

Junior Free Places may, again, be obtained by those who qualify for a certificate of proficiency—that is, essentially, pupils who pass with credit the Sixth Standard of the public-school syllabus; but on this qualification the age of the candidate must not exceed fifteen years. Generally speaking, Junior Free Places are tenable for two years, with a possible extension in certain cases to three years without examination. In the case of district high schools they are tenable to the age of seventeen. A Senior Free Place is tenable by any pupil who has passed the Intermediate Competitive or Non-competitive Examination, the last-named being regarded as the special examination for Senior Free Places. These two examinations are held simultaneously, and differ mainly in the fact that in the Intermediate Non-competitive Examination different papers are set in certain subjects to meet the requirements of non-competitive candidates.

The passing of the Matriculation Examination is also regarded as a qualification for a Senior Free Place. But in a largely increasing number of cases Senior Free Places may now be obtained without the necessity of having recourse to an external examination. By a recent amendment in the regulations the Minister has been empowered to award Senior Free Places to eligible scholars who have satisfactorily completed a two-years course in a secondary school or district high school in accordance with the specified conditions, and are recommended by the Principal of the secondary school attended, or, in the case of a district high school, by an Inspector of the district, such recommendation being subject to the concurrence of the Inspector-General of Schools. Senior Free Places are tenable up to the age of nineteen.

For free places granted in secondary schools in accordance with regulations grants are payable on a sliding scale, in which the capitation payments vary according to the income of the school from public endowments, and are calculated in such a way as to secure to the school for each free pupil under instruction an annual income from capitation and from endowments taken together of not less than £12 10s. per pupil, which is estimated to be sufficient to cover the necessary expenditure.

The following are some of the figures for 1911 and 1912 in regard to free places in secondary schools:—

	1911.	1912.
Number of secondary schools giving free tuition ..	29	29
Total roll number, excluding lower departments ..	*5,209	5,542
Number of free-place holders ..	4,021	4,459
Free-place holders as a percentage of roll number ..	*77 per cent.	80 per cent.
Total annual payment by Government for free places ..	£43,630	£50,199
Cost to Government per free pupil ..	£10 17s.	£10 15s. 5d.

* 1911 figures amended.

It will thus be seen that there are now very few pupils—only 19·7 in every 100—who pay fees for admission into secondary schools. That the free-place system has undoubtedly been fully taken advantage of by the people of New Zealand is evidenced by the enormous increase in free places in the last few years. In 1903 there were 1,600 free pupils at secondary schools; now the number has increased by nearly 180 per cent.

In order to arrive at the total number of pupils in New Zealand receiving free secondary instruction it will be necessary to include also 157 other holders of scholarships or exhibitions granted by the secondary schools included above or by endowed secondary schools not coming under the conditions for free places, 1,815 pupils in attendance at district high schools, almost all of whom were free pupils, 103 Maori pupils receiving free education in Maori secondary schools, and 1,375 holders of free places in technical schools. Consequently, there are approximately 7,900 pupils receiving free secondary education in the Dominion, exclusive of those holders of free places in technical schools who were art students or evening students, or who were taking courses which may be more appropriately described as technical than as secondary.