

various districts. The difference between the highest and lowest average ages for all classes is five months, and the range of difference in the individual classes runs from five months in the preparatory classes to ten months in S3. The lack of uniformity in the various districts is not desirable, as there does not appear to be any reason why the children of one district should be more advanced than those of another, provided the standard of proficiency required for each class is approximately uniform in the various districts. The figures for the Dominion vary very little from year to year, and are themselves too high.

Tables C3 and C4 in E.—2 show the percentages of children in the primary schools of various ages and in the various classes during the last five years. An examination of the figures reveals little alteration from year to year, with the exception that a slight decrease in the percentage of children in the preparatory classes appears during each of the last four years; the percentage fell from 36.33 in 1914 and 35.48 in 1916 to 35.14 in 1917. A still further reduction in this figure is desirable, especially in view of the fact that more than 8 per cent. of the children in the preparatory classes are over nine years of age and more than 20 per cent. over eight years of age. These percentages, it is satisfactory to note, are also a little lower than they were in the previous year.

Children leaving School before passing S6.

From the classification list above and from those of previous years it appears that 84 per cent. of the pupils of S1 reach S5 and only 59 per cent. reach S6, so that approximately 41 per cent. of the pupils of primary schools leave school without doing the work of S6. From returns supplied by Education Boards the number that left school in 1916 without passing S6 was 5,427, being 2,944 boys and 2,483 girls. The figures, though a little lower than they were in the previous year, afford little ground for gratification. The S6 qualification is the least educational equipment with which a child should be permitted to take up his life's work, and the fact that the lack of it to a large extent prevents him from continuing his education afterwards makes the loss the more regrettable. It is not unlikely that among these children there are many who would, if facilities for appropriate further education were placed within their reach, eventually fit themselves to enter the ranks of the industrial workers of the Dominion. The recent extension of the regulations governing free places providing for free education at classes related to industrial occupations (including agriculture and domestic occupations) of pupils leaving the public school without the recognized qualification for further free education will enable the technical schools to move in the direction indicated. These provide, *inter alia*, for the free education of recommended pupils over fourteen years of age who have left the public schools not more than six months previously without obtaining a Standard VI certificate qualifying for further free education. Pupils thus admitted must take subjects bearing upon a trade or industry, including agricultural and domestic occupations, but not including commercial subjects. An increase in the scale of payment is provided to assist the finances of technical high schools and also those of rural classes, the maintenance of which is generally more costly than that of urban classes. These new features are in the direction of making a differentiation between the test or qualification required for further admission to high schools, which will tend to give a bias towards technical and industrial training. In addition, parents whose circumstances necessitate the sending of their children out to work immediately they may leave school will be able to secure further free education for such children.

It might be noted in this connection that whereas in New Zealand a child may leave school at the age of thirteen if he has obtained his certificate of proficiency, or at the age of fourteen otherwise, the English Education Act provides for compulsory full-time attendance at school until the age of fourteen irrespective of the standard of education reached.

Examination of Pupils.

S6 examinations for proficiency and competency are conducted by the Department's Inspectors, the pupils being examined in English and arithmetic, at least, by means of written tests. The certificate of proficiency is a qualification