

PROBLEM OF RETARDATION.

The table opposite classifies, according to age and standard of education, the whole of the pupils who were in attendance at public primary schools at the end of 1926.

The heavy lines indicate the normal progress of a pupil who, entering between the age of six years and seven years, spends two years in the preparatory classes and one year in each of the standard classes, and thus completes the work of Standard VI when he is between thirteen and fourteen years of age.

It must be noted that this table is compiled from statistics furnished at the end of the year by the Education Boards. The pupils are on the point of entering their new classes, hence it may be held that the table does not quite indicate the true position, and that the heavy lines might just as correctly be drawn one stage lower for each class. Some explanation is needed for the presence of some very old pupils in the lower classes. These are either Maori children whose education has begun late, or pupils of subnormal intelligence who ought to be educated in special classes. However, even if these two classes of retardates are excluded, the table shows that a considerable amount of retardation exists in the primary schools. With the object of throwing clearer light on this matter the Department made a close investigation into the position so far as it was revealed by the school promotion class-lists. At the outset it cannot be too emphatically stated that the term "retarded" does not necessarily mean "mentally defective." A child is said to be retarded when his progress at school is slower than the average, but this may be due to many causes other than lack of intelligence. For instance, he may lose a year or part of a year through illness. When he returns to school his state of health may be such that he is unable to pick up the threads for a little time, and he becomes retarded. Changes of teachers and changes of schools will bring about the same result, as will also admission to school at a late age. The child's ability may be quite up to the average but circumstances are against him. It is his education, not his mentality, that is retarded.

The following table shows the results of the investigation referred to :—

TABLE SHOWING PERCENTAGE OF RETARDATION, ACCORDING TO CLASS-LISTS.

Education District.	Number of Children enrolled.	Number of Extreme Retardates.	Percentage.	Percentage less Maoris and Foreigners.
Auckland	65,888	4,202	6·37	5·11
Taranaki	11,674	495	4·24	3·40
Wanganui	17,220	638	3·70	3·23
Hawke's Bay	16,492	633	3·89	2·09
Wellington	27,452	757	2·76	2·56
Nelson	7,118	210	2·95	2·95
Canterbury	37,384	1,127	3·01	2·91
Otago	21,177	396	1·87	1·85
Southland	12,402	232	1·87	1·85
	216,807	8,690		

Percentage of extreme retardates in Dominion, 4·08. (NOTE: Extreme retardates are those children who were ten years of age and still in the infants' department, eleven years of age and still in Standard I, &c.)

Teachers were asked to give an explanation of each case of extreme retardation, and the results have been summarized in the following table :—

TABLE SHOWING EXPLANATIONS FOR 8,690 EXTREME RETARDATES.

	Number.	Percentage.
No reason	1,605	19
Maoris or foreigners	1,242	14
Lack of intelligence	2,904	33
Lack of opportunity	2,278	26
Immigrants or changes	661	8
	8,690	

According to the opinions given by teachers, which we assume to have been well considered, there are in the Dominion some 2,904 children whose retardation is due to lack of intelligence. This represents 1·34 of the school population. Other researches carried on by the Department indicate that the percentage of children whose lack of intelligence is so marked that they require permanent special treatment is about 1·6. There appears, therefore, reasonable ground for believing that