

standards they have reached. A similar calculation to the above has been made in respect of 450,000 children in England, in which two years less has been taken as the normal age, a child being regarded as backward if it was over ten years of age when ready to pass out of S3. From the statistics thus obtained 35 per cent. of the children were found to be backward, 45 per cent. normal, and 20 per cent. advanced. If a similar age were taken for the normal in New Zealand the percentage of backward children would be very much greater than in England. Many of the causes of retardation such as mental backwardness, physical incapacity, and migration from school to school are impossible or difficult to remove. On the other hand, delay in beginning school life is responsible for a great number of children being over the average age, although when measured by the length of time spent at school they cannot be regarded as cases of retardation. The establishment of special auxiliary classes for the care of backward children will have to be extended as opportunity permits.

The average ages of the pupils in the several classes for the two years 1917 and 1918 as at the end of the year's instruction were as follows :—

						1917.		1918.	
						Yrs.	mos.	Yrs.	mos.
Preparatory classes	..	..	..	..	..	7	1	7	0
Class S1	..	..	..	..	..	9	1	8	11
„ S2	..	..	..	..	..	10	2	10	1
„ S3	..	..	..	..	..	11	3	11	1
„ S4	..	..	..	..	..	12	3	12	1
„ S5	..	..	..	..	..	13	1	13	1
„ S6	..	..	..	..	..	13	10	13	11
Mean of average age						9	9	9	10

The figures for each education district are shown in Table C5. 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 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