

1. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

Wellington, 11th June, 1930.

SIR,—

I have the honour to present the report for the year 1929.

There is little fresh to record in the routine work of the Inspectorate. As in previous years, the middle portion of the first school term was devoted to inspecting the secondary departments of district high schools. The education districts chosen on this occasion were those of Nelson, Wellington, Hawke's Bay, Wanganui, and Taranaki, and twenty-eight schools in all were visited. At the close of the inspection in each district a conference was held with the local Inspectors, and problems relating to the various schools and staffs were discussed at some length. It is pleasing to record that the organization and the standard of work had distinctly improved in several schools since the last visit of the secondary Inspectors. In others improvement had been rendered difficult by changes in personnel of the staff, as these usually lead to a break in continuity in teaching methods and even, in some cases, in curricula; in many instances, possibly the majority, a comparatively raw teacher replaces a more experienced one.

The period from mid-April to mid-July was occupied mainly with the full inspection of eighteen of the departmental secondary schools and the remainder of the year with the customary visit to all the secondary schools for the purposes of classifying assistant teachers and of accrediting candidates for senior free places and for leaving certificates.

During the year one new secondary school—the Waimate High School—was opened, thus raising the number of departmental secondary schools to forty-four. Their aggregate roll on the 1st March was 16,867, an increase of 924 on the number for the preceding year. It is interesting to note that this increase is almost the same as that recorded in 1928 (950). One may add further that no great swelling of the aggregate rolls may be looked for in 1930 and 1931, and that the total number of pupils in our secondary schools may reasonably be expected to diminish temporarily in 1932. The low birth-rates of the period 1917–1919 must inevitably affect the enrolment in the manner suggested.

The number of registered private secondary schools was raised to forty-seven during the year by the registration of St. Matthew's Collegiate School for Girls, Masterton, the Marist Brothers' School, Hamilton, St. Catherine's Convent, Invercargill, and the Sacred Heart High School, Nelson. Thirteen of the registered schools were inspected during the year.

Though the number of appeals lodged by teachers against their classification was much larger than usual only two sittings of the Appeal Board were necessary—one in Auckland and one in Dunedin. Of the fifteen appeals lodged twelve were withdrawn and three disallowed.

The number of senior free places granted to pupils from departmental secondary schools on the Principals' recommendation continues to increase steadily, but, on the whole, not more rapidly than the total number of candidates offering. Senior free places on recommendation were obtained by 3,448 pupils, and refused to 1,452; 608 of these subsequently sat the Intermediate Examination, but only 123 succeeded in obtaining their senior free places by this method.

Following the customary practice of accrediting, higher leaving-certificates were granted to 834 pupils, including 126 from registered private secondary schools. In 1928 the corresponding numbers were 778 and 104. The demand for lower leaving-certificates from the purely secondary schools continues to decline, and only sixty-six were granted this year, including ten to pupils in private schools.

No progress was made during the year towards a satisfactory solution of the problem of school leaving-certificates. The whole question was dealt with at considerable length in my last report, and I do not propose to traverse the same ground again. Further consideration of the requirements of the situation has, however, led me to advocate strongly the institution of a new school leaving-certificate, to be awarded on the result of an independent examination taken by secondary-school pupils at the close of their third or fourth year. Such an examination would need to be held at the same time as the University Entrance Examination, otherwise many pupils would submit themselves to both tests—a most undesirable procedure, and one to be discouraged by all means. Further, the institution of independent and synchronous examinations would materially reduce the present unwieldy number of candidates for the entrance test. It is possible that at the outset pupils might hesitate to enter for the new examination, not caring to forgo the advantages which are undoubtedly associated with the passing of a University entrance test, but in a little while the status of a leaving-certificate would be satisfactorily established, and would secure the approval of public estimation. To adopt the procedure followed in Britain and in Australia and establish an examination to serve the dual purpose of leaving-certificate and University entrance, would merely perpetuate the evils of examination-ridden curricula which educationists, both here and at Home, are so busily engaged in decrying. The severance of the two examinations would give the University authorities a better opportunity for gradually raising the standard of attainment required from young people entering upon degree courses; a dual-purpose examination, on the other hand, would tend to preserve its own standard at the level of the requirements and capacities of pupils in their third and fourth year of secondary school work. Its institution and organization would probably be delayed and hampered by the establishment of a composite examining body representative of the aims and requirements of the University and of the schools, and its effect would undoubtedly be to add at least a thousand candidates annually to the already undesirably large number sitting the Entrance Examination.