

There were twelve schools of Grade 0 open during 1919. Of these one was inspected, four sent their pupils in the standard classes to the nearest school for examination, and seven were not inspected in any way during the year. From the results obtained by the schools of Grade 0 that were examined we are of opinion that the inspection of these is necessary in order to ascertain whether the Department is getting a fair return for the expenditure involved. We would suggest that an inspection visit might be paid every two years to those schools of Grade 0 that are too remote to send their pupils to another school for examination.

All the schools of Grade I or higher were visited once during the year, most of them were visited twice, and a number of the weaker schools were visited three times. The Grade I schools present the most difficult problem with which we have to deal. Owing to the small salary, the remoteness from centres of population, the difficulty of obtaining board and lodging, and other disabilities incidental to life in the blackblocks, it is exceptional to get qualified teachers to fill these positions, and the Grade I schools suffer most from frequent changes of teachers. They are the recognized training-ground for teachers who enter the profession without previous service as pupil-teachers or probationers. The length of time spent by such teachers in a Grade I school is generally in inverse proportion to their success as teachers and students, because more desirable positions can always be secured by those who show natural aptitude for teaching if they have gained even partial success in the certificate examination. As far as practicable the assistance of the organizing teachers has been called in to guide the efforts of untrained teachers in these schools, and we fully expect that the quality of the work will by this means be materially improved. At the same time the efficiency of these schools will always be precarious until teachers of promise can be induced to remain in charge for considerably more than a year. Of the fifty-five schools in Grade I, ten were reported as good, thirty-one as satisfactory, and fourteen as fair.

The problem of the schools of Grade II is also serious, but of a different kind. The majority of the teachers are certificated, and the remainder have partially qualified for a certificate. As all the classes are usually represented in a Grade II school, the organization of the work demands special skill. Where the teacher is in earnest and has some ability, he learns by experience how to make the best use of the grouping of classes, how to distribute his time so as to give each class and each subject its due share of attention, and how to keep seven or eight classes fully employed all the time. That some fail to gain satisfactory results is not at all surprising in view of the inherent difficulty of organizing a school of this grade and of the fact that a considerable number of the teachers have not received a regular training. Of the forty-two schools in Grade II, eleven are reported as good, twenty-three as satisfactory, and eight as fair.

The weaker schools of Grade I and II have given us a good deal of anxiety, and we have striven by various means to raise their standard of efficiency. A somewhat elaborate scheme of work, prepared by the Inspectors, was issued for the guidance of the teachers as to the general aim, the method, and the scope of the instruction in each subject. We believe that this has proved very beneficial. In the earlier part of the year we paid a number of two-day visits to some schools, in effect doing the work of organizing teachers, and in all cases after the first visit we furnished the teachers with a confidential memorandum in which were noted recommendations for the improvement of teaching-methods, &c. It is too early to report on the effect of the organizing teachers on the general quality of the school work, as they entered upon their duties in the last quarter of the year. We may say, however, that there is an ample field of work for these officers in the ninety-seven sole-teacher schools of this district. We again venture to suggest the establishment near Invercargill of a model sole-teacher school for the benefit of the comparatively large number of teachers in the service who have neither attended a training college nor served an apprenticeship as pupil-teachers or probationers. This class of teacher is receiving additions to its numbers every year despite the fact that the Southland Education Board annually sends a good number of ex-pupil-teachers and ex-probationers to the training college. It would appear, indeed, that a number of these never return, having received appointments elsewhere. We believe that it would be of very great value to untrained sole teachers to spend a fortnight observing the management of a model school. It is plainly impossible for the organizing teachers to visit all the sole-teacher schools whose teachers require guidance in organization.

The schools of Grade III constitute the largest group in this district, there being altogether sixty-two. Of these, twenty-six are reported as good or very good, thirty-one as satisfactory, and five as fair. All of the head teachers but two and about half of the assistants are now fully certificated, a state of affairs better than has obtained for some years. The smaller schools of Grade III approach most nearly to the ideal in staffing, and where the teachers have ability they ought to obtain very good results. We are pleased to report that a considerable number of the schools in this grade are doing very fine work. Unless the conditions have been exceptional through change of teachers or other adverse circumstances, there is no excuse for unsatisfactory results in schools of this grade; it is not unreasonable to expect the majority to reach a good, and all to reach a satisfactory, standard of efficiency.

There are only nineteen schools of Grade IV or higher. Of these, sixteen are reported as good or very good, and three as satisfactory. There is not one weak school in this group; the general quality of the instruction is very good, and there are several schools in which the standard of attainment leaves but little to be desired. Positions in these schools are in many respects more desirable than in those of lower grades, even if there is no advantage in salary. It is accordingly exceptional to find an uncertificated or an untrained teacher on the staff. It is unfortunate for this district that there are so few schools of Grade IV or higher, where the salary offers a fair reward for the ablest teachers trained in lower positions. When it is remembered that there are sixty-two head-teacherships of the next lower grade, besides a number of assistantships of equal value, it will be admitted that the nineteen larger schools in Southland do not furnish a sufficient number of promotions to reward the most successful of the Grade III teachers, and that consequently many teachers have to wait a long time for the promotion that they have earned.

We welcome the lightening of the burden of work in arithmetic by the elimination of the metric system in the new syllabus. As pupils never had occasion to apply their knowledge of the metric tables to everyday problems, this portion of the course tended to become a mere abstract training in mathematics. For many years arithmetic has been the most troublesome subject on the syllabus,