

SPECIAL SCHOOLS : AFFLICTED AND DEPENDENT CHILDREN.

(E.-4, 1911.)

DURING the year 1910 the total number belonging to the schools for afflicted and dependent children was on the average 2,586, and the expense to the Government was £51,922. Of this sum, £15,314 represents the outlay in connection with the purchase of property, erection of buildings, and other works. The numbers on the roll and the expenditure on account of the various institutions were as follows :—

	Number under Control.	Net Cost. £
School for the Deaf	97	4,087
Jubilee Institute for the Blind	39	721
Special School for Boys of Feeble Mind	31	7,834
Industrial schools	2,419	39,280

By the Education Amendment Act which became law last year extended provision is made for the education and training of young persons who are deaf, blind, feeble-minded, or epileptic. They must now come under efficient and suitable instruction at the age of six years, and remain so until they reach twenty-one years, unless previous to that time the Education Department is satisfied that their educational attainments or their proficiency in some art or handicraft or other calling enable them to provide for their future needs without further instruction.

If the near relative of a child so affected does not provide the education required, the Minister of Education may direct that the child be sent to a school where he will have the special instruction suited to his needs, the cost of maintenance and training to be borne by the relatives according to their means and as agreed upon between them and the Minister. In the event of the Minister's direction not being complied with, a Magistrate may order the child's admission to a special school and fix the rate of the maintenance payment. The question whether or not a child is sufficiently affected to warrant his being regarded as coming under these provisions of the Act is determined by his ability to receive proper benefit from ordinary school instruction. If maintenance payments are not duly observed they may be recovered as a debt, or the defaulter may be dealt with under the provisions of the Destitute Persons Act for disobedience of the Court order. Charitable Aid Boards are made responsible in necessitous cases for payment to a limited extent for the maintenance of children in these schools.

By order of a Magistrate a young person who is epileptic or feeble-minded may be kept under the guidance and control of a special school beyond the age of twenty-one years if it is considered that he is not fit to guide his own life, or that it is otherwise in the public interest that he should be under institutional oversight. In connection with proceedings of this kind the Magistrate appoints counsel to represent the inmate at the hearing. The period of extended guidance is not to exceed four years in the first instance, but on its expiry it may be renewed from time to time by similar procedure, and thus, where necessary, lifelong control is retained. In such cases orders for maintenance against the near relatives may be made.

Parents, school-teachers (either public or private), constables, or officers of charitable or kindred institutions who are aware of the place of residence of blind, deaf, epileptic, or feeble-minded children, and the householder in which such a child lives, must, under a penalty, send notification to the Education Department.

There is, unfortunately, very strong evidence that there are a large number of young people in New Zealand (as in other countries) who by reason of mental defect are unable to properly control their lives, and it is hoped that with the means that the law now allows they will not be permitted to drift towards destitution and criminality, but will be so cared for that they will be able eventually either to maintain themselves respectably or to contribute to their maintenance in suitable institutions according to their various capabilities.

Another important provision in this Act is that giving power for the inspection of orphanages and similar institutions by Inspectors of the Education Department.

Up till now it has been practicable to deal with boys only at the school for the feeble-minded, but plans are now in hand for buildings which would provide for the accommodation of a considerable number of girls.

Reference was made in the report for the year 1909 to the pressing need for another industrial school for boys. As the result of negotiations, the institution