

1. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INSPECTORS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

Wellington, 7th June, 1926.

We have the honour to present our report for the year 1925. Unfortunately, the outstanding feature of the year has been the dislocation caused by the severe epidemic of infantile paralysis that affected the whole Dominion in the summer and early autumn. The reopening of the schools after the summer vacation was necessarily delayed for a period of over two months. By reducing the number and the length of the vacations the majority of schools were able to retain a session of thirty-three to thirty-five weeks. It was realized before the end of February that the reopening would be fairly late in the year, and several schools had even at that early date inaugurated a scheme of instruction through the post; others joined in later at the request of the Department, and by the middle of March practically all schools were engaged in some form of assignment work for the benefit of their pupils. In many instances the newspaper-proprietors generously assisted the schools by publishing assignments in the local Press, and the Postal authorities also made concessions. The response of the pupils was in most centres very gratifying. In not a few instances teachers found that they were being overwhelmed with piles of written work sent in for correction and comment, and many found that they were being called upon to work far longer hours than during the ordinary school session. Several Principals have spoken to us in glowing terms of the zeal and industry displayed by members of their staffs in this pre-sessional work. Unfortunately, certain subjects, especially in first-year forms, had necessarily to be left untouched, but it is undeniable that in those schools where a serious effort had been made the middle and upper forms were able to settle down to advanced work much more effectively than in those where the pupils had not been kept in touch with their subjects. There is no doubt, too, that most of the staffs concerned gained valuable knowledge of the real difficulties that confront the pupil in the various subjects. They benefited much, moreover, from the staff discussions on methods of teaching and other topics that were held in most schools. We wish to place on record our appreciation of the energy and vigour displayed by the Principals and staffs in meeting a very difficult situation.

The work of the Inspectors was naturally hampered by the dislocation referred to above. It had been hoped to complete during the year the triennial round of full inspections, but this was, unfortunately, found to be impossible. Time, however, was found for a detailed inspection of Nelson College, Nelson Girls' College, Timaru Boys', Timaru Girls', Gore, Southland Boys', Southland Girls', Otago Boys', and Otago Girls' High Schools. Visits were also paid to the Waitaki Junior High Schools. Several private schools were visited in connection with applications for registration as private secondary schools.

The sittings of the Appeal Board were attended in April. The Board sat in Auckland, Wellington, and Dunedin; eleven teachers appealed against their classification; one appeal was allowed by consent and one by the Appeal Board, seven were disallowed, and two were withdrawn.

Each of the thirty-six secondary schools was visited during the latter half of the year, although in most cases the visits were somewhat curtailed. Recommendations for senior free places and "higher" leaving-certificates were dealt with on very much the same lines as those described in previous reports, except that in this instance only a few written tests were set to the candidates. This departure from the usual procedure was not regarded as an altogether desirable innovation, but the retardation due to the epidemic and the limited time available left scarcely any other course open. It was assumed that the relative standard of proficiency obtaining in each school was equivalent to that which had been discovered by more exhaustive tests in the two preceding years, and a careful scrutiny was made of the candidates' class records and their showing in school examinations in order to determine which of them were the most deserving of inclusion in the group to be accepted from the school in question. It may be added that a scrutiny of the results obtained by the rejected candidates in the subsequent Intermediate Examination proves that a just estimate of the standard had been made in the case of nearly every school; in the few schools excepted the estimate had apparently erred on the side of leniency. As a result of the Inspectors' recommendations senior free places were awarded in accordance with clause 7 (c) to 2,563 candidates; another 135 were successful in obtaining them by passing the Intermediate Examination in November. Some 615 "higher" and 102 "lower" leaving-certificates were also issued on the Inspectors' recommendations.

Objections to the grading and staffing systems have now become much less frequent. The existing complaints fall for the most part under two heads—the complaints of assistants that the staffing schedule does not provide for a sufficiently high proportion of A and B grade positions, and those of Boards in the smaller towns that they cannot get properly qualified teachers to fill such positions. The contradictory nature of these complaints is obvious, but not inexplicable. So long as the present reluctance of teachers to take up work outside the large centres exists the overstaffing of city schools with higher-grade teachers and the corresponding understaffing of the remoter schools must continue. It must be admitted that it is no light undertaking for the married male teacher to