



THE ICELANDIC NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR PRESCHOOLS

Ministry of Education, Science and Culture 2011



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PREFACE

The National Curriculum Guide contains the frame and conditions for learning and teaching based on the principles of existing laws, regulations and international conventions. Six fundamental pillars have been developed within this frame and they form the essence of the educational policy. They include the working methods, content and the learning environment at every school level and form important continuity in the Icelandic educational system. These pillars are literacy, sustainability, health, and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity.

It is of great importance to develop systematically the knowledge, skills and attitudes that strengthen the individuals' future ability to be critical, active and competent participants in a society based on equality and democracy. The fundamental pillars are, among other things, expected to improve this. The general public should be adequately educated to be able to keep the authorities sufficiently in check, whether this is within the economic, political, media or other social sectors. Schools are factually the only institutions of society that can guarantee youth an opportunity to prepare for active participation in a democratic society, exercise critical and creative thinking and to face diverse social and cultural circumstances.

It has long been known that there will be no real development in educational work without the support of teachers and school administrators. Education policy, organisation, study material and school buildings can be improved over and over again, but if the changes are not put into effect in schools, this is all of no use. The implementation of a new way of thinking in school activities is based on close cooperation of educational authorities with those who are the mainstay of the work carried out in schools.

I hope that this curriculum guide will prove valuable for Icelandic schools at a time of reconstruction, and I urge school personnel, parents, custodians and pupils to familiarise themselves with the content of the guide and to work according to its basic ideas



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INTRODUCTION

The National Curriculum Guide for Preschools is based on the Preschool Act No. 90, 12 June 2008. As far as content is concerned, it is based on the objectives in Article 2 of the Preschool Act and is to be a guide for work in the preschools.

The National Curriculum Guide for Preschools is issued in the same manner as regulations; it details the role of the preschool based on the Preschool Act and regulations on education, upbringing and caring in preschools. The National Curriculum Guide describes the role of education, upbringing and caring of the preschool, the objectives and organisation of preschool operations and the requirements and rights of everyone concerned in the school community.

The role of the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools is to coordinate the education, upbringing and care of preschool children as far as it is deemed necessary and, at the same time, to be a tool to ensure equal opportunity for preschool children for education and upbringing in Icelandic preschools. It is therefore the role of the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools to implement the provisions of law, to serve as instructions of educational authorities on education policy and as a collection of the common objectives of preschool activities.



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ROLE OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDE



The National Curriculum Guide is based on the Preschool Act, No. 90, 12 June 2008, the Compulsory School Act, No. 91, 12 June 2008, and the Upper Secondary School Act, No. 92, 12 June 2008. The National Curriculum Guide is a framework for school activities at these school levels and a guide through their objectives and goals. It gives a comprehensive view of education and expands on the education policy of these laws.

The National Curriculum Guide is intended for school administrators, teachers and other personnel of the educational system. It also provides information about school objectives and activities for pupils, their parents, public institutions, associations, social partners and the general public. The guide is, in a sense, a contract that the nation makes with itself on education.

The role of the National Curriculum Guide is multiple:

- The National Curriculum Guide illustrates the public education policy, a description of study programmes and study requirements; specifications which schools and their personnel are to follow in their educational planning. The National Curriculum Guide is thus to ensure children and youth advantageous conditions for education in accordance with the current law and educational policy.
- The National Curriculum Guide is the main administrative tool used by educational authorities to ensure coordination and synchronisation in schools in the execution of a common educational policy. The National Curriculum Guide is therefore one of the main prerequisites for the Ministry of Education to fulfil its assigned role in directing and supervising the quality and execution of education.

- The National Curriculum Guide defines the framework of administrators, teachers and other personnel of individual schools in their planning, execution and evaluation of school activities which they must carry out, as detailed, for example, in the school curriculum guides.
- The National Curriculum Guide provides pupils and their custodians with information about the quality system and primary criteria on which school activities are based. It is the basis for evaluation of school activities and study assessment in schools. The National Curriculum Guide is intended to provide teachers, pupils and their parents with information on the education of children and youth at each educational level. The National Curriculum Guide is also intended for those who train teachers and other school personnel, as well as those who create study material, research or survey of educational activities.

1.1 The general section of the National Curriculum Guide

Various issues that are discussed in the National Curriculum Guide are common for preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school. Chapters 1 to 3 are the same for the curriculum guides of all three levels, and there the objectives of the educational system are discussed, general education and the objectives of the school system, in addition to the fundamental pillars of education and evaluation of school activities. Emphasis is on flexibility and continuity in the educational system, both in content and working methods. Additional emphasis is on school development and general professionalism of teachers at all levels.

In the general section of the National Curriculum Guide for Preschool, Compulsory School and Upper Secondary School, the role of each level is described and the special emphasis in learning and teaching at each level: their objectives, tasks, and working methods. In the school curriculum guides published by each school, the policy of the National Curriculum Guide is developed in accordance with the policy of the school in question, the pupil body, the school's professional emphasis and special characteristics.

1.2 The role of schools

Schools are educational institutions and their role is defined in laws on education. Icelandic schools constitute a coordinated whole, the educational system, which is to ensure consistency and continuity in education from preschool to university and adult education. Emphasis is on integral educational policy and clearly defined divisions between school levels so that pupils can pass easily from preschool to compulsory school and from compulsory school to upper secondary school in accordance with their individual educational performance and development. Pupils should also have the opportunity to study at two school levels simultaneously if it is appropriate for their education. Every school level aims at offering varied tasks and working methods in order to meet different individual needs and encourage the overall development, welfare and education of each pupil.

The main objective of preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school is to encourage the general education of the citizens. Schools should make an effort to operate according to the status and needs of children and youth. Educational work is to encourage their active participation in democratic society, within and outside school.

The content and tasks of school activities are incorporated in fields of study, subjects or course units. It should be kept in mind that fields of study, subjects or course units are not goals in themselves but aids to facilitate meaningful education and to achieve the objectives of the educational work. The National Curriculum Guides of the three school levels therefore define objectives in accordance with the characteristics of each school level, and the age and development of children and youth.

In the organisation and tasks of school activities and in the working methods of schools, attention should be paid to learning environment and communication that is conducive to general education. General education is the basis for vocational education and all specialised education. Learning and education take place not only in schools. Education is a lifelong process. It is important that schools encourage their pupils' initiative for studying, their enjoyment and enthusiasm and thus promote their education.

In order to achieve the objectives of welfare, learning and education, the working methods of preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools, as well as the interaction between pupils and between pupils and their teachers, are no less important than the tasks set in classes. The working methods of schools should be based on tolerance and equality, democratic cooperation and responsibility.

1.3 Teacher professionalism

The role of teachers is crucial in all school activities. Their work is vital in the school system, such as teaching, administration, upbringing, counselling, research and development. Thus school administrators, remedial teachers and counsellors belong to the body of teachers. Well-educated and enthusiastic teachers are the prerequisite for the quality of education and success in school activities at all school levels.

Teacher professionalism is based on their special vocational education, knowledge, attitudes and work ethic. Teacher professionalism concerns pupils, their education and welfare. Effective communication and constructive teaching enhances the studies and competences of children and youth. Teachers are not only responsible for imparting knowledge to their pupils but also giving them an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills, encouraging their joy of working and nurturing creative thinking. Teachers guide children and youth in their studies and the evaluation of their studies and also support them to adopt a healthy way of life. They endeavour to create good school atmosphere, fair work procedures and an encouraging learning environment.

At the beginning of the 21st century, extensive changes have taken place in Icelandic society and these have both direct and indirect influence on the educational system, the pupils'

studies and the work of teachers. Whether it is the economy or industrial affairs, social issues or migration, technology or communications, there are radical changes taking place that will influence cultural life and knowledge, education and upbringing. Changes in Icelandic society have truly been swift in recent years, making increasing demands on schools in assisting society to understand these changes and cope with new conditions. These changes increase the demands on teachers, both in analysing social changes and adopting school activities to the present status in a responsible manner.

Teachers cooperate 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.

GENERAL EDUCATION

2

Definitions of general education are not consistent. Such definitions vary with time and place and even depend on the individual. The seven liberal arts were the frame for general education of the upper classes in the Classical World. In the Middle Ages the church defined general education in Europe to meet its own needs, but with the Industrial Revolution new technology and academic studies appeared that laid the foundation for general education in modern society. In the 21st century general education is defined with regard to social and individual needs.

At any given time, general education advances the capacity of the individual for meeting the challenges of everyday life. General education therefore contributes towards the individuals' understanding of their characteristics and abilities and consequently their capacity to fulfil their role in a complex society. It is at the same time both individually and socially oriented.

People acquire general education not only within the educational system. However, the school system is the most important basis for society to ensure general education. It is therefore appropriate to explain the fundamental pillars in the National Curriculum Guide and connect them to the main fields of knowledge and skills that the individual is offered at school. General education is based on varied studies of the principal aspects of our culture, environment and society. General education is the goal of integral school activities and studies in fields of study, subjects and course units. Definition of the fundamental pillars is an attempt to map the main fields of the general education at which schools aim.

2.1 Fundamental pillars

The educational policy that appears in the National Curriculum Guide is based on six fundamental pillars on which the curriculum guidelines are based.

These fundamental pillars are:

- literacy,
- sustainability,
- health and welfare
- democracy and human rights,
- equality,
- creativity.

Each of the fundamental pillars derives from laws on preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school. There is also reference to other laws which include legal provisions for education and teaching in the school system, such as in the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, No. 10/2008. In addition, government policy in various issues is taken into account, as, for example, published in Welfare for the Future regarding important policy issues on sustainability. International conventions to which Iceland is a party are taken into consideration, for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the policy of international institutions of which Iceland is a member. Here the UNESCO policy on general education and sustainable development is an apt example and also the Council of Europe policy on democracy and human rights. In formulating the policy that appears in the definition of the fundamental pillars, the idea of teacher professionalism is also taken into account as well as the developmental work that has been carried out in Icelandic preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools.

The role of fundamental pillars

The fundamental pillars refer to social, cultural, environmental and ecological literacy so that children and youth may develop mentally and physically, thrive in society and cooperate with others. The fundamental pillars also refer to a vision of the future, ability and will to influence and be active in maintaining society, change it and develop.

The fundamental pillars are based on the view appearing in school legislation that both social objectives and the educational objectives of the individual are to be achieved. They are socially oriented as they are to promote increased equality and democracy and to ensure well-educated and healthy citizens, both for participating in and for changing and improving society and also for contemporary employment. The fundamental pillars are meant to accentuate the principle of general education and encourage increased continuity in school activities as a whole. In evaluating school activities, the influence of the fundamental pillars on teaching, play and studies have to be taken into consideration.

The fundamental pillars are an intrinsic part of school activities

The concepts that the fundamental pillars are based on are to be reflected in the working methods, communication and atmosphere of schools. They should be evident in all educational activities and in the content of school subjects and fields of study, both regarding the knowledge and the skills that children and youth are to acquire. Fields of study can be specialisation of the tasks of school activities, across subjects and school levels.

The fundamental pillars are an intrinsic part of all curriculum guides at all school levels and their stipulations for all school activities:

- Choice of material and content of study, teaching and play should reflect the fundamental pillars.
- Working methods and techniques that children and youth learn are influenced by ideas which appear in discussions of the fundamental pillars.
- Procedures of teachers and other school personnel are to be based on the fundamental pillars and thus encourage independence, initiative and development of school activities.
- When school activities are evaluated, it should be observed whether and how the fundamental pillars are reflected in study, teaching and play.

The National Curriculum Guide for Preschool, Compulsory School and Upper Secondary School is the basis for an integral composition of curriculum guides in the school system. The organisation of each day, week, month and school year is to reflect the comprehensive overview formulated in the fundamental pillars. In school activities it is important to approach tasks in an integral manner, applying professional broadmindedness and, when appropriate, interdisciplinary methods. This can necessitate unconventional teaching methods and unusual approach to school activities.

Relations and nature of the fundamental pillars

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.

Sustainability concerns the interplay of the environment, economy, society and welfare. Sustainability includes respect for the environment, sense of responsibility, health, democratic working methods and justice, not only at the present time but also for future generations. Therefore it is unthinkable to support human rights without simultaneously espousing

sustainability and balanced social development. Additionally, sustainability is dependent on the equality of social groups. Democracy and human rights, and health and welfare are thus an integral part of sustainability and, at the same time, independent fundamental pillars of education.

Education towards sustainability, equality, democracy and human rights therefore aims at children and youth understanding society as it is and has developed. At the same time, education aims at enabling children and youth to participate in forming society and thus acquiring a vision of the future and ideals to advocate. The concepts education towards sustainability, education towards democracy and human rights and education towards equality, do not necessarily aim at developing new subjects or fields of study, they are rather used to point out educational material and attitudes that are to be emphasised.

Creativity is an important factor in all education and thus part of the other fundamental pillars. Creativity is an intrinsic part of all studies and work, not only art studies. All the fundamental pillars are based on critical thinking, reflection, scientific attitude and democratic values.

Even though the fundamental pillars are linked, they each have their characteristics. Therefore they can be used to comprise the objectives of the whole educational system and issues emphasised by each school or school level. The fundamental pillars are, however, not a new system to classify school activities, but are defined to clarify and integrate the objectives of schools. Most aspects of school activities can be classified as belonging to one fundamental pillar and many of these aspects may belong to any of them.

2.1.1 Literacy

Literacy has usually been linked to the knowledge and skills needed to write down one's thoughts and understand a printed text, that is reading and writing. It has been associated with one set of symbols, printed characters, and related culture and forms of expression. Schools have considered competence in this field chiefly related to individuals, and it could therefore be measured: some are able to read fluently, some are hardly literate, others even illiterate.

Over time, attitudes towards literacy have changed as scholars of various disciplines have through their research clarified this problem. Although scholars do not agree on everything concerning literacy, a few important issues they have pointed out should be mentioned: Literacy depends on agreement made on usage and meaning of words in a speech community and is therefore by nature a social problem. It is dependent on tradition and is therefore not a capacity that an individual can acquire and apply regardless of place, time, culture and values. Literacy requires writing utensils, material to write on and medium, for example, a book to publish what is written and this is partially dependant on technical media and know-how.

Even though literacy deals with systems of symbols and communication technology, it should be pointed out that it deals first and foremost with creation of meaning, and this creation never takes place in a vacuum. Two individuals may understand the same text in a different

way, although their reading technique, phonological awareness and vocabulary are similar. The quality of their literacy cannot be said to differ for their creation of meaning depends on their experience and numerous circumstantial factors that influence their interpretation and understanding. Some texts are even difficult to understand without being acquainted with the discussion tradition and use of terms in various social groups.

It is not only that literacy research which has changed public attitude, digital technology has changed the surroundings where reading and writing take place. Computers and digital communication technology are considered indispensable factors of everyday life, both at home and at work, and have become essential equipment of education. It is therefore of great importance that computers are not only powerful word processing and calculation tools but tools that can be used for wide-ranging creation of meaning, for example, together with imagery. Pupils and teachers are therefore not limited to the printed text as computer technology offers other systems of meaning for studying and teaching. When preparing surveys or projects of various kinds, they can now discuss how to compile and present the material. Should it be done in a short film or a brochure, a radio programme, or a website?

Under these circumstances, terms like digital literacy, media education and media literacy have appeared. Digital literacy refers to knowledge that people have to acquire to be able to use computer and web technology for various forms of communication and creation of material. It involves photographs, printed text as well as music, and relates to the whole spectrum of material management, that is, resources, processing and communication.

The term media education refers to educational work where pupils use various media in their studies and, at the same time, learn a good deal about their utility and influence on culture and democracy. The objective is that they learn to evaluate the material that is communicated in addition to training in using these media for creating material and knowledge. The term media literacy denotes skills and knowledge that pupils acquire in these studies.

Even though the number of tools that can be used in education has increased, it does not diminish at all the importance of reading and writing in the traditional sense. As always, it is of great importance that children acquire certain reading and writing skills although attention is drawn to all the technology that pupils can make use of in communication, education and creation of meaning – for themselves and society.

The main objective of literacy is for pupils to become active participants in transforming and rewriting the world by creating their own meaning and responding in a personal and creative manner to what they read with the aid of the media and technology that is available.

2.1.2 Sustainability

Education towards sustainability aims at making people able to deal with problems that concern the interaction of the environment, social factors and the economy in the development of society.

The most common understanding of the concepts sustainability and sustainable development involves that we leave the environment to our descendants in no worse condition that we received it, and that we endeavour to meet the needs of the present without reducing the possibilities of future generations to meet theirs. This also refers to the definition of sustainability that it is a balanced situation and that sustainable development is the process of change when society, or a smaller unit, is developing towards sustainability. The difference between the traditional definition and the definition used here is a difference in emphasis rather than in meaning. This difference in emphasis is, however, important in educational work as it stresses that little things mean a lot, and that it is not necessary to wait for big changes to be able to rejoice in the smaller.

The environment and thereby nature surround human society. Sustainable development cannot take place, except within the limits that the ecosystems of the earth draw. Therefore understanding of these limits, in addition to the processes, laws, and cycles of nature, is an important basis for successfully working according to the ideals of sustainable development. Thus pupils have to know, understand and respect nature, both because of its intrinsic value and because of the service it renders mankind. Environmental protection, climate change and biodiversity are examples of tasks to be tackled.

From a social perspective, this ideology concerns equality, both intragenerational and transgenerational. In order to obtain equality, democratic methods have to be employed, the diversity of mankind respected and multiculturalism ensured. Diversity is a source of strength that can eradicate poverty, contribute to peace and secure living conditions and quality of life for all, wherever they live in the world. Sustainability is a prerequisite to understand the importance of one's own welfare and that of others.

The economic factor of sustainability is closely related to both the environmental and social factors. The economic system of each society plays an important role when it comes to using natural resources in a sensible manner and dividing them fairly. In this context it is vital that economic growth neither relies on nor leads to excessive encroachment of nature. Production and consumption are inseparable aspects of society, and no less the finances of the individual. Understanding one's own ecological footprint, and the ecological footprints of societies and nations, is conducive to sustainability and moderation. Consumer education and financial literacy are therefore an important prerequisite for being able to assess our needs now and in the future.

Education for sustainability encompasses creating a society of collective responsibility where individuals develop as active citizens, conscious of their own values, attitudes and feelings for global impact and equality of all the inhabitants of the earth, for nature and the environment, for democracy, human rights and justice, for equality and multiculturalism, for welfare and health, and for economic development and vision of the future.

Education for sustainability further encompasses that in their studies children and youth come to grips with diverse problems and points of controversy. Teaching and working methods of the school are to be interwoven with the idea that the aim of education is capability for

action. This involves training in democratic working methods and that children and youth are trained to be interested in and want to take part in society.

2.1.3 Democracy and human rights

When a matter of ethical opinion arises in a democracy, people take a stand and, moreover, they take an active part in shaping society. In a democracy the citizens enjoy human rights and decide on all major issues collectively. The prerequisite of democracy is collective responsibility, consciousness and activity of the citizens and this makes them capable of participating in shaping their society and influencing it, both at home and away. Respect for the human value and health of children and youth involves both respect for their human rights and acceptance of their talents and possibilities for development. Attitudes, values and ethics are essential factors in education for democracy and are at the same time an intrinsic part of other fundamental pillars of education. Schools are to cultivate the attitude that society is to be democratic and individuals are to be critical and have a vision of the future.

Democracy is important in schools. Firstly, schools have to take into consideration that children and youth will in the future take part in democratic society and therefore it is important for children to learn about such societies. Secondly, in all their working methods schools have to take into consideration that the human rights of every individual have to be respected. It is expected that children and youth learn democracy by learning about democracy in a democracy.

In all education, tasks and methods of the school it is important to keep in mind pupils' interest and responsibility for their own education. Furthermore, knowledge of the basic rights of children and adults has to be improved, taking into consideration Icelandic legislation and international conventions. Social studies and life skills are basic subjects for knowledge of democracy and human rights, and of attitudes towards these factors. Democratic outlook is, however, relevant in all other subjects. Democratic values will not be established, unless all subjects and all fields of study are used for this purpose. Concern for people, animals and the environment is also part of democratic education and relevant in all subjects.

Education for democracy and human rights is based on critical thinking and reflection on the basic values of society. Such education relies on cooperation with parties outside the school, no less than cooperation within the school. Thus active cooperation is expected from the homes of children and youth concerning sports and youth work. Active cooperation with the local community within the municipality or area is required, but such cooperation is one of the key factors of sustainability. It is essential for democratic schools to take in this way part in creating a sustainable society of collective responsibility.

2.1.4 Equality

The objective of education for equality is to give every individual an opportunity to develop on his or her own terms, nurture their talents and lead a responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, broadmindedness and equality. In all school

activities everyone should take an active part in creating a society of equality and justice. Equality education involves critical examination of the established ideas in society and its institutions in order to teach children and youth to analyse the circumstances that lead to discrimination of some and privileges for others.

Equality education refers to both the content of education, study methods and learning environment. Equality is an umbrella concept that involves a number of factors. The following are some of these factors in an alphabetical order: age, class, culture, descent, gender, disability, language, nationality, outlook on life, race, religion, residence, sexual orientation. At every school level, education for equality should address how these factors can establish discrimination and privileges for people.

The Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, No. 10/2008, has clear provisions that at all school levels pupils should be educated in equal rights where an effort should be made to prepare both genders for equal participation in society, both in family life and on the labour market. Emphasis should be on boys and girls having as extensive and as equal opportunities as possible. Nowhere in school activities, content, or in working methods should there be any obstacles for either gender. It is important that all school activities, both in classes as in all communication, should be guided by these provisions of the Equality Act. At the same time, it is important to point out that some people have to live with various kinds of discrimination when more than one of these factors come together, for example, gender and disability, sexual orientation and nationality, age and residence. For this purpose it is reasonable for schools to make use of the knowledge that has been acquired in new studies, such as gender studies, queer theory, multicultural studies and disability studies

Equality education incorporates, among other things, studies of gender and sexual orientation. The fundamental pillar equality also emphasises education concerning culture, nationality, languages, religion and values. One of the tasks is the development of Iceland as a multicultural society. With equality emphasis is also put on social understanding of the nature of disabilities. The challenges of people with disabilities derive from the environment no less than from their disabilities. In all school activities the emphasis is on inclusive education.

An effort should be made to create awareness of the different social position and significance of the young and old in comparison to those who are middle aged. Use can be made of the stereotypes, characteristics and historical development of different age groups, that is: childhood, teenage years, adulthood and old age, and the different meaning of these ages at different times in history and in different cultures. The different access to social values depending on class, residence and resources may also be studied. Additionally, the influence of class and residence on health, education and employment opportunities, and access to positions of authority may be studied.

2.1.5 Health and welfare

Health is based on mental, physical and social wellbeing. It is subject to complex interrelation of the individual, circumstances and environment. As children and youth spend a good part

of the day at school, all school activities should encourage health and systematically nurture welfare and wellbeing.

Schools have to create a positive atmosphere and health-promoting environment where development and health are systematically supported in various ways. The main health factors that are to be encouraged are: positive self-image, exercise, nutrition, rest, mental wellbeing, positive communication, security, hygiene, sexual health and understanding of one's own feelings and those of others.

School administrators, teachers and other school personnel should be aware of what is involved in health-related preventive measures and to be able to utilise reliable information concerning the factors that influence health. Schools are to create an environment that contributes to healthy ways of life for children and youth. Their competence is to be encouraged in communication, creating self-image, decision-making, setting goals and stress management. It is necessary that they understand the influence that culture, mass media and technology can have on health and wellbeing. The objective is, among other things, to enable children and youth to make informed and responsible decisions concerning their health.

Schools that emphasise daily exercise and systematically encourage physical exercise as part of daily life, lay the foundation for lifelong physical, mental and social wellbeing. Exercise should be taught, motor skills improved and a secure environment created to encourage physical training for everyone. This has to be kept in mind in physical education and all other school activities. In the same way, healthy diet should be encouraged in schools through education and abundant supply of varied foods. Emphasis should be on the pedagogic and social value of meals by, among other things, giving enough time for meals.

It is important that schools take into consideration the individual needs of children and youth. Everyone needs an opportunity to enjoy their strengths, which is a key factor in building a positive self-image. Many hobbies of children and youth advance health and can be of use in this context. By making room for their interest areas in school activities, it is possible to develop strengths and interest, stimulate a positive self-image and thus encourage health.

In order to meet the emphasis on health, school personnel have to review their work with regard to health and cooperate towards clear objectives that support positive school atmosphere, improve educational performance and wellbeing. In this context school personnel are important as role models. At the same time, close cooperation with parents, healthcare personnel and people from the local community is essential since such cooperation is a prerequisite for success.

2.1.6 Creativity

Learning takes place when an individual responds to stimulus, connects it to previous knowledge and creates new. In this sense education is essentially self-creation, a means of a well-informed individual to become "a new and better person". The creative incentive has its origin in innate curiosity, desire for enterprise, and stimulates individual initiative. The creative

force engenders interest in education when children and youth understand the meaning of tasks and their value.

Creation involves forming tasks and communicating them, to make something, make something new or different from what the individual knows or has done before. Creation is to invent, enjoy, encourage curiosity and interest, engage the imagination and play with possibilities. Creativity is to sense what lies ahead and carry it out. Creativity is based on curiosity, challenge, excitement and search. Grappling the problem and finding a solution can, in itself, be the reward of creation. Creativity disrupts traditional patterns, rules and systems and shows phenomena and received ideas in a different light.

Creativity involves critical thinking and methods that constantly offer new possibilities and therefore the creative process matters no less than the final product. To create is to go outside the known set and thereby increase one's knowledge and skills. Although the general sense of creation is closely connected to art and art studies, creativity as a fundamental pillar is no more limited to art studies than other subjects or fields of study. Creativity as a fundamental pillar is to encourage reflection, personal education and initiative in educational work.

Creative force and intuition are key elements in this context. Critical thinking is a key factor in literacy and creativity and they are interlinked with the role of critical thinking in democracy. Creativity utilises ideas and shapes attitudes, values and competence. Working methods in artistic creation and science are often characterised by joy of creation, initiative and originality. Such working methods are desirable in all educational work. Creativity not only concerns something new and original but also utilises what already exists. It encompasses task solutions and search for new possibilities. This harmonises well with education towards sustainability and literacy in the widest sense.

Play is an important learning method and opens new dimensions where the joy of creation for children and youth can come into its own. Happiness and joy depends on finding an outlet for one's talent as an individual and part of a whole. Creation is an important basis for a vision of the future and for creating such a vision, for participating in creating democratic society and a role of one's own in it.

2.2 Competence

Modern society makes numerous and often contradictory demands on its citizens. The role of the educational system is, among other things, to prepare individuals for the challenges and tasks of everyday life and assist them to understand the complicated relationship of nature and society, objects and ideas. General education aims at increasing the self-understanding of the individuals and their competence to participate in a complicated society. Pupils have to know what they know and what they are capable of, and how best to utilise their knowledge and skills to influence their environment and improve it. Competence is therefore more than knowledge and skills; it also encompasses attitudes and moral strength, feelings and creative force, social skills and initiative.

The pupil not only needs to have acquired knowledge, skills and competence but also to be able to acquire new knowledge, skills and competence, analyse it and communicate. Education has to incorporate all these factors. Such education is based on a learning community which is characterised by the fundamental pillars of education: literacy, sustainability, democracy and human rights, health and welfare and creativity.

When organising educational work, emphasis is to be on the education and children and youth and their competence at study completion. Teaching methods and forms of communication, study material and teaching equipment should first and foremost aim at supporting pupils in their studies. Educational objectives focus on the competence that the pupil acquires during the learning process and has acquired at study completion.

Educational work, as defined by the fundamental pillars of education, takes place in fields of study, school subjects and course units. On the other hand, many tasks require being dealt with in an interdisciplinary and integral manner. In the National Curriculum Guide for each school level the fundamental pillars are further developed. There the scope of school activities is described and the role of teachers at each school level defined. The cooperation of homes and school is also discussed.

The fundamental pillars of education are developed at each school level corresponding to the law on preschool, compulsory school and upper secondary school. In the National Curriculum Guide for Preschool, the fundamental pillars are connected to the fields of education of the preschool, in the compulsory school the fundamental pillars are connected to the school subjects, and in the upper secondary school the fundamental pillars of education are developed in course units and different study programmes. The fundamental pillars are therefore developed in a different manner at the various school levels. In the curriculum guides for each school level continuity and tasks are further discussed, and so are progression, demands for competence and division into levels in accordance with the characteristics and working methods at each school level.

2.3 Learnability

Pupils should know how to acquire new knowledge and skills, in addition to applying the knowledge they have already acquired. They should also be conscious of the importance of being responsible and creative in seeking knowledge, in reflection and reasoning. In order to acquire diverse competences, pupils should get an opportunity to work on different tasks that are connected to the culture of society, the environment of children and youth and everyday life. In all educational work, both in classes and at other times, children and youth should be encouraged to attain learnability both in general and in specific fields.

Learnability is thus a fundamental pillar in all educational work and is based on self-understanding and interest. Learnability also includes knowing one's on strengths and weaknesses and to be able to make decisions accordingly. Learnability is based on the natural curiosity of children and youth, their motivation, their belief in their own abilities and capability of applying their competences in a constructive manner when working on various tasks.

This demands a stimulating learning environment at school. An effort should be made for the pupils to integrate their knowledge and skills as they gain experience in communication that is based on respect for human rights and equality. At the same time, pupils are to learn to express their views and explain their working methods in a responsible, critical and clear manner.

EVALUATION AND SUPERVISION

3

Evaluation is an inseparable factor in school activities and the learning of children and youth. Evaluation gives information about how far children and youth have obtained learning objectives, encourages them to succeed and is useful for teachers and personnel to promote progress in learning. The objective of evaluation of school activities is to ensure that the rights of children and youth are secured and they obtain the education and service they are entitled to according to law. Evaluation is divided into two parts: On the one hand, there is evaluation that schools carry out themselves and is here called internal evaluation. On the other hand, is evaluation by external parties for local authorities, the Ministry of Education or other parties, and is here called external evaluation.

3.1 Assessment

Assessment of children and youth's achievement and improvement is a regular part of educational work, inseparable from learning and teaching. The main objectives of assessment of education are to give guiding information about education and how far its objectives have been achieved. Assessment is used to examine whether the general competence standard of the National Curriculum Guide has been met, educational progression is encouraged, pupils are encouraged to improve their achievement, and to evaluate what assistance pupils require.

Assessment is aimed at gaining information about educational performance and how individuals and groups achieve set objectives. Assessment should give pupils and their parents, teachers, receiving schools and school authorities the necessary information about study progress which can be a guideline in educational planning. If assessment is to fulfil these multiple roles, it has to meet the requirements of being fair and reliable. Assessment

has to be planned and carried out in such a way that it evaluates what is supposed to evaluate in a reliable manner.

Evaluation in school curriculum guides and school operation plans

School curriculum guides should detail the guiding principles of assessment and references so that pupils, parents and school personnel are fully aware of the demands that are made and how the school plans to assess how they are met. Pupils, parents, teachers and other personnel have to be able to understand the outcome of assessment in a similar way. This is a prerequisite for information to be used to improve learning and teaching.

Varied assessment methods

Objectives of school activities are diverse and different means can be employed to obtain them. Therefore assessment methods have to be varied. They are to be consistent with competence criteria, mirror issues emphasised in educational work and be pupil oriented. Assessment is to be reliable, impartial, honest and fair. All aspects of education are to be evaluated: knowledge, skill, competence with reference to the criteria of the National Curriculum Guide.

Teachers should assist children and youth in making a realistic self-evaluation, explain to them the objectives of education and how they are progressing towards them. Emphasis should be on formative assessment where pupils regularly consider their education with their teachers in order to attain their own educational goals and decide where to head. Criteria, on which the assessment is based, have to be absolutely clear to pupils.

The methods of assessment have to be varied and in accordance with the emphases of educational work and apply to as many aspects of learning as possible. Therefore both oral, practical, written and pictorial assignments are to be assessed, also short specific exercises and more thorough studies, individual and group work, projects carried out within a limited timeframe and with unlimited time, and additionally various types of examinations. Portfolios or workbooks, where various tasks and solutions are collected, for example digitally, can be useful to give an overview of the pupils' work and to show their application, activity, work methods, progress and social skills. Assessment has to give special consideration to the needs of pupils and especially their learning disabilities. Schools are to make an effort to meet the needs of pupils in such cases. Special arrangements should be made for these pupils when it comes to general assessment, for example, longer time to complete examinations, being given customised examinations, use of support materials and assistance during examinations and oral examinations.

3.2 Evaluation of school activities

Evaluation of school activities is by law part of the supervisory work of schools and school authorities in order to ensure the rights of pupils and promote school improvement. The objectives of evaluation and supervision are primarily divided into three parts. Firstly, it is

to examine whether school activities are in line with the provisions of law, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide. Secondly, to improve the quality of educational work and encourage improvements, ensure that the rights of pupils are observed and that they are provided with the service that they are entitled to in accordance with law. Thirdly, it is to provide information about school activities, their results and development.

Schools are responsible for internal evaluation but the Ministry of Education, and depending on circumstances, local authorities carry out the external evaluation. External evaluation comprises, for example, evaluations of school activities as a whole or specific aspects of these activities, comprehensive evaluation of the activities of individual schools, evaluation of school subjects and aspects of learning, and supervision of internal evaluation of schools. Additionally, the Ministry of Education is responsible for supervising that local authorities fulfil their relevant responsibilities created by laws on schools. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education is to supervise the status and development of the educational system. To that end the Ministry of Education collects diverse data on school management, for example, through participation in international surveys of learning outcomes and other aspects of educational work.

The Ministry of Education makes a plan about evaluation at all school levels and places it on its website. Additionally, the Ministry of Education publishes detailed directions on internal evaluation that schools can use, if they wish.

The National Curriculum Guide is the basis for criteria on evaluation of school activities but school curriculum guides further detail the objectives and criteria that are stipulated in the National Curriculum Guide and, depending on circumstances, school curriculum guides. It is important that internal and external evaluation incorporates all the objectives of school activities stipulated by law, including the role of schools to encourage pupils to participate in democratic society, support initiative and independent thinking, social skills and other factors that are, among other things, related to the fundamental pillars of education.

3.2.1 Internal evaluation

Internal evaluation should specify the connection with the objectives stipulated in the school curriculum guide. Each school develops methods that take into account the unique emphases of the school in order to determine to what extent these objectives have been achieved. The methods of internal evaluation take into account the educational work that is being carried out in each case.

The internal evaluation of each school is based on a systematic method that is described in the school curriculum guide. Each school year, the school operation plan presents what aspects are to be targeted in the internal evaluation. The school internal evaluation is an effective part of everyday work and includes all aspects of school activities, such as administration, teaching, study requirements, assessment and communication within and outside the classroom. Emphasis should be on the active participation of personnel, pupils, parents and other interested parties, depending on circumstances.

Information has to be collected by various means in order to evaluate school activities realistically. The internal school evaluation is based on diverse data. The selection of information and data that the evaluation is based on is determined by the research topic each time.

Objectives and means are to be evaluated regularly. Internal evaluation gives information about the strengths in the activities of the school and where improvement is needed. With regard to the findings of the internal evaluation, improvements are defined and planned. Schools publish the outcomes of the internal evaluation and improvement plans. Personal information is exempt from publication.

3.2.2 Ytra mat

The Ministry of Education, and depending on circumstances local authorities, are responsible for the external evaluation of preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools, as described in the relevant regulation. The Ministry of Education makes a three-year plan for external evaluation, surveys and evaluations to provide information about the execution of school activities in preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools. The plans are revised each year and published on the website of the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education makes a plan for each evaluation where its objectives, principal criteria and emphases are presented. To execute the evaluation the Ministry of Education brings in independent specialists selected according to the Ministry's procedure policy. Schools, and depending on circumstances local authorities, are notified in writing at least two weeks in advance.

External evaluation is to be based on varied data and information, such as findings of internal evaluation and other written documents from the schools, school visits and interviews, as relevant, and observation of teaching. Schools are to inform external evaluators as thoroughly as possible about those aspects of the school activities that the evaluation comprises.

External evaluators give the Ministry of Education a report on their findings. Before an evaluation report is sent to the Ministry of Education, the school in question gets an opportunity to make substantive comments. The school's comments are to be published as an appendix to the report, if requested. The external evaluation is open to public scrutiny, and its findings are to be placed on the website of the school and the Ministry of Education or in another way made accessible to the public. Similarly and depending on circumstances, the improvement plans based on the evaluation of local authorities and schools are to be published on the website of the Ministry of Education. The findings of the external evaluation are to be effectively followed up. The Ministry of Education requests responses from upper secondary schools and local authorities to the findings of external evaluations. On the basis of these responses the Ministry of Education decides what measures are to be taken.

ROLE OF PRESCHOOL

4

In the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools, emphasis is on the value of play and the importance of democracy and equality in all school activities. It lays down guidelines for preschool activities and discusses the learning areas of the preschool. The emphases of the learning areas mirror the fundamental pillars of education and present the competences that preschool children are to have an opportunity to acquire.

The National Curriculum Guide for Preschools is to direct interested parties of the school community through the policy and ideology of preschool activities. It illustrates guidelines for the municipalities on the formulation of policy for preschool activities, it is a flexible framework for preschool authorities and teachers to decide on objectives of preschool activities, it is a contract for the benefit of children based on integral view of the child and aimed at its welfare, and it serves parents as a point of reference for criteria and requirements in the education and upbringing of children. Taking into consideration the philosophy of the preschool and local circumstances, preschools may choose different ways to achieve the same goals. Each preschool uses its own working methods and devises its school curriculum guide and operation plan.

Preschool is for children below compulsory school age. According to the Preschool Act and the Compulsory School Act children may, however, complete preschool and commence compulsory school study earlier or later if certain requirements are met. On the average, children attend preschool until the age of six. The Preschool Act No. 90, 2008 stipulates the objective of preschool activities in Article 2.

Article 2

Objective

Children's interests and welfare shall be the primary mission of all preschool activities. Children shall be provided with care and education, offered a healthy and encouraging environment to grow up in, as well as safe conditions to learn and play. Learning through play shall be encouraged in a creative environment where children enjoy a variety of possibilities to grow. Preschool practice and methods shall be characterised by tolerance and affection, equality, democratic cooperation, responsibility, concern, forgiveness, respect for human values and the Christian heritage of Icelandic culture.

The main objectives of upbringing and instruction in the preschool shall be:

- a. To monitor and encourage children's general development in close cooperation with parents
- b. To provide systematic linguistic stimulation and contribute to common skills in the Icelandic language
- c. To provide children with mental, intellectual and physical care to the needs of each individual, so that they may enjoy their childhood
- d. To encourage children's broadmindedness and strengthen their moral values
- e. To lay the foundation necessary for the children to become independent, autonomous, active and responsible participants in a democratic society which is undergoing rapid and continuous development
- f. To cultivate children's expressive and creative abilities with the aim of strengthening their self-esteem, health awareness, confidence and communication skills

Based on the objectives of the Preschool Act, Compulsory School Act and the Upper Secondary School Act the following are the fundamental pillars of education:

- literacy,
- sustainability,
- health and welfare,
- democracy and human rights,
- equality,
- creativity.

Education, upbringing and care in the preschool are based on these fundamental pillars and are an integral part of all preschool activities.

Preschool personnel should treat children with respect, show them consideration and listen to them. Personnel should endeavour to be considerate in their relations with children, co-workers and the children's families and generally to be good role models. Personnel are to work in the spirit of the National Curriculum Guide and adopt the values described in the curriculum guide of each preschool.

The role of the preschool head teacher

The preschool head teacher is the professional leader and directs ambitious preschool development. The head teacher leads the democratic cooperation of the different groups that are active within the preschool, encourages equality and constructive interaction which aim at the children's welfare. The head teacher is responsible for the operations and activities of the preschool to be regularly evaluated through internal evaluation and that its findings are used to improve the activities and operations of the school. The head teacher is to make possible for the personnel to enhance their knowledge and develop their capacities. The preschool head teacher is to ensure that preschool activities comply with law and regulations concerning preschools, the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools.

The role of the preschool teacher

Preschool teachers are to lead the development in the field of pedagogy and education, follow the latest development and share their knowledge. Preschool teachers are to be role models in their work with children and make an effort to improve the professional role of the preschool. Preschool teachers are to be the leading co-workers of children, parents and other personnel of the preschool. They are to ensure that every child is respected according to merit and that the learning environment is organised in such a way that children can enjoy their childhood.

GUIDELINES FOR PRESCHOOLS

5

The preschool is the first level of the school system and the beginning of the formal education of the individual. Preschool age is important for learning and development. In cooperation with parents, the preschool is to endeavour to follow and enhance the development of all children, to create for all children a healthy and encouraging environment to grow up in and ensure their security and wellbeing. The emphasis is to be on the children's strengths and competence and on their need for adult protection and guidance. Preschools are to attend to preventive measures by effectively supporting the children's welfare and successful education. Preschool personnel should employ appropriate measures, if necessary, so that all children can use their abilities in accordance with their maturity and needs.

In preschool operations, the concepts of upbringing, caring and education are united. Children are shown respect and concern, encouraged and given tasks that are appropriate for them. They are considered legitimate participants in the preschool community.

Preschools are to follow the guidelines below in all their activities. Preschool personnel, in consultation with parents and their children, should come to an agreement of how to organise the preschool according to these guidelines and write their methods and means in the preschool curriculum guide:

Guidelines

- Preschool should be a democratic forum and learning community where personnel, parents and children are active participants and influence decisions concerning the preschool.
- The operating practices of the preschool should stimulate the cooperation of the children, personnel, parents and the local community.
- Preschool should be a social and cultural forum where the national heritage and the values of Icelandic society have their proper place.
- Preschool should be a community where all individual are respected and make their contribution.
- The operations of the preschool should be in accordance with the environment and the community of the school. Furthermore, the preschool is to be an active participant in the community and have its influence there.
- Preschool activities should be based on equality, respect for human diversity and other cultures.
- The rights of those who attend preschool are to be respected, regardless of gender, background, situation or ability and their needs should be met as far as possible.
- Education towards sustainability should be mirrored in all preschool activities in active collaboration with the homes and local community.
- The preschool should find a variety of ways to cooperate with families and to provide them with information concerning the practices and activities of the preschool.
- Preschool practices should encourage children to show respect and concern for other people, develop feelings of solidarity, consideration and friendship.
- The preschool should encourage children to develop positive self-image by respecting the uniqueness and views of each individual.
- In preschool children should get an opportunity to engage in tasks that take into account their interest, strengths and maturity and thus stimulate their faith in their ability and their inclination in study.

- The preschool should base its activities on the children's experience and endeavour to create meaningful experience for them.
- The preschool should emphasise independence and initiative and encourage the children's sense responsibility for themselves.
- Preschool activities should encourage the children's respect for nature and their environment.
- At preschool children should have an opportunity for varied forms of movement and outdoor activities.
- Preschool children should have an opportunity to engage in a variety of tasks that offer different solutions and encourage exploration and reflection.
- Preschool activities should encourage critical thinking and give children an opportunity to utilise their creative force.
- Preschool should encourage children to express themselves in various ways, for example, through play, movement, visual arts, music, language, numbers and symbols.
- Preschool should provide children with facilities to play and stimulate their imagination and creativity.
- Preschool activities should encourage children to express themselves and listen to narratives, stories, poems and fairy tales.
- Preschool should use everyday relations to stimulate children's sense of the Icelandic language by learning new words and concepts and developing their language.

DEMOCRACY AND EQUALITY IN PRESCHOOL OPERATIONS

6

Preschool is a place where emphasis is to be put on values and practices on which democratic society is based. At preschool parents, personnel and children should cooperate.

Democratic preschool practices are based on equality, diversity, shared responsibility, solidarity and acceptance of different views. At preschool children are to feel that they are part of a group and a community where justice and respect characterise relations. Children are considered active citizens and participants and everyone gets an opportunity to contribute to and influence the preschool environment.

Preschool should encourage equality and the children's active participation in society by giving them an opportunity to experience democratic working methods and relations in everyday activities. In this way they come to understand what democracy involves, learn democratic values and working methods and develop civil consciousness. The children's intuition, experience, skills and opinions should be respected and their views taken into consideration when organising preschool activities and thereby giving them an opportunity to take part in decision on tasks and work methods.

The environment and activities of the preschool should be based on the needs and interest that children express in various ways. In cooperation with other children and adults they exchange views, find solutions and come to an agreement.

In everyday preschool activities, the emphasis should be on caring, consideration and mutual assistance for everyone. When the occasion arises, solidarity and compassion for other people should be discussed. Respect for uniqueness and the opinions of every individual should be respected and children encouraged in their daily relations.

Preschool is to be a place where all:

- Take active part in discussions on everyday issues.
- Listen to each other and exchange views.
- Are responsible for themselves and their actions.
- Work together and support each other.
- May select tasks and work methods.
- Influence preschool activities.
- Take part in philosophical discussions.
- Work towards equal opportunities of the sexes to engage in a variety of tasks.

PLAY AND EDUCATION

7

Play is inseparable from childhood and therefore the focus of all preschool activity. Play is spontaneous and natural to children. They play of their own free will and on their own terms. Play may create joy and wellbeing but can also involve competitiveness and struggle.

Play is children's most important means to learning. It gives children a possibility to learn and understand their environment, express their ideas, experience and feelings and to develop social relations with other children. When children play together, they form social groups and create their own culture. They take part in democratic activities when they express their ideas and, at the same time, have to understand the views of others.

In play, children can develop and experiment with its ideas and gain new understanding and knowledge. In play questions arise and children solve problems on their own terms. In play cognitive and artistic factors are strengthened. Play requires varied use of language, movement, social communication and emotional relations. Play may stimulate children's creativity and their desire to learn and acquire knowledge.

In preschool activities, play can be both a goal and a means to achieve it. When play is used as a means, certain goals are set that are meant to be achieved through the play. The learning areas of the preschool are interwoven in the children's play as the personnel effectively connects their goals and play. The preschool teacher offers new possibilities to the children and thus creates new common experience that can be used in play. It is essential to be aware of what children are interested in and what happens, ask open questions and work effectively with what the children's activities and show interest in them. In play children learn from each other, but the role of adults is, nonetheless, important and complex.

The role of the preschool teacher is to stimulate children's education through play in various ways, for example, by:

- Create varied environment for play and give access at playthings that encourage children to examine, solve problems and create.
- Give adequate and uninterrupted time for play.
- Give adequate space for play so that children have room to move, to develop their play and expand on it.
- Support spontaneous activities and interest.
- Communicate with children and form relations with them through play.
- Be aware of situations that come up in play and use them to awaken children's interest and support their education.
- Support and stimulate positive communication in play.
- Ensure that all children have an opportunity to take part in play both inside and out.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

8

The premises and equipment of the preschool, its playground and surroundings are the learning environment for preschool children for they learn both indoors and out. Organisation, design and utilisation of the learning environment mirror the views and values that are the foundation for preschool activities. As the environment is an important factor in the children's education, its design, utilisation and organisation should be based on the different children's experience, interest and development.

When designing the indoor and outdoor learning environment, the objectives of preschool activity, usefulness and aesthetic factors should to be kept in mind. The environment should be safe, healthy and at the same time encouraging and attractive. Planning and design of this environment should be meticulous so that children can enjoy their activities.

Preschool learning environment should meet the needs of diverse groups of children and personnel. It should be possible to change it and develop according to the needs and interests of those who stay there. Children and their parents should have an opportunity to have influence on the planning of the learning environment in consultation of the preschool personnel.

Housing should be planned in such a way that it encourages communication between children, between children and personnel and between personnel and parents. There should be spaces where play and study take place in small groups, space where children can be in peace and quiet, space where children can play in larger groups, and space where there is room for a variety of movement. Preschool environment should be flexible so that children may use it in different ways and go freely from one place to another, get ideas and use the material that is available.

Materials for preschool should be varied and appeal to different children at different age. An effort should be made to revalue and develop playthings regularly. Playthings should be encouraging and appeal to various senses and stimulate the children to examine and explore. It is important that children may use playthings in various ways and make use of their experience. Space and materials should arouse the curiosity of children and stimulate their imagination, creative incentive and expression so that their ideas may flourish.

The preschool playground is an important learning environment which is to encourage the children to play, examine, move and express themselves in various ways. If this is to be possible, diversity has to be kept in mind, for example, landscape, soil, vegetation and the materials that are accessible for the children.

The local environment of a preschool is varied and depends on the location of the school. Nature offers a variety of materials and abundant opportunities for exploration and discovery. Manmade environment in the neighbourhood of the preschool is also an important learning environment which children should have an opportunity to get acquainted with and learn from.

INTEGRATED AND CREATIVE PRESCHOOL ACTIVITIES

9

At preschool children learn through play and everyday activities both indoors and out. They learn in cooperation with other children and when they get support and encouragement from adults. The learning areas of the preschool are to be integrated, an integral part of all preschool activities and take into account the six fundamental pillar of education. They are based on creative and critical thinking and are linked to play and everyday activities of the preschool.

The concept of competence is defined in the general section of the National Curriculum Guide for Preschool, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools. There the concept is said to include knowledge, skill and moral values, but competence is defined with reference to the children's age and maturity and the educational objectives in each instance.

Preschool activities are based on the Preschool Act where the emphasis is on the values of play. Furthermore, when organising preschool operations, the guidelines of the preschool, the fundamental pillars of education and the learning areas of the preschool are to be taken into consideration. The school curriculum guide is to describe the knowledge, skill and moral values at which the school activities aim. Preschools are to expand in their school curriculum guide on how they work with the competences in accordance with the children's age and maturity.

The preschool learning areas are: Literacy and communication, health and wellbeing, sustainability and science, creativity and culture.

The preschool learning areas are to:

- Be part of children's play.
- Be integrated into preschool everyday activities.
- Be integral and based on children's experience.
- Be based on children's interest and ideas.
- Take into consideration the social and emotional factors of education.
- Be organised in cooperation with school personnel, parents and children.
- Encourage cooperation and collaboration.
- Encourage independence and initiative.
- Encourage imagination and creativity.
- Encourage curiosity, examination and exploration.
- Be enjoyable and conducive to children's wellbeing.
- Stimulate children's interest in learning and encourage them to study and increase their knowledge, skill and competence.
- Encourage clearer self-image and self-knowledge.
- Encourage wholesome communication, friendship and joy.

9.1 Literacy and communication

Children are social beings and communication with others is vital for them. They, for example, need to ask questions, exchange opinions and talk about their ideas, feelings and wellbeing. Children employ various means to express themselves and communicate with others. In addition to language, they use, for example, various sounds, touch, mimicry and dramatic expression, music, visual means and dance. Social competence increases and self-image becomes clearer through rewarding communication and play. Literacy in the widest sense is an important factor of communication. Preschool literacy includes children's knowledge, skill and competence to read their environment and express their experience, feelings and opinions in different ways.

Preschool is to create circumstances where children have ample opportunity to:

- Have positive and wholesome relations in their peer group.
- Recreate their experience in play and creative work.
- Express themselves in various ways and with different materials.
- Get acquainted with language and its possibilities.

- Enjoy listening to and telling stories, poems and fairy tales.
- Develop literacy in the widest sense.
- Understand that written language and symbols have a meaning.
- Share their views and ideas.
- Employ various means and diverse material to acquire information and present their ideas.
- Reflect on their society and culture and the culture of other nations.

9.2 Health and wellbeing

At preschool children should learn and adopt a healthy lifestyle, healthy eating habits, rest, hygiene and exercise. Movement is natural to children and creates wellbeing. Movement may create joy and contentment and children learn through movement. Children should have an opportunity to move freely and also to take part in organised exercise. Movement and wellbeing have positive effect on children's relations, their treatment of the environment and their competence to engage in the activities of everyday life and new challenges. The preventive measures of preschools involve, for example, teaching, evaluation and tasks for children, school personnel and parents where the objective is successful schooling for the children and positive school atmosphere.

Children's wellbeing affects their self-image, if they, for example, have faith in their competence, show interest, want or are able to undertake diverse tasks. Daily activities at preschool should stimulate children's wellbeing and health. For the preschool the children's welfare is an overriding concern and therefore it is important that preschool personnel form friendly and close connections with the children

Preschools should cater to the health and wellbeing of children by emphasising:

- concern,
- physical care,
- nutritious food,
- varied movements,
- challenging outdoor activities,
- relaxation and rest,
- emotional balance,
- positive relationships,
- social relations.

9.3 Sustainability and science

From early on children use various methods to explore and understand their environment. They watch, listen, touch, taste, handle, classify, compare, examine and draw conclusions. Young children learn through interactive relations with their environment. Conditions for new meaningful experience should be based on the children's experience of their environment. Emphasis should be put on continuity of the tasks that are being worked upon each time with, for example, nature and society, various natural phenomena, science and technology.

The role of the preschool is to encourage children's intellectual curiosity by observing and listening to what children are engaged in and thus try to grasp how they think and understand. Their introduction to new materials and ideas should be based on this. They are asked questions that make them think, for example, about sustainability and sustainable development.

Children explore and discuss the context of the phenomena in their environment. Children's curiosity, reflection and speculations should be encouraged and prompt them to ask questions and seek a variety of solutions. At the same time, scientific thinking should be encouraged and children encouraged to discover relations, cause and effect and to understand ideas and concepts. An effort should be made to teach children to respect nature and their environment and to give them opportunity to experience and enjoy.

Preschools are to create circumstances where children have an opportunity to work and reflect on:

- Their conduct and respect for natural and manmade environment.
- How their ecological footprint and that of the local community can work towards sustainable development.
- Natural cycles and phenomena.
- Various natural resources.
- Exploitations of natural resources.
- Information dissemination, presentation and value of information.
- Mathematical tasks, such as, numbers, signs and patterns.
- Living beings in the environment and their ways of life.
- The nature of various forces and their manifestation in the environment.
- The nature of various substances and objects.
- The potential and limitations of technology.
- Space, distances and directions.

9.4 Creativity and culture

Creativity is an important factor in children's education and development. Creative work should be aimed at the creative process, the expression and education that are achieved when ideas, feelings and imagination flourish. Preschool environment is to stimulate perception and encourage children's creative incentive. Culture is an integral factor in all preschool activities and is integrated in children's play, democracy, creative incentive and national culture. Children should have an opportunity to approach their tasks in various ways and on their own terms. The role of the preschool is, among other things, to select approaches that encourage children's creative thinking and independent work methods.

Preschools are to provide room for creative process and aesthetic expression where children:

- Enjoy taking part in creative process.
- Experience happiness and joy in their creative force.
- Explore and work with various materials.
- Utilise diverse technology.
- Are introduced to literature, poetry, stories and fairy tales.
- Learn lyrics and sing with others.
- Create and express their experience, for example, in visual arts, music, dance and dramatic expression.
- Enjoy a variety of culture and art.
- Take active part in shaping the culture of the preschool through festivities and events related to children's culture.
- Are introduced to and work with artists from the various fields of culture and art.

EVALUATION OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND WELFARE

10

Evaluation of children's education, development and welfare involves collecting information about what children are interested in what they do, what they know, can and understand. The information is used in organising preschool activities in consultation with parents to support children's education and welfare. This process should be integrated into the daily activities of the preschool and involve organisation, registration, evaluation and reflection of children's education, development and welfare.

The objective of this evaluation is to increase the knowledge and understanding of preschool teachers and other personnel, parents and children of children's development, education and wellbeing. Additionally, the evaluation is to ensure that the operations of the preschools are according to the provisions of law, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools and that children's rights are respected.

Evaluation is to focus on children's interest, abilities and competence. Children express their abilities, knowledge, competence and interest in different ways. Therefore, evaluation is to focus on the individual and be structured to encourage each child. Based on this, children should be given appropriate study opportunities and encouragement so they can take active part in school activities.

The preschool specialist services of the municipalities are to encourage equal rights of all children to education and wellbeing. If parents and/or preschool personnel consider it necessary to ensure good education, upbringing and care and appropriate environment, specialist services offer counselling and information concerning children.

When evaluating children's development, education and welfare, the emphasis is on the following:

- overall development,
- independence,
- area of interest,
- participation in indoor and outdoor play,
- social skills and solidarity,
- initiative and creative force,
- expression and communication.

Each preschool is to develop a variety of methods to collect, register, organise and define information concerning children's development, education, wellbeing and competence and adopt appropriate work procedure in this regard. This work procedure is to be discussed in the school curriculum guide, be accessible for those concerned and linked to the internal evaluation of the preschool, as applicable.

It is important that the evaluation is based on the participation and cooperation of preschool teachers, other preschool personnel, parents and children. Children should have opportunity to take part in evaluation their education, set objectives and make suggestions concerning feasible means. Parents have valuable information and knowledge concerning their children and should participate in evaluating their wellbeing and education. Evaluation that is carried out in cooperation of preschools, parents and children advances better understanding and insight into children's learning process, their areas of interest and strengths. It helps parents to encourage their children at home and enhances children's awareness of their abilities and strengths and the best way for them to learn. Evaluation is also to strengthen children's self-confidence and self-image and contribute to equal rights to education.

FAMILY AND PRESCHOOL

11

Children's wellbeing at preschool is inseparable from the welfare of their family and home. Parents' attitude and contribution to preschool activities is an important factor of the comprehensive overview of children's welfare and wellbeing. When children go to school for the first time, parents and preschools embark on collaboration where concern and children's welfare is the main objective. Preschool teachers and other personnel are to show different family forms understanding and respect. The collaboration of preschool personnel and parents should be based on mutual understanding and respect for the attitudes and knowledge of both parties. It is important that all these parties trust each other, that they are able to share their views and make collective decisions concerning individual children.

When a child commences its preschool attendance, the foundation is laid for cooperation between parents and preschool. Parents then have an opportunity to get acquainted with the working methods, ideology and curriculum of the preschool and the preschool personnel receives information concerning the children, their situation, experience and areas of interest. This mutual information is the child's first stepping stones at preschool. Right from the beginning parents should know that their contribution is appreciated and they are considered valuable partners. School personnel should endeavour to reach out to the parents of all the children at their preschool.

Daily relations should be marked by cooperation and respect for the feelings and opinions of children, parents, preschool teachers and other preschool personnel. The most frequent relations take place when parents bring or fetch their children and an effort should be made to use that time for daily relations, if possible. In addition, preschool personnel should take

the opportunity whenever possible to give parents information on preschool activities and their child and to listen to the views and ideas of the parents. Likewise, it is important to encourage parents to seek information concerning preschool activities and their children's attendance.

During regular interviews between parents and preschool teachers, opportunities arise to discuss closely children's wellbeing, education and development at home and preschool. Parents know their children best and support their school attendance by giving valuable information which is the basis for the child's education. Furthermore, parents should have easy access to all information concerning preschool activities and their children so they can follow their school attendance, give them support and encouragement.

Parents should participate in preschool activities and this should be based on the principle that family and preschool are collaborators. Parents' views should be listened to and their influence encouraged, for example, through the parent council and participation in the internal evaluation. Preschool teachers consider and evaluate children's views and parents' contribution to preschool activities. Their professionalism makes them responsible for planning school activities with the overall interest of everyone in mind.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SCHOOL LEVELS

12

Children's school attendance should be a continuous progression so children's experience and education at earlier school levels are of use for them at the next level. Completing preschool and commencing compulsory school attendance involves changes for children and their parents. In order to give children a feeling of security and new learning opportunities, it is important that education and upbringing at compulsory school is based on children's earlier experience and education. Therefore the knowledge and tasks that children were engaged in at preschool should be the basis for their compulsory school education, at the same time as they get an opportunity to tackle new challenging tasks and gain new experience.

If children's transfer from preschool to compulsory school is to be successful, this has to be prepared carefully before and after completion of preschool. Preschool children should get an opportunity to get acquainted with the environment and activities of the compulsory school while they are still at preschool and continue good relations with their preschool after they have commenced their compulsory study. Children's last year at preschool and first year at compulsory school should be considered an important factor in their lifelong education.

At the completion of preschool a variety of information is available about preschool children. Certain information about children that is considered necessary for the children's welfare and development is to follow them to compulsory school in order to ensure that their successful compulsory school education is based in their earlier education and experience at preschool. Parents are important links between the two school levels and can give information about their children and their preschool attendance. They are entitled to have access to the data that follow their children from preschool to compulsory school and have an opportunity to

respond to them. An effort should be made to allow children to express their opinions concerning the data and information that follow them between school levels.

Connections between preschool and compulsory school is a cooperative effort of children, parents, teachers and other school personnel at both school levels where the child, its welfare, development and education are in focus. Teachers at both levels must study the education and work methods of each other, find means to develop collaboration and continuous progression in children's education in order to encourage the children's self-confidence and enhance their education. The objectives, organisation and arrangement of the cooperation and links between school levels are to be described in preschool curriculum guides.

SCHOOL CURRICULUM GUIDE AND OPERATION PLAN

13

On the basis of the National Curriculum Guide, each preschool is to formulate its own school curriculum guide. The school curriculum guide is to be in writing and accessible to everyone concerned. The school curriculum guide is to stipulate how the preschool plans to achieve the objectives laid down by the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools, what means will be adopted and how evaluation will be carried out. Additionally, the values on which preschool activities are based should be discussed and the ideology that will be emphasised. The school curriculum guide is also to describe the emphases and methods that the preschool has decided to adopt in its relations with children, school personnel, parents and the local community. Before the school curriculum guide enters into force, a committee elected by the local government is to confirm the guide after a reference from the parent council.

The school curriculum guide is to be revised regularly. The preschool curriculum guide takes into consideration children's interest and views and is to be written in cooperation with preschool teachers, other school personnel, children and parents. The main emphases and criteria in preschool activities are formulated through the participation and discussions of these parties. The school curriculum guide is a sort of agreement concerning the direction each preschool wants to take with its practices and relations to encourage children's education and the work development and professionalism of the preschool

Annually preschools issue an operation plan which details the school's activities, school calendar and practical information concerning each preschool. It may also contain the main emphases in parental cooperation, internal evaluation, connections between preschool and compulsory school, support services and the organisation of security and accident prevention, as applicable. The operation plan is written in close cooperation with preschool teachers,

other school personnel, children and parents. The plan may be worked out in such a way that last year's activities are evaluated at the same time. This creates an opportunity to discuss annually those factors that these parties consider important and are satisfied with and also those that they think might be improved. According to the Preschool Act, the operation plan is to be referred to the parent council before it is confirmed by a committee elected by the local government.

Preschools must be undergoing constant change, keep up with trends and policies and encourage knowledge and progress in preschools for the benefit of the school community as a whole. Developmental work may involve, for example, organised projects that aim at innovation, development and improvement in preschool activities. The aim of a developmental project, schedule, organisation and means should be clear before work on it begins. The outcome is to be evaluated, whether and how objectives were achieved and the findings shared with others involved in preschool operations.

EVALUATION OF PRESCHOOL OPERATIONS

14

The objective of preschool evaluation is to ensure that the rights of preschool children are respected and they get the education and service they are entitled to according to the Preschool Act. Evaluation of preschool operations is twofold: On the one hand, it is evaluation that schools carry out, here called internal evaluation. On the other hand, it is evaluation carried out by outside parties on behalf of the municipality, the Ministry of Education or other parties and is this called external evaluation.

14.1 Internal evaluation of preschool activities

The objectives of internal evaluation of preschool activities is also to provide information about preschool activities, encourage improvement and increase quality and be part of development in preschool activities. Through systematic evaluation, advantages and disadvantages may be analysed and decisions concerning improvements made based on the findings.

Evaluation of preschool activities is to take into consideration the objectives and values stipulated by law, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools. Furthermore, the internal evaluation takes into consideration the practices and characteristics as presented in the school curriculum guide. The internal evaluation is to be an integral part of daily preschool activities, it is to enhance knowledge, competence and reflection on these activities and the personnel's sense of responsibility for the operations of the preschool and be a factor in parental cooperation.

Democratic work methods employed in the internal evaluation where regard is shown for the views of those take part in preschool activities increase the quality of these activities. Preschool

teachers, other personnel, parents and children are the most important participants in this work. These parties should have equal opportunity to reflect on and discuss preschool activities

Each preschool defines the criteria for its activities, presents them in the school curriculum guide and develops evaluation methods that are appropriate for the procedures of the particular school. An effort should be made to use different means for collecting data and varied evaluation methods that take into consideration preschool procedures, the diversity of the parents and the different means of expression that the children use.

Preschool teachers play a key role in the organisation and execution of internal evaluation. However, the preschool head teacher is responsible for administering the preschool internal evaluation and is in charge of the improvements based on its findings. The findings of the internal evaluations and an improvement plan are to be accessible. It is important the committee that is in charge of preschool affairs on behalf of the local government follows up on the findings of the internal evaluation and encourages increased quality in preschool activities.

14.2 External evaluation of preschool activities

The committee that is in charge of preschool affairs on behalf of the local government is to supervise that preschool activities are in accordance with the Preschool Act, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools. This applies both to those preschools that are operated by the municipality or by other parties. The committee is responsible for the circumstances and characteristics of the school to be taken into consideration when the school activities are evaluated and that the school evaluates its internal activities systematically. External evaluation may be based on a variety of information, for example, internal evaluation, evaluation of school curriculum guide and operation plan, execution of the school policy of the municipality, statistics and other data as applicable.

Local governments are responsible for providing the Ministry of Education, school personnel and parents with information on school operations. Findings of assessments and surveys are to be systematically followed up on, but the follow-up depends on the project and the findings.

The Ministry of Education supervises that municipalities meet the requirements stipulated in the Preschool Act, regulations and the National Curriculum Guide. The external evaluation of the Ministry of Education is administered on a regular basis and consists of assessments, surveys, research in addition to collection, analysis and dissemination of information. The Ministry of Education sets an agenda for three years at a time regarding external evaluation, surveys and assessments that aim at providing information on preschool activities. The external evaluation administered by the Ministry of Education may involve an overall assessment of school activities or of specific aspects, institutional assessments, assessments of specific aspects or of internal evaluations. External evaluation may also be an analysis of the findings of the evaluation administered by the municipalities. Findings are to be followed up and the follow-up of the Ministry of Education takes into consideration the findings each time. The findings of all surveys and assessments appear on the website of the Ministry of Education.

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF REGULATIONS 2012 BASED ON THE PRESCHOOL ACT, NO. 90, 12 JUNE 2008

Regulation:

- No. 242/2009 on Venture fund for preschool, compulsory and upper secondary school,
- No. 655/2009 on preschool work environment,
- No. 893/2009 on preschool evaluation and supervision and the municipalities' duty to provide
- information regarding school operations,
- No. 896/2009 on delivery and dissemination of information between preschools and compulsory schools,
- No. 584/2010 on specialist services of municipalities for preschools and compulsory schools and pupils' welfare council in compulsory schools.