

1. REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

I have the honour of presenting my report on the primary schools for the year ending 31st December, 1936.

The Primary Inspectorate at the end of the year numbered thirty-eight. The following changes occurred during the year: Mr. A. McNeil, Senior Inspector of Schools for Canterbury, retired and was replaced by Mr. W. A. Service, Senior Inspector of Otago; Mr. G. E. Overton, Senior Inspector of Nelson, was transferred to a similar position in Otago; Mr. W. J. Boden, Inspector of Schools, Auckland, was promoted to the position of Senior Inspector of Schools, Nelson, while Messrs. C. Robertson and A. J. Woods were appointed Inspectors of Schools in Auckland and Nelson respectively. The increase in the Nelson Inspectorate enabled the inspection of the schools in Marlborough to be undertaken by the Nelson instead of the Wellington Inspectorate.

The reports of the District Inspectors show that the standard of work in the schools has been well maintained, but also that the teachers have received every encouragement to experiment in the adoption of new methods and in the compilation of richer and more cultural schemes of work. It is pleasing to note how many teachers are showing originality and initiative—many more than the general public is aware of. It is easy to assume that the schools of to-day are identical with the schools of a generation ago merely because the same subjects are taught; but this is far from the truth.

Now that the Proficiency Examination is no more it may confidently be assumed that even the more cautious teachers will see some opportunity to enlarge subject content and reshape methods.

During the year the annual Proficiency Examination was held for the last time, the percentage of pupils who were awarded Certificates of Proficiency being slightly over 80. Of these a percentage varying from 30 to 70 in different schools were awarded their certificates without examination, but after consultation with the head teacher. In many of these cases pupils of undoubted ability were thus accredited early in the year, and forthwith entered on a generous scheme of work well suited to their capacity but wider in scope than usual.

The general tone of the schools is good. There is a spirit of confidence and genuine friendship between teachers and pupils in most schools, and, contrary to what may be deduced theoretically, a similar spirit between teachers and Inspectors. To-day, and for some years past, the Inspector has played the role of assessor and inspirer. Both are necessary. Children have only one school life and parents must have some guarantee that this opportunity, even more than the expense involved, has not been in vain. The Inspector, too, can see and assess all types of educational experiments and keep the schools of his district informed thereof. Above all, he should be an inspiring force in the schools, but in this capacity he is under two serious disabilities: he must spend a considerable amount of his time observing every teacher so as to grade that teacher every year with sufficient accuracy to withstand an appeal against his judgment; and, secondly, not one District Inspector has had the opportunity of seeing schools actually in operation in other countries. A number of our teachers, chiefly women, have had such an opportunity by going on exchange, but our men, being as a rule married, have, generally speaking, been unable to take advantage of the teacher-exchange system. And it is married men of considerable experience who have reached the Inspectorate. In so important a matter as education it is, in my opinion, necessary that some one in close contact with the schools—*e.g.* Inspectors of Schools and Training College Principals—should be enabled to go abroad at regular intervals.

It may, however, be said that many of our teachers are by no means unacquainted theoretically with educational developments abroad. Our Training College staffs, Professors of Education, Inspectors of Schools, and educational publications of many kinds have kept the more thoughtful well informed. But circumstances beyond the control of the schools have retarded progress. Classes are in many cases far too large, seating-accommodation unsuitable, equipment meagre, libraries and craftrooms quite inadequate, and specialist supervision of such important subjects as physical education, music, and art and crafts not available. Hence the creative instincts latent in the race to a wonderful degree have been denied full opportunities for development. Our young teachers receive a good training in at least the theory of education, but even they are hampered by the lack of facilities in the schools to which they go for teaching practice. The problem is very largely one of finance, for the solution demands smaller classes, and consequently additional teachers and school-rooms, adequate libraries located in properly equipped reading-rooms, art and craft rooms, and possibly even gymnasias. The difficulty of using available funds to the greatest advantage may be realized when we remember that we have nearly 2,500 primary schools scattered over an area as large as Great Britain, but an area with a population little more than some of the large cities of that country. And more than one-half of these schools have only one teacher. In such circumstances it is impossible to make the best use of our teachers.

TRAINING OF TEACHERS.

At the beginning of the year the Training Colleges in Wellington and Dunedin, which were closed in 1932, were re-opened. In 1936 the number of students in training at the four Colleges was 1,183, of whom 1,061 were two-year students and 122 University graduates admitted for only one year.