

TABLE C.—NUMBER OF EUROPEAN CHILDREN IN NEW ZEALAND FOR EACH YEAR BETWEEN FIVE AND EIGHT YEARS OF AGE, AND NUMBER RECORDED AS UNDER INSTRUCTION.

|   | Age 5-6 Years. |        |        | Age 6-7 Years. |        |        | Age 7-8 Years. |        |        |
|---|----------------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--------|----------------|--------|--------|
|   | Boys.          | Girls. | Total. | Boys.          | Girls. | Total. | Boys.          | Girls. | Total. |
| (1.) Population (excluding Maoris), December, 1910                                  | 10,748         | 10,521 | 21,269 | 10,508         | 10,051 | 20,559 | 10,156         | 9,932  | 20,088 |
| (2.) Attending public schools, December, 1910                                       | 6,914          | 6,177  | 13,091 | 9,182          | 8,338  | 17,520 | 9,362          | 8,608  | 17,970 |
| (3.) Maori children attending public schools  | 189            | 122    | 311    | 223            | 206    | 429    | 314            | 264    | 578    |
| (4.) European children attending public schools                                     | 6,725          | 6,055  | 12,780 | 8,959          | 8,132  | 17,091 | 9,048          | 8,344  | 17,392 |
| (5.) European children attending Native schools                                     | 23             | 15     | 38     | 29             | 20     | 49     | 31             | 22     | 53     |
| (6.) Attending private schools (estimated from Registrar-General's returns)         | 754            | 920    | 1,674  | 1,000          | 1,240  | 2,240  | 694            | 887    | 1,581  |
| (7.) European children attending public and private primary schools                 | 7,502          | 6,990  | 14,492 | 9,988          | 9,392  | 19,380 | 9,773          | 9,253  | 19,026 |
| (8.) Percentage of European children on rolls of public and private primary schools | 69.8           | 66.4   | 68.1   | 95.0           | 93.4   | 94.2   | 96.3           | 93.2   | 94.7   |

The remarks made in my report of last year in reference to this matter have aroused criticism, and I am glad that it is so; the facts are sufficiently serious to demand very careful examination. It was not intended to attribute blame to any one—teachers, Inspectors, Boards, or Department; but the fact appears to be that we are drifting into a state of things that carries with it, among other grave consequences, the result of postponing the beginning of secondary courses of our boys and girls to a higher age than is desirable. The explanations given do not appear to me to be adequate to account for the facts. Brief reference may be made to some of these explanations:—

(a.) The Inspectors of Schools have found in the promotion of the children from the preparatory classes nothing to compel censure, or even to excite remark; since the slow promotion is general in all districts, this would have been done had the evil been serious. But the facts are there—manifest on the most cursory examination of the figures contained in the returns. It might not be out of place to remind ourselves that when the promotion of pupils was placed in the hands of the teachers a general cry was raised that many teachers would be anxious to promote their pupils too rapidly. The fear thus aroused has checked any such possible tendency, as the figures show, in the promotions from Standard I up to Standard VI; but it may have had the effect of delaying the promotions into Standard I from the infant classes.

(b.) Teachers are agreed as to the necessity and desirability of lengthening the time spent by pupils in the infant-room. No reason is given for this opinion; it seems to be fully met by the consideration that the more natural and concrete methods now fortunately in vogue in the preparatory classes should be continued throughout the whole school course; again, it does not answer the objection that, as regards English (the most important subject at this stage), the reading-books used in Standard I are far too elementary (as the experience of Great Britain and the United States shows) for children of eight to nine years of age.

(c.) The nature and amount of work prescribed for the various classes; increase in work prescribed, chiefly handwork; adoption of slower methods of work necessitated by the present syllabus, &c. The present syllabus, certainly, is intended to insist upon quality rather than quantity of work; the quantity of work, except in English and arithmetic, is in the hands of the teachers and Inspectors; and, finally, it is to the point that these objections are largely overcome by the fact that the interval of time spent in the standard classes from Standard I to Standard VI remains practically the same now as it was in 1905, before the introduction of the present syllabus.

(d.) The fixing of a definite time—the beginning of the school year—for the general promotion of pupils. This might have had some effect the first year it was introduced; but all the necessary adjustments should have been made at once, and it could not account for the continued increase in the proportion of the preparatory classes that has taken place this year. Neither could it account for the large increase that took place between the years 1905 and 1907, before the rule was introduced.

I trust the questions raised thus tentatively in my report last year, and emphasized still further by the returns of the past year, will continue to receive the serious attention of all concerned.

I have, &c.,

G. HOBGEN,

Inspector-General of Schools.