

The figures are not quite so good as those of last year, there being no apparent tendency to lengthen the period of stay at secondary schools; little else can be expected, unless compulsion is exercised, while the age of the pupils remains as high as it is. It is found that the average age of entrants is fourteen years, three-quarters of the entrants being between the ages of thirteen and fifteen years. At the beginning of the year one-thirteenth of the pupils in the schools are under fourteen years of age, three-thirteenths are between fourteen and fifteen years, four-thirteenths are between fifteen and sixteen years, and five-thirteenths are over sixteen years of age. It is clear that the most effective method of increasing the period of secondary education is to lower the age at which it is entered upon. This question, which involves the reduction of the primary-school syllabus, is at present receiving the study and attention of the Department. The opinion is expressed in a recent report of the English Departmental Committee on Scholarships and Free Places that the best age for transfer from the elementary to the secondary school is between eleven and twelve, and rather later if a junior technical school is going to be entered. The one year's instruction for which 25 per cent. of the pupils remain at secondary schools can be of little value, as it means that only a beginning is made in the study of several new subjects. If such pupils had begun upon a specially adapted secondary course at an earlier age it is most probable that they would have been able to leave school at the same age as at present with a much more efficient educational equipment.

CURRICULUM OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS.

Although there are no departmental regulations directly governing the curriculum of secondary schools, the regulations defining the subjects of instruction to be taught to free-place holders and the prescribed syllabuses of the various public examinations to a large extent control the character of the courses of work undertaken. Instruction must be provided for junior-free-place holders in English, history and civics, arithmetic, mathematics, a branch of science, and in two additional subjects which may be one or two foreign languages, science subjects, or some such subject as commercial work, woodwork, drawing, &c. The study of home science is compulsory for every girl holding a junior free place.

The Department's Inspectors of Secondary Schools visit all secondary schools inspecting the work, conferring with the teachers on teaching matters, and discussing with the Principals details of organization and method. The work of the pupils is also inspected—frequently by means of written or oral tests—for the award of senior free places and of lower and higher leaving-certificates.

Besides the general or professional course, special courses are now provided at most secondary schools for pupils not intending to follow an academic or professional career. The study of Latin is generally excluded from such courses, which frequently have a commercial, agricultural, or domestic bias. From an examination of the subjects taken by pupils it appears that Latin is now taken by only 52 per cent. of the boys and by 34 per cent. of the girls; French is studied by 76 per cent. of the boys and by 91 per cent. of the girls; agriculture is taken by 709 boys; commercial subjects by 1,699 boys, or 31 per cent., and by 734 girls; woodwork is taken by 530 boys, and cookery or needlework by 1,789 girls. The fact that some of the subjects mentioned are studied during only a portion of the time spent at the secondary school results in a smaller percentage appearing to study such subjects than is actually the case.

In district high schools subjects bearing more or less directly on rural pursuits and domestic life are given prominence. Sixty-two per cent. of the boys take agricultural science, 31 per cent. dairy-work, 55 per cent. woodwork, and 80 per cent. chemistry and physics; while 40 per cent. of the girls take domestic science, and 56 per cent. needlework and cookery. It cannot be said, however, that the rural course is very popular, parents appearing to prefer their children to follow the ordinary programme of work prescribed for public examinations. The task of providing courses both for pupils who intend to continue their scholastic career and for those shortly entering upon some vocation constitutes the difficulty of district high schools where the number of pupils is not sufficiently large to warrant the employment of staffs of teachers numerous enough to teach the wide range of subjects required.