

The number of schools visited in 1919 was 704, the number including all large primary schools and a certain proportion of small schools in country districts previously unreachd by the School Medical Officers. The number of children completely examined was approximately 30,000, and, in addition, a much larger number were partially examined or examined specially for suspected defects. Part of the duty of the school nurse is to "follow up" the report to the parent of the Medical Officer by ascertaining what steps are being taken to obtain the required treatment, and, if necessary, by urging parents to take action. It is found that when circumstances permit and facilities are available a large proportion of the parents notified act on the advice of the School Medical Officer.

It goes without saying that the commonest physical defect found among school-children is dental disease. As a result of the school medical-inspection scheme, which includes no provision for treatment, a very marked improvement is reported in the condition of and attention given to the teeth of children in the town schools. In the country districts, however, where there are practically no facilities for obtaining dental treatment, the notifications of the School Medical Officer can be of little avail. A Chief School Dental Officer has now been appointed, who is at present inaugurating a scheme for providing dental treatment for children otherwise unable to obtain it, and when this system is in operation a great advance will have been made in the work of maintaining the physical fitness of our boys and girls.

Next to dental disease, defects of the nose, throat, ear, and eye are the most common found among school-children. In the country districts, again, great difficulty is experienced in obtaining the necessary medical treatment, this lack of opportunity hindering the greater effectiveness of the work of the medical inspection. It will be necessary for some solution of the difficulty to be sought in the near future.

While further provision for treatment is required, the most important need is the prevention of disease. It may be safely said that the causes of the commonest, and at the same time the most serious, defects in children are known, and that the removal is practicable. Before the children enter upon their school life the seeds of the evil have often already been sown, and supervision of the health of children during the pre-school period is now urged as being of even greater importance than supervision during school life. A wide extension of such work as is done by the Plunket Society during the period of infancy, supervision during the intervening pre-school period, and a general linking-up of this work with the school medical system are suggested as the steps that should be taken in the attempt to prevent physical defects, often difficult to cure at a later stage. Much, it is submitted, can also be done by educating parents in matters relating to the health of their children. Educative propaganda of this kind has been begun by the preparation of special articles for the Press and by circulars widely distributed among parents by School Medical Officers.

A staff of twelve special instructors efficiently carried out the work of instructing pupils and teachers in the various physical exercises which form part of the scheme of physical education. 1,100 schools were visited in 1919 and 85,000 children inspected, while some refresher classes were held for teachers, and the students of the training colleges were given regular instruction. Particular attention was given to special corrective classes for the instruction of children with certain physical defects and deformities, the benefits resulting from these classes and from the general physical training, when properly carried out, being often remarkable.

One of the best results of the work of school medical inspection and physical education has been the unprecedented manner in which the importance of the physical welfare of the child has been brought home to teachers, and more especially to parents. Parents frequently meet the School Medical Officers at the medical examination of their children and gladly accept the advice given, using every endeavour to have remedied the physical defects pointed out to them. The parents are in a position to do infinitely more for the physical welfare of the children than are any Government officers, and one of the chief aims of the system should be, and is, the education and guidance of parents in matters pertaining to health from the birth of the child onwards.

The Department's expenditure on school medical, dental, and physical training services in 1919-20 was £14,816.