

2. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INSPECTORS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

Before 1918 it was customary for the Inspector of Secondary Schools to spend the earlier part of the year in visiting the district high schools, which were also seen by the District Inspectors. As the latter are now, by the Education Act, departmental officers, it was seen that this method of duplicating work and dividing authority had become obsolete. It was therefore decided that the District Inspectors should usually be solely responsible for the inspection, examination, and general oversight of district high schools, and that the Secondary Inspector (or Inspectors) should have much more time than had previously been the case for the inspection and examination of other secondary schools.

The Secondary Inspectors were later instructed to visit and report upon the secondary classes in the large technical high schools which had up till that time been seen only by officers of the Manual and Technical Branch.

The system in operation at present in connection with secondary and technical high schools is therefore as follows: In the first half of each year there is a detailed inspection of the schools of one Island, and a full report of this inspection is sent to each governing body. Teachers are conferred with individually and collectively; teaching methods in use are investigated and criticized; classes are taken for the purpose of testing results or of helping the less experienced teachers, and matters connected with the organization of the staff and the classification of the pupils are fully discussed with the Principal. All this is carried out in a much fuller way than has previously been possible.

During the second half of the year each school is visited for the purpose of awarding senior free places without examination, and of investigating the qualifications of applicants for lower and higher leaving certificates. During this visit the work of individual pupils in certain forms is tested in detail. Under this system each school will be visited thrice every two years and reported upon in alternate years.

During the first half of the year Mr. Cresswell was the sole Inspector. He visited and reported on all the secondary schools in the South Island. In July Mr. E. J. Parr, M.A., B.Sc., who had been for a number of years senior science master in the Otago Boys' High School, was appointed as his colleague, and during the latter half of the year all public secondary schools in the Dominion were visited for the special purposes mentioned above; the technical high schools at Christchurch, Dunedin, and Invercargill were reported upon after a visit in conjunction with a technical Inspector, and some of the larger registered private schools with a secondary department were also inspected.

During the war the staffs of all boys' schools were seriously depleted. An inordinate number of inexperienced teachers were necessarily engaged; in some cases no teachers with adequate qualifications could be secured. All the boys' schools excepting two had on the staff some women teachers, who, although in many cases well qualified in other respects, could naturally take no part in many school activities; consequently men teachers had to undertake more than their share in the supervision of games, drill, and other outdoor activities, and, in boarding-schools, of preparation work, &c. In the end the supply of women teachers also proved unequal to the demand, and even the girls' schools were generally understaffed; classes grew to an abnormal size (the average aimed at is twenty-five, but we saw many of fifty and some of sixty-five and over). To crown all, partly on account of the progressively liberal policy of the Department in the award of free places, partly on account of an enhanced popular appreciation of the value of education, the number of pupils desiring entrance to secondary schools steadily increased in almost every district, while the excessive cost of building often made it impossible to provide adequate accommodation, and every available nook and corner of most schools had to be utilized—libraries, teachers' common-rooms, assembly halls, shelter-sheds, and armouries being turned into temporary class-rooms. It is indeed surprising that the quality of the work of secondary schools did not deteriorate seriously during the progress of the war.

Now that the war is happily ended we may look for a gradual return to normal conditions. However, not all the teachers who answered the Empire's call will return, and of those who do some will certainly not rejoin the ranks of teachers, but will elect to take up more remunerative or more congenial work under the Defence Department or elsewhere. The shortage of well-qualified and experienced teachers will apparently be felt for several years, and it will be some time before the requisite extensions of buildings can be completed. Clearly the next few years will be a period of stock-taking and reconstruction.

ORGANIZATION.

At such a time it may not be out of place to mention a few points which appear to us of some importance in the organization of a large secondary school, points which may seem fairly obvious, but which our observation tells us need some stressing in the case of an appreciable number of schools.

1. The Principal should not be a kind of superior clerk. It has been very difficult under war conditions to secure adequate clerical assistance, or to devolve certain routine business upon a reliable subordinate. In some few schools the Principal has been granted assistance in compiling returns and statistics, keeping record-cards, attending to correspondence, &c.; but in many cases too large a proportion of his time is still devoted to these necessary but mechanical desk duties.

2. Neither should the Principal be essentially a form-master, as in most cases of late he has been compelled to be. Often his intimate knowledge of a special subject and his ripe skill in teaching it lead him to spend an inordinate time with his Sixth form. No doubt he does excellent work in that restricted sphere, but his main activities should be in a wider field. No manager of a big business, however skilful as salesman or canvasser, would dream of going behind the counter or "on the road";