

TARANAKI.

SIR,—

New Plymouth, 13th March, 1917.

We have the honour to submit for the year 1916 our annual report on the public primary schools of the Taranaki Education District and of the private schools inspected.

At the end of the year the number of public schools in operation was 149, including six half-time schools. Of this number seventy-five were in charge of sole teachers. The private schools inspected number fifteen, with a total roll of 996.

The following table shows for each of the standard classes the number on the roll and the number present at the annual examination:—

					Number on Roll.	Present at Annual Examination.
Standard VII	...	...	...	...	52	49
„ VI	...	...	...	...	554	522
„ V	...	...	...	...	832	790
„ IV	...	...	...	...	1,102	1,066
„ III	...	...	...	...	1,158	1,119
„ II	...	...	...	...	1,076	1,027
„ I	...	...	...	...	1,178	1,127
Preparatory	...	...	...	...	3,481	3,222
					<hr/> 9,433	<hr/> 8,922

Inspection.—With few exceptions the schools received two visits during the year. In August the enlargement of the district came into operation, resulting in the addition of forty-five public and six private schools, and it was found that to pay annual visits to all the schools and to give the usual time to the larger ones was not feasible. As the whole district was new ground to one Inspector and part of it was so to the other, an attempt was made to gain acquaintance with as many schools and teachers as possible, and this proved a very strenuous task. The northern part of the new district, owing to the wide distribution of the schools and the bad roads, offered special difficulties.

Conditions.—With reference to conditions under which the schools are in operation, it is satisfactory to report that in spite of the fact that dairy and other farming forms the main occupation of the people the regularity of the attendance is commendable. Owing to the free use of horses few pupils have to walk long distances, and there is hardly any sign of mental weariness sometimes attributed to the children in a dairying district. It is satisfactory to note that a full school year is maintained. It is usual, except where epidemics have reduced the number, to find that the schools have remained open on at least 420 half-days during the year.

The district suffers from the general scarcity of trained and qualified teachers, especially in connection with the smaller schools. Of the head and sole teachers and assistants 126, or 45 per cent., are uncertificated. Many of these have, however, obtained partial passes or have passed the Intermediate Examination. The training of the teachers offers a real difficulty. Owing to facility in obtaining assistantships in favoured localities the pupil-teachers and probationers have a tendency to avoid attendance at the training college. There are also a large number of teachers that have not had any training, and as many of these are in remote districts it is not easy to meet their requirements. The teachers near the larger centres are provided for by Saturday and other classes, and an effort will be made to assist those in sole charge of the smaller schools by correspondence.

Efficiency.—The general efficiency of the schools is creditable to the teaching staff of the district. Occasionally some slackness is evident, but the great majority of the teachers exhibit earnest endeavour and keen interest. Of the 149 schools, thirty-one are recorded as very good, forty-five as good, forty-four as satisfactory or very satisfactory, eighteen as fair or very fair, and only one as very weak. Commendable results were presented in the private schools, the teachers of which are keen to adopt methods enabling them to maintain efficiency.

Standard VI.—The number of pupils examined for certificates, mostly at the end of the year, was 600. Of these, 388 were awarded proficiency and 135 competency certificates, a percentage of 64 and 23 respectively. A number of the candidates found difficulty in connection with the arithmetic, and the teachers concerned will find it advisable to discover the cause of any defective results.

Preparatory Classes.—While there is a general recognition of the importance of this section of the schools, increased application of kindergarten and other sound methods is demanded. In the larger schools this criticism applies to a very small extent. In one school the ordinary routine of the infant-room is supplemented in the lower class by the occasional employment with good effect of Montessori methods. In some parts of the district phonic methods are used in the early steps in reading. The use of wall blackboards and the application of concrete illustration and occupations require fuller attention.

Course of Instruction.—The presentation and selection of the course has received wide and careful attention. The general schemes of work and programme followed by pupil-teachers and probationers were usually drawn up methodically and intelligently. The results of term tests were also duly recorded. In spite of the time occupied by special courses in woodwork, or cookery, and in agriculture, a considerable number of schools presented sound work in the full requirements of the syllabus of instruction.

English Subjects.—Composition and grammar have both received intelligent treatment in the majority of the schools. Reading and recitation have usually been well prepared, and the inflexion and general expression were fairly good. While spelling is by no means a weak subject, the teachers will increase the utility of its study if in the respective classes attention is concen-