

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Education Office, 29th February, 1912.

We have the honour to present our annual report for the year ended 31st December, 1911.

It will be gathered from the statistics submitted that on the whole the schools are in a satisfactory condition, and that there are not wanting signs of progress.

INSTRUCTION.—With respect to instruction, a perusal of the Inspectors' monthly reports shows that the Inspectors refer again and again to arithmetic and reading, or, concerning the latter subject, more specifically to the pupils' articulation, as being of an unsatisfactory character, and with a like frequency they have suggested remedies. It is not altogether easy to explain why arithmetic should fare so badly. The shortcoming may be due (1) to the nature of the syllabus, (2) to the nature of the teaching, (3) to insufficient time for study, or (4) most probably to all three. That the syllabus is not ideal, especially in the matter of arrangement, may be readily admitted, and that less time is now given to the subject than previously may also be admitted, but the fact remains that it is the teaching that is mainly in fault. Insufficient attention is given to the logical development of the subject as the pupils move from class to class, and blackboard demonstration has to a great extent been disused. The remedies are obvious: better schemes and more frequent blackboard demonstration are required. With respect to the pupils' articulation and intonation, concerning which so much has been said in this and other districts, while we acknowledge the faults, we at the same time hold that the remedies are more completely in the teachers' hands than ever before. At no time in the history of education has more attention been paid to the production of the characteristic sounds used in the English language. Our system of teaching reading is purely phonic, and if our pupils' speech is marked by slovenly articulation or false intonation the cause must be sought for either in overmastering home influences or in failure on the teachers' part to continue throughout the pupils' school course the practice of the phonic system so well begun in the lower classes. Referring, in a word, to handwriting, we may say that the pupils who presented themselves for the Proficiency Examination wrote their papers in a uniformly creditable manner. This may be due to some extent to the fact that the writing is judged by the style of the work presented, and the pupils accordingly give of their best. It must be admitted, however, that the average writing-lesson affords a conspicuous example of "how not to do it." The pupils' posture is bad, their method of holding the pen is bad, the method of correcting unsatisfactory work is bad, and blackboard instruction is badly neglected.

ORGANIZATION.—In this respect considerable advance has been made by the substitution of assistant teachers for pupil-teachers in large infant departments. This arrangement, too long delayed, will place the work of infant-teachers on a new and better footing. The substitution of additional assistants in place of pupil-teachers in schools of Grades V and VIA, in pursuance of the Department's plan for the gradual extinction of pupil-teachers, will place these schools in an improved position with respect to staffing, and enhance their efficiency.

OBSERVATION SCHOOLS.—We are again glad to testify to the excellent services rendered by these schools to uncertificated and inexperienced teachers. The special certificate awarded by the Board to the head teachers of such schools will be a permanent record of the value of work well and freely done. The proposed model infant department to be established in connection with the new infant school at Wanganui will doubtless lead to an all-round improvement in infant-teaching throughout the district.

ENVIRONMENT.—The progress in this direction that we noted in our last annual report continues. Not only have the teachers interested themselves in the matter, but many of the Committees have also shown themselves deeply interested in the improvement of the school grounds. It is to the infinite credit of both teachers and Committees that the bare and forbidding building hitherto known as the school is disappearing, and its place taken by a building surrounded by flower-pots and shrubs, with an experimental garden near by.

DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS.—These schools occupy a difficult position. Much is expected from a staff that is very inadequately paid. On the one hand the schools are supposed, through the Matriculation Examination, to be in touch with the universities, and, on the other, to be in touch with the primary industries of the district in which they are placed. It is to their credit that they have served these purposes so well. It is not every year that a district high school has the class of pupil to make a success at matriculation, but each of two of our schools gained four matriculation passes last December, not to mention Civil Service passes. Very important is the work of the schools in supplying secondary education to pupils destined for practical pursuits, and, looking at their efficiency from this point of view, we are pleased to note a great improvement on the previous year's work. The staff and the instructors now understand and realize better the Department's intentions. The Board is fortunate in commanding the services as science instructor of Mr. Martin, whose zeal and ability have enlisted the hearty co-operation of the pupils. Great interest was taken by the boys in the purely farm work, as was evidenced by the visits to Mr. Short's Almadale Farm, and no less interest was taken by the girls in their advanced cookery, dressmaking, household management, and hygiene.

SCHOLARSHIPS.—The rural course, which has by some been hitherto regarded as a kind of interloper, has at last, by the appropriation of a proportion of the Board's Senior Scholarships to pupils taking the course, been put on an equal footing with the literary course. We may and do supply too many candidates for the public service and the professions to absorb with advantage, but we cannot do too much for the girls and boys who are to produce the country's wealth from the country's primary resources. We have already had proof that in ability the rural-course pupils are in no way inferior to those taking the literary course, and it is satisfactory to know that with respect to scholarships both classes of pupils are to be treated alike.