

1917.
NEW ZEALAND.

EDUCATION: MEDICAL INSPECTION OF SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL-CHILDREN.

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

REPORT OF THE MEDICAL INSPECTORS OF SCHOOLS.

SIR,—

Wellington, 20th June, 1917.

It has for some time been recognized that the physical condition of the race is very far from satisfactory. Recently the war has emphasized this lamentable fact, and has aroused the public as nothing else could have done to the fundamental importance of physical fitness. The nation realizes at last that the duty it owes to each individual child is to equip him as well as possible, physically and mentally, for the battle of life, and to shield him, especially in his tender and dependent years, from harmful influences. With the advances in child-study on the one hand, and in preventive medicine on the other, it is now realized that measures to arrest deterioration and increase physical fitness should begin as early in life as possible. Certainly they must not be omitted when the child comes to school, where the laws of the State make his attendance obligatory. Consequently, all civilized nations have instituted medical inspection of their schools, and are rapidly developing and extending their systems.

Wherever medical inspection of schools has been inaugurated a vast amount of hitherto unrecognized and unsuspected physical defect and disease has been discovered. Medical inspection of schools in New Zealand was inaugurated in 1912 with a staff of four doctors. Since then two more doctors and seven School Nurses have been appointed. Over one hundred thousand children have been examined, and notifications sent out to parents telling them of defects discovered. In addition, a course of lectures and demonstrations has been given each year to the students in the training colleges, and many addresses to teachers and parents. The good results that have already been obtained, the number of defects now treated as a direct result of Medical Inspectors' examination and advice, the greatly quickened interest both of parents and children in matters of health, to say nothing of the striking improvement in personal cleanliness everywhere apparent, repay many times over the comparatively small sum medical inspection has cost.

The medical inspection of school-children in New Zealand has shown that many defects are to be found here as in other countries. Broadly speaking, we find that from one-half to two-thirds of our school-children are in need of the attention of a dentist, an oculist, or physician. This does not mean that our schools are filled with physical wrecks, but it does mean that our children enjoy much less than their possible measure of good health. They are losers not only in happiness but in education.

What, then, are the physical defects found amongst our school-children? The answer to this is the same as amongst all civilized peoples. Many children attending school are found to be suffering from—

- (1.) Subnormal nutrition and general poor physique.
- (2.) Dental caries.
- (3.) Affections of special sense organs—*i.e.*, defective eyesight and hearing.
- (4.) Obstructed breathing—*i.e.*, adenoids, enlarged tonsils, &c.
- (5.) Physical deformities—flat chest, flat feet, stooped shoulders, spinal curvature, &c.
- (6.) Mental retardation and defect.
- (7.) Other diseases: These may affect school-children as they affect adults, but the first six groups constitute the particular problem of the schools.

The essential work of School Medical Officers may be roughly summarized as follows:—

- (a.) The routine physical examination of school-children and the notification to parents of defects found which require treatment. The Medical Inspectors instruct teachers, and, where possible, address parents upon matters relating to the welfare of the children.