

There were, in addition, twenty-four pupil-teachers and ten probationers. The number of the latter class has by regulation been slightly increased for the coming year. The status of our assistant teachers has somewhat improved, but the proportion of uncertificated teachers in the low-grade schools has increased, the difficulty of obtaining certificated teachers being most felt in regard to the smaller country schools. As by the Act the employment of uncertificated teachers is temporary only till certificated teachers can be obtained, those in Grade II schools are there only on sufferance, as most of their positions could be filled by certificated teachers from Grade I.

The examinations for proficiency certificates at the various centres were again conducted under the personal supervision of the Inspectors. The local centres were the same as those taken last year—namely, Nelson, Westport, Wakefield, Motueka, and Granity. In outlying and remote schools, many of which occur in this district, we usually held this examination on the occasion of our latest visit to the school. Many of the candidates sent forward very commendable papers that were evidently the outcome of sound teaching. The chief cause of failure was weakness in English or arithmetic, that often prevented the candidates from attaining the qualifying total mark.

Of 411 candidates, 228 gained proficiency and 158 competency certificates, these figures showing a better result than the return for 1911. In addition to these numbers, sixty-three candidates presented themselves at special examinations, twenty-four of whom gained proficiency certificates and twenty-four competency.

Most of the items in the following summary for the public schools of the district form part of the Inspectors' annual return :—

Classes.				Number on Roll.	Present at the Annual Examination.	Average Age of Pupils in each Class.	Average Age for the Dominion in 1911.
						Yrs. mos.	Yrs. mos.
Standard VII	...	...	...	114	112	14 11	15 0
" VI	...	...	...	411	395	13 11	13 11
" V	...	...	...	526	514	13 2	13 2
" IV	...	...	...	651	643	12 3	12 2
" III	...	...	...	772	755	11 3	11 3
" II	...	...	...	773	762	10 1	10 2
" I	...	...	...	815	791	9 1	9 1
Preparatory	...	...	...	2,249	2,166	6 10	7 1
Totals for 1912				6,311	6,138	9 9	...
Totals for 1911				6,151	5,847	9 9	9 9

As we have already pointed out, the total roll is now higher than it has ever been, an increase being noticeable in every standard class except Standard VII, which is lower by twenty-three. Of the 114 pupils in this standard, eighty-nine were in the secondary classes of the district high schools. The preparatory division is also less by 100 than last year, so that the proportion that it bears to the whole—35 per cent.—has fallen 3 per cent. The Inspector-General has for the last three years been raising a strong protest against the disproportionate growth of the preparatory class throughout the Dominion, concluding that teachers were now retaining their pupils too long in infant work when they might be advanced to that of Standard I. There were evidently good grounds for such a complaint, and good service has been done in calling attention to the defect. The percentage has grown persistently and rapidly from 1905 to 1910, till in 1911, the further increase having been but slight, it was for the Dominion 37 per cent. The Inspector-General evidently estimates the normal life of a child in the preparatory division as two years, and 30 per cent. a maximum proportion of children for the preparatory classes. But the preparatory time is generally nearer three years than two years, or nearly one-third of the child's school life, so that when we consider that the returns are estimated at the end of the school year, when the preparatory class is fullest, and Standards V and VI, through the year's leakage, at their lowest, 33½ per cent. or even 35 per cent. does not appear to us abnormal. At the same time, no satisfactory explanation has been given for the rapid increase of late years—that is, for the fact that seven years ago many of our children at the same age were apparently further advanced than those of to-day.

At inspection visits we have in several schools found in the upper preparatory classes children that were, in our opinion, able to undertake Standard I work; and our complaints *re* this faulty classification have usually met with prompt attention at the hands of head teachers, and possibly their action may have had some appreciable effect in reducing the number of pupils in the infant classes. The subdivisions of the preparatory class even in our largest schools do not exceed five, so that the schemes of work for them should be drawn up on the assumption that promotions are to be made at least every six months. Some of our largest schools have been working upon this plan, and one has not only quickly reduced both its undue proportion of preparatory class and their high average age to normal conditions, without any ill effects on the lower-standard classes, but has also succeeded in putting some of the brighter of these latter through two classes in the one year.

The average age of the different classes shows little variation, except that in the preparatory it has fallen three months, possibly a result of the promotion of the elder children referred to above.

As usual, we append notes upon the treatment which certain subjects of instruction receive.

Reading.—We have again to report satisfactorily on this branch of English, and though only isolated cases of outstanding excellence occur, still it is a matter for congratulation that some 90 per cent. of our schools are recorded as doing satisfactory work in this subject. As we have before pointed