APPENDIX A.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,— Wellington, 4th June, 1926.

I have the honour to present my annual report for the year ended 31st December, 1925.

The only changes that took place in the inspectorial staff during the year were the retirement of Mr. W. Brock, M.A., Senior Inspector in charge of the Canterbury District; the transfer of Mr. M. McLeod, B.A., from Hawke's Bay to succeed Mr. Brock; the appointment of Dr. J. W. McIlraith as Senior Inspector to succeed Mr. McLeod; and the appointment of a successor to the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. J. Nicolson, for many years head teacher and latterly an Inspector in the Otago District.

Stated in general terms the duties of an Inspector of Schools in New Zealand comprise the grading of teachers, the making of at least two unannounced visits to the schools in his charge, the setting and marking of papers for the Junior National Scholarship Examination and occasionally for other public examinations, and the sole responsibility of conducting the Standard VI examinations for proficiency certificates. The awarding of grading-marks to teachers occupies from a fortnight to three weeks in the larger districts; the consideration of appeals against grading and the determination of interim gradings through the year absorb additional time, and when further periods occupied in examination work are deducted there is too little time left for the actual work of inspecting schools. It must not be thought that the inspection of schools in this country is at all a formal matter. Every Inspector recognizes that constructive work in improving the methods of teaching and the general efficiency of the instruction constitutes the major portion of his duty. The word Inspector does not by any means describe his main work. Every Inspector regards with pleasure and satisfaction the improvements he has been able to effect in the schools under his charge. Many an uncertificated teacher who entered the ranks without any training has been assisted to reach an honourable position in the service through the constructive work done by the Inspectors who visited his school. The efforts of the Inspectors in this respect have been ably seconded by an efficient staff of organizing teachers.

Last year seventeen organizers were employed throughout the Dominion, but mainly in the North Island districts, where, owing to the more rapid advance of settlement, the number of remote schools manned by uncertificated teachers is larger than in the South Island. The number of uncertificated teachers has been very substantially reduced owing to the much larger number of trained teachers prepared by the training colleges. In the year 1923 there were 1,000 uncertificated teachers employed; last year there were only 465, and of this number a large proportion are only one or two subjects short of the full examination requirements. It is very satisfactory to learn from the Inspectors that only about thirty of these are doing unsatisfactory work, and they will soon be replaced by more efficient trained teachers. It would, I think, be unwise to dispense with the organizing teachers, since young people who pass through the training college cannot possibly have sufficient practice and training in the management of country schools to enable them to do satisfactory work there without some further assistance. It is, however, apparent that as the number of trained and certificated teachers increases the services of organizers will not be so urgently required, and their places may be taken in certain districts by a fully qualified Inspector of Schools.

It is perhaps not generally realized that the work of an Inspector involves duties of a very arduous nature and demands a strong physique and capacity for enduring discomfort cheerfully. Many of the schools, particularly in the North Island districts, can be reached only by riding on horseback, and the distances in many cases are long and the roads bad. I have before me the diary of an Inspector whose journeys for one week consisted in travelling on horseback in a very lonely part of the country over distances varying from twenty to thirty miles daily. On some occasions he succeeded in visiting two very small schools in the course of his daily journey, and one can well understand how, during that period, ordinary official hours were entirely disregarded.

The staffing of primary schools is from year to year being considerably improved, mainly owing to the power now possessed by the Department of granting an increase in school staff wherever classes are unduly large. The scale of staffing is now such as to reduce the number of pupils per teacher to 40 in Grade IV schools, 45 in Grade V, 48 to 50 in Grade VI, and from 45 to 47 in Grade VII, the calculation being based on the maximum average attendance in each grade; but in order to cope with the special difficulties in organization, presented by unsuitable accommodation on the one hand and by rapidly increasing attendance on the other, the Department grants additional assistant teachers wherever it is clear these are urgently needed. Two years ago there were approximately five hundred classes containing over sixty pupils on the roll, and at the end of the year 1925 this number was reduced to about two hundred. There were at the same time about nine hundred classes with less than forty-one pupils on the roll. It may seem anomalous that there should be such a large number of small classes and at the same time a proportion of excessively large classes; but it has to be remembered that in many instances small classes are placed in charge of probationary assistants who have not finished