

1. REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

I have the honour of submitting my report on primary education for the year ending the 31st December, 1935 :—

THE INSPECTORATE.

The Inspectorate at the end of the year numbered thirty-eight, as compared with thirty-seven in 1934 and with forty-four in 1930. The following staff changes occurred during the year: Mr. A. Bain, B.A., Senior Inspector of Schools, New Plymouth, was promoted to the position of Senior Inspector of Schools, Auckland; Mr. C. N. Haslam, B.A., Senior Inspector of Schools, Invercargill, was transferred to a similar position in New Plymouth, while Mr. S. J. Irwin, of the Canterbury Inspectorate, was promoted to the position of Senior Inspector of Schools, Invercargill. Mr. M. Priestley, Acting Senior Inspector, Auckland, retired on superannuation, and Messrs. D. M. Rae, F. C. Lopdell, and J. G. Polson returned to duty in the Training Colleges, while Messrs. S. M. Mills, M.A., M. J. O'Connor, B.A., and A. Lake, B.A., joined the Inspectorate.

Owing to the great disparity between the size of the various education districts, it was found necessary, as during the past few years, to ask the Inspectorate in relatively well staffed districts to assist in the inspection of the relatively understaffed. The number of officers in the Inspectorates ranges from eleven in Auckland to one in Nelson; this is unsatisfactory both for the Inspectors and the schools of the smaller districts.

The principal function of the Inspector is to serve as a source of inspiration to teachers. Unfortunately his power for good is severely limited by his duties: an inspection report must be written annually on every school, public and private, and on every teacher in a public primary school, in order to meet the requirements of the annual grading of teachers. Unless our limited staff of Inspectors is increased, all this cannot be done and adequate time left for inspiring the work of the schools. The grading of teachers has become too intimately linked with inspection. We have now under consideration a simpler system of grading at less frequent though regular intervals, a system that will make unnecessary an annual inspection visit to schools conducted by highly competent teachers.

TRAINING COLLEGES.

At the beginning of the year the Teachers' Training Colleges in Auckland and Christchurch resumed operations after having been closed for twelve months. Four hundred and thirty students were admitted, four hundred in Division A (two-year students) and thirty in Division C (one-year students, graduates).

These colleges are functioning more effectively than ever before: the curriculum is broader, placing greater emphasis on the cultural aspect of subjects, while more intensive practice is given in the technique of teaching. A very gratifying feature was the standard of excellence attained in the technique of teaching by the one-year University graduate students, an indication of the value of a high standard of intelligence in college entrants.

The Auckland College, with the co-operation of the Normal School, resumed its practice of conducting a refresher course for teachers, some hundreds of whom attended. This association of the Inspectorate, the College, and the Normal School with the teachers cannot be too highly commended. It is not only a source of inspiration for the schools, but also a forum where advice can be given and misconceptions removed. Such refresher courses are a necessity in our country; in older and more populous countries teachers have almost daily opportunities of renewing and extending their knowledge and technique by attendance at special courses or occasional lectures.

CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOLS.

Consolidation of small rural schools is proceeding steadily. There are now about one hundred centres to which children are conveyed, and this has represented the closing or the non-establishment of some hundreds of small schools. The wonderful improvement of roads and of road transport during the past decade or two makes it increasingly possible to take the children to the school instead of the school to the children. The result is a better all-round education—academic, physical, and social. We still have, of course, the contrast between communities that consistently refuse consolidation and those that as persistently demand it. Reports indicate that once consolidation is accomplished there is no looking back; for consolidation really means that for the first time in our history the country child can remain in its own district and enjoy the educational advantages of its city fellow. Such is surely one of the most effective ways of making rural life attractive to people with families, for if the consolidated school is large enough facilities for post-primary and manual education can be made available thereat. The fear is sometimes expressed that if country children are educated, even for five hours a day, in a fair-sized country town, they will acquire a taste for town life and rural depopulation will follow; but this assumes not only that there will be no movement from town to country, but also that there is something essentially evil in town life and that a child born in the country should remain in the country. The problem of retaining and increasing our rural population will not be solved by denying the country child opportunity for the development of his personality. It is this right of the individual to the fullest development that is of primary importance; for when he approaches manhood he will have the right, and we should have given him the capacity, to choose his own career.