

OTAGO.

Sir,—

Dunedin, February, 1919.

We have the honour to submit our report on the work of the schools of this district for the year 1918.

The following table shows the number of pupils on the roll and the number present at the annual examination:—

					Number on Roll.	Present at Annual Examination.
Standard VII	...	...	...	...	294	287
„ VI	...	...	...	...	1,588	1,566
„ V	...	...	...	...	2,276	2,238
„ IV	...	...	...	...	2,647	2,593
„ III	...	...	...	...	2,879	2,811
„ II	...	...	...	...	2,761	2,681
„ I	...	...	...	...	3,034	2,944
Preparatory	...	...	...	...	7,045	6,696
Totals	...	...	...	...	22,524	21,816

We have frequently had to deplore the fact that so many of our S4 pupils left school before they reached S6; consequently we note with great satisfaction that the proportion reaching S6 shows a steadily rising tendency. This year, for example, the percentage is 60, while the average percentage for the years 1910–18 of S4 pupils reaching S6 was only 50·3.

During the year 260 schools were in operation: of these, six were household schools. All the schools were inspected, and in nearly all cases two visits were paid. In addition, all the registered private schools in the Otago District were inspected.

Efficiency of Schools.—An analysis of the Inspectors' annual return gives the following results with regard to the efficiency of the schools in this district: Excellent or very good, 30 per cent.; good, 41 per cent.; satisfactory, 26 per cent.; fair to inferior, 3 per cent. We note with satisfaction that the percentage in the lower groups tends to decrease, while in the number of schools placed in the highest groups there is a sensible increase.

The registers and school records are, in general, kept neatly and correctly, but the promotion column of the admission register requires keeping up to date. It should be understood, too, that the schemes of work are the property of the school, and when a teacher leaves the scheme should be left in the school, and the work-book should indicate clearly to the incoming teacher where to proceed with the work of each subject.

Classes for Backward Pupils.—The pupils of our schools may be roughly classified, according to mental ability, in the following groups: (1) Super-normal (comprising perhaps 10–12 per cent.); (2) normal (perhaps 80–85 per cent.); and (3) backward (perhaps 5 per cent.). With regard to the small proportion of really mentally deficient, nothing need be said here, as their cases are provided for more or less adequately by special schools, but we purpose dealing with the three classes mentioned above. (1.) Super-normal pupils: Special provision is made for these pupils by means of the widespread advantages of our national-scholarship system, and their rapid progress through the various school classes is provided for by the “freedom of classification” allowed to head teachers, by which such pupils may cover the work of two standard classes in one year. With regard to the latter point, we notice that while a few head teachers take full advantage of their right to advance the super-normal child more rapidly than the remainder of the class, in many schools the best pupils are allowed to “mark time.” In all our large schools there should be—in S1 to S4 at least—a fair proportion, perhaps 8 to 10 per cent., who are fit to be advanced two standards yearly. (2.) Normal pupils: These form, of course, the vast majority of our pupils; but the rate of progress of the normal pupils is certainly reduced by the presence of pupils who fall into Division III. If by any means these backward pupils could be taught separately, perhaps the chief gain would be that the general level of progress of normal pupils would be raised, since every experienced teacher knows how much both general progress and discipline are affected by the presence of pupils below the average capacity. One special advantage of the segregation of such backward pupils would be that the time of the school medical officer would be saved, since, as a general rule, the backward pupil is one whose physical condition requires special attention. In England a considerable part of such pupils' time is given to hand-work, and it is important to notice that our present arrangements for handwork hardly benefit backward pupils at all, since the most valuable branches of handwork (cookery, laundry-work, carpentry, and gardening) are not begun till S5 is reached, while the great majority of backward pupils never reach that standard.

As legislative authority has already been obtained for the payment of special teachers for backward pupils, and as we feel sure the Minister of Education would sanction a grant for any additional class-room required, we suggest that a beginning might be made by building an additional class-room at Macandrew Road School, and another at the Normal School, where there are special facilities for manual training, and that special teachers be approved to teach the classes referred to. As it is very important that no stigma should attach to the pupils of such classes, and as it is especially desirable that the sympathy of the parents concerned should be enlisted, the name “practical school,” used in England, is suggested as suitable for these classes. Our suggestion, of course, merely indicates how a beginning might be made in the treatment of backward pupils, and leaves out of consideration the special teaching of backward pupils in country districts. At present no legislative authority has been given for special teaching in the latter case, though in our opinion the case of the country child deserves the same consideration.