

No. 5.—SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, SUMNER.

EXTRACT FROM THE REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR.

I HAVE the honour to lay before you my report for the year 1915.

The number of pupils under instruction during the year is shown in the following tabulated statement :—

	Boys.	Girls.	Total.
Pupils of 1914 who returned to school	54	46	100
Admitted at or near the beginning of the year	7	2	9
Admitted later	3	..	3
Total number at the school	64	48	112
Left in July	1	..	1
Left in December at end of school year	7	5	12
Pupils expected to return to Sumner in 1916	56	43	99

Of the 112 pupils on the roll, 64 came from the North Island and 48 from the South Island. There were 35 from the Auckland District, 3 from Taranaki, 9 from Hawke's Bay, 17 from Wellington, 3 from Nelson, 2 from Marlborough, 2 from Westland, 24 from Canterbury, and 17 from Otago.

Nine boys and 4 girls attended as day pupils, and 55 boys and 44 girls were in residence at the school.

Of the 112 pupils admitted during the year 5 were over the age of eight years. The ages of these 5 were respectively as under: 8 years 10 months, 10 years 7 months, 12 years 5 months, 14 years, and 17 years 2 months. In only one of these 5 cases—that of a boy of fourteen years, whose deafness was acquired—was there any valid reason for the long delay in admission. Four of these pupils made good progress during the year, but no amount of progress will compensate for the wasted time caused by the delay in their admission. It is especially to be regretted that the case of the pupil aged seventeen years was not brought under the notice of the authorities years ago. As I have often pointed out, the necessity of commencing the education of deaf children at an early age cannot be too strongly urged. It is insisted on by practically all who have studied the question of the education of the deaf; indeed, the preponderance of opinion among experts appears to be in favour of commencing the education of deaf children at four or five, or even earlier. The mental condition of deaf children that have been allowed to reach even the age of twelve or thirteen without education is appalling, and can scarcely be conceived by any one who has not been faced with the problem of educating such children. Yet such cases are by no means uncommon, even in this country, where the education of deaf children has been wisely made compulsory between the ages of six and twenty-one years. During the past ten years there have been admitted to this school fifty-one children over the age of eight, thirty over the age of ten, eleven over the age of twelve, four over the age of fourteen, and two over the age of sixteen years.

I do not in the slightest degree suggest that parents should not call in the aid of an aural surgeon when there is any possibility of their children's hearing being improved by treatment, but I wish to point out that such treatment could be just as efficiently given at this school as in the home, and without prejudice to the educational aspect of the case. I also desire to warn parents of deaf children of the danger of having the ears of the latter meddled with by any one but a properly qualified aural surgeon, and especially to beware of advertised remedies for deafness. In every case parents would do well to obtain my advice as soon as defective hearing is noted in children, as intelligent home treatment has a marked influence on subsequent progress. Furthermore, persons knowing of uneducated deaf children of whatever age will be doing a real service to all concerned if they report such cases to the Education Department.

As a rule, when a child is stone-deaf there is not so much delay on the part of the parents in getting them admitted here; whereas, when a child has some residual hearing and is able to say "Daddy" and two or three other words, its parents are apt to think that it is in no need of the special instruction that alone will enable it to speak. It ought to be generally known that a child that is too deaf to hear the ordinary tones of the voice will, unless given special instruction of the kind given here, grow up dumb or practically dumb. Unfortunately, this knowledge is very often not acquired by parents until it is too late for the children to receive anything like adequate instruction.

In July one boy was removed, after having been seven years and a half at the school and having made excellent progress. At the end of the year a boy and a girl, who had been admitted towards the beginning of the year on trial, were removed on account of mental deficiency. There were also removed seven boys and five girls, who had reached a satisfactory standard of education. They had been at the school respectively 8 years, 9 years 8 months, 11 years, 9 years 5 months, 10 years, 3 years 3 months (a lip-reading case), 9 years, 7 years, 10 years, and 9 years.

The work of the school was carried on in a satisfactory manner during the year, and at the annual examination, which was conducted in November by Mr. T. H. Gill, M.A., the pupils acquitted themselves creditably.

In addition to the ordinary school-work the girls received instruction in cooking, laundry-work, domestic economy, dressmaking, and dancing, and the boys in woodwork and gardening.