

No. 5.—SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, SUMNER.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR.

SIR,—

School for the Deaf, Sumner, 1st March, 1913.

I have the honour to lay before you my report for the year 1912.

The number of pupils under instruction during the year is shown in the following tabulated statement :—

	Boys.	Girls.	Total.
Pupils of 1911 who returned to school	52	41	93
Admitted at or near the beginning of the year	5	4	9
Admitted in September	1	..	1
Absent during the year but retained on roll	1	1
Total number on roll	58	46	104
Left in April	1	1
Left at the end of the year	5	6	11
Pupils expected to return to Sumner in 1913.. .. .	53	39	92
Pupil being trained at Ruakura Experimental Farm	1	..	1

Inclusive of the lad at Ruakura, the total number on the roll was 105. Of these thirty-one came from the Auckland District, one from Taranaki, seven from Hawke's Bay and Gisborne, twenty-three from Wellington, one from Marlborough, two from Nelson, three from Westland, twenty-two from Canterbury, and fifteen from Otago.

Two boys were boarded out during the year, and eight boys, four girls, and one adult attended as day pupils during the whole or part of the year. The advantages secured by the daily journey to and from school and from the more frequent intercourse with the outside world were again very apparent in the case of these pupils. Similar good results were noted in the case of those children whose parents, while not living sufficiently near to the school for them to attend as day pupils, were able to have them home occasionally for the week-end.

As will be seen from the above table, there were five boys and four girls admitted early in the year. One of the former was taken on trial only, it being apparent that he was mentally subnormal, and at the end of the year he was removed to the Special School at Otekaieke. The other new-comers made good progress, all completing in a satisfactory manner the course of instruction prescribed for beginners. Two made much more rapid progress than the others. These were a boy of ten and a girl of seven. The former should have been admitted four years ago. Both had partial hearing, quite insufficient, however, for them to take their places in a public school or, without special instruction, to acquire speech. Their vocabulary at the time of admission was similar to that of a hearing infant of from twelve to fifteen months, and the articulation of the few words they could utter was extremely defective. On account of the auditory powers possessed by them, their instruction in articulation was a much less arduous matter for their teacher than in the case of the congenital deaf-mutes admitted at the same time. In the case of the latter the training in speech demands a great amount of pains-taking care and sympathetic attention on the part of the teacher. At the end of the year the eight children referred to possessed a vocabulary of several hundred words and were able to make use of easy short sentences.

The following extracts from letters received from the parents of some of these children may be of interest :—

A father writes : " With regard to Harry, I must admit that at first I was a little disappointed. He would not say a word, but after he was home a few days he made up for it. I could hardly believe he was the same boy that went away. What a change ! You, my dear sir, have simply worked wonders, and words fail me to express my thanks to you. How do I now regret not having sent him before ! It was indeed a great surprise and pleasure to hear him talk and to know what he was talking about. I have indeed to thank you and your staff for the manner he has progressed."

Another writes : " On behalf of my son, I have much pleasure in congratulating you on the rapid strides he has made since he joined the school only nine months ago."

A third parent writes regarding his daughter, the partially deaf girl referred to in a previous paragraph : " There is a wonderful improvement in her hearing since coming home, consequently she speaks much better [than when seen a few months before]. . . . Pleased to say she is well : she arrived home in the best of health and a credit to your institution. Many thanks for all that has been done."

It is somewhat curious that in almost all cases of partial hearing that have had some months' instruction parents believe that an actual improvement in the children's hearing has taken place. What really occurs, however, is that as the child acquires the ability to articulate correctly, and as its vocabulary increases, its still defective ear gets gradually to recognize words and phrases that before instruction were unintelligible and apparently inaudible to it. A somewhat similar aural phenomenon has often been noticed by persons visiting a foreign country or for the first time hearing spoken a tongue unknown to them. They find it impossible almost to repeat a single word of what has been said in their presence, and the effect is as if they had not heard it. When a knowledge of the language has been acquired, however, their understanding ears can follow it readily. It is possible, of course, that aural training and instruction in articulation may exercise some stimulus on the auditory nerves,