

Children who are feeble-minded in the real sense of the term are unlikely ever to improve sufficiently to make it safe for them to enter the general community. As the great majority of them will need to be under protecting control throughout life, and will not in the ordinary course be more than partially self-supporting even when they attain the adult stage, it is a question whether they should not in the first instance and for the term of their lives be under the care of the Mental Hospitals Department.

The Special School at Richmond for the reception of feeble-minded girls has now been fully established, and good work is being done under capable management. The teaching staff has been strengthened by the addition of another teacher (two teachers in all), and through their efforts an improvement is noticeable in the comportment and dexterity of the children.

At the Special School for Boys at Otekaike a scheme providing instruction in carpentry, bootmaking, and mat and basket making has been carried out satisfactorily during the year. The younger boys receive instruction by means of kindergarten and Montessori methods, and many of them become quite skilled at handwork. Basketmaking and matmaking are occupations that feeble-minded boys take to readily, but as the majority of them are of low vitality it is essential that occupations involving physical movement should also be available for them. Many of the elder boys assist either in the garden or orchard or on the farm. Considerable improvement has been made during the past twelve months in the methods of farming the 300-odd acres attached to the institution.

The following tables show the numbers dealt with during the past year, together with particulars regarding expenditure :—

Special School for Boys, Otekaike.

Numbers as at 31st December, 1917 :—

In residence	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	76
Boarded out	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1
Temporarily absent with friends	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2
								79

Particulars of expenditure for the financial year ended 31st March, 1918 :—

	£	£
Salaries	3,403	
General maintenance	4,127	
Travelling-expenses	345	
Maintenance of buildings, furnishings, &c.	368	
Additional buildings, furniture, &c.	1,636	
	9,879	
Less—		
Parental contributions towards maintenance	1,130	
Amount collected from Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards	1,186	
Sundry other recoveries	319	
	2,635	
Net expenditure	£7,244	

Included in the above figures, the sum of £1,636 was expended on additional buildings, furniture and equipment for new cottages, and in completing new works already in hand at the end of the previous year. By the addition of three cottage homes accommodation for a further ninety boys was provided.

During the year a great many new cases were admitted on trial, but in some instances it was found after observation that the boys were of a very low grade mentally and quite incapable of improvement under the teaching at Otekaike. These cases are being gradually drafted out and provided for elsewhere, either by admission to a mental hospital or by returning to the care of parents or guardians.

The Special School at Otekaike was established some eleven years ago. During this time a sum amounting to £41,000 has been expended by the Department in erecting buildings and providing adequate lighting, water, and drainage schemes.