

The Inspector-General of Schools has felt it his duty once more to bring under notice (see E.-2) the gradual increase in the proportion of children in preparatory classes. During the year he has obtained fuller information on the subject, and has accordingly been enabled to define the position more accurately. He points out that, while the percentages of children on the school roll from 5 to 8 years of age have increased in the years 1905-11 from 29·8 to 31·4 the percentage on the roll of the preparatory classes has risen from 28·3 to 37·3, an increase of 9 per cent., as against 1·6. The following figures show how much more rapidly the number of pupils in preparatory classes has increased than those of five to eight years of age :—

[illegible]

Several Boards consider that this exceptional increase is not an occasion for alarm or anxiety, as comparatively few pupils proceed to the secondary schools, and the long wait in the preparatory classes compels the average pupil to spend longer at school before reaching the standard of exemption. There can be no doubt, however, that from the point of view of the community at large no benefit can accrue by keeping back pupils capable of more advanced work.

Table D4 shows the number of pupils in each education district receiving instruction in the various subjects set forth in the syllabus. As reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, geography, elementary science and drawing, object-lessons and vocal music are compulsory subjects, and history must be taken unless the parent objects, no separate return has been prepared of these subjects. It may be of interest to compare the numbers doing nature-study, handwork, and elementary agriculture during the past five years. The total number doing handwork in 1910 and 1911 is not available, as the number has been split up under the headings of the various subjects included under the general title of handwork—viz., cookery, woodwork, needlework, elementary agriculture, and other branches of handwork.

				Number of Pupils.				
				1907.	1908.	1909.	1910.	1911.
Roll	..	..	..	141,071	147,428	152,416	156,324	161,648
Nature-study	..	..	..	122,660	128,716	134,651	136,341	129,796
Handwork	..	..	..	105,514	112,952	116,588	..	..
Elementary agriculture and dairy-work			Comprising "Handwork."	6,000	8,000	10,200	15,159	18,546
Cookery	..	..		..	..	..	5,155	6,110
Woodwork	..	..		..	..	..	5,532	6,742
Needlework	..	..		53,789	55,065	55,911	54,606	57,968
Other branches of handwork	..	..		..	..	..	100,772	109,763

It will be seen from the above table that the number taking the various subjects of manual instruction has increased in every case, and in most cases more than proportionately to the increase in the roll number.

Conveyance of Children.

Conveyance by Rail.—Since the year 1895 children out of the reach of a primary school, but living near to a convenient line of railway, have been granted free passes to the nearest public school or private school; in 1902 this privilege was extended to holders of scholarships and free places in secondary schools, district high schools, and technical schools; and at the beginning of 1909 the same concession was granted to other secondary pupils who were compelled to travel by rail in order to attend school.

The amount paid on this account for railway fares in the years 1910 and 1911 was as follows :—

	1910.	1911.
	£	£
Primary pupils	4,961	4,753
Pupils attending—		
(a.) Secondary schools	2,323	2,308
(b.) District high schools.. .. .	1,354	1,426
(c.) Technical schools	3,798	4,359
	£12,436	£12,846