

1893.

NEW ZEALAND.

EDUCATION :

SCHOOL FOR DEAF-MUTES

(REPORT OF COMMISSION ON).

Laid upon the Table of the House of Representatives by the Hon. Mr. Reeves with the Leave of the House.

REPORT.

IN pursuance of a Commission issued under the hand of His Excellency the Governor of New Zealand, and dated the 14th day of October, 1892, authorising and directing Herbert William Brabant, Resident Magistrate, and J. Veel Colborne-Veel, M.A., Secretary to the Education Board of North Canterbury, to make inquiry into the management of the Sumner Institution for Deaf-mutes, particularly with regard to the statements set forth in a letter addressed to the Hon. R. J. Seddon by H. S. Fish, Esq., M.H.R., a copy of which letter is attached to the said Commission.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

We, the above-named Commissioners, sat at the said institute to take evidence on the following days, viz.: 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, and 29th October, and 2nd and 4th November; but before doing so we duly gave notice to the parties concerned, and particularly to the above-named H. S. Fish, Esq. We received from the said H. S. Fish, Esq., a telegram (which is attached to the depositions) declining to attend or to conduct the inquiry. We therefore, on the day and hour of which notice had been given to him, read your Excellency's Commission, and proceeded to inquire into the premises in his absence. Besides taking evidence, minutes of which we submit with this report, we inspected the buildings and premises used for the purposes of the institute. We witnessed Mr. van Asch's method of instruction; and we read a large number of letters, reports, and other documents laid before us by the Secretary of the Education Department and the Director of the institution.

The charges made in the said letter of H. S. Fish, Esq., may be divided into the following heads:—

I. That the Director of the institution, Mr. van Asch, has himself, and that his daughter has, received private pupils without the sanction of the Education Department.

II. That the boys in the institution are employed in doing farming and other work for the Director's private benefit; that far more attention is paid to the work of the house and the garden than to their education; that the boys are worked far too hard. In a supplementary charge, contained in a letter addressed to Mr. Fish by Mr. J. Jones, it is stated that proper attention is not paid to teaching the girls sewing.

III. That the Director contracts with the Government for the board of the children, and that he has at times supplied improper food. Mr. Fish urges that the boarding should not be in the hands of the Director, whose attention should be confined to teaching and supervising the teaching.

IV. That no provision is made for teaching trades or placing out the children when they leave the institution, which, Mr. Fish urges, should be made, in order that the pupils may become bread-earners and useful citizens.

V. That, while the total cost to the Government for each pupil is about £80 per annum, no commensurate results have been obtained for the large expenditure incurred.

Having divided the charges made into these five heads, we beg leave to report on them as follows:—

I. It is not denied by Mr. van Asch that he takes private pupils. He has five pupils who are treated differently from the others in the institution—one who is under the tuition of Miss K. van Asch, such tuition being paid extra for by the pupils' parents, and four who are what Mr. van Asch calls parlour boarders, and have closer relations with his own family than the pupils generally. For these he receives extra remuneration from the parents, the sums paid him varying from £20 to £60 per annum for each pupil, the aggregate extra amount receivable this year on account of these pupils being £180. He argues that he understood that he was allowed by the Government to make these arrangements. In two cases he obtained direct leave, and in the others he assumed that there would be no objection.

In our opinion, this system of taking private pupils is radically wrong, and should not be permitted in future. We think that, as the Director is a paid servant of the Government, he should not be allowed to receive direct remuneration from the parents or guardians of pupils. We can conceive that the greater infirmities of some of the pupils might render special treatment or extra attendance necessary in certain cases; but we think that such treatment or attendance should only be allowed after report by the Director to the Education Department, and that the parents or guardians should arrange with the department and not with the Director.

II. As to the work done by the boys, it has not been shown that they are worked too hard. We agree with the opinion expressed by the Director that it is advisable, considering the limited mental capacity of the pupils, that they should have some manual labour provided for them—that it is, in fact, a necessary part of their education. The evidence certainly does not bear out the assertion that more attention is paid to the work of the house and garden than to the mental improvement of the pupils. We agree in objecting to the boys being engaged too much in house-work. They have been made, for instance, to scrub floors and occasionally to wash clothes, which latter is in no sense a suitable employment. But, as to the garden and farm operations, we think that even more attention might with advantage be given to them than has been the case hitherto. The garden which we inspected shows no great amount of care bestowed on it; and it seems that the Director declined to allow a pupil to learn to milk on the ground that a learner practising on them might injure his cows. We recommend that in future the employment of the boys in as well as out of school should be governed by regulations to be drawn up by the Education Department. We suggest that the occasional employment of a practical man to assist and direct the gardening would be advantageous.

III. As to the alleged supply of improper food: We find that in 1891, for a short time, salt mutton from the Director's farm was an article of diet. It is also stated that about that time there was a lack of sufficient vegetables. Complaints were at the time made by the assistant teachers, but for a long time past there has been no cause of complaint. The Director has since the foundation of the institution contracted with the Government to supply the pupils and teachers with board, the present scale of payment being £33 per head for pupils and £40 for teachers. We learn that the Director has now voluntarily given notice to the Government that he is no longer willing to contract for the board, and that the Government have accepted such notice; and, on considering the management of the institution as a whole, we think that it would be better that the catering should in future not be under the management of the Director, chiefly for the reason that, as the number of pupils is now considerable (forty-seven), the superintendence of their tuition should occupy his whole time. At the same time we fear that difficulties must arise in making fresh satisfactory arrangements, owing to the buildings of the institution not being such as to enable the family of the Director to live apart from the pupils.

IV. As to the question of teaching trades to the pupils: At first sight this suggestion would, we think, meet with unanimous approval, but on consideration it is not so evident that a move in this direction is at once desirable. We learn from the Director that, of the thirty-one boys in the institution, there are at present only six who are suitable in point of age and other qualifications to be so taught; and we think it probable that there will not at any time be a great number who could successfully be prepared for apprenticeship to trades. It also appears that they could not be taught at Sumner unless the Government were willing to supply special teachers at considerable expense. At the same time it must not be forgotten that the Government are pledged to afford the boys an opportunity of learning trades. (See Appendix to Journals, 1880, H.—1E.) The difficulty in the way of giving such instruction where the institution now is suggests another reason for removing it as soon as possible to a more convenient site. In the event of the Government deciding upon the erection of a suitable building, we strongly recommend that a site be chosen near a large town or near a railway-station whence town can be reached in a very short time, and that sufficient land be attached to it to afford space for a garden and a small farm. Here the boys would be able to receive excellent instruction in at least the rudiments of garden and farm work, pursuits which, we believe, will be found most applicable to the majority, while those who show an aptitude for mechanical employments may be taught either by special teachers at the institution or under arrangements made for their instruction in town. It is also very necessary that full provision should be made at the institution for the instruction of the girls in various branches of household economy, such as sewing, with cutting out—which latter appears not to be taught at present—cookery and laundry-work, and also occupations which would assist them in earning a livelihood, such as dressmaking, lacemaking, &c.

V. Mr. Fish's charge which we have called No. V. is that "no commensurate results have been obtained for the large expenditure on the institution, amounting to about £80 per annum for each child." The amount—approximately correct as stated—is no doubt large. We think, however, that in the case of deaf-mutes the relative cost per head of a boarding-school education must be more than in the case of ordinary children. The report of the late Royal Commission shows this to be the case in England. The fact that parents—men having the means to pay—living at Melbourne and elsewhere are willing, as the evidence shows, to pay not merely £80 per annum, but larger sums, goes to prove that they consider the education worth the money.

But we are of opinion that it will be found possible in the future, by careful management, to reduce the cost per head. And in this connection we may refer to the buildings occupied by the institution. Since its establishment in 1880 it has always been carried on in temporary premises rented for the purpose, which have been changed from time to time as the number of pupils increased. At present there are two houses, each enclosed in its own grounds, but 500 or 600 yards apart—large houses certainly, but not containing any room large enough for a dining-room for the pupils, and wanting in conveniences, such as ventilators, fire-escapes, bath-rooms, closets, &c., which the institution should have. For these two houses the Government pay as rent £450

per annum. The cost of erecting a suitable building would, of course, vary in accordance with the materials used, but, in our opinion, the interest on the cost would not exceed one-half of the amount paid as rent. Probably, however, Mr. Fish's statement that no commensurate results have been obtained was made in a more extended sense, and intended to impugn the ability of the Director, the quality of the education, and the management of the school generally. We recognise the gravity of the question submitted to us, and have given it our earnest attention. We propose to report the conclusions we have come to—(1) As to the competency of the Director to teach deaf-mutes, and the education the pupils are receiving; (2) as to the general management of the institution.

(1.) As to the Director's competency, and the education afforded by the institution: We find that Mr. G. van Asch was specially selected in England, after careful inquiry by a Commission appointed for the purpose. Since he opened the institution, in 1880, his teaching, and the progress of his pupils, have been very favourably reported on by the Inspector-General of Schools; by Mr. Pope, Native School Inspector; and by Dr. Prins, the Medical Officer. Further, Mr. van Asch's teaching has satisfied nearly all the parents of the pupils who have been at the institution during the last twelve years, some of whom have expressed themselves warmly and gratefully as to the benefits conferred on their children. We inquired ourselves into the articulation and degree of education of the pupils now at the institution. We must candidly confess that at first we were disappointed at the articulation of the pupils. Some of them did not readily make themselves understood by our unaccustomed ear; but after hearing the evidence we are inclined to believe that we expected too much in the matter of articulation, though we are still not satisfied that as much has been done by the teachers in this respect as is possible. (See the Inspector-General's report in the Appendix to the Journals, 1885, No. E.-4, and his evidence before us on the 4th November.) We were certainly gratified by the degree of education shown by some of the pupils. Against this mass of evidence in favour of the teaching at the institution we have only certain statements made by Mr. H. E. Crofts, lately an assistant teacher under Mr. van Asch; and a complaint by Mr. J. Jones, the father of a pupil who has left the institution.

On reference to Mr. Crofts' evidence, it will be seen that his charges against the teaching are somewhat vague—the principal one being an assertion that articulation is not properly or sufficiently taught. It appears that Mr. Crofts learned what he knows of the articulation method from Mr. van Asch himself, and, besides this, in our opinion, he cannot be regarded as a reliable or impartial witness in the case, for the following reasons: It appears from the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1892, to which our attention was directed, that some time since the Director made certain charges against Mr. Crofts, then an assistant teacher, and Mr. Crofts made certain counter-charges against the Director. These were referred to Mr. Beetham, R.M., to inquire into as a Commissioner, who reported entirely in favour of the Director. It will be seen from his telegram to us that Mr. Fish requested us to take Mr. Crofts' evidence. As we did not know his address, we requested the officers of the Education Department to ascertain it. After some trouble they found he was at Feilding, and requested him to attend our inquiry. This he declined to do then, but did so after we issued a subpoena for him, thus causing delay. When he did appear, he wanted us to begin the inquiry, which had been going on for more than a week, again, to allow him to appear as prosecutor, cross-examine witnesses, and go over the grounds of Mr. Beetham's inquiry. This we declined to permit.

Then, as to Mr. J. Jones's complaint, which appears in a letter amongst our papers in evidence, it is that Miss Jones was not taught to speak intelligibly, or to make her own clothing, nor was she sufficiently instructed in needlework to enable her to make her living by it. We carefully inquired into the case, and examined Miss Jones. It is quite true that her articulation is defective, but we are inclined to believe the officers in the institution when they say that this is due to her not being a clever pupil. We were convinced, by our observation of other pupils that the teaching is, and must be, more successful in some cases than others. As to Mr. Jones's other complaint, it does not appear to us that the technical education of the children has been sufficiently attended to, but we have no reason to suppose that Miss Jones has been treated exceptionally.

(2.) As to the general management of the institution: As far as the evidence goes, Mr. Crofts is the only witness who impugns it; but we have carefully gone into this question ourselves, and formed opinions from our own observations. We cannot say that we are as satisfied in this respect as we are with the quality of the education. We would first remark that we are in doubt whether the Director or the Education Department is responsible for the details in which we suggest an improvement is possible. We found that no proper records had ever been kept of the admission and leaving of pupils, of their parentage, addresses, state of health, &c., nor of their advancement from class to class, nor of any examination or other reason for such advancement. An admission register had been supplied to the Director, such as is in use in the State schools. The only use that was made of it was to make some rough, incomplete notes of admissions and discharges in the index; the body of the register had never been used at all. There are, as far as we could ascertain, no records of the progress of the pupils, or of medical and general information respecting them, to which a new Director might refer in case of the present one leaving the institution. We think it injudicious that a young lady (Miss Buckingham) should be left in charge of the principal building at night, as she is stated by the Director to be.

We think sufficient attention has not been given to the technical and practical education of the pupils, and to endeavouring to put them out in life. As we have already pointed out, the Government in their prospectus undertook this duty; and we think the Director should determine, after consulting the parents, to what occupation a pupil should be brought up, and act accordingly. In our opinion, also, drill and some gymnastics should be taught, and we suggest that the teachers might interest themselves in teaching the deaf-mutes the ordinary games which other children play at.

The recommendations which we most respectfully make for your Excellency's consideration are as follows :—

1. That a building be erected as a deaf-mute institution for the colony on a suitable site.
2. That in future the Director abandon the practice of taking private pupils or parlour boarders.
3. That the Education Department make fresh arrangements as to the board of pupils, so as to allow the Director to devote his whole time to education.
4. That more attention be paid to the technical and practical education of the children, both boys and girls.
5. That, with a view of rendering the supervision more systematic and effective than is now practicable, some local body or person be appointed to advise the Education Department on the management of the institution.

Given under our hands at Christchurch, this 5th day of November, 1892.

HERBERT W. BRABANT,
J. V. COLBORNE-VEEL,
Commissioners.

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