

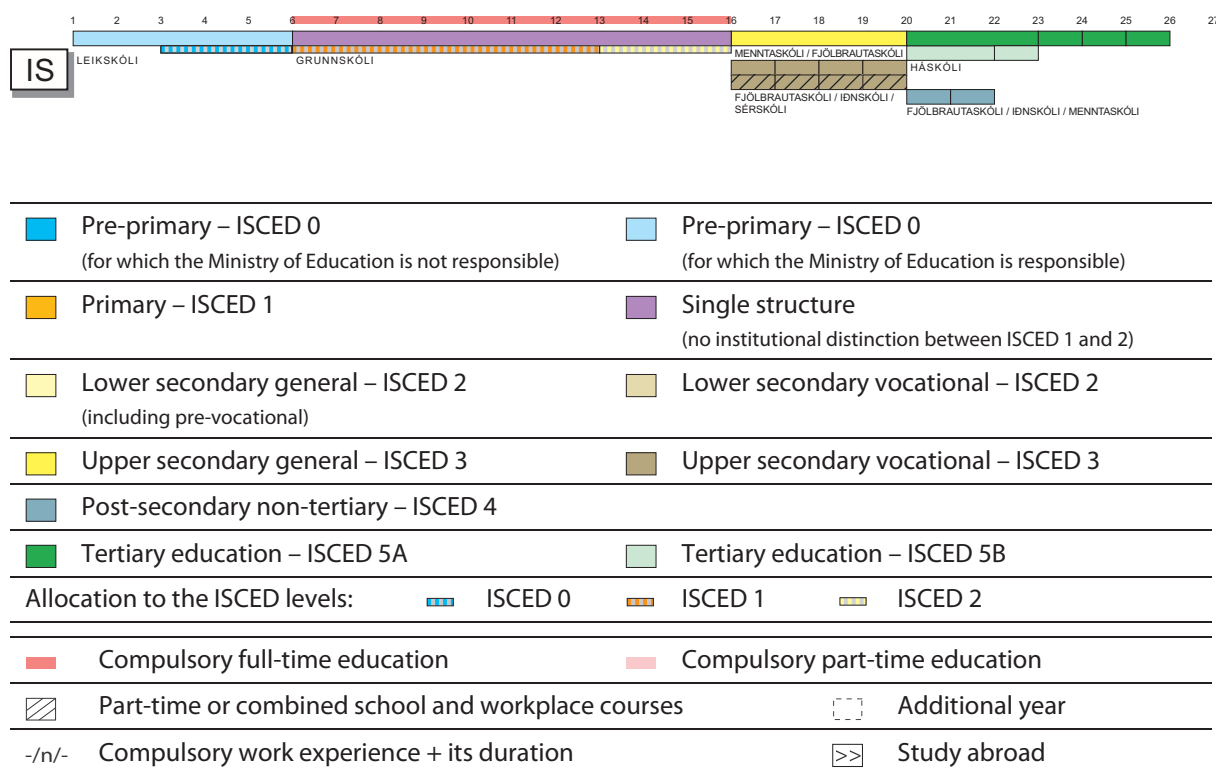
Organisation of the education system in

Iceland

2009/2010

4. Single Structure Education

Organisation of the education system in Iceland, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

This chapter describes the compulsory education in Iceland which extends to primary and lower secondary levels and includes children from the ages of six to sixteen. Chapter 4 deals with upper secondary education.

The Educational System in Iceland

4.1. Historical Overview

In regulation from 1756 special requirements were made for the instruction of children as a necessary preparation for their confirmation. In 1880, a legislation was enacted on instruction of children in reading, writing, arithmetic and the Christian doctrine of the Lutheran Church. Parents were responsible for the instruction, while all supervision was placed in the hands of the ministers of the State Church.

In the period between 1903 and 1904 there were 50 schools in the country and teaching was being provided in 800 homes. The first major school act was passed by the Icelandic Parliament in 1907. The School Act from 1907 established the basic direction and policy upon which educational practices have been built to the present. By this Act, a fixed regional and administrative structures was established with educational districts in the rural areas and school districts in towns and villages, each one with a school board. Another feature of the 1907 School Act was the founding of the Office of Education and the appointment of the first Director of Education. The post of the Director of Education *fræðslumálastjóri* was established in 1908. The director's responsibility was to direct and supervise public education. By the 1907 School Act, public education

became compulsory and free of charge for all children between the ages of ten to fourteen. The Office of Education could also grant educational districts permission to order compulsory schooling for children younger than ten years of age but not for children younger than seven. Before entering school, all children were supposed to have learned to read and write at home. Primary schools were to be established in all towns and rural communities, and funded and run by local authorities, which subsequently could apply for funds from the government. The Office of Education, was responsible for supervision of all public education, provision of school books and equipment, administration of final examinations and appointment of inspectors. The 1907 School Act marked the beginning of state involvement in educational affairs in Iceland, as education free of charge became available to all children in the country.

In 1929, a law was enacted concerning the establishment of state-run lower secondary district schools, and in accordance with this legislation eight district boarding schools were established in different parts of the country. Most of these schools offered a two-year educational programme.

In 1936, a new legislation on instruction for children was passed, extending compulsory schooling to include children from the ages of seven to fourteen (7th grade).

In 1946, a new law concerning the education system and the state's obligation in education came into effect. The length of compulsory education was extended to the age of fifteen and was divided into primary and lower secondary level. At the primary level, schools had six grades, for children aged seven to thirteen. The primary level was divided into two equally long stages, one for younger children, i.e. children younger than ten and the other for children who were ten and older. Final examinations for children who were ten and thirteen years of age took place under the supervision of an external examiner. The examinations were nationally coordinated, at least in mathematics and Icelandic, and were under the supervision of the Office of Education. Children who did not pass these examinations at the age of ten and thirteen had, as a rule, to remain at that stage and re-sit the examination a year later. The lower secondary level was a three year programme with an extra fourth year for those who did not intend entering the grammar schools or who failed the examination at the close of the third year (ninth grade). The compulsory education was completed at the close of the upper primary school (eight grade). For further information see 2.1. Upon completion of compulsory education, pupils could enter the ninth school year and prepare for the nationally coordinated selection examinations *landspróf miðskóla* which gained them entry to grammar school. At the end of the tenth school year, pupils could take the lower secondary school examination *gagnfræðapróf* which gave them right to enter all schools at the upper secondary level except the grammar school.

In 1974, a new Compulsory School Act was passed following an extensive debate on education in Iceland. It stipulated nine years of compulsory education from the age of seven to sixteen and gave all children the right to attend school from the age of six, if the parents wished. It was anticipated in the law, however, that nine years of compulsory schooling would be put into effect within ten years of the passing of the law and in 1984, the act's provision on nine years compulsory schooling came into force.

The Compulsory School Act from 1974 provided for the first time the division of the country into eight educational regions, each with its own educational committee and an office headed by a Regional Director of Education. The act also made the services of psychologists available to the schools, and from the year 1977 nationally coordinated examinations *samræmd próf* at the completion of compulsory school replaced the previous selection examination. What mainly characterises this legislation is its emphasis on equal opportunities in education. During the preparation of the 1974 legislation, extensive development work for the primary and lower secondary level (the compulsory level) was started, resulting in revision of teaching materials and methods of teaching in practically all subjects.

In 1991, compulsory schooling was extended to ten years instead of nine, i.e. it became mandatory for all children to start school at the age of six.

In 1991, a new legislation on compulsory education replaced the one from 1974. Its objectives remained unaltered, the alterations were chiefly intended to adapt education to changing social trends. Thus the school hours of the youngest children were extended, and the intention of providing a single-shift education programme in all primary and lower secondary schools was announced. It also contained provisions for an increased measure of decentralisation, more influence of parents and the introduction of school counselling.

A new legislation on compulsory education was passed in 1995. This act made the local municipalities responsible for the operation of schools at the compulsory level. That included pay for instruction, administration and specialists' services as well as building school facilities,

On 1 January 2007 the Compulsory Schools Act no. 98/2006 took effect. The Act, passed by parliament in the spring of 2006, amends Act no. 66/1995 with subsequent amendments. The principal amendments to the Compulsory Schools Act which took effect on 1 January 2007 are as follows:

- The provision that the average duration of a teaching period shall be 40 minutes is removed. Provision is only made for minimum duration of weekly teaching, in minutes, and not in teaching periods. This amendment gives schools more flexibility to organise time in school otherwise than in conventional teaching periods.
- The mandated right of parents' committees to be heard is clarified, so that it extends to prospective major changes in school operations and activities.
- Special emphasis is placed upon the increased role of pupils in the work of the school, by legislation that each compulsory school shall have a pupil's board, whose role is expanded.
- The Minister of Education was authorised to grant a pupil an exemption from compulsory education in a specified subject, and to recognise study outside compulsory school as equivalent to study in a compulsory subject. This authority is now transferred to the head teachers. By this amendment, Ministry intervention in cases of individual pupils in compulsory schooling is reduced, and head teachers are assigned to assess whether sufficient reason exists for an application for an exemption.

A Compulsory School Act passed in June 2008 introduces a set of changes that are mostly a continuation of previous legislative developments. The administration of the schools, that are run by the municipalities, is clarified and decentralised, and the role, rights and duties of parents and children outlined. A great emphasis is placed on the general welfare of pupils and the inclusion of all children in the school irrespective of origin or handicap. At the same time a framework is being established to develop more individualised learning and greater flexibility for the pupil. The Act also puts emphasis on ensuring continuity and progression during the schooling process and ways are sought to respond to each pupil's needs. More weight is put on quality assurance and that the schools and municipalities assert their accountability towards pupils, parents and society, develop internal quality processes and provide information about their activities and results. Nationally coordinated examinations will continue in grades 4, 7 and 10, but more focus is put on their role as a guide for the pupils, parents and schools.

The first comprehensive curriculum guide for primary and lower-secondary schools *gagnfræðaskóli* was issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in 1960 and based on the laws on compulsory education from 1946. This curriculum remained in effect until new laws on compulsory school were passed in 1974 at which point the writing of new national curriculum guide was begun. The National Curriculum Guide

was issued in a series of booklets between 1975-1977. They were structured in such a way that a general section which described the main objectives of education at this level and teaching methods were together in one booklet and separate booklets for each subject were issued later. The National Curriculum Guide issued in 1989 emphasized the dual role of upbringing and instruction at the compulsory level, while also dealing with individual subjects and the organisation of school work. A new National Curriculum Guide was published in 1999 and was revised during 2005-2007.

A new General Section of the National Curriculum Guide took effect on 1 August 2007. The General Section is the first section of the National Curriculum Guide, and revised versions of the individual sections on each study subject, was published during 2007. The National Curriculum Guide will now for the first time be published only in electronic form. On this occasion only minor changes were made to the National Curriculum Guide, reflecting developments in schools' work, and changes in wording in accord with Act no. 98/2006.

[Frá einveldi til lýðveldis](#)

[Iceland 1986, handbook](#)

[Saga Alþýðufræðslunnar á Íslandi](#)

[The Modern Icelandic School System in Historic Perspective](#)

[Althingi, the Parliament of Iceland](#)

[The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture](#)

[The National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools](#)

[Aðalnámskrá grunnskóla/National Curriculum Guidelines for Compulsory Education](#)

[Compulsory School Act 1991](#)

[Compulsory School Act 1995](#)

[Law on compulsory education 1974](#)

[Law on the education of children 1907](#)

[Law on the education of children 1936](#)

[Lög um héraðsskóla./Law concerning regional boarding schools.](#)

[Lög um skólakerfi og fræðsluskyldu /Law on the education system and the state's obligation to provide schooling](#)

[Lög um uppfræðing barna í skript og reikningi/ Law on the instruction of children in writing and arithmetic](#)

Námskrá fyrir nemendur á fræðsluskyldualdri./ National curriculum guidelines for children at compulsory school age.

4.2. Ongoing Debates and Future Developments

National Curriculum Guide from 2007 is currently under revision. The revision of the curricula for compulsory education as well as for pre-primary and upper secondary education is based on national development of the eight key competences recommended by the European Union in 2006. This work started in 2008 after the adoption of the Act of 2008, and will be in line with the EU recommendation. The key competences will be a fundamental part of the Iceland's lifelong learning strategy and will mirror the main emphasis and objectives of the educational system.

Althingi, the Parliament of Iceland

The Educational Testing Institute

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

The National Centre for Educational Materials

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.3. Specific Legislative Framework

Education at compulsory level is governed by the Compulsory School Act from 2008. According to this Act the local municipalities are responsible for the operation of schools at the compulsory level.

The local municipalities pay for instruction (general teaching, substitute teaching, special education and the teaching of children in hospitals), administration and specialists' services as well as establishing and running schools at the compulsory level. The Act makes it the duty of parents to see to it that their children register for and attend school. The Compulsory School Act also specifies the duty of the state and local municipalities to see to that instruction, as decreed by law, be given.

According to the Compulsory School Act the state monitors that educational laws and regulations are being carried out, it also continues to be responsible for the publication of educational materials. The state is in charge of co-ordinated school surveys and nationally coordinated examinations in Icelandic, English and mathematics in grade 4, 7 and 10. Furthermore, the state is responsible for assessing individual schools and the educational work that is carried out there to ensure that all such activities are in compliance with existing laws and the National Curriculum Guidelines. See [9.4](#).

Local education offices provide general pedagogical counselling, pedagogical counselling in respect to particular subjects, educational counselling for pupils and school psychology services. Where such services are not being offered by the local municipalities themselves, the local authority in question is under an obligation to negotiate with other local municipalities or with institutions, or other parties which provide similar services. The Compulsory School Act stipulates mandatory education for children and adolescents between the ages of six and sixteen. The Act determines the length of the school year and the minimum number of instruction minutes to be given each year and defines which subjects are obligatory. For information on how the basic legislation has developed see [4.1](#).

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.4. General Objectives

The main objectives of compulsory schooling as stated in the Compulsory School Act from 2008 are the following:

- to encourage pupils' general development and prepare them for active participation in a democratic society that is continuously developing. The organisation of the school and the work that takes place there is thus to be guided by tolerance and affection, Christian heritage of the Icelandic culture, equality, democratic operation, 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.
- to encourage broadmindedness in pupils, strengthen their skills in the Icelandic language and their understanding of Icelandic society, Icelandic history and characteristics, of people's living conditions and the individual's duties to the community, the environment and the world.
- to provide pupils with the opportunity to develop and use their creativity and to acquire knowledge and skills in their strive towards education and development. School activities shall lay foundations for pupils' autonomy, initiative and independent thinking and train their cooperation skills.
- to encourage good cooperation between the school and the home, with the objective of ensuring successful school operation, general welfare and safety for pupils.

On basis of this Act, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues regulations and National Curriculum Guide. These provide the details of how the law is to be implemented and define more clearly the educational role of compulsory schools and the main objectives of instruction in individual subjects in accordance with that role.

Aðalnámskrá grunnskóla/National Curriculum Guidelines for Compulsory Education

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.5. Geographical Accessibility

It is the duty of the local municipalities to see to it that all children from the age of six to sixteen have the opportunity to attend school.

There are schools all over the country for children of compulsory school age. It varies in different areas how long the children remain at school on a daily basis. It is customary for children living in rural areas to be bussed to and from school every day, free of charge.

The State funds Icelandic schools abroad, or instruction in Icelandic, in some countries where there are relatively large numbers of Icelanders working and living. Special grants are distributed for these purposes.

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.6. Admission Requirements and Choice of School

The Compulsory School Act from 2008 stipulates that all children and adolescents between the ages of six and sixteen are required to attend school, and consequently there are no admission requirements for Icelandic compulsory schools. Under the law, compulsory education begins in the calendar year that the child turns six and ends at the close of the spring term the year in which the child reaches the age of 16. Parents can apply for their child to begin its schooling earlier or later than its peers or they may be asked to give their consent that the child begins its schooling earlier or later than its peers. According to the Compulsory School Act, heads of compulsory schools have the authority to grant such exemptions after having referred the case to the local education office and received their assessment.

A child attends the school closest to its home. In local municipalities where there is more than one compulsory school, parents may request that their children be allowed to attend a school that is not in the school district where they live.

Pupils, who are thought not able to attain the goals of the compulsory schooling, due to learning disabilities, are provided education in accordance with their abilities. Deaf, blind and otherwise disabled pupils are generally accommodated within a compulsory school or in special divisions within a school. For more information on education for children with learning disabilities, see chapter 10.

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.7. Financial Support for Pupils' Families

Education at the compulsory level is free of charge for the pupils. Instruction, administration, bussing, maintenance of buildings and facilities are paid by the local municipality in question. The cost of educational materials are paid by the state. Pupils in urban areas have the option of bringing their own lunch or buying, at a reduced price, a hot meal, sandwiches, milk or fruits during their lunch break. Most schools outside the capital have canteens where the pupils receive a hot meal paid for, partly, by their parents. According to the Act from 2008, the local municipalities are supposed to offer all children one hot meal during school hours.

Family allowances are related to the number of children and are paid until the age of 16. They are paid according to family income, i.e. there is a maximum amount that may be decreased or abolished if the family income exceeds a certain amount.

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.8. Age Levels and Grouping of Pupils

Compulsory education is organised in a single structure system, i.e. the primary and lower secondary education form part of the same school level and usually takes place in the same school. Schools are organised into classes by age from grade one to ten. Officially there is no selection or streaming by ability and children automatically go up from one grade to the next according to age. In the larger schools there are several classes for one yearly intake. The Compulsory School Act does not contain any provisions concerning the maximum number of pupils within a single class but even though the Act does not have any such

provisions, the Teachers' Organisation and the National Association of Local Authorities in Iceland, have made an informal agreement to that effect that the former provisions on maximum number of pupils in a single class, are to be respected. According to this informal norm the number of pupils in a class in grades 1 to 6 is not to exceed 24 and in grades 7 to 10 there may be 28 to 30 pupils. In smaller schools, mostly rural schools, several grades are grouped into a single class with one teacher.

Classrooms are generally allocated to individual classes, i.e. each class has its own classroom and teachers move from room to room. Certain subjects in most compulsory schools, for example arts and crafts, home economics and physical education, are taught in classrooms that are specially intended for them.

Wage contract between the Teachers Union (teachers at the compulsory level) and the wage committee of municipalities.

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.9. Organisation of School Time

The minimum annual operating time for compulsory schools, nine months, is defined in the law on this level of education. See [4.9.1.](#) and [4.9.2.](#)

Wage contract between the Teachers Union (teachers at the compulsory level) and the wage committee of municipalities.

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.9.1. Organisation of the School Year

Compulsory schools operate for nine months a year. They usually begin between the 21st of August and the 1st of September and end between the 31st of May and the 10th of June. The number of school days are 180. Classes are held five days a week.

Division between days of instruction and other school days is the responsibility of the head teacher in consultation with the School Council and with the consent of the School Board.

There is a Christmas holiday for two weeks and an Easter holiday from Palm Sunday and up to and including the first Tuesday after Easter. The individual school may plan the holidays differently. If a school chooses to do so, it must be announced in the school working guide and it must be seen to that the pupils' holidays are never shorter than 15 weeks over the school year. Compulsory schools may also take a winter holiday, which is usually in February and lasts for one school week. Schools at the compulsory level have a day off on 1 December (Independence Day), and 1 May, if these holidays fall on a weekday.

Compulsory school teachers must work for 12 days at school at various task allocations during the months June and August. These 12 days are included in the yearly workload of the compulsory school teachers.

Wage contract between the Teachers Union (teachers at the compulsory level) and the wage committee of municipalities.

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.9.2. Weekly and Daily Timetable

In accordance to the Compulsory School Act, the weekly instruction time a pupil shall receive per week at compulsory schools are as follows:

Grades 1 to 4	1200 minutes	30 lessons
Grades 5 to 7	1400 minutes	35 lessons
Grades 8 to 10	1480 minutes	37 lessons

Decisions about how daily workload is distributed over the day is made by each head teacher in consultation with the School Council. Each lesson in a compulsory school normally lasts 40 minutes, but schools can plan their teaching around longer units. In determining daily and weekly working hours of compulsory shall pupils, care shall be taken to ensure continuity and that the total does not exceed a reasonable workload considering the age and maturity of the pupils.

Length of school day, each day of the week, an example.

	Out-of-hours provision (before lessons)	Lessons (starting and finishing times in the morning)	Lunch break	Lessons (starting and finishing times in the afternoon)	Out-of-hours provision (after lessons)
Monday	8.00	9.00	40 min	14:30	17.00
Tuesday	8.00	9.00	40 min	14:30	17.00
Wednesday	8.00	9.00	40 min	14:30	17.00
Thursday	8.00	9.00	40 min	14.30	17.00
Friday	8.00	9.00	40 min	14:30	17.00

Individual schools at the compulsory school level organise their timetable. They generally start between 8.00 - 9.00 a.m., but it varies how long into the day they operate. Most schools will have finished their school day between 15.00 p.m. and 17.00 p.m.

All compulsory schools operate on a single shift system and the pupils remain at school after regular teaching is over, to study, play, and have their hobbies.

[Compulsory School Act 2008](#)

4.10. Curriculum, Subjects, Number of Hours

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues the National Curriculum Guide which is intended both to provide the more detailed objectives necessary to implement the Compulsory School Act from 2008 and offer instruction as to how it is to be carried out in practice.

The National Curriculum Guide is a further development of the law and has the legal status of a ministry regulation. It interprets the articles of the school act and further specifies what is to be co-ordinated in all Icelandic compulsory schools. Furthermore, the National Curriculum Guide sets the limits for each school and its staff in respect to organisation, execution and evaluation of education within that school. The National Curriculum Guide applies to all grades and subjects in compulsory schools.

The National Curriculum Guide shall among other things emphasise the following:

- Self consciousness, personal awareness, ethical consciousness, social awareness and pupils' awareness of their civil responsibilities and duties.
- Physical and mental well-being, healthy lifestyle and responsible approach towards living beings and the environment.
- Training pupils in using the Icelandic language in all studies.
- Dramatic and artistic expression.
- The ability of pupils to understand causal relationships and to draw logical conclusions.
- Understanding of vital and creative activities, innovation and entrepreneurial studies.
- Balance between academic and practical studies.
- Utilising children's' play as means of learning and development.
- Studies which will be of advantage to pupils in their daily life as well as in further studies and future employment.
- Preparing both sexes equally for active participation in society, family life and employment.
- A variety of means to acquire knowledge, through the use of technological media, information and communication technology, school resource centres and written sources.
- Education and career guidance and counselling, information about occupations and employment, available courses of study in preparing for future studies or employment.

In devising the National Curriculum Guide, in the organisation of study and instruction and in producing and selecting study material, special effort shall be made to ensure that all pupils have equal study opportunities and a chance to select subjects and learning approaches in their own education. The objectives and practice of study and instruction aim at preventing discrimination on the basis of origin, gender, sexual orientation, geographic location, social class, religion, health condition, handicap or situation in general.

All school activities shall encourage a healthy lifestyle and take into account the variation of personality, development, talent, abilities and interests of each individual pupil.

The National Curriculum Guide lays down the main objectives of study and instruction, the structure and organisation of study, as well as division of time between instruction in different subjects and subject areas in the compulsory school. Effort shall be made to ensure as much cohesion of studies as possible, but each compulsory school determines if particular subjects is taught in a separate or integrated way. The National Curriculum Guide defines required learning outcomes within each subject area. Pupils shall have the possibility to fulfil the learning outcomes of particular subjects and subject areas in various ways. The National Curriculum Guide also defines learning outcomes and requirements for pupils to finish individual subjects or subject areas and the requirements for pupils that finish compulsory school in less than 10 years. The National Curriculum Guide outlines the cooperation between compulsory school and pre-primary school

on the one hand and compulsory school and upper secondary school on the other hand and how to arrange efficient transfer and adaptation between school levels.

The National Curriculum Guide shall stipulate the content and organisation of study in the following fields: Icelandic or Icelandic as second language 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.

From the beginning of their compulsory education, pupils shall have the possibility of choice regarding their studies, such as of topics, learning methods and subjects, according to the framework provided by the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools and the school curriculum guide. The objective is to encourage pupils to take responsibility for their studies and create flexibility in school activities. Distance education and web-based learning may account for part of pupils' schoolwork.

In grades 8, 9 and 10, elective subjects and subject areas chosen by pupils may account for around one third of the study time.

Organised studies carried out outside of the compulsory school, such as in music schools, may be evaluated as part of compulsory education according to further implementation laid out in the National Curriculum Guide. If a pupil engages in such studies, the local authorities in question are not obliged to bear the related cost, even though the studies are accredited as part of compulsory education. Temporary participation in employment, social activities, sports or organised voluntary work can also be evaluated as part of compulsory education as long as it complies with school operation objectives.

Compulsory school pupils are entitled to enrol in particular subjects at upper secondary level while still in compulsory school, as long as they demonstrate the necessary competences. The head teacher authorises the pupils' participation in such studies outside of school hours according to the framework laid down in the National Curriculum Guide.

According to the Compulsory School Act, the staff of each school are obliged to write their own school curriculum guide and an operational plan. The head teacher is responsible for their implementation and shall devise them in consultation with teachers. The school curriculum guide is a more detailed version of the National Curriculum Guide, as regards objectives, content and assessment of studies, operational methods and evaluation and quality control of school activities. The school curriculum guide shall take into consideration the compulsory school's culture, characteristics and circumstances and shall be revised regularly. The annual operational plan shall provide information on the school calendar, including pupils' study schedule, school rules, support services, duration of Christmas vacation, Easter vacation and other winter vacation, extra-curricular and social activities as well as other aspects concerning school activities each year. The school's annual operational plan shall be submitted to the School Board for approval, which confirms its entry into force provided that it has been devised in accordance with law, regulations, National Curriculum Guide, collective bargaining agreements and local authorities' decisions regarding school activities. The head teacher shall be responsible for the implementation of these provisions as well as for their discussion within the school and in the School Council and for presenting the operational plan results before the School Board. The operational plan and school curriculum guide shall be accessible for all parties within the school community.

The language of instruction in Icelandic schools is Icelandic.

Pupils in all compulsory schools shall be provided with the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular and social activities. Extra-curricular and social activities may be organised as part of daily school activities or

outside normal school hours. The local authorities may also offer compulsory school pupils with extended stay outside of daily teaching hours.

Municipalities may charge for extended stay outside of daily teaching hours as well as for extra-curricular activities based on their special rate.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Aðalnámskrá grunnskóla/National Curriculum Guidelines for Compulsory Education

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.11. Teaching Methods and Materials

Neither the curriculum nor laws and regulations contain instructions regarding teaching methods. Teachers are free to choose the methods and materials that suit their objectives and circumstances at any given time.

In grades one to three, a class teacher teaches most of the subjects in his or her class. The borders between individual subjects at this age are not very clear. Teaching takes a variety of forms, class teaching, group work or individual tutoring.

Instruction in clearly defined subjects characterises teaching in the later stages of compulsory education. In the upper grades of compulsory school, the borders between traditional subjects are clearly defined and teachers tend to be subject teachers teaching one or two subjects in many classes.

Instruction based upon the school's immediate environment generally takes place in the form of special field trips which are most often linked to studies in traditional subjects. Studies of pollution in a nearby lake or river or studies of soil erosion and actions to make the situation better are examples of projects related to natural and social sciences.

There has been a tendency in recent years to offer different types of instruction in respect to the rate at which the syllabus is covered in grades eight to ten. Pupils select a group according to ability, i.e. the best pupils choose a group where they can accelerate in the subject, then there is a group for average pupils and the weakest pupils choose a group where the subject matter is covered more slowly.

A few schools at compulsory level in Iceland adhere to a particular ideology in education, although individual teachers are allowed to take note of different educational theories. These schools follow the main aims of the Compulsory School Act and take notice of the of the National Curriculum Guide.

Generally speaking schools are well equipped. The use of computers is very common and about 99% of all compulsory schools are linked up to Internet which allows teachers to communicate, exchange information, assignments, educational materials and ideas and to be linked to data banks throughout the world. The average ratio of computers per pupil in compulsory schools is one computer to every 15 pupils.

Official recommendations regarding homework do not exist.

Pupils are provided with teaching materials free of charge. A public institution, The National Centre for Educational Materials, see [2.6.1.2.1](#), is responsible for providing all children in compulsory schools with

teaching materials and receives budget appropriation for this purpose. It is relatively expensive for a small nation to publish satisfactory teaching materials in its own language. For this reason there is no possibility of a choice from a variety of different textbooks for all subjects but the variety of teaching material has increased in recent years, for example audio-visual material and computer and multi-media programmes. Individual schools and teachers may choose which materials they use when alternatives are available.

The National Centre for Educational Materials

Aðalnámskrá grunnskóla/National Curriculum Guidelines for Compulsory Education

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.12. Pupil Assessment

According to the Compulsory School Act, assessment of pupils' results and progress shall be a regular part of school activities. The purpose is to monitor whether pupils fulfil the objectives laid down in the National Curriculum Guide and if attain their study objectives, to encourage pupils to make progress and determine which pupils may need special support. Further provisions on study assessment shall be laid down in the National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools.

Examinations and other forms of assessment, usually written, are carried out by individual teachers and schools. Assessment is therefore not necessarily standardised between different schools and teachers. The way in which the reports on pupils' progress are written varies greatly: the assessment can be in the form of a number, a letter or a description either oral or written. Reports are given at regular intervals throughout the school year and at the end of each year. The purpose of assessment by the school and the teacher is above all to help improve learning and teaching and to provide both the parents and the children with information on how their studies are progressing.

Nationally coordinated examinations samræmd próf are given every year in Icelandic and mathematics, in grades 4 and 7 and in Icelandic, English and mathematics in grade 10.

The nationally coordinated examinations are composed, marked and organised by The Educational Testing Institute, see [2.6.1.2.2](#). Marks ranging from one to ten are given based on referenced criteria. Information regarding individual pupils' assessment may not be given to other than to pupils themselves or to their parents. However, this information may be provided when pupils transfer between schools at the compulsory level, provided that full confidentiality is ensured and that procedures take into account provisions of current legislation on personal protection and personal information.

Pupils and parents are entitled to information about test results, evaluation methods and evaluation techniques, including the right to examine evaluated projects and test results. They are also entitled to an oral explanation of the assessment and that the assessment results are revised within the compulsory school.

When children start compulsory school at the age of six, emphasis is on diagnosing their standing. They are offered a test for dyslexia so it will be possible to support those who need it from the beginning of their school attendance. The weakest pupils are provided with special education, i.e. they get remedial teaching provided by an extra teacher in mathematics and Icelandic, see [9.4](#).

The Educational Testing Instituteing Institute (Námsmatsstofnun)

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.13. Progression of Pupils

Pupils at the compulsory level are automatically moved up from one grade to the next at the end of each year. Academically gifted pupils are, however, allowed to omit a grade. They can begin their schooling at the age of five or finish compulsory schooling in a shorter time than others. Very few pupils, however, choose to accelerate (0.4%) or lengthen (also 0.5%) their studies at this level. The main rule is that pupils are put into a class according to age, and the weakest pupils are provided with special education.

4.14. Certification

Upon completion of compulsory school education, the pupil receives a certificate attesting to the completion of compulsory education. The certificate records the pupil's study assessment report for his/her final year of compulsory school education for the study undertaken.

The head teacher determines whether a pupil has concluded compulsory education and is responsible for the pupil's graduation from compulsory school. A pupil may graduate from compulsory school before completing the 10-year compulsory education, provided that the pupil fulfils compulsory school requirements according to description of learning outcomes in the National Curriculum Guide.

Compulsory School Act 2008

4.15. Educational Guidance

Compulsory schools generally offer educational counselling which, among other things, includes assistance in organising studies and study-related problems. Educational counselling also often involves helping students with their personal problems. According to the Compulsory School Act the pupils have the right to receive educational and career guidance and counselling within the compulsory school by appropriate specialists.

The Compulsory School Act stipulates that all children have the right to appropriate instruction within an encouraging study environment in suitable facilities which takes into account their needs and general well-being. A compulsory school shall endeavour to organise its activities in such a way that pupils feel safe and able to apply their talents to the fullest.

Organisation of primary health care in compulsory schools is according to current legislation on primary health care services. Compulsory school health care services shall cooperate with the School Board and head teacher on the organisation and arrangement of primary health care.

The head teacher is responsible for ensuring that pupils are provided with primary health care in their compulsory school.

School health care is provided in the schools but organised from the health centres national wide. School nurses are situated in the schools (one nurse per 800 students) and doctors from the health centres visits the school when needed.

Special health screening for growth and vision are provided at 6, 9, 12 and 14 years of age and hearing test are provided at the age of 6. If needed there are also screening for behavioural problems, psychosocial problems and physical status. Pupils in grade 1, 7 and 10 are invited to wash their mouth with fluoride every other week in order to prevent tooth decay.

Vaccination is by special schedule at 12 (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) and at 14 years of age (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis and Polio).

In school health care there is special health educational programme (called 6H of health) for every age in school. The programme emphasis on building the children's skills for healthy lifestyle. It contains education regarding nutrition, physical activity, safety, hygiene, sleep, psychosocial health (like self concept and communication), sexual health and prevention of drug, alcohol and tobacco use. At the same time all parents get information letters from the school health care where the educational material is highlighted for parents.

The school health care provides and/or coordinates care for children with chronic illness and special health care needs when needed.

[Compulsory School Act 2008](#)

4.16. Private Education

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture may provide accreditation to compulsory schools or parts thereof which are run by other parties than the municipalities, as non-profit organisations, as limited companies or as other recognised legal forms, given the consent of the municipality regarding the establishment of the school. The consent of the municipality may be subject to a certain maximum number of pupils. Same law and regulations shall apply to those compulsory schools as to compulsory schools operated by the municipalities.

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture may authorise accreditation of compulsory schools or study programmes within general compulsory schools which are operated according to recognised foreign or international curriculum guide and study organisation.

All private schools receive considerable financial assistance from the municipalities and in addition their pupils pay school fees. Teaching in private schools follows the National Curriculum Guide which is in effect for compulsory schools and pupils take the same nationally coordinated examinations samræmd próf in the grades 4,7 and 10.

[The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture](#)

[Aðalnámskrá grunnskóla/National Curriculum Guidelines for Compulsory Education](#)

[Compulsory School Act 2008](#)

4.17. Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures

Parents who wish 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. Children that receive instruction at home are exempt from compulsory schooling but shall comply

with regular evaluation and monitoring and shall undergo the nationally coordinated examinations according to the Compulsory School Act. If the permission is granted, the municipality has to make a contract with a compulsory school in the municipality concerning advice, supervision and various services.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Compulsory School Act 1991

4.18. Statistics

Please refer to the subdivisions for more details.

4.18.1. Compulsory Schools

In the school year 2008-2009 there were 174 compulsory schools in Iceland. The number of pupils are 43.511. It is expected that the number of pupils in compulsory education will be smaller in the coming years, as the age groups that will be starting compulsory education in the next years are smaller than the age groups that will be completing compulsory education. The largest school has 759 pupils and the smallest rural school has two pupils. Average pupil-teacher ratio was 9,5 the school year 2008-2009.

Schools 2008-2009	Number
Total	174
Public schools	161
Small schools*	56
Private schools	9
Special schools	4

*Schools with fewer than 100 pupils

Landshagir 2009

4.18.2. Pupils in Compulsory Schools

School year 2008-2009

Pupils	Number	Proportional
Total	43.511	100 %
Male	22.166	50.9%
Female	21.345	49.1 %
In public schools	42.702	98.1 %
In private schools	666	1.5 %
In special schools	143	0.3 %
Immigrants	2.069	4.7%

Landshagir 2009

4.18.3. Pupils by Class Size

School year 2008-2009

Grade	Number of classes	Number of pupils	Pupils per class
1	251	4.062	16.1
2	239	4.084	17.0
3	246	4.450	18.1
4	232	4.135	17.8
5	229	4.295	18.7
6	232	4.239	18.2
7	239	4.456	18.6
8	225	4.372	19.4
9	229	4.469	19.5
10	237	4.660	19.6
Total	2.359	43.222	18.3

* Pupils in special schools are not included.

Landshagir 2009

4.18.4. Teachers in Compulsory Schools

School year 2007-2008

Teachers	Number	Proportional
Total	4.999	100 %
Male	1.049	21,6 %
Female	3.950	78,4 %
Qualified	4.237	86,6%
Un-qualified	762	13,4 %

4.18.5. Number of pupils in compulsory schools learning each foreign language 2008-2009

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
English	875	1163	1382	2805	4293	4407	4359	4356
Danish	6	8	7	57	197	375	4190	4340
Swedish	0	5	7	8	4	12	18	36
Norwegian	0	0	0	0	0	1	18	28
German	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	122
French	13	19	14	0	0	0	0	8
Spanish	0	0	0	5	22	18	7	24