

CLASSIFICATION OF PUPILS.

The table opposite classifies, according to age and standard of education, the whole of the pupils who were in attendance at public primary schools at the end of 1925.

The heavy lines indicate the normal progress of a pupil who, entering between the age of six years and seven years, spends two years in the preparatory classes and one year in each of the standard classes, and thus completes the work of Standard VI when he is between thirteen and fourteen years of age.

The most important feature to be noted in the table is the extremely large number of children who are in classes below that which should be expected at their age. The number of such pupils in each class is shown by the figures below the heavy lines; and if the table is examined horizontally the figures on the left of the heavy lines indicate the number of retarded pupils in the various groups.

RETARDATION.

Special importance is attached to the table given under the preceding heading of "Classification of Pupils."

The problem of retardation is receiving more thoughtful consideration than ever before. Some interesting investigations have been made along this line, but much more research will have to be done before any definite conclusions can be arrived at. In the meantime the Department is endeavouring to meet the situation in two different ways—(1) reducing the size of the classes, and (2) establishing special classes for backward children.

Several classes for backward children have been established in each of the four centres, as well as in some of the smaller towns, the total number being fifteen. Others are in process of establishment. The problem of the backward child in the country districts is a difficult one that has yet to be faced.

Those classes already established have more than justified their existence. By the removal of discouraging and discouraged pupils teachers have been relieved of a burden, while the pupils themselves have been given a new outlook on life. The relief from strain has changed sullen and bad-tempered pupils into happy children. Not more than sixteen pupils are enrolled in each class, so that individual attention can be given to each pupil. The time-table is, roughly speaking, divided into three equal parts, one-third of the time being given to academic subjects, one-third to handicrafts, and one-third to physical instruction. The parents of the children have in many cases expressed their gratification for the improvement noticeable in their children. This improvement is sometimes less scholastic than personal. The child who was struggling along at the foot of a class, daily growing more conscious of his inferiority, suddenly finds himself with no vastly superior intellects to compete against. He progresses at his own rate, not at the rate of a class, and his failures are no longer constantly before him. The changed atmosphere has a stimulating effect and causes a pleasing development of the personality.

Another type of special class is the opportunity class, of which a few have been established. This class is designed for children who though not necessarily backward have become retarded through a long absence from school because of ill health or some other reason, and for children who have a difficulty with one subject.

PUPILS LEAVING PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

In 1924, 17,726 pupils left the public primary schools; of these, 12,938, or 73 per cent., had passed the Standard VI examination, and 4,788 (27 per cent.) had not passed that examination but had attained the age of fourteen years.