

- (4.) That the kindergarten is admittedly doing a work that cannot be overtaken by the State school, inasmuch as in the kindergarten instruction is commenced as early as three years of age and continues till the children are fit to be drafted into the infant department of the public school. Testimony is available as to the satisfactory progress through the public-school course of all children who begin their education in the kindergarten, which is generally conceded to be the true foundation of industrial training.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

THOMAS SCOTT and others.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 11TH SEPTEMBER, 1903.

JAMES ALLEN, M.H.R., examined. (No. 1.)

The Chairman : The Committee will be glad to hear what you have to say in support of this petition, Mr. Allen.

Mr. Allen : I may say that I have been on the Advisory Committee of the Free Kindergarten Association in Dunedin ever since its initiation—some fourteen years ago—and I therefore speak with a full knowledge of the work that has been done. The Committee last year, I think, reported under a misapprehension as to the work which is being undertaken by the Free Kindergarten Association in Dunedin. I may say that the schools are absolutely free, no child being charged any fee whatever. Public subscriptions are raised in the city wherever they can be obtained, and the institution is entirely supported by voluntary contributions. The misapprehension arose last year through some of the members thinking that these kindergartens were doing the work that was being done in some of the public schools. The Free Kindergarten Association of Dunedin was started with an entirely different object. It was started with the idea of taking in children below the present school age—that is, below five years of age—and it is doing that work. There are a few exceptions, and I will give you reasons for them. The work consists of going out into the streets and gathering together the waifs and strays of from two years up to five, on the average, and training these children in kindergarten methods, and this has proved of great benefit to many of these young children for many years past, so much so that the public-school authorities are adopting these methods for public schools in Otago now. I wish to make sure that you are convinced as to the age and class of children taken, and in order to be correct I have secured the names and ages, and in some instances the nationality, of all children in these kindergarten schools. There are two of them. The first one was established in Walker Street, Dunedin, and any one who remembers Walker Street fourteen years ago will recollect that it was one of the worst slums in Dunedin. It was the residence of Chinese, Syrians, and other foreigners, and the whole place was a disgrace to the community. It was that knowledge that led the Kindergarten Association to start, in order that they might get these children—these so-called outcasts of society—under some control and start them on a right course of living. If you went to Walker Street to-day, with a recollection of what it was before, you would see the great change that has taken place. The ladies we have trained to do this work have actually gone out into the street, picked up these children, and fed and clothed them in order to bring them into the schools, and I know of cases where they have gone into the homes of these children where the mothers have not been able to look after them. So that the work they perform is rescue-work and is of immense value to the whole of the community in starting these children on a line of life, leading them to be good citizens, whereas if they were left alone in their horrible surroundings they would probably drift into the gaol or reformatory, where they would cost the State a large sum of money, and on that account we ask for aid. With regard to age, I admit that there are some children who are over the limit of school age—five years. In the Yaralla School there are,—Girls of three years and under, 9; four years and under, 15; five years and under, 20; five years to five years eight months, 6: total, 50. Six of the girls are therefore over the minimum school age, and the reason is this, that the ladies and teachers looking after these children have found that there are a few who are scarcely fit to go to the public schools at five years of age, so they keep them for a few months longer to make sure that when they leave they may become decent pupils for the public schools. Of the boys in the same school there are,—Of three years and under, 6; four years and under, 8; five years and under, 14; five years to five years and a half, 4; age not given, 1; over six years, 1: total 34. There are fifty girls and thirty-four boys in that school, and one of the boys is over six years of age.

The Chairman : There are no pupils over six?

Mr. Allen : There is one over six. The reason why some are over the school age is that they are not fit to go to the public schools, in the judgment of those who know best. In the Walker Street School there are,—Of four years and under, 10; five years and under, 13; from five years to five years seven months, 8: total, 31. Or a grand total of 115, out of which there are nineteen who are over school age. Now with regard to the class of children. In one of