

The average percentage of cases of retardation in S1 to S6 inclusive is 19, and the highest rate—23 per cent.—obtains in S3. Investigation into this matter has been made in other countries, where somewhat similar conditions have been found to prevail. The Education Department of Victoria estimates the cases below normal classification in its schools at 22·2 per cent., the figures being based on the assumption that children commence school at the age of six years. Various causes are mentioned to account for the position, of which the most important are—(1) Lateness in beginning school life; (2) physical incapacity due to various causes; (3) mental dulness; (4) irregularity of attendance; (5) migration from school to school. The onus of some of these circumstances rests with the parents, while others are practically unavoidable. It is hoped that the medical inspection of school-children will do something towards removing the evils of (2), the necessity now being fully realized of giving special attention and care to physically weak children. The matter of providing special instruction for mentally backward children is also receiving attention, although in small schools it presents a somewhat difficult problem. In view of the fact that a very lenient view has been taken of what may be regarded as normal classification, the fact that 19 per cent. of the children fall below that standard can scarcely be regarded as satisfactory.

On an entirely different matter—namely, that of the comparison of the number of children in S1 with the number in S6, the classification table is also instructive. It immediately appears that there are only a little over half as many children in the higher standard as there are in the lower. To estimate more accurately, however, the number of S1 children that reach S6 it is necessary to take the number of pupils over a period of five years. The figures are found to be as follow:—

Year.	S1 Pupils.	Year.	S6 Pupils.	Percentage of S1 Pupils reaching S6.
1906	16,839	1911	10,032	60
1907	16,996	1912	9,920	59
1908	17,628	1913	10,373	59
1909	18,668	1914	10,803	58
1910	19,033	1915	11,339	60

The percentage is fairly uniform throughout the period taken, and when allowance is made for children leaving to attend private schools and for other circumstances, it must still be admitted that there is room for improvement in the number of children reaching at least the standard of education represented by S6. On the other hand, it is to be borne in mind that a number of pupils who leave the primary schools before passing S6 afterwards qualify for the S6 examination at continuation classes or classes of a similar nature.

Tables C3 and C4 in E.—2 show the percentages of children at the various ages and in the various classes for the last five years. There has been little difference in the figures during that period, and, in fact, during the last ten years. In 1915 53 per cent. of the children were under ten years of age, and 47 per cent. were over that age. The corresponding figures for 1914 were 54 and 46 respectively. The following figures show a comparison in this respect between conditions in England and in New Zealand:—

	*England.	New Zealand.
5 and under 7 years of age	22·8	18·6
7 .. 12	58·1	56·6
12 .. 15	19·0	23·0
15 years of age and over	0·1	1·8

* Excluding children from three to five years of age.

With regard to the proportion of children in the various classes it has been pointed out for some years that the number in the preparatory classes is too high, and teachers have been warned against the tendency to allow children to remain too long in these classes. Happily the percentage, which was 35·94 in 1915, was the lowest that has obtained for some years, although 21 per cent. of the children in the preparatory classes were over eight years of age, and 7 per cent. were over nine years of age.