

*Changes in Personnel of Teaching Staff.*—In some districts the constant change of teacher is seriously affecting progress. In one portion of an Inspector's district the staff of every school within a radius of ten miles from the principal school (ten or eleven schools in all) changed during the year, as did also the entire staff of the principal school, consisting of some six teachers. During the last couple of years more or less frequent change has at times become unavoidable; none the less, however, is it highly detrimental to the progress of the communities concerned, and steps should at once be taken to prevent its continuance.

*Time spent in Preparatory Classes.*—We have so repeatedly drawn attention to the matter that we do so again with some reluctance, but the whole question is one of such importance that until some very material improvement follows our efforts we shall be obliged to continue their application. There may be some reason for the length of time many country children are kept in the preparatory classes: inefficient teaching, irregular attendance brought about by bad roads, long distances, and stormy weather, the difficulty of providing suitable instruction for classes whose members are in so many different stages of development and require such constant personal supervision, are all factors contributing to slow progress and may account for the retardation referred to. In the case of the child in the larger centre no such reasons exist, and it is to him we specially wish to draw attention. We find there are still a considerable number of higher-grade schools where a large proportion of pupils are kept in the preparatory department for periods ranging from two and a half to three years. As only a very small percentage of these children gain more rapid promotion than from the lower to the next higher standard each year, it follows that a loss of six months or a year at the beginning of school life cannot be recovered during its currency, and that the pupil does not complete his primary-school training within the time generally admitted to be sufficient for the purpose. Besides, many of those in the upper division of the preparatory classes we find are doing a good deal of the work prescribed for S1, with the result that when they get into the higher standard they will in all probability either be marking time or going over more or less familiar work, an occupation certainly not tending to foster habits of application and industry. As we have stated in former reports, we are of opinion that the normal child should be able without undue effort to cover the preparatory work prescribed in the syllabus within two years, and we consider that all normal pupils should be promoted to S1 within that period after being enrolled.

*Irregular Attendance.*—In the larger centres attendance is good; in many of the country districts great improvement is possible. We are not now referring to children living long distances from school, but to those whose homes lie within the limits defined by the Act. There seems to be little doubt that an appreciable number of children, living under conditions making attendance relatively easy, persistently absent themselves from school in defiance of the provisions of the Education Act and of the powers of the controlling authority. The following are a few typical cases: (a) Four pupils absent for upwards of three months; (b) boy absent for six months, S3; (c) family of three very irregular; (d) two boys hardly attended one complete week during whole of one year. The children in all these cases are of school age, live within the distance limit, and none have passed S6. Many of the Native children attending European schools are amongst the worst offenders. As an example: one of the Inspectors writing in March says, "The number on the roll is eighteen, ten being Maoris and eight Europeans; but the attendance to-day was only seven, all Europeans. The average attendance for this year up to the present is only nine, scarcely any of the Maoris having returned to school since the Christmas holidays. In addition to the eighteen on the roll, there are in the district near the school at least seven other Maoris of school age, while in a village about two miles and a half away are several others also of school age. If all of school age attended I believe that there would be over thirty on the roll." The cases to whom reference is made have all been reported for irregular attendance. In connection herewith we would point out that if a pupil absents himself from school for an entire quarter the teacher is directed by regulation to remove his name from the register, so that if no effective action is taken during the quarter in question the pupil, having obtained his discharge, is apt to be forgotten. We are very strongly of opinion that the whole matter of irregular attendance calls for immediate attention and remedial action.

*Original Work in Schools.*—This heading implies not so much that the work is original in the sense that it has nowhere been attempted before, but that it is an effort to try methods not formerly applied by the teacher and to learn from the test of actual experience. One large school has adopted the practice of subdividing its classes into groups, some of which work by themselves (in the school-grounds when the weather permits) without the direct assistance of the teacher, who is thus able to concentrate on the weaker units. Another school allows its pupils (S6 to S3) to do much of their reading silently from books selected from the library. The number of books read in this way per pupil during the year was on the average as follows: S6, 36; S5, 14; S4, 32; S3, 23. In a neighbouring school adopting the same method fifty books per unit were read in the upper division of the preparatory department. In one or two schools the isolated essay in S6 has been largely discontinued, and the more enterprising pupils have been encouraged to take up some subject—historical, scientific, or romantic—and devote their time to producing a continuous narrative. The surprising success achieved by quite a number of pupils tends to show that under the orthodox system much remarkable talent is allowed to lie dormant. Attempts have been made in other schools to secure a more rapid style of writing, consistent with neatness and legibility, and experiments are also in progress to determine whether the use of lines is an aid or a hindrance. These are only a few of the tests that are being brought into operation. We would commend the attention of teachers to work of the kind. Research—we attach to the term the meaning expressed in the opening words of this paragraph—tends to keep the mind fresh and open and the ability vigorous and adaptable, and we hope that teachers where conditions are favourable will come to recognize the importance of conducting such experiments in methods of teaching as appear to offer encouraging prospects.