

1. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

Wellington, 1st July, 1929.

SIR,—

I have the honour to present the report for the year 1928. Early in the year the Inspectorate suffered a loss when Mr. W. T. Foster resigned his position to become Principal of the Napier Boys' High School. Mr. J. B. Mawson, M.C., M.A., was appointed to fill the vacancy, and took up his duties as Inspector in May.

The routine work of inspection, accrediting, examining, and grading, has been carried on very much as in previous years. A considerable portion of the first term was spent in visiting all the district high schools in the Canterbury, Otago, and Southland Education Districts, some twenty-nine in all. As in the previous year, conferences were held with the full staff of local Inspectors on the completion of the visits in their respective districts. These informal conferences are of undoubted value to both groups of Inspectors, and afford opportunity for discussion of not only the difficulties besetting individual schools, but also secondary-school methods in general. On the whole, the work being done in the secondary departments visited was very creditable indeed, due allowance being made for the unfavourable conditions under which much of the teaching is done.

The remainder of the first half of the year was devoted in the main to the full inspection of eighteen of the departmental secondary schools. In these visits the practice is for two Inspectors to collaborate, two days as a rule being spent in the smallest schools, and as many as five in schools with seven hundred to nine hundred pupils. Although a system of biennial inspections has been consistently aimed at for some years past, it has now been found advisable to modify the procedure by subjecting only about 40 per cent. of the schools to complete inspection in each year. This will leave more time for attention to the district high schools, which at present are paid a brief visit only once in three years.

Two new secondary schools—Rongotai Boys' College (Wellington) and Avonside Girls' High School (Christchurch)—were opened last year, thus raising the number of departmental secondary schools to forty-three. Their aggregate roll on the 1st March, 1928, was 15,943. The number of registered private secondary schools now stands at forty-three also, four having been recognized in 1928, viz.—Sacred Heart Convent, New Plymouth; St. Mary's Collegiate School, Christchurch; Marist Brothers' School, Greymouth; and Craighead School, Timaru. Sixteen of these registered schools were inspected during the year.

The number of appeals lodged by teachers against their classification was smaller than usual, and all but one of them were subsequently withdrawn; in the single case heard the appeal was disallowed.

The latter portion of the year was occupied with the customary visit to all the secondary schools in connection with the classification of assistant teachers and the accrediting of candidates for senior free places. The principle introduced in the preceding year of placing more responsibility upon the Principals in determining the fitness of their candidates has again been followed, and where the Inspectors were satisfied that the average standard of the Fourth Form work in the school was sufficiently high very little alteration was made in the list submitted by the Principal. The number of senior free places granted to candidates from departmental secondary schools on the Principals' recommendations has risen considerably in the past two years; 2,563 were granted in 1926, 2,992 in the following year, and 3,165 in 1928. An additional 125 candidates obtained senior free places by passing the Intermediate Examination in November.

There has been an increased demand for both grades of leaving-certificates; 778 secondary-school pupils were granted the higher certificate, and 85 the lower, all on recommendation; included in these numbers are 104 and 3 respectively from registered private schools.

The present position in connection with the Department's certificates of secondary instruction is not altogether satisfactory. In the first place, the nomenclature is somewhat misleading. The present lower leaving-certificate is granted to a pupil who has satisfactorily completed at an approved school at least a three-years course of secondary instruction, and has in general reached a standard of attainment comparable to that required in the University Entrance or Class D Examination. The certificate is intended, in short, to certify that the holder has completed a good average secondary-school course. The value of the certificate to the ex-pupil seeking employment is, however, unmistakably diminished by the title "lower." The average employer, unskilled in the intricacies of educational nomenclature, is apt to stumble at the title, and to set down the holder as an inferior product of the secondary school. The present gradation of titles—"intermediate," "lower," "higher"—is, moreover, in itself open to objection. I am strongly of opinion that a more logical sequence, such as "lower school certificate," "schools leaving-certificate," and "higher leaving-certificate," would be more effective in every way.

But there are other issues involved. At the present time our leaving-certificates are too closely associated with the candidate's success in the University Entrance Examination; the lower certificate can be, and occasionally is, granted to candidates who do not sit either the Entrance or the Class D Examination, but the number of applications from such candidates is very small indeed. The real explanation of this situation lies in the fact that most employers—not only those in Government and professional offices, but also those in commercial and industrial houses—have come to regard a pass in the Entrance Examination as the only reliable measure of a secondary pupil's attainment, and as a consequence the requirements of that examination dominate the curricula and outlook of our Fifth Forms to such an extent as to make it unusual for any pupil in them to avoid sitting the examination. It is fair to add that in most girls' schools there are considerable groups of girls who are not taking