

On the assumption that school life is commenced at the age of five years and that two years are spent in the preparatory classes and one year in each standard, pupils should be eight years old at the end of a year in S1, nine years old in S2, &c. In the above table pupils are regarded as below normal classification if they are nine years of age or over in S1, and so on ; and the large number coming under this heading is arresting—in fact, more than half of the pupils according to this standard are below normal classification. The following figures show the position for each standard:—

Class.				Normal Classification.	Above Normal Classification.	Below Normal Classification.
				Per Cent.	Per Cent.	Per Cent.
Class P	..	..	..	..	..	20
„ S1	..	..	..	38	14	48
„ S2	..	..	..	38	13	49
„ S3	..	..	..	34	12	54
„ S4	..	..	..	32	12	56
„ S5	..	..	..	34	12	54
„ S6	..	..	..	38	14	48
Classes S1–S6				36	13	51

While 51 per cent. of the pupils are one year or more below normal classification, about 20 per cent. are two years or more below. Beginning school life at a later age than five years doubtless accounts to a great extent for the high ages of the pupils, and other causes beyond the teachers' control are irregular attendance, migration from school to school, and mental backwardness. It is well, however, to keep the fact steadily in view that large numbers of children are much older than they should be for the classes they are in, and everything possible should be done to avoid the waste of time and opportunity represented by such retardation. The fact is not to be overlooked, of course, that modern investigation goes to show that children should be classified less according to age than according to educational ability, which varies at the different ages more than was previously supposed. There is, therefore, always the danger to be avoided of forcing a backward child to attempt work beyond its ability, but it is probable that in our schools the tendency is to err in the other direction, not only backward children being retarded owing to the lack of special attention, but, what is now regarded as a much more serious matter, the children with more than average ability being denied the opportunity of progressing at the faster rate suitable to their capabilities. The following are the average ages of the pupils in the several classes at the end of the year's instruction:—

				1920.		1921.	
				Yrs. mos.		Yrs. mos.	
Preparatory classes	..	..	..	7	1	7	1
Class S1	..	..	..	9	1	9	1
„ S2	..	..	..	10	2	10	3
„ S3	..	..	..	11	3	11	3
„ S4	..	..	..	12	3	12	3
„ S5	..	..	..	13	1	13	2
„ S6	..	..	..	13	11	14	0
Mean of average age				9	10	9	11

The average age varies very little from year to year and shows no sign of becoming lower. The difference in the figures from the various education districts is difficult to account for and is not regarded as satisfactory. The opinion is quite established that the average age of fourteen for passing S6 is much too high, and the fact that the pupils enter upon their secondary course of education at least two years too late in life is now regarded as a serious flaw in our education system. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, an effort is being made to have the matter remedied, and it is intended shortly to make the experiment in three or four districts of shortening the primary course to such an extent that the average pupil will be transferred to a junior high school at the age of twelve years, at which stage the post-primary course will be entered upon.