

No. 3.—SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, SUMNER.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (ABRIDGED).

SIR,—

I have the honour to lay before you my report for the year 1920.

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

	Boys.	Girls.	Totals.
Pupils of 1918 who returned to school	58	42	100
Admitted early in the year	6	9	15
Admitted later	2	4	6
Under instruction during the year	66	55	121
Left during the year	14	10	24
Died	2	2
Number expected to return in 1920	52	43	95

The average age of the congenital deaf cases admitted, fifteen in number, was six years and eight months, which is a great improvement on past records. There were two cases amongst these, however, in which valuable time had been wasted before admission had been sought by parents. One of these was a boy aged ten years and five months, and the other a girl aged ten years and nine months. Both were bright healthy children with a certain amount of residual hearing. Had they been admitted five years earlier, as they ought to have been, their education would by now have been well advanced, and there would have been reasonable prospects of their eventually leaving school well equipped for the battle of life. As is it, there is every likelihood of the contrary being the case. Though the education of deaf children is legally compulsory up to the age of twenty-one years, if necessary, it is seldom practicable or desirable to retain pupils to such an advanced age, and in the case of these two children it will be quite impossible to give them an adequate education before they reach seventeen or eighteen years of age. It is difficult to suggest any steps that could be taken that are not already taken to prevent such conditions arising. As a rule it is in cases of partial deafness that the necessity for early admission to the school is most frequently ignored. Parents of totally deaf children usually make some sort of inquiries about the school before the children are greatly advanced in age, but when a child has sufficient hearing to enable it to say two or three words, such as "dadda" or "mumma," its chance of receiving that early education that is vital to its future welfare is greatly diminished. There appears to be a popular superstition, hard to account for, that the child will be all right when it is seven or in some cases when it is fourteen. Such an erroneous notion has been the cause of the late admission of many of our pupils in the past, and it is to be hoped that with the spread of knowledge it will go the way of other popular fallacies.

Of the 121 pupils whose names were on the roll, sixteen attended as day pupils. Of these latter four were part-time pupils who were treated for stammering, with satisfactory results, a marked improvement being effected in each case. Of the 105 boarders, one was absent on a visit to England during the greater part of the year, and two others during the last half-year on account of illness.

Of the 121 pupils whose names were on the roll, twenty-three came from the Auckland District four from Taranaki, eight from Hawke's Bay, thirty from Wellington, six from Nelson, twenty-eight from Canterbury, and twenty-two from Otago.

One case, that of a girl of the age of eighteen years and seven months, who was admitted toward the end of November in order to learn lip-reading, calls for special mention. As a result of an attack of influenza which occurred four years previously she had gradually lost her hearing, and in spite of medical attention extending over two years had become practically stone-deaf. During the four years of her affliction no attempt whatever had been made to give her any knowledge of lip-reading, and in consequence of her habitual means of communication with others having been cut off by her deafness she had sunk into a very despondent or even morbid mental condition. Up to the time of her illness she had been a very bright girl, and had passed the Sixth Standard at the age of twelve. There is no doubt that had she been admitted to this school as soon as her deafness showed signs of becoming serious she would have been spared much depression of spirits, and would have learned the art of lip-reading much more easily and effectively. It was a matter of extreme difficulty for her teacher to get her to grasp the first principles of the art, and by the end of the year she had probably made about as much progress as she would have made in two days had she been admitted earlier—that is, before her hearing had entirely disappeared. It cannot be too frequently urged that in all cases of serious loss of hearing the study of lip-reading should be commenced without loss of time. The art is much more easily acquired when the eye is assisted by a remnant of auditory power than when the hearing has completely gone, and, contrary to a stupid notion unfortunately prevalent in some quarters, the practice of the art has no prejudicial effect on the organ of hearing. Inasmuch as its tendency is to prevent nervous strain it can only be beneficial.

During the first half of the year the general health of the pupils was excellent, but during the latter half a number of minor ailments and two serious cases of illness, both of which unfortunately terminated fatally, occurred. One of these deaths was due to acute gastro-enteritis and the other to pneumonia.

Twenty-four pupils left during the year. Of these five were cases of congenital deafness, four of acquired deafness, and one doubtful. Exclusive of one case, which was removed after two years at school in consequence of the parents going to Australia, the average time under instruction of the congenital cases, dating from admission to withdrawal, was eight years and three months. This average is unduly low. It is not possible under any conditions to give a deaf child a thorough educa-