

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) :—

Industrial schools, receiving-homes, and probation homes	..	..	3,784
Juvenile probation	..	..	376
Infant-life protection	..	..	704
Afflicted children—			
Deaf	..	..	97
Feeble-minded	..	..	233
			<hr/> 5,194

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 1,767 children boarded out—1,705 from Government receiving-homes and 62 from private industrial schools (Roman Catholic). Arranged according to the ages of the children the numbers at 31st March, 1925, are as follows : Under five years, 336; from five to ten years, 615; from ten to twelve years, 388; from twelve to thirteen years, 187; from thirteen to fourteen years, 162; and over fourteen years, 79.

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.

Associated with child-placing in families, it is essential that there should be cottage homes where remedial treatment and preliminary training in correct habits and discipline may be carried out. This is provided for in the receiving-homes for children and older girls, and in probation homes for boys. As these homes are of limited capacity, the period for which any one child is kept in residence is necessarily limited, but further provision is made at the Boys' Training-farm, Weraroa, and at the Caversham Industrial School for the accommodation for periods up to twelve months (or longer if necessary) of boys and girls respectively who after several trials at board or in situations fail to do well.

The residential training institution is a very necessary part of the system, but no boy or girl is admitted to such an institution until the Department is fully satisfied that no other course is open in the interests of the inmate's future welfare and in the public interest. The success of the system of placing out children in family homes can perhaps be judged best by the fact that a very small number of these young people find their way into institutions such as Weraroa and Caversham. The average number in residence at Weraroa is eighty-seven boys, and the average number at Caversham thirty-three girls. These numbers include not only the failures under the placing-out system, but also