

MEDICAL INSPECTION.

(Appendix F of E.—2.)

The work of medical inspection was continued during the year 1914 on the lines previously laid down. The staff of four Medical Inspectors which, it is recognized, must be increased as soon as circumstances permit visited as many schools as possible of Grade IV and upwards, examining children of Standard II and children that were suspected of suffering from some physical defect. Children previously examined were also re-examined for the purpose of ascertaining if their defects had been cured or attended to.

The number of schools visited during the year was 403, and the number of children examined was 16,019. Of this number 10,248 were pupils taken at the routine examination, and the remainder—5,771—were special cases thought to be suffering from some defect.

The Medical Inspectors do not treat cases, but where necessary recommend the parents to obtain medical attention for their children. Although in some cases the expense involved is an obstacle, the percentage of cases that are found to have been treated is generally high, sometimes being as satisfactory as 70 or 80 per cent. The Medical Inspectors also report that the number of special cases brought up for their inspection each year is rapidly growing smaller.

The most common defect found in the medical examinations is that of decayed and neglected teeth, 68 per cent. of the children inspected at the routine examination being found to suffer from this cause. The percentage is lower than that given for the previous year, and it is hoped that the policy of insisting on cleanliness and other preventive measures will tend steadily to lessen the prevalence of this harmful disease. Forty-three per cent. of the children are recorded as having enlarged glands; a large percentage of these defects, however, are not of a serious nature, and dental disease is a cause to which the presence of enlarged glands may frequently be attributed. The percentage of children suffering from malnutrition was 19, as compared with 23 for the previous year. This number includes bad and medium cases, and it is pointed out that want of food is seldom the cause of the unsatisfactory condition of the children's physical condition. The worst cases are reported as coming from the congested areas of the towns and the remote country districts. Ignorance and lack of time on the part of parents, excessive strain on the strength of the children before and after school, and poor and cramped conditions in the home, are all causes which may to some extent account for a condition of malnutrition. There is little doubt that the efforts of the Medical Inspectors and the physical instruction now given are having an excellent result in the diminution of the number of cases of obstructed breathing among school-children. Twenty-four per cent. of the children examined at the routine examination were suffering from this cause, and nearly one-third of the special cases dealt with. Physical deformities happily show a smaller percentage than in the previous year. Their existence is to some extent, in the opinion of the Medical Inspectors, attributable to the use of unsuitable desks. Especially in the case of younger children, shorter lesson periods with intervals for physical drill or breathing-exercises in the open air in this connection are strongly recommended.

In addition to the work carried out by the Medical Inspectors, school-teachers examine as many children as they conveniently can, keeping a record of such particulars of physical condition as they are qualified to observe. The heights and weights of over 17,000 children were observed and recorded by teachers during the year; and the graph given on page 17 shows that according to the statistics thus obtained the average New Zealand child is superior to the English child in these particulars.

The Medical Inspectors gave courses of lectures and practical instruction to the training-college students in the work of medical inspection. This is regarded as one of the most important parts of the scheme of medical inspection; the value of having teachers trained to observe physical defects in their pupils and to do everything possible to create a healthful school environment is incalculable.