

APPENDIX A.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

I have the honour to present my report on primary education for the year ended 31st December, 1921.

I greatly regret that owing to the pressure of other duties it was impossible for me to carry out the work of inspection in an effective manner, or to confer at any length with the district Inspectors. I have therefore to refer you to the annual reports of the nine Senior Inspectors for a detailed statement regarding the efficiency of the primary schools and district high schools in the several districts. Some of these reports may appear somewhat pessimistic in tone, since they deal more with faults in the teaching and in the quality of the pupils' work than with the progress that has been made during the year. Reports of this kind, though not fully reflecting the efficiency of the district, certainly serve to indicate the high standard of attainment set by the Inspectors. It is a special characteristic of the system of school-inspection in New Zealand that the Inspectors are all skilled in the management of schools and classes, and are consequently able to devote a large part of their time to the actual handling of the work. From an examination of school reports from different parts of the Dominion I gather that there is still a tendency for the Inspector to spend a great deal of time in examining every subject more or less closely. This practice certainly enables him to criticize, but it is very doubtful whether it gives him time to show how improvements can be effected. The latter is unquestionably the Inspector's most important duty.

I was very glad to read in the annual report of the Auckland Inspectors that it was proposed "to indicate to teachers lines of educational investigation for the present year." The Inspectors wisely remark, however, that untrained and uncertificated teachers would be well advised "to follow well-proven lines that will result in some good being done for the pupils in their charge." In the teachers' organ, *National Education*, a teacher complained very bitterly that he was fettered, hampered, and confined in his school work, and dared not attempt any departure from the orthodox. I cannot believe that an Inspector would suppress originality in whatever shape or form, but would rather fan any spark of enthusiasm he might detect. There are teachers, however, as there are Inspectors and other educationists, who are only too ready to follow a will-o'-the-wisp and to mistake the shadow for the substance. Let us have originality by all means—most of us are too much hampered by tradition; but let us not forget that the primary schools are expected to give their pupils a mastery of the tools of education.

Anent this matter of experimenting with new methods, some of the reports show how easy it is to be led astray by results. The teacher devises a new method, he naturally desires it to be successful and infuses enthusiasm and interest into the experiment, his pupils respond, and the results are good. Very naturally he attributes his success to his method, whereas his enthusiasm and the pupils' interest, not to mention the unconsciously exerted but powerful suggestion, may have triumphed over all the weaknesses in his method, and may, indeed, have produced success in spite of the method.

In order to ascertain what attitude in regard to educational investigation was adopted by the inspection staff in the different districts I requested that the matter might be dealt with in the annual reports. The following extracts show clearly that the Inspectors recognize the importance of fostering among teachers the spirit of inquiry:—

"It is to be feared that little of this [educational investigation] is carried on in our schools. Nor will it be until teachers are widely enough read to know just how to begin and are bold enough to begin experimenting. Here and there a lone soul is making inquiries to an end and deserves credit for his efforts."—(*Taranaki*.)

The Wanganui Inspectors report on experiments in "print-writing," on "the dramatization of reading-matter" as bearing on the teaching of reading to beginners, and on the teaching of spelling. In the same district several teachers are trying the two best-known systems of education by self-effort, and in one of the largest schools a special class for retardates has been established. In this class no time-table is used, and the pupils are "allowed a fairly wide freedom of choice in the work." The experiment will be watched with interest.

"Teachers have few opportunities of performing original research work while they are engaged in the routine duties of their schools. The schools offer the opportunity of putting to the test the results achieved in the field of experimental education . . . and it is in this direction that we wish to encourage our teachers to proceed."—(*Hawke's Bay*.)

"With regard to educational investigation, the labours of the Infant Circle call for special commendation. The 'Circle' is composed of the infant-mistresses of city and suburban schools. Periodical meetings are held at which papers on infant-teaching methods, &c., are read, and general discussions follow."—(*Wellington*.)

"Experimentation, however, is but little practised, many teachers generally being content to adopt traditional and accredited methods, natural conservatism inducing them to continue the use of methods that they have found fairly effective in preference to spending time in experiments that appear to them to be of doubtful value. With many teachers that