

Kópavogur, 20th August 2020

The National Examinations: a tool to assess students' learning level and provide feedback

Dear parents/guardians of Grade 7 students,

This coming **24th and 25th September**, the National Examinations will be administered among students in Grade 7. The Icelandic language test is scheduled for 24th September, and the mathematics test for 25th September.

The tests have mainly a twofold purpose. First, they are intended to provide students, parents, teachers and school authorities with an overview of each student's learning level. Second, they are meant to provide information about basic knowledge and skills that serve as the foundation of further education, allowing for professional intervention and appropriate support to be provided in order to maximise the benefits of schooling.

Please keep in mind that the tests are only limited measures of knowledge in two subjects, and that they constitute only one of a range of methods used by schools to evaluate education and provide feedback on students' academic performance. Assessment takes many forms, and this is only one way of many to figure out where we stand and where we are headed.

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 4 to 6. The National Curriculum Guide provides a general framework for education, allowing each school a certain amount of flexibility in its implementation, keeping in mind that students also progress at varying rates. The National Examinations take this into account by covering a very broad range. Moreover, in response to the considerable variation in children's development and skills at this age, ample time is given to complete each test.

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. Students receive an **overall score** for each of the tests, as well as a separate score for each learning area tested. Overall scores and learning area scores use the traditional grading scale from 1 to 10. 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. More detailed information about the results can be found [here](#). Schools will receive the results of the tests at the end of October and will subsequently inform their students of their individual scores.

Applying for special support or an exemption

Students can apply to receive special support to take the tests, consisting of reading assistance and lengthened time limits. An exemption from taking the tests can also be granted in exceptional cases. Applications to receive special support or an exemption are submitted by the headteacher in consultation with the student and parents/guardians concerned. The deadline to submit applications for special support or an exemption is **Thursday 10th September**. No applications will be considered after that date.

Time limits for the tests have been modified, meaning that students will now be able to take advantage of both the standard examination time of 80 minutes and an additional examination time of 30 minutes, for a total of 110 minutes. Most students are able to complete each test in about 60 minutes, although this can vary considerably between individuals. For this reason, there is no need to put in a special request for more time.

If a student needs text to be read out loud during the tests, or requires other special assistance, the parent/guardian must make the school aware of this before **Tuesday 1st September**. The same applies for exemptions from sitting the tests. The deadline for the school to notify students' needs for special support or exemptions is on midnight, Thursday 10th September.

Aiming for a problem-free implementation

As in the few previous years, the National Examinations will be computerised, using an implementation that has worked well for the examinations held in the last couple of years. According to surveys conducted among school administrators following the autumn examinations of the past few years, over 90 per cent were satisfied with the implementation of the tests.

Computerised tests provide a certain flexibility for schools in how they organise the tests, and the headteacher is free to decide on the exact timing of each test on the day of testing. The examinations are implemented on the basis of clear processes and checklists, as well as on a contingency plan that includes guidelines on how to attend to students if problems are encountered when administering the tests.

Parents and children can view sample and practice tests online

Grade 7 students and their parents have access to [sample tests](#) 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 show examples of questions that may occur, and to demonstrate how the examination system works. 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