

## II.

## REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF SCHOOLS.

The INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF SCHOOLS to the Hon. the MINISTER OF EDUCATION.  
SIR,—

I have the honour to place before you the following remarks on two matters of general interest arising out of the returns submitted by Education Boards or suggested by Inspectors in their annual reports.

1. *Length of Time spent by Pupils in Preparatory Classes.*

In my last two reports I have had occasion to draw attention to the ever-increasing length of time spent by children in the preparatory classes of the public schools. As the matter is, in my opinion, one of great importance, I venture to bring it once again under your notice.

Percentage of the roll of public schools in the preparatory classes .. .. .	1905.	1906.	1907.	1908.	1909.	1910.	1911.
	28·3	29·4	31·1	34·3	36·7	37·2	37·3
Percentage of the roll of age over five but not over eight .. .. .	1905.	1906.	1907.	1908.	1909.	1910.	1911.
	29·8	30·0	30·1	30·5	31·1	31·1	31·5

It will be noticed that while there has been a steady increase in the percentage of children between five and eight, there has been an astonishing increase in the percentage of pupils in the preparatory classes. It is true that the 1911 figures show signs that this important matter has been to some extent taken in hand by teachers, for this is the first year since 1905 that the increase in the percentage of preparatory pupils has been less than that of pupils between five and eight years. Nevertheless, it is a fact that in the last seven years the proportion of pupils on the roll of the preparatory classes has increased by 32 per cent. as against an increase of only 6 per cent. in the proportion between five and eight years of age.

The following comments may be made on the four causes set out in previous reports :—

(1.) That there may have been an increase in the proportion of young children, say, between five and eight years of age, in the population of the Dominion during the year in question.

There *has* been an increase. In 1911 the proportion of such children in the European population was 6·563 per cent., as against 6·184 in 1905 ; but this increase will account for the discrepancy only in a very small degree.

(2.) That a larger proportion of children may be entering the schools between the ages of five and seven than formerly.

An examination of Table A shows a very slight increase over the percentage for 1905, and a very considerable decrease from that for 1910. It is obvious, therefore, that this cause cannot be seriously considered.

(3.) That a certain proportion of children may be leaving school from the upper classes at an earlier age to go to secondary schools or day technical schools, or to go to work : this would make the numbers in the lower classes appear relatively larger.

A glance at lines 4 and 5 of Table B will show that the very reverse is the case ; the increase in the number of children between twelve and fifteen years of age attending public schools is much greater than the increase in the number of such children in the population—19 per cent. as against 6 per cent.

(4.) That children may be spending a longer time in the preparatory classes than formerly is suggested by the fact that in every standard the average age has increased by from two to four months.

I have therefore been forced to the conclusion that pupils are kept unduly long in preparatory classes, and consequently are retarded throughout their whole school course. Several of the Boards' Inspectors have argued that the time spent in the preparatory classes should not be curtailed, but that pupils might be passed quicker through the lower standards. Such a course, however, has certainly not been generally followed in the past few years, as the time spent in passing from S1 to