

APPENDIX A.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit the following report for the year ended 31st December, 1928 :—

During the year Mr. G. Raymond, Inspector of Schools, Christchurch, retired on superannuation, his place being filled by the transfer of Mr. J. Brunton from Napier. Mr. S. A. Clark was appointed to the vacancy in the Hawke's Bay District.

The principal work engaging the professional officers in the Department during the year was the issue of the revised Primary Syllabus of Instruction, which has received general approval at the hands of teachers. It may fairly be regarded as constituting a very important stage of progress in the sphere of primary education in the Dominion. It has been designed to meet the conditions of the New Zealand child, and an attempt has been made, as far as possible, to bring the contents of the syllabus into relation with the actual experiences of life. At the same time it offers to the teacher a larger measure of freedom to choose and to put into execution those methods which his own experience and craftsmanship lead him to consider the most suited to his pupils and their environment.

The new syllabus naturally requires new text-books, and it is only fair to say in respect to these that revision was long overdue. For the first time in the history of the Department the text-books were considered in the manuscript and nothing was included that had not been previously approved. In this connection, acknowledgment must be made of the assistance given by the executive members of the New Zealand Educational Institute, who kindly placed their services at the disposal of the Department in offering criticisms and useful suggestions for improvement. The last series of approved text-books was issued over twelve years ago, and the need for a change will therefore be evident. No alteration will be made in the present series for the next five years.

The reports of the Senior Inspectors of Schools in the various districts show that the standard of education, in general, continues to be well maintained throughout the Dominion. The percentage of passes at the Proficiency Examination shows a slight decrease on that of 1927, being 80.3, as compared with 81.1. The examination was conducted on lines similar to those used in the previous year. On the whole, the papers were slightly more difficult, or, rather, they made a more searching test of the pupils' natural ability and knowledge. Accrediting was largely used in the various districts, with very satisfactory results, the fact that the results are somewhat lower showing in a measure that head teachers exercise due care in their recommendations.

Standardized tests for diagnostic purposes are now used freely by teachers. In many instances where the same tests were applied at intervals the records were a clear indication not only of the progress of the pupils, but also of the success of the teachers' efforts. Inspectors say that the tests are very popular with the children, who become quite eager to improve upon their previous scores. Teachers who use them have the satisfaction of knowing definitely the standard of work reached by their classes.

The "adopted" school scheme has been continued in several districts, and the reports show that the country teachers and pupils have received much benefit from correspondence with the larger schools. The criticism of the "adopted" school's work and the supply of specimens from the "parent" school have done much to help the country school to achieve its best results. Correspondence between pupils has become a feature of the scheme.

Of the primary-school subjects which are perhaps brought more directly before the members of the public, spelling and writing are subjected to criticism, and it would appear that the general opinion of Inspectors is that spelling is not nearly so satisfactory as it should be. Newer methods of treatment have apparently failed to produce the results anticipated. My impression is that it is not the methods at fault so much as the manner in which they are understood and applied.

The following paragraphs from the "Programme of Studies for the Elementary Schools of Alberta, Canada," quoted in the *Education Gazette* of last year, may well be repeated in this connection :—

"The task of the school in teaching spelling is not so much the teaching of all the words the child will never use as it is the development of the ideal of not making mistakes in spelling. 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. It will never be able to teach the child to spell all the words he will need to use in even a very limited sphere of activity, but if it can establish in his mind the set purpose of not disgracing himself in the eyes of society by making errors in spelling he will take charge of his own learning, and mistakes in spelling will disappear.

"The school must give the child perfect control over the spelling of those common and much-used words of the language, and must develop in the child such an ideal of exact spelling as will induce him to take charge of his own spelling from that point on for all other words which he may need."

In writing, too, it has been found desirable to adopt a uniform style throughout the Dominion. Print-script, which has been given a fair trial in several districts, has been objected to by the average business man, and its use in the standard classes will therefore be relegated to mapping, tabulating, &c., a rhythmic style of cursive writing being adopted for general use.