

AGE AND CLASSIFICATION OF PUPILS.

The table on the previous page classifies, according to age and standard of education, the whole of the pupils who were in attendance at public primary schools at the 30th June, 1928. The table does not give a reliable basis for estimating the extent of retardation in the public schools, since there are included children who on account of racial difficulties, or sickness, or mental deficiency, or similar cause have either entered school late or have suffered breaks in their school career.

The percentage distribution of pupils amongst the various classes and age groups was as follows :—

Class.				Percentage of Total Roll.	Age Group.				Percentage of Total Roll.
Special classes for backward children				.. 0.2	5-6	..	..	..	9.1
Primer				.. 28.9	6-7	..	..	..	11.7
Standard	I	..	..	.. 11.9	7-8	..	..	..	11.9
	II	..	..	.. 12.1	8-9	..	..	..	11.6
	III	..	..	.. 12.8	9-10	..	..	..	10.8
	IV	..	..	.. 12.3	10-11	..	..	..	11.0
	V	..	..	.. 11.6	11-12	..	..	..	11.4
	VI	..	..	.. 10.0	12-13	..	..	..	10.5
	VII	..	..	.. 0.2	13-14	..	..	..	7.8
				100.0	14-15	..	..	..	3.4
					15-16	..	..	..	0.7
					Over 16	..	..	..	0.1
									100.0

SPECIAL CLASSES FOR BACKWARD CHILDREN.

The establishment of special classes for backward children has been continued, and the many requests for such classes have necessitated the appointment of an assistant supervisor. On the 30th June, 1928, there were 386 children (241 boys and 145 girls) enrolled in special classes. A training course, held in Wellington in February, was attended by thirty-three teachers. Of this number, twenty-one were already engaged in teaching backward children, five were beginning for the first time on the 1st March, 1929, and the remainder hope to be employed on this work as opportunity arises. The question occupying the minds of all interested in the mentally handicapped is the employment of these children when school-days are over. The establishment of after-care associations similar to those working in England and Scotland is receiving the consideration of those interested in the work, and it is anticipated that some definite suggestions will be acted upon in the coming year. Another question under consideration is the education of those children whose abilities are too limited for them to derive benefit from the special class. The Department recognizes that something must be done to meet the needs of these children, and is co-operating with the Mental Deficiency Board in the matter. The education of backward children living in the country is a difficult problem that will have to be solved in the future.

ELIMINATION OF LARGE CLASSES.

During the year the gradual elimination of large classes was proceeded with, and, having regard to the many difficulties in the way, reasonable progress was made. In February, 1928, 67 per cent. of the classes in public schools of Grade IV and over had more than forty children, and 3 per cent. had more than sixty. By February, 1929, the percentage of classes with over forty pupils had been reduced to 64, and the percentage of classes with over sixty pupils had been reduced to 2. Since the beginning of 1929 the Department has approved of the appointment of more than one hundred additional assistants, so that there should, when this report is published, be no class of more than sixty pupils in the Dominion.