

APPENDIX A.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

Wellington, N.Z., 9th August, 1928.

I have the honour to submit the following report for the year ended 31st December, 1927.

Of the staff of Inspectors, Mr. W. A. Ballantyne, B.A., of Taranaki, retired on superannuation, having completed over forty years' service, the vacancy thus caused being filled by the appointment of Mr. J. A. Henry, B.A., Dip. Ed. Owing to ill health, Mr. J. T. G. Cox retired on superannuation from the Auckland staff, while Mr. R. B. Clarke, M.A., was appointed to a vacant position in Dunedin.

The reports of the Senior Inspectors of Schools in the various districts show that the standard of education is, in general, well maintained throughout the Dominion. Indeed, as far as the examination for the certificate of proficiency is concerned, the percentage of passes was the highest yet reached—viz., 81.1. The modern type of question has made the examination more searching in character, while at the same time it offers the pupil a fair chance of proving his claim. This year, also, the system of accrediting was more extensively used and appears to have worked quite successfully.

The "adopted" school scheme referred to in last year's report has now been put into operation in several districts, and the reports certainly indicate that the outlying schools are materially assisted by their "parent" schools.

The Correspondence School conducted by the Department still meets the needs of the children in remote places in a satisfactory manner, and is much appreciated by the parents.

The number of special classes established for backward children has now reached twenty, and proposals for additional ones are being made. By the courtesy of Professor Johnston, Principal of Vinelands Institution, New Jersey, U.S.A., two New Zealand teachers of special classes spent six months in training in the best-known school in America, and there they gained much valuable experience. A New Zealand teacher of special classes is proceeding to England shortly on a year's exchange with an English teacher engaged in similar work, and her experience abroad should add greatly to our knowledge of the technique necessary in dealing with the children concerned. At the same time I do not think that we can at present form a true estimate of retardation in the Dominion. There are so many different causes assigned for retardation that it would seem necessary to fix in some way or other a standard by which it is to be judged. The inability of a child to perform the work of the class below that which is considered normal for its age depends very largely upon the soundness of the classification of the teacher who makes it. This would seem to require that a uniform standard of achievement for each class be first set up—a matter which requires a considerable amount of experiment and research. Of the subjects of the curriculum, arithmetic appears to be the one most fruitful of retardation, and this can hardly be justified when it is prescribed by the regulations that the classification of pupils shall be made on the basis of English and not arithmetic. The modification of the present programme in arithmetic and the increased appreciation of English contained in the new syllabus should lessen the retardation that may have arisen from this cause.

In reference to the various subjects of the curriculum, the Inspectors report that a much wider field is now covered in reading. Very few schools have no library, and where formerly the pupils read one book it is safe to say that they now read twenty. Indeed, so much time is now devoted to silent reading that there is some danger of oral reading receiving too little attention. Reading aloud is a valuable art, giving pleasure as well as entertainment to the listeners, and should still find an important place in the day's work.

Spelling appears still to exercise the attention of Inspectors, several of whom fail to find systematic teaching of the subject. Even though it may be said that spelling has no great educational value, it must be admitted that "Society looks upon ability to spell correctly as one mark at least of an educated person." "Amongst business and professional people, nothing so immediately discounts the chances of an applicant as the misspelling of words in common use. The school must take note of this feeling on the part of society in general and respect it." ("Programme of Studies," Alberta.) Suggestions for the treatment of spelling on modern lines have been recently circulated in the *Education Gazette*.

In regard to writing, there is a consensus of opinion that a boy or girl leaving the primary school should write a cursive hand, and that the use of print-script should be confined to the preparatory classes unless it is required for some special purpose, such as mapping. This view is in agreement with many English authorities, and appears to be adopted throughout America, where efforts are concentrated in securing a speedy hand through cursive writing.

As has been suggested above, there is still some drag in arithmetic, particularly in the lower and middle divisions. The tests issued by the Department for use in the examination for certificates of proficiency did not appear to make too severe a demand upon the pupils, while they covered the syllabus to a much fuller extent and were far more practical and useful in character than the type of question set in former years. After all, the arithmetic of most value, both from its practical application and from its affording evidence of mental alertness in dealing with number, is not done up in paragraphs.