

The Council is much concerned at this return to the old plan, against which it successfully protested some years ago, and it trusts that the representations it has made on the subject may result in all children being tried at the Departmental Court, whatsoever the charges may be.

The statistics attached hereto of the proceedings at the Departmental Court, in consequence of the hearing of felony charges at the Police Court, do not comprise (as in the past) all the children arrested; but, in order to show the total number of children charged, a supplementary return is added of the cases heard at the Courthouse. From these returns it is seen that the total number of children charged is 304, compared with 217 during the preceding year; the increase being in charges of felony, 122 against 52; misdemeanors, 52 against 43; and uncontrollable, 34 against 19.

The Departmental Court.

Charge.	Number charged.	Sent to the Industrial School.	Sent to Boys' Reformatory.	Sent to Girls' Reformatory.	Whipped.	Sent to Gaol.	Fined.	Locked up till Evening.	Bound over to be of Good Behaviour.	Committed for Trial.	Discharged with a Caution.	Withdrawn.	Dismissed.
Felony ...	56	...	17	1	24	2	...	...	6	1	3	...	2
Misdemeanour	52	2	4	1	15	...	22	3	1	...	3	...	1
Uncontrollable	34	13	6	7	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1	7
Neglected ...	27	22	1	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3
Destitute ...	69	68	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1
	238	105	28	10	39	2	22	3	7	1	6	1	14

Police Court.

Number charged.	Sent to Boys' Reformatory.	Whipped.	Punished by Parents to the satisfaction of the Court.	Liberated under First Offenders Act.	Sent to Gaol.	Convicted, but not punished.	Fined.	Dismissed.	Total.
66	20	23	9	5	1	1	1	6	66

NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER CONTROL.

In the last annual report attention was drawn to the fact that on the 30th June, 1896, the number of children under the control of the Council was lower than in 1895, and that the then decrease was the first for ten years. On the 30th June, 1897, however, the wards of the State numbered fifty-five more than in 1896, the figures for the three years 1895, 1896, and 1897 being 1,124, 1,122, and 1,177 respectively. The children at present in the care of the State are as follows:—

	Boys.	Girls.	Total.
In the Industrial School ...	15	39	54
" Boys' Reformatory ...	103	...	103
" Girls' Reformatory—Protestant ...	...	18	28
" " " Roman Catholic ...	...	10	
Placed out ...	484	453	967
In the Lunatic Asylum ...	1	4	5
" Blind Asylum ...	1	...	1
" Hospital ...	4	1	5
" Gaol ...	1	...	1
Absconders ...	7	6	13
Totals ...	616	561	1,177

THE NEW COMMITTALS.

From the year 1892 until 1896 there was a steady annual decrease in the number of committals, which fell from 219 in the former to 173 during the latter year. The year 1896-97, however, shows so unusual an increase as to make a record in the matter of committals of children to the care of the department, the total number being 260.

That there is an increase in the number of children received as "destitute" should not occasion surprise considering the bad season; but the increase from 93 last year to 111 is not extraordinary. The comparatively large number of children sentenced as uncontrollable—35 as against 19 for 1895-96—appears serious, although during 1894-95 the number of such committals was 38. The large majority of these uncontrollable children, however, consist of boys under thirteen years of age whose principal fault was truancy, to which was added the practices of sleeping out, associating with bad companions, and petty thieving. To truancy, however, is mainly due their committal, for in some instances, at least, parents would not have troubled themselves in the matter had it not been for fear of fine under the Education Act.