

No. 3.—SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, SUMNER.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (ABRIDGED).

SIR,—

I have the honour to lay before you my report for the year 1921.

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

			Boys.	Girls.	Total.
Pupils of 1919 who returned to school	..	..	47	39	86
Admitted during the year	..	..	19	13	32
			—	—	—
Under instruction during the year	..	..	66	52	118
			—	—	—
Left school during the year	..	..	11	6	17
Died	..	..	1	..	1
Absent during the year, but expected to return in 1921	..	..	..	1	1
			—	—	—
Number expected to return in 1921	..	..	54	47	101

Of the 118 pupils, twenty-four were day pupils and ninety-four boarders. Of the former, ten were part-time pupils under treatment in the afternoons for speech-disorders of various kinds, while continuing their general education at public schools in the mornings. There were also nine whole-time pupils attending for the correction of speech-defects for varying periods. Of these four were day pupils and five boarders. Thus there were ninety-nine deaf pupils and nineteen pupils being treated for defective speech.

The homes of the ninety-nine deaf pupils were distributed throughout the Dominion as under: Nineteen in Auckland, six in Taranaki, six in Hawke's Bay, nineteen in Wellington, three in Nelson, one in Marlborough, two in Westland, twenty-three in Canterbury, and twenty in Otago. The proportionately larger number of Canterbury pupils may be attributed to the school being better known there than in other parts.

Five of the cases of congenital deafness admitted call for special mention as instances of neglect, due probably to parental ignorance. The ages at which these were admitted were respectively eight years and two months, ten years and three months, twelve years and six months, sixteen years, and thirty-one years and ten months. To the unthinking the first of these cases might not appear to indicate a very serious waste of time. But when one realizes that, as an English writer well says, "No matter at what age the deaf begin their education, they all begin at the same point—an intellectual zero," one can form some sort of an idea of how much a child loses whose intelligent intercourse with its fellows is almost completely cut off until months after its school life has commenced, and who does not begin the latter until over eight years of age. What shall we say of those whose education is deferred until the age of ten and a half or twelve and a half years? Skilful, patient care on the part of their teachers may do much for them, but no amount of skill or devotion can atone for the years that have been wasted. The condition of the boy whose school career began at the age of sixteen is still sadder. Here we have a bright, intelligent lad, eager to learn, but unable to express himself except by gestures and grimaces, taking his place in a class along with little children of five, starting with them at the same "intellectual zero," and, though mentally well endowed by nature, faced with the prospect of ultimately leaving school with a very limited knowledge of language and very ill equipped for the battle of life. The other case referred to, that of a young man of nearly thirty-two years of age, is one of the most pitiful that has come under my notice. He too starts at "intellectual zero," but very gratifying results have been obtained during the few weeks he has been at school, and there is every indication that in time he will be able to take a more human position in society. The above cases indicate how desirable it is in the interests of the deaf that persons knowing of deaf children not getting proper education should notify the Department of the same without loss of time. That parents, householders, and officials generally are required by law to give such information, and liable to a penalty if they do not, is a fact that might with advantage be brought home to the public in a forcible manner.

As mentioned above, nineteen of our pupils were not deaf, but attended for treatment of speech-defects. Ten of these were stammerers, and the other nine were unable to articulate properly. Inability to pronounce certain letters is a not uncommon condition among children, and may greatly retard their educational progress. When the defect is confined to a single letter the child's speech is peculiar only, but when there are several that cannot be pronounced, his utterance, through the constant recurrence of the defective elements, may be so abnormal as to be utterly unintelligible to any but his intimate associates. Under such conditions a child grows up excessively shy and hyper-sensitive, which cuts him off from ordinary social intercourse and tends to make him morbidly secretive to an extent that is difficult to realize by any one without experience of such cases. Fortunately these cases of defective articulation, when not the result of mental deficiency, readily respond to scientific treatment based on an exact knowledge of the mechanism of speech. After varying periods of treatment, six of the nine cases referred to above left the school able to speak correctly. Two, recently admitted, require further treatment, but in the ninth case the defective speech is the result of mental deficiency, and, while considerable improvement has been effected, the disability may be regarded as a permanent one. All the cases of stammering that were treated at the school have done well, very gratifying results having been obtained. One case,