

given to the appointment of about two hundred additional assistants to replace pupil-teachers and enable large classes to be subdivided. Even then the returns obtained early this year showed that there were still far too many large classes of over sixty pupils. At the instance of the Minister, an immediate investigation was therefore made in the case of each school, and a large number of the schools were personally visited by the Chief Inspector of Primary Schools. From his report it was found that no fewer than 113 classes of over sixty pupils could be reduced by reorganizing the classes and rearranging the pupils. In seventy-seven other cases it was found that an additional assistant would be needed, and the Boards concerned have been notified that they may appoint this additional assistant immediately. In forty-nine cases it was found that an additional assistant could not be properly utilized unless some of the class-rooms were remodelled by enlarging or subdividing rooms, or by adding a new room. The Boards concerned have been asked to supply sketch-plans and estimates immediately in order that this work may be done.

It is considered that no matter is of so immediate and pressing importance as the reduction of these large classes, the existence of which is prejudicial to good methods of teaching and is a strain on both pupils and teachers.

As a result of the steps taken there should, before the end of the present year, be no class in New Zealand with more than sixty pupils. As so many difficulties and defects have been attributed to the existence of large classes, it may be confidently expected that with the general clearing of the position as herein indicated there will be a marked advance in the work of the schools in many directions.

INSTRUCTION IN AGRICULTURE.

Since the prosperity of New Zealand depends so largely on the development of agriculture, the Department is constantly being urged to provide for more complete instruction in agriculture in the schools.

The Department fully recognizes the value of a sound and thorough training in agriculture, and that a much larger proportion of our boys should be attracted to and trained in this fundamentally important occupation in the Dominion.

It should be recognized by even the most ardent advocate of the pursuit of agriculture that in the primary school at least very little of what may really be called agricultural instruction can be given. People may read or hear of instruction in agriculture and of instructors of agriculture in connection with primary schools in this or other countries, but if so these names do not really represent all that might be implied from them. At a recent conference of teachers of agriculture, agricultural experts, and representatives of farming interests, it was unanimously agreed that in the primary schools the best service that can be rendered to agriculture is to foster a soundly devised course of instruction in nature-study in a direct and practical manner. By this means children may become interested in all living and growing things, they will find absorbing interest in all kinds of plant and animal life, and will see to what a great extent the study of nature is as interesting and demands as much of the intellect as any study of mathematics, languages, or arts and sciences. The main object should be to promote a love of nature and a deep and intelligent interest in it. The children should also have small garden-plots in which they may cultivate and see grow under their own care and attention all kinds of plants and crops. It must be remembered that this school-gardening, which is often wrongly called "elementary agriculture," can be undertaken in the primary school only by children of from about eleven to fourteen years of age, so that the scope of their work should be limited to their capacity and by the claims of their general education.

The claim of general education is a strong one, for this is the main purpose of a primary-school course. Nothing would more quickly drive children from the country or give them a disinclination to follow agricultural pursuits, or cause parents to seek the towns, than any early limitation of a child's general education in order to introduce too soon or too greatly either so-called agricultural instruction or any other form of vocational training. To do so would be to tell the boy who it is desired should take up farm-work that he must thereby be content with a limited general education and stand at a disadvantage in ordinary social and public life with boys in other occupations.