

awakening perceptions of the beauty, the order, and the mystery underlying nature's laws and embodied in nature's works.

The establishment of school gardens as a development ancillary to nature-study has enlisted the sympathy and support of citizens truly disinterested in their regard for the public weal and practical in their efforts for its promotion. For what has been accomplished in this direction we desire officially to express warm appreciation, and personally to tender sincere thanks.

In the larger centres throughout the district provision for manual and technical training through the medium of instruction in woodwork for boys of Standard V and Standard VI, and in cooking and laundry work for girls at the same stages, yields further evidence of new influences at work in the field of education, and of a genuine desire to promote individual welfare while paying due regard to the wider interests of the State.

To the foregoing remarks may be added a reminder that under existing regulations teachers are granted a wide option in compiling their schemes of work. Surely, therefore, it is needless to elaborate further the contention that, whatever the defects of our system, it cannot justly be charged with a display of pedantic adherence to ancient prejudices or of indifference to modern requirements.

Apart from the new arrangements involved in examining Sixth Standard pupils, our routine of duties has closely followed that of the previous year. With the exception of one or two small and remote household schools, every school on the Board's list was visited on two occasions. The secondary classes in district high schools (ten of which are now in operation, Kaikoura having been reopened), and the continuation classes in connection therewith, have been duly examined, and fifteen private schools, with an aggregate enrolment of 1,269 pupils, have each received one visit. The appointment of an additional Inspector, who entered upon his duties in July, will, we hope, permit us in future to place both public and private schools on the same footing with regard to official attentions, and will also enable us to pay more frequent and more prolonged visits of inspection where these are deemed necessary. Such visits are, we think, of paramount importance where teachers profess ignorance of the regulations they have undertaken to administer, where they fail to keep prescribed records, and where inexcusable delay in forwarding prescribed returns to the Board's office shows that in some cases the claims of duty receive but tardy attention.

School architecture is intimately connected with educational efficiency, with the present comfort and convenience of both pupils and teachers, and with their future physical and even mental welfare. We therefore feel it a very pleasant duty to record in this connection our sincere appreciation of good taste, professional skill, sound judgment, and careful attention to details which have of late been manifested in this branch of the Board's administration.

Hitherto statistics for each year have been compiled from the record of pupils enrolled at the date of our annual (or examination) visit. The head teacher's examination, held towards the close of the year, is now officially known as the "annual examination," and in accordance with the altered regulations this supplies the data for the year's returns. The changed conditions render it impossible to establish reliable comparisons between the numbers given in Appendix I of our report for 1907 and those in the corresponding appendix for 1908. During the summer months the P. classes receive their largest accession of very young recruits, hence we were quite prepared to find the roll-number quoted in that portion of the table showing an increase of about 1,150 when compared with the corresponding one of the previous year. Unfortunately, however, the total increment of enrolment does not quite reach 880; a decrease, therefore, has occurred in the totals for standard classes. No material change is apparent in Standard VII, but in Standard VI the loss of some 240 pupils is not at all a reassuring item. A slight increase in average ages generally is explained by the fact that on this occasion the examinations for promotion were held late in the year. With regard to those classes in which these are still undesirably high, we have some reason to hope that at least a partial remedy will be found in adopting, to a greater extent, inspection instead of examination as the dominant factor in determining our estimate of efficiency in the management of infant departments. While the aggregate attendance in Standard VII still holds its own, the permanence of secondary and continuation classes at some of the smaller district high schools does not seem too well assured. Extended operation of the "free place" system has brought these into more direct competition with the high schools and with the Technical College in Christchurch, and here we are inclined to think that victory will ultimately be found on the side of the big battalions.

In accordance with clause 24 of present Regulations for Inspection and Examination of Schools, we now proceed to deal with those topics in the various sections of clause 12 which seem to call for special comment. The Roman numerals prefixed to the following paragraphs indicate the sections of clause 12 which are thus brought under notice, the omission of certain numerals implying that on the corresponding topics no comment is necessary:—

(II.) In schools where more than one teacher is employed it is extremely rare to find the organization at fault. In sole-charge schools, where the grouping of classes is a matter of vital necessity, we are glad to find that teachers display increasing readiness to avail themselves of the relief afforded by this practice. It reduces the number of classes requiring supervision and separate instruction, and it affords to some of the brightest pupils better opportunities to cover the work of two standards in one year. We must, however, make it clear that such rapid advancement is not always desirable, that it is justifiable only where an exceptionally quick child would otherwise be subjected to the tedium of merely marking time, and where there is no risk of physical or mental strain.

(IV.) On page 5 of the Inspector-General's last published report, the statistics dealing with the percentages of attendance for the thirteen education districts place North Canterbury eleventh in order of merit. Assuredly the fact does not redound to our credit. No district in the Dominion is so lavishly provided with schools, none can boast of better roads, and in none are climatic conditions so favourable. The two districts showing a slightly lower record come so close on our heels that there is no