



# THE ICELANDIC NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR COMPULSORY SCHOOLS

General Section

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture



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## PREFACE

The National Curriculum Guide contains the frame and conditions for learning and teaching based on the principles of existing laws, regulations and international conventions. Six fundamental pillars have been developed within this frame and they form the essence of the educational policy. They include the working methods, content and the learning environment at every school level and form important continuity in the Icelandic educational system. These pillars are literacy, sustainability, health, and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity.

It is of great importance to develop systematically the knowledge, skills and attitudes that strengthen the individuals' future ability to be critical, active and competent participants in a society based on equality and democracy. The fundamental pillars are, among other things, expected to improve this. The general public should be adequately educated to be able to keep the authorities sufficiently in check, whether this is within the economic, political, media or other social sectors. Schools are factually the only institutions of society that can guarantee youth an opportunity to prepare for active participation in a democratic society, exercise critical and creative thinking and to face diverse social and cultural circumstances.

It has long been known that there will be no real development in educational work without the support of teachers and school administrators. Education policy, organisation, study material and school buildings can be improved over and over again, but if the changes are not put into effect in schools, this is all of no use. The implementation of a new way of thinking in school activities is based on close cooperation of educational authorities with those who are the mainstay of the work carried out in schools.

I hope that this curriculum guide will prove valuable for Icelandic schools at a time of reconstruction, and I urge school personnel, parents, custodians and pupils to familiarise themselves with the content of the guide and to work according to its basic ideas.



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## INTRODUCTION

The general section of the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools stipulates the objectives and organisation of school activities at the compulsory school level. In this curriculum guide, the role of the National Curriculum Guide, general education and the fundamental pillars of education are discussed, and so are evaluation of school activities and other issues. The National Curriculum Guide details certain provisions of the Compulsory School Act, No. 91, 12 June 2008 and also regulations concerning learning and teaching at compulsory school. It discusses pupils and school personnel and lays down the common objectives for learning and teaching in all Icelandic compulsory schools. The National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools describes the pedagogical and educational role of the compulsory school and its general policy for teaching and the organisation of teaching. The National Curriculum Guide details provisions on school subjects and fields of education and also on emphases and proportions. A reference timetable, showing the relative proportion of subjects and subject areas, is included in the National Curriculum Guide. Each compulsory school decides whether specific subjects and subject areas are taught separately or in an integrated manner but an effort should be made to make education as integral as possible. The National Curriculum Guide defines competence criteria for each subject area and each subject. Pupils should have an opportunity to achieve the competence criteria of the various subject areas and subjects in different ways. Study progress criteria define at what point pupils have completed the various subjects and subject areas. Criteria are formulated for pupils who complete compulsory education in less than ten years.

The National Curriculum Guide is issued by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture in the same manner as regulations and serves diverse purposes. It is both a means of control to execute provisions of law, instructions of the educational authorities on school policy and a compilation of the common objectives for school activities in the whole country. The National Curriculum Guide is to coordinate education and teaching as far as necessary and to ensure the right of all pupils for a defined minimum education and their equal rights to study.

The National Curriculum Guide is to serve different parties. It describes the objectives and requirements common for all pupils, teachers and school authorities and other school personnel. At the same time, it is criteria for standardised assessment in compulsory schools, evaluation of school activities, guidelines for those who produce study material or are engaged in teacher education, it is the basis for writing school curriculum guides and self-evaluation in schools and for the policy making of local authorities. The National Curriculum Guide also provides information and criteria for parents so they can follow the school activities, study progress and the welfare and wellbeing of the pupils. Additionally, the National Curriculum Guide provides pupils with diverse information about school activities.





# ROLE OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM



The National Curriculum Guide is based on the Preschool Act, No. 90, 12 June 2008, the Compulsory School Act, No. 91, 12 June 2008, and the Upper Secondary School Act, No. 92, 12 June 2008. The National Curriculum Guide is a framework for school activities at these school levels and a guide through their objectives and goals. It gives a comprehensive view of education and expands on the education policy of these laws.

The National Curriculum Guide is intended for school administrators, teachers and other personnel of the educational system. It also provides information about school objectives and activities for pupils, their parents, public institutions, associations, social partners and the general public. The guide is, in a sense, a contract that the nation makes with itself on education.

## The role of the National Curriculum Guide is multiple:

- The National Curriculum Guide illustrates the public education policy, a description of study programmes and study requirements; specifications which schools and their personnel are to follow in their educational planning. The National Curriculum Guide is thus to ensure children and youth advantageous conditions for education in accordance with the current law and educational policy.
- The National Curriculum Guide is the main administrative tool used by educational authorities to ensure coordination and synchronisation in schools in the execution of a common educational policy. The National Curriculum Guide is therefore one of the

main prerequisites for the Ministry of Education to fulfil its assigned role in directing and supervising the quality and execution of education.

- The National Curriculum Guide defines the framework of administrators, teachers and other personnel of individual schools in their planning, execution and evaluation of school activities which they must carry out, as detailed, for example, in the school curriculum guides.
- The National Curriculum Guide provides pupils and their custodians with information about the quality system and primary criteria on which school activities are based. It is the basis for evaluation of school activities and study assessment in schools. The National Curriculum Guide is intended to provide teachers, pupils and their parents with information on the education of children and youth at each educational level. The National Curriculum Guide is also intended for those who train teachers and other school personnel, as well as those who create study material, research or survey of educational activities.

## 1.1 The general section of the National Curriculum Guide

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Various issues that are discussed in the National Curriculum Guide are common for preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school. Chapters 1 to 3 are the same for the curriculum guides of all three levels, and there the objectives of the educational system are discussed, general education and the objectives of the school system, in addition to the fundamental pillars of education and evaluation of school activities. Emphasis is on flexibility and continuity in the educational system, both in content and working methods. Additional emphasis is on school development and general professionalism of teachers at all levels.

In the general section of the National Curriculum Guide for Preschool, Compulsory School and Upper Secondary School, the role of each level is described and the special emphasis in learning and teaching at each level: their objectives, tasks, and working methods. In the school curriculum guides published by each school, the policy of the National Curriculum Guide is developed in accordance with the policy of the school in question, the pupil body, the school's professional emphasis and special characteristics.

## 1.2 The role of schools

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Schools are educational institutions and their role is defined in laws on education. Icelandic schools constitute a coordinated whole, the educational system, which is to ensure consistency and continuity in education from preschool to university and adult education. Emphasis is on integral educational policy and clearly defined divisions between school levels so that pupils can pass easily from preschool to compulsory school and from compulsory school to upper secondary school in accordance with their individual educational performance

and development. Pupils should also have the opportunity to study at two school levels simultaneously if it is appropriate for their education. Every school level aims at offering varied tasks and working methods in order to meet different individual needs and encourage the overall development, welfare and education of each pupil.

The main objective of preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school is to encourage the general education of the citizens. Schools should make an effort to operate according to the status and needs of children and youth. Educational work is to encourage their active participation in democratic society, within and outside school.

The content and tasks of school activities are incorporated in fields of study, subjects or course units. It should be kept in mind that fields of study, subjects or course units are not goals in themselves but aids to facilitate meaningful education and to achieve the objectives of the educational work. The National Curriculum Guides of the three school levels therefore define objectives in accordance with the characteristics of each school level, and the age and development of children and youth.

In the organisation and tasks of school activities and in the working methods of schools, attention should be paid to learning environment and communication that is conducive to general education. General education is the basis for vocational education and all specialised education. Learning and education take place not only in schools. Education is a lifelong process. It is important that schools encourage their pupils' initiative for studying, their enjoyment and enthusiasm and thus promote their education.

In order to achieve the objectives of welfare, learning and education, the working methods of preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools, as well as the interaction between pupils and between pupils and their teachers, are no less important than the tasks set in classes. The working methods of schools should be based on tolerance and equality, democratic cooperation and responsibility.

### **1.3 Teacher professionalism**

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The role of teachers is crucial in all school activities. Their work is vital in the school system, such as teaching, administration, upbringing, counselling, research and development. Thus school administrators, remedial teachers and counsellors belong to the body of teachers. Well-educated and enthusiastic teachers are the prerequisite for the quality of education and success in school activities at all school levels.

Teacher professionalism is based on their special vocational education, knowledge, attitudes and work ethic. Teacher professionalism concerns pupils, their education and welfare. Effective communication and constructive teaching enhances the studies and competences of children and youth. Teachers are not only responsible for imparting knowledge to their pupils but also giving them an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills, encouraging their joy



of working and nurturing creative thinking. Teachers guide children and youth in their studies and the evaluation of their studies and also support them to adopt a healthy way of life. They endeavour to create good school atmosphere, fair work procedures and an encouraging learning environment.

At the beginning of the 21st century, extensive changes have taken place in Icelandic society and these have both direct and indirect influence on the educational system, the pupils' studies and the work of teachers. Whether it is the economy or industrial affairs, social issues or migration, technology or communications, there are radical changes taking place that will influence cultural life and knowledge, education and upbringing. Changes in Icelandic society have truly been swift in recent years, making increasing demands on schools in assisting society to understand these changes and cope with new conditions. These changes increase the demands on teachers, both in analysing social changes and adopting school activities to the present status in a responsible manner.

Teachers cooperate with school administrators on the development of school curriculum guides consistent with conditions and special emphasis at each school level. It is the responsibility of teachers to implement professionally in their teaching and other school activities the stipulations of education law and the policy that is specified in the National Curriculum Guide.

## GENERAL EDUCATION

# 2

Definitions of general education are not consistent. Such definitions vary with time and place and even depend on the individual. The seven liberal arts were the frame for general education of the upper classes in the Classical World. In the Middle Ages the church defined general education in Europe to meet its own needs, but with the Industrial Revolution new technology and academic studies appeared that laid the foundation for general education in modern society. In the 21st century general education is defined with regard to social and individual needs.

At any given time, general education advances the capacity of the individual for meeting the challenges of everyday life. General education therefore contributes towards the individuals' understanding of their characteristics and abilities and consequently their capacity to fulfil their role in a complex society. It is at the same time both individually and socially oriented.

People acquire general education not only within the educational system. However, the school system is the most important basis for society to ensure general education. It is therefore appropriate to explain the fundamental pillars in the National Curriculum Guide and connect them to the main fields of knowledge and skills that the individual is offered at school. General education is based on varied studies of the principal aspects of our culture, environment and society. General education is the goal of integral school activities and studies in fields of study, subjects and course units. Definition of the fundamental pillars is an attempt to map the main fields of the general education at which schools aim.

## 2.1 Fundamental pillars

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The educational policy that appears in the National Curriculum Guide is based on six fundamental pillars on which the curriculum guidelines are based.

These fundamental pillars are:

- literacy,
- sustainability,
- health and welfare
- democracy and human rights,
- equality,
- creativity.

Each of the fundamental pillars derives from laws on preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school. There is also reference to other laws which include legal provisions for education and teaching in the school system, such as in the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, No. 10/2008. In addition, government policy in various issues is taken into account, as, for example, published in Welfare for the Future regarding important policy issues on sustainability. International conventions to which Iceland is a party are taken into consideration, for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the policy of international institutions of which Iceland is a member. Here the UNESCO policy on general education and sustainable development is an apt example and also the Council of Europe policy on democracy and human rights. In formulating the policy that appears in the definition of the fundamental pillars, the idea of teacher professionalism is also taken into account as well as the developmental work that has been carried out in Icelandic preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools.

### The role of fundamental pillars

The fundamental pillars refer to social, cultural, environmental and ecological literacy so that children and youth may develop mentally and physically, thrive in society and cooperate with others. The fundamental pillars also refer to a vision of the future, ability and will to influence and be active in maintaining society, change it and develop.

The fundamental pillars are based on the view appearing in school legislation that both social objectives and the educational objectives of the individual are to be achieved. They are socially oriented as they are to promote increased equality and democracy and to ensure well-educated and healthy citizens, both for participating in and for changing and improving society and also for contemporary employment. The fundamental pillars are meant to accentuate the principle of general education and encourage increased continuity in school

activities as a whole. In evaluating school activities, the influence of the fundamental pillars on teaching, play and studies have to be taken into consideration.

The fundamental pillars are an intrinsic part of school activities

The concepts that the fundamental pillars are based on are to be reflected in the working methods, communication and atmosphere of schools. They should be evident in all educational activities and in the content of school subjects and fields of study, both regarding the knowledge and the skills that children and youth are to acquire. Fields of study can be specialisation of the tasks of school activities, across subjects and school levels.

The fundamental pillars are an intrinsic part of all curriculum guides at all school levels and their stipulations for all school activities:

- Choice of material and content of study, teaching and play should reflect the fundamental pillars.
- Working methods and techniques that children and youth learn are influenced by ideas which appear in discussions of the fundamental pillars.
- Procedures of teachers and other school personnel are to be based on the fundamental pillars and thus encourage independence, initiative and development of school activities.
- When school activities are evaluated, it should be observed whether and how the fundamental pillars are reflected in study, teaching and play.

The National Curriculum Guide for Preschool, Compulsory School and Upper Secondary School is the basis for an integral composition of curriculum guides in the school system. The organisation of each day, week, month and school year is to reflect the comprehensive overview formulated in the fundamental pillars. In school activities it is important to approach tasks in an integral manner, applying professional broadmindedness and, when appropriate, interdisciplinary methods. This can necessitate unconventional teaching methods and unusual approach to school activities.

## Relations and nature of the fundamental pillars

The fundamental pillars of education are divided into six categories. They are interrelated and interdependent in education and school activities. By referring to them, a clear overview of educational work can be obtained. They are based on the idea that active democracy is unobtainable without literacy of the diverse symbolism and communication systems of society. They are also based on the idea that active democracy can only flourish if simultaneously every form of equality between individuals and groups in society is supported. Human rights will not be ensured, except by supporting individual health and welfare and by fighting discrimination and every form of violence, including bullying.

Sustainability concerns the interplay of the environment, economy, society and welfare. Sustainability includes respect for the environment, sense of responsibility, health, democratic working methods and justice, not only at the present time but also for future generations. Therefore it is unthinkable to support human rights without simultaneously espousing sustainability and balanced social development. Additionally, sustainability is dependent on the equality of social groups. Democracy and human rights, and health and welfare are thus an integral part of sustainability and, at the same time, independent fundamental pillars of education.

Education towards sustainability, equality, democracy and human rights therefore aims at children and youth understanding society as it is and has developed. At the same time, education aims at enabling children and youth to participate in forming society and thus acquiring a vision of the future and ideals to advocate. The concepts education towards sustainability, education towards democracy and human rights and education towards equality, do not necessarily aim at developing new subjects or fields of study, they are rather used to point out educational material and attitudes that are to be emphasised.

Creativity is an important factor in all education and thus part of the other fundamental pillars. Creativity is an intrinsic part of all studies and work, not only art studies. All the fundamental pillars are based on critical thinking, reflection, scientific attitude and democratic values.

Even though the fundamental pillars are linked, they each have their characteristics. Therefore they can be used to comprise the objectives of the whole educational system and issues emphasised by each school or school level. The fundamental pillars are, however, not a new system to classify school activities, but are defined to clarify and integrate the objectives of schools. Most aspects of school activities can be classified as belonging to one fundamental pillar and many of these aspects may belong to any of them.

### 2.1.1 Literacy

Literacy has usually been linked to the knowledge and skills needed to write down one's thoughts and understand a printed text, that is reading and writing. It has been associated with one set of symbols, printed characters, and related culture and forms of expression. Schools have considered competence in this field chiefly related to individuals, and it could therefore be measured: some are able to read fluently, some are hardly literate, others even illiterate.

Over time, attitudes towards literacy have changed as scholars of various disciplines have through their research clarified this problem. Although scholars do not agree on everything concerning literacy, a few important issues they have pointed out should be mentioned: Literacy depends on agreement made on usage and meaning of words in a speech community and is therefore by nature a social problem. It is dependent on tradition and is therefore not a capacity that an individual can acquire and apply regardless of place, time, culture and values.



Literacy requires writing utensils, material to write on and medium, for example, a book to publish what is written and this is partially dependant on technical media and know-how.

Even though literacy deals with systems of symbols and communication technology, it should be pointed out that it deals first and foremost with creation of meaning, and this creation never takes place in a vacuum. Two individuals may understand the same text in a different way, although their reading technique, phonological awareness and vocabulary are similar. The quality of their literacy cannot be said to differ for their creation of meaning depends on their experience and numerous circumstantial factors that influence their interpretation and understanding. Some texts are even difficult to understand without being acquainted with the discussion tradition and use of terms in various social groups.

It is not only that literacy research which has changed public attitude, digital technology has changed the surroundings where reading and writing take place. Computers and digital communication technology are considered indispensable factors of everyday life, both at home and at work, and have become essential equipment of education. It is therefore of great importance that computers are not only powerful word processing and calculation tools but tools that can be used for wide-ranging creation of meaning, for example, together with imagery. Pupils and teachers are therefore not limited to the printed text as computer technology offers other systems of meaning for studying and teaching. When preparing surveys or projects of various kinds, they can now discuss how to compile and present the material. Should it be done in a short film or a brochure, a radio programme, or a website?

Under these circumstances, terms like digital literacy, media education and media literacy have appeared. Digital literacy refers to knowledge that people have to acquire to be able to use computer and web technology for various forms of communication and creation of material. It involves photographs, printed text as well as music, and relates to the whole spectrum of material management, that is, resources, processing and communication.

The term media education refers to educational work where pupils use various media in their studies and, at the same time, learn a good deal about their utility and influence on culture and democracy. The objective is that they learn to evaluate the material that is communicated in addition to training in using these media for creating material and knowledge. The term media literacy denotes skills and knowledge that pupils acquire in these studies.

Even though the number of tools that can be used in education has increased, it does not diminish at all the importance of reading and writing in the traditional sense. As always, it is of great importance that children acquire certain reading and writing skills although attention is drawn to all the technology that pupils can make use of in communication, education and creation of meaning – for themselves and society.

The main objective of literacy is for pupils to become active participants in transforming and rewriting the world by creating their own meaning and responding in a personal and creative manner to what they read with the aid of the media and technology that is available.

### 2.1.2 Sustainability

Education towards sustainability aims at making people able to deal with problems that concern the interaction of the environment, social factors and the economy in the development of society.

The most common understanding of the concepts sustainability and sustainable development involves that we leave the environment to our descendants in no worse condition that we received it, and that we endeavour to meet the needs of the present without reducing the possibilities of future generations to meet theirs. This also refers to the definition of sustainability that it is a balanced situation and that sustainable development is the process of change when society, or a smaller unit, is developing towards sustainability. The difference between the traditional definition and the definition used here is a difference in emphasis rather than in meaning. This difference in emphasis is, however, important in educational work as it stresses that little things mean a lot, and that it is not necessary to wait for big changes to be able to rejoice in the smaller.

The environment and thereby nature surround human society. Sustainable development cannot take place, except within the limits that the ecosystems of the earth draw. Therefore understanding of these limits, in addition to the processes, laws, and cycles of nature, is an important basis for successfully working according to the ideals of sustainable development. Thus pupils have to know, understand and respect nature, both because of its intrinsic value and because of the service it renders mankind. Environmental protection, climate change and biodiversity are examples of tasks to be tackled.

From a social perspective, this ideology concerns equality, both intragenerational and transgenerational. In order to obtain equality, democratic methods have to be employed, the diversity of mankind respected and multiculturalism ensured. Diversity is a source of strength that can eradicate poverty, contribute to peace and secure living conditions and quality of life for all, wherever they live in the world. Sustainability is a prerequisite to understand the importance of one's own welfare and that of others.

The economic factor of sustainability is closely related to both the environmental and social factors. The economic system of each society plays an important role when it comes to using natural resources in a sensible manner and dividing them fairly. In this context it is vital that economic growth neither relies on nor leads to excessive encroachment of nature. Production and consumption are inseparable aspects of society, and no less the finances of the individual. Understanding one's own ecological footprint, and the ecological footprints of societies and nations, is conducive to sustainability and moderation. Consumer education and financial literacy are therefore an important prerequisite for being able to assess our needs now and in the future.

Education for sustainability encompasses creating a society of collective responsibility where individuals develop as active citizens, conscious of their own values, attitudes and feelings for

global impact and equality of all the inhabitants of the earth, for nature and the environment, for democracy, human rights and justice, for equality and multiculturalism, for welfare and health, and for economic development and vision of the future.

Education for sustainability further encompasses that in their studies children and youth come to grips with diverse problems and points of controversy. Teaching and working methods of the school are to be interwoven with the idea that the aim of education is capability for action. This involves training in democratic working methods and that children and youth are trained to be interested in and want to take part in society.

### **2.1.3 Democracy and human rights**

When a matter of ethical opinion arises in a democracy, people take a stand and, moreover, they take an active part in shaping society. In a democracy the citizens enjoy human rights and decide on all major issues collectively. The prerequisite of democracy is collective responsibility, consciousness and activity of the citizens and this makes them capable of participating in shaping their society and influencing it, both at home and away. Respect for the human value and health of children and youth involves both respect for their human rights and acceptance of their talents and possibilities for development. Attitudes, values and ethics are essential factors in education for democracy and are at the same time an intrinsic part of other fundamental pillars of education. Schools are to cultivate the attitude that society is to be democratic and individuals are to be critical and have a vision of the future.

Democracy is important in schools. Firstly, schools have to take into consideration that children and youth will in the future take part in democratic society and therefore it is important for children to learn about such societies. Secondly, in all their working methods schools have to take into consideration that the human rights of every individual have to be respected. It is expected that children and youth learn democracy by learning about democracy in a democracy.

In all education, tasks and methods of the school it is important to keep in mind pupils' interest and responsibility for their own education. Furthermore, knowledge of the basic rights of children and adults has to be improved, taking into consideration Icelandic legislation and international conventions. Social studies and life skills are basic subjects for knowledge of democracy and human rights, and of attitudes towards these factors. Democratic outlook is, however, relevant in all other subjects. Democratic values will not be established, unless all subjects and all fields of study are used for this purpose. Concern for people, animals and the environment is also part of democratic education and relevant in all subjects.

Education for democracy and human rights is based on critical thinking and reflection on the basic values of society. Such education relies on cooperation with parties outside the school, no less than cooperation within the school. Thus active cooperation is expected from the homes of children and youth concerning sports and youth work. Active cooperation with the local community within the municipality or area is required, but such cooperation is one of

the key factors of sustainability. It is essential for democratic schools to take in this way part in creating a sustainable society of collective responsibility.

### 2.1.4 Equality

The objective of education for equality is to give every individual an opportunity to develop on his or her own terms, nurture their talents and lead a responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, broadmindedness and equality. In all school activities everyone should take an active part in creating a society of equality and justice. Equality education involves critical examination of the established ideas in society and its institutions in order to teach children and youth to analyse the circumstances that lead to discrimination of some and privileges for others.

Equality education refers to both the content of education, study methods and learning environment. Equality is an umbrella concept that involves a number of factors. The following are some of these factors in an alphabetical order: age, class, culture, descent, gender, disability, language, nationality, outlook on life, race, religion, residence, sexual orientation. At every school level, education for equality should address how these factors can establish discrimination and privileges for people.

The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, No. 10/2008, has clear provisions that at all school levels pupils should be educated in equal rights where an effort should be made to prepare both genders for equal participation in society, both in family life and on the labour market. Emphasis should be on boys and girls having as extensive and as equal opportunities as possible. Nowhere in school activities, content, or in working methods should there be any obstacles for either gender. It is important that all school activities, both in classes as in all communication, should be guided by these provisions of the Equality Act. At the same time, it is important to point out that some people have to live with various kinds of discrimination when more than one of these factors come together, for example, gender and disability, sexual orientation and nationality, age and residence. For this purpose it is reasonable for schools to make use of the knowledge that has been acquired in new studies, such as gender studies, queer theory, multicultural studies and disability studies

Equality education incorporates, among other things, studies of gender and sexual orientation. The fundamental pillar equality also emphasises education concerning culture, nationality, languages, religion and values. One of the tasks is the development of Iceland as a multicultural society. With equality emphasis is also put on social understanding of the nature of disabilities. The challenges of people with disabilities derive from the environment no less than from their disabilities. In all school activities the emphasis is on inclusive education.

An effort should be made to create awareness of the different social position and significance of the young and old in comparison to those who are middle aged. Use can be made of the stereotypes, characteristics and historical development of different age groups, that is: childhood, teenage years, adulthood and old age, and the different meaning of these ages

at different times in history and in different cultures. The different access to social values depending on class, residence and resources may also be studied. Additionally, the influence of class and residence on health, education and employment opportunities, and access to positions of authority may be studied.

### **2.1.5 Health and welfare**

Health is based on mental, physical and social wellbeing. It is subject to complex interrelation of the individual, circumstances and environment. As children and youth spend a good part of the day at school, all school activities should encourage health and systematically nurture welfare and wellbeing.

Schools have to create a positive atmosphere and health-promoting environment where development and health are systematically supported in various ways. The main health factors that are to be encouraged are: positive self-image, exercise, nutrition, rest, mental wellbeing, positive communication, security, hygiene, sexual health and understanding of one's own feelings and those of others.

School administrators, teachers and other school personnel should be aware of what is involved in health-related preventive measures and to be able to utilise reliable information concerning the factors that influence health. Schools are to create an environment that contributes to healthy ways of life for children and youth. Their competence is to be encouraged in communication, creating self-image, decision-making, setting goals and stress management. It is necessary that they understand the influence that culture, mass media and technology can have on health and wellbeing. The objective is, among other things, to enable children and youth to make informed and responsible decisions concerning their health.

Schools that emphasise daily exercise and systematically encourage physical exercise as part of daily life, lay the foundation for lifelong physical, mental and social wellbeing. Exercise should be taught, motor skills improved and a secure environment created to encourage physical training for everyone. This has to be kept in mind in physical education and all other school activities. In the same way, healthy diet should be encouraged in schools through education and abundant supply of varied foods. Emphasis should be on the pedagogic and social value of meals by, among other things, giving enough time for meals.

It is important that schools take into consideration the individual needs of children and youth. Everyone needs an opportunity to enjoy their strengths, which is a key factor in building a positive self-image. Many hobbies of children and youth advance health and can be of use in this context. By making room for their interest areas in school activities, it is possible to develop strengths and interest, stimulate a positive self-image and thus encourage health.

In order to meet the emphasis on health, school personnel have to review their work with regard to health and cooperate towards clear objectives that support positive school atmosphere, improve educational performance and wellbeing. In this context school

personnel are important as role models. At the same time, close cooperation with parents, healthcare personnel and people from the local community is essential since such cooperation is a prerequisite for success.

### 2.1.6 Creativity

Learning takes place when an individual responds to stimulus, connects it to previous knowledge and creates new. In this sense education is essentially self-creation, a means of a well-informed individual to become “a new and better person”. The creative incentive has its origin in innate curiosity, desire for enterprise, and stimulates individual initiative. The creative force engenders interest in education when children and youth understand the meaning of tasks and their value.

Creation involves forming tasks and communicating them, to make something, make something new or different from what the individual knows or has done before. Creation is to invent, enjoy, encourage curiosity and interest, engage the imagination and play with possibilities. Creativity is to sense what lies ahead and carry it out. Creativity is based on curiosity, challenge, excitement and search. Grappling the problem and finding a solution can, in itself, be the reward of creation. Creativity disrupts traditional patterns, rules and systems and shows phenomena and received ideas in a different light.

Creativity involves critical thinking and methods that constantly offer new possibilities and therefore the creative process matters no less than the final product. To create is to go outside the known set and thereby increase one’s knowledge and skills. Although the general sense of creation is closely connected to art and art studies, creativity as a fundamental pillar is no more limited to art studies than other subjects or fields of study. Creativity as a fundamental pillar is to encourage reflection, personal education and initiative in educational work.

Creative force and intuition are key elements in this context. Critical thinking is a key factor in literacy and creativity and they are interlinked with the role of critical thinking in democracy. Creativity utilises ideas and shapes attitudes, values and competence. Working methods in artistic creation and science are often characterised by joy of creation, initiative and originality. Such working methods are desirable in all educational work. Creativity not only concerns something new and original but also utilises what already exists. It encompasses task solutions and search for new possibilities. This harmonises well with education towards sustainability and literacy in the widest sense.

Play is an important learning method and opens new dimensions where the joy of creation for children and youth can come into its own. Happiness and joy depends on finding an outlet for one’s talent as an individual and part of a whole. Creation is an important basis for a vision of the future and for creating such a vision, for participating in creating democratic society and a role of one’s own in it.

## 2.2 Competence

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Modern society makes numerous and often contradictory demands on its citizens. The role of the educational system is, among other things, to prepare individuals for the challenges and tasks of everyday life and assist them to understand the complicated relationship of nature and society, objects and ideas. General education aims at increasing the self-understanding of the individuals and their competence to participate in a complicated society. Pupils have to know what they know and what they are capable of, and how best to utilise their knowledge and skills to influence their environment and improve it. Competence is therefore more than knowledge and skills; it also encompasses attitudes and moral strength, feelings and creative force, social skills and initiative.

The pupil not only needs to have acquired knowledge, skills and competence but also to be able to acquire new knowledge, skills and competence, analyse it and communicate. Education has to incorporate all these factors. Such education is based on a learning community which is characterised by the fundamental pillars of education: literacy, sustainability, democracy and human rights, health and welfare and creativity.

When organising educational work, emphasis is to be on the education of children and youth and their competence at study completion. Teaching methods and forms of communication, study material and teaching equipment should first and foremost aim at supporting pupils in their studies. Educational objectives focus on the competence that the pupil acquires during the learning process and has acquired at study completion.

Educational work, as defined by the fundamental pillars of education, takes place in fields of study, school subjects and course units. On the other hand, many tasks require being dealt with in an interdisciplinary and integral manner. In the National Curriculum Guide for each school level the fundamental pillars are further developed. There the scope of school activities is described and the role of teachers at each school level defined. The cooperation of homes and school is also discussed.

The fundamental pillars of education are developed at each school level corresponding to the law on preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school. In the National Curriculum Guide for Preschool, the fundamental pillars are connected to the fields of education of the preschool, in the compulsory school the fundamental pillars are connected to the school subjects, and in the upper secondary school the fundamental pillars of education are developed in course units and different study programmes. The fundamental pillars are therefore developed in a different manner at the various school levels. In the curriculum guides for each school level continuity and tasks are further discussed, and so are progression, demands for competence and division into levels in accordance with the characteristics and working methods at each school level.

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## 2.3 Learnability

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Pupils should know how to acquire new knowledge and skills, in addition to applying the knowledge they have already acquired. They should also be conscious of the importance of being responsible and creative in seeking knowledge, in reflection and reasoning. In order to acquire diverse competences, pupils should get an opportunity to work on different tasks that are connected to the culture of society, the environment of children and youth and everyday life. In all educational work, both in classes and at other times, children and youth should be encouraged to attain learnability both in general and in specific fields.

Learnability is thus a fundamental pillar in all educational work and is based on self-understanding and interest. Learnability also includes knowing one's own strengths and weaknesses and to be able to make decisions accordingly. Learnability is based on the natural curiosity of children and youth, their motivation, their belief in their own abilities and capability of applying their competences in a constructive manner when working on various tasks.

This demands a stimulating learning environment at school. An effort should be made for the pupils to integrate their knowledge and skills as they gain experience in communication that is based on respect for human rights and equality. At the same time, pupils are to learn to express their views and explain their working methods in a responsible, critical and clear manner.



## EVALUATION AND SUPERVISION

# 3

Evaluation is an inseparable factor in school activities and the learning of children and youth. Evaluation gives information about how far children and youth have obtained learning objectives, encourages them to succeed and is useful for teachers and personnel to promote progress in learning. The objective of evaluation of school activities is to ensure that the rights of children and youth are secured and they obtain the education and service they are entitled to according to law. Evaluation is divided into two parts: On the one hand, there is evaluation that schools carry out themselves and is here called internal evaluation. On the other hand, is evaluation by external parties for local authorities, the Ministry of Education or other parties, and is here called external evaluation.

### 3.1 Assessment

Assessment of children and youth's achievement and improvement is a regular part of educational work, inseparable from learning and teaching. The main objectives of assessment of education are to give guiding information about education and how far its objectives have been achieved. Assessment is used to examine whether the general competence standard of the National Curriculum Guide has been met, educational progression is encouraged, pupils are encouraged to improve their achievement, and to evaluate what assistance pupils require.

Assessment is aimed at gaining information about educational performance and how individuals and groups achieve set objectives. Assessment should give pupils and their parents, teachers, receiving schools and school authorities the necessary information about study progress which can be a guideline in educational planning. If assessment is to fulfil

these multiple roles, it has to meet the requirements of being fair and reliable. Assessment has to be planned and carried out in such a way that it evaluates what is supposed to evaluate in a reliable manner.

### Evaluation in school curriculum guides and school operation plans

School curriculum guides should detail the guiding principles of assessment and references so that pupils, parents and school personnel are fully aware of the demands that are made and how the school plans to assess how they are met. Pupils, parents, teachers and other personnel have to be able to understand the outcome of assessment in a similar way. This is a prerequisite for information to be used to improve learning and teaching.

### Varied assessment methods

Objectives of school activities are diverse and different means can be employed to obtain them. Therefore assessment methods have to be varied. They are to be consistent with competence criteria, mirror issues emphasised in educational work and be pupil oriented. Assessment is to be reliable, impartial, honest and fair. All aspects of education are to be evaluated: knowledge, skill, competence with reference to the criteria of the National Curriculum Guide.

Teachers should assist children and youth in making a realistic self-evaluation, explain to them the objectives of education and how they are progressing towards them. Emphasis should be on formative assessment where pupils regularly consider their education with their teachers in order to attain their own educational goals and decide where to head. Criteria, on which the assessment is based, have to be absolutely clear to pupils.

The methods of assessment have to be varied and in accordance with the emphases of educational work and apply to as many aspects of learning as possible. Therefore both oral, practical, written and pictorial assignments are to be assessed, also short specific exercises and more thorough studies, individual and group work, projects carried out within a limited timeframe and with unlimited time, and additionally various types of examinations. Portfolios or workbooks, where various tasks and solutions are collected, for example digitally, can be useful to give an overview of the pupils' work and to show their application, activity, work methods, progress and social skills. Assessment has to give special consideration to the needs of pupils and especially their learning disabilities. Schools are to make an effort to meet the needs of pupils in such cases. Special arrangements should be made for these pupils when it comes to general assessment, for example, longer time to complete examinations, being given customised examinations, use of support materials and assistance during examinations and oral examinations.

## 3.2 Evaluation of school activities

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Evaluation of school activities is by law part of the supervisory work of schools and school authorities in order to ensure the rights of pupils and promote school improvement. The

objectives of evaluation and supervision are primarily divided into three parts. Firstly, it is to examine whether school activities are in line with the provisions of law, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide. Secondly, to improve the quality of educational work and encourage improvements, ensure that the rights of pupils are observed and that they are provided with the service that they are entitled to in accordance with law. Thirdly, it is to provide information about school activities, their results and development.

Schools are responsible for internal evaluation but the Ministry of Education, and depending on circumstances, local authorities carry out the external evaluation. External evaluation comprises, for example, evaluations of school activities as a whole or specific aspects of these activities, comprehensive evaluation of the activities of individual schools, evaluation of school subjects and aspects of learning, and supervision of internal evaluation of schools. Additionally, the Ministry of Education is responsible for supervising that local authorities fulfil their relevant responsibilities created by laws on schools. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education is to supervise the status and development of the educational system. To that end, the Ministry of Education collects diverse data on school management, for example, through participation in international surveys of learning outcomes and other aspects of educational work.

The Ministry of Education makes a plan about evaluation at all school levels and places it on its website. Additionally, the Ministry of Education publishes detailed directions on internal evaluation that schools can use, if they wish.

The National Curriculum Guide is the basis for criteria on evaluation of school activities but school curriculum guides further detail the objectives and criteria that are stipulated in the National Curriculum Guide and, depending on circumstances, school curriculum guides. It is important that internal and external evaluation incorporates all the objectives of school activities stipulated by law, including the role of schools to encourage pupils to participate in democratic society, support initiative and independent thinking, social skills and other factors that are, among other things, related to the fundamental pillars of education.

### **3.2.1 Internal evaluation**

Internal evaluation should specify the connection with the objectives stipulated in the school curriculum guide. Each school develops methods that take into account the unique emphases of the school in order to determine to what extent these objectives have been achieved. The methods of internal evaluation take into account the educational work that is being carried out in each case.

The internal evaluation of each school is based on a systematic method that is described in the school curriculum guide. Each school year, the school operation plan presents what aspects are to be targeted in the internal evaluation. The school internal evaluation is an effective part of everyday work and includes all aspects of school activities, such as administration, teaching, study requirements, assessment and communication within and outside the

classroom. Emphasis should be on the active participation of personnel, pupils, parents and other interested parties, depending on circumstances.

Information has to be collected by various means in order to evaluate school activities realistically. The internal school evaluation is based on diverse data. The selection of information and data that the evaluation is based on is determined by the research topic each time.

Objectives and means are to be evaluated regularly. Internal evaluation gives information about the strengths in the activities of the school and where improvement is needed. With regard to the findings of the internal evaluation, improvements are defined and planned. Schools publish the outcomes of the internal evaluation and improvement plans. Personal information is exempt from publication.

### 3.2.2 External evaluation

The Ministry of Education, and depending on circumstances local authorities, are responsible for the external evaluation of preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools, as described in the relevant regulation. The Ministry of Education makes a three-year plan for external evaluation, surveys and evaluations to provide information about the execution of school activities in preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools. The plans are revised each year and published on the website of the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education makes a plan for each evaluation where its objectives, principal criteria and emphases are presented. To execute the evaluation the Ministry of Education brings in independent specialists selected according to the Ministry's procedure policy. Schools, and depending on circumstances local authorities, are notified in writing at least two weeks in advance.

External evaluation is to be based on varied data and information, such as findings of internal evaluation and other written documents from the schools, school visits and interviews, as relevant, and observation of teaching. Schools are to inform external evaluators as thoroughly as possible about those aspects of the school activities that the evaluation comprises.

External evaluators give the Ministry of Education a report on their findings. Before an evaluation report is sent to the Ministry of Education, the school in question gets an opportunity to make substantive comments. The school's comments are to be published as an appendix to the report, if requested. The external evaluation is open to public scrutiny, and its findings are to be placed on the website of the school and the Ministry of Education or in another way made accessible to the public. Similarly and depending on circumstances, the improvement plans based on the evaluation of local authorities and schools are to be published on the website of the Ministry of Education. The findings of the external evaluation are to be effectively followed up. The Ministry of Education requests responses from upper secondary schools and local authorities to the findings of external evaluations. On the basis of these responses the Ministry of Education decides what measures are to be taken.

## ROLE OF THE COMPULSORY SCHOOL

# 4

The years that children study at compulsory school are an important formative period for them as individuals and citizens. School should give pupils an opportunity to acquire knowledge, skill and competence that prepares them for studies upon the completion of compulsory school and for lifelong education. In compulsory school the basis is laid for the participation of individuals in democratic society and for the human values that are to encourage their overall development, enhance their awareness of Icelandic culture and respect for the culture of other nations.

According to the Compulsory School Act, No. 91, 12 June 2008, the compulsory school is 10 years in duration. As a rule, children begin compulsory school study in the calendar year they reach six years of age. According to law, however, commencement of school study can begin earlier or later, and it can be completed earlier. Most pupils begin compulsory education the year they reach six years of age and conclude their compulsory study the year they reach sixteen years of age. Pupils move automatically from grade 1 to grade 10 irrespective of study progress or status in other respects. The second article of the Compulsory School Act, No. 91, 12 June 2008 defines the objectives of compulsory school.

## Article 2

### *Objective*

The role of the compulsory school, in cooperation with the home, is to encourage pupils' general development and prepare them for active participation in a democratic society that is continuously developing. Compulsory school practice and methods shall be characterised by tolerance and affection, Christian heritage of Icelandic culture, equality, democratic cooperation, responsibility, concern, forgiveness and respect for human values. The compulsory school shall endeavour to organise its activities to correspond fully with the position and needs of their pupils and encourage the overall development, well-being and education of each individual.

The objective article shows that the objectives of school activities include various issues. A number of these issues are of greater importance than individual subjects or fields of education. This indicates that each school is responsible for deciding how these issues are included in the pupils' tasks and work methods. Equal emphasis is on the school procedures and the content of the studies, and these two aspects are to form a cohesive whole in school activities. It is important that each school defines in the school curriculum guide how these objectives are to be achieved. The welfare of children is a fundamental issue in the activities of compulsory schools, in their collaboration with the homes and the prerequisite for education. Health and a healthy lifestyle are essential for the welfare of the pupils. Compulsory school begins where preschool ends and lays the foundation for further studies and life in a sustainable society. School is the children's workplace for ten years during an important period of development and formation in their lives. Compulsory school is therefore an important factor in the individual's progress towards overall development and general education. Compulsory school is to create conditions for pupils to enjoy their childhood and encourage their self-confidence and social skills, stimulate their creative force and increase their understanding of human values.

Local authorities are primarily responsible for operating schools and implementing the Compulsory School Act. Compulsory school, as the name indicates, is mandatory and each local authority must provide schooling for all children 6 to 16 years of age who are legal residents there. This applies also to those children who have been placed in foster care with foster parents residing in the municipality. The Compulsory School Act provides for a nine-month school year, during which pupils are to have a minimum of 180 days of teaching.

Compulsory schools must educate all children in an effective manner. According to law, all children are entitled to appropriate education in compulsory school, both academic, vocational and artistic, and local authorities are required to offer appropriate study opportunities regardless of the children's physical or mental capabilities, emotional or social situation or linguistic development. This applies to all children: children with or without disabilities, with

long-term illnesses, exceptionally intelligent children and children with mental disabilities, children from remote communities and children from ethnic, linguistic or cultural minorities.

Parents must see to it that their children are enrolled in a compulsory school and that they attend school. Parents are entitled to select a compulsory school within the municipality for their children according to the regulations of the municipality. The local school board is to ensure that all children of compulsory school age receive the education provided for by law. In addition to public schools, there are schools accredited by the Ministry of Education but run by others than the local authorities. These schools are subsidised by the municipality and parents can choose to enrol their children in these schools according to the rules of the relevant municipality.

Clear responsibility, rights and obligations of children and parents enhance the welfare of the pupils. Therefore, the participation of parents in school activities should be encouraged and good relations between them and school authorities, teachers and the school community as a whole. Increased rights necessitate increased responsibility which occurs through active parent involvement and careful selection of representatives on the school council, and furthermore, with effective exchange of information and consultation with other parents.

The Compulsory School Act gives local authorities and schools substantial latitude and autonomy to plan education to fit the needs and conditions of each community; the central principle, however, as laid down in the act and the National Curriculum Guide, is to make it possible for all children to study in their local inclusive schools. The law also covers private schools, specialised schools and special treatment within general compulsory schools, experimental schools at the compulsory school level and other recognised education at compulsory school level, such as home tutoring, distance learning and flexible learning.

## STUDY ASSESSMENT IN COMPULSORY SCHOOL

# 5

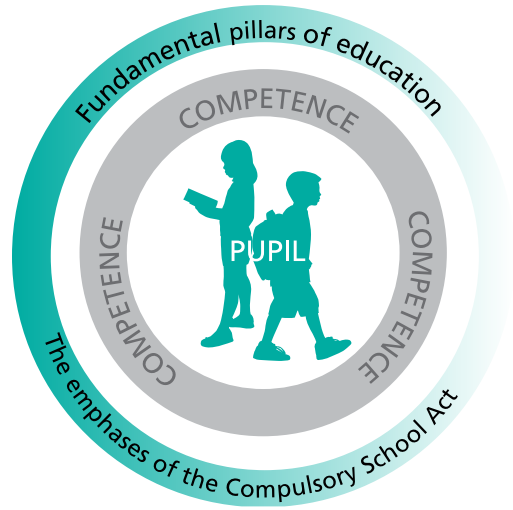
Education in compulsory school is primarily based on the Compulsory School Act, No. 91, 12 June 2008, in addition to later regulations concerning the act. In Article 2 the role of the compulsory school is stipulated and Article 24 stipulates the content of education and emphasizes not directly connected to specific subjects or subject areas. Article 25 stipulates that the National Curriculum Guide is to include provisions on the content and organisation of teaching in certain subjects and subject areas.

According to law, the objective of compulsory school is twofold. On the one hand, it is general education that encourages the general development of all pupils and their active participation in democratic society, and on the other hand, preparation for employment and further studies. This involves that pupils know their strengths, both regarding academic knowledge and moreover their vocational knowledge and skill. General education strengthens the individuals' competence considered necessary to live and work in harmony with themselves, to have an opportunity to develop in and with their environment and to be able to improve their living conditions by, for example, making conscious decisions and continuing their studies.

Based on the objective articles of the preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school acts, the fundamental pillars of education have been defined. These fundamental pillars, in addition to the emphases of Article 24 of the Compulsory School Act, define the competence that pupils should achieve at compulsory school. The connections between these factors are shown in this figure.



In the innermost ring is the pupil on whom compulsory school education is focused. Next to him is defined the competence that the pupil is to have achieved upon graduation from compulsory school. This is followed by the fundamental pillars of education in Iceland and the emphases stipulated by the Compulsory School Act and are to be the guidelines for all education and school activities. Each of these issues will be discussed further in the next chapter.



## FUNDAMENTAL PILLARS OF EDUCATION AND EMPHASES OF THE COMPULSORY SCHOOL ACT

# 6

In the general introduction, common for both preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school, the fundamental pillars of education in Iceland are defined. They are:

- Literacy in the widest sense
- Education towards sustainability
- Health and welfare
- Democracy and human rights
- Equality
- Creativity

The fundamental pillars of education and the emphases of the Compulsory School Act are to be the guidelines for general education and work methods of the compulsory school. They are to appear in the content of subjects and subject areas of the National Curriculum Guide, the pupils' competence, study assessment, school curriculum guide and the internal evaluation of schools. The compulsory school is the only school level that is mandatory for pupils and is therefore an important forum for developing their competence consistent with the fundamental pillars and for preparing them for participation in democratic society.

According to Article 24 of the Compulsory School Act, certain aspects of learning and teaching are to be emphasised. These emphases are further development of the objective article of the act and the fundamental pillars of education in Iceland. Most of them have in common not

to be confined to specific subjects or school activities but are to be general guidelines for all compulsory school education, both formal and non-formal, and in all school activities. Below each of these important issues will be discussed briefly in the same order as they appear in Article 24. The National Curriculum Guide shall among other things emphasise the following:

**Self-consciousness.** This involves that pupils acquire realistic and healthy self-image. It means that pupils know their feelings, their strengths and weaknesses and are confident of their competence to deal with a variety of daily tasks

**Ethical consciousness** involves that pupils strengthen their moral maturity and are able to identify with others. Pupils' feelings and experience are essential in the development of their moral sensibility, which consists of learning what is considered right and wrong, good and bad in human behaviour. Pupils should learn to take a moral stand on matters of opinion and respect the right of others to express their opinions. Additionally, to learn to make a distinction between positive and negative behaviour patterns in relations and to respect others.

**Social awareness and civil consciousness.** These concepts include competence to perceive, understand and respond to the feelings of others and what it involves to live in society with others. Civil consciousness denotes the attitude and competence to be an active participant in democratic society in accordance with one's responsibilities and duties.

**Social competence** aims at having positive and effective relations with others. Healthy self-image is the basis for social competence. Children with healthy social competence are more likely to take the initiative towards relations, maintain them and adjust to new circumstances. Mature social competence is the basis for the full and happy life of the individual.

**Physical and mental welfare.** An effort should be made to help pupils to adopt a healthy lifestyle and responsible approach towards living beings and the environment. Exercise, hygiene and a healthy lifestyle are important criteria in school activities. Health is defined as physical, mental and social welfare. In order to support good health an effort should be made, in collaboration with the homes, to encourage the pupils' healthy lifestyle and that they are aware of their responsibility and understand that a healthy life leads to general welfare. Good health is the basis for achievement in employment and active participation in society.

It is important that pupils acquire competence in Icelandic in their studies, play and work. In all studies emphasis should be put on training pupils in Icelandic. This applies equally for those whose native language is Icelandic, those who are of foreign origin and those whose native language is sign language. An effort should be made to train pupils in expressing



their knowledge, opinions and feelings in various ways, therefore emphasis should be put on dramatic and artistic expression and experience in school activities.

Pupils' reasoning and critical thinking should be encouraged as well as their creative thinking and problem solving. Pupils should be trained in reasoning and supporting their views orally and in writing. It is important that pupils learn to reflect on their ideas and realise what effect feelings have on their thoughts, sound judgement and ability to respond to new circumstances.

It should be emphasised that pupils gain deep understanding of the phenomena they are engaged with in their studies. This can, for example, be done by emphasising productive and creative work, vocational skill, innovation and entrepreneurial studies where initiative and self-reliance are encouraged in working methods and utilisation both in school activities and in everyday life.

Balance between academic and practical education is essential. Both mind and hand play an important role in encouraging the overall development of the pupil. When school activities are organised, the share of practical studies must not be detrimentally limited. This refers both to the proportion of academic and practical subjects and also to the work methods and tasks within each subject from the beginning to the end of compulsory school.

To children play is a spontaneous means of learning and developing. In compulsory school it is important to retain this method in school activities and develop it as the pupils grow older. Play is as fruitful means of development and understanding for a 15-year-old pupil as it is for a six-year-old child. Play can be integrated into every subject and learning area in a varied learning and working environment and in extracurricular activities

Education is to make pupils capable of grappling with the tasks of everyday life and at the same time prepare them for further studies and employment upon graduation from compulsory school. Emphasis on overall development is, however, always essential. For their education and increased maturation, pupils need an opportunity to exercise their strengths and interest and to link their education to what they know from home, the local community and the wide world.

Both sexes have to be prepared equally for active participation in society, both in private life, family life and employment. Gender studies and their concepts are an important factor to make pupils conscious of the status of the sexes in society. It is vital that boys and girls share equally the tasks that school sets them. All tasks are to be based on equality and equal rights.

Learnability is a basic factor in all school activities and is based on the pupil's self-understanding and involves know one's own strengths and weaknesses and be able to make decisions on this basis. Learnability involves, for example, competence to acquire knowledge and skill in various ways. Pupils should learn these ways, for example, by mastering technological media, be able to utilise information and communication technology and different sources

of knowledge through research in libraries and various data bases. Additionally, nature and the environment should, as far as possible, be used as a forum for learning and teaching, for example, in outdoor classes but also through the human resources of the local community, for example, the experience of parents and family.

Pupils should be prepared for further studies and employment through systematic vocational and study counselling, extensive introduction of the study offer available upon graduation from compulsory school, introduction of the labour market and how studies prepare people for the variety of occupations that society has to offer.

## 6.1 Knowledge, skill and competence

One of the primary objectives of compulsory education from the first grade to the last, is the overall development and general education of the individual. From a tender age, each pupil is to prepare for lifelong education. By defining from the beginning of compulsory school the competence that is aimed at upon graduation, foundation is laid for integral general education. Competence involves the pupil and is a pupil-oriented implementation of the fundamental pillars and emphases.

### Definition of the concepts knowledge, skill and competence:

#### KNOWLEDGE

is an accumulation of facts, principles, theories, and methods. It is both theoretical and practical.

- Knowledge is acquired by watching, listening, discussing or from experience through action.
- Knowledge is analysed through discussion, classification, and comparison.
- Knowledge is communicated through various forms of expression, for example, verbally, in writing, and vocationally.

#### SKILL

is both intellectual and practical. It involves ability to utilise methods, practices and logical thinking.

- Skills are acquired through exercising methods and practices.
- Skill involves analysis by choosing between methods and organised procedures.
- Skills are communicated by using the working methods, tools and methods of the various forms of expression.

#### COMPETENCE

involves overview and ability to utilise knowledge and skills.

- The prerequisites of competence are a sense of responsibility, respect, broadmindedness, creativity, moral awareness and the individuals' understanding of their own capabilities. Additionally, self-confidence and ability to work autonomously are of importance.
- Competence involves the students' analysis of their own knowledge and skills by comparing, connecting, simplifying, drawing conclusions and reasoning. Analytical competence is based on critical thinking and professional reflection.
- Communicating competence involves various forms of expression where cognitive, artistic, and practical knowledge and skills are interconnected with the moral and social attitudes of the individual. Communicating competence requires creativity, responsibility, and functionality

At compulsory school pupils' competence is developed within each learning area and subject and as competence criteria upon completion of compulsory school education. Compulsory schools decide themselves how the competence criteria are implemented in school activities but work methods are to be explained in the school curriculum guide.

In the National Curriculum Guide special chapters stipulate the content and organisation of studies in Icelandic or Icelandic as second language or Icelandic sign language, mathematics, English, Danish or other Nordic languages, artistic and practical subjects, natural sciences, physical education, social sciences, equal rights affairs, religious studies, life skills and information and communication technology. The subjects and subject areas of the compulsory school are aids so that pupils can achieve the competence criteria laid out in the National Curriculum Guide. Each compulsory school determines if particular subjects or subject areas are to be taught separately or in an integrated manner, but effort should be made to ensure that studies are as integrated as possible. Information concerning this is to be issued in the school curriculum guide.

Requirements for specialised and general education of the pupils are presented as competence criteria. Study assessment in compulsory school is based on pupils' competence with regard to general competence criteria and the specific competence criteria of each learning area and subject. The criteria are diverse. They comprise both limited aspects of knowledge and skill but also long-term objectives, both those that schools are to attend to and those that are the lifelong task of each individual. Competence criteria refer to knowledge as well as work methods. The competence criteria that concern social development will only be obtained if pupils have an opportunity to cooperate and through democratic working methods in the organisation of education and school activities.

The final learning outcomes that should be achieved upon study completion at compulsory school are to be defined for each learning area and subject.

The following figure describes competence upon study completion at compulsory school. It also includes the first level of competence at the upper secondary school.

**Description of competence upon study completion at compulsory school. includes the first level of competence at the upper secondary school.**

**STUDENTS HAVE ACQUIRED:**

- varied vocabulary to be able to express their opinions and support them
- knowledge of social values, morality, human rights and equality
- knowledge concerning being an active citizen in a democratic society
- knowledge concerning the Icelandic environment in a global context (e.g. culture, society, nature, sustainability)
- knowledge useful as preparation for further studies
- vocabulary to be able to express themselves in a simple manner in foreign languages and insight into the respective cultures
- knowledge and understanding of the influence of role models and stereotypes on their own image and lifestyle

**STUDENTS HAVE ACQUIRED SKILL TO:**

- express themselves clearly, responsibly and creatively
- take part in a conversation, support their views and respect the views of others
- be self-sufficient at work and in everyday life
- apply creative thinking in all their work
- work autonomously, responsibly and creatively under supervision
- use different techniques in acquiring and communicating knowledge in a responsible and critical manner
- use varied study methods
- treat their environment with sustainability in mind

**STUDENTS**

- have acquired competence to express their thoughts and feelings in a rational context
- have acquired competence to express themselves in a simple manner in foreign languages
- have a clear self-image and are aware of how they can use their strengths in a creative way
- can have positive and constructive relationships and collaboration with others
- respect the values of life, human rights and equality
- show respect for the environment in a global context
- have responsible attitude towards their own welfare, both physical and mental
- have acquired a positive attitude towards education
- have acquired a competence to be an active and a responsible citizen in a democratic local community and in society as a whole
- have acquired competence to link their knowledge and skill with everyday life, technology and science

In the chapter on study assessment these issues are the basis for the key competence criteria that are accredited upon study completion at compulsory school.

# LEARNING AND TEACHING

# 7

This chapter describes the main emphases concerning learning and teaching which are to encourage the best possible study achievement compared to the pupils' capabilities. These are to be the guidelines in all school activities and guide school authorities and teachers in organising learning and teaching. Each school is to detail this in the school curriculum guide and teachers in the preparation and implementation of teaching.

## 7.1 Appropriate education

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Article 2 of the Compulsory School Act emphasises that the main objective of the compulsory school is to encourage the general development of all pupils. This entails that education is based on the capabilities of each pupil and within an encouraging study environment where the pupils feel safe and able to apply their talents.

Compulsory school education takes into account the development, personality, talent, abilities and interest of each individual pupil. This is to be the foundation for the organisation of all school activities and teaching. It requires teachers to make an effort to get to know all the pupils that they teach, evaluate their situation with regard to their studies and consult with both the pupils and their parents about the objectives to be aimed at each time. Parents should be encouraged to follow the study progress of their children.



## 7.2 Equal study opportunities

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At compulsory school all pupils are entitled to appropriate education. Pupils should have equal opportunities, regardless of their abilities or circumstances. Therefore special effort should be made to prevent discrimination on the basis of whether the pupil is of Icelandic or foreign origin. Opportunities are not to depend on whether pupils are boys or girls, where they live, what class they belong to, their sexual orientation, their health or whether they have disabilities or their circumstances in other respects.

## 7.3 Inclusive school

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At the compulsory school level, all pupils have the right to compulsory education in common inclusive schools which all children are entitled to attending. Inclusive school means a compulsory school in the pupils' municipality or local community where the educational and social requirements of each pupil are met with emphasis on respect for human values and social justice. The inclusive school assumes that everyone has equal or equivalent study opportunities and the education is appropriate for each individual. The attitude of the inclusive school is characterised by respect for the rights of all pupils to participate in the learning community of the local school regardless of their attainment or status. This basic principle in school operations in Iceland involves universal involvement, access and participation of every pupil in school activities. Inclusive education is a continuous process that aims at offering good education for everyone. Respect is shown for the diversity and different needs, abilities and characteristics of the pupils and an effort is made to eliminate all forms of discrimination and disintegration at school.

Compulsory school pupils are a diverse group and their needs are varied. Local authorities are to ensure that children at compulsory school age, who are legal residents of the municipality and children who have been placed in foster care with foster parents residing in the municipality, receive special support, according to evaluation of their special needs. Pupils with special needs are defined as those who have difficulties studying because of specialised study problems, emotional or social problems and/or disabilities, dyslexic pupils, pupils suffering from long term illnesses, developmental disorders, mental disturbances and other pupils with health-related special needs. Precocious pupils and pupils with special talents in particular fields are also entitled to appropriate study opportunities. They should be given the opportunity to develop their special abilities and to put their time to good use by attempting additional and more complex objectives and more demanding and meaningful study based on their own capabilities.

If parents and school specialists believe that a pupil's special situation is such that it is to his/her best advantage to attend specialised school, the parents can ask that their child is admitted a specialised school temporarily or permanently. In this situation, any decision is to take into consideration the general welfare of the pupil.

## 7.4 Pupils should enjoy their childhood

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School should be the pupils' refuge where they feel safe, have an opportunity to develop and use their abilities and to enjoy their childhood. Childhood and youth are an important period in the life of each individual. The possibilities for development that every school day and every class offers are to be used to the full. It is important to sustain the child's natural curiosity for it is one of the most important preconditions of education. Play is children's way to learn from the world and to learn about the world. It is essential that compulsory school encourages play as an educational method and that this emphasis is not limited to the youngest grades. This right also demonstrates that childhood and youth have their own intrinsic value and are not only preparation for further studies and employment. Pupils are entitled to express their opinion regarding their study environment, the organisation of studies and school activities, and other decisions that affect them. Their opinion should be taken into account whenever possible. Pupils should be able to express their opinion in all school activities, for example, in regular discussions in class under the direction of their supervisory teacher, when the occasion arises. Furthermore, pupils should be able to express their opinion through their representatives on the pupils' association board in the school council.

## 7.5 The role of teachers

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The primary role of the teacher is educational and pedagogical work with pupils, to raise and maintain the pupils' interest in their study, guide them in various ways, encourage good working atmosphere among the pupils and give them a chance to work in peace. This role can also be described as leadership role: to be the pupils' leader in their studies. This involves an effort to create an encouraging and productive study environment. Professional teaching that adjusts to the needs of individual pupils in an inclusive school increases the likelihood of success. From the beginning to the end of compulsory school, it is important that teachers cooperate on the pupils' education as far as possible and that teaching and upbringing are not separated.

Each pupil is to have a supervisory teacher. Supervisory teachers are, more than other personnel, responsible for their pupils' studies and their development, their wellbeing and general welfare. Supervisory teachers make an effort to get to know their pupils, their parents and circumstances. They work closely with those other teachers who teach the pupils they supervise, collect information and send them further either to others at school or to parents in order to make parents able to take part in decisions concerning their child and school activities. Supervisory teachers play a crucial role in good cooperation between school and home, and are the main link between school and home.

## 7.6 School atmosphere

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In everyday life pupils need to learn various means to become active participants in democratic society; among these are communicative competence, respect, tolerance and an understanding of the structure of democratic society. Pupils have to learn to associate peacefully with each other and school personnel, to take responsibility for their conduct and behaviour and to respect school rules. Pupils' study discipline and self-discipline should be prioritised. In order to make this possible, school personnel should, in collaboration with pupils, parents and other personnel, encourage positive working spirit and mutual respect within the school. The pupils' social competence should be encouraged by giving them an opportunity to actively participate in school activities. Positive school atmosphere is essentially a preventive measure which can reduce negative relations, such as bullying and other forms of violence. Among pupils' basic rights is to have peace to work at school so that they can get to grips with their study and take full advantage of the education offered. Therefore, emphasis must be on good atmosphere in each school and on good working spirit in each class.

## 7.7 Cooperation between home and school

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The welfare of children and successful study progress is to a great extent based on parents supporting their studies and protecting their interest in every way, that their cooperation with the school is positive, that they give the school the necessary information and that they take part in their children's study and in parental work from the beginning to the end of the children's compulsory school attendance. Mutual and effective exchange of information between homes and school and consultation between school personnel and parents concerning learning and teaching increases the likelihood of success in school activities. Schools are responsible for establishing such cooperation and sustaining it throughout the child's compulsory school attendance. Parents' active share and participation in the studies and activities of their children is the prerequisite for parents being able to take on their share of the responsibility for the successful upbringing and education of their children.

## 7.8 Preventive measures

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Compulsory schools are to organise preventive measures and health promotion with regard to the mental, physical and social wellbeing of the pupils. Emphasis should be on general preventive measures, such as concerning tobacco, alcohol and other intoxicants and other forms of addiction, for example, web or gambling addiction. All compulsory schools should issue a prevention plan which should be part of the school curriculum guide. This plan is to include, among other things, the school's plan for preventive measures against addiction, alcohol and tobacco, a plan against violence, a plan on

security and accident prevention and a policy on discipline. In addition, there should be guidelines on what action to take if school rules are violated. The prevention plan is to be made known to all members of the school community: the school personnel, parents and pupils and it is to be issued in the school curriculum guide.

## **7.9 Connections between school and the local community**

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It is important that schools establish active connections with their local community, and they encourage positive relations and collaboration with individuals, organisations, businesses and institutions. This is necessary to increase diversity in studies, for example, in electives at the lower secondary level and to link the pupils' education with the reality of their immediate environment and thus make it more meaningful. Such connections concern, for example, the environment, culture, the arts, social and leisure activity and the economy. The school is often the heart of the community where generations meet and can be compared to the bustling squares of cities and it is therefore important that schools use the possibilities this offers to link the generations of the community. An effort should therefore be made to encourage active and good relations between school and the local community based on mutual respect for the needs and obligations of everyone. The school curriculum guide is to describe the relations between the school and local community.

## **7.10 Specialist services in compulsory schools**

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The municipalities' specialist services for compulsory schools aim at furthering compulsory schools as professional institutions which can solve most problems that occur in school activities and to give school personnel appropriate guidance and assistance in their work.

On the one hand, specialist services involve support for school operations and school personnel with the pupils' interest in mind, and on the other hand, to support compulsory school pupils and their parents. The objective of the specialist services is to provide pedagogical, psychological, developmental and sociological knowledge to the advantage of the schools. In implementing specialist services, municipalities should emphasis preventive measures in order to systematically enhance the general welfare of the pupils and avert difficulties. Early evaluation of the pupil's status followed by counselling is an important response to educational, social or psychological difficulties so that subsequently it is possible to organise education and assistance in a manner appropriate for each pupil and in cooperation with the personnel of the inclusive school. Specialist services are to be based on comprehensive overview of the circumstances and interest of the pupils, irrespective of the profession of the specialist or who provides the services. Thus the determinant should always be the pupil's welfare.

The specialist services should through counselling and education support school activities and practice and school personnel and parents in various ways. Appropriate interpretation services are necessary to ensure that information and counselling are of use for parents and pupils; therefore good access to such services is essential.

Laws on preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school emphasise continuation in education. In the implementation of the specialist services it is, therefore, important to emphasise sound continuity marked by systematic dissemination of information of the pupils' status and circumstances when they transfer from one school level to the next. Discontinuity of their education when transferring is to be avoided and attention paid to provisions of law concerning exchange of information at transfer between school levels.

### **7.11 Study and vocational counselling**

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Study and vocational counselling is by law part of school specialist services. Study and vocational counselling in compulsory schools involves cooperating with pupils, parents, teachers, school authorities and other school personnel on various welfare activities concerning the education, wellbeing and future plans of the pupils. Study and vocational counselling involves assisting pupils to channel their abilities, interest and strengths. An effort should be made to assist pupils to solve problems if difficulties emerge in their studies or work at school. Study and vocational counsellors can assist pupils to interpret information concerning their studies and guiding them towards further studies and employment. Equality is to be emphasised in study and vocational counselling by presenting to boys and girls varied study offers and employment upon graduation from compulsory school. An effort should be made to introduce to both sexes the occupations that previously have been considered either only for men or women. It is important to introduce to pupils new occupations and the development of employment in modern society.

## STUDY CONTENT AND STUDY ORGANISATION

# 8

### 8.1 Teaching and teaching methods

Teaching aims at assisting pupils to acquire knowledge, skill and a positive attitude and thus obtain the competence that is the objective of education.

Activities in an inclusive school should involve a wide variety of working and teaching methods. Teachers are professionally responsible for implementing the most successful working and teaching methods to achieve the best results in accordance with the competence criteria laid down each time. When selecting teaching and working methods, attention should be paid to the age, development and abilities of the pupils and the nature of the task. Carefully prepared teaching which adjusts to the requirements and status of individual pupils in an inclusive school is likely to be successful.

The teaching and working methods are to be conducive to the competence criteria at which the school aims. As an example of this, one could mention those concerning the encouragement of moral and social development, democratic participation and civil consciousness which cannot be obtained except by enhancing the ethics and the pupils' social competence in a systematic manner and by encouraging positive school atmosphere characterised by democratic working methods and collaboration.

Selection of teaching methods and school organisation is to be based on the obligation of the compulsory school to provide each pupil with the best possibilities available for

education and development. Teaching is to take into consideration the requirements and experience of individual pupils and to encourage the pupils' interest and pleasure in their work. Teaching methods are to take equality and equal rights into consideration and must not discriminate against pupils, for example, because of gender, residence, origin, race, disabilities, religion, sexual orientation or social status.

## **8.2 Educational materials**

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Educational materials play a very important role as a means to achieving the objectives of school activities. According to the Compulsory School Act and the Educational Materials Act, pupils in compulsory schools are to be provided with study materials free of charge in those subjects and subject areas stipulated in the National Curriculum Guide. Pupils in compulsory study may not be charged for their instruction, study materials or anything else which they require for their study in accordance with the National Curriculum Guide or school curriculum guide. Furthermore, pupils may not be charged for field trips that are part of compulsory studies, except for subsistence during field trips, in consultation with parents.

Educational materials, teaching and working methods which schools choose to use together with the organisation of school activities and assessment, should all be based on defined competence criteria and implemented in order to fully realise each pupils' potential for achieving them. Educational materials include all the material which is used to achieve the objectives of learning and teaching. Educational materials should be varied and carefully made, exploiting the newest knowledge in education and pedagogy. Educational material include printed material, such as text books, reference books, booklets on themes and guides of various sorts; visual materials of various types, such as photographs, films, educational films and documentaries, posters; audio material such as CDs and digital audio files, computer programs; internet material; multimedia content; material for practical and outdoor teaching, etc. Nature and the school's cultural environment are also an important source of education and development.

School libraries play a key role in creating conditions for development and increasing pupils' understanding of the nature of information and data which they need to have access to in their studies, and at the same time to encourage initiative and independent working methods.

Educational materials are to be in accordance with law and the National Curriculum Guide at any given time. Educational materials which are especially compiled or selected for use in compulsory schools must appeal to pupils, be attractive and interesting, present the material clearly and logically, and have regard for the competence which pupils are presumed to have already acquired.

In preparing teaching materials and selecting them for use, care should be taken that they are in accordance with the fundamental pillars of education, that is: literacy, democracy and human rights equality, health and welfare, education towards sustainability and creative employment. Educational materials should appeal equally to both sexes and not discriminate between individuals or groups on the basis of their gender, sexual orientation, residence, origin, race, disabilities, religion or social status.

### 8.3 Options and electives

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The possibility of choice regarding studies is part of the education policy of each municipality and school. One of the roles of the school council of a compulsory school is to discuss policy making and the characteristics of the school, including electives offered. When deciding on study offer and the diversity of electives, it is important to take into consideration the conditions, culture and history of the local community.

Electives are part of compulsory education. In grades 8, 9 and 10, elective subjects and subject areas selected by pupils may account for up to one-fifth of study time, but schools can organise different ratio of electives for various grades, and this is to appear in the annual operation plan. The purpose of pupils' options at the lower secondary level is to adapt studies as much as possible to the individuals' needs and enable each pupil to determine the emphasis of his or her study based on interest areas and plans for the future, in cooperation with parents, teachers and school counsellors.

Selection of studies should aim at systematic preparation for studies at the upper secondary level and is considered direct preparation for academic, vocational, artistic or technical study. For this purpose, pupils get an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the subject areas or within mandatory subjects. Additionally, pupils can select tasks aimed in particular at broadening their horizons or giving pleasure or deepen their knowledge, skill and competence in specific areas in which they are interested.

Schools are to define the arrangement of electives in their operation plan and make them known to pupils and parents after a reference from the school council and consent from the school board. Schools are to explain the objectives of the electives offered, provide teaching plans and a summary of the study materials and decisions on study assessment. The elective study offer is to be part of the operation plan of the school.

If parents request, pupils' temporary participation in employment, regular participation in social activities, sports or organised voluntary work may be evaluated as part of compulsory education as long as it complies with school operation objectives. Additionally, organised study carried out outside of the compulsory school, such as in upper secondary school, art school and language school, may be evaluated as part of compulsory education. In each case, the relevant school evaluates the extent of such education. Such cases are



to be handled with equality in mind. On the average, this study is not to exceed 160 minutes a week each school year at the lower secondary level and can then be accredited as the pupils' electives.

## **8.4 Subjects and subject areas**

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The fundamental pillars of education are to appear in all school activities. They are to be part of the content of subjects and subject areas, both in the methods employed and the knowledge, skill and competence that the pupils are to obtain. The ideas that they are based on should be reflected in every subject. In order to acquire varied competence, pupils need to work on different tasks related to their working environment and everyday life. This requires study methods and tasks which require that the pupils integrate their knowledge and skills and link them to daily life, fields of interest and relations with other people. In the curriculum for each subject the fundamental pillars and key competence are linked to tasks and working methods of particular subjects.

Subjects are important part of school activities but not objectives as such. It is not the role of schools to teach subjects but to educate pupils and encourage their overall development.

Through the tasks and methods of the subjects, pupils get acquainted with different aspects of the world; the world of objects and concepts, nature and culture. They learn about their local community and distant countries, the microscopic world of particles and the wide expanses of space. Subjects offer pupils possibilities to study and discuss customs and ways of life, knowledge and ideas, theories and facts, laws and rules which endow their life and environment with meaning and purpose. Additionally, subjects include different methods and techniques conducive to study and development. The content and working methods of subjects should appeal equally to the pupils' reasoning and feelings and encourage their curiosity and creative incentive. The methodology and techniques of different subjects encourage varied studies and general education. In society, problems are usually not fragmented and isolated but an integration of many factors. This is vital to keep in mind when organising school activities. Therefore emphasis should be on integration of subjects with the focus on problems which connect various subjects. The objective of making education more meaningful to pupils can be achieved in this way, and at the same time, make clear to them the interconnection of subjects and the necessity of having insight into their world.

## **8.5 Reference timetable**

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The Compulsory School Act stipulates further the subject areas and tasks of school operations. According to Article 25, provisions are to be laid down for the content and organisation of study in the following fields: Icelandic, Icelandic as a second language

Subjects – Subject areas	Grades 1 - 4	Grades 5 – 7	Grades 8 – 10	Weekly classes	Weekly classes
	Total time in Grades 1 - 4 Minutes per week	Total time in Grades 5 - 7 Minutes per week	Total time in Grades 8 - 10 Minutes per week	Total time in Grades 1 - 10 Minutes per week	Proportion
Icelandic, Icelandic as second language or Icelandic sign language	1.120	680	630	2.430	18,08%
Foreign languages: English, Danish or other Nordic language	80	460	840	1.380	10,27%
Arts and crafts	900	840	340	2.080	15,48%
Natural sciences	420	340	360	1.120	8,33%
Physical education	480	360	360	1.200	8,93%
Social sciences, religious studies, life skills, equal rights affairs, ethics	580	600	360	1.540	11,46%
Mathematics	800	600	600	2.000	14,88%
Information and communication technology	120	160	80	360	2,68%
School electives	300	160	870	1.330	9,90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.800</b>	<b>4.200</b>	<b>4.440</b>	<b>13.440</b>	<b>100%</b>

or Icelandic sign language, mathematics, English, Danish or other Nordic languages, arts and crafts, natural sciences, physical education, social sciences, equal rights affairs, religious studies, life skills and information and communication technology. Furthermore, it stipulates that the proportional division of time between different subjects and subject areas in compulsory school is to be specified. Effort is to be made to ensure as much integration of studies as possible, but each compulsory school determines if particular subjects are to be taught in a separate or integrated manner. The head teacher is responsible for study organisation. Generally subjects and subject areas are taught continuously throughout the study period and according to professional opinions. Nevertheless, the reference timetable allows certain flexibility within subject areas and between units, the arrangement is to be issued in the school operation plan.

### Explanations for subject areas in reference timetable:

**Foreign languages:** To these belong English and Danish where English is considered the first foreign language and Danish, Norwegian or Swedish the second foreign language.

**Arts and crafts:** To arts belong music and visual arts and dramatic art. To crafts belong design and handicraft, textiles and home economics. These two areas should have equal weight within the total hours.

**Natural sciences:** To these belong, for example, natural history, physics, chemistry, geology, biology and ecology.

**Physical education:** To this belong sports and swimming.

**Social sciences:** To these belong, for example social studies, history, geography and sociology, religious studies, life skills, equal rights affairs, ethics and philosophy.

**Information and communication technology:** To these belong, for example, media studies, library studies, computer use and information and communication technology.

**Options and electives:** To these belong the hours allocated to schools, especially for grades 1 to 7 and pupils' electives in grades 8 to 10. According to the emphases in the Compulsory School Act, balance between academic and practical education is to be kept and the share of practical studies must not be detrimentally limited when school activities are organised. This is also valid for the organisation of electives. Therefore, up to half of the hours for electives are reserved for arts and crafts.

The organisation of subject areas and subjects should be based on the fundamental pillars of education, the emphases of the National Curriculum Guide and key competence. In addition to the subjects and subject areas mentioned in the reference timetable, several interdisciplinary factors, such as, innovation, entrepreneurial studies and new media are considered part of the curriculum.

When planning school operations and reference timetable, it is important to keep in mind the framework for weighing subjects and subject areas in the time framework of the schools. No decision is made how much time is allotted for each subject each week. What the timetable looks like is for each school to decide in consultation with the school community. There is nothing against subjects or subject areas being worked on for a shorter period than a whole school year so that they will have more weight for a certain period but are not on the timetable at other times. Schools have flexibility to decide this.

Special chapters in the National Curriculum Guide will lay down provisions for the content and organisation of those subjects and subject areas specified in the Compulsory School Act. These chapters will discuss:

- **Educational value and main objectives of the subject.** This is based on the educational policy of the general introduction of the National Curriculum Guide and the general section of National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools, especially the fundamental pillars of education and the emphases of the Compulsory School Act.



- **Teaching methods.** The teaching methods which are characteristic for the subject or the subject area are described.
- **Study assessment.** Diverse assessment methods based on main objectives and competence criteria are described. Competence criteria for assessment based on provisions of the National Curriculum Guide are laid out.
- **Competence criteria.** This is description of competence criteria which involve knowledge and skill for each subject or subject area and the key competence at which they aim at the:
  - Completion of grade 4
  - Completion of grade 7
  - Completion of grade 10
- Other issues concerning the special status of the subject or subject area, for example, connection with interdisciplinary factors, integration, cooperation between home and school and the possible utilisation of the local environment.

## STUDY ASSESSMENT IN COMPULSORY SCHOOL

# 9

### 9.1 Objectives of study assessment in compulsory school

Assessment of the pupils' competence and progress is a regular part of school activities, inseparable from learning and teaching. The main objective of assessment is to guide pupils through their education and how they can attain its main objectives. Study assessment shows how far pupils achieve the general competence criteria of the National Curriculum Guide, supports study motivation, encourages pupils for progress and evaluates who require special assistance.

Assessment is also to give pupils and their parents, teachers, receiving schools and school authorities information on the pupils' study progress, their competence, working methods and progress and can be used, for example, for further organisation of their studies.

### 9.2 Study assessment in school curriculum guide and school operation plan

Study assessment criteria and standards are to be described in the school curriculum guide so pupils, parents and school personnel are aware of what requirements are made and how the school plans to assess how they are met. Those involved, pupils, parents, teachers and other school personnel, have to be able to understand the outcome of assessment in a similar way. This is a prerequisite for information to be useful to improve learning and teaching.

### 9.3 Varied assessment methods

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The objectives of school activities are varied and there are various means to obtain them and therefore assessment methods have to be varied. They have to be appropriate for the competence criteria, mirror issues emphasised in teaching and take the pupils into account. Study assessment is to be reliable, impartial, honest and fair for pupils. All aspects of education are to be evaluated: knowledge, skills, competence with reference to the criteria of the National Curriculum Guide.

### 9.4 Criteria for study assessment in compulsory school

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Study assessment in compulsory school is to evaluate pupils' competence within each subject area and this applies equally to academic, practical and artistic study. The criteria for the various subject areas will be elaborated in the relevant chapters of the National Curriculum Guide. Additionally, the pupils' competence in each subject area is to be assessed based on key competence and the emphases of the Compulsory School Act. This is called key competence at the completion of compulsory school.

Criteria for assessment of key competence in compulsory school are stipulated in the following five points which are common for all subject areas:

- Pupils' competence to express their thoughts, feelings and opinions orally, in writing or in other manner. Competence to communicate their knowledge and skill and express themselves clearly and in a listenable manner and to take part in conversation and discussion.
- Creative thinking and initiative in presentation and processing of material. Competence to use knowledge and skill, to draw conclusions, confidence to seek new solutions and use critical thinking and reasoning.
- Competence to work independently, in cooperation with others and under supervision.
- Competence to use various media in seeking, processing and communicating knowledge, and in using information in a responsible, creative and critical manner.
- Pupils' competence to be responsible for their education and to evaluate their work methods and performance.

It is difficult to assess certain aspects of compulsory school education. This is true of, for example, morality, moral attitudes, equality, democracy, human rights, civil consciousness, sustainability and health. School are to find means to evaluate these factors but the pupils' self-evaluation, peer assessment, parent assessment and evaluation of school atmosphere may be useful as part of internal evaluation of schools. It should be kept in mind that by nature some objectives are such that it is not known whether they have been achieved or not until later in life.

Four standardised evaluation criteria are defined for each subject area, A – D. These are, on one hand, used to assess how far pupils have achieved the competence criteria of each subject area and, on the other hand, the pupils' key competence described above. The standardised criteria are to be used when pupils graduate from compulsory school. They can also be used at the completion of grades 4 and 7 and in study assessment generally. The standard can be adapted to the requirements of the school each time.

Standard	Subject Area	Key Competence
<b>A</b>	Exceptional learning competence and performance with reference to the competence criteria of the subject or field of education.	Exceptional competence with reference to the criteria of competence.
<b>B</b>	Good learning competence and performance with reference to the competence criteria of the subject or field of education.	Good competence with reference to the criteria of competence.
<b>C</b>	Passable learning competence and performance with reference to the competence criteria of the subject or field of education.	Passable competence with reference to the criteria of competence.
<b>D</b>	Defective learning competence and performance with reference to the competence criteria of the subject or field of education.	Defective competence with reference to the criteria of competence.

Upon completion of compulsory school education, pupils are to receive a certificate attesting to the completion of compulsory studies. The certificate is to record the pupils' study assessment report for the study undertaken during their final year of compulsory school education, it is, however, desirable to refer to studies in grades 8 to 10. The reference is to be twofold as shown in the evaluation criteria above. The certificate shall, furthermore, record the criteria on which the study assessment is based. For the information on study assessment to be trustworthy, fair and reliable, and suitable to enhance the pupils' realistic self-evaluation, two things should be kept in mind. On the one hand, the pupil being assessed and his/her progress, application and achievement with reference to his/her own status, and on the other hand, in comparison with others, for example, those of the same age.

## 9.5 Links with the competence levels of the upper secondary school

Education at the upper secondary school is linked to four competence levels which overlap, on one hand, with the lower secondary level of the compulsory school, and on the other, with the university level. The levels show gradually increased demand on

the pupils' knowledge, skills and competence. It is important that pupils begin their studies at an appropriate level of the upper secondary school. Common criteria for study assessment at the completion of compulsory school and a common standard support this. Pupils begin their studies at upper secondary school either at the first or second level according to more detailed arrangement in the National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools and the school curriculum guide of the relevant school. Evaluation of what is the appropriate level for each pupil is decided by the relevant upper secondary school in consultation with pupils and their parents and is further defined in the National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools. The assessment is always individual oriented. Compulsory school is responsible for the assessment being fair and reliable and to give pupils, their parents and the upper secondary school the best possible guidance for studies at upper secondary school.

## **9.6 Study assessment throughout the school year**

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Teachers should assist their pupils towards realistic self-evaluation, explain to them the objectives of education and how they are progressing towards these objectives. Emphasis should be on formative assessment, which is based on pupils regularly examining their studies with their teachers in order to understand their own objectives and to decide where to aim. Pupils should be aware of the criteria on which the assessment is based.

## **9.7 Varied study assessment**

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The form of assessment material is to be varied and in accordance with the method of teaching and to apply to as many aspects of learning as possible. The assessment is to involve both oral, practical, written and pictorial assignments, also short specific exercises and more thorough studies, individual and group work, projects carried out within a limited timeframe and with unlimited time, and additionally, various types of examinations. Portfolios or workbooks, where various tasks and solutions are collected, for example digitally, can be useful to give an overview of the pupils' work and to show their application, activity, working methods, progress and social skills.

Assessment is to take into consideration the special needs of pupils and especially their learning disabilities. Schools are to make an effort to meet the needs of pupils in such cases. These pupils are entitled to special arrangements when it comes to general assessment, for example, longer time to complete examinations, being given customised examinations, use of support materials and assistance during examinations and oral examinations, or in some appropriate manner that meets the pupils' needs.



## **9.8 Coherent national assessment in compulsory schools**

The Ministry of Education organises coherent national assessment in compulsory schools, provides schools with standardised achievement examinations for that purpose and carries out national assessments.

All pupils in grades 4, 7 and 10 of compulsory school are to undergo national achievement examinations in Icelandic and mathematics. Pupils in grade 10 additionally undergo a national achievement examination in English. The Minister of Education can implement other examinations according to decision. National achievement examinations in these grades are intended, in particular, to assess whether the National Curriculum Guide's intermediate objectives have been achieved and to provide pupils, parents, school personnel and educational authorities with nation-wide information and references. A head teacher may exempt pupils from undergoing national achievement examinations in particular subjects in grades 4, 7 and 10, provided that valid arguments and parental consent support the decision. This concerns, for example, pupils of foreign origin who have recently moved to the country and have limited knowledge of Icelandic, pupils with special needs and pupils with long-term illnesses.

An overall summary of the national achievement examination results is to be issued and distributed to compulsory schools, school councils in compulsory schools, school boards and educational authorities. Information on the results of national achievement examinations may be released to other parties but confidentiality is to be ensured concerning individual pupils' results.

## **9.9 Standardised examinations and scanning tests in compulsory schools**

Schools should have access to diagnostic tests and other assessment forms which facilitate scrutiny of specific aspects of study and teaching in order to use the results for appropriate guidance and teaching for their pupils. Standardised examinations, for example, reading tests, mathematics tests, motor development tests, screening tests to predict potential reading difficulties, standardised questionnaires, and other such instruments can prove to be very useful aids in diagnosing problems at an early stage of schooling, thereby increasing the likelihood that they can be corrected through systematic action.

## **9.10 Graduation before completing 10-year education**

If parents consider their child fulfils the requirements to enrol in upper secondary school, they may apply to the head teacher of a compulsory school for their child to graduate from compulsory school before 10 years of compulsory education are concluded. The

head teacher is to consult with the supervisory teacher of the child and the specialist services of the municipality before making a decision. The head teacher is to determine when a pupil has concluded compulsory school education and is responsible for the pupil's graduation from compulsory school. The pupil is to complete all compulsory education according to the National Curriculum Guide with exceptional results in order to graduate, cf. the following criteria:

- The pupil has fulfilled requirements with regard to the competence criteria of the National Curriculum Guide with exceptional results.
- The pupil has received study and vocational counselling.
- The head teacher, supervisory teacher and specialist services consider the graduation advisable
- The pupil has acquired social maturity to handle upper secondary school environment.

Pupils who have not concluded compulsory school education can, however, begin studies concurrently in the upper secondary school in consultation with their parents, the relevant upper secondary school and municipality in order to make clear how the studies will be assessed. According to the Compulsory School Act, the relevant compulsory school and upper secondary school are to come to an agreement concerning the execution and arrangement.

Should a head teacher deny parents graduation from compulsory school before 10 years of compulsory education is concluded, parents may make an appeal to the Ministry of Education who administers resolution.

## EVALUATION OF COMPULSORY SCHOOL OPERATIONS

# 10

According to the Compulsory School Act, the objectives of evaluation and supervision of the quality of compulsory school activities are:

- to provide information about school activities, school achievements and development for educational authorities, compulsory school personnel, receiving schools, parents and pupils
- to ensure that school activities are according to law, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools
- to increase the quality of education and school activities and encourage improvements
- to ensure that pupils' rights are respected and that they get the service that they are entitled to according to law

Evaluation is divided into two parts: On the one hand, there is evaluation that schools carry out themselves and is here called internal evaluation. On the other hand, is evaluation by external parties for local authorities, the Ministry of Education or other parties, and is here called external evaluation (cf. chapter 3).

### **10.1 Internal evaluation of compulsory school**

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The head teacher in collaboration with school personnel is responsible for the quality of the activities of the relevant school. Each school is to formulate a clear policy in

accordance with the fundamental pillars of education, objectives and emphases of the Compulsory School Act, the provisions of the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools and the school policy of the relevant municipality. Furthermore, the internal evaluation should take into account the work methods and characteristics of each school as defined in the school curriculum guide. The school curriculum guide is to define emphases and plans for internal evaluation.

Each compulsory school is to systematically evaluate the achievements and quality of school activities. There are various ways for schools to evaluate their activities and it is important that the system used is appropriate for the activities of the relevant school. When carrying out internal evaluation, the links with the objectives stipulated in the school curriculum guide are to be defined. The characteristics of the school should be the foundation of the methods that each school develops in order to evaluate to what extent the school's objectives have been obtained. The methods of the internal evaluation should take into account the tasks that the school is engaged in each time.

Internal evaluation is to be an integral part of daily school activities, encourage the personnel's knowledge, competence and reflection on their work and enhance their sense of responsibility. Democratic work methods regarding the internal evaluation, where the opinions of those involved in the school activities are considered, enhance work quality. The findings of the internal evaluation are to be used for improving school activities in consultation with the school board.

## 10.2 External evaluation in compulsory school

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### Evaluation and supervision by municipalities

School boards, on behalf of the local government, are to supervise that school operations in compulsory schools are according to the Compulsory School Act, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools. This is valid for both schools run by municipalities and those run by other parties. The school board is responsible for school activities being evaluated with regard to the circumstances and characteristics of each school. The evaluation can be based on a variety of information. This can, for example, be information from internal evaluation, evaluation of the school curriculum guide and operation plan, the implementation of the municipal school policy, statistical information and other relevant data. The school board is also responsible for the school internal evaluation being systematic. The school board should make an effort that the findings of the internal evaluation increase the quality and improve achievement in every aspect of school activities.

The local government is to ensure that information concerning school operations is advanced to the Ministry of Education, school personnel, parents and pupils. The local

government is also to issue relevant information within the municipality concerning the assessments and evaluations of school operations.

The evaluation and assessment findings are to be systematically followed up but this is to be done in accordance with the tasks and the findings.

### External evaluation by the Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education supervises whether municipalities fulfil the obligations that the Compulsory School Act, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide stipulate. Regular external evaluation by the Ministry of Education involves reports, surveys and research in addition to general collection, analysis and dissemination of information. The Ministry of Education sets an agenda for three years at a time regarding surveys and assessments that aim at providing information on implementation of school operations.

The findings of all surveys and reports appear on the website of the Ministry of Education. Reports and improvement plans of the local governments based on the findings of the external evaluation are also issued there. Emphasis is on whether school operations are according to provisions of law and regulations and the objectives laid down by municipalities and individual schools. Findings are to be applied and the follow-up of the Ministry of Education is based on the findings each time.

## SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

# 11

School activities should develop steadily. New pedagogical and educational knowledge demands revision and this applies equally to new knowledge within the fields of knowledge which are the basis for subject areas and subjects. New social circumstances and technical innovation also necessitate changes. Collaboration and coordination are key factors in successful development in education. Educational authorities, local governments, specialist services, school authorities and teachers are collectively responsible for continuous revision and that improvement characterises the activities of all involved. School development is organised, systematic and continuous effort for improvement in school activities. School development should always be advantageous for children.

### 11.1 Municipal school policy

Municipalities are to formulate their own school policy based on local circumstances and the emphases they want to establish. Policy formulation should be carried out in comprehensive cooperation of all those directly involved. Among these are school boards, parents, pupils, school authorities, teachers and other school personnel, in addition to those parties involved in or affected by the school policy. Municipal school policy is to give the individual institutions it concerns scope for making professional decisions. Private schools formulate their own emphases and guidelines for school development within the framework of their service agreement.

## 11.2 School policy

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Each school formulates its school policy in its curriculum guide. School development and improvement is detailed in the guide. Governmental and municipal education policies are the framework for individual schools. School development is based on cooperation of school personnel, parents and pupils and this is to shape all work methods.

School internal evaluation is to encourage improvement. Internal evaluation brings out the strengths and weaknesses and based on these pressing tasks may be prioritised. The findings of internal evaluation can also stimulate school development.

New knowledge is another source of developmental efforts. Continuing education for personnel can encourage such knowledge based on professional progress and research. School policy and continuing education plans for individual employees or the school as a whole are to be consistent with and support improvement plans.

School development is based both on attitudes and work methods. When schools formulate their plans a few years ahead, it is easier to outline individual tasks and coordinate them to the comprehensive school policy. Both professional leadership and organised guidance is an important prerequisite for successful development work.

## SCHOOL CURRICULUM GUIDE AND OPERATION PLAN

# 12

Each school is to issue its policy in two ways. On the one hand, the general policy is issued in the school curriculum guide, and on the other hand, information that is variable from one year to the next appears in the annual operation plan. The head teacher is responsible for the implementation of the school curriculum guide and operation plan and shall devise them in consultation with teachers and other school personnel who have thereby committed themselves to implement them. The school council is to discuss the school curriculum guide and the annual school operation plan. The school board approves these after it has been verified that they are in accordance with law, regulations, the National Curriculum Guide, school policy, collective bargaining agreements and the decisions of the local government concerning the arrangement of school operations. The following chapters are the framework for issues that are to be part of the school curriculum guide, on the one hand, and the operation plan, on the other. Schools have substantial latitude to implement these issues.

### 12.1 School curriculum guide

Each school devises a school curriculum guide. The school curriculum guide details how it makes use of the latitude for decisions that are stipulated in law, regulations, the National Curriculum Guide and the school policy of the relevant local government. Private schools, which do not belong to a particular municipality, do not have to work according to the municipal school policy.



The school curriculum guide is a more detailed version of the National Curriculum Guide and there is scope to adapt official provisions to the characteristics of each school and local circumstances and to describe how these circumstances are used to enhance learning and teaching.

The school curriculum guide describes the values that are the basis for all school activities. There the general criteria stipulated in the National Curriculum Guide are detailed.

The school curriculum guide is to give information concerning:

- School operations and the main issues in their development since the establishment of the school
- School policy; values, pedagogical and educational policy and teaching methods
- The implementation of the fundamental pillars of education and emphases of the Compulsory School Act
- The objectives of education with regard to the provisions of the National Curriculum Guide
- The study assessment and reference system of the school
- Internal evaluation of achievement and quality
- Plans for improvement and development
- Cooperation between the school and the home, information dissemination
- Cooperation with preschool and upper secondary school, reception and transfer plans
- Relations with the local community and how to utilise it for education and development
- Plans for:
  - reception of new pupils
  - preventive measures against alcohol and intoxicants
  - measures against bullying and other forms of violence
  - security and accident prevention
  - equality and human rights
  - emergency measures
  - discipline

## Operation plan

The annual operation plan provides information on the school calendar, including important dates. The operation plan details how the 180 school days that each school has at its disposal are to be spent. The plan includes the school calendar showing when school begins in the autumn and ends in spring.

The school operation plan is to give information concerning:

- The school's administrative infrastructure, including organisation chart
- School personnel
- School calendar, including duration of Christmas vacation, Easter vacation and other winter vacations. The school calendar is to mark with explanations the ten days when the pupils' attendance is permitted to be cut
- The arrangement of teaching, for example, teaching plans
- The tasks of internal evaluation
- The pupils' operation plan, including information on the pupils' timetable, parent-teacher interviews, the main events of the school year and field trips
- Pupils' electives in grades 8 to 10
- School board, parent council, pupils' association and their operation plans
- School rules
- Information on support services, including school health care and specialist services
- Information on extra-curricular and social activities
- Continuing education plan
- Evacuation plan
- Contingency plan for epidemics, storms, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes
- Other aspects concerning school activities each year, such as practical information on the school's opening hours, consultation hours of specialists, canteen, absence and vacations.

## RESPONSIBILITIES AND OBLIGATIONS OF PUPILS, PERSONNEL AND PARENTS

# 13

The whole school community should make an effort to encourage and support good work atmosphere and positive school spirit characterised by mutual trust, respect and shared responsibility, where security and healthy lifestyle are valued.

### 13.1 Pupils' responsibilities and obligations

The concepts pupils' responsibilities and pupils' obligations are closely linked. Pupils' obligations cannot be discussed without taking their responsibilities into consideration. Rights and obligations cannot be separated and both demand responsibility. This is both a question of individual responsibility and shared responsibility. This means that pupils are, on the one hand, responsible as individuals for their actions, and on the other hand, share responsibility as members of a group/community and therefore share responsibility with others in the group/community.

#### 13.1.1 Pupils' responsibility for their studies

An effort should be made to teach pupils to be responsible for their studies and they from early on adapt good work methods. The pupils' sense of responsibility develops as they get opportunities to select their tasks and make decisions concerning their studies so that they become meaningful to them. In this their age and level of maturity should be kept in mind. Pupils are expected to make such decisions from the beginning of their compulsory school attendance. A sense of responsibility only develops if pupils get used

to making decisions and standing by them, both decisions made on their own and those made in consultation with others. The same applies to study methods that pupils adapt, and it is therefore necessary that pupils at any age have a choice of various methods in their studies. Pupils should be allowed to apply different methods in their studies and be trained to work both on their own and to collaborate with others. They do this by selecting tasks within the limits laid down by the official objectives of education in individual subjects or subject areas, whether they are in the National Curriculum Guide or the curriculum guide of their school. Additionally, according to the Compulsory School Act and reference timetable, pupils may select subjects and subject areas, especially at the lower secondary level.

### **13.1.2 Pupils' responsibility for their behaviour and relations**

It is important that pupils are not only responsible for their studies but also their behaviour and conduct at school. This concerns various aspects of behaviour towards their peers, personnel and various other individuals that they come into contact with at school and elsewhere. Pupils are responsible for their behaviour and relations with others, considering their age and level of maturity. Pupils are to obey instructions from teachers and school personnel in every way regarding school-related matters and follow school rules and general rules of conduct in their relations with school personnel as well as with their fellow pupils. When school rules are devised, it is important that pupils participate in their making and that their opinions are taken into consideration and thus gain their support for the rules. Parents' views are also to be considered when school rules are devised and decided what measures to take if school rules are violated. This is conducive towards good working spirit, positive school atmosphere and democratic upbringing of the pupils.

The school curriculum guide is to detail the aspects that the school considers most important to create good school spirit. The participation of everyone involved in school activities and their solidarity is essential for good school spirit. It is important that pupils, considering their age and level of maturity, are aware of their responsibility for how good school spirit is created, what it involves and that each individual is part of a larger whole that is the shared responsibility of everyone.

### **13.1.3 Freedom of expression**

Pupils should have an opportunity to express their opinions on everything that takes place at school, whether it concerns their study, wellbeing, facilities or social conditions. It is fair that their views are taken into consideration but with regard to their age, level of maturity and the nature of the matter.

From the beginning of their compulsory school attendance, the pupils' association is an important forum for pupils to express their opinions and look out for their interests.

Pupils elect their representatives for the school council and it is important that they seek the pupils' opinion and have an opportunity to support their interests in the school council. The procedures of the school council are to take the pupils' active participation into consideration.

## **13.2 Personnel's responsibilities and obligations**

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### **13.2.1 Professionalism and attention**

This involves the personnel carrying out their work in an attentive manner and meeting the educational and social needs of the pupils. The personnel do this by regularly reflecting on their job, seeking new means, acquiring new knowledge and thus constantly striving to learn more and do better. All personnel should show consideration towards children and parents as well as colleagues.

### **13.2.2 Positive school atmosphere**

In all their activities, school authorities, teachers and other personnel are to encourage positive school atmosphere and working spirit with their pupils' welfare and security in mind. School authorities should endeavour to create positive communication and mutual trust in the school as a whole, considering the age and level of maturity of the pupils in this context.

Personnel are to emphasise the pupils' study discipline and self-discipline, orderliness, positive relations, forgiveness, tolerance and politeness. An effort should also be made to build the self-image of the pupils, enhance their self-respect and their respect for others, the possessions of others and the environment.

### **13.2.3 Confidentiality**

School personnel should observe confidentiality in regard to the situation of children in all their relations with the pupils, their parents and other personnel both at school and outside it. School personnel should observe confidentiality regarding the matters of which they gain knowledge in their work and concerns pupils or their parents, keeping the pupils' interests in mind. The obligation of confidentiality does not include matters which, according to law, are to be reported to the police or to the Child Welfare Authorities.

## **13.3 Parents' responsibilities and obligations**

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According to the Compulsory School Act, parents are responsible for the upbringing of their children; they are responsible for the enrolment of their children when they reach compulsory school age and their school attendance. Parents look out for the interests



of their children and that they apply themselves to their studies. Parents look after their children's study process in cooperation with them and their teachers and report to the school issues that may influence their study process, application and behaviour. At the same time, parents have the opportunity to take part in their children's education and school activities in general. Parents should consult the school regarding their children's schooling, follow and support their education and study process and make sure that the children come to school rested and obey school rules.

## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

# 14

School personnel, pupils and parents comprise the school community of each school. It is important for these groups to co-operate effectively in shaping this society and the rules of interaction which should characterise relations within and outside the school. To accomplish this requires regular discussions on emphases and agreement on main points of reference.

According to the Act in respect of Children, No 76, 2003, parents are those that are responsible for the legal custody of children. Parents are responsible for the upbringing of their children. They are obliged to ensure that their children attend school and are as receptive as possible for the education the school provides. The school assists parents in bringing up their children and offers them educational opportunities. The pupils' education and welfare is a joint task of the home and school. This cooperation must be based on mutual respect and trust, mutual exchange of information and joint decisions and responsibility. Emphasis should primarily be placed on cooperation between home and school concerning each individual, his/her study and welfare, and on the home and school as the forum for education. Priority should also be given to cooperation in individual classes or groups taught as a unit and grades, both with respect to study, pupils' welfare, class spirit and main points of reference for the school's educational efforts. School authorities and supervisory teachers, with the assistance of other teachers, are primarily responsible for active collaboration. They should endeavour to create opportunities for parents to participate in school activities and encourage active collaboration based on equality.

Parents should have an opportunity to take part in the education of their children and in school activities generally. Parents are obliged to provide the compulsory school with information regarding their child that is necessary for school activities and the child's welfare. Parents are responsible for their children doing the homework on which the school and the parents have agreed and that hobbies and work outside school are not detrimental to the children's education.

Finally, it is important that there is solid collaboration between home and school concerning school activities as a whole, for example, guidelines concerning behaviour, orderliness, school atmosphere and emphases in the school policy of individual schools or local governments. Parents are expected to participate in the formation of the school community and undertake with school authorities, teachers and other school personnel to implement the objectives of the school operations and join forces to ensure their children optimal conditions to grow up in and their general welfare.

Experience shows that effective parental involvement and solidarity concerning basic guidelines is the best preventive measure against various threats, such as drug abuse and undesirable behaviour. If the parents of pupils in the same class or school manage to coordinate their efforts concerning educational guidelines, the likelihood of success in school operations increases.

## **14.1 Information dissemination**

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Mutual and effective exchange of information between parents and school personnel encourages mutual trust between them and assists them to share responsibility and make decisions concerning the welfare of the pupils. Increased awareness on the part of parents of daily school operations and systematic cooperation concerning its activities increases the likelihood of their active participation in decisions and responsibility. Increased parental participation encourages the children's progress at school and their overall welfare. It is essential that schools regularly provide clear information on school operations and plans for future activities. This can be done in various ways, for example, in interviews with parents, at information meetings with groups of parents, in the school curriculum guide and through communication software and on the school's website. Parents are to inform the school on the child's situation and general development and those factors that can influence their wellbeing and study achievement.

## **14.2 Parent council**

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The compulsory school is to operate a parent council. The head teacher is responsible for its foundation and guarantees that it is provided with all necessary assistance. The role of the parent council is to support school activities, support pupils' welfare and



improve the relations between school and home. The parent council of each compulsory school sets its own rules, for example, regarding elections for its board and election of representatives for the school council

Decision making in school affairs has moved closer to parents, underlining the need for a formal avenue for parental participation. An efficient and active parents' association in each school gives parents an opportunity to encourage and support good school atmosphere and get acquainted with other parents, pupils and the school personnel. It provides parents with a forum to discuss their children's schooling, together with other questions concerning child rearing and education. In order to achieve success, it is necessary for all involved to consider the objectives of the council and how its efforts can be organised to achieve these objectives. With an active parent council, it is possible to join forces for the interest and wellbeing of children. Parent councils are to emphasise parental involvement in individual supervision groups or classes. Parent councils are to cooperate with the school council and pupils' association.

### **14.3 School council**

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According to law, the school council is a consultation platform for the head teacher and school community regarding school operations. The school council takes part in formulating school policy and school characteristics. The school council discusses the school curriculum guide, annual operation plan, financial plan and other plans regarding school operations. Any plans for major changes in school operations and activities are to be referred to the school council before a final decision is made. The school council is to monitor security, conditions and general well-being of pupils. The head teacher is responsible for the school council work and that it sets its own rules.

## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SCHOOL LEVELS

# 15

One of the main issues of the new school policy, which was formulated in 2008 with the introduction of the Preschool Act, the Compulsory School Act, and the Upper Secondary School Act, is to increase latitude, flexibility and continuity between the three school levels and within each level. Emphasis is on accommodating the diverse needs of children, but this calls for increased flexibility in organisation, for example, length of study and divisions between school levels. The main objectives of collaboration and connections between school levels are to create continuity in children's education, accommodate their needs and encourage effective organisation of study. Furthermore, to ensure mutual knowledge and understanding of teachers' work and pupils' education and contribute to the wellbeing and security of children when they transfer between school levels.

### 15.1 Connections between preschool and compulsory school

Flexibility in the organisation of education, including length of study, is necessary in order to accommodate the different needs of children. A head teacher may authorise that a child may start school attendance before the age of six. Before such a decision is made, it is essential that the personnel of the relevant preschool and compulsory school have discussed the matter. According to the Preschool Act and the Compulsory School Act, municipalities are to initiate cooperation between preschools and compulsory schools.

The school curriculum guide is to detail this cooperation and how to arrange efficient transfer and adaptation between school levels. Continuation in children's schooling is of importance so that experience and study at previous school levels is useful at the next. When children's compulsory school attendance begins, their preschool study and experience should be the basis for their compulsory school study. The competence that the children acquired at preschool is to be the basis for their compulsory school study. Positive transfer from preschool to compulsory school also involves the children's preparation and adaptation. Preschool children need an opportunity to get acquainted with the receiving school while they are still at preschool, and the first weeks of compulsory school attendance should be viewed as preparation and adaptation.

### **15.1.1 Information between school levels**

At the completion of preschool certain information exists on the children. In order to ensure that study at compulsory school is based on the study and experience at preschool, and to optimise their adaptation, certain information on all children is to follow them to compulsory school. This can, for example, be in the form of a portfolio that the children have taken part in making. Parents are important contacts between the two school levels and give information on their children and their preschool attendance. Furthermore, they are entitled to be informed about the data that follow each child from preschool to compulsory school and have a possibility to respond to them.

### **15.1.2 Cooperation**

The connection between preschool and compulsory school is a cooperative venture for parents and teachers of both school levels where the welfare of the child is in focus. Teachers at both school levels should study the education and working methods of each other for children to experience continuity from preschool to compulsory school. In order to ensure this, preschools and compulsory schools should work out a plan that contains the common emphases of both school levels according to the National Curriculum Guide in addition to processes and responsibilities for the implementation. Such plans are to be issued in school curriculum guides at both school levels.

## **15.2 Connections between compulsory school and upper secondary school**

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The great majority of pupils commence their upper secondary school study immediately upon completing compulsory school. It is important that pupils get reliable information on the upper secondary school level as a whole and also on specific schools, especially local schools. The upper secondary school is responsible for this information which should be accessible for all.

Compulsory school pupils are entitled to dependable study and vocational counselling which facilitates selecting appropriate education. Local authorities initiate cooperation between compulsory schools and upper secondary schools. Head teachers of compulsory schools and principals of upper secondary schools are responsible for this cooperation. The cooperation involves responsibility for dissemination of information between schools and to pupils and parents concerning education at the upper secondary school level and how best to organise this cooperation.

Compulsory school pupils are entitled to enrol in particular subjects at upper secondary level upon completion of compulsory school study in the relevant subjects. Compulsory school pupils are also entitled to enrol in such course units while still at compulsory school, as long as they demonstrate the necessary competence. In these circumstances mutual trust is essential between the compulsory and upper secondary schools. The study is the responsibility of the compulsory school and assessment is accredited in the pupil's certificate at the completion of compulsory school study. Upper secondary school education is linked to competence levels. The relevant upper secondary school validates that the studies meet the school's criteria and accredits them as such.

If compulsory school pupils participate in courses at upper secondary level and their studies are considered as part of compulsory school studies, the cost of teaching at the upper secondary school level is according to the Compulsory School Act and Upper Secondary School Act. Further implementation and arrangement is to be negotiated between the compulsory school and upper secondary school in question

If compulsory school pupils have been admitted to special treatment within general compulsory school or to a specialised school, teachers and other specialists, in cooperation with the pupils and their parents, should participate in devising and organising the transference plan for their future enrolment in upper secondary school, with the preparation to starting in grade 9.

- The Ministry of Education issues regulations concerning enrolment in upper secondary schools. The following rules are valid for compulsory school pupils enrolling in upper secondary schools:
- All pupils who have completed their compulsory school education or reached the age of 16 are entitled to enrol in upper secondary school.
- Pupils who have completed compulsory school education according to the National Curriculum Guide for the Compulsory School are entitled to enrol in the study programmes of the upper secondary school, provided special requirements are not made.
- An effort should be made that pupils can attend upper secondary school near their home or in an upper secondary school near to their municipality of residence.

## EXEMPTIONS FROM THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE

# 16

Study in accordance with the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools is mandatory study, and therefore no exceptions can be made. There are, however, several provisions in the Compulsory School Act which authorise exemptions from compulsory study and the instructions of the National Curriculum Guide.

As a rule, children begin their compulsory school attendance in the calendar year that they turn six years of age. According to the Preschool Act and the Compulsory School Act, however, commencement of school study can begin earlier or later in special instances. A head teacher may authorise a child to begin school study at the age of five or seven years if certain requirements are met.

The Compulsory School Act, furthermore, permits pupils to finish compulsory school in less than ten years. This refers to precocious pupils who may graduate from compulsory school earlier than is normal for their age. This is the responsibility of the relevant school with the assistance of the specialist services of the municipality and at the parents' initiative or after receiving their approval to assess when and how acceleration of this sort should take place. Pupils have to complete all their compulsory school study according to the National Curriculum Guide before graduating from compulsory school in less than ten years. Notwithstanding permission to complete compulsory school in less than ten years, compulsory schools should offer precocious pupils opportunities to deepen their knowledge in the subject areas of the compulsory school or to take electives in other subjects, depending on their interest.

## 16.1 Exemption from attending school

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If parents of pupils of compulsory school age apply for exemption for the child from attending school temporarily, the head teacher may grant such an exemption in particular subjects or completely from attending school. This should be done in consultation with the supervisory teacher and the arguments presented are considered to be valid. The National Curriculum Guide does not give detailed instructions on what are to be considered valid arguments, but in all instances the parents must ensure that the pupils catch up on any studies missed during the period of the exemption. Valid arguments can, for example, concern participation in activities for national teams in sport at the lower secondary school level, youth work, family journeys or volunteer work.

## 16.2 Validation of study outside of compulsory school

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A head teacher of a compulsory school may, by law, recognise study outside of compulsory school or competence that a pupil has acquired as the equivalent to study in a compulsory subject from the beginning of compulsory school to its end. As an example of this, is the competence of pupils whose native language is other than Icelandic in their native language, the competence of Icelandic pupils in other foreign languages than English and Danish, study at music schools, at other art schools and language schools. Participation in social life, sports or organised volunteer work may also be assessed as electives at the lower secondary school level.

## 16.3 National achievement examinations

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Compulsory school pupils in grades 4, 7 and 10 are to undergo national achievement examinations. Head teachers may exempt pupils from undergoing national examinations in individual subjects or in all subjects, provided that valid arguments and parents' and teachers' consent support the decision. The head teacher's exemption may concern pupils whose native language is other than Icelandic and have recently moved to Iceland, pupils with special needs in general compulsory schools or specialised schools or pupils who due to circumstances beyond their control cannot sit the examinations.

## 16.4 Experimental schools

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The Minister of Education, Science and Culture may authorise municipalities or other organisations to organise experimental schools or to carry out experiments in particular aspects of school activities. In such cases temporary exemptions may be made from the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools. Such exemptions may concern, for example, education, the school's operating time, organisation of teaching, number of classes, deviation from reference timetable and deviations from the National Curriculum

Guide. As an example of this, are schools organised according to accredited national curriculum guides of other countries or international curriculum guides and organisation. Reasonable time limits are always to be stipulated for such experiments and the Ministry of Education evaluates such experiments upon conclusion. Such experimental schools may be run as general compulsory schools under the auspices of municipalities, as a department within a compulsory school or as an independent private school accredited by the Ministry of Education and funded by the municipality according to law.

## **16.5 Home tutoring**

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Local government may exempt parents in order to teach their children at home according to further provisions laid out in regulation. Parents who wish for an exemption in order to teach their children at home, in part or totally, shall apply for such exemption from their municipality. A head teacher may provide an exemption in consultation with the school board and specialist services. At least one of the parents granted permission to take care of home tutoring is to be a certified compulsory school teacher. Children that receive home tutoring are exempt from compulsory schooling but are to be supervised by the municipality and their study be evaluated regularly. They are to undergo national achievement examinations and have access to the specialist services of the municipality and other support services. The municipality appoints a particular school to handle the connection with the home. Pupils receiving home tutoring should have an opportunity to take part in extracurricular activities and have access to school activities as they wish. Although children receive home tutoring, their wishes for participation in common school activities should be taken into consideration

## **16.6 Special teaching because of medical condition**

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All compulsory school pupils are entitled to appropriate teaching without discrimination and regardless of their physical or mental attainment. Pupils, who have difficulties studying because of specialised study problems, emotional or social problems and/or disabilities, dyslexic pupils, pupils suffering from long-term illnesses and pupils with health-related special needs, have the right to special study support, according to evaluation of their special needs

Pupils that are considered unable to attend school according to doctor's evaluation because of an accident or a long-term illness, have the right to special teaching because of their condition, either in their home or at a medical institution. If possible, schools should utilise information technology and distance learning for these pupils so that they are able to continue their study as best they can and keep up connections with their school and friends. Special teaching because of medical condition does not apply to illness shorter than a week.

## 16.7 Distance and flexible education

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The main objectives of distance and flexible education at compulsory school should be to give those pupils who wish an opportunity to study regardless of residence. This especially refers to education that is not offered in the relevant school, such as, language study for pupils of foreign origin and various kinds of electives. This also applies to pupils who have the competence to take particular course units at upper secondary school as distance or flexible education while still at compulsory school. In order to encourage flexibility at the connection of compulsory and upper secondary school, compulsory school pupils should preferably be offered to take distance or flexible education at upper secondary school as part of their compulsory education without special fee. The arrangement of distance and flexible education is to be detailed in the school curriculum guide.

## 16.8 Exemption from compulsory education

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According to the Compulsory School Act, a head teacher is authorised to exempt a pupil from compulsory education in a particular subject if there are valid arguments to support this. This, for example, applies to exemption for pupils whose native language is other than Icelandic for education in Danish. This also applies to teenagers who have lived abroad for a long time. Additionally, pupils with special needs or disabilities may be granted exemption from a particular subject in consultation with specialists. Pupils should be offered other subjects instead, for example, in their native language or Icelandic. Furthermore, this exemption may be used for pupils who have shown exceptional achievement in a particular field, for example, are on the youth national teams in sports or in artistic study as can be seen in the guidelines for schools concerning such issues and are detailed below.

It is important that schools show consideration and understanding in discussing issues connected to homes. This applies especially to religious beliefs and ideologies. With regard to the special position of such factors, and especially to freedom of religion, individual students can be exempted from specific aspects of compulsory study related to religion and ideologies on their parents' request and if valid arguments support it. Compulsory schools should organise their activities in such a way that pupils do not need exemption from particular school activities because of their religion or ideologies.

If a pupil has been granted exemption from a compulsory subject at compulsory school, it is natural that such exemption is valid for the same subjects in upper secondary school.

Guidelines for compulsory school procedure regarding parents' request for exemption from compulsory education in a particular subject, cf. Article 15 of the Compulsory School Act:

- The request is to be in writing. The request should be approved by the parent/guardian



of the pupil and head teacher. The request is to include name, ID number, address, and the compulsory school of the pupil.

- The request is to include arguments for and explanation of the reasons, or these to be enclosed. Explanations and arguments may come from parents, teachers, specialist services, specialists, doctors (health certificate), depending on circumstances.
- Further explanations should be acquired if necessary. Specialist opinion or that of others acquired if this is considered necessary. The school may offer other studies instead, but this is not mandatory if the pupil has met competence requirements or if it is considered desirable to decrease study requirements.
- Head teacher is to file the request as a separate topic and answer formally in writing.

Guidelines for compulsory school procedure regarding exemption from physical education at compulsory school level, cf. Article 15 of the Compulsory School Act:

- Formal request for exemption from physical education is to be sent to the head teacher signed by the pupil's parents and the pupil in question. Included are to be information about the pupil, that is, name, ID number, address, compulsory school, sports club and sport, in addition to clear arguments for the exemption request.
- Enclosed should be verification from the relevant sports club concerning the pupil's training of the sport in question.
- Enclosed is to be the relevant coach's report on the pupil's status. At the end of term the coach is to turn in an assessment of the pupil's effort and achievement.
- A pupil who has gained exceptional achievement in swimming with a sports club may generally only be exempted from school swimming, not physical education in general.
- A pupil who has gained exceptional achievement in a sport (other than swimming) generally is not exempted from school swimming.
- Generally, the head teacher only exempts compulsory school pupils in grades 8 to 10 from physical education if they have gained exceptional achievement in their sport. Exception is not granted if the sport has been assessed as part of electives.
- The head teacher is to accord equitable treatment when handling exemption requests.
- Head teachers are not to exempt compulsory school pupils in grades 1 to 7 from physical education because of sport in a sport club.
- Head teachers are not to accept exemption requests except when enclosed information is sufficient.
- Head teachers may, with reference to Article 15 of the Compulsory School Act, exempt individual pupils partly from physical education for a certain period. Parents are nonetheless to take care that the pupil catches up on what he/she might lose out on while he/she is exempt from attendance.

## APPENDIX

### SUMMARY OF REGULATIONS 2012 BASED ON THE COMPULSORY SCHOOL ACT, NO. 91, 12 JUNE 2008:

- No. 1111/2007 on fund for teaching materials
- No. 1150/2008 on enrolment in upper secondary school
- No. 1157/2008 on school council in compulsory school
- No. 242/2009 on venture fund for preschool, compulsory and upper secondary school
- No. 435/2009 on arrangements and implementation of national achievement examination in grades 4, 7 and 10 of compulsory school
- No. 531/2009 on home tutoring for compulsory school pupils
- No. 656/2009 on school transportation at compulsory school
- No. 657/2009 on compulsory school buildings and school premises
- No. 658/2009 on compulsory school evaluation and supervision and the municipalities' duty to provide information
- No. 896/2009 on delivery and dissemination of information between preschools and compulsory schools
- No. 897/2009 on dissemination and handling of information on compulsory school pupils and parents' rights to access to information on their children
- No. 980/2009 on accreditation of compulsory schools that are not run by municipalities
- No. 440/2010 on activities and practices of the committee of exemptions in compulsory schools
- No. 584/2010 on specialist services of municipalities for preschools and compulsory schools and pupils' welfare council in compulsory schools
- No. 585/2010 on compulsory school pupils with special needs
- (In process) on pupils' responsibilities in compulsory schools
- (In process) on compulsory school education of foster children