

No. 3.—SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF, SUMNER.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (ABRIDGED).

I HAVE the honour to lay before you my report for the year 1921. The number of pupils under instruction during the year is shown in the following tabulated statement :—

	Boys.	Girls.	Total.
Pupils of 1920 who returned to the school	52	44	96
Admitted during 1921	30	22	52
Total under instruction	82	66	148
Absent	1	3	4
Total on roll	83	69	152
Left during the year 1921	35	15	50
Expected to return in 1922	48	54	102

Of the 148 pupils under instruction, 38 attended as day pupils and 110 as boarders at the school. The pupils may be classified as under :—

	Boys.	Girls.	Totals.
Deaf children	57	55	112
Lip reading pupils (adults)	2	7	9
Children with defective articulation	13	4	17
Stammerers	10	..	10
Totals	82	66	148

Special day classes, similar to the special class which was instituted in Wellington in 1920, were opened early in the year at Auckland and at Dunedin, and were staffed by teachers from this school. They are attended by partially deaf children that are unable to profit by the instruction given at the public schools, and also by children who stammer or who have other defects of speech. Most of the latter attend as part-time pupils. The number of pupils admitted to these classes up to the end of the year was as follows : Wellington, 55 pupils ; Auckland, 40 pupils ; Dunedin, 60 pupils ; In connection with each of these special classes there is an evening class for the adult deaf, who are given instruction in lip-reading. The number of such that have attended up to the present is as follows : Wellington, 19 ; Auckland, 27 ; Dunedin, 25. As these classes for deafened adults are becoming better known they are increasing in size at a rate which tends to become embarrassing, there being a limit to the number that can be taken by a single teacher in each centre. The lip-readers attending these classes are very enthusiastic, and in each of the three towns mentioned have formed themselves into a club, meeting two or three times a week for practice, which is the main thing in lip-reading.

It would be of advantage if a special day class similar to those already established in Auckland, Wellington, and Dunedin were instituted in Christchurch. In the schools in and around the latter city are many children whose speech requires correction, and who could attend a special class if centrally situated, but who cannot spare the time to come to Sumner. (The same applies to the adult deaf of the district). Meanwhile the general education of many of these defective speakers is being seriously retarded for the want of a little skilled treatment. Defective speech is often, of course, a natural accompaniment and result of feeble mentality, but frequently it is not, and in the latter event it is readily correctable by any teacher who understands the mechanism of speech. The necessity of all young teachers receiving as part of their training a thorough knowledge of the mechanism of speech, and also some practical experience in the work of speech-correction, is evident. I am afraid that far too little of this special knowledge is possessed by most teachers, though it is pleasing to find in some quarters a growing appreciation of its importance.

Of the 112 deaf children under instruction, 24 came from the Auckland District, 5 from Taranaki, 7 from Hawke's Bay (inclusive of Gisborne), 17 from Wellington, 5 from Nelson and Marlborough, 26 from Canterbury, 27 from Otago, and 1 from Australia.

As I have repeatedly pointed out, no time should be lost by parents or by teachers in cases of acquired deafness. Lip-reading is much more readily learned before deafness becomes total than afterwards. There is a mistaken notion prevalent that its acquirement is prejudicial to the hearing, but this is entirely erroneous, even though it be held in some cases by medical men who ought to know better. As a matter of fact, through relieving ear-strain, it is more likely to be beneficial than otherwise. In almost all cases of acquired deafness, unless lip-reading is resorted to, a highly morbid and gloomy state of mind is set up, which has a most detrimental effect on future progress, and which can only be prevented by restoring the deaf person to social intercourse by means of lip-reading. Hence the promptly reporting of all cases of deafness, either complete or partial, should be regarded as a matter of urgency by all responsible persons, more especially by teachers.

There are certain facts about deafness that should be known to all teachers and parents. One of these is that if a child becomes deaf at an early age it will become quite dumb in a few months time, unless it be properly taught. This applies to children up to the age of eight years. After that age, where hearing is completely lost, the speech does not, as a rule, entirely disappear, but has a tendency to become weak and inaudible, and the child exhibits a growing disinclination to speak at all, which in course of time renders it almost dumb. If such children are given the benefit of special instruction without any loss of time their speech will remain natural always. Another fact that should be more generally known is that by the Education Act of 1914, parents, teachers, and others are bound under a penalty to send notification of cases of deafness among children to the Minister of Education. Parents should get the advice of a specialist at the very first symptom of auditory trouble in their children. No time should be lost in the matter, as prevention is better than cure. There are forms of deafness which, if taken in time, can be remedied by skilled treat-