

REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF SCHOOLS.

The INSPECTOR-GENERAL of SCHOOLS to the Hon. the MINISTER of EDUCATION

SIR,—

Department of Education, Wellington, 30th May, 1894.

I have the honour to submit my report on secondary schools inspected by me in 1893. In the month of June I set out with the intention of inspecting the schools at Napier, Wanganui, and New Plymouth. In the course of my journey I received telegrams advising me that the Wanganui Collegiate School and the Wanganui Girls' School had suspended operations on account of an epidemic of measles, and that it would be useless for me to visit them. Owing to the same epidemic only about one-third of the pupils at the Napier Boys' High School, and about one-half of the pupils of the Napier Girls' High School, were present. In October I inspected the Auckland College and Grammar School, the Thames High School, the Whangarei High School, Miss Edger's and Dr Macarthur's private schools at Auckland (at the special request of the Auckland Board of Education), the Wellington College, and the Wellington Girls' High School, and in November, the Southland Boys' and Girls' High School, the Otago Boys' High School, the Otago Girls' High School, the Waitaki Boys' High School, the Waitaki Girls' High School, the Timaru High School, the Ashburton Boys' and Girls' High Schools, Christ's College Grammar School, the Christchurch Boys' High School, and the Christchurch Girls' High School. The Rangiora High School was at that time temporarily closed, it has since been reopened. A visit to the Akaroa High School would have involved the expenditure of more time than I had then at my disposal.

I have no hesitation in saying that the local authorities charged with the administration of the several public institutions for secondary education are discharging their functions with due vigilance, and are making good and faithful use of their powers, and of their endowments, and, further, that they have succeeded in obtaining the services of a large body of able and highly-qualified teachers—in some cases, eminently qualified, and in most cases more than equal to all the requirements of the positions they occupy. I regret that some of the teachers are working under conditions that obscure their merit, especially in the small towns, where it is impossible to have large schools, and where, on that account, the staff is too small for proper classification, or for due attention to every class, and the number of pupils who come sufficiently prepared, and who stay long enough to receive the best teaching the staff is competent to give, is discouragingly low. In such cases it is not only the teachers that are discouraged, the managers, too, are disappointed, and are too readily disposed to think that more pupils would attend if the teachers, by greater efficiency, made themselves and their schools more popular.

There is no need for me to enter into particulars with respect to the staff, the attendance, and the kind of work being done in the several schools when I inspected them, the annual reports of the schools, to be printed with this report, supply all information under these heads brought down to a later date, and they show quite clearly how unfair it would be to apply any common standard in judging of the efficiency of schools differing so widely among themselves in constitution and resources. I am in a position to testify that in each of the schools the course of study defined in its own report is strictly followed.

The schools at Whangarei and Akaroa, with only one teacher to each, afford opportunities of education that are not to be despised, and are doing useful work, but the special advantages of class teaching, and the stimulus of emulation, are almost entirely wanting in cases like this. It is true there is some compensation in the individual attention necessarily bestowed on each pupil, but this is to a great extent nullified by the very limited time that the master can devote to each. The relation between these institutions and the strong schools at Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin is one of contrast rather than of comparison.

It is scarcely possible for a school that has less than six forms, with six good teachers, to win distinction year after year by getting its pupils placed high in the Junior Scholarship examination list of the University. In this respect a large school has a double advantage it may be expected to have a larger number of promising candidates than a smaller school, and, secondly, having more teachers, it can give the larger number of promising candidates more thorough training for the competition. The disturbing elements that enter into calculations made on this basis, and that give interest to the competition, are, of course, the individual qualifications of the candidates for the year, and the comparative skill of the teachers, or the comparative value they set on the competition. It is fair to assume that, on the whole, and in the average supplied by a comparison of the results of several years among the large schools, with advantages approximately equal, the most efficient will secure the largest number of high places. This result ought not to be discouraging to the managers and teachers of the smaller schools, and they ought to limit their expectations, and their professions, with regard to their means and appliances.

I am convinced that the Junior Scholarship examination is a very useful and fitting test of the comparative efficiency of the schools. I am inclined to think that no other external examination of the schools is necessary. But what I wish to show is that it is not an adequate test of their merits. As an illustration of what I mean I may refer to the small High School at the Thames, the merits of which I am every year constrained to recognise, but which certainly cannot claim to be equal in efficiency with the larger schools. It is a school of about sixty pupils, in three divisions, each under one teacher. It is peculiar in this respect that it admits without fee any public-school pupil who has passed the Sixth Standard, and contains very few pupils except those who have in this way qualified for admission. In the lowest division careful instruction is given (by a lady) in the elements of the subjects that are studied in the secondary school, but not in the primary. In the middle division the settled habit of attention to work is very conspicuous, and a great part of the instruction takes the form of lecture, with judicious use of the blackboard. In the upper division, under the immediate tuition of the headmaster, there is an air of alacrity and a manifesta-