

the case of pupils attending a private school, the head teacher thereof may apply for and receive from the Chairman or Secretary of the Board a general certificate of exemption for such children, upon satisfying the Board that efficient and regular instruction is given at such school. The only means by which the Board can satisfy itself that the instruction is efficient is by requiring its Inspectors to report. The wording of the Act in this connection is not quite clear—*i.e.*, it seems doubtful whether or not an Inspector can insist on entering a private school with the object of inspecting methods of instruction and conditions generally; but the intention of the Act is quite plain—*viz.*, to safeguard the interests of the State by providing that children living under normal conditions shall be regularly and efficiently taught. All children between the ages specified attending private schools who have not obtained certificates of exemption are considered as not attending any school, and their parents or guardians are liable to be prosecuted and fined for non-compliance with the terms of the Education Act. The Board has very properly determined no longer to issue general certificates of exemption until advised to do so by its Inspectors, so that all private schools applying for these certificates—whether or not they have applied to be inspected—will be visited by an Inspector of Schools. We consider it right that those private schools which have not applied for exemption certificates should be reminded of the position in which the parents of the children comprising their enrolment may at any time find themselves placed. As it is evidently the intention of the Act to bring about the inspection of all private schools, it is to be hoped that the immediate future will witness the introduction of such amendments as will cease to make it optional on the part of schools to apply for general certificates of exemption. It is quite possible for small, inefficient schools to be overlooked and exist in a community for years, to the manifest detriment of those attending; whereas were they required by law to apply for exemption their presence would become known and the efficiency of their methods would be inquired into.

**RURAL EDUCATION IN DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS.**—We regret to say that owing to a number of vexatious, though perhaps unavoidable, delays in providing accommodation and equipment it was found impossible to introduce into our district high schools before the end of the year the full scheme of rural education to which reference was made in our last report. Two of these schools, however, have already entered on the course, and, with the erection and equipment of manual-training centres at Waihi, Pukekohe, and the Northern Wairoa, the schools in the immediate neighbourhood of these centres will follow, so that the close of the present year should witness a considerable expansion of the work already begun. We are most anxious to see this particular form of instruction more widely diffused, feeling sure that its introduction cannot fail to be of very real and direct benefit to our young people.

**INSTRUCTION IN AGRICULTURE.**—The newly appointed instructor in agriculture entered on his duties at the beginning of the year, and by his energy and enthusiasm has already stimulated teachers to further effort, and has become a very real factor in the promotion of greater efficiency in that phase of school-work coming more directly within his sphere of influence. During the progress of the year two short courses of instruction in elementary agriculture were provided, and gladly attended by an adequate enrolment; whilst at the beginning of January another course was specially arranged for those teachers who were unable to attend previously. Considerable benefit was undoubtedly derived by all who were able to take advantage of the instruction thus imparted, though both instructor and students felt the absence of a suitable garden in which to demonstrate, experiment, and observe. With the object of making some provision for this necessary part of the special work to which reference is herein made, the Board applied to the City Council for the use of a plot of ground in the Domain; this, we trust, the authorities will see their way to grant, so that before many months have passed greater facilities for enabling teachers to understand the details of gardening operations, and appreciate the possibilities opened up by this phase of school-work, it is hoped, will be forthcoming. It is proposed that the ground in question be made available not only for teachers attending future courses of instruction, but also for students at the Training College, and pupils taking up work in elementary agriculture at the Technical College.

**SCHOOL GARDENS AND PLAYGROUNDS.**—The Board's offer of prizes for the best school gardens and school-garden courses had the effect of drawing a large number of schools into the competition. In appraising the work special stress was laid on the degree to which the garden became a means of education, teachers' aims and methods, pupils' notes and drawings, co-ordination of garden-work with other school subjects, the utility and success of the operations undertaken being duly considered in making the final award. In quite a number of cases highly creditable work was done, both inside and outside the building, and very pronounced interest was displayed by pupils in the operations involved; the appearance of the playground, too, was greatly improved—to the undoubted benefit of school and neighbourhood. During the course of his visits the instructor in agriculture emphasized the importance of regarding the playground as the unit, the garden being a highly important portion thereof, and working in the direction of improving the entire school environment. This should undoubtedly be borne in mind when considering any general plan having for its object the evolution of the school garden: *i.e.*, the position of the garden should be determined by its surroundings—*e.g.*, school buildings, approaches thereto, entrance to grounds, neighbouring roads—and not merely, as is frequently the case, be made to depend on aspect, quality of soil, or a desire to utilize a hitherto unused and possibly worthless corner. The preparation of the garden, in short, should form part of a scheme for making school environment more attractive, and should be undertaken concurrently with such other work as will tend towards the gradual improvement of school surroundings. In quite a number of cases we are unable to congratulate either teacher or Committee on the general appearance of the playground, little or no trouble being taken to secure even moderate tidiness—to say nothing of moderate improvement. When the importance of environment as a factor in moral education is borne in mind it is obvious how needful it is that the appearance of each school, both within and