

MEDICAL INSPECTION.

This sphere of work has for its chief aim the prevention rather than the cure of physical defects in school-children, or at least it aims at dealing with defects in their very earliest stages, thus enabling the children concerned to develop into healthy men and women.

The staff of Medical Inspectors, school nurses, and physical instructors has been increased during the year, and the work in all its phases has been considerably developed. Parents, teachers, the children themselves, and the public generally are becoming more and more impressed with the value of this branch of the Department's activities, and numerous evidences of appreciation have reached the Department. For general information some of the more distinctive features of the work of the past year may here be referred to.

The inspection of all children in schools in Grade III and upwards has been systematically carried out, and the reports forwarded to parents have been followed up by the visits of the school nurse. Careful investigation shows that from 70 to 75 per cent. of the cases reported have been attended to by parents, either by their own ministrations or through the services of the medical or dental practitioner. It will thus be seen that the work of inspection is not merely of formal or statistical value, but that very definite and permanent practical results eventuate in the great majority of cases.

It is regretted that owing to the impossibility of securing larger staffs and means of conveyance in the outlying districts the children in back-country schools have not yet received the benefit of medical inspection. It must be remembered that over one-third of the children of New Zealand are taught in schools containing less than a hundred pupils, and that the children of these schools are out of the reach of ordinary medical or dental services, since these can be obtained only at considerable expense. It is highly necessary, therefore, that the benefits of medical and dental inspection and dental treatment should be provided for that portion of the children of New Zealand who in all probability stand in most need of attention. Some advance in this direction has been made possible by the recent increase in the number of Medical Inspectors, and as doctors are being released from war service it should be possible soon to meet all requirements.

Early in the year applications were called for the position of school dentists, but owing to the large number of dentists engaged in military service it was found impossible to secure suitable applicants. Later in the year applications were again called, and arrangements are now pending for the appointment of twelve school dentists, of additional Medical Inspectors and school nurses, and, in particular, of a Superintendent of Medical and Dental Inspection, whose duty it will be to organize and direct the rapidly increasing activities of this branch of work. Applications are also being dealt with for the position of Chief School Dental Officer, who, in association with the Medical Superintendent, will shortly have the direction of a large staff of school dentists. The latter will in some cases be stationed in towns, and in other cases will travel through the country districts by means of motor ambulances, in which simple treatment can be provided in a general and systematic manner. The ambulances are already in New Zealand, and as soon as the staff is organized the work will be commenced.

In the meantime a number of extra activities have been undertaken in various districts, owing, to a large extent, to the enthusiasm of the Medical Inspectors and school nurses concerned. For instance, in one centre the services of the local dentists were secured practically free of cost for one morning per week, until the children in the town who required dental treatment had all been attended to. The hospital authorities gladly co-operated, and the result is that in this centre there has been a complete treatment of the teeth of practically all the children. In several districts tooth-brush drill has been instituted with very satisfactory results, and there is no doubt that with the extension of this simple daily practice the need for dental treatment will be very greatly reduced.

In another district, where goitre is very prevalent, the Medical Inspectors made special investigations, as the result of which arrangements have been made for the systematic treatment of about fifty children suffering from this complaint. In this way it is hoped that in this district goitre will be cured in its very earliest stages and that the prevalence of the complaint will be very considerably diminished in the future.