

WANGANUI.

SIR,—

Wanganui, 28th February, 1919.

We have the honour to present our report for the year ended 31st December, 1918.

The work of the schools was considerably interfered with during the year by enforced holidays. The incomplete state in which, therefore, the pupils left their work will no doubt prove a considerable handicap during the coming year. The difficulty with regard to the annual promotion of the pupils was met by asking teachers to record in the annual examination class-lists only the new classification of each pupil, and a general report on the work done during the year. The early closing of the schools rendered it necessary to resort to a different method of dealing with the award of proficiency and competency certificates. In the case of all schools above Grade IIIA it was resolved to depend in the main on the recommendations of the head teachers. Fortunately, progress proficiency tests had, at the request of many teachers, been sent out to all schools, so that the marks awarded and the recommendations made were based on the same tests throughout the district. The Inspectors also made use of various notes made on the work of the candidates at the notified visits of inspection. In the case of schools below Grade IIIB a synchronous examination was held on the 4th December. The papers for this examination, with full directions as to the method of procedure, were sent out by the Inspectors, and the services of an honorary assistant supervisor were secured by each School Committee. 277 candidates in 103 schools were examined in this manner. In the schools above Grade IIIA 778 candidates were entered, and we have good reason to believe that the number of certificates awarded was not in excess of the number we ourselves would have awarded had we been able to hold a final examination. During the past few years we have made every effort to establish a uniform standard in the marking of pupils' work. The marked specimen papers inserted in the Board's *Leaflet* from time to time have been of undoubted assistance. We have every reason to believe that our efforts have borne good fruit. The following are the details of the proficiency and competency awards: Candidates presented, 1,055. Certificates awarded: Proficiency, 818; competency, 146; endorsed competency, 34. The percentage of successful candidates may appear somewhat high; but it has to be remembered that our awards in 1917 were not liberal, and better results were to be anticipated the following year. In this connection it is interesting to note that the percentage of proficiency certificates gained in 1917 in schools below Grade IIIB was 53 per cent., while in 1918 the percentage rose to 71 per cent. In both years the Inspectors set and examined all the papers. In the case of schools above Grade IIIA the corresponding percentages were respectively 63·4 in 1917 and 75·5 in 1918. Notwithstanding, however, the obvious conclusions to be deduced from the above figures, we do not think it would be wise yet to abandon the usual final examination of proficiency candidates by the Inspector.

We now submit some comments on the general character of the work done in the several subjects of instruction:—

Reading and Recitation.—In nearly all schools the reading was of satisfactory fluency, but the delivery in both reading and recitation was rarely marked by pleasing and appropriate expression. The stereotyped class-tone was very noticeable, and even in the smaller schools where the enslavement to the class-tone should have been less pronounced the delivery was monotonously uniform. We were well pleased with the attention paid to the comprehension of the subject-matter, and, in many schools, to the oral reproduction of lessons read. Free oral reproduction of whole paragraphs, of whole pages, and in some cases whole lessons, has been for some years a feature of the instruction in reading in this district. Some years ago we instituted the practice of examining from sight readers in all classes, and we think this has induced many teachers to abandon the old custom of "one class one reader," and to make fuller use of the many free readers with which the schools are provided. While not discouraging attention to oral reading, we have laid stress on the importance of silent reading accompanied or followed, according to circumstances, by free questioning and free comments by the pupils themselves, and, as far as possible, free oral reproduction of the subject-matter. The silent-reading lesson, however, has its dangers: lazily used it may result in mere waste of time; in the oral-reading lesson even the laziest teacher must show some signs of activity. In very few schools did we find the pieces set for recitation well memorized; nor did we find the selection generally well made. Frequently the pieces were marked by no literary merit whatever. We have no hesitation in saying the recitation is a much-neglected subject.

Singing, unfortunately, shares in this neglect. Few teachers would appear to be aware of the importance of this subject; hence the scant attention it receives. In far too many of our schools the efforts of teachers are confined to a few popular or patriotic (?) songs of very doubtful sentiment and little or no musical merit.

Spelling.—Notwithstanding the injunctions contained in the syllabus, many teachers continue the old-fashioned cram method of dealing with (we cannot say "teaching") this subject. We have done our best in the columns of the Board's magazine, the *Leaflet*, and elsewhere to suggest more rational methods, and we believe the time is not far distant when spelling will be really taught and the method of setting, testing, and punishing will be abandoned.

Writing.—We are well satisfied that with the present methods of teaching and the present style of writing teachers are getting the best possible results; but we confess to considerable misgiving as to whether the usual method of utilizing mainly finger-movements and ignoring arm-movement is not altogether wrong. Some experiments with the Palmer system of handwriting are being made in the district, and these may lead to a modification of our present method of teaching.

Arithmetic.—In arithmetic, though the general quality of the work done was by no means unsatisfactory, we have found much unnecessary labouring to teach "type" sums and a lack of effort to develop the general intelligence of the pupil. Mental arithmetic has not yet come into its own, and the text-book and text-book methods hold sway. In most cases the text-book provides