

There is little doubt that, generally speaking, more attention has been paid of late years to the methods of teaching young children: more natural methods have been introduced, more handwork, and probably more work calculated both to call forth the natural activities and to stimulate the imagination of those in the "infant" classes. Certainly it is not desirable to begin what is called the "formal work" too soon, even in reading, and still less in arithmetic; but there is surely no reason why from the very beginning there should not be systematic training in language, especially by means of stories told to the children and by the children, and by means of the simple reporting by the children of facts coming naturally within their observation. Nor is it desirable to confine the reading of children of eight or nine to the quantity and quality of matter that is found in the ordinary Infant Reader, and presumably intended—wisely or otherwise—for children of six or seven. The newer methods in the infant classes may justify the spending of a longer time in those classes, although in other countries, where the newer methods have been longer in vogue, and are more fully carried out, it has not been found necessary to retard the progress of the children in reading. If the standard of work in the preparatory classes had been generally raised, then the progress through the standard classes ought to be more rapid than it was before. But this is not the case; the average ages of the pupils in S1 and S6 respectively in December of the last four years have been as follows (in years and months):—

		1906.	1907.	1908.	1909.
S1	...	9.0	9.1	9.3	9.2
S6	...	13.9	13.10	14.0	13.11

The interval in each case is 4 years 9 months.

[It has often been contended, by the way, that the effect of placing the classification of the pupils in the hands of the teachers has been that the latter are inclined to hurry the passage of the children from class to class: the figures just given do not bear out the contention that any general tendency of this kind exists.]

The remedy for the present state of things is, I would suggest, to promote the children sooner out of the preparatory classes into the classes where they will have reading-matter more suited to their natural powers; and (this is important) to continue in the standard classes (especially the lower standard classes) the methods that exercise the activities, observation, and imagination of children in the most natural manner. I am afraid that we are forced to the judgment that children are at present kept too long in the infant classes without any corresponding gain; that the influence of the old standard pass system is still so strong that it follows that the best pupils complete their primary course nearly a year later than they ought to complete it, and that even the average pupil might gain his certificate of proficiency much earlier than he does. The next stage of work—at the secondary school or technical school—might then be begun somewhat earlier than at present, and there would be more chance for the pupil to bring that work to a definite stage before he left school altogether. It is, however, impossible to discuss fully here all the questions suggested by the facts set forth in the tables, especially as there is room for considerable difference of opinion, according to the various ideas that may be held as to the respective "spheres of influence" of primary and secondary schools (including in the latter term the technical schools).

Table C explains itself. I give it as supplementing the information exhibited in Tables A and B.

TABLE C.—NUMBER OF EUROPEAN CHILDREN IN NEW ZEALAND FOR EACH YEAR BETWEEN FIVE AND EIGHT YEARS OF AGE, AND NUMBER RECORDED AS UNDER INSTRUCTION.

	Age 5-6 Years.			Age 6-7 Years.			Age 7-8 Years		
	Boys.	Girls.	Total.	Boys.	Girls.	Total.	Boys.	Girls.	Total.
(1.) Population (excluding Maoris), December, 1909	10,564	10,314	20,878	10,356	9,851	20,207	9,991	9,714	19,703
(2.) Attending public schools, December, 1909	7,074	6,166	13,240	8,602	7,889	16,491	9,243	8,504	17,747
3.) Maori children attending public schools	169	170	339	238	222	460	299	250	549
(4.) European children attending public schools	6,905	5,996	12,901	8,364	7,667	16,031	8,944	8,254	17,198
(5.) European children attending Native schools	16	15	31	32	16	48	17	29	46
(6.) Attending private schools (estimated from Registrar-General's returns)	710	898	1,608	864	1,139	2,003	928	1,227	2,155
(7.) European children attending public and private primary schools	7,631	6,909	14,540	9,260	8,822	18,082	9,889	9,510	19,399
(8.) Percentage of European children on rolls of public and private primary schools	72.2	67.0	69.9	89.4	89.6	89.5	99.0	97.9	98.5

One inference that may be drawn from it is that there are very few children over seven years of age who are not going to school. The figures, indeed, seem almost too good: one would imagine that the children taught at home, together with the deaf, blind, and feeble-minded, would be more than $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the total number of children between seven and eight years of age. It is, of course, possible that, owing to delay in the purging of the rolls, the names of a few children are entered on two rolls; if so, the number of children attending school would appear to be greater than it actually is, but it is not probable that this duplication of names exist to any marked extent.

G. HOGGEN,
Inspector-General of Schools.