courses, a liberty emphasized on the first page of the Syllabus of Instruction, has been claimed in too few cases. Too little is being done to develop the æsthetic, the emotional, and the creative side of child life. Hence such aspects of education as music, art, and associated crafts, drama, appreciation of literature (including poetry), receive inadequate treatment. A gradual improvement is taking place, but the general aim is still too much in the direction of enabling the pupil to earn his living, and not sufficiently in that of enabling him to find an enduring satisfaction in life at all stages of his existence. Unfortunately the Proficiency Examination at the end of the primary stage has influenced practice throughout the whole course; yet it is probable that the most important factors have been the force of mere tradition and the absence of the requisite knowledge and skill. With, however, the gradual permeation of the schools by teachers who have taken specialist courses in the training colleges the trouble should progressively disappear.

Little fault can be found with the teaching of the traditional three R's. Music is better than it has ever been, and some, though too little, progress is being made in the matter of the reading of music and in the development of choral work, so strong a feature in the schools of the Mother-country. Art is slowly improving, but attention is concentrated too exclusively on a photographic reproduction of objects instead of on illustration work, design, and decoration. The association of art with craft work has yet to be developed in our primary schools. The inspirational possibilities of colour are still to be explored. These await an adequate supply of trained teachers with adequate equipment.

Physical education on the recreational side is excellently catered for in both field and water sports. Wherever facilities are available swimming and life-saving receive enthusiastic attention. In this branch of education experts are readily available; for some years past all students leaving our training colleges have been well equipped. But in the field of remedial physical education the position is not so satisfactory; shortly after the new system of physical training was introduced it was necessary to withdraw the itinerant instructors, with the result that the difficult but valuable system