

Kópavogur, 28th January 2020

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

Dear parents/guardians,

Students in Grade 9 are expected to take the National Examinations, to be held this coming 10th to 12th March. The Icelandic test is scheduled for 10th March, the mathematics test for 11th March, and the English test for 12th 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.

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, keeping in mind that 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. Shallow reading comprehension means reading with precision, while deep reading comprehension relies on reading between the lines and on interpreting and drawing conclusions from the text. In addition, the 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. Students are allowed to use the calculator integrated in the examination system and/or their own calculators.

The **English** test will include tasks that measure both shallow and deep reading comprehension. Shallow reading comprehension means reading with precision, while deep reading comprehension relies on reading between the lines and on interpreting and drawing conclusions from the text. In addition, the tasks will assess comprehension of individual words and phrases. There will also be tasks that assess linguistic skills and knowledge of grammar and spelling.

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 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.

Special support and exemptions

All students in Grade 9 sit the National Examinations. The tests are taken on a computer, students being given a log-in code by their teacher on the day of the test.

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 150 minutes and an additional examination time of 30 minutes, for a total of 180 minutes. Most students are able to complete each test in about 60 to 90 minutes, although this can vary considerably between individuals. For this reason, there is no need to apply for more time except in very particular cases.

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 **Friday 21st February**. The same applies for exemptions from sitting the tests. The deadline for the school to notify students' needs for special support or exemptions is 25th February.

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 refers 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 in early April and will subsequently distribute them to the students or their parents/guardians.

Preparing a student 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 examination 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 for students to prepare 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,

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