

Kópavogur, 21st August 2018

The National Examinations: a tool to assess each student's performance and provide feedback

Dear parents/guardians,

All Grade 4 students are expected to take the National Examinations, to be held this coming **27th and 28th September**. The Icelandic language test will be held on 27th September, and the mathematics test on 28th September.

The tests have mainly a twofold purpose. First, they are intended to provide parents, teachers and school authorities with an overview of each child's learning level. Second, they are meant to provide information about basic knowledge and skills that serve as the foundation of further education. This allows for professional intervention and appropriate support to be provided in order to maximise the benefits of the schooling for the child. Please keep in mind that the tests are only limited measures of knowledge in two subjects, and only one of a range of methods used by schools to evaluate education and provide feedback on students' academic performance.

What is covered by the tests?

The tests cover areas of learning laid out in the National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools, in particular the educational goals for Grades 2 and 3. The National Curriculum Guide is a general framework for education, but each school has a certain amount of flexibility in its implementation, another factor being that each student's progress is different. The National Examinations take this into account by covering a very broad range. Also, in response to the considerable variation in children's development and skills at this age, ample time is given to complete each test.

Each student receives an **overall score** for each test as well as a separate score for each **learning area** tested. The Icelandic test assesses proficiency in two areas: reading comprehension and language use. The mathematics test assesses proficiency in three areas: arithmetic and operations; geometry and measurements; and numbers and numerical literacy. Overall scores and learning area scores use the traditional grading scale (1–10) and are referred to as **standardised scores**. Test and learning area results are also presented as a **percentile rank**. The percentile rank shows the student's position among others in the same year group. Finally, **normally distributed scores** (using the scale 0–60) are used for separate statistical and reporting purposes. More detailed information about the results can be found here. Schools will receive their students' results at the end of October and will proceed to distribute them to the students or their parents/guardians.

Aiming for a problem-free implementation

As in the few previous years, the tests will be computerised, using an implementation that has worked well for the National Examinations administered in the autumn. According to the results of a poll conducted among headteachers following the tests held in the autumn of 2017, around 90 per cent of those responding declared themselves satisfied with the implementation of the tests. School administrators also submitted a number of useful suggestions which the Directorate of Education has taken into account in its work on preparing this year's tests.

However, a number of problems were encountered in the implementation of the National Examinations administered in Grade 9 in March of this year. Following that, independent reviewers were commissioned to write detailed reports on the reasons for the partial failure of the implementation. With the assistance of external experts, the Directorate of Education has examined the conclusions of the reviews, amended the working methods used when preparing the tests, and made every effort to ensure a problem-free implementation in the future. As one of the changes made, the administrators of each school are free to decide the precise time at which each test is to start. This leads to a more distributed load on the examination system and reduces the risk of technical problems. A contingency plan has also been drawn up, containing advice on how to respond to any problems encountered when administering the tests and on ways to care for the students in such cases (for example in the event of a blackout, a loss of internet connection, a failure in the examination system, etc.).

Parents and children can view sample and practice tests online

For the first time, Grade 4 students and their parents are now able to take full-length [sample tests](#) made available on the website of the Directorate of Education. This makes it possible for anyone interested to become familiar with the examination system and practise taking an electronic test. The purpose of the sample tests is to demonstrate the type of questions that may occur and to show how the examination system works, not to prepare students for the material content of the tests. The website also contains various [practical information](#) about the tests, how to prepare for them and how they are administered. We wish you and your children all the best in your school work.

For the Directorate of Education,

Sverrir Óskarsson
Director of Assessment