

**THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM
GUIDE FOR COMPULSORY SCHOOL
GENERAL SECTION
2004**

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Ministry of Education,
Science and Culture:
Curriculum Guide 38

April 2004

Publisher: Ministry of Education,
Science and Culture
Sölvhólgata 4
150 Reykjavík
Telephone: 545 9500
Fax: 562 3068
E-mail: postur@mrn.stjr.is
Website: www.mrn.stjr.is

Design and layout: Himinn og haf advertising
Photographs: Kristján Maack
Graphics: Himinn og haf advertising
Printing: Gutenberg
English translation: Keneva Kunz

© 2004 Ministry of Education,
Science and Culture
ISBN 9979-777-11-7

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Compulsory School	7
Structure of compulsory school study	7
Connections between pre-school and compulsory school	9
Connections between compulsory and upper secondary school	10
Entrance requirements in upper secondary school ...	12
Role and objectives of compulsory school	15
General education	16
Equality in education	17
Working practices in compulsory school	18
National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory School	21
Purpose of the National Curriculum Guide	21
Common objectives for all pupils	22
Pupils whose mother tongue is not Icelandic and deaf pupils	23
Objectives and setting objectives	24
Final objectives	25
Intermediate objectives	25
Enabling objectives	25
School Curriculum Guide	27
Hours of Instruction	31
Options and electives	33
Instruction and Teaching Methods	35
Instructional Materials	37
Evaluation	39
Evaluation methods	39
National and standardised examinations	40
Use of results	41
Evaluation of school operations	45
Self-evaluation	45
Criteria for self-evaluation	46
External evaluation	48
Assessments of self-evaluation methods	49
Assessments of school operations	49



Connections Between Home and School	51
Information dissemination	52
Parents' associations	52
Parents' councils	53
Pupils' welfare	55
Exemptions from the National Curriculum Guide	59



INTRODUCTION

Education is an asset which we can never be deprived of. It never deserts us, but instead enables all individuals to take advantage of their potential and enjoy life. The family provides the earliest education. Love and a good education are the best gifts one can give a child.

Tens of thousands of Icelanders of all ages pursue studies of some sort. They have the right to demand that the contents of their studies fulfil unambiguous requirements. Time spent at school should be well utilised, aimed at meaningful achievement with discipline and clear objectives.

A review of the National Curriculum Guides for Compulsory and Upper Secondary School began in the autumn of 1996. Shortly afterwards, work began on reviewing the Curriculum Guide for Pre-schools. Over two hundred teachers and other specialists have assisted in one way or another on this comprehensive undertaking. All of them deserve sincere thanks upon its conclusion. Representatives of political parties and interest groups have been consulted. The education policy upon which the Curriculum Guides are based was publicised by sending an information booklet to every household and holding a series of promotional meetings throughout the country.

The school policy is intended to support and shape integrated instruction in individual schools and in the school system as a whole. Curriculum development work, carried out concurrently for pre-school, compulsory school and upper secondary school, marks the beginning of a new chapter in the history of education in Iceland. Its aim is to ensure natural continuity and progression during the schooling process. Ways are sought to respond to each student's needs. Students' options are increased, thus increas-

ing their own responsibility for their studies. National examinations in compulsory schools are not mandatory, as was previously the case, but students who do sit the exams enjoy advantages upon entering upper secondary school over those who omitted the examinations.

In implementing school policy, we must respect those values which have served Icelanders best. Our schools have grown from a Christian heritage and these roots must never be severed.

This new National Curriculum Guide is issued with a wish for the positive development of all students who study under its provisions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Björn Bjarnason". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Björn Bjarnason
Minister of Education, Science and Culture



COMPULSORY SCHOOL

According to Act No. 66/1995, on Compulsory School, this school level covers a period of ten years. Pupils are generally expected to commence study during the year they reach six years of age. The Act does, however, authorise students to begin earlier or later in certain instances. As a result, by far the greatest number of pupils conclude their compulsory study in the year they reach sixteen years of age.

Since 1996, local authorities have been 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 legally domiciled there. The Act provides for a nine-month school year, during which pupils are to have a minimum of 170 days of instruction.

Parents must see to it that pupils are enrolled in a compulsory school and attend school; the local school board is to ensure that all children of compulsory school age receive the instruction provided for by law. Should a child of compulsory school age fail to attend school, and is not prevented from doing so by illness or other valid reason, the school board shall intervene.

The Compulsory School Act gives local authorities and schools substantial latitude to arrange study 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 provide all children with the opportunity to study in their local schools.

Structure of compulsory school study

Compulsory school instruction is in most instances structured so that pupils of the same age are arranged in grades.

In larger schools, there may be several classes in each grade. In schools with very low enrolments, pupils of varying age are taught in a single class. As a general rule, pupils move from one grade to the next according to their age. In certain instances, however, pupils may advance at a slower or faster pace.

The National Curriculum Guide defines and describes the common study objectives which compulsory schools should aim at and specifies the minimum number of instructional hours which pupils are to be provided with in individual subjects and subject areas. Local authorities and schools may arrange at their discretion part of this minimum instruction to which pupils are entitled, in addition to which they may offer additional hours of instruction exceeding the minimum mandatory requirements. In Grades 9 and 10, this flexibility applies to around 30% of the time stipulated in the Curriculum Guide. In these grades, pupils are expected to have the opportunity to choose between subjects and subject areas.

Individual subjects are a central focus of the educational structure of compulsory school, although it may be difficult to distinguish clearly between subjects in the youngest grades, where the same teacher will provide instruction in most subjects. As schooling progresses, subject specialisation increases, and by the time they reach the uppermost grades, pupils receive most of their instruction from subject-specialised teachers.

National examinations are held in Grades 4, 7 and 10. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible by law to ensure the national examinations are held. All students in Grades 4 and 7 are required to sit the national examinations in Icelandic and mathematics, with certain exceptions. These include, for instance, immigrants and deaf students. The national examinations in Grade 10 are

optional. A special institute looks after the holding of national examinations, including their composition, grading and final processing.

Connections between pre-school and compulsory school

The principal role of pre-schools is to create an environment and facilities for education and development, conducive to children's physical and mental well-being.

The great majority of Icelandic children have attended pre-school for a longer or shorter period prior to commencing compulsory school. Pre-schools prepare children for their formal schooling in a number of ways. In pre-schools children have learned and developed through play and other organised educational activities. They have strengthened their self-image, acquired independence and learned to work together. Various pre-school activities, connected with language development, mathematics, nature study, music, art and motion, are of intrinsic value in facing challenges in daily life and the everyday environment, while at the same time they serve as preparation for formal study in compulsory school.

It is important to increase connections between pre-schools and compulsory schools, through co-operation between pre-school teachers in charge of the oldest pre-school children and the compulsory school teachers who will take charge of them in Grade 1. It is clearly in the children's interest that teachers at both school levels should be well-informed about each other's emphases, working methods and schedule. The less which comes as a surprise to children and their parents when they change their schools and workplace, the better the continuity between school levels, and the greater the likelihood of a successful beginning in compulsory school. It is important that parents are clear as to the differences between pre-school and compulsory



school, what new demands are made of children and parents, what rights they have and what methods and obligations the children will encounter in their new workplace.

In addition to co-operation between school principals and teachers of both pre-schools and compulsory schools, exchanges of visits by the children can contribute to a smooth transition between school levels. Pre-school children can profit considerably from visiting their expected schools, giving them the opportunity to get to know the classroom, playground, teachers and students. Similarly, a visit by six-year olds to their former pre-school can help in strengthening ties between pre-school and compulsory school. It is no less useful for parents' associations or groups at both school levels to consult and co-operate with each other.

Compulsory schools also need to prepare the way for children who do not attend pre-school to begin their school attendance. The school must introduce itself to them and their parents, explain what they can expect, what demands are made upon the commencement of school and how the school intends to support development and provide instruction.

Connections between compulsory and upper secondary school

The great majority of pupils commence their upper secondary school study immediately upon completing compulsory school. They have a variety of options. Pupils planning further academic study can choose between language, social science or natural science programmes in upper secondary schools. Those planning on vocational study can choose between a large number of vocational training programmes, leading to qualifications in various professions.

To be admitted to a specific programme, pupils must fulfil the requirements for preparatory study. The entrance

requirements specify the minimum achievement required in key subjects of individual programmes. The requirements are based on achievement in national examinations as well as on grades given by the schools.

It is very important that Grade 9 pupils realise what awaits them upon completing compulsory school, in order for them to take advantage of the options open to them in Grades 9 and 10. The National Curriculum Guide assumes that in these grades pupils will be able to decide for themselves where they wish to place the emphasis in their studies, in consultation with their parents and teachers and taking their future plans into consideration. A pupil who intends to follow a language programme, for instance, should be able to place additional emphasis on foreign languages by studying a third foreign language in compulsory school. He/she should have the option of choosing e.g. natural sciences or fine arts subjects to widen his/her educational scope and experience before the specialisation of upper secondary school takes over. The Curriculum Guide allows for pupils to take up to one-third of their instructional hours in Grades 9 and 10 in optional subjects.

The increased options open to pupils in Grades 9 and 10 is intended to give them more responsibility for their own studies. They must look to the future, decide where they intend to head and evaluate realistically what they need to do to achieve their objective. Increased freedom of choice means that pupils can conclude compulsory school with a variety of emphases. At the same time, they have been relieved of the obligation to sit all national examinations at the end of Grade 10. The varying entrance requirements for upper secondary schools and Grade 9 and 10 options mean that the pupils themselves decide what national exams they take, depending upon what course of upper secondary study they intend to follow.



Entrance requirements in upper secondary school

Entrance requirements mean that a pupil must have achieved a specific minimum grade in certain subjects in order to enrol in upper-secondary school programmes apart from the general programme. In determining entrance requirements, scholastic achievement on both national and school examinations is taken into consideration. Grades given for national examinations are standardised, i.e. a pupil's achievement is indicated relative to the achievements of other pupils. In assessing applications, schools use a so-called reference grade, which is the average of the standardised national grade and school grade.

This provides the basis for the following entrance requirements.

- **Everyone who has completed compulsory school study is entitled to commence study in upper secondary school.**
- **Everyone who has completed compulsory school study, but has not taken final national examinations or does not fulfil the entrance requirements for other programmes, shall be entitled to commence study on a special programme or in the general programme. Pupils in the general programme may choose a short, practical course of study providing preparation for specific jobs; study which gives them the opportunity of improving their previous performance in academic subjects, so that they can commence a programme of study requiring good preparations in individual subjects; or study which the pupils themselves define in accordance with their own interests, in consultation with their study counsellors and parents.**

- A pupil, who has completed compulsory school in accordance with the provisions of the National Curriculum Guide, including taking national exams at least in Icelandic and mathematics, and has achieved the required minimum or higher reference grade in these subjects, may enrol in specified programmes of study in upper secondary school, insofar as the school does not set additional requirements for achievement in other subjects. Attention is drawn to the fact that, to an increasing extent, examinations are held following one to two years of basic study in a specific vocational field to determine the course of a pupil's further study.
- To commence study in an academic programme in upper secondary school, a pupil must fulfil the requirements concerning reference grades in certain key subjects specified for each programme. To commence study on a language programme, a pupil must have achieved the specified reference grades in Icelandic, English and Danish, and another specified reference grade in mathematics. For the social science programme, a pupil must have achieved the specified reference grades in Icelandic, English and social science subjects, and another specified reference grade in mathematics. For the natural science programme, a pupil must have achieved the specified reference grades in Icelandic, mathematics and natural science subjects, and another specified reference grade in English.
- To commence study in a fine arts programme, a pupil must have achieved a specified reference grade in Icelandic and mathematics, and have studied fine arts in compulsory school or in a special school with satisfactory results in the estimation of the accepting school, or demonstrated in another manner that this study is suitable for him/her.



- A school principal may authorise a pupil, who does not fulfil the entrance requirements for a programme, to commence study in the programme in question if he/she considers it probable that the pupil will fulfil the requirements made concerning scholastic achievement in the programme and provided pupils fulfilling the entrance requirements have not been rejected. Furthermore, the principal may, in accordance with Article 15 of the Upper Secondary School Act, grant a pupil who has reached the age of 18 years admission to specific programmes in upper secondary school even though he/she does not fulfil the minimum requirements for study achievement at the conclusion of compulsory school.
- If a pupil wishes to acquire the right to study in all programmes, he/she must achieve the reference grade in all subjects in which national examinations are held at the conclusion of compulsory school.
- The above entrance requirements shall enter into force upon the commencement of the 2001-2002 school year.



ROLE AND OBJECTIVES OF COMPULSORY SCHOOL

Compulsory schools shall co-operate with pupils' homes in preparing their pupils for life and work. The primary responsibility for raising and educating children rests with their parents, while the role of compulsory school is primarily to provide pupils with formal instruction and participate in their social development. This joint undertaking of home and school calls for close connections, mutual trust and exchange of information, shared responsibility and co-operation.

The school system should be flexible in order to adapt to innovation and changing demands. Its primary responsibility, however, is to provide pupils with good, all-around education. General education is the best preparation for every individual in today's knowledge and information society. An individual must from an early age adapt to the fact that education is a lifelong task. Nor can a curriculum be laid down once and for all; needs and circumstances change. Changes in family patterns and life at home and in the world of work can make new and changed demands of schools.

The compulsory school shall endeavour to have its work accord as well as possible with the nature and needs of pupils, supporting the all-round development of each of them. Compulsory schools are to welcome all children, no matter what their physical or mental capabilities, their social and emotional situation or linguistic development. This applies to both handicapped and non-handicapped children, children of exceptional intelligence or mentally handicapped intelligence and everything in between, children from isolated settlements, children from ethnic, linguistic or cultural minorities. Compulsory schools are required to educate all children effectively.

All pupils are entitled by law to receive suitable instruction in compulsory schools and local authorities are obliged to provide all pupils with suitable study opportunities. Official policy is to have handicapped pupils study with other pupils wherever possible. At the compulsory school level, all pupils are entitled to attend compulsory study in their local school, unless their parents and school specialists are of the opinion that the due to the pupil's special situation, it is to his/her best advantage to attend a special school, or if for health reasons the pupil must reside at a location distant from his/her home. The National Curriculum Guide describes the main emphases in education of children and youth of compulsory school age.

General education

Universal, general education is one of the main pillars of democracy. It is the basis of culture and general welfare. Basic education is intended to strengthen the individual's critical and independent thinking, together with the ability to respond in a new situation. In today's ever-changing environment, what individuals need is the ability to respond to new situations, rise to challenges and exploit innovations and advances in all areas. Compulsory schools should encourage pupils' self-confidence and positive ambition. Pupils need to have an opportunity to express their opinions orally and in writing as part of their study. They need to be able to give voice to their opinions, be unafraid of changes and take responsibility for their actions.

Their basic education should encourage tolerance, respect for others and for the environment. Compulsory schools should also strengthen the capacity for sound judgement, tolerance, Christian charity and values. Variety in the instructional methods used and healthy extracurricular activities, for instance, can help achieve these objectives. Compulsory schools should encourage Icelanders' own

cultural consciousness as well as respect for the cultures of other nations. General education should offer opportunities for artistic instruction. In addition to encouraging pupils' overall development, studies in the fine arts and music lay the foundation for creative expression and the ability to enjoy the arts and culture.

General education involves co-operating with families to encourage health and healthy lifestyles, raising moral consciousness and encouraging a responsible approach to the environment and life in general.

General education should help individuals to understand their own position in society and to apply their knowledge and abilities in their daily lives and environment. These responsibilities of the school are partly covered by the concept of life skills and are aimed at preparing pupils, in cooperation with their families, for life and work in a democratic society and enhancing their understanding of society and the role of the individual in that society. This includes, for instance, an understanding of the society's historical background, economic pursuits, culture, nature, family responsibility, financial responsibility and the rights and obligations of the individual. This also includes the school's responsibility to support preventive measures against various sorts of threats, through narcotics education, accident prevention measures and traffic education.

Equality in education

One of the basic tenets of educational effort is equality in education, which involves offering pupils suitable studies and instruction and giving them the opportunity to work on tasks of their own choosing. This does not necessarily mean the same solutions for everyone, but rather comparable and equivalent opportunities. The tasks undertaken should appeal equally to both boys and girls, rural and urban pupils, whether handicapped or not, regardless of



origin, religion or race. The National Curriculum Guide for compulsory school emphasises having schools prepare both genders for participation in the labour market, family life and society. One of the most important tasks of schools and school authorities in this connection is to find ways to accommodate the varying abilities and interests of pupils, i.e. to provide pupils with education suited to each individual's needs.

Compulsory school is to support each individual's education. Pupils should be given an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills, and to learn working habits which can contribute to a continuous desire to learn and develop. Furthermore, the foundation should be laid for pupils' independent thinking and their ability to co-operate positively and compete with others should be trained.

The school must prepare pupils for lifelong learning and changing demands by emphasising working habits which develop social skills and organisational and communicative ability. It is also important that pupils learn to recognise and express their own emotions, while at the same time respecting others' emotions and their expression, regardless of origin, gender, residence, religion or handicap.

Working practices in compulsory school

To fulfil the obligations placed on it by the Article of the Compulsory School Act concerning objectives (Art. 2), i.e. to prepare pupils for life and work, the school must offer ambitious study opportunities suited to the needs of all pupils. This means that schools must emphasise supporting the development of each pupil as a balanced individual, with solid education and training, enabling him/her to undertake further study, and preparing these pupils to take part in the labour market, family life and social life. To do so, the school must offer varied but equivalent study opportunities, in order to accommodate the special situa-

tion of individuals. Each pupil should be able to find study suited to his/her needs, increasing his/her strength and maturity.

Compulsory schools are to encourage broad-mindedness and increase pupils' understanding of the human condition and living environment, of Icelandic society, its history and unique characteristics, and of the responsibilities of the individual towards society and his/her rights within it.

A conscious and responsible individual, able to participate actively in an open and free society, is a precondition of democracy. The society's ethical values must be reflected in all school activities. Discussion of such values and the premises for them should be part of all subjects.

School working practices should be characterised by the values of democratic co-operation, Christian ethics and tolerance. The principal values of democratic co-operation are: the equal worth of all people, respect for individuals and solidarity. The principal values of Christian ethics, which the school should instil and be guided by, are: responsibility, concern for others and a desire for conciliation. Tolerance is linked to democracy and Christian ethics and is based on the same premises. Everyone should have the right to independent opinions and the opportunity to express them and win support for them, provided that this is done fairly and respecting the right of others to do the same.

In co-operation with the home, compulsory school should emphasise strengthening pupils' moral consciousness and responsible behaviour. This applies to any type of deportment, action or speech involved in communication with other pupils, teachers, other school staff and other persons with whom pupils come into contact. Similarly, teachers and other school personnel should set an example for pupils in these respects.



Emphasis is placed on making information technology (IT) a natural aid in all school subjects. The enormous advances in this area have changed many aspects of work and society. Each subject must take advantage of the opportunities which information technology offers to achieve its own objectives.

All teachers are Icelandic teachers, no matter what subject they teach. It should be emphasised that training in using Icelandic is the key to overall study success.

The basic factors dealt with in this chapter focus on encouraging various general, educational goals in school work. The general instructional and educational objectives of compulsory school cannot be achieved unless special attention is given to the objectives which are at the core of school activities but are not classified under individual subjects or subject areas. All subjects and instruction have to contribute to achieving these objectives. These same objectives are no less important in other aspects of school activities, such as at recess and on field trips, in student council work and extracurricular activities, and for relations between home room teachers and the students they supervise.



NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR COMPULSORY SCHOOL

Purpose of the National Curriculum Guide

The National Curriculum Guide outlines the detailed implementation of the provisions of Acts and Regulations on compulsory school study and instruction. The Guide applies to all pupils and sets common objectives of study and instruction for all the country's compulsory schools. The National Curriculum Guide lays down the instructional and educational role of compulsory school and the primary principles underlying its instruction and organisation. It implements legal provisions on core subjects and other compulsory subjects, determining their emphases and weighting. A reference timetable, showing the relative weighting of subjects and subject areas, is included in the National Curriculum Guide.

The Guide is issued by the Minister of Education in the same manner as a Regulation and fulfils a variety of purposes. It is at the same time an instrument to apply legislation, instructions from educational authorities in following specific school policy, and a reference file on the common educational objectives of schools in Iceland. The Curriculum Guide is intended to co-ordinate study and instruction to the extent this is considered necessary and to ensure the right of all pupils to a certain minimum level of education.

The National Curriculum Guide is intended to serve many different users. It describes the common goals and requirements which apply to all pupils and personnel in compulsory school. At the same time it is a reference for evaluation of schools and school operations, a guide for persons working on instructional materials and teacher education, and a basis for compiling school curriculum guides and for schools' self-

evaluation. The National Curriculum Guide also provides information and references for parents to enable them to follow closely the working practices and success of school operations and the welfare and experiences of pupils.

Common objectives for all pupils

The National Curriculum Guide assumes that the large majority of students should be able to achieve most of the its objectives within the same length of time. It is clear, however, that some pupils can easily aim at additional and more complex objectives, while others will need more time and study especially adapted to them. The objectives of the Curriculum Guide should thus be regarded as neither a minimum nor a maximum. It is the responsibility of each school to adapt their own instruction as best suits the needs of their pupils. Pupils are entitled to work on tasks suited to their academic ability and capacity.

Growing attention has been given to pupils with specific educational difficulties. Many of these pupils have difficulty in mastering reading skills. To address this problem and other study difficulties it is necessary to meet pupils' special needs through extensive screening and diagnosis as early as possible during their school life. Based on such diagnosis the school, in co-operation with the pupil's guardians, can respond in an effective manner. The National Curriculum Guide sets out clear requirements for schools concerning detection of reading difficulties. These pupils also are entitled to have consideration paid to their reading difficulties in testing and other evaluation.

Highly gifted pupils, exceptional students and pupils with special talents in certain fields also are entitled to suitable study opportunities. They should be given the opportunity to develop their special abilities and put their time to good use by attempting additional and more complex objectives and more demanding study.

Pupils whose mother tongue is not Icelandic and deaf pupils

This National Curriculum Guide contains, for the first time, provisions on special Icelandic instruction for students whose mother tongue is not Icelandic. There are also new provisions on special Icelandic instruction for deaf and hearing-impaired pupils and sign-language instruction for the deaf. The objectives for Icelandic instruction of immigrants and the deaf and of sign-language instruction fall under the subject area of language arts (Icelandic) in compulsory school.

Pupils whose mother tongue is not Icelandic have different cultural, linguistic and educational back-grounds. These pupils thus have varying premises to undertake normal study in Icelandic schools. They are entitled to special instruction in Icelandic in compulsory school, aimed at making them capable of participating fully in school activities and in Icelandic society.

Deaf children do not learn Icelandic in the same way as children who hear do. They do not hear the language in their environment and thus have to depend upon artificial conditions to acquire their first language. The National Curriculum Guide sets the requirement that schools assist deaf children in learning and maturing on their own premises in order to gain a command of Icelandic. Sign language is of basic importance for the development of language, personality and thinking of deaf children. For the deaf, sign language is the most important source of knowledge and their route to participation in Icelandic culture and the culture of the deaf. Sign language is of great importance for all school work and for the pupils' life and work.

Special Icelandic instruction for immigrants and the deaf should be adapted to the pupils' study situation in general and their linguistic and cultural background. For this reason it is natural to allow these pupils to be exempted from



studying specific subjects and from taking national examinations and allow them the possibility of deviating from exam regulations.

Objectives and setting objectives

Clear objectives are a basic premise for school operations. The objectives serve as a guide for all school operations and as the basis for planning study and instruction. They direct both instruction and evaluation and are the basis for evaluation of the quality of school operations.

In order for everyone to understand the objectives in the same manner, so that they can serve as a reference for school work, they must be clearly presented. This has been a guiding rule in setting out the objectives of the National Curriculum Guide. They comprise school policy, they are pupil-oriented, describing what pupils are intended to be capable of and know at specific points in their compulsory school study. They concern pupils' overall maturity, all subject aspects and also cross-disciplinary factors common to all subjects. The objectives of subjects or related subject areas are classified together and published in separate booklets. The General Section, together with all the subject booklets, comprises the entire National Curriculum Guide. The booklets on individual subjects or subject areas include the justification for including this subject in compulsory school study and describe its place and purpose. They list the final objectives of the subject, which should describe generally what knowledge, comprehension and skills are demanded of pupils in general upon completion of compulsory school study in the subject and interim objectives at specific points in the study.

The objectives of the National Curriculum Guide are arranged in three classifications:

- final objectives,
- intermediate objectives,
- enabling objectives.

Final objectives

Final objectives are naturally intended to provide an overall view of what is aimed at in individual subject instruction in compulsory school. They explain the general purpose of the study and describe what schools should be aiming for and what pupils should have acquired upon completion of mandatory school study. In the Curriculum Guide, final objectives are further specified as intermediate objectives, which in turn are broken down into enabling objectives. These sub-objectives are arranged as a detailed list of individual objectives for age levels. Interim and enabling objectives are thus directly linked to final objectives. The enabling objectives must be achieved in order to reach the interim objectives, which in turn are necessary for achieving the final objectives.

Intermediate objectives

The National Curriculum Guide assumes that intermediate objectives will be the central point of reference for all school operations. Intermediate objectives are divided into three levels. The first are intermediate objectives at the end of Grade 1-4 study, followed by intermediate objectives following Grade 5-7 study and finally intermediate objectives upon completing Grade 8-10 study. The intermediate objectives give an overall view of what students are generally expected to have learned upon their conclusion. They are worded so as to make it fairly easy to measure or assess whether or to what extent they have been achieved. The intermediate objectives also form the basis for mandatory national exams in Icelandic and mathematics in Grade 4 and Grade 7, and the national exams taken upon conclusion of compulsory school.

Enabling objectives

The enabling objectives are a collection of objectives/topics by which the intermediate objectives are to be achieved. They are to describe the structure, continuity and momen-



tum in instruction in each subject, show how the intermediate objectives can be implemented in detail and arrange them in individual steps or sequences which can comprise one year of compulsory school study. The National Curriculum Guide sets out enabling objectives as guidelines for teachers, parents and pupils. A school may decide to rearrange these enabling objectives and then present this arrangement in its school curriculum.



SCHOOL CURRICULUM GUIDE

According to law, each school is to publish a school curriculum guide annually. The principal is responsible for ensuring that it is compiled, published and publicised. A school curriculum guide should be a detailed implementation of the National Curriculum Guide, while at the same time offering the possibility of adapting the instructions contained in the latter to the specific situation and local environment of each school, focusing on its special characteristics and putting them to use for more effective study and instruction.

The National Curriculum Guide emphasises that study objectives should be presented clearly, so that neither teachers, pupils nor parents are left in doubt as to what demands are made of pupils and schools. The same demands are made of school curriculum guides. The National Curriculum Guide sets general references for schools, but it is left up to each school to expand upon them in its school curriculum guide, taking into consideration both the pupils studying in the school as well as those instructional methods followed by the school. In its curriculum guide, the school develops e.g. various general and subject-specific objectives of the National Curriculum Guide. Here it publishes the guidelines which apply in the school, for example, concerning treatment of facilities, discipline and access to counselling and support of various sorts. It indicates, for example, how the school organises its instruction, what instructional methods it uses and how evaluation is carried out.

It is important for a school to cultivate connections with various external parties. Therefore a school's curriculum guide must describe how it intends to co-operate with households, enterprises, organisations, institutions and other parties outside the school on the joint task of providing all pupils with a solid education. The school curricu-

lum guide must indicate, for instance, the school's plans for connections with business and industry, for employment counselling and for introducing work and study options to pupils.

The presentation of objectives in the National Curriculum Guide is intended so that the great majority of pupils can achieve these objectives within roughly the same length of time. On the other hand, it is clear that while some pupils will achieve the objectives in a much shorter time, others will require longer. These pupils need to be provided with suitable tasks, and such remedies described in the school curriculum guide.

The National Curriculum Guide does not prescribe whether pupils should be grouped according to ability or in mixed-ability classes. The division into classes and grouping of pupils is left to each school's discretion. The school curriculum guide must describe the grade arrangements and grouping of pupils and the school's arguments for the same. A carefully prepared school curriculum guide is one pre-requisite for achieving the objectives of the National Curriculum Guide and for the school to enjoy the confidence of parents and the general public.

A school curriculum guide must include explanations of:

- the school's policy and work schedule, including the period of the school session and school calendar;
- arrangement of study, ordering of enabling objectives, continuity in the study, grouping in classes and study groups;
- the school's educational policy, special education remedies, instruction of chronically ill children;
- form of evaluation, exam arrangements, grading scale;
- school rules, including rules on treatment of facilities, relations, attendance and handling of discipline ques-

tions, and a description of how the school will deal with infringements of school rules;

- information on school personnel, their education and experience;
- how relations with parents are arranged;
- parents' involvement in school activities, homework, etc.;
- life skills programme – how the school intends to arrange life skill studies and preventive measures;
- the school's social and extracurricular activities.

Each year the school curriculum guide must be submitted to the school board and parents' council for comments. In order for these parties to be able to take advantage of their right to submit comments, the school curriculum guide clearly has to reach them early enough so that their comments can be considered before the guide comes into effect.







HOURS OF INSTRUCTION

The Compulsory School Act sets the pupils' minimum number of hours of school instruction. This is generally the definition of the minimum instruction to which pupils are entitled. According to the Compulsory School Act, pupils in Grades 1-4 are entitled to 30 hours of instruction weekly, i.e. 40-minute periods, over the nine months of school operation, pupils in Grades 5-7 are entitled to 35 hours of instruction weekly and pupils in Grades 8-10 to 37 hours of instruction weekly. This applies as of the 2001-2002 school year, when the provisions of the Compulsory School Act on hours of instruction will have come fully into effect. Local authorities may offer pupils a longer stay at school in addition to their daily hours of instruction.

Pupils shall have at least 170 school days each year.

The total length of time provided for in each grade is divided among compulsory subjects in the so-called reference time table. It sets the relative weighting of individual subjects and indicates the minimum instruction to which each pupil is entitled in these subjects.

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	% of fixed hours of instruction
Subject areas												
Language arts	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	54	19
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	50	17
Danish							3	3	4	4	14	5
English					2	2	2	3	3	4	16	6
Home economics	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2			12	4
Physical education	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	30	10
Music and art	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4			32	11
Life skills				1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	2
Natural science	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	26	9
Social studies and Christian studies	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	2	2	30	10
IT and technical subjects	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2			16	6
Fixed hours	26	26	26	27	31	31	33	34	26	27	287	100
School electives	4	4	4	3	4	4	2	3	11	10	49	
Total weekly hours	30	30	30	30	35	35	35	37	37	37	336	

Language arts and mathematics are allocated the greatest share of the reference time table, or approx. 36% of the total hours of compulsory school instruction. These subjects are defined as core subjects due to their importance as the basis for study in other subjects. Emphasis is also placed on training in Icelandic in all subjects and all students' school work.

The reference time table allows schools to themselves allocate part of the minimum hours of instruction required by law. In Grades 1-8 this latitude is 12% of the total. Schools are expected to explain in their school curriculum guides what use is to be made of this time. It can be used to supplement instruction in core subjects or for other compulsory subjects. It can also be used to achieve the school's specific local objectives or for instruction in areas not included in the National Curriculum Guide.

Options and electives

In Grades 9 and 10, individual schools are intended to determine almost 30% of the total hours of instruction. They are expected to offer pupils in these grades an opportunity to select subjects and subject areas. The purpose of increasing pupils' options is to adapt studies as much as possible to the individuals' needs and enable each pupil to determine the emphasis of his/her study based on interests and plans for the future, in co-operation with parents, teachers and school counsellors.

This has three main advantages. In the first place, it accommodates the view that general education is necessary at compulsory school level, cf. decisions on core subjects and the reference time table. Secondly, pupils are given an opportunity, through their electives, to move in the direction of specific subject areas depending upon their plans or interest. Thirdly, pupils have the possibility of avoiding subjects or subject areas in which they are not interested or which they have less need of for their future pursuits.

The contents of study options in Grades 9 and 10 can be divided into three main classes. Firstly, there are options intended as direct preparation for study in academic programmes of upper secondary school. In the second place, there are options conceived as direct preparation for vocational, artistic or technical study. Thirdly, pupils can select subjects aimed in particular at broadening their horizons or giving pleasure throughout their lives.

Electives are part of compulsory study. Compulsory schools are to define and explain the objectives of the electives they offer, provide course descriptions, teaching plans and decisions on evaluation, and make these known to pupils and parents after they have been approved by the local authority.







INSTRUCTION AND TEACHING METHODS

Instruction is aimed at assisting pupils in acquiring knowledge and understanding, developing their own opinions and attitudes and acquiring skills in specific areas. Instruction is aimed at having students achieve the objectives set, and is thus a means to a specified end.

School operations should include a wide variety of approaches and teaching methods. Teachers bear the professional responsibility for selecting the most favourable and effective routes to achieve the objectives of the National Curriculum Guide and school curriculum guides. Selection of teaching methods and approaches has to be made in consideration of the objectives aimed at, the age, development level and ability of the pupils concerned in each instance and the nature of the subject matter. Carefully conceived instruction, adapted to objectives and pupils, increases the likelihood of success.

The school's instructional methods and approaches have to serve the objectives aimed at in each case. Objectives concerned with strengthening social development, for instance, can only be achieved if pupils have an opportunity to cooperate. Objectives concerning training pupils in democratic methods can be best achieved if study and instruction, and relations they involve, take their point of departure in such objectives.

The objectives of school operations vary; some concern specific aspects of knowledge, skills and attitudes while others are long-term objectives which the schools are to encourage and individuals continue to work towards after completing their schooling. Compulsory school is intended to produce independent pupils, who have developed

self-confidence and security. They should know how to learn, have the determination to take the initiative and work independently, be able to co-operate with others and express themselves clearly and concisely both orally and in writing. These aspects should be emphasised in all school activities from the very beginning of schooling. The selection of instructional methods and organisation of school operations has to be based on the responsibility of compulsory school to provide each pupil with optimal opportunities to study and develop. Instruction should take into consideration individual pupils' needs and experiences and encourage their will to learn and work satisfaction. The methods may not discriminate between pupils on the basis of gender, residence, origin, race, handicap, religion or social status.



INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Instructional materials, methods and approaches which schools elect to use, together with the organisation of school operations and evaluation, should all be based on the objectives set and be implemented in order to fully realise each pupils' potential of achieving them. Educational materials play a very important role as a route to achieving the objectives of the National and school curriculum guides. Instructional materials include printed matter, such as text books, reference books and guides of various sorts; visual materials of various types, such as photographs, films, videos and posters; audio material such as tapes and CDs; computer programs; internet material; multimedia content; material for practical instruction; etc.

According to the Compulsory School Act, pupils are to be provided with instructional materials free of charge in the subjects prescribed by the National Curriculum Guide. Pupils in compulsory study may not be charged for their instruction, instructional materials or anything else which they require for their study in accordance with the National Curriculum Guide.

The purposes of instructional materials is to achieve objectives. The National Curriculum Guide should thus provide the authors of instructional materials with direction and serve as a reference in selecting instructional materials. Furthermore, the National Curriculum Guide is the basis for evaluation and assessment of the quality and usefulness of instructional materials.

Instructional materials which are especially compiled or selected for use in compulsory school must appeal to pupils, be attractive, present the material clearly and logically, and have regard for the knowledge and skills presumed to have been already acquired by pupils. Instructional materials

should be varied and conceived with care, should increase pupils' knowledge, deepen their understanding of themselves and their surroundings, train them in various ways of working and encourage them to develop healthy and positive attitudes. Instructional materials exploiting the newest information technologies both communicate knowledge and train students in working methods which will serve them in their lives and work.

In preparing instructional materials and selecting them for use, care shall be taken to avoid discrimination between individuals or groups on the basis of their gender, residence, origin, race, handicap, religion or social status.



EVALUATION

Each teacher and school should carefully monitor pupils' success in achieving the study objectives set by the National Curriculum Guide and the school. Evaluation is intended to obtain the most reliable information on the success of school efforts and how well individual pupils or groups have managed to achieve the objectives set. The main purpose of evaluation is to gather information to assist pupils in their study, stimulate them and encourage them to make an even better effort.

Evaluation should provide pupils and their parents, teachers, receiving schools and school authorities with information on pupils' study progress which can, for instance, be used as guidance in arranging subsequent study.

Evaluation methods

Evaluation in compulsory school should as a rule be carried out by the school's teachers, and provide pupils and their guardians with the most relevant information possible on their study achievement.

Evaluation does not only take place at the conclusion of a study period, but is instead a permanent aspect of school operations, inseparable from study and instruction. Evaluation of study and progress is thus part of the school's activities. Evaluation attempts to discover whether a pupil has achieved the objectives aimed at or how far he/she has proceeded towards them. Since these objectives vary, and various routes can be followed to achieve them, it is clear that a variety of evaluation methods must be used. They must suit the objectives to be measured and reflect the emphases of the instruction. It is not possible to evaluate study achievement and progress solely through examinations and other formal methods. The nature of many of the objectives means that only infor-

mal methods can be applied. Evaluation results must thus be based both on teachers' informal evaluation and on formal methods, such as examinations and tests. It must be kept in mind that, due to the nature of some of the objectives, whether they have been achieved or not only becomes apparent later in life. They cannot therefore always be assessed through the usual school evaluation.

Evaluation should be objective, honest and fair to the pupils. This means that all aspects of study, progress, knowledge, comprehension and skills must be evaluated, weighted in accordance with the study emphases. It is not sufficient, for example, to merely evaluate what knowledge a pupil has acquired since part of instruction will unavoidably be directed at other types of objectives. It is important to assess both the practical and theoretical aspects, using written, practical or oral testing as appropriate.

Evaluating pupils' status at the beginning of a period of study can provide information useful in facilitating the structure of instruction and more effective study. Evaluation should also be carried out continuously during the course of study. Teachers should assist pupils in making realistic self-evaluations, explain to them the study objectives and how much progress has been achieved toward them. Information on study achievement should be gathered equally through evaluation in each instructional period and evaluation over a longer period, such as the school year.

National and standardised examinations

In addition to informal evaluation methods, such as teachers' subjective evaluation, and formal measurements, e.g. through school examinations, tests and structured surveys, national measurements are made of study achievement in mathematics and language arts in the fourth and seventh grade and in a number of subjects in the tenth grade.

National examinations in these grades are intended in particular to measure whether the National Curriculum Guide's intermediate objectives have been achieved and to provide pupils, parents, school personnel and the educational authorities with nation-wide information and references.

The outcome of school evaluation and of the national examinations can supplement each other and together provide comprehensive information enabling pupils to evaluate their own performance and achievement and their strong and weak points, and facilitate schools in providing suitable instruction.

Both schools and individual teachers have access to a growing extent to diagnostic tests and other instruments which facilitate investigation of specific aspects of study and instruction. Standardised 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.

Use of results

School personnel should explain the evaluation carried out by the school carefully to parents and guardians.

Pupils' grades and other reports on their school progress should be entered at regular intervals, and no less frequently than once each year, into special report cards which pupils then take home.

The results must be shown clearly and unambiguously, so that both pupils and parents understand what they mean. Figures, letters, words or other format can be used, but it must be clear what the objectives are and what references



were used in measuring performance. It is also necessary to be aware of the limitations of evaluation. A grade in the form of a figure says, for example, little if it is not accompanied by a written or oral explanation of how it was obtained and what it means. Emphasis is placed on oral reporting of results, in addition to written, particularly in the early school years.

Schools may themselves decide by what means they communicate the outcome of evaluation to pupils and their parents. Preferably each school should use a consistent presentation of results. It is important to give a comprehensive explanation of the school's evaluation rules and system of reporting results in the school curriculum guide so that pupils, parents and all school personnel realise what demands are made, how the school intends to measure or evaluate whether they are satisfied and what sort of reporting system or grade scale is used. All of those involved, pupils, parents and school personnel, must be able to understand the evaluation results in the same manner. This is a pre-condition if the information is to be useful for improving study and instruction. It is in the pupils' and their guardians' best interest to have clear information available on how well a pupil is doing in his/her study, both with regard to his/her own ability and compared to other pupils.

Any assessment of pupils' progress or performance based on the objectives of compulsory school should have two points of departure. On the one hand, it should focus on the pupil concerned, evaluating his/her progress, effort and achievement on its own terms. On the other hand, it should make a comparison with others, e.g. of the same age in this school or in the entire country. For the information provided by evaluation to be credible, fair and honest, and to develop realistic self-evaluation on the part of pupils, both of these approaches must be used.

In the case of national examinations, the authority conducting the examinations issues a summary of the overall examination results and distributes them to compulsory schools, parents' councils in compulsory schools, upper secondary schools and educational authorities. These must show the averages for individual schools for each examination, the average for all schools and other information required to clarify the results and interpret them. Information on the results of national examinations may be released to other parties but confidentiality shall be ensured concerning individual pupils' results.







EVALUATION OF SCHOOL OPERATIONS

Evaluation of school operations is generally divided into internal and external evaluation. Internal evaluation refers to self-evaluation of the institution, carried out by its own employees. External evaluation refers to an assessment of the institution's activities carried out by external parties.

The current Compulsory School Act includes for the first time provisions on evaluation of school operations. It places principal emphasis on self-evaluation by schools themselves, but the Ministry of Education is also to see to it that external evaluation is carried out of the activities of individual schools or of specific aspects of school operations, and furthermore that an assessment is made of the methods used by schools for their self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is a way of working systematically on quality and improvements in school operations. Self-evaluation is also a way of disseminating knowledge and information on school operations. A self-evaluation is to include the school's policy and objectives, a definition of the ways in which these are to be achieved, an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's operations and a plan for improvements. Its main objective is to make it easier for school personnel to work towards the school's objectives, assess whether they have been achieved, review them and encourage improvements. This applies to objectives and emphases provided for in Acts, Regulations and the National Curriculum Guide, as well as to local objectives which the school includes in its school curriculum guide. At the same time, self-evaluation creates an objective basis for improvements. Part of the self-evaluation process is the collecting of comprehensive information on school activi-

ties, to provide information on to what extent the achievements of school operations are in accordance with its objectives. Self-evaluation is not carried out once and for all, but must be part of a continuous effort. It has a long-term perspective, rather than being an isolated action. A school's self-evaluation report must include a detailed description and analysis of the school's objectives and operations. In addition, it is important that the self-evaluation report provide proposals for improvement.

The current Compulsory School Act includes clear provisions for schools to take up self-evaluation. According to the Act, the schools themselves are free to determine what methods they use for self-evaluation. The Act also makes provision for an assessment to be carried out by the Ministry of Education at five-year intervals of the self-evaluation methods used by schools.

Criteria for self-evaluation

There are a number of aspects which the Ministry of Education regards as important criteria in self-evaluation work.

- 1. Formal.** A description of the self-evaluation methods must be provided in the self-evaluation report, the school curriculum guide and conceivably in various other types of written documentation produced by the school. Here is should be stated whether a standard self-evaluation method is applied or an eclectic and adapted method. An explanation must be given of how the self-evaluation as a whole is carried out. The description must indicate who directs the project, who carries it out in each instance and what are included in the evaluation.
- 2. Comprehensive.** Self-evaluation must include all the main aspects of school operations, i.e. objectives, administration, study, instruction, student assessment,

pupils, personnel, facilities and external contacts. Schools are not, however, expected to be able to deal with all of these aspects in equal detail each year.

- 3. Reliable.** It is important that self-evaluation be based on trustworthy data and reliable measurements. Data from the school's records, e.g. student progress and absentee records, need to be available. Schools may not, however, in all instances be able to base their efforts to data on record, but must in such case assess their operations through other means, such as opinion surveys of different groups, e.g. pupils, personnel, parents, receiving schools, general public, industry and former pupils.
- 4. Co-operative.** All personnel must, in one way or another, be involved in the self-evaluation work. In preparing and organising the self-evaluation, all personnel must be made aware of the scope of the project. Furthermore, general approval of the implementation is needed. The division of tasks must be clear, as well as the responsibility and direction. At this stage, participation of pupils, parents and other interested parties in the self-evaluation should be considered.
- 5. Improvement-oriented.** A self-evaluation report must include an action plan and working plan for improving school operations which should be commenced upon following the self-evaluation. Information also needs to be provided as to how the objectives of the improvement plan are to be achieved. Criteria defining what comprises improved achievement must be defined.
- 6. Performance-linked.** The school is to endeavour to assess whether school objectives have been reached and what the school's achievement has been, based on the criteria which it set for itself. This could, for



example, be criteria on study achievement, well-being of pupils and personnel, conduct, absenteeism or dropping-out.

- 7. Institutionally and individually oriented.** The self-evaluation must be directed both at the institution itself and at individuals within it. As an example of this one could mention evaluation of the school's performance in comparison with others, for example in national examinations, together with evaluation of its administration and instruction.
- 8. Descriptive.** The self-evaluation report must include a short and concise description of the school's activities (written text, figures, tables). The description must be connected with the objectives set.
- 9. Analytical.** A self-evaluation report must present an analysis of strengths and weaknesses which are arranged systematically for each aspect of the evaluation, followed by a final summary.
- 10. Public.** It must be decided in advance who should have access to specific aspects of the self-evaluation, but the self-evaluation report must be made public. In this respect care must be taken to comply with the provisions of current legislation, for instance, on the treatment of personal information.

External evaluation

The main purpose of external evaluation of schools is to obtain an overall picture of school operations or of specific aspects of such at any given time. Attention is directed to various features of the schools' internal activities, such as administration, instruction, development work, co-operation and interaction within the school, study achievement and the connections between the school and the society.

Assessments of self-evaluation methods

Assessments of self-evaluation methods used by schools are intended to provide information on how compulsory schools fulfil the Act's provisions on evaluation of school operations. These assessments do not imply a substantive discussion of specific aspects of school operations or a comparison between schools, but are rather intended to examine whether the methods applied for self-evaluation fulfil professional requirements for such and encourage improvements in schools.

Assessments of the schools' self-evaluation methods are based, for instance, on an assessment of the self-evaluation report of the school in question, a site visit and interviews with the administrators, personnel representatives and pupils' representatives. To obtain as clear a picture as possible of the self-evaluation process the evaluators must check what documentation the school has based its self-evaluation upon, how the data has been processed and what methods the school has used for self-evaluation. As examples of school data, one could mention information on time utilisation, examination performance, parent-teacher co-operation, and the education and continuing education of personnel. The criteria for self-evaluation work which are discussed above also serve as the basis for assessments of self-evaluation methods.

Assessments of school operations

As part of its general supervisory responsibilities, the Ministry of Education can have assessments made of school operations. Such assessments may cover specific aspects of school operations, e.g. instruction in a specific subject, or may involve overall assessment of the operations of individual schools.







CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

Three groups comprise the school community in each school, i.e. pupils, school personnel and parents. 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 of the school. To accomplish this requires regular discussions of emphases and agreement on main points of reference.

Parents/guardians are primarily responsible for raising their children. They are obliged to ensure that the children attend school and are as receptive for the education the school provides as possible. The school assists parents in raising their children and offers them educational opportunities. The pupils' education and welfare is a joint task of the home and school. This co-operation must be based on mutual respect, mutual trust, joint responsibility and mutual exchange of information. Emphasis should be placed on co-operation between home and school concerning each individual, his/her study and welfare, and on the home and school as the fora for education. Priority should also be given to co-operation 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.

Finally, it is important to have solid co-operation between home and school concerning overall school operations, e.g. guidelines for behaviour and treatment of facilities, school spirit, and the strategic emphases for each school or municipality. Parents are expected to participate in shaping the school community and to work with teachers and other school personnel in implementing the objectives of school operations. Parents should also join forces to an increasing

extent to ensure their children optimal conditions to grow up in and general welfare. Experience shows that a high degree of parental involvement and solidarity on basic guidelines is the best preventive measure against various threats, such as drug abuse. If the parents of pupils in the same class or school manage to co-ordinate their efforts concerning educational guidelines, this increases the likelihood of success in school operations.

Information dissemination

The family, school and immediate environment are the strongest influences in shaping an individual. Mutual and effective exchange of information between parents and school personnel encourages mutual trust between them. Increased awareness on the part of parents of daily school operations and systematic co-operation concerning its activities, e.g. in connection with homework, increase the probability that students will feel comfortable and make good progress in school. It is very important for parents to pay close attention to their children's studies, their well-being, study achievement and progress. It is very important that schools regularly provide clear and helpful information on school operations and plans for future activities. This can be done in various ways, e.g. interviews with parents, information meetings with groups of parents, in the school curriculum guide and on the school's website.

Parents' associations

The activities of parents' associations in compulsory schools is developing steadily. The transfer of compulsory schools to municipal responsibility moved the decision-making in school affairs closer to parents, underlining the need for a formal avenue for parental participation. The advent of parents' councils in compulsory schools provides an occasion for reviewing the activities of parents' associations and further strengthening their foundation. Having an efficient and active parents' association in each

school is without doubt a positive factor. It provides parents with a forum to discuss their children's schooling with one another, together with other questions concerning child development and education. To achieve maximum success it is necessary for individuals involved in the administration and operation of such an association to consider its objectives and how its efforts could be organised to achieve these objectives.

Parents' councils

Parents' councils are the means by which compulsory schools announce their plans and receive parents' formal response to them. The role of a parents' council, according to the Compulsory School Act, is in particular to discuss and express its opinion to the school and School Board on the school curriculum guide, which all schools must publish each year. The parents' council is also to see to it that parents receive notification of plans and to supervise their implementation. It is very important for parents to avail themselves of this formal venue for expressing their views. The active participation of parents' councils can provide schools and school authorities with effective and constructive supervision and with realistic suggestions for improvements.







PUPILS' WELFARE

In addition to pupils, the school community includes teachers and other school personnel and parents. Co-operation and solidarity must characterise the school community; teachers and other school personnel, as well as parents, must realise their responsibility as role models.

Home room teachers play a significant role in this connection. The principal shall select a home room teacher for each class or group of pupils. He/She is the school's main contact with homes and also pays close attention to his/her pupils' study and development. The home room teacher directs their study and work, assists them and advises them on personal matters. Home room teachers and study counsellors play a key role in this regard.

It is important that pupils can turn to any of the school's personnel in matters concerning their welfare and well-being, and get a prompt and appropriate response, if problems of any sort arise, e.g. teasing, mobbing, breaches of discipline or emotional upset.

It is important that the entire school community, i.e. school personnel, parents and pupils, join in discussions and are involved in shaping policy in the many and varied aspects of school affairs, whether concerning the study itself or the pupils' social and mental well-being. The school has a parents' council and a teachers' council, and pupils may set up a student council, which can, for instance, pursue their issues concerning their interests, social questions and welfare. According to the Compulsory School Act, at least twice each year the principal shall hold a joint meeting of the teachers' council, parents' council and student council to provide them with information on school activities and discuss matters of concern to these bodies. Children are entitled to freely express their opinions on all issues of con-

cern to them; their opinions shall be given due respect in accordance with their age and development. The school should make every attempt to safeguard pupils' general welfare in co-operation with parents and ensure that pupils have an opportunity to express their opinions on issues of concern to them and participate in shaping their school community as appropriate for their age and maturity. It must always be borne in mind, however, that compulsory school pupils are minors and subject to their parents' guardianship.

The principal shall ensure that school rules are adopted. These rules concern the entire school community, i.e. school personnel, administrators, pupils and parents. It is therefore very important that parents' views are considered in setting the rules for each school and that parents are satisfied with them. Similarly, pupils' or student council representatives should be involved in drafting school rules and should be able to interpret these rules for their fellows and thus bear some responsibility for them. The penalties for violation of school rules should also be publicised together with the rules themselves, so that it will be clear to all parties what rules apply in the school and what the penalties are for violating them.

All compulsory schools should develop a preventive plan including, for instance, measures to prevent breaches of discipline, as well as guidelines on what action to take if school rules are violated. Such actions could mean that schools define in their school curriculum guide how they will work to prevent violence, including mobbing. A plan must exist proposing the response to be taken if mobbing is discovered in the school and it must be clear to everyone who looks after such questions in the school. Discussion on mobbing must include school personnel, parents and the pupils themselves, who are generally both the victims and perpetrators in the case of mobbing. It is thus important

that specific rules be adopted on interpersonal relations and treatment of facilities, both within and outside of the school.

It is a pupil's basic right to have peace to work at school, so that he/she can acquire the best possible grasp of the study and take full advantage of instruction. Therefore, emphasis must be placed on creating a good working atmosphere in each school and each class. Pupils' study discipline and self-discipline should be prioritised, together with respect for facilities, positive relations with others, tolerance, politeness and good conduct. Emphasis should also be placed on strengthening pupils' self-respect, self-image, respect for each other and for the possessions of others. This increases the likelihood of a positive atmosphere in the school and of pupils' well-being.

It is important that school premises, facilities and equipment, the school yard and pupils' route to school are safe. Regular inspection should be made of school equipment, accident prevention, fire prevention and hygiene.

Pupils' consciousness of their attitudes, interests and abilities should be raised, so they can make the most of their study and work. Emphasis should be placed on helping pupils' recognise their strengths and weaknesses and increase self-knowledge to better deal with the demands of society.

The Compulsory School Act stipulates that pupils in all compulsory schools should be given the opportunity to participate in extracurricular and social activities organised by the school. Children's leisure activities should provide them with ways to increase their ability to deal with daily tasks, actions to increase their self-confidence, social abilities and character, and mental, psychological and physical development. The school's extracurricular activi-



ties should be aimed at enabling pupils to assume responsibility for social tasks; emphasis shall also be placed on positive interpersonal relations and a variety of activities suitable for the age, interests and maturity of pupils. The major focus shall be on healthy and sound lifestyles.



EXEMPTIONS FROM THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE

This educational level is compulsory; all children 6-16 years of age must attend school. Study in accordance with the National Curriculum Guide 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 compulsory school study in the calendar year they turn six years of age. According to the second paragraph of Article 35 of the Compulsory School Act, however, commencement of school study can begin earlier or later in special instances. A principal may authorise a child to begin school study at the age of five or seven years if its parents/guardians so request and the school's specialist services recommend it.

The Compulsory School Act also allows for pupils to conclude their entire compulsory school study in a shorter period than ten years. This means that especially diligent pupils can graduate from compulsory school one or even two years earlier than is normal for their age. It should naturally be placed at the school's discretion, with the assistance of specialist services and after receiving parental approval, to assess when and how acceleration of this sort should take place.

In certain cases a pupil may be allowed to postpone conclusion of compulsory school study. This applies to pupils who have concluded Grade 9, but do not appear able to take full advantage of instruction. With parental approval, a principal may allow the pupil to take up to one year off from school.

According to Article 35 of the Compulsory School Act, the Minister of Education may grant individual pupils exemption from compulsory school study in a specific subject if there are valid reasons for so doing.

The Minister of Education may also, by law, recognise study outside of compulsory school as the equivalent to study in a compulsory subject. As an example of this, knowledge of foreign languages other than English and Danish can also be recognised.

It is important that the school show consideration and understanding in discussing issues connected to homes, such as consumption patterns and lifestyles. 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. Their school and family must jointly ensure that these pupils have equivalent educational and developmental opportunities.

Should the guardian of a pupil of compulsory school age apply for a temporary exemption for the child from attending school, the principal may grant such an exemption. The guardian must ensure that the pupil catch up on any studies missed during the period of the exemption.