

On the assumption that school life is commenced at the age of five years and that two years are spent in the preparatory classes and one year in each standard, pupils should be eight years old at the end of a year in S1, nine years old in S2, &c. In the above table pupils are regarded as below normal classification if they are nine years of age or over in S1, and so on ; and it must be admitted that the large number coming under this heading is arresting—in fact, more than half of the pupils are below normal classification. The following figures show the position for each standard :—

Class.				Normal Classification.	Above Normal Classification.	Below Normal Classification.
				Per Cent.	Per Cent.	Per Cent.
Class P	..	..	..	..	..	21
„ S1	..	..	..	39	14	47
„ S2	..	..	..	37	12	51
„ S3	..	..	..	33	12	55
„ S4	..	..	..	34	12	54
„ S5	..	..	..	35	13	52
„ S6	..	..	..	38	16	46
Classes S1–S6				36	13	51

While 51 per cent. of the pupils are one year or more below normal classification, about 20 per cent. are two years or more below. Beginning school life at a later age than five years doubtless accounts to a great extent for the high ages of the pupils, and other causes beyond the teachers' control are irregular attendance, migration from school to school, and mental backwardness. It is well, however, to keep the fact steadily in view that large numbers of children are much older than they should be for the classes they are in, and everything possible should be done to avoid the waste of time and opportunity represented by such retardation. The fact is not to be overlooked, of course, that modern investigation goes to show that children should be classified less according to age than according to educational ability, which varies at the different ages more than was previously supposed. There is, therefore, always the danger to be avoided of forcing a backward child to attempt work beyond its ability, but it is probable that in our schools the tendency is to err in the other direction, not only backward children being retarded owing to the lack of special attention, but what is now regarded as a much more serious matter—the children with more than average ability being denied the opportunity of progressing at the faster rate suitable to their capabilities. The following are the average ages of the pupils in the several classes at the end of the year's instruction :—

						1919.		1920.	
						Yrs. mos.		Yrs. mos.	
Preparatory classes	..	..	..	..	..	7	1	7	1
Class S1	..	..	..	..	..	9	0	9	1
„ S2	..	..	..	..	..	10	1	10	2
„ S3	..	..	..	..	..	11	3	11	3
„ S4	..	..	..	..	..	12	3	12	3
„ S5	..	..	..	..	..	13	1	13	1
„ S6	..	..	..	..	..	13	11	13	11
Mean of average age						9	10	9	10

The average figures are practically the same as for many years past ; the results from the various education districts also still show an unaccountable range, difference amounting to as much as seven months in several classes. Detailed figures may be found in Table C4 in E.—2. The average age of the pupils at the end of the year S6 is being freely criticized. Careful comparison with the position in other States goes to show that although the age may be too high in New Zealand, it is not higher than prevails elsewhere when equal standards of work are attained. Children leaving the primary schools at lower ages in other countries do so with a smaller equipment for entering upon secondary work. The matter of shortening the primary-school course so as to enable qualified pupils to enter