

OTAGO.

SIR,—

As required by the Education Act, 1914, I have the honour to present the following report of the Education Board of the District of Otago for the year 1927 :—

Board.—There has been no change in the personnel of the Board, which is as follows : Urban Area—Messrs. James Wallace, J. H. Wilkinson, R. H. S. Todd, and Leonard Sanderson ; North Ward—Messrs. George Livingstone and James Mitchell ; Central Ward—Messrs. James Smith and James Horn, M.P. ; South Ward—Hon. D. T. Fleming, M.L.C., and Mr. Parker McKinley, M.A. Mr. James Wallace was re-elected Chairman of the Board, it being now his tenth year in that position. Twenty-seven meetings of the Board have been held during the year, the average attendance being nine.

Probationers.—The quota for the Otago District was fifty, as against thirty-six last year. Out of a total of 125 applicants all qualified by examination, twelve males and thirty-eight females were selected, fifteen of whom had higher leaving-certificates and full D, twenty-seven higher leaving certificates and portion of D, three full D, four partial D, and one a lower leaving-certificate and portion of D. The cutting-down of the number of appointments in 1925 and 1926 to about half the number allowed in previous years has had the effect of reducing the number of young people seeking admission to the teaching profession. In 1925 there were 200 applicants for thirty-five vacancies ; in 1926 there were 151 for thirty-six vacancies ; and this year 125 for fifty vacancies. The Inspectors' reports show that about one-fifth of last year's applicants would not make effective teachers, and the Board has thought it necessary to suggest to the heads of high schools and district high schools that they should discourage pupils from endeavouring to qualify themselves by examinations when they know that from the point of view of personality the pupils are unsuitable or have not a reasonable chance of securing an appointment.

Inspection of Schools.—For some reason—possibly that of economy*—the Department did not fill the vacancy created by Inspector Robertson's transfer to Southland at the end of February until the last week in October, the result being that, working shorthanded, the Inspectors found it impossible to visit every school twice. Inspector Robertson's resignation removes from the Otago inspectorate the last of the Inspectors appointed by the Otago Education Board. Not one of the present Inspectors is an Otago-trained man. The Board finds it a decided disadvantage that the members of the inspectorate do not know Otago geographically.†

Efficiency of Schools.—The Inspectors' estimate of the general efficiency of the schools is as follows : Excellent or very good, 11 per cent. ; good, 50 per cent. ; very fair, 34 per cent. ; fair, 5 per cent. This shows a slight decrease in the "very fair" category (36 per cent. last year), and a pleasing increase in the two highest groups. Only about a dozen schools of Grade I and upwards were this year recorded as fair (below satisfactory).

Proficiency Examination.—The Proficiency Examination was taken wholly as a synchronous examination, the procedure being identical with that adopted in 1926 except that no special supervisors were appointed.

Elementary Agriculture.—The Senior Agriculture Instructor reports that a more intelligent interest in and appreciation of this subject by the pupils is becoming pleasingly apparent in a number of schools. The majority of the school-gardens have reflected systematic attention to the various practical operations. An appreciation of the effect created by a well-kept garden has resulted in a greater recognition by teachers of the importance of improving the school environment generally. The Senior Agriculture Instructor states that in general the year's work has been marked by improvement both in methods and results.

Woodwork, Cookery, and Dressmaking.—The following table shows the number of schools able to take advantage of these classes, and the number of children in attendance :—

Subject.	Number of Centres at which Instruction given.	Number of Schools.	Roll Number.
Woodwork	12	34	1,602
Domestic science	13	37‡	1,440

School-buildings.—The only new work carried out was the erection of four additional rooms at the new Caversham School. Remodelling received attention at the Normal, Musselburgh, Sawyer's Bay, and Tokomairiro Schools. The usual attention was given to maintenance work, and in this connection the Board notes increased expenditure on the upkeep and renewal of out-offices, shelter-sheds, drainage systems, and fences which have outlived their period of usefulness. The Board observes with pleasure a growing desire on the part of Committees to improve the school-grounds, and a considerable sum has been granted by way of subsidy to supplement local efforts in this direction. All reasonable requests for the interior renovation of residences have been granted, but the Board regrets to report that it has had to decline almost every application for the interior painting of schools.

Replacement of Long Desks.—In last year's report the Board pointed out that it would cost £14,500 to complete the equipment of the schools in this district with modern furniture, and the suggestion was made that the Department and the Board should each allocate £500 annually to enable the work to be completed in fifteen years' time. The Board trusts that the Department will yet see its way to make this grant.

* The delay in filling the vacancy was not due in any way to economy as is suggested in the Board's report.

† The present Inspectors have been in the Otago District two years, seven years, and eleven years respectively.

‡ Includes two private schools.