

2. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INSPECTORS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

Wellington, 5th July, 1920.

WORK OF THE YEAR.

Our work was seriously interfered with last year by the coal shortage in the winter, which compelled us to spend an inordinate number of days travelling in slow trains. During the earlier part of the year all the secondary schools of the North Island, with the exception of Wellington Girls' College, were inspected, an average of from three to four days being spent in each school by both Inspectors. During this visit Principals were kept posted on all details, teachers were conferred with individually and in groups, and the inspection usually concluded with a general discussion with the whole staff, in which we were pleased to see junior teachers occasionally taking part. Some of the larger technical high schools and district high schools were also visited, the latter in company with the Senior District Inspectors. In every case our report contained a complete commentary on all that we saw, and it appears unnecessary to cover again ground that has in this way been already satisfactorily traversed.

During the latter part of the year all secondary schools were visited with a view to the award of senior free places without formal external examinations and of lower and higher leaving-certificates. Certain forms, especially those composed of second-year pupils, were tested by means of written and oral work. As a result of these tests, after consultation with Principals, senior free places were awarded under clause 7 (c) to over fifteen hundred pupils. A large number of leaving-certificates of both grades were also issued on our recommendation.

THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS.

Our last report stressed the need of a general reorganization now that the war is over. A special matter that seems to call for immediate attention is the training of secondary-school teachers in pedagogy. The persons who desire to take up secondary teaching are usually young graduates, fresh from the University and quite untrained in teaching methods. Under the instruction of skilled teachers their latent powers would rapidly develop; under the present system they are either thrown entirely on their own resources, or at best have to depend upon such practical help as can be given by a Principal who is usually busied with matters of general organization and the like, or upon the hints and suggestions of the Inspectors at the time of their short and infrequent inspection visits. Although we are anxious to help young teachers to the best of our ability, although we devote a considerable proportion of our time in each school to them, and although we find most of them keenly anxious to profit by our visit, yet we confess we cannot do much for them during a short inspection visit that occurs only once every two years. Teachers have, in fact, to gain their experience in many schools mainly at the expense of their pupils. The result is perhaps not quite as bad as might be expected, for an appreciable number of these young graduates are "born teachers" to whom right methods come by a kind of instinct, and nearly all of them are earnest students, whose academic training has made them specially quick to appreciate and adopt right lines of work. Nevertheless, even to persons of this mental calibre, and perhaps specially to such, a short course of observation in a good school and of practice teaching under expert supervision and direction would undoubtedly be of great value. We again affirm the opinion expressed two years ago that there is urgent call for co-operation between training colleges, University colleges, and secondary schools in the main centres. We venture to say that a unique opportunity now presents itself in Christchurch. Canterbury College has just engaged a Professor of Education; the Canterbury College Board of Governors, alone among the governing bodies of University colleges, has control of the local high schools, and has at least two of its members on the Board of Advice of the Training College. It seems to be plainly indicated that the Christchurch High Schools should be made practising and observational schools for secondary teachers, and that University college, high school, and training college should be associated for the purpose. Such a scheme would involve a special staffing of the high schools named and the provision of bursaries of some kind. The additional expense, however, need not be great, and would surely yield a handsome return.

AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

In June the then Hon. Minister of Education summoned a conference to discuss the question of agricultural education. The conference was attended by about twenty delegates, including selected Inspectors of primary schools and teachers of agriculture in secondary schools, together with representatives of Lincoln College, the University of New Zealand, the Agricultural Department, and the Education Department. During the sessions, which extended over three days, a general discussion was held, and sub-committees, appointed for the purpose, submitted reports on the teaching of agricultural science in the primary schools, the secondary schools, and in the University colleges. Some of the suggestions contained in these reports have been incorporated in the revised syllabus for primary schools. With regard to secondary schools and the University there were manifested such sharp differences of opinion as to the possibility of satisfactory courses being devised that no definite action has yet resulted. The Director of Education in his capacity as member of the University Senate has represented to that body the advisability of putting the subject on the syllabus for the B.A. degree, and a sub-committee is preparing a draft prescription accordingly. It is hoped that the matter will receive at the hands of the Senate the careful attention which its great importance demands, and that we shall soon have in at least one of the affiliated colleges a Lecturer in Agriculture, whose work will be chiefly in connection with training-college students and young teachers in secondary schools. If these facilities for the study of the subject are denied, we feel compelled, with the greatest reluctance, to advise the Principals of secondary schools to delete agriculture from the syllabus of instruction.