

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

Dear parents/guardians,

Students in Grade 9 are expected to take the National Examinations, to be held this coming 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> March. The Icelandic test is scheduled for 11<sup>th</sup> March, the mathematics test for 12<sup>th</sup> March, and the English test for 13<sup>th</sup> March.

The tests have mainly a twofold purpose. First, they are intended to provide 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. This allows for professional intervention and appropriate support to be provided in order to maximise the benefits of the schooling for the child. It is important to remember that the National Examinations are tests specific to three school subjects, and that they constitute only one of a range of methods used by schools to assess students' skills and provide feedback on their academic performance.

### **What is covered by the tests?**

The tests cover content specified in the National Curriculum Guide for compulsory schools and are based on the assessment criteria for the lower secondary level. The National Curriculum Guide provides a general framework for education, allowing each school a certain amount of flexibility in its implementation, while students also progress at varying rates. The National Examinations take this into account by covering a very broad range. The considerable variation in children's development and skills at this age is also taken into account by allowing ample time to complete each test and using a wide range of tasks (questions).

The **Icelandic** test will include tasks that measure both shallow and deep reading comprehension. The basis of shallow reading comprehension is precision reading, while deep reading comprehension relies on reading between the lines and interpreting the text. Other tasks will assess comprehension of individual words and phrases, and of literary terms such as *imagery*, *mood* or *point of view*. There will also be tasks that assess linguistic skills and knowledge of grammar and spelling.

The **mathematics** test will include tasks from the fields of arithmetic and operations; geometry and measurements; patterns and algebra; and ratios and percentages. The students are allowed to use the calculators in the computers that they use in the tests, but they can also bring their own if they feel that is more convenient.

The **English** test will include tasks that measure both shallow and deep reading comprehension. The basis of shallow reading comprehension is precision reading, while deep reading comprehension relies on reading between the lines and interpreting the text. Other tasks will assess comprehension of individual words and phrases. There will also be tasks that assess linguistic skills and knowledge of grammar and spelling.

## Grading

Each test is graded using two different scales:

- a) The *competence score* shows how the student performed in the test taken as a whole. This score uses the grading A, B C and D, where each letter corresponds to specific National Curriculum Guide assessment criteria.
- b) The *percentile rank* shows the student's relative position both in respect of the test as a whole and in respect of individual learning areas. In other words, it indicates the student's position among other students in the year group.

Schools will receive their students' results by mid-April and will subsequently 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. While the administration of the tests held in Grades 4 and 7 in the autumn of 2018 went smoothly, some problems were encountered when administering the National Examinations in Grade 9 in the spring of 2018. Following that, independent reviewers were commissioned to write detailed reports on the reasons for the partial shortcomings of the test administration. In response to those reviews, the Directorate of Education amended the procedures for preparing the tests and continues to make every effort to ensure that they are administered successfully. As one of the changes made, the administrators of each school are given the choice of when to start each test. This leads to a more distributed load on the examination system and reduces the risk of technical problems. The Directorate has also revised its contingency plans, which outline appropriate responses to any problems encountered when administering the tests, and contain recommendations on how students should be cared for in the event of an unexpected situation, such as a blackout, a loss of internet connection, a failure in the examination system, a breakdown in a student's computer, etc.

## Students and parents can view sample tests online

Grade 9 students and their parents have access to full-length [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 give examples of questions that may appear and to demonstrate the functioning of the examination system, *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.

## Preparing your child for the test

The purpose of the tests is to assess your child's learning progress. This is one of a wide range of methods used by the school to provide children and their parents with feedback on their strengths and on their educational standing in respect of specific learning areas. The tests also allow the teacher to determine whether teaching priorities will need to be changed in the following school year, which is the last year of compulsory school. There is no reason to allow this specific test to cause extra stress, uncertainty or anxiety. The tests measure reading comprehension, knowledge in languages, and the ability to solve mathematical problems, with the aim of assessing the student's overall skills. It is important that your child prepares for the tests by getting a good night's sleep and eating breakfast on the morning of each examination day. We recommend emphasising to your child that the important thing is to try one's best, and that this will make the whole experience easier.

We wish you and your children all the best in your school work.

For the Directorate of Education,

Sverrir Óskarsson,  
*Director of Assessment*