

1. REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

Sir,—

I have the honour of submitting my report on the primary schools for the year ending 31st December, 1938.

INSPECTORIAL STAFF.

The Inspectorial staff located in the nine education districts numbers thirty-seven. Early in the year Mr. C. N. Haslam, Senior Inspector of Schools in the Taranaki District, retired on superannuation after many years of service highly appreciated by the teachers, Boards, and Department. The vacancy thus created was filled by the promotion of Mr. R. R. Hunter, of the Southland Inspectorate, whose place was taken by Mr. J. G. Gasparich, Headmaster of the Onehunga School. During the year the vacancy on the Nelson staff caused by the death in 1937 of the Senior Inspector, Mr. H. C. N. Watson, was filled by the transfer of Mr. G. E. Overton, Senior Inspector of Schools for Otago. As a consequence Mr. T. A. Morland, Senior Inspector of Hawke's Bay, was promoted to the Otago position, and Mr. J. A. Henry, Inspector of Schools, Auckland, was promoted to the position of Senior Inspector of Schools, Hawke's Bay. The vacancy caused by the death in 1937 of Mr. N. H. S. Law, Inspector of Schools, Auckland, was filled by the transfer of Mr. A. H. Denne from the Native Schools Inspectorate.

In May a full conference of Inspectors of Schools—primary, secondary, technical, and Native—was held, and afforded an excellent opportunity both in the conference-room and elsewhere for exchange of ideas and discussion of the many changes consequent on the abolition of the Proficiency Examination and the meetings of the New Education Fellowship in the Dominion in 1937. This was the first full conference since 1932, though similar conferences had previously been held every three years. Circumstances, however, such as the absence of the Director abroad, the abolition of the Proficiency Examination, and the visit of the New Education Fellowship delegates, made it inexpedient to summon a conference earlier. Now that the period of transition thus created is passing, the conference expressed the unanimous wish that the system of triennial conferences be reverted to.

The Inspectors have discharged their duties with their customary enthusiasm and thoroughness. The recent changes have increased rather than diminished their work: the freedom which head teachers now enjoy of adapting their schemes to the district and to individual pupils naturally makes inspection, if it is to be efficient, a slower process; while the system of keeping some hundreds of non-permanent teachers in employment as supernumerary teachers increases considerably the number of teachers to be seen actually at work. Unfortunately, the annual grading of teachers makes it necessary that every teacher should be seen every year. From this task there is no escape unless the grading system is abandoned, and there seems little hope that the teachers would consent to this, or unless biennial grading is substituted and the teachers graded on the result of the one or more visits paid during the two-year period. The latter course would relieve the Inspectors of the necessity of visiting so often schools which they know to be efficiently conducted.

THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS.

In February last 863 students were admitted to the Training Colleges. The system introduced the previous year whereby the responsibility for the selection of students was transferred from the Senior Inspector of Schools of the district to a special committee consisting of the Senior Inspector and two others nominated by the local Education Board continued to operate and gave very general satisfaction. The change was welcomed by none more than the Senior Inspectors themselves.

During the year the regulations governing admission to the Training Colleges were amended to provide for the abolition of the Training College Entrance Examination. It was felt that this examination, coming at the end of the secondary-school course and after the University Entrance Examination, interfered with the proper completion of the secondary course. It was therefore decided to accept a pass in the University Entrance Examination or the School Certificate Examination as the minimum academic qualification for entrance to the Training College; but, in order to encourage pupils to remain at the secondary schools for a year after passing these examinations, it was agreed that preference should be given, other things being equal, to those possessing a Higher Leaving Certificate or superior qualification. In order that the selection of students should be completed before Christmas and the successful applicants notified of the college they would enter the following February, it was further decided that applications for admission should close on the 1st October, and that the applicants should have the necessary academic qualifications by that date. These amendments were warmly welcomed by Education Boards and the principals of the secondary schools, and generally by the candidates themselves, to whom it was a great advantage to know before the Christmas vacation of their selection and destination.

The colleges are doing very fine work in imparting both knowledge and technique and above all in inspiring their students. The probationary assistants of 1938—those responsible for a year's teaching of a class for the first time since leaving the college—were a particularly fine lot. Additional model schools for the practical training of the students were opened during the year in Wellington and Dunedin, while similar plans for the Christchurch Training College are under consideration. More and more the influence of the colleges is manifesting itself in the schools; some of the colleges conduct special courses in the colleges themselves for the benefit of teachers; at other times the lecturers are invited to visit outlying centres to conduct short refresher courses. By no means at present can all these demands on the lecturers' time be satisfied; but the demand is growing, and the time is at hand when the question of duplicating lecturerships in certain subjects will have to be considered if lecturers are to devote adequate time to this important matter.