

TARANAKI.

SIR,—

New Plymouth, 10th May, 1905.

We have the honour to lay before you our annual report for the year ending the 31st December, 1904.

During the year seventy-seven schools were open. Three newly opened schools were not examined, nor were two which were closed for a portion of the year.

The following table contains a summary of the examination results :—

Classes.					Number on Roll.	Present at Inspector's Annual Visit.	Average Age of Pupils in each Class.
Standard VII.	...	...	...	...	80	71	Yrs. mos. 14 5
" VI.	...	...	...	...	226	216	13 11
" V.	...	...	...	...	431	421	13 3
" IV.	...	...	...	...	566	548	12 5
" III.	...	...	...	...	662	644	11 3
" II.	...	...	...	...	638	623	10 3
" I.	...	...	...	...	643	628	9 3
Preparatory	...	...	...	...	1,645	1,449	7 1
Totals	...	...	...	...	4,891	4,600	11 6*

* Mean of average age.

As compared with the return for 1903 the following increases are shown: Roll, 93; present at Inspector's annual visit, 150. The number of pupils absent at the annual visit was 291—95 in the standards and 196 in the preparatory classes. Last year the absentees numbered 348—106 in the standards and 242 in the preparatory classes. The number of pupils in Standard VII. shows an increase of eight. Of the eighty pupils in Standard VII., fifty-one were receiving free tuition in secondary subjects at the Stratford District High School, and in addition to these forty ex-Standard-VI. pupils were enjoying a similar privilege at the New Plymouth High School.

For the first time the three Roman Catholic schools at New Plymouth, Stratford, and Opunake were inspected and examined by the Board's Inspectors. The summary of results shows, roll, 267; present, 246. We are pleased to report that the work done, especially in the middle and lower classes, was highly satisfactory, and that the teachers were in a very high degree zealous and painstaking.

Though the new regulations did not come into force until the end of the year, we informed teachers that it would be noted as commendable if, so far as time and opportunity permitted, they introduced any of the new courses of instruction. In many cases this was done, and with very satisfactory results. One result, at any rate, has been that teachers who formerly considered the new syllabus an almost impossible one, now look upon it less unfavourably, and we are convinced that greater experience will lead to a deeper appreciation of its merits. The Course A geography, which at first raised so much opposition, was well attacked, particularly by the more experienced teachers, but, to the less experienced, some parts of the course present difficulties which can be overcome only by the formation of classes for the instruction of the teachers themselves. One department of nature-study is often misunderstood by those teachers whose inclinations lead them to take up plant-life, but whose knowledge is limited to general principles. Because they do not understand botanical classification, and cannot give the name of any plant brought to them by the pupils, they underestimate their capabilities to train the observing and reasoning powers. The names, though useful, are by no means essential, for the educative value of the lessons lies in discovering similarities and differences, and, by deducing the reasons for these, in leading the pupils to a recognition of general principles. Looked at from this point of view, terminology plays a very insignificant part.

In most schools, and particularly in the large ones, reading has reached a high standard of excellence, being marked by accuracy and by intelligence of expression. On the other hand, in some schools the reading is neglected in the lower classes, with the result that passages well within the understanding of the pupils are read without any attention to the sense, and the reading degenerates into a mere saying of words. It should be remembered that the reading, no matter how elementary, must contain all the elements of good reading, and that pupils, from the very earliest stages, must be led to grasp the writer's meaning, and then to give expression to that meaning in the words of the passage. In fact, in testing reading we do not even look at the book. We listen for the writer's meaning as interpreted by the child. Teachers would do well to adopt this practice more frequently.

The graphic system of writing has been introduced into the majority of schools, and we are pleased to note that wherever the principles have been studied and carefully taught the change has proved highly successful. Of the general neatness of the clerical work, we can speak in the highest terms.

The arithmetic tests were as a rule by no means well answered, and, even when the method of working was known, we were often astonished at the general prevalence of inaccuracies in the simplest mechanical operations. Nor was it only the mechanical work that was defective. Questions well within the syllabus, and which the teachers described as fair ones when the cards were handed to them before work began, were quite beyond the pupils. In great measure this arises from the lamentable weakness in mental arithmetic, which has been reported year after year without any appreciable improvement. Mental arithmetic is a means not only of inducing mental alertness, but also of rapidly