

REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

I have the honour of submitting my report on the primary schools for the year ending 31st December, 1940.

THE WAR.

Although considerable numbers of teachers are serving with the Forces it cannot be said that there has as yet been any marked effect on the efficiency of the schools. The calmer, more restrained, but more resolute attitude of the country in facing this great crisis is reflected in the schools. Teachers and children have assisted wholeheartedly in the various campaigns to raise funds, to collect valuable waste material, and to provide comforts for the soldiers. The Junior Red Cross movement has received new impetus, and in one district the children provided the money to purchase a fully-equipped motor-ambulance.

In the latter part of the year, at conferences of representatives of Emergency Precautions Scheme organizations, proposals for the protection of school-children in case of emergency during school hours were investigated, and it was found that the best plan was to incorporate school-protective measures in the general Emergency Precautions Scheme of each locality. For this purpose, a Protection of School Children Committee was to be set up as a sub-committee of each organization. Teachers are readily offering their services in the various emergency precautions units, and emergency drills are regularly practised in the schools.

The Department, in collaboration with the Boards and the New Zealand Educational Institute, has made full provision to safeguard the professional interests and rights of soldier-teachers. As in the case of other State employees, the Government is paying their contributions to the Superannuation and Social Security Funds. Promotion in the teaching service is provided for by the award of the usual grading efficiency increases and by a system of general applications covering all vacant positions for which the claims of teachers in the Forces must be considered, the guiding principle being that soldier-teachers are to lose nothing professionally while they are serving their country.

The war has brought into sharp relief the significance of the democratic mode of living. As far as conditions permit, the children must be taught to realize that democracy is based on service, and consideration for the rights of others, and that the foundation of future citizenship is laid in the willing and cheerful accomplishment of the manifold daily tasks of the school undertaken by all for the good of all.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS.

The abolition of the Proficiency Examination can now be regarded as one of the most beneficial movements in the recent history of primary education in this country. In a changing world, where education must conform with social and economic progress, our schools are becoming more closely related to the realities of life. The physical welfare and well-being of the children are considered to be of paramount importance. The schools provide occupational and cultural pursuits unthought of a generation ago. Subjects of instruction formerly treated as ends in themselves are becoming merged as far as possible into streams of activities, physical, oral, written, and manual in which the children are given the opportunity, under expert guidance, to develop through fuller self-expression. Ability-grouping, which asks for capacity achievement in different phases of school work according to the innate aptitudes and abilities of the individual pupils, is being extended. Club or hobby periods enable pupils to exploit with kindred spirits of a group, free-choice work in music, drama, art, craft, or useful occupations. To quote recent cases, one school has discovered a boy with marked ability for printing, another a boy with a flair for commercial art, another, a girl with a wonderful gift for art needlework. These pupils, with little academic ability, have thereby gained confidence and self-respect, indispensable for success in future life.

Although the curriculum has been enriched and extended, the length of the school day has not been altered. To meet this situation it has become necessary to revalue certain subjects, which in some details of scope and content are still cumbered with the legacy of pedantic tradition. Arithmetic is *par excellence* an example. Can a school in reasonably meeting the needs of everyday life continue to ask pupils at any stage to work sums involving fantastic combinations of weights and measures unheard of outside the class-room, or waste valuable time on useless calculations undertaken under the specious guise of mental discipline? A critical analysis of the content of certain subjects must result in an adjustment of educational values and criteria. In one district the teachers have conducted an investigation in evolving minimal prescriptions in arithmetic, and already the time devoted thereto has been reduced to two hours and a half weekly, without loss of accuracy.

In the schools to-day children speak and write English more clearly and confidently than ever before, and there is nothing in the new education to preclude the acquirement of essential accuracy in spelling or arithmetic provided the courses are rational and well graded and due attention is given.

TRAINING OF TEACHERS.

The total number of students in training at the four colleges during the year was 1,460. Of these, 690 were in their first year, 680 in their second year, and 90 were undertaking an additional year of specialist training. Commendably good work is accomplished in the colleges. The principles underlying educative processes based on a sympathetic understanding of the child, and of the worth of the individual, are well established. As far as facilities allow, the students are given sound practice in the methods of teaching and class-management.

The fine work of the colleges is reflected in the attitude of the probationary assistants who are completing their last year of training as staff teachers in the schools. These young teachers engage in their duties with enthusiasm and purpose.

There is a greater demand for the services of trained specialist teachers, especially in the fields of physical education, art and crafts, music, and speech, and an additional twenty studentships were awarded for 1940. The college staffs and teacher-specialists have given valuable assistance in an