

The figures for each education district are shown in Table C5 of E.—2. As has been mentioned in previous reports, the various districts, with no apparent reason, show a difference in the average ages for the various classes, the range of difference being as high as eleven months in S5. The figures for the Dominion do not yet show any sign of the lowering of the average ages that is desirable.

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. The proportion of children in the preparatory classes continues to decrease in the manner desired, although the decrease in 1918 must to some extent be accounted for by the diminished number of new entrants. The percentage of children in these classes, which was 36·33 in 1914, is now 33·83, the percentage of children between the ages of five and seven years having decreased only from 18·9 to 17·11 during the same period, thus showing that the smaller proportion of pupils in the preparatory classes is largely the result of more rapid promotion to higher classes. Six per cent. of the pupils of the preparatory classes are still, however, over nine years of age, and 19 per cent. are over eight years of age; these percentages, happily are gradually diminishing. As has been stated in previous reports, the normal child should cover the work of the preparatory classes within two years.

Children leaving School before passing S6.

From the classification table above and from those of previous years it appears that 87 per cent. of the pupils in 1914 reached S5 in 1918, and only 66 per cent. of those in S1 in 1913 reached S6 in 1918, so that approximately 34 per cent. of the pupils of primary schools leave school without doing the work of S6, and 13 per cent. without doing the work of S5. From returns supplied by Education Boards the number over fourteen years of age that left school in 1917 without passing S6 was 5,057 (2,764 boys and 2,293 girls), being more than half as many as left school with a S6 certificate. The figures have decreased during the last two years, but the fact of so many children failing to attain to the very moderate standard of education represented by S6 is a matter for great regret. It is not unlikely that among these children are many who, if the facilities were placed within their reach, would fit themselves to fill creditably positions in the industrial world of the Dominion. Provision was made for an extension of the free-place system at technical schools and classes to afford such children some training in subjects related to industrial occupations. From 100 to 150 free places were granted under the new regulations in 1918, and a further extension of the scheme is anticipated.

Examination of Pupils.

S6 examinations for proficiency and competency are usually conducted by the Department's Inspectors, the pupils being examined in English and arithmetic, at least, by means of written tests. The closing of the schools owing to the influenza epidemic at the end of 1918 prevented, in most cases, the examinations being held by the Inspectors, and certificates were awarded on the teachers' recommendations based on examinations held during the year, and where possible after consultation between the teachers and Inspectors. In some cases subsequent examinations were also held. On the whole the scheme worked well, but naturally it was a difficult matter for inexperienced teachers to arrive at correct estimates, and a general tendency in other cases to accept too low a standard of merit is remarked upon. Inspectors are generally of the opinion that the usual method of awarding these certificates is still to be preferred and should not be materially departed from. As a result of the unusual conditions the number of pupils obtaining certificates of proficiency—10,400, or 73·6 per cent. of the number of candidates—was higher than usual, the percentage for the previous year being 67. The percentage ranged in the various education districts from 60·1 per cent. to 81·5 per cent., showing a range difference of 21·4 per cent., as compared with 25·7 per cent. in 1917. The number of certificates of competency granted was 2,043, or 14·5 per cent. of the number of candidates; of this number 303 were endorsed for merit in science and handwork.