

1. REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

I have the honour to present the following report for the year ended 31st December, 1931 :—

INSPECTORATE.

During the year the following Inspectors retired on superannuation :—

Mr. J. Robertson, B.A., B.Sc., Senior Inspector, Auckland.
 Mr. N. R. McKenzie, Senior Inspector, New Plymouth.
 Mr. T. J. Griffin, B.A., Senior Inspector, Nelson.
 Mr. G. P. Graham, B.A., Inspector, Canterbury.
 Mr. J. Brunton, M.A., Inspector, Canterbury.
 Mr. A. N. Burns, M.A., Inspector, Wellington.
 Mr. C. R. Munro, Inspector, Auckland.
 Mr. D. E. Leslie, Inspector, Auckland.

Both as teachers and Inspectors these gentlemen have given faithful and valuable service to education in the Dominion, and they take with them the best wishes of the Service for the long enjoyment of well-earned leisure. Early in the year Mr. S. A. Clark was transferred from Napier to Christchurch, and Mr. E. Bissell, of Hastings Street School, joined the Hawke's Bay Staff as Acting-Inspector. The present staff consists of 35 Inspectors. In 1930 the number was 44.

GENERAL EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOLS.

During the year the work of the schools has proceeded in a very satisfactory manner, and on the whole pleasing progress has been made in the various subjects. The Inspectors report that composition, writing, nature-study, drawing, and handwork, and singing have shown improvement, in some cases marked improvement, upon the work of the previous year. Spelling is the weakest subject, and further consideration of the methods adopted in teaching it seem to be necessary. It would appear that the easier standard of marking errors in spelling in the proficiency test during the two or three years previous to 1931 led to a falling-off in accuracy, and that a return to the previous scale of marking was called for to impress upon pupils the importance of correct spelling.

PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION.

For a number of years it had been the practice for the Inspectors to accredit pupils, on the recommendation of their teachers, in the award of proficiency certificates. Originally only a small percentage of qualified pupils were awarded the certificate without examination, but latterly in some districts very few pupils in the larger schools were required to sit for the examination. In 1931 the Department felt that the time had arrived when the efficiency of this method of qualifying should be reviewed to ascertain whether the standard of attainment demanded for the award of a proficiency certificate, and the junior free place in a post-primary school that the certificate carried with it, was approximately equal throughout the Dominion. Instructions were issued to the effect that all candidates would be required to sit for the examination, but that in determining the passes the Inspectors would, as in previous years, consult the teachers, wherever possible, and the class lists showing the record of each pupil's work during the year. Passes were thus determined on the result of a written examination and the school record. Some changes were made in the papers set, the chief being the discontinuance of the questions in English that admitted of one-word answers, the re-introduction of dictation and the raising of the standard of marking in spelling, and a reduction by ten minutes of the time allowed for written arithmetic. The results in the public schools in the various districts ranged from 63.5 per cent. to 78.6 per cent., the average being 67.0 per cent., which is 11.9 per cent. lower than that of 1930. The following reasons are given by the Inspectors for the decrease in the percentage of passes :—

- (1) Over-promotion of pupils, especially in schools where the accrediting system was in operation. Where this took place over a number of years pupils entered Form II poorly prepared in the work of the lower standards, and, hence, were unable to assimilate thoroughly the instruction in the highest class.
- (2) A more definite differentiation than heretofore between those pupils that might take up an academic post-primary course and those whose post-primary course should be non-academic.

It would seem probable, however, that the lower percentage of passes was due in some measure to an unintentional and unperceived lowering of the standard of attainment required of the candidates. For a number of years in some districts only the children who were not accredited in large schools and the children in small country schools were examined on the test set by the Department. The consequence was that the standard reached by the pupils who were examined by the Inspectors tended to become the standard of attainment required from all candidates in the school or district. The standard reached was naturally lower than it would have been had all the best pupils in the school or district been included in this examination. Support is given to this opinion by the fact that the Dominion percentage of passes in the private schools where accrediting had been less freely used was over 2 per cent. higher than it was in public schools; and also by the fact that in two districts the percentages of passes were 9.5 and 5 respectively higher in the country schools than in the larger centres.