

Bearing in mind that a child must reach the age of fourteen or have gained a Sixth Standard certificate of competency before he can leave school, and that the average age of S4 pupils is 12 years 10 months, and of S5 pupils 13 years 7 months, it may well be asked how it is that so large a percentage leave school before passing S6. No doubt a considerable number have reached the age of exemption, and have been withdrawn as soon as the minimum requirements of the Act have been complied with. But there can be no doubt that a very large number are withdrawn from school before they have reached either the requisite age or the requisite standard. For such, the following remarks made by the Inspectors of the Otago Education Board particularly apply: "The culture and discipline of Standard V and Standard VI are more valuable than those of all the lower classes. It is just here that the child has mastered the use of the tools—reading, writing, and mathematical accuracy—that will tend to give him a taste for intellectual pursuits in after-life. This minimum of instruction is one of the child's birthrights, and it behoves those in authority to see that he is not deprived of it."

It was only a few months ago since the standard of exemption was raised from S5 to S6, and consequently it will be impossible for a year or two to say what has been the effect of the alteration. So far as pupils over fourteen years of age are concerned, the only remedy for their withdrawal from school will be the raising of the age of exemption still higher. If this were done, scholars would fall naturally into three classes: (1) those who pass S6 at an early age, and who, being promising pupils, naturally make their way into the secondary or day technical school; (2) those who pass S6 at the age of thirteen or fourteen, most of whom are immediately withdrawn by their parents from school to enter some form of employment; (3) those who cannot legally leave school till they reach the raised age of exemption—say fifteen years. In the case of these two latter classes, their want of ability, and possibly of industry, during their school life will have its effect in after-school life, and it is particularly in their case that some form of compulsory continuation instruction up to the age of sixteen or seventeen is wanted.

I would suggest as a first step, legal provision for the compulsory attendance, without any local option, either at a day school or a continuation school, of all children up to the age of fifteen years (now their attendance from fourteen to seventeen years of age is a matter of local option).

A further examination of the figures submitted by various education districts is instructive. In a district containing a number of fair-sized towns and one large city it is found that 90 per cent. of the S4 children pass through S5, and 71 per cent. through S6. On the other hand, in three typical rural districts, on the average only 81 per cent. pass through S5, and 58 through S6. The only logical conclusion is that the evil is of commoner occurrence in country districts than in towns, and this is the more to be deprecated as facilities for attending continuation classes are much rarer in the districts where they are obviously most required—the backblocks country.

I have, &c.,

G. HOGBEN,
Inspector-General of Schools.

TABLE A.—NUMBER OF CHILDREN FOR EACH YEAR OF AGE BETWEEN FIVE AND EIGHT YEARS OLD, (1) IN THE POPULATION, (2) ATTENDING PUBLIC SCHOOLS (EXCLUDING MAORIS).

	Age, Years.	December, 1905.			December, 1910.			December, 1911.		
		Boys.	Girls.	Total.	Boys.	Girls.	Total.	Boys.	Girls.	Total.
(1.) Population	5-6	9,487	9,256	18,743	10,748	10,521	21,269	11,668	11,425	23,093
	6-7	9,300	8,841	18,141	10,508	10,051	20,559	11,435	10,982	22,417
	7-8	8,973	8,717	17,690	10,156	9,932	20,088	11,052	10,708	21,760
(2.) Attending public schools	5-8	27,760	26,814	54,574	31,412	30,504	61,916	34,155	33,115	67,270
	5-6	5,719	5,178	10,897	6,725	6,055	12,780	6,962	6,286	13,248
	6-7	7,193	6,539	13,732	8,959	8,132	17,091	9,031	8,324	17,355
(3.) Number attending public schools (2), expressed as percentage of population	7-8	7,804	7,348	15,152	9,048	8,344	17,392	9,766	8,948	18,714
	5-8	20,716	19,065	39,781	24,732	22,531	47,263	25,759	23,558	49,317
	5-6	60.3	55.8	58.1	62.6	57.5	60.1	59.8	55.0	57.6
	6-7	77.3	74.0	75.7	85.3	80.9	83.1	78.9	75.9	77.4
	7-8	87.0	84.3	85.7	89.1	84.0	86.6	88.4	83.6	86.0
	5-8	74.6	71.1	72.9	78.7	73.9	76.3	75.4	71.2	73.3