## VICTORIA.

During the period August 2nd to 21st we visited every class in the State School for the Deaf (No. 3774) and the Catholic School for the Deaf, St. Mary's, Portsea. By invitation we inspected the new building for the Kindergarten for Deaf children at Burwood and saw a group of privately taught deaf children at Geelong. We also visited the following centres, the Psychiatric Clinic at the Children's Hospital, the Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, the Departments of Psychology and Architecture at the Melbourne University (where a joint project to provide a clinic for the study of handicapped children is under consideration), the Australian Association for Better Hearing and the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria.

Besides being invited to discuss problems in the education of deaf children with the Director of Education and his staff, we were asked to meet the members of the School Medical Service, the 3AW Appeal Board for Deaf Children and the Board of Management of the Victorian School for Deaf Children.

We are particularly grateful to the Director of Education and his staff, to the Headmaster of the State School for the Deaf and his assistants for their ready co-operation and help.

1. Ascertainment of Deafness.

At the State School there are 213 deaf pupils of school age, at St. Mary's Catholic School, Portsea, 42, and in the Private Group at Geelong 2 pupils. In addition, the State School has one pupil under six years of age, there are 5 at St. Mary's and 2 at Geelong. A small number of children, 10 of whom have been reported to us, are using hearing aids in ordinary schools or as patients of the Psychiatric Clinic at the Children's Hospital.

We are informed that the total number of children of school age in Victoria is 312,561. It would appear that fewer than one per thousand are receiving any form of special educational treatment on account of deafness. In our opinion it is urgent that a survey of the hearing of boys and girls in ordinary schools be initiated. In all areas in Britain and Australia in which surveys have been made the incidence of defective hearing sufficient to handicap school progress is appreciably higher than this.

A beginning has been made in the ascertainment of deafness in children of pre-school age both at the Victorian School for the Deaf and at the Psychiatric Clinic of the Children's Hospital.

2. Victorian School for the Deaf (State School No. 3774 and Associated Residential Institution).

Of the 214 pupils enrolled in the School, 100 are in residence. The schooling of all the pupils is the responsibility of the Education Department and of the Headmaster. All the resident pupils' out-of-school life and activities are under control of the Superintendent of the Institution and his domestic staff. There appeared to be little liaison or co-ordination between the two authorities.

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We visited all classes in the School while they were at work. The pupils included deaf children of three main categories -

(a) children with some naturally acquired speech and language and as a rule with useful capacity to benefit from auditory training;

(b) pupils without naturally acquired speech or language but with some capacity to benefit from auditory training; and

(c) pupils totally deaf to speech.

There was a small percentage of all these pupils who would be classed as educationally sub-normal.

A member of the staff, Mrs. Ward, is especially responsible for teaching and for directing the teaching of speech throughout the School. The senior woman teacher, Miss Reeves, is responsible for testing the hearing of all pupils.

At the time of our visits, 20 pupils were using individual hearing aids. In most cases these have been fitted very recently. Six classes were reported to be equipped with group hearing aids, but we saw few of these in use. The group aids are of pre-war type and were said to break down frequently. As the result of the persistent methods of teaching speech with some help from the use of hearing aids in the majority of cases, many of the pupils can articulate intelligibly. It is all the more regrettable that we heard few pupils talking spontaneously.

We were obliged to recognise that the children of all categories made little or no use of their speech when communicating freely, in or out of school. We were informed that the manual alphabet is commonly used to supplement the oral teaching of English. Sometimes pupils who were able to talk intelligibly made no attempt to speak but used signs and finger-spelling to communicate their thoughts.

The standard of general education was on the whole very fair. Apart from training in carpentry for some of the boys and some instruction for girls in domestic arts, the provision made for teaching handicrafts and arts appeared very inadequate.

In our considered opinion this School suffers from a fundamental weakness. All the pupils, irrespective of category or of residual capacity to hear, are profoundly influenced by the deaf and dumb tradition which is a conspicuous feature both of the residential unit and of the wide spread use of finger-spelling and signing in the playground.

A praiseworthy effort has been made to train new teachers in methods of developing lip reading, speech and language. Owing however, to shortage of staff it has frequent been necessary to place teachers in charge of classes almost immediately after appointment and before they have received ar special training or help to teach deaf children.

We should like to record our appreciation of the devotion and sincere interest in their work of the Headmaster and of his staff.

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We were unable to find evidence that any expert guidance is given to the Supervisors and domestic staff with whom the resident pupils spend their out-of-school hours.

Lip reading and speech are not the basis of communication. We were impressed by the sympathetic and kindly attitude of the Superintendent and Matron. The benefit that can be gained by the pupils from the use of hearing aids is seriously lessened by the adverse acoustic conditions of the class rooms, and by the limited extent and scope of the auditory training that is provided.

3. Residential Kindergarten Unit, Burwood.

The Board of Management and the Superintendent of the Victorian School for the Deaf are to be congratulated on their vision and initiative in undertaking the establishment of this Unit.

The plan of separate houses for groups of ten children each appears to us to be excellent.

Everywhere the rooms are light, spacious and airy, and the buildings as a whole are beautifully adapted to the needs of young children.

4. Catholic School for the Deaf, St. Mary's, Portsea.

Our visit to this School was made on 8th August. The 47 pupils are placed in 5 classes. Of the 5 teachers two hold a Diploma to teach the Deaf, three are certificated for work in ordinary schools and have gained considerable experience in teaching the deaf.

All pupils are taught orally and we saw no finger-spelling or signing used by any children during our visit. There was ample evidence that the children communicated with each other by speech and lip reading - even the youngest three year olds made spontaneous attempts to talk to each other.

The standard of speech and language at each stage are impressively high. In one class there were 7 pupils who had previously been taught on a combined system, but who are now making good progress by oral methods of teaching only. Both in and out of school the children are members of a talking community. The range and quality of the handicrafts are good.

From a study of the children's audiograms and from observations of the pupils, we feel sure that more extensive auditory training would lead to even better rates of progress than are already being attained.

At the time of our visit 6 pupils had individual hearing aids and 15 more were on order.

5. Group of Deaf Children at Geelong privately educated.

At the time of our visit this Group consisted of 2 children aged 4 to 6 years and 2 aged 7 to 10 years in the charge of a fully qualified teacher of the deaf (Miss Elkan, trained at the Hamburg Institute for the Deaf).

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All the pupils have made a good beginning in speech and lip reading and are benefiting from being brought up in a home school in a talking environment. The parents have not only initiated and financed this, but also co-operate with the teacher in providing home training for the children.

At their request we made tests of the children's capacity to hear speech, and we agree that regular auditory training would be highly beneficial to all the children.

6. 3AW Appeal Board.

We wish to place on record appreciation of the contribution to the education of deaf children made by the work of this Board, which has made it possible for the State Department of Education to arrange for two teachers to take the one-year course for teachers of the deaf at Manchester University, England.

7. Recommendations.

(1) That pupils with any appreciable amount of naturally acquired speech, and other pupils who have reached a good standard in lip reading, speech, and school subjects be educated either -

(a) in a separate school; or

(b) in special classes, attached to ordinary schools, but taught by fully-trained and qualified teachers of the deaf.

(2) That children admitted to the proposed separate school or special classes should not be housed with those who rely on silent means of communication. A new residential unit would be needed for this purpose, and also to accommodate those resident pupils who, on leaving the Burwood Kindergarten Unit, give promise of becoming successful oral pupils.

(3) That since our experience leads us to a firm conviction that modern methods of educating deaf children call for a supply of teachers who have undergone full-time training in them, provision be made to ensure that an adequate number of trained teachers of the deaf is available. (Since this recommendation was first made to the Director, arrangements have been completed for the training of 2 teachers at Manchester University in Session 1950-1951).

(4) That at the Burwood Kindergarten the teaching staff should consist of teachers trained in modern nursery methods of educating deaf children under seven years of age.

(5) That systematic and comprehensive auditory training be provided for all pupils who have any useful residual capacity to hear speech and music. That the present group hearing aids be replaced by modern equipment. A piano is urgently needed both for rhythmic work and auditory training.

(6) That in all class-rooms in which hearing aids are used good acoustic conditions be ensured by the fitting of sheet rubber floor coverings and sound-absorbent material, such as cane-ite, on ceilings and a greater part of the wall surface.

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(7) That the present system whereby the school and residential unit come under separate control be reviewed, to bring about an integration of aims and a unified educational and domestic policy.

(8) That at the Residential Kindergarten, Burwood, certain structural and other alterations and additions be made. (Our proposals under this head which are set out in detail under Appendix 1, have already been communicated to the Superintendent who has informed us that arrangements are being made to implement them).

(9) That the status of Supervisors in the Victorian Institution be raised to enable the recruitment of candidates of high quality. It would seem advisable that the services of a young married couple be secured in order that senior boys may have the companionship of a man with capacity for youth leadership.

(10) That means be taken to establish and maintain close liaison between teachers, Supervisors and domestic workers who have regular contacts with the children.

(11) That at the Psychiatric Clinic of the Children's Hospital the services for testing pre-school children suspected of deafness and for guidance to their parents be extended, and that means be taken to ensure specially trained workers.

(12) That in view of the satisfactory progress of the deaf pupils now being taught privately in the Geelong Group under a qualified teacher, financial assistance be granted by the State.

(13) That in view of the outstanding success of the School for the Deaf at St. Mary's, Portsea, consideration be given by the appropriate authorities to a proposal for a Catholic Oral Primary School for Deaf Boys in Victoria.

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