

Owing to the accumulation of their numbers the percentage of retarded children increases in each succeeding class until S4 is reached, the lowering in the percentage in the upper classes being due to the fact that badly retarded children seldom reach them. The above figures include children retarded one year or more, about two-fifths of the number being retarded two years or more. It is unnecessary again to mention the causes of retardation, some of which are beyond the control of teachers or educational authorities; the object of drawing attention to the matter is to show the necessity for entrance to school at an early age and for avoiding any unnecessary delay in promotion, especially in the lower classes. In comparing the standard ages in New Zealand with those in other countries it should be stated in fairness that where a lower age is taken as being normal the syllabus of instruction will be found to be less comprehensive than it is in this Dominion. The following are the average ages of the pupils in the several classes at the end of the year's instruction:—

						1918.		1919.	
						Yrs.	mos.	Yrs.	mos.
Preparatory classes	..	..	..	..	..	7	0	7	1
Class S1	..	..	..	..	..	8	11	9	0
„ S2	..	..	..	..	..	10	1	10	1
„ S3	..	..	..	..	..	11	1	11	3
„ S4	..	..	..	..	..	12	1	12	3
„ S5	..	..	..	..	..	13	1	13	1
„ S6	..	..	..	..	..	13	11	13	11
Mean of average age						9	10	9	10

The figures for each education district are shown in table C5 in E.-2. In several classes there is a range difference of seven months in the average age for the various districts, any good reason for the variation not being apparent. As will be observed, there are as yet no signs of a lowering of the ages in the various classes or of the mean of the average age.

A certain check may be kept on the length of stay in the preparatory classes by observing the percentage number of children in these classes. In 1919 35·05 per cent. of the whole number of pupils were in the preparatory classes, which is 1·22 per cent. more than in the previous year. The number of children between the ages of five and seven was only 0·3 per cent. more of the total roll than in 1918, the inference being that, instead of an improvement taking place in the direction of shortening the time spent in these classes, there has been a slight tendency in the opposite direction. Six per cent. of the pupils in the preparatory classes were over nine at the end of the year, and 22 per cent. were over eight years of age.

#### *Children leaving School before passing S6.*

In 1914 there were 21,621 pupils in S1 who, allowing for various contingencies, should at the end of 1919 have been in S6. The fact that there were only 13,235 pupils in S6 in 1919 demonstrates the regrettable fact that 39 per cent. of the primary-school pupils leave school without reaching the very moderate standard of education represented by S6. This figure is higher than the one ascertained in 1918, the reduced number of pupils in S6, referred to above, accounting for the fact. Similarly it appears that 16 per cent. of the pupils leave school without doing the work of S5. The law as at present constituted allows children to leave school upon attaining the age of fourteen years irrespective of the class reached, and an amendment in the direction of raising the compulsory school age would unquestionably benefit the leavers here referred to. In 1918 they numbered 4,662, being nearly half as many as left having passed S6. An attempt to assist some of the children leaving school thus ill-prepared for their future work was made by extending the free-place system at technical schools to offer them some training in subjects related to industrial occupations. The attempt has been successful in so far as nearly 1,000 such free places were taken up in 1919 by pupils who had not passed S6.

#### *Examination of Pupils.*

The usual practice of the Inspectors examining the pupils of S6 for the proficiency and competency certificates was reverted to in 1919 after having been partially suspended in 1918 owing to the influenza epidemic. The examinations