

The following statement gives a comparison between the years 1910 and 1911 as regards the numbers of children belonging to the various institutions and the cost to the Government :—

	Number under Control.		Net Cost.	
	1910.	1911.	1910. £	1911. £
Under Industrial Schools Act ..	2,419	2,632	39,280	36,841
School for the Deaf ..	97	98	4,087	3,651
Jubilee Institute for the Blind ..	39	35	721	405
Special School for the Feeble-minded ..	31	54	7,834	6,375

The feature of the work connected with special schools that demands the most urgent attention at the present time is that of making provision for the large number of boys and girls of feeble mind whose disabilities preclude their receiving due benefit from instruction in ordinary schools, but who are capable of being improved under special tuition. Six years is fixed by the Education Amendment Act, 1910, as the age at which young people of this kind shall come under instruction, and, unless previously exempted by the Minister of Education by reason of ill health or through having developed sufficiently to enable them to earn their own living, the instruction must be continued until they are twenty-one years old. When an inmate of the School for the Feeble-minded reaches that age, and it is considered that he has not the capacity to guide his life either in his own or the public interest, he may, on the order of a Magistrate, be kept under control for a further period of four years ; and by similar procedure extensions of the currency of the order may be made from time to time, thus securing lifelong guidance where deemed advisable. It is to be noted that at such proceedings counsel appointed by the Magistrate and paid for by the Government appears on behalf of the pupil.

The number of children in the Dominion who are suitable for this training in such schools cannot be accurately determined at present, but it is undoubtedly very large—almost certainly not less than 300—and, as the parents of very few of them are in a position to pay for efficient tuition privately, a heavy expenditure must be incurred to provide for them in special schools.

The increase of mental deficiency which is so alarmingly evident in older countries is already shown plainly in New Zealand. Here, however, if energetic measures are taken, the danger to society can be eliminated, as the circumstances are very favourable for doing so. A careful watch can be kept to prevent persons of feeble mind from coming in from outside countries ; our population is small, and, by detaining those adults who are mentally incapable of taking up the duties of citizenship advantageously, the propagation of their class will be kept at a minimum. The subject is of the first importance, and, although the cost of establishing and maintaining schools of this kind is heavy, their work will undoubtedly be a strong factor in restricting the expenditure in connection with destitution and criminality.

The number of children brought under the operation of the Industrial Schools Act during the year was 389, an increase of 99 over the number for 1910. In 195 of these cases vagrancy, lack of control, or being charged with offences constituted the reason for action. Children who have drifted into bad habits of this kind are very often found to be not suitable for boarding out with foster-parents, and for that reason have to be kept in residence at the industrial schools at a heavier cost for maintenance. An examination of the causes underlying the admission of so many young people shows that in somewhat more than two years 225 boys between ten and sixteen years old were sent to industrial schools for the above-named reasons. In 93 of these cases the evidence showed that both parents were of good character ; in 43 additional cases the character of the father was described as good ; and in 38 others the mother's was good. Thus, out of these 225 boys who got out of hand, there were 174 cases in which one or both of the parents were of good character. This seems to show that the trouble lies more in the weakness or laxity of parental control than in the bad character of the parents or in the fault of the children ; and the need for the admission in many cases might be obviated if, when the Magistrate was satisfied that want of judicious guidance was the cause of the trouble, the child were placed by the direction of the Court under the friendly and helpful oversight of an officer who had the experience and other qualifications needed to obtain a good