

APPENDIX A.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

5th August, 1921.

I have the honour to present my report for the year ended 31st December, 1920.

During the year the demands made by office duties were heavier than was anticipated, but notwithstanding this all the education districts were visited and the Inspectors and Boards' officials conferred with. At these visits methods of inspecting schools and of effecting improvements in the organization were discussed, and an attempt made to arrive at some common basis for the appraisal of school-work and the efficiency of the teacher. In all centres I found the staff of Inspectors carrying out their duties with praiseworthy zeal and fidelity, and I have no hesitation in saying that the popular conception of an "Inspector" as one who is nothing more than a critic does not do justice to the work of an Inspector of Schools in New Zealand. The ranks of the inspectorate are filled for the most part by men who have had long experience as headmasters of large schools, and these find their work as Inspectors much more strenuous and exacting than the management of a school. The regulations specify that where an Inspector discovers weaknesses in the schools under his control he shall not merely point out these weaknesses, but shall by advice and illustration show how they may be removed. The actual work of organizing and teaching occupies, therefore, a large part of his time, and demands that he shall, in school and after school, give of his best.

The most radical change in the method of inspecting schools came as the result of placing the classification of pupils in the hands of the head teachers. Prior to this the Inspectors were the classifying officers, and examining was their chief work. As a rule, each school received two visits yearly, the first visit being for the purpose of seeing the teacher at work and advising him how to improve his methods of teaching and organizing, and the second visit for the purpose of examining the results of the year's work and of classifying the pupils. In most districts I found the old system survived in some shape or form. The Inspector does not now classify the pupils except in small inefficiently conducted schools; but in most schools he does at one of his visits hold an examination of some kind. It is indeed safe to say that most Inspectors devote almost the whole of one visit to the work of examining. This is done even in the case of some normal schools attached to training colleges where the headmaster is himself a potential Inspector. The practice of examining colours nearly all inspection reports, and its effect is seen in the very prevalent conviction among teachers that their grading-marks depend on what they call their "results." There are, I imagine, few educationists of note in these days who still hold to the doctrine that the worth of a teacher can be expressed in terms of the number of "sums right" or "spellings wrong." It is time we took higher ground than this, and obtained from the wider outlook a truer sense of relative values. Until the system of appraising schools and school-teachers by the method of examination is further modified it is hopeless to expect teachers to break away from traditional methods and show originality. In consequence of the system of grading teachers in accordance with efficiency marks awarded by the Inspectors as grading officers the latter hold the key to the position. Their attitude and their methods are sure to be reflected in the methods and aims of the teachers. If Inspectors are stereotyped, teachers are likely to be stereotyped also. I would therefore urge that it is of paramount importance for Inspectors to break away as far as is reasonable and possible from the formal examination method of appraisal that formed a proper and very necessary adjunct to the education system of the past. The careful and detailed examination of schools the efficiency of which is in doubt, or which are conducted by teachers of whose fidelity the Inspector is not assured, must always form part of the Inspector's duty, and there is no suggestion in this report that examination in such cases as these should be abandoned. Nor is there any suggestion here that the Inspector should countenance slackness either on the part of the teacher or on the part of the pupil. Careful and accurate work should always receive high praise, and our education system might well be held to have failed in its object if it did not succeed in training children to regard care and accuracy as a worthy aim. It should indeed be counted among the chief duties of the Inspector to set a high standard of attainment and to show how this standard can be reached. Under the formal examination system the Inspector had little time to do more than apply the measure, as if the process of measuring accuracy were the chief means of securing accuracy. As well imagine that to weigh and measure a child's body is more important than to feed it! What is urged here is that the Inspector shall not only measure the success or failure of a teacher, but shall also supply his deficiencies. Under a freer system of inspection this can be done. It is, for example, much more profitable to a teacher to see the Inspector actually handle a class in arithmetic, and demonstrate how accuracy can be attained and intelligence developed, than to see the results of a formal examination by means of test-cards. The latter he can see any day and does see a great many times in the year; the former he has at most only two opportunities of seeing during the year. A skilled Inspector will use both methods judiciously, but will always recognize the greater importance of the former.