

A record is kept of the percentages of children in the various classes, the percentage of pupils in the preparatory classes being in 1921, 34·40 per cent. of the whole number—a very slightly lower figure than that for the previous year. Any reduction in this figure is welcomed as one sign that pupils are being promoted more rapidly out of these classes and that the suspected retardation is being overcome. The fact still remains, however, that at the end of the year 20 per cent. of the pupils in the preparatory classes were eight years of age and over, and 6 per cent. nine years of age and over, showing that there is still considerable scope for improvement in this respect.

Examination of Pupils.

(Table C5 in E.-2.)

The usual practice was followed in 1921 of holding S6 examinations for the award of certificates of proficiency and competency, the Inspectors as a rule conducting the examinations, but in the case of some large schools contenting themselves with carefully reviewing the work done at the teachers' examinations held throughout the year. Where the teachers are thoroughly experienced the latter method commends itself, as it improves the attitude of the pupil towards his daily task and does not admit of his best efforts being confined to a short period at the end of the year. The examination resulted in 11,633 certificates of proficiency being awarded, the number representing 72·4 per cent. of the public-school S6 roll, and 2,395 certificates of competency, representing 14·9 per cent. of the roll. Included in the number of competency certificates were 348 which were endorsed for special merit in handwork or science. The percentage of certificates awarded is 2·3 higher than in the previous year. A matter of serious consideration arising out of the results is the wide difference in the figures of the various districts, which in the case of the proficiency certificates ranged from 59·2 per cent. in Nelson to 82·2 per cent. in Hawke's Bay. It is difficult to believe that the efficiency of the school-work varies between one district and another to the extent of 23 per cent., so that part, at least, of the difference must be considered due to the variation in the standard set up by Inspectors. The Department's endeavour is to make this standard as uniform as possible, and Inspectors are urged to use their best efforts in the same direction. The fact that in some districts there are fairly uniform results year after year in spite of changes in the inspectorate goes to show that differences in the standard set by Inspectors may not be the only factor in the case, which is also more or less confirmed by the fact that the district with the highest record of passes in 1921, although under the same inspectorate a few years ago, produced the poorest results. In this district the higher records are attributed to a genuine improvement in the efficiency of the schools. The matter is a serious one from the point of view that if the examination results do not accurately indicate the relative efficiency of the pupils in the various districts, pupils below the average standard are being awarded free secondary education in some districts while pupils in other districts above the average are being denied this privilege.

DESTINATION OF PUPILS AFTER LEAVING THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

Of 16,000 children leaving the primary schools in 1920, 11,400 had passed S6, and 4,600, or 29 per cent., had not done so. The figures show an improvement of 5 per cent. over the previous year in the number having passed S6 before leaving. A certain proportion of those leaving without the minimum educational equipment regarded as necessary are very backward children who probably would be little benefited by further teaching along the usual lines, but there still remains a large number who, owing to external conditions, have reached only S4 or S5 at the age of fourteen years, and it is a matter for regret that these children are denied at least one year's further schooling or that it was not possible to pass them more quickly through the standards. Of those leaving school without passing S6 it appears that approximately 46 per cent. of the boys take up farming pursuits and 60 per cent. of the girls domestic duties, 20 per cent. learn trades, and the remainder follow miscellaneous callings, only a small proportion receiving any further education. The provision of free places at technical schools offering