

1903.
NEW ZEALAND.

PUBLIC PETITIONS M TO Z COMMITTEE

(REPORT OF, ON THE PETITION OF THOS. SCOTT AND 138 OTHERS, TOGETHER WITH THE PETITION AND MINUTES OF EVIDENCE).

Brought up on the 15th September, 1903, and ordered to be printed.

REPORT.

No. 123.—THOMAS SCOTT and OTHERS, of Dunedin.

PETITIONERS pray that assistance may be granted the Dunedin Free Kindergarten Association by subsidy or by annual grant.

I am directed to report that the Committee, having heard the evidence regarding the kindergarten work being done in Dunedin, are of opinion that it is of great value to the State, and would recommend to the favourable consideration of the Government the question of granting a subsidy to work of this kind throughout the colony; and that the evidence of James Allen, Esq., and H. D. Bedford, Esq., together with a letter from Rev. Mr. Waddell be printed and added to this report.

15th September, 1903.

G. FOWLDS,
Acting-Chairman.

PETITION.

To the Hon. the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives.

WE, the members of the executive of the Dunedin Free Kindergarten Association, together with the undersigned electors of the City of Dunedin, ask your honourable House to grant assistance to the association, either by a subsidy of pound for pound on all subscriptions to and donations received by the association or by way of an annual grant-in-aid, as in New South Wales.

We approach your honourable House with confidence, and appeal for monetary support on the undermentioned grounds:—

- (1.) That the association have been in existence for a period of fourteen years, during which time they have successfully trained a number of young women, who are to-day teaching kindergarten principles in this city and in kindergarten departments attached to several of the public schools.
- (2.) That if this agency had not been in existence and in operation it would have fallen to the State, through the Education Department, to have established a truant school in Dunedin at a much greater cost than the subsidy now asked.
- (3.) That there is great need for the extension of free kindergartens to other localities in and around Dunedin; but the association, for want of funds, cannot plant additional schools where they are known to be urgently required.

- (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

these schools I admit the class of children is fairly good all the year round. In the Walker Street School, which was really the first one started, there are thirteen Syrians, also quarter-caste Maoris, and some Chinese—not many. There are others who have no parents at all, and others who have only a mother, whose living is got in many instances by acting as charwoman. In such cases the woman is only able to get her living by our taking her children and looking after them while she is away charing. That is the class of work we are doing, and it is all done by voluntary effort; and I may add that if the State took it in hand I do not think it could do it as effectively as these ladies are doing it, because it involves almost daily visiting. I cannot conceive of any more effective way of looking after these children, because these ladies sometimes feed and clothe them themselves, and it is all philanthropic work. To enable them to do this they make their claim on the public, who have voluntarily subscribed so far; but these ladies find the effort hard, and think the time has come, after fourteen years' work, when they may reasonably claim some assistance from the State. A subsidy of pound for pound is all they ask for, and I think the State should grant it, as it would cost the country an enormous sum to otherwise care for these children. The Chinese and Syrians who go to these schools are not in a fit condition, if left alone, to go into the public schools, and certainly if admitted without preliminary preparation it would be to the detriment of our own children in the public schools. Our preliminary training, however, does fit them to go into the public schools after they reach five years of age, or in exceptional cases a little later, without any harm being done to our own children who are there. I may also state that some years ago we had a ragged and truant school, but have been able to do away with it owing partly to the work of this Kindergarten Association. We prepare these children, and fit them for leading better, purer, and nobler lives. We claim to be the pioneers in this work, and that as a result of our fourteen years' experience the State schools have adopted our kindergarten methods. The only local training in kindergarten work has been obtained through our efforts, and we have trained teachers who are now doing a great deal of kindergarten work in addition to that we undertake. I do not say they are doing it in free schools, but they are doing it in schools which subscribe a certain amount to help them to live. That the Kindergarten Association has been doing a vast amount of good I am perfectly persuaded of. We are perfectly free, and make no charge. Now, in New South Wales it will be seen that in 1901 (Vol. iii., Appendices, p. 25) £6,000 was granted in aid of educational institutions in the proportion of £1 for every £2 raised by private subscription, and the Kindergarten Union there was granted a special sum of £100, so that other colonies are doing what we are asking our colony here to do. We do not want to close these institutions. I may say, as one who knows fully the facts concerning these schools, that but for the advice of myself and Mr. Mark Cohen—who unfortunately is not here to give evidence—and others, these ladies would have lost heart. The continual effort in going to the public for aid to keep the schools going has disheartened them, and I feel that if the schools are allowed to go it will be a serious loss to the community. If the State grants them pound for pound it will encourage these ladies to continue their efforts to raise money from the public. I have to express regret that Mr. Mark Cohen has been unable to remain over to give evidence before this Committee, because in my opinion it would have been of an invaluable nature; but he has written me a long letter, portions of which I will read to the Committee.

Mr. Fowlds: What is the cost of the schools?

Mr. Allen: £300 a year for the two. I do not say that is enough. We have had to drop the training of teachers, because we could not keep it up. Mr. Cohen says,—

In Walker Street, as the names on the register and the types of nationalities presenting themselves for admission show, the bulk of our pupils are drawn from the homes of Assyrians, Chinese, and half-breeds, none of whom could or would be admitted into a State school, even were the age lowered to-morrow, without being subjected in the first instance to some process of purification. On this point I can express myself without any reservation whatever. During my connection with the Otago Education Board I made this question one of very close study, and was forced to the conclusion that but for the agency of the Kindergarten Association in gathering together the waifs and strays of this then notorious resort, partially clothing them, and then taking in hand the first stage of their mental equipment, our Board must have taken up and coped with the necessity of establishing and maintaining in Dunedin a ragged or truant school, such as existed in this city (first near the Octagon and afterwards near Stafford Street, under the direction of a Mr. Paterson) and was maintained in the early seventies either by the Provincial Government of that day or the united School Committees of Dunedin. If there had been no kindergarten in Dunedin during the last decade I am perfectly satisfied that a large percentage of the pupils who have in the interval passed through the Walker Street branch would have graduated through the pavement and the gutter either into our reformatory at Look-out Point or into the gaol. I contend that for fourteen years the Kindergarten Association have relieved the Education Board of a part of their legitimate work, and have saved the State a considerable sum, if by their efforts only a small percentage of our pupils have passed out of our class-rooms into those of our primary schools, and eventually out into the world, all the better equipped mentally, morally, and physically by their knowledge of the underlying principles of Froebelianism to take part in the great battle of life.

In the closing paragraph of his letter Mr. Cohen says, referring to the class of women who have to go out to work for a living,—

To these women the free kindergarten is indeed a joy and a blessing, for it not only goes to the home in quest of the children, but it often clothes and feeds them, and cares for them educationally, while the mother is acting the part of the breadwinner—too often for the entire family. If alone for the part they play in helping to keep the home intact the free kindergarten, wherever it is planted, is a veritable boon to the workers, and on humanitarian grounds should receive direct and ample encouragement from the State.

I will only occupy the time of the Committee a little longer with the evidence of those engaged in primary schools as teachers, and one or two others whose evidence on this matter is of some value. In a letter to Mr. Mark Cohen, Mr. D. R. White, head of the Normal School, Dunedin, who was an examiner of the kindergarten students for several years, and has taken great interest in the work, says,—

Without doubt the little ones from three to five years were receiving a splendid preparation for the primary schools. I may say that the mistress of the Normal School has time and again spoken of the special brightness and aptitude of the pupils who have been admitted into our junior classes from the kindergarten schools.

I produce this as evidence to show that out of such rough material we produce something of value to the primary schools. In another letter to Mr. Cohen, Mr. Owen J. Hodge writes,—

I am a frequent visitor and a great admirer of the excellent work done in an excellent manner. . . . I am thoroughly convinced it manifests itself right through their school life. . . . The children in attendance at the branch must be compared not with any other children, but only with other children similarly situated as regards their homes, their parents, their surroundings. . . . But compare those that have been to school with those that have not, and that have had little or no home school. The difference can at once be seen.

He is referring to the difference when these children come into the school after being first trained by the Kindergarten Association.

The question is largely a people's question. Of what use is free secondary education to a boy entitled to it if he is unable to take advantage of it because he has to go to work? . . . When he is a little toddler, when his services are not in demand, then the kindergarten school must be preparing him for his career.

Finally Mr. Hodge says,—

I hope I have made my opinion clear. Let me restate it shortly: The majority of our children have a very limited number of school years. It is desirable to increase that number. This can be easily done by giving them special treatment at an earlier age than that at which they enter our primary schools. The free kindergarten schools are now doing good work in that direction.

Mr. W. J. Moore, headmaster of the Kensington Public School, dwells upon the fact that owing to our work we have induced the primary schools in the Otago District to take up this method of work for teaching, and he emphasizes the value of it. These children are taught to be clean and to cultivate healthy habits, whereas if left alone they would simply be gutter-children. Then there is very valuable evidence from Mr. D. Wright, our city missionary. He writes,—

Those of us who thoroughly know the city, with its large and steadily increasing population, can unhesitatingly aver that such schools are most urgently needed; and of our own knowledge we declare that for years the work has been carried on with an enthusiasm and success by the Free Kindergarten Association and by teachers of skill and experience. Largely through personal visitation in what may be termed the slums of our city and other means, little children of the poorer struggling classes have been brought into the free kindergarten schools who would otherwise have been found in the streets and getting their first lessons in wrong-doing. It is an indisputable fact that these schools have done most excellent service to the city and for the commonwealth at large, and now it seems both equitable and reasonable that the State should in some definite and tangible form recognise the value of the work already accomplished, and, if need be, provide means whereby other schools may be opened in other localities. The doors of these schools are thrown open for all little neglected children, irrespective of colour, race, or creed, and it is also well known that boys and girls passing from the kindergarten schools to the ordinary State schools have proved to be apt and successful pupils. You will, I am sure, accept my word that in this matter I am neither a dreamer nor an unreasonable faddist, but that I write from sincere convictions and from personal knowledge and personal observation.

I do not think I need quote a letter from the High Street School, but there is a letter from the Rev. Mr. Waddell, who speaks in the highest terms of the work done. It is as follows:—

Dunedin, 14th August, 1903.—I am asked my opinion as to the value of the kindergarten in Walker Street. It has been under my observation from the very beginning. I was led to take steps in regard to it, seeing the number of little children "spilt like drops about the street." This was especially pathetic in the winter time. Their homes were small and many of them comfortless, and there was nothing for these little boys and girls save the kindergarten of this street—the very worst conceivable. The kindergarten school has gathered these waifs in. They are under the care of kind guardians; they are drilled and taught in a way that makes learning easy and knowledge a delight. No one could conceive the change that the school works on these little ones unless he had seen them in their original condition. They are saved from the contaminating influences of the street at the most impressionable age. The parents speak in the highest terms of the good it has done them and the children. The State has also saved many hundreds of pounds, for it is as certain as anything well can be that not a few of these little ones are criminals in embryo, and they owe their salvation to the kindergarten influence. It is a very noble thing to pick up the wounded on the field of battle and to care tenderly for them; but it is even a more noble thing to destroy the causes that make war a necessity. It is good to look after our prisoners in the gaol, and our grown-up criminals and incapables; but it is a more heroic thing to prevent them from being criminals and incapables at all, and I am certain that an institution such as the Walker Street kindergarten is doing just that work. It is not only inducing these young lives to law and order in a pleasant way, and preparing them to become apt pupils in the State schools: it is a most valuable addition to the economic and moral forces of the State.

You will note that the Rev. Mr. Waddell is strongly in favour of the continuance of these schools. All that we ask is a little help to encourage our voluntary efforts in getting money, because there are men and women engaged in collecting for this work who have done good and noble work, and who need encouraging. If the Committee can see its way to recommend the Government to help us by granting pound for pound I shall be glad. After all, it is a paltry sum which is being asked for, in view of the vast benefit which I am sure is being done by this Free Kindergarten Association.

1. *The Chairman.*] I just want you to emphasize the statement you made—that the kindergarten institution has been in existence for fourteen years. During the whole of that period has any fee been charged?—Not one penny. On the contrary, we have often fed and clothed these children.

2. During the period in which it has been in operation have any children over six years of age been receiving instruction in the school?—Yes, I gave you an instance of one. I could not tell you from my own knowledge whether there have been more over six, but I know there have been from time to time children over five.

3. Can you give the Committee the figures showing the number attending over the age of five years?—There are nineteen out of the 115 over five years of age.

4. *Mr. Fowlds.*] Five years and eight months is the limit in one case?—Yes; they are very exceptional cases.

5. *Mr. Alison.*] Are we to understand that the intention is to limit the age to about five, unless in exceptional cases there are strong reasons for exceeding that age?—We have not the slightest desire to keep the children after they are five years old if we can get rid of them; but there are cases where we feel justified in keeping them a little longer.

6. *Mr. Rhodes.*] The children who are mostly over five years are the children of aliens?—Yes. There is one quarter-caste Maori of 5 years and 7 months, one Syrian of 5 years and 3 months, and

another Syrian of 5 years and 1 month. The others, apparently, in this list are all British subjects, but many are fatherless or motherless. Some have mothers who have to go out to work. There is one child of 5 years and 3 months whose parents are unknown.

7. Do you find that the numbers are increasing in the school?—The numbers in the Walker Street School are remaining approximately about the same, but we have purified Walker Street during the fourteen years we have been at it. In the other school the number is increasing.

8. And in your opinion there is scope for much further work?—Yes, in the poorer parts of the town.

9. During the fourteen years have you received no support from the Government?—No.

10. Are the schools in New South Wales that you referred to exactly similar?—Yes, I think they are exactly the same.

11. *Mr. Foulds.*] If this petition were granted you realise, of course, that the grant would need to be applicable all over the colony?—Yes, and I think we ought to encourage these schools all over the colony. I should only be too glad to see a subsidy granted wherever there is need for it.

12. If these grants were made, of course, definite regulations would be needed. You would not recommend that the age-limit should be made five, I suppose, but think it should go up to six?—I think it would be very unwise to restrict the age to five, because there are cases where the children are not fit to go at that age into the primary school.

13. To get the best results, as far as the State is concerned, you think it might be necessary to keep them a little longer?—Yes, that is our experience.

14. *Mr. Rutherford.*] You deal at present with all races and mixtures?—Yes, all races.

15. It is not proposed by your association to differentiate in any way?—No, not in any way.

16. *Mr. Bennet.*] I think you said that sometimes these children have to be fed as well as educated?—That is so in some cases.

17. Up to the present you have had no means of housing them?—No, we could not do that.

18. Do you not think that might be urged?—I only wish it could. I might say that I have known some of the ladies to go into the homes of these poor children and actually scrub the floors for the mothers.

19. Of course the improvement will not be complete until there is a home?—That is somewhat outside of our work. It is a matter that the State might consider.

20. But you could not give the full benefit of your institution to these children if they have to go home to their squalid surroundings?—That would raise the large question as to whether it would be wise to separate them from their mothers. In some instances the effect has been good on the mothers after we have trained the children.

21. *Mr. Alison.*] The petition asks a pound-for-pound contribution by the State?—Yes.

22. Do you propose that the State shall have any supervision or control of these kindergarten schools?—We would rejoice at State inspection and a State report upon our work; but I would impress on the Committee the value of the free work now being done, especially the constant visitation and overlooking done by these ladies.

23. Do you not think that if the State contributed pound for pound there should be provision for management or inspection by the State?—I think there should be inspection; but it would not be wise for the State to take the management, because I believe the local management is much more effective.

24. But you think there should be inspection?—Yes, and regulation if necessary.

25. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Is it in any way a denominational institution?—The children get a certain amount of religious teaching, but we make no discrimination. I consider that a certain amount of training in religion is necessary. So far as the committee of the association are concerned, they are perfectly undenominational—they are gathered from all sorts.

26. *The Chairman.*] They are not connected with any church?—Absolutely none.

27. *Mr. Bennet.*] What is approximately required to keep the schools going?—I think these two schools could be kept going for £300 a year. If we launched out it would be more expensive. If we were to re-establish the system of training teachers, as we did at first, it might cost a little more.

28. *Mr. Alison.*] We have four centres in the colony, and, of course, this kindergarten or rescue work could very well be undertaken in each of them, as also in smaller towns. If the State is to vote pound for pound for this purpose for any part of the colony would it not be well that there should be a limitation of the amount the State may be called upon to provide, so that the objection could not be raised that it would be a large demand on the State funds?—Subsidies always are limited, and no doubt they would be limited in this case by reason of the pound-for-pound contribution. Although the petition is from Dunedin, and refers to one place only, I feel certain that every one connected with the association would be only too glad to know that it was made general, and the same good work undertaken in other places. They would not object to the subsidy being made general.

29. Supposing the subsidy were limited to pound for pound, would the limitation, in your opinion, act to the detriment of the work as time goes on?—I do not think it would be any detriment to us if it were limited, and I think perhaps it would be wise to limit it. Any help to us would be an encouragement, even if it be limited.

30. What limitation would you suggest?—If we are only to run these two schools the State might grant us up to £200 to start with.

H. D. BEDFORD, M.H.R., examined. (No. 2.)

31. *The Chairman.*] Have you anything to urge in favour of this petition?—Mr. Allen has given us such an exhaustive view of the matters contained in the petition that I feel that there is

not much left for me to add. The matter is so important that I do not think we ought to consider the amount to be given by the State. The more it expends the better for the colony, and I do not think the State can spend too much in this direction. Any one who has studied the question at all will realise that the work, from a moral and health point of view, is of the utmost importance; and Mr. Allen has given the testimony of many men in the city who are interested in educational work to show how good the preparation is in these kindergarten schools for the primary schools. This work is extending very rapidly. These kindergartens are being established in all parts of America, and I have here a few figures showing their growth: "In every centre branches are established, reaching from New York to the heart of Mexico, from Frisco to Texas. In every place it seems a loving, growing work. Take Brooklyn alone: Five years ago there were thirteen kindergartens; to-day there are 110. In Saginaw (Michigan) there are five kindergartens, besides private kindergartens—150 children receiving the benefit of the work. There is also an excellent training-school in session five afternoons a week, where a course of study for students is complete and thorough. The Fort Worth (Texas) kindergarten reports 150 children enrolled in its two schools. The Executive Board of Wisconsin State Federation of Women's Club held a conference with the heads of standing committees to make a special effort to establish five kindergartens in all towns and cities in the States where kindergartens do not exist at present. This work will be carried on by the women's clubs in each locality. So successful has the kindergarten work been in Pittsburg and Alleghany that, whereas ten years ago only eleven ladies were present at its inauguration, to-day its members and auxiliary circles number five hundred. And how do they manage all this? By bringing conviction and real loving zeal into the work." There is a similar growth in all civilised parts of the world. I do not think I need add anything further to what Mr. Allen has said.

32. *Mr. Bennet.*] You did not give us the age of the children taught in America?—It is the same as it is here.

33. *Mr. W. Fraser.*] You referred to a certain number of schools besides private schools. Are they not all private, the same as in Dunedin, or are they State schools?—Some of these private schools make a charge.

34. And the others?—The others are State schools. As Mr. Allen pointed out, in New South Wales the State is subsidising them.

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