

1. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INSPECTORS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

Wellington, 7th June, 1924.

We have the honour to present our report on secondary education for the year 1923.

In January Mr. J. Drummond, M.A., who had acted as Chief Inspector for a period of two years, left the Department in order to take up his duties as Principal of the Auckland Grammar School. For the following six months the whole of the work was undertaken by one Inspector only, as Mr. H. P. Kidson, M.A., B.Sc., was unable to commence duty until the middle of July. As a consequence less ground than usual was covered in the inspection visits made in the earlier portion of the year. It was found possible, however, to inspect the schools at Gisborne, Napier, Dannevirke, Wanganui, Hamilton, Thames, Epsom, Mount Albert, and Whangarei, as well as several private schools.

Visits in connection with the award of senior free places must, of course, continue to be paid to every school throughout the Dominion during the latter part of the year. The procedure followed in past years in dealing with the candidates recommended has in the main been adhered to; it has been described in previous reports and needs no further explanation here. As a result of the Inspectors' investigations, senior free places were awarded in accordance with clause 7 (c) to over 2,340 candidates. Some 370 higher and 170 lower leaving-certificates were also issued on the Inspectors' recommendations.

The sittings of the Appeal Board took up even less of the Inspectors' time than in the preceding years. The Board sat in Auckland and in Wellington only; three appeals were heard in the former place and five in the latter. Out of a total of over four hundred teachers only twenty-five appealed against their classification; fourteen of these appeals were subsequently withdrawn, three were allowed by consent, two were allowed by the Appeal Board, and the remaining six were unsuccessful. On the whole, teachers appear to be satisfied with the application of the grading scheme. Probably the satisfaction would be still more marked, in so far as the younger teachers are concerned, if some of the inevitable anomalies associated with the introduction of the scheme did not appear to make their own classification somewhat unfair by comparison. Such anomalies, however, will naturally disappear as the older teachers drop out of the profession.

By direction of the Hon. Minister, steps were taken early in the year to reduce the variety and number of text-books used in the secondary schools of the Dominion. A sufficiently comprehensive list of approved books was accordingly drawn up and was gazetted in May; it is to become fully operative in 1925. In compiling the list it has been found advisable to retain for the present several mediocre but widely used books, and, on the other hand, to exclude some excellent ones by reason of their high cost. Several old-fashioned and comparatively poor books have been banished, and at the same time those introduced by the more progressive teachers have not been neglected. The list, though meeting with considerable criticism on minor points, has on the whole been well received; it should ultimately not only reduce the expense to pupils moving from school to school, but also materially improve the quality of the text-books used in the schools.

In the last report reference was made to the difficulty experienced by remote schools in obtaining teachers. Unfortunately, there has been but very little improvement in the situation, and the difficulty has continued to be a very real one throughout the past year. Some Boards were compelled to advertise several times before receiving applications from even partially qualified teachers to fill vacancies on their staffs, and at least one school was forced to continue throughout the year with an incomplete staff. The intellectual and other advantages that the large centres offer evidently appeal more to teachers than the opportunities for more rapid promotion that are now undoubtedly offered in the schools in the smaller centres; as a consequence the congestion of higher-grade teachers in the large schools is becoming more and more pronounced. There appears to be no direct remedy for this under the present system, but in time, no doubt, the "waiting-list" in the higher grades in city schools will become so large that teachers will be induced to accept higher salaries in less attractive centres in preference to waiting for several years for promotion in their own schools. The latest classification list shows that forty-one A grade, twenty-three B grade, and forty C grade teachers were in December last waiting to obtain positions of a higher grade than those they held. Of these exactly one-half were on the staffs of the ten city schools, and the remainder were distributed among the twenty-five schools in smaller towns. On the other hand, seventeen teachers held positions of a grade above their own, and the majority of these were in the smaller schools.

We would again point out that the steady increase in the number of pupils in secondary schools calls for a still greater supply of young teachers who are willing to take up secondary-school work in preference to primary or technical work. Young people leaving the secondary schools with a view to entering the teaching profession prefer as a rule the shorter and easier instructional course that is required to enable them to obtain quite satisfactory posts as primary teachers. Most of them cannot afford to spend four years at the University preparing themselves for positions in secondary schools, for which the remuneration is not appreciably higher than that obtainable elsewhere after a much shorter period of preparation.

Apparently the training colleges afford only meagre opportunities for practice in secondary-school teaching even to those students who have definitely expressed their intention to take up secondary work. The remedy is not easy to discover, but an aid to the solution of the difficulty evidently lies in the judicious use of the secondary schools in training-college centres as practising schools for such students. Much will naturally depend upon the degree of correlation that can be devised by the Principals of the training colleges and the schools; but a considerable amount of good work has