

No. 2.

REPORT by MR. VAN ASCH.

Institution for the Deaf and Dumb,
Sumner, 19th June, 1880.

SIR,—

I have the honor to report that the Institution for the training and instruction of deaf-mutes was opened here on the 10th of March last with five pupils, and that five others have arrived since. There are therefore ten pupils now in attendance; three girls and seven boys.

Although the buildings are not of a pretentious kind, yet they sufficiently answer the purpose as temporary premises. The grounds are decidedly suitable for recreation, being dry and quiet as well as spacious.

The majority of the children are between the ages of nine and eleven, two are fourteen, one is five, and one youth of seventeen attends as a day-boarder. Classified according to their respective homes: two belong to Auckland, one to Wellington, two to Canterbury, and five to Otago. All are in the enjoyment of good health and possess healthy faculties, save one, who unhappily suffers in some degree from mental weakness as well as deafness. The case being a mild one, and evidently capable of improvement, I allowed the child to enter on six or twelve months trial.

The time, specially set apart for instruction is five hours a day. This time is devoted chiefly to mechanical exercise of the vocal organs, to teaching lip-reading, and to writing, so as to create a medium for acting on the mind and understanding of the pupils. The effect of such exercises is already apparent in all the pupils, in the better development of the facial and other muscles. It is also manifest from the acquired power (more or less) to articulate certain letters, combinations of these, and certain short words carefully selected for their suitability. For example,—the most advanced pupils are able to audibly enunciate words such as ba, bee, oak, beef, hat, bone, sea, sleep, soap, &c., &c. They can also write these words, and read them from the teacher's lips.

For the first year, it is of great advantage if personal attention can be given to each pupil. Yet to facilitate this it is desirable to have several of the same standing together; wherefore admitting children of different ages, at all times, to the Institution is injurious to the work, and very wearing to the teacher.

Notwithstanding that the mental calibre of the pupils, with two or three happy exceptions, is below the average, and in spite of the disadvantages already referred to, I am happy to state that the progress of all according to their different powers may be considered satisfactory. In the case of the one who became deaf at the age of seven, and who still retained part of his speech, it is particularly so. Indeed it may be pointed out, that this Institution offers special advantages to all such.

Bearing in mind the physical nature of these Isles I cannot forebear expressing to the Government the fear I have, that the proportion of deaf-mutes in this Colony must be large, probably larger than is at present shown in statistical returns; also, that as the population of the land increases numerous cases of deafness are likely to occur; and I would respectfully but earnestly submit for the Government's consideration, the desirability of setting aside certain land revenues (as is done in other Departments of Education) so as to provide specific funds on a permanent basis for the maintenance and instruction of these afflicted children. I would further recommend that no fresh pupils be admitted to the Institution between the terms, and not until they have completed their sixth year.

The Hon. the Minister of Education.

I have, &c.,
G. VAN ASCH.

No. 3.

REPORT by DR. PRINS, Visiting Medical Officer.

Christchurch, 2nd June, 1880.

SIR,—

In accordance with your request I have the honor to report that I visited the Deaf and Dumb Institution, at Sumner, on the 31st ultimo.

The buildings in which the Institution is located consists of two cottages a short distance apart. They are capable of accommodating about 18 inmates, twelve in one and six in the other.

There are at present eight children, five boys, and three girls. They are in excellent health, clean, and seem to be very happy and well cared for.

The only needed attention to the buildings that I would suggest is, that an arrangement be made for ventilating the school-room before next summer.

The water used on the premises is rain water collected in tanks; there seems to be sufficient in quantity for the requirements of the Institution, and the quality is very good.

The closets have pans which are emptied and buried on the premises periodically.

I presume that the present arrangements as to buildings is a temporary one; as such it answers very well; the locality is healthy, and the accommodation sufficient. I found the place orderly and clean, and the impression left is of having visited a happy family home rather than a public Institution.

In conclusion, I cannot help remarking that although the Institution has been but very recently established the progress made by the inmates in the method adopted by Mr Van Asch is wonderful, and requires to be seen in order to be appreciated and understood.

I have, &c.,
H. H. PRINS,
M.R.C.S., Eng.

The Secretary, Education Department, Wellington.