

*Special Schools for the Feeble-minded.*

There are two such special schools—one at Richmond for girls, and one at Otekaike, near Oamaru, for boys. The number of girls in residence at Richmond at the end of the year was 64, and the number of boys at Otekaike 152.

**No. 2. — REPORT OF THE OFFICER IN CHARGE, INDUSTRIAL AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS BRANCH (INCLUDING AFFLICTED CHILDREN AND INFANT-LIFE PROTECTION).**

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit the following report on the work of the Industrial and Special Schools Branch for last year :—

The Branch carries out the following phases of social-welfare work :—

- (1.) Maintenance, supervision, and training of all destitute, dependent, and delinquent children committed to the care of the State.
- (2.) Supervision of children and juvenile offenders placed on probation by the Courts.
- (3.) Supervision of all infants under six years of age maintained for payment apart from their parents or guardians.
- (4.) Supervision of children in cases where widows' pensions are paid by the State.
- (5.) Education and training of afflicted children over the age of six years. The definition "afflicted" includes deaf, blind, or improvable feeble-minded children, and children partially deaf or suffering from defective speech, and stammerers.

The following figures show the number of children dealt with under the foregoing headings Nos. (1), (2), (3), and (5) :—

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Industrial schools, receiving-homes, and probation homes .. ..	3,692
Juvenile probation .. ..	227
Infant-life protection .. ..	684
Afflicted children—	
Deaf .. ..	106
Feeble-minded .. ..	217
	<hr/> 4,926

**BOARDING-OUT SYSTEM.**

The majority of the children committed to the care of the State are not detained in institutions, but are boarded out in foster-homes situated mainly in suburban areas and in districts in close proximity to the smaller centres of population. At the end of the year there were 1,868 children boarded out—1,811 from Government receiving-homes and 57 from private industrial schools (Roman Catholic). Arranged according to the ages of the children the numbers at 31st December, 1923, are as follows: Under five years, 341; from five to ten years, 705; from ten to twelve years, 342; from twelve to thirteen years, 184; from thirteen to fourteen years, 174; and over fourteen years, 122. These numbers include nearly 400 epidemic orphans of all ages, who are placed mainly with relatives. It is pleasing to note that the authorities of private industrial schools (especially St. Mary's, Auckland) have adopted the boarding-out system to a limited extent for the purpose of providing for the children belonging to these schools.

The rate paid to the foster-parents for the maintenance of each child is 15s. a week, but for infants under twelve months 17s. 6d. a week is paid. Each child is provided with a very complete initial outfit, the foster-parents being required to maintain the clothing at this standard. Medical attendance, medicines, and dentistry are provided by the Department, as also are school-books and school stationery. Upon Boarding-out Officers and Managers of Receiving-homes rests the responsibility of selecting proper homes and of supervising the inmates in these homes. No hard-and-fast rules can be laid down as to the type of home to be selected, or the number of times a home should be visited, or the methods of supervision. Much depends upon the personality, ability, and intuition of the officer concerned. Frequent visiting is advocated in the interests of the children, and as a general rule this is carried out; but the Department arranges a further safeguard by obtaining confidential reports every quarter from the headmasters or class-teachers of the schools which the children attend. Wherever possible, arrangements are also made for local honorary Lady Visitors to visit the foster-homes monthly, or more frequently if necessary, and generally keep a friendly eye on the children concerned.

For certain types of dependent children there is no question that the boarding-out system is superior to all other systems of dealing with them. The fact that under the boarding-out system children have the opportunity of growing up as ordinary members of the community under decent conditions is in itself sufficient to commend the system apart from any other consideration in its favour.