

APPENDIX F.

MEDICAL INSPECTION OF SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL-CHILDREN.

1. EXTRACT FROM THIRTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION.

MEDICAL INSPECTION.

The result of some years' experience of the medical inspection of school-children in Europe and America has been to show that it is not necessary to examine all the children in a school every year; but that examination twice or three times during a child's school-life is sufficient in the case of primary schools. It has accordingly been decided that in New Zealand children of public schools shall for the present be examined by the Medical Inspectors when in Standard II and again when in Standard V. There is not yet a sufficient number of Inspectors to do more than examine sample children in Standard II in some of the schools, but it is hoped that it may be possible shortly to appoint a sufficient number not only to carry out the plan completely, but to give the necessary attention to special cases, and to give instruction to teachers in connexion with the work of inspection and with other matters that concern the health of the children. Teachers are asked to fill up certain more formal details for all the children; this should be done in each case, of course, by the teacher of the class, and need not take many hours altogether. When the cards are once filled up very little labour will keep them up to date. The advantages to be gained by the teacher's co-operation are obvious: the records of height and weight, the chief uses of which are to indicate defects where they exist, will be much more numerous; teachers have a better opportunity of discovering abnormal cases, and learn to take an intelligent interest in the health of their scholars.

So far the work has been mainly experimental; but the results are sufficient to justify the existence of the system and to show the necessity for its extension.

During the year 1913 333 primary schools were visited, and 12,357 children medically examined; of these, 7,661 were pupils in Standard II taken at the routine examination, and 4,696 were special cases thought by the teachers to be suffering from some defects.

The Medical Inspectors do not treat cases, but, where necessary, recommend the parents to obtain medical attention for their children. Generally this advice appears to be followed; but there is a proportion of cases in which the expense of treatment is an obstacle. This is especially the case with dental disease; and, unfortunately, no less than 72 per cent. of the children examined in Standard II were found to be suffering from defective teeth.

The injurious effects of obstructive breathing on a child's physical and mental condition ought now to be a matter of common knowledge, yet about a third of the children at the routine examination, and a higher percentage of the special cases, were found to be thus handicapped. The Inspectors think that in many cases correct breathing-exercises and fresh air are the only remedies necessary.

Too many children were found suffering from physical deformities; 22 per cent. have stooped shoulders, and 7 per cent. have spinal curvature. It is hoped that the new system of physical training will do much to improve this condition of things. Malnutrition was observed in 23 per cent. of the children, although not in all cases serious. Here it is noticed that it is not so much poverty as ignorance or carelessness on the part of the parents that is responsible for the poor condition of these children. Excessive manual labour outside of school-hours, overcrowding in the homes, unsuitable and badly cooked food, and late hours are all possible causes to which this lack of robustness is attributed.

It is clear that a great amount of good is being done by the Medical Inspectors in cases where other medical assistance is unnecessary. Remedies that cost little or nothing are recommended, and wrong and harmful methods of rearing the children corrected. Often dullness and incapacity have been found to be due to some physical defect, such as defective eyesight or hearing, or throat and nose troubles.

Instruction in the medical inspection of children is given to the students of the training colleges, and, as opportunity occurs, to teachers already in the schools also; so that in course of time the detection of certain physical defects in the scholars will not be left to the experts.