

The grouping of deaf-mute children together for purposes of instruction is never done according to age, nor even to length of time at school. It is ruled entirely by the standard of proved attainments. Besides the lowest or articulation class of seven beginners, there were this year seven other classes, of five, six, seven, six, three, five, and eight pupils respectively. The adult pupil received attention individually as well as in class. The articulation class is always a laborious and monotonous one; it is frequently trying to the throat of the teacher. Only experienced and physically strong teachers are suitable for it. Of the seven little ones in this class, to whom one teacher devoted her whole time, two proved to be above the average, and three good, whilst two fell behind. It was only through extra exertion on the part of the teacher and by protracted and frequent repetitions of exercises, that the whole prescribed course of spoken and written exercises, including words and short sentences, could be got through. With the exception of the highest, the rest of the classes were taught by the other teachers in rotation. In a boarding-in establishment like the Sumner Institution, this system of changing teachers to a different class once in three weeks is to be recommended, as it gives all the pupils an opportunity of practising lip-reading on different mouths.

In addition to the director there are five assistant teachers, three of whom are certificated and two uncertificated. There are services in connection with the welfare of deaf-mutes which no doubt can be adequately recognised by the salary paid to the teacher. Will that, however, balance the whole of his account? In my humble opinion it will not. The difficulties of the teacher of deaf-mutes are too great and too manifold, his work too especial and too intellectual, and his task too noble and too gigantic for that. His chief reward must flow from a deeper and purer source. The pleasing looks of his pupils, their cheerful and intelligent remarks, their innocent expressions of admiration for his zeal and power, their gratitude for his sympathy, their appreciation of his tact and talent to enter into their inward life—these are the real rewards; these are the substances which, in kind, repay him better than either gold or encomiums. If I therefore refer here to the names of Messrs. Allan and Stevens, the two chief assistants, as teachers of merit, it is not so much to thank them for the excellent manner in which they have performed their duties as Civil servants, as chiefly to congratulate them upon their signal success in the art of teaching and training the unfortunate deaf-and-dumb, and to encourage them to further persevere in the study of the deeply-hidden misfortune of deaf-mutism. Though not actually engaged in class instruction, there is one other unobtrusive worker in the institution whose special services, though of a semi-educational character, I wish to mention—they are those of Miss L. Buckingham. The confidential correspondence with old pupils, as carried on by her, is, I think, of peculiar value.

The branches of instruction were speech, lip-reading, writing, reading, arithmetic, geography, drawing, Scripture lessons, the writing of letters, telegrams, receipts, &c., the reading of most parts of the newspaper, including telegraphic and commercial news, grammatical construction, and elementary science in a simple form. Let it be distinctly understood that the clearly spoken word was and is our only means of communication, and that finger-signs have no place and no meaning amongst us. Although the subjects referred to are many, there is one still to be added. It is that of language, which is in reality the most important of all, for the teaching of language accompanies, supports, penetrates, illumines, enlivens, and encircles all the other subjects. The physique of the pupils was in some instances not altogether satisfactory. To remedy this, a suitable course of calisthenic exercises and drill for both girls and boys has been introduced. Technical education has been kept up; it consisted in training the elder boys to milk, and to use carpenter's tools, and in familiarising them with the production of flowers and vegetables. My remarks of last year still apply, however—viz., that a well-regulated, inexpensive, and practical system of technical education cannot be brought into satisfactory working order in a suburb like Sumner, or on premises and in buildings such as we at present occupy.

The influenza epidemic is evidently no respecter of persons, and has been amongst us in rather a severe form. It was a tiresome intruder. It robbed the majority of the pupils of the benefit of several days' instruction, and interfered with the regularity of thorough class-teaching for several months. It also hastened the death of one of our oldest pupils, who had, however, for the last two years been suffering from pneumonia in a pronounced form. The epidemic, together with a severe attack of tonsillitis, forcing a prolonged leave of absence on Mr. Allan, the head assistant-master, led to a close and necessary examination of our system of drainage. Defects discovered were of course at once remedied. Whether the confined and limited area of Sumner, its low situation and its want of drainage, will be found permanently compatible with the fair health of the large number of inmates and the members of the staff is a matter I do not feel myself sufficiently competent to pronounce upon.

It is becoming better understood, I believe, that the claim we are working is poor and our farm-ground sterile. Rich returns and plentiful harvests, then, cannot be expected. Fair experts would, however, give us credit, I dare say, for having obtained pure gold and sound corn. The labours at the Sumner Institution with its results having been occasionally referred to in terms of commendation by intelligent strangers, it is out of place for me to make here any further remarks on the subject beyond stating that I believe the work of 1897 to be creditable.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Minister of Education, Wellington.

G. VAN ASCH.

*Approximate Cost of Paper.*—Preparation, not given; printing (1,700 copies), £1 8s.

By Authority: JOHN MACKAY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1898.