

INTRODUCTION.

In a separate memorandum laid on the table of the House of Representatives expression has been given to my personal views on certain educational matters and reforms, the necessity for which has been emphasized by the demand at present being made on the nation's supply of man and brain power.

Fortunately for this Dominion, it was possible to carry on the work of education in the main without hindrance during the year 1915. The loss of the services of a number of teachers who enlisted with the colours has been keenly felt, but it has been possible so far to keep their places filled, thus avoiding the closing of any schools. The heavy demands on the financial resources of the country have also made expenditure in certain directions imprudent, thus hindering the progress of some desirable projects. On the other hand, as a set-off against any losses that the pupils of our schools may have suffered from such causes, there should be mentioned the splendid lessons in patriotism and national service that the war has taught them. The very appreciable part that the children have played in providing for the wants of the soldiers and those rendered destitute by the war must have helped them to understand, in a way that they could never have learned from theoretical lessons or lectures, the real meaning of love of country and of personal sacrifice in the interests of their country and the Empire.

The year 1915 was the first year of the operation of the Education Act, 1914, and the work of carrying out a certain amount of reorganization, of arranging the many details involved, and of framing regulations rendered necessary by the provisions of the Act, occupied the time and attention of the Department for the greater part of the year.

The transference of the Inspectors of Schools from the service of the Education Boards to the direct control of the Department necessitated a certain amount of rearrangement. The organization is not yet complete, but it can now be claimed that the new order is working satisfactorily and that some of the advantages of centralization forecasted are already evident.

Another important reform that has been carried into effect in accordance with the provisions of the Act is that of the grading of teachers. The regulations have met with widespread approval, and the first Dominion graded list of teachers is now in print. After any necessary revision as a result of criticism and experience requisite improvements may be made, and then the graded list may be made the basis of a much improved system of appointment and promotion for the Dominion as a whole. Such a system has been long desired, as it provides for appointment on merit, and merit only. It will also break down parochialism and give all parts of New Zealand an equal opportunity for securing the best teachers available for particular positions. The benefit to the efficiency of the schools and to the education of the children will be very great, since it will make possible a much more rational distribution of teachers, putting the right man or woman in the right place, and stimulating and rewarding the progressive teacher.

The alteration in the number and boundaries of the education districts is likewise being carried into effect, the changes involved necessitating the arrangement of a great deal of detail, both by the Department and by the Education Boards concerned. As the Education Boards of the new districts do not come into office until August of the current year, the results of the change will not be apparent for some time.

As indicated throughout this report, there are numerous matters pertaining to our education system still requiring consideration and perhaps amendment, while in every department possibilities of advance and improvement are apparent. One feels justified in saying, however, that the work carried out in the year 1915 was on sound, progressive lines, and that the report reveals a record of substantial effort with highly satisfactory results.