

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Wanganui, 2nd March, 1918.

We have the honour to present our report for the year ended 31st December, 1917.

During the year 202 schools were in operation, 117 being single-teacher schools, forty-three employing two teachers, twenty three teachers, and twenty-two more than three teachers. The total number of teachers (heads and assistants) employed was 399, of whom 258 were certificated and 141 uncertificated. Most of the uncertificated teachers were in the smaller schools, and here we found greatest difficulty in securing an adequate return for the salaries paid. In most of these cases two visits a year proved quite inadequate, but with the present staff we could do no more. We are glad to record, however, that some of the beginners proved to be most devoted to their studies and to their school-work, among them being men and women who had previously followed other callings. Acting on our advice the Board held a winter and a summer school of instruction in Wanganui, and many teachers from remote schools availed themselves of these opportunities to gain further knowledge of school-work. We have in previous reports pointed out the necessity in this district for a model country school, and we are glad to know that the establishment of such a school is now possible. Some further method of aiding inexperienced teachers is, however, necessary, and we would suggest that much good would result if supervising teachers were appointed to give assistance in the small schools throughout the district. We do not think these supervisors should have the rank of Inspectors, but should, under the direction and control of the Board and the Inspectors, move from school to school aiding the teachers and demonstrating good methods of organization and teaching.

In the larger schools the head teachers willingly seconded our efforts to have more attention paid to such details of organization as the arrangements for the professional training of pupil-teachers and probationers, the establishment of the prefect system, the providing of adequate playground supervision, the preparation of a proper plan of supervision of classes by head teachers, and a systematic method of aiding the assistants and dealing with class weaknesses. We were glad to note by the end of the year a very marked improvement in the trainees, and are confident these will go forward to the Training College well prepared for the more highly specialized training they will receive there.

Early in February conferences between Inspectors and teachers were held in Wanganui, Feilding, Palmerston, and Taihape, and much benefit to ourselves as well as, we believe, to the teachers resulted from the free interchange of opinion the conferences made possible.

There is a tendency for the general public to judge the success of a school and a district by its percentage of proficiency passes in S6. While there is, no doubt, some general relation between the efficiency of a school and the success of its S6 pupils, and while it is desirable teachers should be urged to spare no effort to enable their pupils to qualify for the privileges attached to a S6 pass, yet it must be remembered that in North Island districts especially the movement of the people from place to place is very pronounced and cannot but react deleteriously on the progress of the pupils. This movement in the school population is still most pronounced in the Wanganui Education District.

The war has robbed our schools of many efficient teachers. No less than seventy-two have gone on active service, and there remain only fifty-five, all in the Second Division, who are eligible for service. Some of our most reliable and most efficient teachers are at the front, several have fallen, and, though those who have stepped into the gaps are in most cases maintaining the efficiency of the service in its higher branches, there remain positions for which the Board can find only inexperienced teachers.

With the coming into use of the motor-car some change in methods of inspection appears desirable. At present the notified visit of inspection is compulsory, except for the space of one year, when it may, with the Board's approval, be omitted. The notified visit has in this district, and we believe elsewhere, become an examination visit. The Inspector takes charge and tests as many subjects and as many classes as possible. We believe some testing of a teacher's work is necessary; but we would suggest that the retention of the notified visit unduly hampers Inspectors who desire to move freely among the schools and examine only where such a course appears necessary. We do not suggest there should be no examination by Inspectors—in the smaller schools this is very necessary—we merely recommend that the notification of one visit should be mandatory only in cases where an examination is decided upon.

The Board's *Leaflet* and the circulating library, both of which are in the Inspectors' care, continue, we feel sure, to be of service to teachers, and amply repay the money and effort expended on them. By their help teachers have been made acquainted with modern movements in education, a knowledge of Montessori methods has been spread through the district, and teachers have been kept in touch with educational ideals. Many teachers are full of enthusiasm, and spare neither time nor effort to keep themselves in the van of educational advance. We are glad to have the opportunity here to commend the many teachers of infant classes who, in their effort to follow in the footsteps of Dr. Montessori, prepared large stocks of material and even manufactured part of the recognized Montessori apparatus. The method has been introduced into many of the country schools, and where understood has proved an unqualified success. One of our most pleasing experiences has been to mingle with the Montessori pupils in a country school and to note their ingenuous eagerness and interest in their self-imposed tasks.

With regard to the subjects of instruction and methods of teaching, there is less cause to complain of the isolation of the subjects. The possibilities of the correlation of studies and their corresponding intensification is well recognized in all efficient schools. The importance of a well-reasoned scheme of manual and technical instruction is recognized throughout the district and we have endeavoured in other than manual and technical subjects to lay stress on practical methods of instruction.