

COUNTRY SYSTEM MAPPING

Country Report: Iceland

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is an independent and self-governing organisation. The Agency is co-funded by the ministries of education in its member countries and by the European Commission via an operating grant within the European Union (EU) education programme.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.

The views expressed by any individual in this document do not necessarily represent the official views of the Agency, its member countries or the European Commission.

© European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2023

This publication is an open-access resource. This means you are free to access, use and disseminate it with appropriate credit to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Please refer to the Agency's Open Access Policy for more information: www.european-agency.org/open-access-policy.

You may cite this publication as follows: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2023. *Country System Mapping Country Report: Iceland*. Odense, Denmark

The information in this document was current in May 2023.

This country report has been drafted by Diana Murdoch for the Agency in co-operation with the Iceland Team:

Representative Board member: Ragnheiður Bóasdóttir

National Co-ordinator: Anna Magnea Hreinsdóttir

Country Analyst: Edda Óskarsdóttir



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

You may not modify or translate this publication without the Agency's approval.

With a view to greater accessibility, this report is available in accessible electronic format on the Agency's website: www.european-agency.org

Secretariat

Østre Stationsvej 33

DK-5000 Odense C Denmark

Tel.: +45 64 41 00 20

secretariat@european-agency.org

Brussels Office

Rue Montoyer 21

BE-1000 Brussels Belgium

Tel.: +32 2 213 62 80

brussels.office@european-agency.org



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
SECTION 1. BACKGROUND TO THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM	9
SECTION 2. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM	14
SECTION 3. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK	31
SECTION 4. SYSTEM GOVERNANCE	45
SECTION 5. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY	54
SECTION 6. STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION, CO-OPERATION AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION	59



INTRODUCTION

The goal of the Country System Mapping (CSM) activity is to identify, map and analyse the key features that impact the effective implementation of inclusive education policy in practice in all Agency member countries' education systems. In a departure from previous thematic activities undertaken by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency), CSM considers the **whole** education system from the perspective of implementing policy for inclusive education in practice. However, within this system-wide view, there is a focus on the specific priorities Representative Board members (RBs) have already identified in relation to monitoring and evaluation, cross-sector working and quality assurance.

The main output from the CSM work is a systematic mapping of information on each country's education system.

Information from the individual CSM Country Reports has been analysed in two ways:

- **Thematic Analysis** to highlight issues (challenges and opportunities) emerging from the reports to use as the starting point for the Agency's Thematic Country Cluster Activities (TCCA).

Challenges for inclusion are defined as things the country needs to work on to reach an inclusive education system. Strengths for inclusion are things that encourage and reinforce inclusive practice in the country and could potentially be shown as an example to other countries.

- **Mapping** to inform TCCA groupings, based on the system structures and processes countries have (or do not have) in common.

The agreed goal for the mapping element of the CSM analysis work was to highlight parameters, or comparative factors, that indicate which country systems are structured and/or working in different – or similar – ways.

The information from the CSM work will be used within the remainder of the [Multi-Annual Work Programme 2021–2027](#) (MAWP). As of autumn 2024, country cluster activities will be organised which are closely aligned to individual country approaches to key issues for inclusive education, as well as system structures and processes countries have in common.



Work within a shared vision for inclusive education systems

All Agency work is aligned with the [position on inclusive education systems](#). This agreed position states that the ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that:

All learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers ([European Agency, 2022, p. 1](#))¹.

Agency work focuses on supporting the development of inclusive education systems in member countries to ensure every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This aim is directed at all learners. However, all aspects of Agency work clearly recognise that some groups of learners face obstacles and barriers that mean they should be considered **learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education in mainstream schools in their local community, alongside their friends and peers**.

UNESCO identifies the possible obstacles and barriers to education learners may face as arising from:

... gender, remoteness, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion and other beliefs and attitudes ([UNESCO, 2020, p. 4](#))².

Many learners may face a combination of these factors and the intersectional (inter-connected) nature of learners' needs must be acknowledged. Every learner has their own unique experiences of discrimination and/or barriers to learning. Everything and anything that can marginalise learners and increase their chances of exclusion from mainstream inclusive education must be understood and recognised.

All Agency member countries are committed to working towards ensuring more inclusive education systems. They do so in different ways, depending on their past and current contexts and histories. Inclusive education systems are a vital component within the wider aspiration of more socially inclusive societies that all countries align themselves with, both ethically and politically. However, all Agency work clearly recognises that countries have differences in their ways of thinking about, identifying and making provision for different groups of learners who may be considered vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

All countries have undergone key conceptual changes in their thinking and policy priorities for developments as they move towards inclusive education as an approach that ensures high-quality education for all learners. Across countries, the first shift was made from the concept of special educational needs to special needs education. This shift represented a focus away from the learner (identified as having special educational needs) towards a focus on the provision they receive (special needs education for learners who experience difficulties at school). The term 'special needs education' has also widened the focus

¹ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022. *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems*. Odense, Denmark

² UNESCO, 2020. *Global Education Monitoring Report: Inclusion and education: all means all*. Paris: UNESCO



beyond learners with disabilities to include learners who appeared to be failing in school for a wide variety of reasons.

It is worth emphasising here that there have never been agreed definitions of the concepts of special educational needs or special needs education that can be consistently used across countries. The groups of learners considered as having special educational needs which require additional provision largely differ across countries.

The most recent shifts emphasise a move away from a concern with types of special needs or the categories a learner may or may not fall into, towards thinking of inclusion and inclusive education as an approach for all learners. They emphasise the barriers experienced by learners and focus overall on learners who may be vulnerable to exclusion from educational opportunities for different reasons.

Agency work focuses on supporting the development of inclusive education systems in its member countries to ensure every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This aim is directed at all learners, while recognising the need to specifically address learners who may be vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

Overview of the Country System Mapping

The information collected in the CSM activity aims to provide evidence of and reflection on **where countries currently are** in their inclusive thinking, policy and provision for all learners, but in particular for those learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

CSM work focuses on the **whole** education system and how certain structures, mechanisms and processes may impact on the implementation of policy for inclusive education in practice. It aims to get insights into how the needs of all learners – including individuals or groups of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education – are being considered. Many questions refer to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education. Countries have opportunities to clarify what 'learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education' means for them and their systems.

However, it is acknowledged that it may not be possible for countries to provide information covering all learners and all learner groups.

The questions specifically focus on four priorities RBs have identified for wider future Agency work in relation to:

- Monitoring and evaluation
- Cross-sector working
- Quality assurance
- Effective policy implementation.

There are six main sections:

Section 1. Background to the inclusive education system

Section 2. Overview of the education system

Section 3. Legislative and policy framework



Section 4. System governance

Section 5. Quality assurance and accountability

Section 6. Stakeholder collaboration, co-operation and effective communication

In each of these sections, relevant information was collected covering International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 02 (pre-primary education) to 3 (upper secondary education).

All questions were rephrased into statements for the purpose of this report.

System description

Sections 1 to 6 include specific questions that aim to provide a factual description of key aspects of the legislation and policy framework for inclusive education in the country. The system information aims to accurately describe the relevant policy frameworks in countries.

Different types of questions are used to collect information that describes important system features – structures, mechanisms and processes – relating to governance, monitoring, quality assurance and collaboration. The descriptive information includes sources of original material and, where possible, is supported with quotes and citations from relevant policy documents and published work.

The descriptive information will be analysed to highlight parameters, or comparative factors, that indicate how countries are structured and/or working. This mapping will be used to inform country cluster groupings based on system structures and processes that countries have in common.

The descriptive information will also be used to prepare thematic cluster activities with Agency member countries. These activities will elaborate and collect even more detailed country information for the different priority areas from 2023 onwards.



SECTION 1. BACKGROUND TO THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM

This section provides key background information in relation to inclusive education in the country.

1.1 Overview of the historical development of inclusive education

In 1907, the first education act was set in Iceland and thereby formal schooling was established. This act brought about discussion of establishing one school for the 'common people' and another for the 'elite', but it was not realistic for such a small population to run two different school systems. Children with disabilities were not allowed to go to school with the exception that a school for the deaf was established in 1865.

A new education act was passed in 1946. It marked a turning point in the education of children and young people. The law decreed a compulsory, comprehensive education system for all school levels. Equality for education was increased and children from low income households were given grants to attend schools. However, children and youth with disabilities were excluded from formal education.

In 1974, a new Act for compulsory schooling was passed. This Act changed some fundamental assumptions about schooling by mandating equal access to education regarding residence (urban vs. rural), gender and disability. Furthermore, it stated explicitly that school was for *all* children and that most children should be educated in the regular school, categorising special needs into five groups and stating that two of those should be educated in institutions which the state was obliged to build (Lög um grunnskóla 63/1974).

The 1974 Act was later supplemented with the first regulation of special needs education in 1977, which further emphasised the categorisation of pupils and secured financial support for special schools and special classes.

This legislation was built on ideas of mainstreaming, as students with special needs could enter their neighbourhood schools and receive their education in the special education environment if they could not function in a regular classroom. A school for mildly disabled pupils was established in 1960, and in 1980 another for severely disabled pupils. A school for physically disabled children was established in 1969 but was integrated into a general school in the year 1974. Still another school for pupils with behaviour or social problems was established in 1974 and in 1980 a school for severely disabled children was established. The mainstream schools set up special classes for children with learning and behavioural difficulties and emotional or social problems. In some cases, these special classes were initiated for certain types of diagnosed disabilities, such as autism, behaviour problems or blind children. Pupils with learning difficulties in the mainstream school were mainly educated in special education rooms outside the classroom.

A new regulation for special needs education was set in 1990, in response to criticism of the categorisation of special needs, which called for different specialised placements. This regulation explicitly affirmed the right of all children to access their neighbourhood



schools (Reglugerð um sérkennslu 98/1990). Here, the shift was towards assessing pupils' needs in the school environment and rejecting the medical model of categorising children according to their 'handicap'. The 1990 regulation based the funding for special needs education on a fixed estimate that 20% of the school population needed special education.

Influenced by the Salamanca Declaration, which Iceland was a party to, the 1995 Act for Compulsory schools (66/1995) stated that schools should welcome all pupils living in their neighbourhoods, teaching them according to their needs as equals, without specifically mandating that pupils should not be segregated according to their needs.

The 1995 Act moved the control of and responsibility for schools, including special schools, from the state to the municipalities. This change led to a relatively high level of decentralisation of education governance and provided schools with a high level of autonomy. The municipalities established an 'equalising fund' to respond to concerns regarding how to finance the growing call for special needs education, to even out financial situations between different municipalities. Contributions from this fund were based on the diagnosis of a medical specialist at specific qualified institutions, which meant that the medical model was once again the basis for financing special needs education.

The latest Act for compulsory schools (Lög um grunnskóla 91/2008) states that school practice should be in accordance with pupils' needs and attainment, supporting their development, well-being, and education. Pupils' educational needs are to be met in their neighbourhood schools without exclusion or regard to their physical or mental abilities. For the first time, inclusive education is openly stated as the basis for the education policy.

The 2008 Act introduced several innovations:

- using the phrases 'support system' and 'support service' instead of 'special needs education';
- building education on pupil competences instead of subject areas;
- requiring schools to make an active plan of screening pupils from first grade upwards to ensure that they are taught and supported according to their needs;
- indicating that pupils should have the opportunity to attain educational goals in different ways.

A regulation on learners with special needs from 2010 followed the 2008 Act, fundamentally transforming special needs education by shifting the focus from special needs and remediating pupils' failings to emphasising pupils' strengths, abilities and circumstances. It also addresses how the school responds to diversity, equal opportunity and participation in learning, giving the policy of inclusion increased depth (Reglugerð um nemendur með sérþarfir 585/2010).



1.2 Legislation and policy definitions linked to key concepts within inclusive education systems

Inclusive education

The main objective of Iceland's education policy is to offer all citizens equal opportunities to receive education, regardless of age, domicile, financial situation, disability, sex, mother tongue or religion.

Source: [Eurydice 2.1](#)

[The Compulsory School Act](#) stipulates 10 years of schooling for all children between the ages of six and sixteen. The ideology is that the compulsory school is to be inclusive and the educational needs of each pupil met according to their abilities.

Source: [Eurydice 12](#)

Special needs education

[Regulation on support for students with special needs in compulsory school](#) 585/2010 and [Regulation on Municipalities Specialist Services in Schools](#) 584/2010.

Support for students or groups of students consists of a flexible and varied learning environment and teaching methods designed to meet the needs of all students.

When organising support for individual students or groups of students, it must be promoted that it takes place within the school without discrimination. In special circumstances, such as due to a child's stay in a health institution or in a facility run by the child protection authorities, support is provided accordingly.

Support for students with special needs must be provided by classroom teachers, special education teachers or other teachers as appropriate. The school principal can also hire other parties to support students if they deem it necessary after obtaining the approval of the local government.

Learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

No information.

Learners with special educational needs

[Regulation on support for students with special needs in compulsory school](#) 585/2010 and [Regulation on Municipalities Specialist Services in Schools](#) 584/2010.

Learners who need special educational support in accordance with assessed needs.

Source [European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#)

Children with special educational needs (emotional or social problems and/or physical or mental disabilities)

Source: [Eurydice 12](#)



Other(s)

Individuals with disabilities: defined as intellectual disability, psychiatric illness, physical disability, blindness and/or deafness, as well as disabilities resulting from chronic illness and accidents.

Source: [European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#)

Learners with disabilities are addressed in The Act on Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity 86/2021

Pupils with dyslexia or pupils suffering from long-term illnesses and pupils with health-related special needs.

Pupils that are deemed unable to attend school according to doctor's evaluation because of an accident or a long-term illness.

Pupils with severe disabilities and with psychiatric and social difficulties.

Source: [Eurydice 12](#)

Guidelines for services for special needs pupils in pre-primary and compulsory schools are given in [Regulation on support for students with special needs in compulsory school](#) 585/2010 and [Regulation on Municipalities Specialist Services in Schools](#) 584/2010.

1.3 Individuals or groups of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education focused on in the report

Learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education are those who have difficulties with learning due to general or specific learning disabilities, emotional or social difficulties and/or disabilities, (Act on Services for Persons with Disabilities with Long-term Support Needs 38/2018), learners with long-term illness, with developmental disorders, mental disorders and learners with other health-related special needs (Regulation on support for learners with special needs in compulsory school 585/2010). This group also includes learners with a foreign language background.

1.4 Development of thinking around learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

The Act on Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity 86/2021 addresses that no child should be left behind. It focuses on cross-sectoral co-operation addressing the educational system, the system of social affairs and the health system to collaborate with Municipalities and schools on the matter of every child and their families.

The current thinking around learners considered vulnerable to exclusion has broadened in the last decade, from being focused on different disabilities to now being all learners that for some reason do not thrive in the education system. The reasons can be various, and more and more the focus is directed towards mental and behavioural problems such as anxiety, depression, etc., that can lead to school avoidance.



1.5 Future education system developments that may impact positively or negatively on inclusive education

Today there is an on-going process for the education, health and social systems to work together due to the new Act on Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity. Also, we have Education Policy 2030 and an Action Plan to 2023 accordingly which states, among other things, that a new Act on School Services for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary school will be set in the autumn of 2030.



SECTION 2. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

This section provides information on the structures and features of the whole education system that influence the development and implementation of inclusive education in the country.

2.1 Overview of the education system

The education system in Iceland is divided into four levels: pre-school, compulsory, upper secondary and higher education (universities). The system is predominantly publicly funded with very few private schools.

The Icelandic parliament and the [Ministry of Education and Children](#) bear political and legal responsibility for the education system and are responsible for establishing its administrative framework and principal goals. The Ministry prepares educational policies, including national curriculum at all school levels and ensures their implementation. It also takes the initiative in the development of educational innovations, including distance learning and the publication of educational material. Local authorities are responsible for the operation of pre-schools and the single-structure compulsory school level (primary and lower secondary schools) in their area.

Schools at all educational levels follow educational policies as determined by local authorities and the Ministry. Such policies are a general guideline for schoolwork and the educational and pedagogical aspects that society wishes to focus on.

School is compulsory for children 6 to 16 years of age and the state has an educational obligation to the age of 18.

Relatively few students are in special schools (four schools with around 0.5% of the total), special units or special classes in Iceland compared to most European countries, while the incidence of formally diagnosed special needs of pupils is above average.

Source: [Statistics Iceland](#).

Inclusive education – Education for All

Inclusive education – Education for All is the guiding policy for Iceland's national education system from early years to the transition period. This means addressing and responding to all learners' learning needs without treating or defining those in need of special support any differently from other learners. In accordance with this, the legislation for the four educational levels includes all learners. In short, Education for All means that:

- All learners have equal opportunities to attend school and acquire education in accordance with their ability and needs.
- Schools must attend to the abilities and needs of all learners.
- Learners and/or their parents decide on which school they attend.
- All learners have the right to the support and provision that they need.



In the school system, pre-primary is considered the first education level. A key element of the system is coherence from pre-primary level to upper secondary school level. The school Acts from 2008 strengthen this coherence for those educational levels, namely the Pre-School, Compulsory School, Upper Secondary Education and Higher Education Acts.

In addition, several regulations have been issued that provide for various policy details. The Icelandic Government incorporated the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) into Icelandic law in 2013 and adopted the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the Dakar Declaration on Education for All (2000).

The Act on Services for Persons with Disabilities with Long-term Support Needs 38/2018 stipulates that all individuals with disabilities (defined as intellectual disability, psychiatric illness, physical disability, blindness and/or deafness, as well as disabilities resulting from chronic illness and accidents) are to be enabled to live and function in the community. For this purpose, where the needs of a person with disabilities are not covered by general services within the fields of education, health and social services, special services – as detailed in the law – shall be provided.

Integration of all learners into mainstream education, as far as possible, is therefore the policy in Iceland. The general aims of the legislation on each school level apply to all learners, including those with disabilities and special needs.

Source: [European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#)

Iceland – 2022/2023

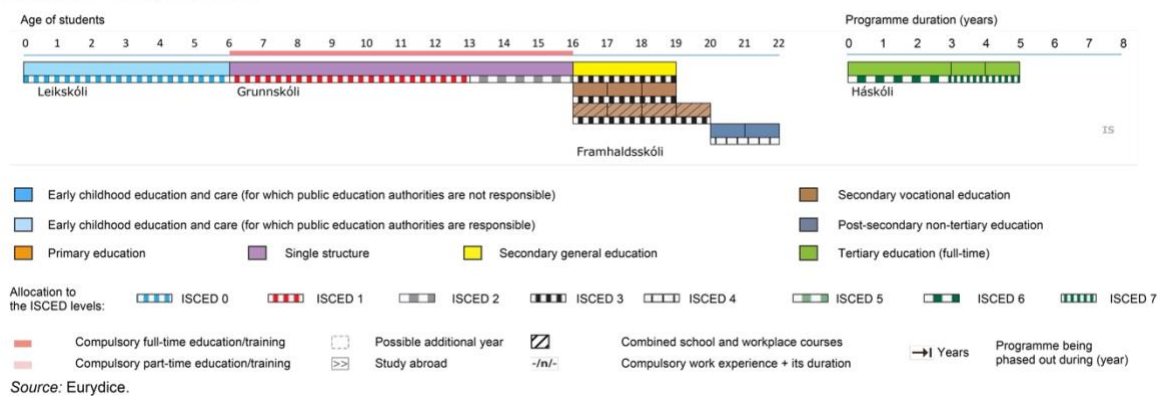


Figure 1. Structure of the Education System. Source: Eurydice



Stages of the Education System

ISCED 0

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is divided into centre-based provision and home-based provision. From age 1 until age 6 when primary education starts, children can attend pre-school centres (*Leikskóli*), which fall under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education. There is also a system of regulated and publicly subsidised home-based provision (*Dagforeldri*), aimed at the youngest children (from birth up to age 2), which falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare. The cornerstone of ECEC work is play. It is the pre-school teacher's teaching method and the child's path to learning. Each school is responsible for introducing its own framework based on the guiding principles of learning by play.

Pre-primary education is defined by law as the first level of the educational system, providing education and care for children who have not reached 6 years of age, at which point compulsory education begins ([Pre-School Act 90/2008](#)). The pre-school is not a part of compulsory education but around 96% of children aged 2 to 5 attend these schools. Thus, in 2021, just over 19,275 children were in Icelandic pre-schools, most of them run by local authorities. The challenge has been to provide children placement in pre-schools directly after the conclusion of parental leave, or from the age of 1 year.

ISCED 1–2

The local communities are principally responsible for compulsory schools (a single-structure system of primary and secondary education) as well as the implementation of the Primary School Act.

All learners have the right to appropriate education in compulsory schools, including academic, vocational and artistic studies, and local authorities are obliged to provide students with the appropriate learning opportunities, regardless of their physical and mental capacity, social and emotional condition or level of language development. The intention is for all learners to complete, on an equal footing, quality education in inclusive compulsory schools free of charge. Education at the compulsory school level is not completely free of charge, as the legislation makes provision for charges, e.g. for writing tools, school meals and after-school leisure activities. Many municipalities have recently abandoned such charges or greatly reduced them, among other things to promote more equality among pupils. In the autumn of 2021, 46,859 students attended compulsory schools in Iceland.

The comprehensive school (*grunnskóli*) became a reality by law in 1974, when the common practice changed from a selective school system to a school system that does not group the students on the basis of academic achievement or abilities. It is compulsory for pupils aged 6–16 years old. Compulsory education is organised in a single-structure system, i.e. primary and lower-secondary education are part of the same school level ([Compulsory School Act 91/2008](#)). The most common form of organisation is that all ten grades are in one school building, although different arrangements exist. At minimum number of hours of instruction per week are allocated centrally, dependent upon the grade level. The school year is 181 days from the last week of August until the beginning of June.



According to Icelandic compulsory school act and the National Curriculum Guide, compulsory schools are obliged to educate all children effectively. Each school is required to prepare a school curriculum and work plan based on the national curriculum. School curricula are a guideline for students, teachers, other school employees and parents. Further information on school curricula can be obtained from the schools' websites.

School councils in each local community ensure that all children in their catchment area attend school. The school council is also responsible for ensuring that schools are provided with access to specialist services and that there is acceptable housing available, as well as areas for outdoor activities and playgrounds.

The head teacher is the head of a primary school (including lower secondary school). They are responsible for the work of the school, manage the school, and provide professional leadership. The assistant head teacher works under the leadership of the head teacher, and together they manage the daily work of the school.

Department managers or project managers are mid-level managers who manage a section of the schoolwork, a department or schooling level, according to the decision of the head teacher.

There are teachers' councils operating in all larger primary schools. The councils operate with a mandate from teachers and assist head teachers with the management of the school. In smaller primary schools, teachers' meetings carry out the duties of a teachers' council.

Teachers and the supervisory teachers of individual classes organise the preparation of the class curriculum. The curriculum stipulates the study programme for the school year or for individual classes during the school year. During each semester there is a course assessment or examination for each subject, to monitor the academic progress of students.

An individually oriented curriculum is a schedule for all students. It suits those who need further educational or social assistance, on top of what is offered by the class curriculum.

ISCED 3

The [Upper Secondary School Act](#) 92/2008 contains provisions concerning the National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools and school working guides. The National Curriculum Guide, issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture defines, among other things, the objectives of individual subjects and branches of study. It also describes the overall structure and the contents of individual subjects and branches. Furthermore, the National Curriculum contains guidelines for school working guides and assessment of the work that goes on in schools. The law stipulates that individual schools are to write their own school working guides which, among other things, are to specify what areas individual schools have chosen to emphasise, define the education they offer, and their teaching methods and administration. Even though the schools' working guides may vary, they have to offer courses on various levels of strength and skills. Under the National Curriculum Guide, the matriculation examination, one of the paths toward concluding the upper secondary school level, must include courses with various levels of strength to ensure deeper knowledge and skills.



The most common form of education at this level is a comprehensive upper secondary school which offers both general academic studies and VET. Almost all VET takes place at upper secondary school level (ISQF 3/EQF 4 or beyond). A few possibilities exist at post-secondary non-tertiary level (ISQF 5/EQF 5), e.g. tour guides, masters of crafts, where journeymen with at least one year working experience learn how to start a company and train apprentices. The highest ISQF VET levels are captains and marine engineers (ISQF 5/EQF 5).

School curricula are issued in all secondary schools. The curricula describe available study programmes, the length and content of courses, division according to subject matter, teaching methods, learning assessments and administrative methods. The school board of the school in question must approve the curriculum for it to take effect, and the board monitors its implementation.

Upper secondary education is not compulsory, but anyone who has completed compulsory education has the right to study at upper secondary level until the age of 18. Pupils are usually between 16 and 20 years of age. General academic education is primarily organised as a three-year course leading to a matriculation examination. The length of the courses in vocational education varies, lasting from one semester to ten, but four-year courses are most prevalent ([Upper Secondary Education Act 92/2008](#)). The state is responsible for secondary schools. They are steered directly from the Ministry, which until 2008 gave the schools very little freedom to decide on curriculum issues. The latest legislation for secondary schools (*Lög um framhaldsskóla 92/2008*) provided each school with more independence, requiring them to decide on curriculum matters and make their own plan of education.

Upper secondary schools are intended to promote the all-round development of students and their active participation in a democratic society. The schools are also intended to prepare students for participation in the labour market and further study. In 2020, around 22,000 students attended Icelandic upper secondary schools. School enrolment at secondary level is good, with about 95% of 16-year-old students attending upper secondary school in the autumn of 2020. However, the drop-out rate in upper secondary schools is an on-going challenge and the proportion of those in vocational education at upper secondary level is low by international comparison. Most teenagers attend upper secondary school, and drop-out rates have been steadily decreasing in the past decade, with about 20% of people aged 25–34 not graduating from secondary education (see Statistics Iceland 2022b).

ISCED 5–7

Mainly because of the Bologna process, higher education in Iceland follows a three-cycle structure. First and second cycle education is referred to as undergraduate education and the third cycle as postgraduate education.

Source: [Eurydice](#)

Special schools

There are currently three segregated **special schools** that provide consultation services for the whole country at the compulsory level: *Klettaskóli* that serves pupils with severe



disabilities, and *Brúarskóli* and *Hlíðarskóli* for learners with psychiatric and behavioural difficulties. Additionally, there is one private special school, *Arnarskóli*, founded in 2018.

Klettaskóli began operation in the fall of 2011 when two special schools were merged.

Klettaskóli is a school is for students with:

- moderate, severe and profound mental retardation with or without additional disabilities;
- mild mental retardation and defined additional disability/disabilities, e.g. autism, blindness, deafness and severe mobility impairment.

The city of Reykjavík's School and Leisure Division runs *Klettaskóli*, and students from neighbouring municipalities can study at *Klettaskóli* if the student's home municipality approves the student accommodation. *Klettaskóli* also has an active participation class located in a large comprehensive school in one suburb of Reykjavík.

Klettaskóli is a consulting school that provides country-wide consultation to other compulsory schools and affiliated institutions.

Brúarskóli was founded by the city of Reykjavík in 2003 and is a special school for children and teenagers who have serious mental, behavioural or social difficulties (including drug abuse). *Brúarskóli* operates at five locations in Reykjavík: one is centrally based, two are units in compulsory schools, one is a hospital school, and one is in a drug rehabilitation centre. *Brúarskóli* is a temporary school resource, and the goal of the school is to empower students and support them so that they are able to go back to their neighbourhood schools. The focus is on teaching students based on their interests and abilities, as well as on strengthening and improving their social and communication skills.

Hlíðarskóli is a part of the compulsory school system of Akureyri, in northern Iceland. It is a school for learners with significant behavioural and adjustment problems, social and emotional problems, and their families. It is a temporary resource that takes over when every effort has been made to meet the student's needs in their neighbourhood school. The aim of the school is to provide other compulsory schools in Akureyri with education and advice regarding the issues of the school's target group. Learners are given opportunities to study in the most diverse way possible, so that they can enjoy their strengths. They receive diverse teaching that considers their different needs.

Source: [Eurydice 12](#)

Other information

Education in Iceland has traditionally been organised within the public sector, and there are relatively few private institutions in the school system. Almost all private schools receive public funding.

Source: [Eurydice](#)

According to the Compulsory School Act, parents can teach their children at home, in part or totally, but they must apply for such exemption from their municipality. Children who receive instruction at home are exempt from compulsory schooling but must comply with regular evaluation and monitoring, and undergo the nationally co-ordinated examinations. If permission is granted, the municipality must make a contract with a compulsory school



in the municipality concerning advice, supervision and various services. Home schooling is rare in Iceland and to be able have your children in home schooling, parents must be qualified with a licence to teach in compulsory schools.

Source: [Eurydice 2.3](#)

2.2 Specific features that are present within the education system

Early tracking of learners into a particular educational pathway (i.e. streaming learners by abilities into different types of provision or school; this includes placing children into separate schools)

Not present. There are two special schools on the compulsory education level which provide services for severely disabled children. Otherwise all children attend their neighbourhood schools.

'Double-shift' patterns to the school day (i.e. learners attend for either a morning or afternoon session)

Not present.

Grade retention (i.e. holding learners back to repeat school years, instead of providing flexible support that enables learners to progress with their peers)

Not present.

Multiple languages of instruction

Not present.

Specific policies on access to compulsory education in local schools (i.e. school selection policies)

Not present. All children have the right to attend their neighbourhood school.

2.3 Public and private authorities responsible for different types of provision

The Icelandic [Parliament](#), the Althingi, is legally and politically responsible for the school system.

The Parliament determines the basic objectives and administrative framework of the educational system. All education, apart from the higher educational level, falls under the jurisdiction of the [Ministry of Education and Children](#).

Municipalities are responsible for the operation of pre-primary and compulsory schools, whereas the operation of upper secondary schools and higher education institutions is the responsibility of the state. The municipalities are responsible for providing appropriate education as decreed by law. The head teacher at compulsory school determines whether a pupil has concluded compulsory school education and is responsible for the pupil's graduation from compulsory school.



Continuing and adult education is provided by public authorities, private institutions, companies and organisations. The [Ministry of Education and Children](#) monitors the implementation of all educational laws and regulations, apart from for higher education.

Pupils have the right to have their special needs met regarding studies in inclusive compulsory school, and regardless of their physical or mental attainment. According to the Compulsory School Act, municipalities must ensure that specialist services are provided in compulsory schools, determine the organisation of such services and conduced towards providing the services within the compulsory school itself. Specialist services include support for pupils and their families, as well as support for compulsory school activities and personnel. A regulation on specialist services (Regulation 584/2010) describes what kind of specialist services both for pre-primary schools and compulsory schools should be provided.

Source: [Eurydice](#)

Local municipalities may enter a contractual agreement with private non-profit entities to operate a pre-primary day-care centre. All the private pre-primary schools get the same financial support from their local municipality, and therefore the private sector of the pre-primary level could be described as grant-aided private sector. Local authorities make an agreement with the pre-primary school in question regarding the fee collection. The operational forms involved vary from one private pre-primary school to another. For example, there are parent-operated pre-primary schools where a special association is formed to carry out the operation of the school, and there are organisations that manage and direct pre-primary schools. There are no differences in the provision of private education or in the legislative framework compared to the public sector. The municipalities and [Ministry of Education and Children](#) monitor and evaluate private schools in the same way as local schools.

Upper Secondary Education compliant with the [Upper Secondary School Act](#) 2008: the [Ministry of Education and Children](#) can provide schools, other than public upper secondary schools, with accreditation to carry out instruction at upper secondary level subject to certain conditions. Accreditation of an upper secondary school provides a confirmation that at the time at which accreditation is granted, the activities of the school comply with general conditions of the framework legislation for this school level. These schools operate in accordance with the same legislation as the public schools and are subject to the same supervision. All grant-aided upper secondary schools receive public funding as determined in the state budget.

Source: [Eurydice](#)

The [Ministry of Education and Children](#) is responsible for the implementation of legislation at all school levels from pre-primary and compulsory education through the upper secondary and higher education levels, in addition to continuing and adult education, and music schools. The Ministry is, among other things, in charge of producing national curriculum guides for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools, issuing regulations and planning educational reforms, and is responsible for the implementation of the laws, regulations and curriculum guides at all levels, apart from the higher educational level.



The Ministry is also responsible for evaluation of the school system, assessment of schools and national assessment of pupils according to the legislation. The Ministry also reports to the parliament on a regular basis on the operation of schools at pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary level.

The national curriculum guide is a further development of the law and has the legal status of a Ministry regulation. The [Ministry of Education and Children](#) is directed by a Permanent Secretary who acts on the instruction of the educational minister. The Ministry of Education and Children issues a National Curriculum Guide for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education. The National Curriculum Guides lays down the schools' pedagogical role, the objectives and structure of school activities and general policy in teaching and instructional organisation. The professional operation of pre-primary and compulsory schools is to be supervised by the relevant municipalities and the Ministry. The upper secondary schools are supervised by the Ministry. The Directorate of Education is under the auspices of the Ministry, develops and publishes educational materials and distributes them free of charge to pupils at the compulsory level. The Directorate also organises national co-ordinated examinations and oversees international comparative research in the field of education with special emphasis on projects that can produce practical and/or scientific knowledge relevant to assessment or evaluation, for example in the OECD's PISA and TALIS studies, as well as through the European Commission's co-operation projects on education; Eurydice and Youth Wiki networks.

Source: [Eurydice 2.6](#)

2.4 Levels of autonomy open to educational institutions – schools, local authorities, school maintainers, etc. – within the system

In Iceland there is a two-tiered system: central government and municipalities. There is no administration of schools in Iceland at regional level. 'Local level' refers here to municipalities.

Pre-primary level

Local authorities are responsible for pre-primary school operations. Local authorities shall take the initiative of ensuring places for children in pre-primary school and are responsible for the general organisation of school operations of the municipality's pre-primary schools, the development of individual pre-primary schools, housing and facilities, special solutions on offer in pre-primary schools, specialist services, in-service training of teachers, evaluation and monitoring, information collection and distribution and the implementation of pre-primary school activities in the municipality. Local authorities formulate a general policy for pre-primary school operations in the municipality and present it to its inhabitants. A pre-primary board, elected by the local authorities, oversees pre-primary school affairs on behalf of the local authorities. Pre-primary school head teachers, pre-primary school personnel and parents of the municipality each elect one representative and one alternate to represent them at board meetings, with the right to address the meetings and propose motions.



Pre-primary education is controlled by the pre-primary board which supervises pre-primary education in the municipality concerned. The pre-primary board is comprised of representatives appointed by the political parties or organisations that have been elected to the local government. In addition, teachers' and parents' representatives are entitled to attend the pre-primary board meetings, with the right to address the meetings and make proposals. In municipalities where the same body is responsible for both pre-primary and compulsory education, a school board is appointed which supervises educational affairs at both school levels.

Pre-primary head teachers are required to hold regular meetings with the staff concerning the functioning of the school and the welfare of each child attending them. Pre-primary head teachers are obliged to promote collaboration between the parents of the children attending the schools and the staff of the schools. Parents in all pre-primary schools elect representatives to a parent council. At least three parents sit on the parent councils. Elections for the parent council are to be held every September for a one-year term. The parent council defines its own rules. The pre-primary school head teacher can apply to the municipality for exemption from the obligation to set up a parent council if there are valid reasons for the exemption, such as a small number of pre-primary school children. The role of the parent councils is to comment on the curriculum guide and other plans for the school operations. They are also to follow closely the implementation of the school curriculum guide and other plans within the school, and its presentation to parents. The parent council has the right to be consulted regarding all major changes in pre-primary school activities.

The pre-primary school board, or the school board where applicable, is in charge of the affairs of pre-primary schools in a local municipality, and parents' representatives have the right to attend the board's meetings, address them and make proposals.

Compulsory level

All operation of compulsory schools is at the responsibility and expense of the local authorities. Local authorities are responsible for general organisation of school operations of compulsory schools in their respective municipalities, development of individual schools, housing and facilities special solutions on offer, specialist services, evaluation and monitoring, information gathering and distribution, and for implementation of school activities in the municipality. They are also responsible for the in-service training of teachers. Local authorities formulate a general policy for school operations and present it to its inhabitants. Local authorities are to establish co-operation between pre-primary school and compulsory school on the one hand, and between compulsory school and upper secondary school on the other.

It is the responsibility of the local authorities to ensure that children at compulsory school age who are legal residents of the municipality, and children who have been placed in foster care with foster parents residing in the municipality, attend compulsory school. A regulation was released in 2012 ([547/2012](#)) concerning compulsory schooling of foster children with the main goal to secure appropriate education for those children that often live temporarily in foster homes in other municipalities, and their schooling was often disrupted during foster care. This is a great improvement, organised in co-operation with other ministries and various stakeholders.



Within each municipality, matters concerning compulsory schools come under the authority of the school board, which oversees educational affairs in the municipality in question. The school board is elected by the relevant local authority at the beginning of each elective term. The [Local Government Act](#) and agreements made with the municipality in question apply to school board elections and operations. School board alternates are to be of the same number as principal board members and be elected in the same way. Head teachers, compulsory schoolteachers and parents in the municipality vote for their school board representative and alternate to sit in school board meetings with the right to speak and propose a motion.

All compulsory schools are required to operate a school council, which is a forum for co-operation between the head teacher and the school community regarding school operations and activities. The school council participates in policy making for the school and in devising and developing the school culture. The school board, given the consent of the local government, can assign certain additional projects to the school council of individual schools.

The head teachers of a compulsory school are to organise meetings with the teaching staff as often as necessary. Teachers and other specialised school personnel are required to attend meetings of the teaching staff. Consultation between heads of age cohorts and heads of subjects in compulsory schools takes place during regular meetings.

Under the [Compulsory School Act](#) from 2008, a pupils' association is to operate in all compulsory schools. The head teachers are responsible for their foundation. The pupils' association functions include addressing pupils' interests and social and welfare issues, and the head teacher must ensure that they are provided with all necessary assistance.

The pupils' association in each school sets its own rules, e.g. regarding elections to its board and the election of its representative to the school council. At least twice each year, the head teacher of a compulsory school is required to hold a joint meeting of the teachers' council, parents' council and pupils' council to provide them with information on school activities and discuss matters of concern to these bodies.

Under the legislation concerning compulsory education, all compulsory schools are to have a parents' council. The head teacher is responsible for its foundation and for ensuring that it is provided with all necessary assistance. The role of the parents' council is to support school activities, ensure pupils' welfare and promote relations between school and home. The parents' council of each compulsory school shall set its own rules, e.g. regarding elections for its board and election of representatives to the school council.

According to the [Compulsory](#) and the [Pre-primary School Acts](#) of 2008, municipalities may co-operate in operating a compulsory school, pre-primary school and music school managed by one head teacher, given the consent of the relevant school boards. The director of such an institution is to be certified to work as teacher at pre-primary or compulsory school level. Local authorities may decide that a parent council and a school council operate jointly as one council. The co-operative school is to be operated in all other respects according to legislation for the relevant school levels.



Upper secondary education level

Under the [Upper Secondary School Act](#) from 2008, the daily administration of upper secondary schools is managed by the head teachers, who ensure that school operations comply with acts, regulations, national curriculum guidelines and other existing statutes at any given time. They are also responsible for adhering to the budgetary plans of the school. The head teacher serves as director of the school board, and hires administrative staff, teachers, and other school personnel in consultation with the school board. The head teacher is responsible for devising a financial plan and ensuring that the school budget is followed, they shall take initiative in formulating the school curriculum guide and organise developmental work within the school.

In every upper secondary school there is a school board with five members: three representatives nominated by the Ministry of Education and Children and two representatives nominated by the municipality. There are three non-voting observers, with a right to address meetings and propose motions: one nominated by the teachers' assembly, one by the pupils' association and one by the parents' council. The head teacher attends school board meetings as a non-voting observer with the right to speak and propose a motion. The school council provides consultation and assistance to the head teacher. The head teacher serves as chairman of the school council, which, in addition to the head teacher, consists of the head teacher's assistant and representatives of teachers and pupils.

Upper secondary schools are required to organise a school assembly at least once every school year. All school personnel and pupils' representatives, according to further decision by the head teacher, have a right to sit in the school assembly. The school assembly discusses school matters.

The head teacher is obliged to summon a school assembly if one third of permanent staff so requests. Upper secondary schools must organise a teachers' assembly at least twice every school year. The head teacher summons the assembly, proposes a schedule and chairs the assembly, or delegates the chair. Minutes of teachers' assemblies are to be presented to the school board. Teachers' assembly in upper secondary schools is to cover policy-making for school activities, such as organisation of study, methods of instruction, the structure of the school curriculum guide and the structure of examinations and study assessments.

The school board, the head teacher and the school council can appeal to the teachers' assembly regarding other matters.

At the beginning of each autumn semester, the teachers' assembly is to elect representatives to the school council. The teacher assembly also elects a non-voting observer to the school board.

All upper secondary schools are to operate a pupils' association. The pupils' association manages pupils' social activities, their welfare and general interests. It sets its own rules regarding composition, role and working methods. Each upper secondary school is responsible for the operation of its pupils' association.

Occupational councils for occupational groups or individual occupations are appointed for four years at a time by the [Ministry of Education and Children](#). Each occupational council is comprised of between five and nine representatives, of which two to four are



nominated by federations of employers, two to four by federations of employees from the relevant occupations, and one representative jointly nominated by the Association of Icelandic Upper Secondary Schools and the Icelandic Teachers' Union.

The occupational councils advise the Minister regarding vocational education at upper secondary school level in their respective occupations. Their roles include proposing general study objectives and defining the needs for knowledge and skills for the respective occupations as part of the national curriculum guidelines and making proposals on learning outcomes. The councils shall also devise criteria for the division of study between school-based and workplace learning, and make proposals regarding structure and content of examinations for individual occupations.

Occupational councils can establish professional councils for each occupation or occupational groups with representatives from individual occupations and vocational teachers and/or other specialists. The professional councils provide advice on innovation and development within the relevant occupational fields, and proposals on particular pilot projects and development projects.

The chairs of the occupational councils constitute a special occupational committee whose role is to advise the [Ministry of Education and Children](#) regarding policy-making and the implementation of vocational education, to serve as platform for collaboration and co-ordination for the occupational councils, and to comment on the categorisation and division of occupations between occupational councils.

A parents' council is to be operated in each upper secondary school. The head teacher calls its inaugural meeting. The role of the parents' council is to support school activities, tend to pupils' interests and collaborate with the school in strengthening co-operation between the staff and the parents or legal guardians of underage pupils in the school. Members shall be parents of pupils in the upper secondary school. The parent council nominates one observer to sit on the school board. The parent council sets its own rules.

Source: [Eurydice 2.7](#)

2.5 General mechanisms for funding schools

Local authorities fund the construction and the operation of pre-primary and primary schools. The state funds the operation of upper secondary schools.

Funding of ECEC

The construction and the running of pre-primary schools (including all salaries and operation costs) are by law at the expense and the responsibility of the municipalities. Funds are allocated to the municipalities from the national income taxation to fund, among other things, the construction and running of pre-primary schools. Local taxes may also be used for the financing. Parents contribute a substantial amount towards operating costs at the pre-primary level. The share that parents contribute varies from one municipality to another and in some cases, depends on the circumstances of the parents or whether they have more than one child in pre-primary schools. Overall, parents contribute ranging from ten per cent up to a quarter of the operating costs of pre-primary schools.



When parties other than the municipalities operate pre-primary schools, the municipalities usually contribute to the cost of the operation but there are no nationwide co-ordinated rules concerning such contributions. It is up to the municipality concerned to allow other parties to operate a pre-primary school according to guidelines in the Pre-Primary school act.

Funding of single structure education

The cost of education at the compulsory level is entirely borne by the local municipalities, except the cost for educational materials, the nationally co-ordinated examinations and evaluation of schools, which is borne by the state. The state also has a school development fund to support school development projects. All decisions regarding the construction and maintenance of school buildings and facilities are made by the local authorities in question. Funds are allocated to the municipalities from the national income taxation.

Funding of upper secondary education

Each upper secondary school is allocated funds from the state budget according to a mathematical model in which the number of pupils is one of the factors. The institutions manage the funds according to their budgets, covering salaries, operating and fixed costs.

All educational institutions funded by the state are supervised by the [Icelandic National Audit Office](#) to ensure the accountability of schools' financial management. The upper secondary schools are subjected to auditing each year.

When establishing a new upper secondary school, an agreement shall be concluded regarding capital investment costs and division of costs between the parties involved in establishing the upper secondary school. Capital investment costs include housing and general equipment that the parties to the agreement agree to provide to the school. Local authorities provide building lots for upper secondary schools without charge. The municipality where an upper secondary school is located pays 40% of the building of a new school but the state pays all operational costs of the schools. [The Ministry of Education and Children](#) sets the guidelines for capital investment costs of upper secondary schools in consultation with the [Icelandic Association of Local Authorities](#).

The main principle for funding of the extra costs related to VET at the upper secondary school level is that the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture makes a contract with each school based on a specific calculation – a formula which considers the actual cost per student in the relevant subject per term. The amount differs between study programmes.

Costs for the tertiary level are determined in the annual state budget as passed by Parliament each year.

Source: [Eurydice 3](#)

Fees within public education

Fees within ECEC

Parents contribute a substantial amount towards operating costs of the pre-primary school level. The share that the parents contribute varies from municipality to



municipality and to some extent, on the circumstances of the parents. In general, single parents and students pay substantially lower fees than others and many municipalities offer reduction to parents who have two or more children at pre-primary level. Parents contribute a tenth or up to a quarter of the operating costs of pre-primary schools.

Fees within single structure education

The compulsory education is free of charge for pupils and their parents. The parents, however, pay for meals, usually the basic cost of the raw material used. The public authorities are also not required to provide pupils with material for personal use such as writing supplies and paper. Fees can be collected for subsistence during study trips and field trips, in consultation with parents. Municipalities may also charge for extended stay outside of daily teaching hours as well as for extra-curricular activities based on their special rate.

Fees within upper secondary education

Education at the upper secondary level is, as such, free, but pupils pay enrolment fees to the school. Pupils also pay for textbooks and meals, and pupils in vocational education pay part of the costs of materials. The head teacher decides the amount of these fees. However, the limit of enrolment and material fee is prescribed in a Ministry regulation. Financial contributions to student body organisations are optional.

Source: [Eurydice 3](#)

2.6 Specific mechanisms for funding the inclusion of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

Financial support for learners' families in ECEC

Not applicable.

Financial support for learners' families in single structure education

Not applicable.

Financial support for learners' families in upper secondary education

Not applicable.

Pre-primary education

The municipalities fund pre-primary education, but they may determine fee collection for a child's pre-school attendance. However, the fee collected for each child may not exceed the average real cost incurred by each child's attendance at pre-schools operated by the municipality. There are no separate funds for special education.

Compulsory education

Compulsory schooling, including books, course supplies and study trips, is free of charge. The central government provides funds to municipalities to meet the needs of learners with disabilities at compulsory school age. This is provided through the Local Authorities



Equalisation Fund. The following two conditions apply to payments to the municipalities from the Equalisation Fund:

- that the pupil in question is a legal resident of the municipality and their disabilities have been diagnosed;
- that, when the disability falls within the frame of reference of the Local Authorities Equalisation Fund, there is a need for special assistance.

Payments to the municipalities for learners with disabilities depend on levels of disability. The same amount is expected to be paid per pupil with the same degree of disability, irrespective of whether the special education provided varies from one municipality to another.

The Advisory Committee of the Local Authorities Equalisation Fund has set the working rules for deciding the degree of disability in accordance with its type. The type of disability that falls below a defined level should rely on special assistance in the form of a payment to the local authority. The amount allocated to local authorities from the Equalisation Fund for each individual pupil is meant to provide an educational opportunity for the individual pupil. This amount differs according to medical diagnosis and is in accordance with the amount the individual and their family gets from the national security system because of a given disability, as described in the Act on the Affairs of Disabled People of 1992. The State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre has the final say on whether the amount suggested by other specialists is in accordance with the given disability.

Local authorities use different ways of allocating funds to secure inclusive education of vulnerable groups, and to support students with general and specific learning needs. Three main ways can be identified that are often used simultaneously so that it can be difficult to state that a certain municipality uses a specific allocation method.

1. **Support needs assessed regularly.** A pool of funds is allocated to schools. Here, the student's need for support is assessed by professionals according to certain definitions set by local authorities. Formal diagnoses are considered but funds are not automatically assigned based on those. The argument of municipalities that take this route is that need for support is not always dependent on a formal diagnosis. Based on the assessment, a pool of funds is distributed to the schools that organise additional support based on the student's needs. In addition, it is common to allocate additional funds for defined support, e.g. to support staff and special education management.
2. **Responding to needs for support.** Here the allocation is based on the assessment criteria of teachers and other professionals regarding students' support needs. Various analytical data are taken into consideration. Incidental support needs of students are dealt with. In addition, it is common to allocate additional funds for defined support, e.g. to support staff and management of support services.
3. **Fixed allocation of teaching hours.** A pool of funds is allocated to schools in the form of allocating teaching hours according to the number of students in the school. Allocation factor varies from 0.16–0.5 lessons per week per student, i.e. 16–50 weekly hours per 100 students. There is a variable distribution co-efficient depending on the age of the students. In addition, it is common to allocate additional funds for defined support, e.g. to support staff and special education management.



When the local authorities draw up their annual budget, they set aside an amount to finance special educational provisions within the municipality. The local authorities can either provide an educational opportunity in the pupil's school or use the money to buy services in another school in the local community or in another community. This could include a special class or a special school. Communities can share the running of a special class or a special school and local authorities set aside extra money for this purpose.

Upper secondary school

The state treasury pays upper secondary school operating costs. In the upper secondary schools, pupils do not have to pay school fees but they pay for course supplies and part of the cost of materials. Applications for funds for educating pupils in need of special support are submitted to the Ministry of Education on an individual and/or group basis.

Source [European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#)



SECTION 3. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

This section provides information on the overall framework of legislation and policy governing the whole of the education system in the country.

3.1 Is there a single legislation and policy framework covering all learners in all educational settings?

Yes.

3.1a Description of the single legislation and policy framework

A suitable general education is one of the fundamental rights of all Icelandic citizens. This right is guaranteed by article 76 of the [Constitution of Iceland](#). The Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, incorporated into Icelandic law by Act 62/1994, also guarantees the right to a general education.

A substantial policy reform effort was reached in 2008 with the adoption of a new legal framework for all main school levels:

The [Preschool Act 90/2008](#), [Compulsory School Act 91/2008](#), [Upper Secondary Education Act 92/2008](#), and [Higher Education Institutions Act 63/2006](#): together with the national curriculum guides for all school levels, these comprise the various core national policies for the Icelandic educational system encompassing all learners.

The main objective of Iceland's education policy is to offer all citizens equal opportunities to receive education, regardless of age, domicile, financial situation, disability, sex, mother tongue or religion.

Education is compulsory for children who are turning 6-years-old in the year primary education commences and is compulsory for ten years or until the year they turn 16. Thus, children born in September or later are still 5-years-old in the beginning of their primary education.

Between ages 16 and 18, emphasis is placed on providing the opportunity for upper secondary education for all, irrespective of the pupil's results at the end of compulsory schooling. Those that have the right to enrol in upper secondary school also have the right to study until the age of 18, according to the Upper Secondary Education Act 92/2008.

There are seven higher education institutions in Iceland. Most of them have departments that are run as lifelong learning centres for adult education. In addition, there are several private schools that offer adults a range of courses.

In the Icelandic education policy, it is of great importance that adults who have not finished upper secondary education get a second chance. There are several ways and means of getting prior learning, courses and other life and working experiences validated to accelerate the completion of accredited education.

Source: [Eurydice 2.1](#)



3.1b Overview of the general education legislation and policy framework guiding the whole system

Not applicable.

3.1c Overview of the specific education legislation and policy framework impacting on the inclusion of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

Regarding disabled students, the policy promotes inclusion rather than segregation. By law, all schools are expected to provide pupils with disabilities the same education as other pupils, as well as appropriate opportunities.

Source: [Eurydice 2.1](#)

There are three compulsory schools in Iceland dedicated to special needs education. Two are in Reykjavík and one in Akureyri. All pre-primary and compulsory-level schools (ISCED levels 0–2) offer students support in case of specific learning difficulties, emotional or social difficulties or disabilities.

There is no upper secondary school in Iceland specially for pupils with learning disabilities but most upper secondary schools in Iceland offer pupils with learning disabilities either general or vocational programmes and some offer both.

Source: [Eurydice 2.8](#)

Integration of all students in mainstream education, as far as possible, is therefore the policy in Iceland and no separate legislation exists covering special education either at the pre-primary, compulsory or upper secondary education level. The general aims of the legislation at each school level apply to all pupils including those with disabilities and special needs.

Guidelines for services for special needs pupils in pre-primary and compulsory schools are given in [Regulation on Support for Learners with Special Needs](#) 585/2010 and [Regulation on Municipalities Specialist Services in Schools](#) 584/2010.

At upper secondary level, pupils with disabilities and pupils with emotional or social difficulties are to be provided with instruction and special study support. Specialised assistance and appropriate facilities are to be provided as considered necessary.

Under the [Pre-primary School Act](#), children who – because of their disabilities or because of emotional or social difficulties – need special assistance or training, are to be provided with such support in their own pre-primary school in co-operation with the municipality. This is supervised by the head teacher of the pre-primary school in co-operation with the teacher, a developmental therapist or other specialist services such as a speech therapists or psychologist according to [Regulation on Specialist Services in Schools](#) 584/2010. All children from birth to adolescence are given regular check-ups to monitor their health and development.

[The Compulsory School Act](#) stipulates ten years of schooling for all children between the ages of 6 and 16. The ideology is that compulsory school will be inclusive and the educational needs of each pupil met according to their abilities.

All children have the right to suitable instruction and care. Pupils have the right to attend school in the area where they live. Schools are to undertake systematically the integration



of children with special educational needs (emotional or social problems and/or physical or mental disabilities) into mainstream education.

At upper secondary school level, pupils with special needs, disabilities or emotional or social difficulties are to be provided with instruction and special study support. Specialised assistance and appropriate facilities are provided as considered necessary. A few secondary schools in the country have special programmes or units for pupils with disabilities where they are taught according to individual curriculum. The units may differ from one time to another, because they are by definition run on a temporary basis. Everyone is entitled to education for the first two years of the secondary school level (age 16–18) but pupils with disabilities are entitled to education for four years at the secondary level. Specialist advice and suitable conditions are to be ensured. In their studies, disabled pupils follow the ordinary curriculum and take courses with other pupils as far as possible.

Source: [Eurydice 12](#)

3.2 Is there a single curriculum framework covering all learners in all educational settings?

Yes.

3.2a Description of the single curriculum framework

The main objectives of compulsory schooling as stated in the [Compulsory School Act](#) of 2008.

The Act introduces a set of changes that are mostly a continuation of previous legislative developments. At the same time, the [Pre-Primary School Act](#) and the [Upper Secondary School Act](#) were passed, and one of the aims was to increase cohesion between all these school levels, increasing co-operation between the levels with clear focus on the education and welfare of the pupils concerned in the whole system. The administration of the schools, which are run by the municipalities, is clarified and decentralised, and the role, rights and duties of parents and children outlined. Great emphasis is placed on the general welfare of pupils and the inclusion of all children in the school irrespective of their origin or disabilities. More weight is put on quality assurance and having the schools and municipalities live up to their accountability towards pupils, parents and society, developing internal quality processes and providing information about their activities and results. Nationally co-ordinated examinations will continue in grades 4, 7 and 9, with increased focus put on their role as a guide for the pupils, parents and schools.

On the basis of this Act, the Ministry of Education and Children issues regulations and the [National Curriculum Guide](#). The National Curriculum Guide provides the details of how the law is to be implemented and define more clearly the educational role of compulsory schools and the main objectives of instruction in individual subjects in accordance with that role.



The main objectives of compulsory schooling as stated in the Compulsory School Act of 2008 are:

- To encourage pupils' general development and prepare them for active participation in a democratic society that is continuously developing. The organisation of the school and the work that takes place there is thus to be guided by tolerance and affection, the Christian heritage of Iceland's culture, equality, democratic operation, responsibility, concern, forgiveness and respect for human values. Compulsory schools are to endeavour to organise their activities to correspond fully with the position and needs of their pupils and encourage the overall development, well-being and education of every individual.
- To encourage broadmindedness in pupils, strengthen their skills in the Icelandic language and their understanding of Icelandic society, Icelandic history and characteristics, of people's living conditions and the individual's duties to the community, the environment and the world.
- To provide pupils with the opportunity to develop and use their creativity and to acquire knowledge and skills in the course of their development. School activities shall lay foundations for pupils' autonomy, imitative and independent thinking, and train their co-operation skills.
- To encourage good co-operation between the school and the home, with the objective of ensuring successful school operation, general welfare and safety for pupils.

Source: [Eurydice 5](#)

Teaching and learning in single structure education

Curriculum, subjects, number of hours

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture issues the National Curriculum Guide which is intended both to provide the more detailed objectives necessary to implement the Compulsory School Act of 2008 and to offer guidelines on how it is to be carried out in practice; the Curriculum Guide is revised regularly. The Minister in office at the time the National Curriculum Guide is revised decides how the revision is conducted. Most often a group of editors is appointed from officials within the Ministry. They hire experts as well as active teachers to work on different areas.

The National Curriculum Guide

The [National Curriculum Guide](#) has the legal status of a ministerial regulation. It interprets the articles of the school act and further specifies what is to be co-ordinated in all Icelandic compulsory schools. Furthermore, the National Curriculum Guide sets the limits for each school and its staff regarding organisation, execution and evaluation of education within that school. The National Curriculum Guide applies to all grades and subjects in compulsory schools. The language of instruction in Icelandic schools is Icelandic.

The National Curriculum Guide emphasises equal study opportunities for all pupils and a chance for them to select subjects and learning approaches. The objectives and practice of study and instruction aim at preventing discrimination based on origin, gender, sexual



orientation, geographic location, social class, religion, health condition, ability or situation in general. All school activities shall encourage a healthy lifestyle. It also considers the variation of personality, development, talent, abilities and interests of each individual pupil.

The National Curriculum Guide lays down the main objectives of study and instruction, the structure and organisation of study, as well as the division of time between instruction in different subjects and subject areas in the compulsory school. The National Curriculum Guide defines required learning outcomes within each subject area. Pupils shall be allowed to fulfil the learning outcomes of subjects and subject areas in various ways. The National Curriculum Guide also defines learning outcomes and requirements for pupils who complete individual subjects or subject areas and the requirements for pupils that finish compulsory school in less than 10 years.

Based on the objective articles of the pre-school, compulsory school and upper secondary school acts, the fundamental pillars of education have been defined. These fundamental pillars, in addition to the emphases of Article 24 of the Compulsory School Act, define the competence that pupils should achieve at compulsory school.

In the National Curriculum Guide, common for both pre-school, compulsory school and upper secondary school, the fundamental pillars of education in Iceland are defined. They are:

- Literacy in the widest sense
- Education towards sustainability
- Health and welfare
- Democracy and human rights
- Equality
- Creativity.

According to the Curriculum Guide of 2011, the fundamental pillars of education are divided into six categories. They are interrelated and interdependent in education and school activities. By referring to them, a clear overview of educational work can be obtained. They are based on the idea that active democracy is unobtainable without literacy of the diverse symbolism and communication systems of society. They are also based on the idea that active democracy can only flourish if simultaneously every form of equality between individuals and groups in society is supported. Human rights will not be ensured, except by supporting individual health and welfare and by fighting discrimination and every form of violence, including bullying.

Compulsory subjects

The National Curriculum Guide stipulates the content and organisation of study in the following fields: Icelandic or Icelandic as second language or Icelandic sign language, mathematics, English, Danish or other Nordic languages, arts and crafts, natural sciences, physical education, social sciences, equal rights affairs, religious studies, life skills, and information and communication technology.



From the beginning of their compulsory education, pupils shall have the possibility of choice regarding their studies, such as of topics, learning methods and subjects, according to the framework provided by the [National Curriculum Guide](#) and the school curriculum guide. The objective is to encourage pupils to assume responsibility for their studies and create flexibility in school activities. Distance education and web-based learning may account for part of pupils' schoolwork.

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. Local authorities may offer pupils a longer stay at school in addition to their daily hours of instruction.

Source: [Eurydice 5.2](#)

Upper secondary education and training in Iceland normally serves the 16–19 age group. General study programmes normally last three years and lead to a university admission qualification. Vocational education and training normally last 3–4 years, depending on the VET subject and may in part be work-based (an apprenticeship). All education at the upper secondary level is governed by the [Upper Secondary School Act 2008](#), which primarily defines the framework for education at this level, its objectives, provisions and the role and responsibility of the parties involved in providing education at this level. More detailed provisions regarding implementation of upper secondary education are to be found in regulations, issued on the basis of the beforementioned act.

In Iceland, vocational education and training normally includes apprenticeships, delivered by both public and private institutions. The National Curriculum Guide, as for all upper secondary education, covers and guides for vocational branches of study.

Source: [Eurydice 6](#)

3.2b Overview of the general curriculum framework

Not applicable.

3.2c Overview of specific curriculum framework(s) for different groups of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

There is no specific curriculum framework for different groups of learners vulnerable to exclusion.

Most secondary schools in the country have special programmes or units for **pupils with disabilities** where they are taught according to individual curriculum that is based on the general curriculum for upper secondary schools. The units may differ from one time to another because they are, by definition, run on a temporary basis. Everyone is entitled to education for the first two years of the secondary school level (age 16/18), but pupils with disabilities are entitled to education for four years at the secondary level. Specialist advice and suitable conditions are to be ensured. In their studies, disabled pupils follow the ordinary curriculum and take courses with other pupils as far as possible.

Pupils who are multi-lingual or whose mother tongue is not Icelandic are entitled to learn Icelandic as a second language in compulsory schools. This subject has developed in this country in recent years. There are also provisions in the general curricula that



students whose native language is not Icelandic may be exempted from learning a third language – the subject ‘Danish’ is specifically mentioned. Such exemptions provided in compulsory schools also apply to upper secondary schools. Compulsory schools may recognise pupils’ skills in their mother language as part of the compulsory education. There are no specific central provisions on mother language education for students of foreign origin, but according to a survey conducted a few years ago almost half of the students of foreign origin received some mother tongue education at compulsory school level.

Source: [Eurydice 5](#)

3.3 Is there a single legislation and policy framework for all teacher education and professional development?

Yes.

3.3a Description of the single legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development

Iceland has new legislation on teacher qualifications: The Act on the education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders of pre-schools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools 95/2019, which states the requirements and focus of teacher education.

This new law states that a teacher’s committee shall be established, which decides on policy regarding the professional development of teachers and their further education. (The text is only available in Icelandic.)

Source: [European Agency – Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion](#) (2020). Policy Mapping Grid Iceland, p. 5.

Provisions concerning in-service training for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary teachers are in their wage-contracts, in laws and regulations for individual teacher education institutions, and in central legislations at individual school levels. (Eurydice, National Education Systems, Iceland, Continuing Professional Development for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education.)

Continuing professional development of teachers and head teachers is proposed in laws and arranged in accordance with wage agreement. Usually, upper secondary school teachers have a minimum of 80 hours per year for professional development. Compulsory school teachers have 170–90 hours per year, but ECEC teachers do not have a set number of hours for their professional development.

Continuous professional development of compulsory school teachers and upper secondary school teachers is part of their contracts on salaries and working conditions. CPD is optional in negotiations of municipalities and their pre-primary school teachers. (Eurydice, National Education Systems, Iceland, Continuing Professional Development for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education.)



Final responsibility and decision-making power concerning teachers and other education staff, their education and working conditions, lies with the state, i.e. the [Ministry of Education and Children](#). The legal context on these issues is stipulated in the Act on the education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders of pre-schools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools 95/2019 and further in legislation on education (Legislation on Pre-school, Compulsory school and Upper secondary school). It is also described in education agreements with municipalities and private school institutions and in contracts with teacher unions. Titles of teachers at compulsory and upper secondary-level respectively are protected as licensed professions and the same goes for teaching at ECEC level.

Accreditation of private schools lies within the education authorities, following recommendation by the respective municipality. Public upper secondary teachers and head teachers are state employees. In the case of ECEC and compulsory school level, teachers and head teachers are municipal employees. Teachers and head teachers in private schools at all levels are hired by the respective institution.

General educational requirements to become an ECEC, compulsory and upper secondary school teacher consists of a five-year course programme (master's level or ISCED 7). Most teachers graduate with a master's degree in education or in their respective field of study together with Teacher Certification Studies. Vocational teachers' educational requirements include 60 credit units in Teacher Certification Studies in addition to a final diploma in the vocational field, such as qualification as Master craftsman in a trade. The 2008 Act has been fully effective since the autumn of 2012.

National Council on professional development of teachers – appointed by the Ministry of Education and Children, [Association of municipalities](#), the universities offering teacher education, and associations of teachers and headmasters – makes policies on in-service education and professional development.

Source: [Eurydice 9](#)

3.3b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development

Not applicable.

3.3c Overview of specific legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development and what and who this specific framework focuses on

In January 2020, a new framework of legislation on education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders of pre-schools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools ([Act 95/2019](#)) entered into force, repealing the Act 87/2008 on the education and recruitment of teachers and administrators. The act lays down licencing requirements in Iceland. A significant novelty is that licenced teachers may move up and down school levels, although with more requirements for teaching in specific subjects **at** the upper secondary school stages (ISCED 3 or grades 11, 12 and 13).

Source: [Eurydice 14.5](#)



Initial education for teachers working in early childhood and school education

Teacher education for compulsory school teachers was upgraded to university level in 1971 and education of pre-primary school teachers in 1998.

Courses leading to pre-primary school teaching and compulsory school teaching have tended to be concurrent programmes. Courses leading to teaching in upper secondary schools, vocational programmes and art education are usually arranged in a consecutive model.

Icelandic legislation requires a 180-credit bachelor's degree and a 120-credit Master's degree to be issued with a licence to teach in pre-school, compulsory school and secondary school.

For Pre-primary Teacher's Certificate a minimum of 150 ECTS in education studies are required and a minimum of 90 ECST in subject fields related to the pre-primary school curriculum.

For Compulsory Teacher's Certificate a minimum of 120 ECTS in education studies are required and a minimum of 120 ECST in subject fields related to the primary or secondary curriculum.

For Upper secondary Teacher's Certificate, a minimum of 60 ECTS in education studies are required and a minimum of 180 ECST in a subject field related to the primary or secondary curriculum.

Academic programmes and education for teachers in Arts or in Sport and Health Sciences are similarly organised and students graduate with a Master's degree.

Vocational teachers' educational requirements include 60 credit units in Teacher Certification Studies in addition to a final diploma in the vocational field, such as qualification as Master craftsman in a trade.

A programme for teachers in special education has been provided since 1974 and is currently offered as an elective line of study at Master's level at the School of Education at the University of Iceland.

Practical fieldwork in initial teacher's education takes place in educational institutions at the respective level.

Curriculum, level of specialisation and learning outcomes

The Act on education, competency and recruitment of teachers and school leaders of pre-schools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools, stipulates the general educational requirements to become a pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary school teacher. The law requires for most teachers a Master's degree (300 ECTS) in education or in a respective field of study together with Teacher Certification Studies. For vocational teachers, educational requirements include 60 credit units in Teacher Certification Studies in addition to a final diploma in the vocational field; such as qualification as Master craftsman in a trade.

Source: [Eurydice 9](#)



Continuing professional development for teachers working in early childhood and school education

There is no single comprehensive legislation that applies to the professional development of teachers and their further education. Provisions concerning in-service training for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary teachers are in their wage-contracts, in laws and regulations for individual teacher education institutions and in central legislations on individual school levels.

Emphasis has been placed on making it possible for teachers to have access to in-service training or further education. Teacher education institutions offer such programmes.

Educational authorities, at state level and municipal level, have adopted the policy of encouraging teachers themselves to bring about innovations and initiate developmental and in-service training projects. Individual pre-primary schools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools are required by law to develop local professional development schemes for teachers. In-service training projects are often initiated by the associations of teachers of a given subject and in some cases by local education offices.

According to laws on compulsory and upper secondary education, there are provisions on sabbaticals for teachers. Teachers must apply for leave of absence to the respective authorities. There are comparable provisions in the wage contract between the municipalities and the [Association of Pre-primary School Teachers](#).

Source: [Eurydice 9.1](#)

Organisational aspects

Continuous professional development of compulsory school teachers and upper secondary school teachers is part of their contracts on salaries and working conditions. CPD is optional in negotiations of municipalities and their pre-primary school teachers.

The Council of Continuous Professional Development of Teachers was established by the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in 2013. It is led by the ministry, with strong representation from the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities and various stakeholders of the educational system.

Incentives for participation in continuing professional development (CPD) activities

In most teachers' wage contracts, teachers are expected to spend time on in-service training, preparation and other duties outside their presence in school.

Source: [Eurydice 9.3](#)

3.4 Is there a single legislation and policy framework to ensure support for all learners throughout their school careers?

Yes.



3.4a Description of the single legislation and policy framework that ensures support for all throughout their school careers

[The Compulsory School Act](#) stipulates ten years of schooling for all children between the ages of 6 and 16. The ideology is that the compulsory school is to be inclusive and the educational needs of each pupil met according to their abilities.

All children have the right to suitable instruction and care. Pupils have the right to attend school in the area where they live. Schools are to undertake systematically the integration of children with special educational needs (emotional or social problems and/or physical or mental disabilities) into mainstream education.

Source: [Eurydice 12](#)

Academic support and guidance: All compulsory school pupils have the right to appropriate instruction within an encouraging study environment in suitable facilities which considers their needs and general well-being. Each pupil is to have a supervisory teacher. Supervisory teachers are to follow their pupils' studies closely and their personal development and general welfare. All pupils at the compulsory level have the right to receive educational and career guidance and counselling within the compulsory school by appropriate specialists.

Pupils in upper secondary school have the right to receive educational and career guidance and counselling within the school from the appropriate specialists.

Source: [Eurydice 12.4](#)

3.4b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework that ensures support for the majority of learners throughout their school careers

Not applicable.

3.4c Overview of the specific legislation and policy framework that ensures support for learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education throughout their school careers

The Act on Services for Persons with Disabilities with Long-term Support Needs 38/2018 stipulates that all individuals with disabilities (defined as mental retardation, psychiatric illness, physical disability, blindness and/or deafness as well as disabilities resulting from chronic illness and accidents) are to be enabled to live and function in the community.

Integration of all students into mainstream education, as far as possible, is therefore the policy in Iceland and **no separate legislation** exists covering special education either at pre-primary, compulsory or the upper secondary education level. The general aims of the legislation on each school level apply to all pupils including those with disabilities and special needs.

Guidelines for services for special needs pupils in pre-primary and compulsory schools are given in [Regulation on Support for Learners with Special Needs](#) 585/2010 and [Regulation on Municipalities' School Services](#) 584/2010.

At upper secondary level, pupils with disabilities and pupils with emotional or social difficulties are to be provided with instruction and special study support. Specialised assistance and appropriate facilities are to be provided as considered necessary.



Adult Educational Centres are also obliged to provide adult education to individuals with reduced educational and professional opportunities, considering their competences and unequal situation.

Source: [Eurydice 12](#)

Pupils with **dyslexia** or pupils suffering from **long-term illnesses** and pupils with health-related special needs also have the right to special study support, according to evaluation of their special needs. Pupils that are deemed unable to attend school according to a doctor's evaluation because of an **accident or a long-term illness** have the right to special instruction because of their condition, either in their home or at a medical facility. Special instruction because of a medical condition is the responsibility of the relevant municipality. If a child's parents, head teacher, teachers or other specialists believe that the child is not receiving suitable instruction in the compulsory school, the parents can ask that their child be admitted to a special class within general compulsory school or to a specialised school. Most of the larger municipalities have one or more special classes within their catchment area, inside mainstream schools, which provide appropriate services for various disabilities according to needs.

There are currently three segregated special schools that provide services for the whole country at the compulsory level, one that serves pupils with **severe disabilities** and two for children with **psychiatric and behavioural/social difficulties**.

Pupils with **exceptional learning ability** do have the right to a challenging learning experience, but admittedly more organised effort is being put on meeting the needs of **children with disabilities** rather than children with exceptional abilities. However, this does not mean that little is done for exceptionally gifted children, only that the programmes there are more on a municipal level or at particular schools rather than nationally organised.

At upper secondary school level, pupils with **special needs, disabilities or emotional or social difficulties** are to be provided with instruction and special study support. Specialised assistance and appropriate facilities are provided as considered necessary. A few secondary schools in the country have special programmes or units for pupils with **disabilities** where they are taught according to individual curriculum. The units may differ from one time to another because they are by definition run on a temporary basis. Everyone is entitled to education for the first two years of the secondary school level (age 16–18) but **pupils with disabilities** are entitled to education for four years at the secondary level. Specialist advice and suitable conditions are to be ensured. In their studies, disabled pupils follow the ordinary curriculum and take courses with other pupils as far as possible.

Source: [Eurydice 12](#)

Pupils in compulsory schools with social or psychological difficulties that may affect their studies are to receive specialist analysis. All surveys and analyses regarding individual pupils are to be carried out within the compulsory school and made in consultation with parents. It is the municipalities' responsibility to ensure that this service is provided in the compulsory school.



Pupils who have difficulties because of learning difficulties, emotional or social problems and/or disabilities, have the right to special study support, according to Regulation on Specialist Services in Schools 584/2010.

At the upper secondary school level, pupils with disabilities and pupils with emotional or social difficulties are to be provided with instruction and special study support. Specialised assistance and appropriate facilities are to be provided as considered necessary by the Ministry of Education and Children.

Source: [Eurydice 12.4](#)

A regulation was released in 2011 concerning compulsory schooling of **foster children**, with the main goal to secure appropriate education for those children that often live temporarily in foster homes in other municipalities, and their schooling was often disrupted during foster care. This is a great improvement, organised in co-operation with other ministries and various stakeholders.

Source: [Eurydice 2](#)

3.5 Is there a single legislation and policy framework to ensure support for all learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life?

Yes.

3.5a Description of the single legislation and policy framework that ensures support for all learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life

Career guidance

All pupils at the compulsory level have the right to receive educational and career guidance and counselling within the compulsory school by appropriate specialists.

Pupils in upper secondary school have the right to receive educational and career guidance and counselling within the school from the appropriate specialists. The upper secondary school curriculum guide shall include a description of the school's objectives and policy concerning educational and vocational guidance and counselling and it shall also describe how the school fulfils its role and duty in this regard.

At the upper secondary school level, many of the special units include preparation for adult life. This includes training for a job, either in the labour market, in sheltered workshops or in other facilities that are organised for the disabled. The aim is to find a permanent job for the pupils that suit their abilities and interests. Mainstream and special schools introduce employment opportunities and the rules of work to their final-year pupils with special needs, the aim being to have a successful **transition from school to work**.

Source: Eurydice [12.4](#)



3.5b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework that ensures support for the majority of learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life

Not applicable.

3.5c Overview of the specific legislation and policy framework that ensures support for learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life

At the upper secondary school level, many of the special units include preparation for adult life. This includes training for a job, either in the labour market, in sheltered workshops or in other facilities that are organised for the disabled. The aim is to find a permanent job for the pupils that suit their abilities and interests. Mainstream and special schools introduce employment opportunities and the rules of work to their final-year pupils with special needs, the aim being to have a successful transition from school to work.

Source: [Eurydice 12.4](#)

Efforts are directed at combating drop-outs of learners with a foreign language background from secondary schools by providing support at all school levels, including through increased emphasis on native language teaching and promoting active bi-lingualism or pluri-lingualism.

Source: [Voluntary review of progress to 2030 SDG4](#) GEM targets p. 41



SECTION 4. SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

This section provides information on aspects of governance across and between different system levels, bodies and stakeholders in the country.

4.1 Shared responsibilities across and between central and local government

The Icelandic [Parliament](#), the Althingi, is legally and politically responsible for the school system. There are four school levels in Iceland: pre-primary, compulsory (single structure primary and lower secondary education), upper secondary and higher education. The parliament determines the basic objectives and administrative framework of the educational system. All education, apart from the higher educational level, falls under the jurisdiction of the [Ministry of Education and Children](#).

Municipalities are responsible for the operation of **pre-primary and compulsory schools**, whereas the operation of **upper secondary schools and higher education** institutions is the responsibility of the **state**.

Continuing and adult education is provided by public authorities, private institutions, companies and organisations. The [Ministry of Education and Children](#) monitors the implementation of all educational laws and regulations, apart from for higher education. This falls under the responsibility of the [Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation](#).

Education in Iceland has traditionally been organised within the public sector, and there are relatively few private institutions in the school system. Almost all private schools receive public funding.

Source: [Eurydice 2](#)

The [Ministry of Education and Children](#) is responsible for the implementation of legislation at all school levels from pre-primary and compulsory education through the upper secondary and higher education levels, in addition to continuing and adult education and music schools. The Ministry is, among other things, in charge of producing national curriculum guides for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools, issuing regulations and planning educational reforms, and is responsible for the implementation of the laws, regulations and curriculum guides at all levels, apart from the higher educational level.

The Ministry is also responsible for the evaluation of the school system, assessment of schools and national assessment of pupils according to the legislation. The Ministry reports to the Parliament on a regular basis on the operation of schools at pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary level.

The national curriculum guide is a further development of the law and has the **legal status of a ministry regulation**. The [Ministry of Education and Children](#) is directed by a Permanent Secretary who acts on the instruction of the educational minister.



The [Ministry of Education and Children](#) issues the **National Curriculum Guide** for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education. The National Curriculum Guides lays down the **school's pedagogical role**, the objectives and structure of school activities and general policy in teaching and instructional organisation.

The professional operation of pre-primary and compulsory schools is to be supervised by the relevant **municipalities and the Ministry**. The upper secondary schools are supervised by the **Ministry**.

The **Directorate of Education** is under the auspices of the Ministry, develops and publishes educational materials and distributes them free of charge to pupils at the compulsory level. The Directorate also organises national co-ordinated examinations and oversees international comparative research in the field of education, with special emphasis on projects that can produce practical and/or scientific knowledge relevant to assessment or evaluation, for example in the OECD's PISA and TALIS studies, as well as through the European Commission's co-operation projects on education: Eurydice and Youth Wiki networks.

Source: [Eurydice 2.6](#)

In Iceland, there is a two-tiered system governing education: **central government and municipalities**. There is no administration of schools in Iceland at regional level. '**Local level**' refers here to municipalities.

In 2022, there were 64 municipalities in Iceland, ranging in size from towns to villages and rural area units. **Municipalities** are responsible for the operation of schools at pre-primary and compulsory level. Apart from being represented in the school boards of upper secondary schools, municipalities have no administrative responsibilities at the upper secondary level. They have no administrative responsibilities at the higher education level nor concerning adult education. A few of the larger municipalities, however, operate adult education programmes.

Local authorities are responsible for **pre-primary** school operations. Local authorities shall take the initiative of ensuring places for children in pre-primary school and are responsible for the general organisation of school operations of the municipality's pre-primary schools, the development of individual pre-primary schools, housing and facilities, special solutions on offer in pre-primary schools, specialist services, in-service training of teachers, evaluation and monitoring, information collection and distribution and the implementation of pre-primary school activities in the municipality. Local authorities formulate a general policy for pre-primary school operations in the municipality and present it to their inhabitants. A **pre-primary board**, elected by the local authorities, is in charge of pre-primary school affairs on behalf of the local authorities. Pre-primary school head teachers, pre-primary school personnel and parents of the municipality elect one representative each and one alternate to represent them at board meetings, with the right to address the meetings and propose motions.

All operation of **compulsory schools** is at the responsibility and expense of the **local authorities**. Local authorities are responsible for the general organisation of school operations of compulsory schools in their respective municipalities, development of individual schools, housing and facilities, special solutions on offer, specialist services, evaluation and monitoring, information gathering and distribution, and for



implementation of school activities in the municipality. They are also responsible for the in-service training of teachers. Local authorities formulate a general policy for school operations and present it to their inhabitants. Local authorities are to **establish co-operation** between pre-primary school and compulsory school on the one hand, and between compulsory school and upper secondary school on the other.

It is the responsibility of the **local authorities** to ensure that children at compulsory school age who are legal residents of the municipality, and children who have been placed in foster care with foster parents residing in the municipality, attend compulsory school. A regulation was released in 2011 concerning compulsory schooling of foster children with the main goal to secure appropriate education for those children that often live temporarily in foster homes in other municipalities, and their schooling was often disrupted during foster care. This is a great improvement, organised in co-operation with other ministries and various stakeholders.

Within each municipality, matters concerning compulsory schools come under the **authority of the school board**, which is in charge of educational affairs in the municipality in question. The school board is elected by the relevant local authority at the beginning of each elective term. The [Local Government Act](#) and agreements made with the municipality in question apply to school board elections and operations. School board alternates are to be of the same number as principal board members and be elected in the same way. Head teachers, compulsory school teachers and parents in the municipality vote for their school board representative and alternate to sit in school board meetings with the right to speak and propose a motion.

All compulsory schools are required to operate a **school council**, which is a forum for co-operation between the head teacher and the school community regarding school operations and activities. The school council participates in policy making for the school and in devising and developing the school culture. The school board, given the consent of the local government, can assign certain additional projects to the school council of individual schools.

The **head teachers** of a compulsory school are to hold meetings of the teaching staff as often as necessary. **Teachers and other specialised school personnel** are required to attend meetings of the teaching staff. Consultation between heads of age cohorts and heads of subjects in compulsory schools takes place during regular meetings.

Under the [Compulsory School Act](#) 2008, **pupils' associations** are to operate in all compulsory schools. The head teachers are responsible for their foundation. The pupils' association functions include addressing pupils' interests and social and welfare issues, and the head teacher must ensure that they are provided with all necessary assistance.

The pupils' association in each school is to set its own rules, e.g. regarding elections to its board and the election of its representative to the school council. At least twice each year, the head teacher of a compulsory school is required to hold a joint meeting of the teachers' council, parents' council and pupils' council to provide them with information on school activities and discuss matters of concern to these bodies.

Under the legislation concerning compulsory education, all compulsory schools are to have a **parents' council**. The head teacher is responsible for its foundation and for ensuring that it is provided with all necessary assistance. The role of the parent council is



to support school activities, ensure pupils' welfare and promote relations between school and home. The parent council of each compulsory school shall set its own rules, e.g. regarding elections for its board and election of representatives to the school council.

According to the [Compulsory](#) and the [Pre-primary School Acts](#) 2008, **municipalities may co-operate** in operating a compulsory school, pre-primary school and music school managed by one head teacher, given the consent of the relevant school boards. The director of such an institution is to be certified to work as a teacher at pre-primary or compulsory school level. **Local authorities may decide that a parent council and a school council operate jointly as one council.** The co-operative school is to be operated in all other respects according to legislation for the relevant school levels.

Under the [Upper Secondary School Act](#) 2008, the daily administration of upper secondary schools is managed by the **head teachers**, who ensure that school operations comply with acts, regulations, national curriculum guidelines and other existing statutes at any given time. They are also responsible for adhering to the budgetary plans of the school. The head teacher serves as director of the school board, and hires administrative staff, teachers and other school personnel in consultation with the school board. The head teacher is responsible for devising a financial plan and ensuring that the school budget is followed, they take initiative in formulating the school curriculum guide and organise developmental work within the school.

Source: [Eurydice 2.7](#)

4.2 Specific areas for shared responsibilities across and between central and local government

Policy development, implementation and co-ordination

Government policy statement issues that municipalities should provide and implement school policy documents grounded in government policy

Identification of needs/referral for services

Whole education system:

Health service, educational and social workers pay special attention to children's mental and physical condition. If a preliminary assessment reveals the need for further diagnosis or means of therapy, the guardians are directed to the appropriate national agency. The four main national agencies concerned are: The Counselling and Diagnostic Centre, [Icelandic organisation of the visually impaired](#), the [National Hearing and Speech Centre](#) and the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Unit of the [National Hospital](#). Each agency seeks adequate solutions of diagnosis and treatment in consultation with the parents.

Source: [Eurydice 12](#)

Data collection and sharing

Each school or institution is **required** to systematically evaluate internal activities with active participation of staff, students, pupils and parents as relevant. They are to publish



information on the **internal evaluation, compliance** with the school curriculum guide and plans for **improvement**.

Source: [Eurydice 11](#)

Every three years, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture is to deliver comprehensive reports to the Parliament on pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education. The reports explain schools' operation and activities, based on systematically gathered information, evaluation and research (both national and international).

Source: [Eurydice 11.3](#)

Monitoring and evaluation

Whole educational system.

The Ministry of Education and Children is responsible for the **evaluation and monitoring** of educational institutions in the educational system in Iceland.

External evaluation is organised by the Ministry and can include evaluation of schools/institutions, evaluation of internal evaluation methods or other defined parts of school activities. Since the establishment of the Directorate of Education, most aspects of the process belong under the auspice of the Directorate. At pre-primary and compulsory school levels, the municipalities are, by law since 2008, responsible for their own evaluation of schools and school activities.

Laws on pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education stipulate that the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is to conduct comprehensive **external evaluation** at these school levels with the Directorate of Education. The rationale for this was to gather reliable information concerning factors such as **quality control** in operating schools, the educational achievement and careers of pupils, teaching practices and their impact on educational achievement, communication within schools, and relationships with parties outside schools.

Each school or institution is **required** to systematically evaluate internal activities with the active participation of staff, students, pupils and parents as relevant. They are to publish information on the **internal evaluation, compliance** with the school curriculum guide and plans for **improvement**.

Source: [Eurydice 11](#)

External monitoring: Every three years, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture is to deliver comprehensive reports to the Parliament on pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education. The reports explain schools' operation and activities, based on systematically gathered information, evaluation and research (both national and international).

National evaluation: Since 2000, Iceland has taken part in the OECD PISA studies and since 2009 in the TALIS study. Iceland also participates on a regular basis in OECD work on developing student-achievement indicators. The Icelandic educational system has been regularly reviewed by OECD experts.



Assessment: All pupils in compulsory grades 4, 7 and 9 undergo national examinations in Icelandic and mathematics, and additionally in English in grade 9.

The purpose of these examinations is to **monitor** to what extent the National Curriculum Guides are fulfilled in the Icelandic educational system, guide teachers and schools regarding the individual student's teaching, provide information of individual student's educational achievement for students, parents and schools, and provide information for schools and school districts regarding the educational achievement in individual schools. These examinations are prepared, graded and organised by the Directorate of Education. The results of the national co-ordinated examinations are distributed, i.e. pupils receive their own marks and the mean figures are distributed to the public for each examination at every compulsory school in the country where pupils in that grade in the school are more than 10, as well as for each region and region-wide.

Every three years, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture is to deliver comprehensive reports to the Parliament on pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education. The reports explain schools' operation and activities, based on **systematically gathered information, evaluation and research** (both national and international). Education and training providers in adult education need to carry out a systematic internal evaluation of the quality of their activities and publish information about their quality control and plans for improvement.

Source: [Eurydice 11.3](#)

Evaluators: The evaluators in external evaluations are experts working for the Directorate of Education who have a thorough knowledge and experience of the school level in question, as well as experience and/or training in the field of educational evaluation or quality management. The evaluators may be, for example, experts in evaluation, former teachers or head teachers.

Internal evaluation is a co-operative task within the school. Those connected to the school and its activities, such as administrators, teachers, other staff members, pupils and parents, participate in one way or another in the internal evaluation. Because of the nature of the task, the type of participation of each group varies; the head teacher/rector has the overall responsibility for ensuring that internal evaluation is carried out. A special steering group or some kind of 'quality group' is often set up which drafts the internal evaluation/working plan for the school and leads the work. It depends on the municipality, the school or individual teacher as to whether the internal evaluators receive special training.

Source: [Eurydice 11.1](#)

Quality assurance and accountability

Laws on pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education stipulate that the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is to conduct comprehensive **external evaluation** at these school levels with the Directorate of Education. The rationale for this is to gather reliable information concerning factors such as **quality control** in operating schools, the educational achievement and careers of pupils, teaching practices and their impact on educational achievement, communication within schools, and relationships with parties outside schools.



Each school or institution is required to systematically evaluate internal activities with the active participation of staff, students, pupils and parents, as relevant. They are to publish information on **the internal evaluation, compliance** with the school curriculum guide and plans for **improvement**.

The external evaluation of a school is carried out by the Directorate of Education at the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Children. No provisions are to be found in laws or regulations on the frequency of the external evaluations of schools except in the Upper Secondary School Act. There, it is stated that evaluation of upper secondary schools shall be carried out no less than every five years.

Internal evaluation must be part of a continuous effort in all pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools. It has a long-term perspective, rather than being an isolated action.

Source: [Eurydice 11.1](#)

Accountability: no direct information was found, but some accountability may be inferred through the measures for monitoring, evaluation and quality control.

Funding

Local authorities pay for the construction and the operation of pre-primary and primary schools.

The state contributes towards the operation of schools at the upper secondary level.

When establishing a new upper secondary school, an agreement shall be concluded regarding capital investment costs and division of costs between the parties involved in establishing the upper secondary school.

Local authorities provide building lots for upper secondary schools without charge. The municipality where an upper secondary school is located pays 40% of the building of a new school, but the state pays all operational costs of the schools. The municipality where an upper secondary school is located pays 40% of the construction of a new school, but the state pays all the operational costs. The [Minister of Education and Children](#) sets the guidelines for capital investment costs of upper secondary schools in consultation with the [Icelandic Association of Local Authorities](#).

Source: [Eurydice 3](#)

Funding of ECEC: The construction and the running of pre-primary schools (including all salaries and operation costs) are by law at the expense and the responsibility of the municipalities. Funds are allocated to the municipalities from the national income taxation to fund, among other things, the construction and running of pre-primary schools. Local taxes may also be used for the financing. Parents contribute a substantial amount towards operating costs at the pre-primary level. The share that parents contribute varies from one municipality to another and, in some cases, depends on the circumstances of the parents or whether they have more than one child in pre-primary schools. Overall, parents contribute ranging from 10 per cent up to a quarter of the operating costs of pre-primary schools.



When parties other than the municipalities operate pre-primary schools, the municipalities usually contribute to the cost of the operation, but there are no nationwide co-ordinated rules concerning such contributions. It is up to the municipalities concerned to allow other parties to operate a pre-primary school according to guidelines in the Pre-Primary School Act.

There are no nationwide co-ordinated rules concerning financial autonomy in pre-primary schools. Therefore, the autonomy can take different forms from one municipality to another. Pre-primary schools run by the municipalities are monitored by the local Internal auditing departments to ensure that finances are used in accordance with the budget and laws and regulations. Every municipality is, however, obliged by the [Pre-Primary School Act](#) to publish a general school policy in the municipality.

Funding of single structure education: The cost of education at this level is entirely borne by the local municipalities, except the cost for educational materials, the nationally co-ordinated examinations and evaluation of schools, which is borne by the state. The state also has a school development fund to support school development projects. All decisions regarding the construction and maintenance of school buildings and facilities are made by the local authorities in question. Funds are allocated to the municipalities from the national income taxation.

Compulsory schools are gradually gaining more autonomy concerning human and financial resources and teaching content. In many cases, head teachers have their own budgets for operation costs, while others have full autonomy concerning staff recruitment. Head teachers have autonomy regarding instruction, teaching methods and the school's internal affairs. Compulsory schools run by the municipalities are monitored by the local Internal Auditing departments to ensure that finances are used in accordance with the budget and laws and regulations. Every municipality is, however, obliged by the [Compulsory School Act](#) to publish a general school policy in the municipality.

Source: [Eurydice 3.1](#)

Education at the compulsory school level is not completely free of charge, as the legislation makes provision for charges, e.g. for writing implements, school meals and leisure activities. Many municipalities have recently abandoned such charges or greatly reduced them, among other things to promote more equality among pupils.

Source: [Voluntary review of progress to SDG 4](#) GEM targets, p. 38

Fees within ECEC: Parents contribute a substantial amount towards operating costs of the pre-primary school level. The share that the parents contribute varies from municipality to municipality and to some extent, on the circumstances of the parents. In general, single parents and students pay substantially lower fees than others, and many municipalities offer reduction to parents who have two or more children at pre-primary level. Parents contribute a tenth or up to a quarter of the operating costs of pre-primary schools.

Fees within single structure education: The compulsory education is free of charge for pupils and their parents. The parents, however, pay for meals, usually the basic cost of the raw material used. The public authorities are also not required to provide pupils with material for personal use, such as writing supplies and paper. Fees can be collected for subsistence during study trips and field trips, in consultation with parents. Municipalities



may also charge for extended stays outside of daily teaching hours as well as for extra-curricular activities based on their special rate.

Fees within upper secondary education: Education at the upper secondary level is, as such, free, but pupils pay enrolment fees to the school. Pupils also pay for textbooks and meals and pupils in vocational education pay part of the costs of materials. The head teacher decides the amount of these fees. However, the limit of enrolment and material fee is prescribed in a ministry regulation. Financial contributions to student body organisations are optional.

Source: [Eurydice 3.1](#)

4.3 Formal and informal collaboration across ministries

For a period of time, the Ministries of Education and Children, of Social Affairs and Labour, and of Health have had both formal and informal collaboration around several subjects. Today, a formal collaboration is between the Ministries around children and families in line with the new Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity 86/2021

4.4 Specific mechanisms for formal and informal collaboration that impact on inclusive education

Development of a shared vision for inclusive education

Cross ministerial co-operation after the Audit, shared meetings in 2018.

Policy development, implementation and co-ordination

Educational Policy 2030.

Identification of needs/referral for services

Act on Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity 86/2021.

Data collection and sharing

Dashboard on the Matters of Children.

Monitoring and evaluation

New Act on the Directorate of Education in autumn 2023.

Quality assurance and accountability

As above.

Funding

The cost estimate in the Act on Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity 86/2021 and a special financial project built on the FPIES, carried out in 2019 in 13 Municipalities in Iceland.



SECTION 5. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

This section provides information on the general and specific quality assurance and accountability frameworks and mechanisms informing the country's education system.

5.1 School inspection processes and structures for all forms of educational provision

External evaluation is organised by the Ministry and can include evaluation of schools/institutions, evaluation of internal evaluation methods or other defined parts of school activities. Since the establishment of the Directorate of Education, most aspects of the process belong under the auspice of the Directorate. At pre-primary and compulsory school levels, the municipalities are, by law since 2008, responsible for their own evaluation of schools and school activities.

Laws on pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education stipulate that the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is to conduct comprehensive external evaluation at these school levels with the Directorate of Education. The rationale for this was to gather reliable information concerning factors such as quality control in operating schools, the educational achievement and careers of pupils, teaching practices and their impact on educational achievement, communication within schools, and relationships with parties outside schools.

Every three years, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture is to deliver comprehensive reports to the Parliament on pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary education. The reports explain schools' operation and activities, based on systematically gathered information, evaluation and research (both national and international).

Laws on the four levels of education – pre-primary, compulsory, upper secondary and higher education – all highlight the importance of systematic internal evaluation to measure and improve quality. Each school or institution is required to systematically evaluate internal activities with the active participation of staff, students, pupils and parents as relevant. They are to publish information on the internal evaluation, compliance with the school curriculum guide and plans for improvement.

Source: [Eurydice 11](#)

5.2 Other quality assurance processes for all forms of educational provision

By law, the Ministry of Education and Children is responsible for regular external evaluation of pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools, but is authorised to extend its amendment to the Directorate of Education.



At the pre-primary and compulsory school levels, municipalities are to conduct their own evaluation of schools and schools' activities along with the Directorate of Education.

All pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools are required to implement internal evaluation methods to evaluate their work. Schools are free to choose among systems for their own use, but these should include significant elements of internal monitoring. An internal 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.

The external evaluation of a school is carried out by the Directorate of Education at the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Children. No provisions are to be found in laws or regulations on the frequency of the external evaluations of schools except in the Upper Secondary School Act. There, it is stated that evaluation of upper secondary schools shall be carried out no less than every five years.

Internal evaluation must be part of a continuous effort in all pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools. It has a long-term perspective, rather than being an isolated action.

The main purpose of evaluating schools externally, apart from improving the quality of the work, is to obtain an overall picture of each school's activities or of specific aspects at any given time. Attention is directed towards various features of the school's activities, such as administration, development work, co-operation and communications within the school, study achievements, and communications between the school and parents as well as other acting parties outside the school.

In internal evaluation, reliable information is gathered on such matters as school management, academic achievement, the academic experience of the pupils, teaching methods and their influence on academic achievement, and communications within the school, as well as between the school and parents and other acting parties outside the school. Schools can make a schedule for their internal evaluation, where emphasis and priorities consider the needs of the school. Teaching and classroom observations are part of external evaluation in pre-primary and compulsory schools. Information is obtained from documents, focus group interviews and observations in the school and classrooms.

External evaluation is based on the internal evaluation report of the school, a site visit, classroom observations in compulsory schools and interviews with the administrators, staff, parents and pupils' representatives. To obtain as clear picture as possible, the evaluators must consider what documentation the school has based its internal evaluation on and how the data has been processed. The evaluators formulate their judgment upon analysing the data and with help of the Quality Indicators. After giving the head teacher an opportunity to make substantive comments, the evaluators send their report to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The overall results are then made public on the Ministry's and the Directorate's websites. The Ministry reports to the relevant school, and to the municipality in the case of compulsory schools and pre-primary schools, on what needs to be improved in the school's activities. Schools then have a pre-defined time to send the Ministry information on how the school intends to work with the results of the evaluation.



In the internal evaluation, each school can choose its own evaluation methods and decide the procedures. No one specific method is recommended by the Ministry, since the choice of method used is, by law, in the hands of each school. It is up to each school to decide whether to seek assistance from experts in their internal evaluation.

The results of external evaluation are to be used by the school to improve its work. Educational authorities also make use of evaluation results. At pre-primary and compulsory school levels, the municipality is responsible for implementation of improvements.

Internal evaluation results are intended for use by the school to improve various aspects of its own performance and activities, and to call attention to good practices and results in the work of the school. Schools' internal evaluation reports are to be made public, for example on school websites.

Source: [Eurydice 11.1](#)

5.3 Evaluation mechanisms used to monitor outcomes at different system levels

General outcomes (academic, social, well-being, etc.) for all learners

In internal evaluation, reliable information is gathered on such matters as school management, academic achievement, **the academic experience of the pupils**, teaching methods and their influence on academic achievement, and communications within the school, as well as between the school and parents and other acting parties outside the school. Schools can make a schedule for their internal evaluation, where emphasis and priorities consider the needs of the school. Teaching and classroom observations are part of external evaluation in pre-primary and compulsory schools. Information is obtained from documents, focus group interviews and observations in the school and classrooms.

Source: [Eurydice 11.1](#)

Specific outcomes (academic, social, well-being, etc.) for learners vulnerable to exclusion

As above.

Outcomes for schools (professional development, staff and personal well-being, etc.)

External evaluation is based on the internal evaluation report of the school, a site visit, classroom observations in compulsory schools, and interviews with the administrators, **staff, parents and pupils' representatives**. To obtain as clear picture as possible, the evaluators must consider what documentation the school has based its internal evaluation on and how the data has been processed. The evaluators formulate their judgment upon analysing the data and with help of the Quality Indicators.

In internal evaluation, reliable information is gathered on such matters as school management, academic achievement, the academic experience of the pupils, teaching methods and their influence on academic achievement, and communications within the school, as well as between the school and parents and other acting parties outside the



school. **Schools can make a schedule for their internal evaluation where emphasis and priorities consider the needs of the school.** Teaching and classroom observations are part of external evaluation in pre-primary and compulsory schools. Information is obtained from documents, focus group interviews and observations in the school and classrooms.

Source: [Eurydice 11.1](#)

Outcomes for parents and families (support, participation, family well-being, etc.)

No information.

5.4 Evaluation mechanisms used to monitor the effectiveness of processes at different system levels

Effectiveness of teaching and learning processes

No information.

Effectiveness of school management processes

No information.

Effectiveness of teacher professional development processes

‘There are no special formal support measures for teachers in schools, but it is determined locally by municipalities and individual schools’.

Source: Eurydice, National Education Systems, Iceland, Conditions of Service for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education.

Efficiency and effectiveness of funding mechanisms

To some extent. Audit outcomes on the finance of compulsory schools.

Effectiveness of (vertical) co-operation between stakeholders at different system levels

No information.

Effectiveness of (horizontal) co-operation between ministries and ministerial departments

No information.

5.5 Specific monitoring mechanisms relating to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

This is not available in the Icelandic system.



5.6 Specific evaluation mechanisms relating to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

Not applicable.

5.7 Specific accountability mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

Not applicable.



SECTION 6. STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION, CO-OPERATION AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

This section provides information on the structures, mechanisms and opportunities for stakeholder collaboration and co-operation in the country.

6.1 Does the legislation and policy framework specify learner voices are used to inform the development of learning and teaching environments?

Yes.

6.1a Description of the legislation and policy framework around the use of learner voice

According to the 2008 Act for pre-, primary and secondary school and the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for all school levels, school should be the learner's refuge where they feel safe, have an opportunity to develop and use their abilities, and to enjoy their childhood. Childhood and youth are an important period in the life of each individual. The possibilities for development that every school day and every class offer are to be used to the full. It is important to sustain the child's natural curiosity for it is one of the most important pre-conditions of education. Play is children's way to learn from the world and to learn about the world. It is essential that compulsory school encourages play as an educational method and that this emphasis is not limited to the youngest grades. This right also demonstrates that childhood and youth have their own intrinsic value and are not only preparation for further studies and employment. Pupils are entitled to express their opinion regarding their study environment, the organisation of studies and school activities, and other decisions that affect them. Their opinion should be considered whenever possible. Learners should be able to express their opinion in all school activities, for example, in regular discussions in class under the direction of their supervisory teacher, when the occasion arises. Furthermore, learners should be able to express their opinion through their representatives on the pupils' association board in the school council.

6.2 Does the legislation and policy framework ensure curriculum development processes take account of all learners and their communities?

Yes.

6.2a Description of how the legislation and policy framework around curriculum development processes take account of all learners and their communities

The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for all school levels states that learners should have an opportunity to express their opinions on everything that takes place at school,



whether it concerns their study, well-being, facilities or social conditions. From the beginning of their compulsory school attendance, the pupils' association is an important forum for pupils to express their opinions and look out for their interests. Pupils elect their representatives for the school council and it is important that they seek the pupils' opinion and have an opportunity to support their interests in the school council. The procedures of the school council are to take the pupils' active participation into consideration.

6.3 Does the legislation and policy framework support the active involvement of different stakeholders in ensuring inclusive learning environments?

Parents and families

Yes. The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for all school levels and the law on pre-school, primary school and secondary school from 2008.

School-leaders/leadership teams, teachers and specialist staff

A new act on education and recruitment of teachers is in preparation emphasising, among other things, competence and flexibility in the work of teachers at all school levels. A review is also underway of the support system for professional staff development of teachers at all school levels.

Source: [Voluntary review of progress to SDG 4](#) GEM targets p. 40

Specialist services involve support for school operations and school staff with the learners' interests in mind. They also aim to support compulsory school learners and their parents. The specialist services provide pedagogical, psychological, developmental and sociological knowledge to the advantage of the schools.

Source: [European Agency Country Information Iceland](#)

Stakeholders in the local communities

No.

Local-level decision-/policy-makers

Education at the compulsory school level is not completely free of charge, as the legislation makes provision for charges, e.g. for writing implements, school meals and leisure activities. Many municipalities have recently abandoned such charges or greatly reduced them, among other things to promote more equality among pupils.

Source: [Voluntary review of progress to SDG 4](#) GEM targets p. 38

In January 2011, the main responsibility for special services for people with disabilities was transferred from the state to the local municipalities. This was a step towards mainstreaming services for people with disabilities and integrating special services for people with disabilities with ordinary social services, which are the responsibility of the municipalities.



The regulation (585/2010) on municipality professional services to the local pre-primary and compulsory schools, and on learner protection councils in primary schools, focuses on professional services by the municipalities to support learners in pre-primary and compulsory schools and their parents, and to support the schools' activity and the staff.

The municipalities' professional services aim to use pedagogical, psychological, developmental and sociological knowledge in schools. Professional services should be aimed at promoting schools as professional organisations that can solve most of the challenges that arise in schools and provide the school staff with guidance and assistance to their work as appropriate

Source: [European Agency Country Information Iceland](#)

Non-governmental organisations, disabled people's organisations or other organisations representing vulnerable groups

No

Other(s)

Yes. Young people: Education lays the foundation for active participation in a democratic society, and the government's policy places particular emphasis on the participation and activity of young people. Iceland holds the presidency in the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2019, and young people are one of the main priorities of the Icelandic Presidency programme. In connection with this, a number of specific events will seek young people's views on various aspects related to the SDGs.

Source: [Voluntary review on progress to 2030 SDG 4](#) p. 37

6.4 Does the legislation and policy framework ensure that curriculum development processes involve the participation and contribution of different stakeholders?

Yes.

6.4a Description of the legislation and policy framework ensuring the involvement of stakeholders in curriculum development processes

According to the 2008 law for pre-, primary and secondary schools, there should be a parent council in the school or a school council. As stated in the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for pre- and primary school levels, the school is to operate a parent council. The head teacher is responsible for its foundation and guarantees that it is provided with all necessary assistance. The role of the parent council is to support school activities, support pupils' welfare, and improve the relations between school and home. The parent council of each compulsory school sets its own rules, for example, regarding elections for its board, and election of representatives for the school council decision-making in school affairs has moved closer to parents, underlining the need for a formal avenue for parental participation. An efficient and active parents' association in each school gives parents an opportunity to encourage and support a good school atmosphere and get acquainted with other parents, learners, and the school personnel. It provides



parents with a forum to discuss their children's schooling, together with other questions concerning child rearing and education. To achieve success, it is necessary for all involved to consider the objectives of the council and how its efforts can be organised to achieve these objectives. With an active parent council, it is possible to join forces for the interest and well-being of children. Parent councils are to emphasise parental involvement in individual supervision groups or classes. Parent councils are to co-operate with the school council and pupils' association.

According to law, the school council is a consultation platform for the head teacher and school community regarding school operations. The school council takes part in formulating school policy and school characteristics. The school council discusses the school curriculum guide, annual operation plan, financial plan, and other plans regarding school operations. Any plans for major changes in school operations and activities are to be referred to the school council before a final decision is made. The school council is to monitor security, conditions and general well-being of learners. The head teacher is responsible for the school council work and that it sets its own rules.

6.5 Does the legislation and policy framework support the development of learning communities in local/regional areas?

Yes.

6.5a Description of the legislation and policy framework that supports the development of learning communities

The role of pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools are (as stated by law) to promote the comprehensive development of all students and their participation in a democratic society that is constantly evolving. All school levels must promote broadmindedness in students and enhance their skills in the Icelandic language, their understanding of Icelandic society, its history and characteristics, people's behaviour and the individual's responsibilities to society, the environment and the outside world. Students must be given the opportunity to use their creativity and to acquire knowledge and skills in a continuous effort for education and development. School activities must lay the foundation for students' initiative and independent thinking, and train their ability to co-operate with others.

According to the Educational policy 2030, a focus should be on constant development of school practices in accordance with educational policy and standardised performance measures. Schools must base their teaching on clear and reasoned criteria and include systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. It is important that there is clear responsibility for the implementation and quality of school and educational work. Educational institutions themselves shall be responsible for internal evaluation, while ministries and local authorities shall be responsible for external evaluation. External evaluation must be regular and followed up with targeted improvement support in collaboration with the state, local authorities and other education providers.

The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for all school levels states that teachers co-operate with school administrators on the development of school curriculum guides



consistent with conditions and special emphasis at each school level. It is the responsibility of teachers to implement professionally, in their teaching and other school activities, the stipulations of education law and the policy that is specified in the national Curriculum Guide.