

1900.

NEW ZEALAND.

STOKE INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL, NELSON.

MEMORANDUM FROM THE SECRETARY, EDUCATION DEPARTMENT, TO THE RIGHT HON. THE PREMIER AND THE HON. MR. W. C. WALKER, MINISTER OF EDUCATION, ON THE SUBJECT OF ST. MARY'S INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL FOR BOYS, STOKE, NELSON.

Laid on the Table of both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.

Wellington, 31st August, 1900.

Stoke Industrial School.

No written statements, signed, sworn, or otherwise, by inmates or ex-inmates of the Stoke Industrial School were handed to me or shown to me by the Chairman of the Nelson Charitable Aid Board, or by any other person, at any time.

I had an interview with Mr. Rout, the Chairman of the Charitable Aid Board, at his house on the evening of the 26th June. He had in his hands certain papers, out of which he read extracts. I saw nothing but the back of those papers. The matter read to me was similar to that obtained by me on the following evening from five inmates whom I saw at Mr. Rout's office—*i.e.*, on the 27th June.

The inmates did not even then state anything more than is referred to in my report of the 2nd July, attached; they were not sworn, nor were there any statements written out or signed. My report gives, I consider, a fair summary of what was elicited from them. No notes were taken on that occasion by Mr. Rout, the only other person present. I took rough notes to guide me in framing my report.

The only questions excluded by the five-years limit were the two serious ones of the use of chains and of a criminal offence. In regard to these, when the question of extension from two years to five years was under consideration I asked Mr. Rout whether five years would bring in what he considered material evidence. He said it would. Thereupon I telegraphed the Minister of Education advising extension to five years.

The use of chains, although outside the five-years limit, was admitted.

No evidence, except hearsay evidence, which could make even a *prima facie* case was brought under my notice in regard to the criminal charge. If it had been, I should at once have brought it under the notice of the Commissioner of Police.

Right Hon. the Premier.

GEORGE HOGGEN.

(Memorandum.)

Education Department, Wellington, 2nd July, 1900.

St. Mary's Industrial School for Boys, Stoke, Nelson.

ON Monday, 25th June, I made a surprise visit to the school, arriving there about 9.30, and spent three hours and a half in the institution. I may say that I found everything in order, but the standard of life as to cleanliness and comfort not high. Many of the arrangements are very primitive. The rooms downstairs were rather dusty; the dormitories were clean. Counterpanes, blankets, and bedding were fairly clean; sheets had evidently not been changed for more than a week. They did not seem in worse condition than one would expect under such circumstances. Being only rough-dried, they would never look neat, but they should be changed every week. Most, but not all, of the pillows had slips on them, and they were in the same condition generally as the sheets.

There is not sufficient means of ventilation in the dormitories; not enough baths for the number of boys in the institution. There should especially be better provision for hot baths. The only means of getting hot baths is by employing the washtubs in an open shed used as a laundry. This provision is very rough and insufficient.

Out-buildings are rough. Closets and urinals are difficult to keep clean. Their condition under the circumstances (it was thawing when I arrived) was passable, but they should be floored with asphalt or concrete. Most of the class-rooms had not been used since the previous Friday, and were rather dusty. At the time of my visit they had not yet been prepared for school, which

is held in the afternoon. There is a fairly good band-room, and a room which serves very well for the purpose of a tailor's workshop. Store-rooms for clothes are rather small for such a large number of boys as there are in the institution (126). The boys were somewhat roughly clad, and I think it would be advisable—in winter, at all events—that they should all have somewhat warmer underclothing. Some had boots and stockings or socks, and some were barefooted. They did not seem, however, as far as I could see, to be suffering from cold. There were no fires in any part of the premises, except the kitchen. Dinner was being prepared when I arrived. Potatoes, which were sound but not of particularly good quality, were being scraped in a rough-and-ready manner in the yard. The dinner, which consisted of Irish stew, tasted better than it looked. It contained a sufficient quantity of meat, and there was an ample supply. The dietary scale shown me does not show sufficient variety (former inmates who afterwards came to see me informed me that puddings, although down on the bill-of-fare two days a week, were given only on Christmas Day and New Year's Day, but very little butter and milk were provided, and hardly any vegetables, except potatoes). Irish stew plays too prominent a part in the dietary scale. The boys seem on the whole well nourished. Their height and development are rather below the normal standard for boys of the same age. This may be due to the previous history of many of them. The Brothers and the Visiting Medical Officer informed me that there was remarkably little sickness among the inmates.

The training of the inmates seems to be too indefinite altogether. They should be more regularly trained in different kinds of work. The arrangements for holding school are open to criticism. The regular hours are from 1 to 4 and from 5 to 6.30, with an hour—from 7 to 8—in the morning during part of the year. I did not see the school in operation. Such indications as I could see of the character of the teaching did not impress me greatly; in fact, such a school should have a good teaching staff. There is no proper carpentry workshop, though there are a few tools in a shed that passes by that name. There is no regular instruction in carpentry.

The estate is a large one, with sheep and cattle, a garden, and some fruit-trees. The boys therefore have an opportunity of picking up a miscellaneous experience in various kinds of work.

In regard to the four cells referred to in the report of the surprise visit made by the members of the Nelson Charitable Aid Board, which has been the subject of correspondence with this department, one of these has since been removed. It was about 7 ft. 6 in. by 4 ft. by 7 ft. high, with a barred opening about 18 in. square looking into the room in the corner of which the cell was placed. This was situated in the tower. Two other cells have been used as a photographic studio, probably for some years past; the remaining cell, on the ground-floor, is somewhat larger and more comfortable than the first one referred to; the two latter, it was admitted, have been used recently for confining two returned absconders for a period of a week or more. This is contrary to regulations laid down by an Order in Council dated 14th October, 1895, for punishments in Government industrial schools, which regulations are held to apply to private schools also. It was likewise admitted that the regulations had been further transgressed by the use of a supple-jack for corporal punishment instead of the prescribed strap. In my opinion, all punishments should be entered regularly in a punishment record, and copies of the same, as far as it applies to Government inmates, should be forwarded monthly to this department, as is done in the case of the Government industrial schools. From the admission of the Brothers it appears, moreover, that the regulations regarding deprivation of ordinary articles of diet—regulations prescribed by the same Order in Council—have not been strictly adhered to.

After my visit I saw the Very Rev. Dean Mahoney, official manager of the institution, who resides in Nelson, and I had a general conversation with him on the matters observed during my visit. I also saw four members of the Charitable Aid Board—namely, Messrs. G. M. Rout, J. Piper, C. Harley, and J. Baigent—who have made a complaint to the Minister of Education regarding alleged illegal punishments inflicted on inmates of the institution, and have asked for an inquiry into other abuses that are alleged to exist in connection with its management. These charges may be summarised as follows:—

1. Confining in cells for illegal periods.
2. Use of fetters, and irregular punishment in other ways.
3. Cruel treatment of inmates.
4. Improper and insufficient food.
5. Insufficient clothing.
6. Irregularities in respect of wages of inmates at service.
7. Unsatisfactory arrangements for the training and education of the inmates.
8. Illegal and irregular burial of deceased inmates in the grounds of the institution.
9. More serious charges of a more or less criminal character.

On these grounds an inquiry is asked for by the members of the Charitable Aid Board, the resolutions, I am informed, having been carried unanimously. The inquiry asked for is described variously as “an official inquiry,” “an open and full inquiry,” and “a public inquiry.” Opinions in favour of such an inquiry were also expressed by Judge Robinson, Mr. Tatton, and Dr. Mackie, who, with other gentlemen, on the invitation of Dean Mahoney, visited the institution shortly after the surprise visit of the Charitable Aid Board. Two only of those who came to see me considered an inquiry unnecessary. These were Mr. J. A. Harley, Mayor of Nelson, and Dr. Roberts, Medical Officer to the institution. The latter, however, qualified his statements by saying that the Medical Officer to such an institution ought to be appointed by Government, as he would then be free to criticize points in the management which might come under his observation. Several other citizens of known standing supported the request for an inquiry, though desiring that their names should be withheld. On the whole, there seems little doubt that a strong feeling of uneasiness as to the management of the institution has been growing up for many years past, and has now reached an acute stage. A large proportion even of those likely to form a sober judgment fear that there may be a solid substratum of fact for the suspicions entertained.

Five former inmates came to see me, and made statements as to some or all of the charges enumerated above. There seems strong *prima facie* evidence that the first three charges are not without foundation, the charge of cruel treatment being made, however, with especial reference to one, or at the most two, of the Brothers in charge. It is possible that there has been laxness in regard to keeping proper official records of inmates' earnings.

With regard to the most serious charges, No. 9 above, I could find no foundation but hearsay. What was spoken of to me as evidence could not by itself be admitted as such.

With regard to the wages of service inmates, I may say that at my direction at the beginning of this year an officer of this department spent a week at Nelson going through the wages accounts, and that in consequence new books have been opened; and if these are audited at regular intervals, as I propose, by one of our officers, it will be impossible in future for such irregularities to occur as may have occurred in the past.

I have had conversation on the matters referred to in this report with our Visiting Officer, Mr. Thompson, who paid a visit to the institution when in the district some months ago. His conclusions agree generally with my own; but I may add that he informs me that the Brothers gave him to understand that they inflicted no punishments except slight strokes on the hand, and, when questioned particularly as to solitary confinement, replied that they did not use that form of punishment. This statement is at variance with the admission now made by them.

In conclusion, my own view is that the general public uneasiness in Nelson regarding the institution cannot be allayed, or the exact truth as to some of the charges be ascertained, without holding a full inquiry; such an inquiry would also be in the true interests of the institution itself. A purely departmental inquiry might be the means of arriving at most of the facts, but would scarcely satisfy local public opinion.

It is not for me to suggest the exact form an inquiry should take.

Hon. W. C. Walker.

GEORGE HOGGEN.

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