

## SPECIAL SCHOOLS.

(See also E.—4.)

## DEPENDENT CHILDREN AND CHILD WELFARE.

The functions of the special Schools Branch of the Department include provision (1) For the maintenance, education, and training of any destitute, dependent, or homeless children committed to the care of the State; for the maintenance and guardianship of all epidemic orphans who have lost both parents; for the training of uncontrollable and delinquent children and juvenile offenders, and for the supervision of all young persons under the age of sixteen years who are placed on probation by the Courts: (2) for the supervision of all infants and young children under the age of six years maintained apart from their parents for payment either in foster-homes or private institutions, or adopted with premium: and (3) for the education and maintenance of all afflicted children—the deaf, the blind, and the feeble-minded.

Probably the outstanding feature during the year was the extraordinary increase in the number of children who for various causes incidental to the economic conditions of the present time have been committed to the guardianship of the Department. The number of new cases actually dealt with was 864, as compared with 381 for 1918 and 358 for 1917.

This abnormal increase has thrown a very heavy burden on the receiving-homes and the organization for the boarding-out of children, and has necessitated the adoption of a system providing for children being dealt with in their own districts rather than admitting them to receiving-homes in the various centres of population. During the year agencies for providing for State children were established in Napier, Hamilton, Whangarei, and Timaru, and further establishments are contemplated in such places as Greymouth, Palmerston North, and Invercargill.

The juvenile probation system, now firmly established in each of the four centres, has also been extended to such districts as Whangarei, Hamilton, and Nelson, and in all probability will be further extended in the near future to include Wanganui, Napier, Palmerston North, Greymouth, and Invercargill. A boys' probation home has recently been established in Dunedin, so that now there is a probation home in each of the four centres of population. The function of these homes is to provide temporarily for boys who cannot be properly controlled by their parents, or who have committed petty offences against the law and are in need of home training and discipline for short periods prior to placing out under suitable conditions, generally with relatives or friends. As a general rule young boys who have been guilty of more serious offences, or who have already been given a chance under the supervision of the Probation Officer and have failed to make good, are admitted to the special section for schoolboys at the Boys' Training-farm, Weraroa. The percentage of failures under the probation system is very small indeed (less than 3 per cent.). The number of cases dealt with by the Probation Officers is as follows: Auckland, 401; Wellington, 127; Christchurch, 196; Dunedin, 94; total, 818.

*Children boarded out.*

The number of children boarded out in foster-homes at the end of the year was 1,696, showing an increase of 425 when compared with the numbers for the previous year. The system of supervising all these children has been considerably revised during the year, making provision for more frequent visits at shorter intervals to the foster-homes. On account of the general shortage of housing-accommodation throughout New Zealand, considerable difficulty has been experienced in finding foster-homes, especially in the principal cities, but it may be stated that there is no dearth of suitable people in the country districts who are anxious to provide and care for these unfortunate children.

On account of the increased cost of living the boarding-out rate has been raised from 15s. to 17s. 6d. per week for infants under twelve months, and from 12s. 6d. to 15s. for children over that age and up to fifteen years, or longer if the child in question is still attending school. In addition, a very complete initial outfit of clothing is supplied with each child, and the Department provides free medical and dental treatment and medicines. School books and stationery are also provided for children attending school.