

2. REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

I have the honour to present the report for the year 1931.

As a result of the diminution in the number of the Department's senior officers, the routine work of the Inspectorate was considerably interrupted during the year by Inspectors being required to remain in Wellington to assist in administrative work. The staff still consists of three besides myself—namely, Miss J. I. Hetherington, M.A. (Dublin), Mr. E. Caradus, B.Sc., and Mr. J. B. Mawson, M.A. The programme of inspection accomplished was, nevertheless, commensurate with those undertaken in previous years. In the earlier part of the year seventeen departmental and twenty-three registered private secondary schools were fully inspected, as well as the secondary departments of twenty-nine district high schools. Later in the year all departmental schools were visited in connection with the annual classification of teachers and the award of senior free places and higher leaving certificates. The former system of partial accrediting for the free places and of complete accrediting for the certificates has not been departed from in any material respect.

An outstanding event of the year was the calamitous earthquake in the Hawke's Bay District and the ensuing dislocation and interruption in the school life of so many children in that area. The disaster occurred during the first morning of the secondary school year. Though several pupils, more particularly at the Napier Girls' High School, were seriously hurt, there was fortunately no actual loss of life in the secondary schools themselves. One pupil at the Hastings High School, however, was killed in a shop in the town. The buildings suffered severely. At the girls' school in Napier the two-storied brick building in course of erection for the new school was damaged beyond repair, and ultimately had to be demolished and removed; the old school, a wooden building, was so badly wrenched and torn that it too had to be pulled down. At the boys' school the large assembly hall was razed to the ground and the hostel and several class-rooms were rendered unsafe for occupation. Hastings High School suffered considerable damage and the private schools at Havelock North were both badly knocked about, Iona to such an extent that it had to close for the year.

The complete destruction of the Napier Technical School (with the unfortunate loss of several lives) and the irreparable damage done to the nearly completed new Technical School buildings rendered the reorganization of post-primary education in Napier not only desirable, but extremely necessary. Steps were accordingly taken to establish combined or amalgamated schools which would provide instruction in all the courses and subjects hitherto taught separately or in duplicate in the secondary and technical schools. Under the Finance Act of April, 1931, a Napier Secondary Education Board was established and in the second term the Boys' and the Girls High Schools were reopened as separate "combined schools." Both schools worked under very great difficulties for the remainder of the year, the girls' in sheds and rooms scattered about the school-grounds and the boys' partly in temporary erections at the High School and partly at the Technical School workshops over a mile away.

The Finance Act referred to also provided for the establishment of combined schools at Nelson under the Council of Governors of Nelson College. Later in the year regulations for combined schools, based in the meantime on those for technical schools, were issued by the Department and applied at once to the Napier schools. Their application to the Nelson schools and to the New Plymouth schools—where a somewhat similar amalgamation had been effected in 1927—was, however, postponed till the commencement of the ensuing year.

Including the two Napier schools, the number of departmental secondary schools has remained at forty-four. The aggregate roll on 1st March was 17,122, as compared with 17,127 and 16,867 in 1930 and 1929 respectively. The value of the 1931 figures for purposes of comparison is, however, depreciated by the fact that by no means all the pupils from the earthquake area had at that date been enrolled at other secondary schools as refugee children. The roll numbers at the close of the year, a more reliable basis of comparison, have been 14,905, 15,552, and 15,873 in the successive years 1929, 1930, and 1931. From these figures it would appear that the secondary rolls had increased at a uniformly steady rate. At the close of the past year, however, the rolls have undoubtedly been abnormally swelled by the comparatively large number of pupils who were forced by stress of circumstances to remain at school longer than they had intended. In the present economic depression employment has been almost impossible to obtain, especially in the towns, and, as a consequence, the upper forms in the secondary schools have become disproportionately large. Another effect of the depression has been to reduce materially the number of new entrants into secondary schools. Whereas the number of these was 6,044 in 1929, increasing to 6,134 in 1930, it fell to 5,626 in 1931—a disconcerting fall of over 8 per cent. Contributing factors to the decrease have been the low birth-rates of the later war period, the opening of the Otahuhu Intermediate School near Auckland, and the dislocation caused by the earthquake. On the 1931 figures the prospects for undiminished secondary school rolls in 1932 and 1933 are far from promising.

During the year St. Patrick's College, Silverstream, was added to the list of registered private secondary schools; these now number forty-nine, with an aggregate roll (on 1st July) of 3,940 (1,776 boys and 2,164 girls).

Only three appeals were lodged by teachers against their classification; as all of these were subsequently withdrawn, the Appeal Board was not required to sit, the first occasion on which no session has been necessary.