

SESS. II.—1897.
NEW ZEALAND.

EDUCATION: SCHOOL FOR DEAF-MUTES.

[In continuation of E.—4, 1896.]

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

No. 1.

EXTRACT FROM TWENTIETH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION.

THE number of pupils at the end of 1896 was 48—26 boys and 22 girls. The expenditure for the year was as follows: Professional staff and occasional tuition, £1,055 5s. 10d.; steward, matron, and servants, £476 9s. 6d.; house-keeping, £715 8s. 11d.; rent, £470; school and workshop material, £14 15s.; medical attendance and medicines, £26 2s. 2d.; drainage, and removal of refuse, £39 14s. 8d.; repairs and other work on buildings and premises, £69 8s. 10d.; travelling, £73 13s. 4d.; sundries, £52 18s. 6d. The total expenditure was £2,993 16s. 9d., and the recoveries—fees for maintenance, &c.—£281 6s. 6d.

No. 2.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR.

SIR,—

School for Deaf-mutes, Sumner, 15th May, 1897.

I have the honour to report that the number of pupils in 1896 exceeded that of the previous year by four, and amounted to a total of fifty. It was the largest as yet recorded in the institution's books. Even this figure does not include all the inmates whose names have been on the roll at one time. Fifty-one is that number; but the trial given to one deaf boy of low mental capacity during the first month of the school year conclusively proved that even the ablest of mentally defective children are not fit subjects to be admitted into a school for deaf-mutes. The boy referred to was accordingly sent back to his friends, and so cannot be included as an inmate of the institution.

The proportion of boys to girls was as twenty-seven to twenty-three; and from eight families sixteen deaf-mute children came to us in twos, and one other family sent us three.

Admitted as beginners were five boys and two girls. In addition to these, one boy and one girl re-entered the school after an absence of one and three years respectively. Riverton, Pembroke, Miller's Flat, George Creek, Anderson's Bay, Dunedin, Warrington, Moeraki, Timaru, Geraldine, Springfield, Rangiora, Papanui, Halswell, Richmond, Christchurch, Hokitika, Greymouth, Kumara, Reefton, Seddonville, and Foxhill are returned as the homes of the thirty-three Southern pupils; Wellington, Masterton, Eketahuna, Wanganui, Napier, Gisborne, Wairoa, Waiwera, and Auckland as those of the Northern pupils. Compared with the census returns of last April, these figures show a decided preponderance in favour of the South Island. Whether this means that several of the deaf-mutes in the Provincial Districts of Auckland, Taranaki, and Hawke's Bay are still allowed to grow up in ignorance and uncared for, there is no positive proof, but the finger of probability, at any rate, points in that direction.

Owing to severe colds and other slight ailments, also to heavy rains and local floods during the winter time, there have been fluctuations in the attendance. In July a death took place from heart disease; and in September, by order of the medical adviser, one of the most advanced pupils was sent home as severely suffering from the same complaint. Excluding these two cases, there were seven pupils who left the institution at the end of the year: four with the approval of the Director and three without it.

The test applied by the Director in judging whether a child ought to leave or stay is: (1) Ability to use and understand simple language, as applied to the common concerns of life; and (2) age. The rule that no pupil over eighteen ought to remain in the institution explains itself. There is a disposition on the part of some unthinking parents, however to question the right of the Director to

advise and guide them as to the length of time a deaf-mute ought to remain under instruction. To ventilate this subject, I beg leave to make the following observations: Children that can hear begin school equipped with a vast store of ideas, an extensive vocabulary, and a marvellous facility to use it in colloquial language. They attend school from the age of five or six to fourteen or fifteen years of age—that is, nine years. Out of school, also, they keep on gaining information and knowledge of every kind and from every quarter—in short, the hearing of sounds influences the mental development of hearing children exactly the same as does breathing the air the development of their bodies. How contrary is all this with the deaf-mute! He enters the school with little beyond a sound mind; sometimes with a weak body, for he does not know how to breathe properly, and to walk straight. As he has no notion of names, or any form of language, he can neither give nor receive any information by means of it. Much time, labour, patience, and intelligent effort, by both teacher and pupil, are needed to impart to the latter a little preparatory knowledge of language, and to provide him with even a crude and laboured way of expressing himself. Four years' training, at the least, is requisite to put a deaf-mute on anything like a par in mental status with a child of six years of age that can hear. Deaf scholars cannot absorb knowledge from books and printed matter, nor digest and assimilate general information, like ordinary children. Is it then surprising that an expert teacher of the deaf should claim for deaf children also a similar course of eight or nine years' general education, in addition to the four or five years of preparatory training that are needed by such children before their general education can begin? Of the seven pupils who left the institution last year, three were taken away, contrary to the advice of the Director, before their training could be completed; and the Director cannot be held responsible if the results in such cases are unsatisfactory.

The progress of the pupils may be considered satisfactory on the whole. There is always a percentage of children who, through want of memory or from some other disqualification, are unable to keep up with the rest of their class-mates. The number of these, however, was small. The reading and explaining of the lessons in the prescribed course was gone through in a satisfactory manner; with this were combined hints on grammatical construction, and exercises suggested by the subject-matter of the lessons. The correction of the pupils' remarks is a constant work. Due time was also bestowed on the subjects of geography and arithmetic, including the use of money, Scripture lessons, and the perusal of suitable parts of the newspapers. Special attention was given by one of the teachers and the steward to training the elder boys in the handling and use of carpenters' tools. Gardening also was included as another branch of industrial training. The girls were taught to sew and mend; but in the absence of a suitable apartment, and of an experienced dressmaker to teach them, the training of the elder girls in dressmaking and cutting-out is not as complete as it might be.

The question of schoolroom accommodation is again pressing the management. The four class-rooms at the institution proper hitherto in use are enough to accommodate a small number, and to answer temporary purposes. But they do not supply the present number of scholars and teachers with enough light and sufficient breathing space. Neither are they roomy enough to admit of the necessary isolation for beginners. The sound of a deaf-mute's voice being monotonous and somewhat peculiar, it is of the utmost importance that even in the advanced classes the teacher with his pupils should occupy a separate room. In the case of the infant or articulation class this is an absolute necessity, for the first attempts of a young deaf-mute to emit sounds at all, much less articulate sounds, are often weak, and in the absence of perfect silence no teacher can be expected to perceive minute differences of utterance so as to produce satisfactory results. To remedy in a measure some of these defects it was decided that the class of beginners should henceforth attend daily at the girls' sitting-rooms, at Beach Glen, premises already in the occupation of the Education Department. In practice no serious obstacles have presented themselves to this arrangement, except the inconvenience to the Director of having to absent himself from the one schoolroom in order to superintend and assist in the working of the other.

Recent visits made to a few of the best institutions in Europe convince me that, before long, measures ought to be taken to make adequate and permanent provision in the interest of this colony's deaf-and-dumb. In educational work pure and simple, the results hitherto obtained—though by no means perfect, for no first-class teacher is ever satisfied on this score—are, to say the least, creditable; but in the matter of manual training for both girls and boys, especially for girls, we are by no means on a level with some of the best establishments in the Old World. At any rate, I feel convinced that until the institution is carried on in roomy, well-lighted buildings, and on suitable premises owned by the Government and situated near an industrial centre, the task of supplying manual training by trade experts will be costly, and beset with numerous and almost insuperable difficulties.

The Hon. the Minister of Education, Wellington.

I have, &c.,

G. VAN ASCH.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given printing (1,675 copies), £1 8s.

By Authority: JOHN MACKAY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1897.