

4. MR. HOUGHTON'S REPORT.

Sir,—

Dunedin, 6th July, 1880.

I have the honor to furnish, for your information, the following report upon the Industrial School, as requested :—

Since my connection with it as Honorary Inspector, now some three years ago, it has been to me throughout the whole of this period a great pleasure, when making my usual fortnightly visits, to observe the order, regularity, cleanliness, and obedience of the children in the institution. There can be no question of the kindness and parental care under which the children are brought up, or of the affection which they exhibit towards the whole of the staff employed in the institution. In very few cases has it been found necessary to inflict punishment—kindness has prevailed over stolid obstinacy. In the cases of lads of an advanced age who have been committed to the school, only in one instance do I recall a lad's being sent to gaol—and in that instance most reluctantly—by the master, for continued insubordination. Upwards of 240 children of all ages, from a few months to fourteen years old, are under perfect control, and are most ably taught by one male and one female teacher, assisted by one of the older boys; and I believe that their examination will compare favourably with other schools in the province. One feature of the schools should not be lost sight of, and that is the skill displayed by many of the children in singing, which is taught in the evenings by the master; and by the drum and fife band, most kindly taught by a resident of Caversham, who for several years past has given instruction two or three evenings weekly. Such teaching has had a most beneficial effect on the general conduct of the school. It has been given as a reward for good behaviour, and is most highly prized by those obtaining the privilege of belonging either to the singing-class or to the band.

I should mention that there is a most efficient Sunday school, taught by some twelve or fourteen teachers from the young people of Caversham, under the superintendence of Mr. Blackwood.

Of the conduct and discipline of the school I cannot speak too highly. A few cases of absconding have occurred in the case of lads of full age, when first committed. All have been brought back again, and gradually they have become sensible of the good they were receiving.

The boys big enough are employed out of doors in gardening, and such work, with school hours, fully fills up their time. Of those placed out in service after their term in school has ended, most satisfactory accounts are received from their employers; and one cannot read the letters from the children themselves without a feeling of thankfulness for the good training they received whilst in the school.

Due allowance must be made for the difficulties the management has met with, and the great strain at times upon the master to provide accommodation for the numerous committals made to the school, in a mass of buildings at best only makeshift. The recent enlargement of the schoolroom has provided space now for the children to assemble in without the overcrowding so much complained of previously, and the enlargement, during the present cold season, has proved of the greatest comfort in giving a large room in which the children can spend their evenings before going to rest.

The health of the children has been wonderfully good. But few cases of sickness have occurred, and the expenditure for medicines has been remarkably small. All have been well cared for by the visiting surgeon, Dr. Burns, to whose weekly visits much of this satisfactory state of things is to be attributed.

From time to time I have called attention to the many abuses in connection with the admission of children to the institution, and to the very serious charge the Government is brought under by the admission of infants of the most tender age, and to the absolute necessity for greater care being exercised by committing magistrates for the prevention of such abuses. As a result of my own observation, I believe it will be found, as a rule, that when parents succeed in getting their children admitted they consider themselves as relieved from all further responsibility. A very serious matter is the admission of infant children (whose period of residence may reach fourteen years), and the cost it entails on the State. Some legislation is necessary in this direction.

In conclusion, I most willingly offer my tribute of admiration to the master and matron, Mr. and Titchener, whose services are proving so invaluable. The high state of efficiency in which the institution is found is due to their unwearied care in looking after the welfare of these waifs and strays of society, whose future usefulness will be due to the fostering care received whilst in the Industrial School.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Minister of Education,
Wellington.

H. HOUGHTON,
Honorary Inspector.