

FILES ON SCHOOL EDUCATION



School Education in France

2012















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General principles

The French constitution states that it is 'the duty of the state to provide free, compulsory, secular education at all levels'. The French school system was founded on general principles that were inspired by the 1789 revolution, and were added to and have taken shape with a set of legislative texts from the 19th century to the present day.

■ ACADEMIC FREEDOM

State schools and private schools that have a contract with the state coexist within the state system. In exchange for signing a public contract, private schools benefit from state support but are subject to regulation and must respect the national curriculum.

The state alone awards diplomas. Exams are set at the national level. 83% of pupils are schooled in the state system and 17% in private schools. A small number of pupils are taught in private schools that have not signed a public contract.

■ FREE PROVISION

Provision of schooling at level 1 (premier degré: nursery and elementary schools), level 2 (second degré: lower secondary/collèges and upper secondary general, technological and vocational lycées) is free in state schools. Building, equipment and running costs are divided between the various local authorities.

At primary level, local authorities (municipalities/les communes) provide school supplies and – in many cases – textbooks. The State also provides free textbooks in *collèges* (lower secondary). Theoretically in *lycées* (upper secondary) parents are responsible for buying textbooks but in practice the conseils régionaux (regional authorities) may make the decision to provide them free of charge.



Teachers at different levels of the school system are paid by the State, according to their qualifications, diplomas and experience.

■ NEUTRALITY

The curriculum and content of teaching have to respect the principle of neutrality. Teachers and pupils are required to show philosophical and political neutrality.

■ SECULARISM (*LAÏCITÉ*)

The French school system has been based on the **principle of secularism** since the end of the 19th century. State schooling has been secular since the Jules Ferry Education Act of 28 March 1882.

The respect for the beliefs of pupils and their parents means the absence of religious teaching in the syllabus – which does not prevent the teaching about religion – and the banning of proselytism. The principle of religious freedom led to the introduction of one day off every week to allow for religious teaching outside school.

■ COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Schooling has been compulsory **since the law of 28 March 1882**. It is compulsory from the age of six for all French or foreign children of both genders who are resident in France.

Initially schooling was compulsory until the age of thirteen but was extended to the age of 16 in 1959.

However (with a prior declaration) the family can home-school their children.

Devolved Powers

Since the 1980s the State has been devolving powers in order to strengthen the role of local authorities in the management of the school system. The 'recteur' is the ministry representative at local level, within académies (30 local authorities).

Overview of competencies	Nursery and Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
Investment (construction, reconstruction), infrastructure, running costs	Municipality	Département	Region
Pedagogical costs	Municipality	Conseil général	Conseil régional
Teaching staff (recruitment, training, allocation, pay)	State	State	State
Curriculum	State	State	State
Awarding diplomas	N/A	State	State

NB. France has 26 regions (30 *académies* responsible for the local administration of education), 101 *départements* and 36,851 municipalities.



Teachers

In France, teachers are recruited by competitive exam and become State civil servants. Teachers from private schools that are under contract with the State are also recruited by competitive exam. They have the status of public contractors.

As of 2011, candidates must have a two-year master in order to enter the competitive exam with a view to raising the qualification level of teachers.



Whilst preparing for the competitive exam at university, students can undertake work placements in class, either through observing or teaching, with the support of another teacher or with sole responsibility for a class. Afterwards successful candidates become trainee teachers: they are assigned to a school for a year. They are awarded permanent status at the end of their first year of teaching and training, if the outcome of their assessment is positive.

■ SEVERAL COMPETITIVE EXAMS

In order to teach at primary level, candidates take the primary teacher recruitment competition (CRPE) organised by the regional education authority (académie).

There are several national competitive exams for teaching in the public sector at secondary level:

- The Certificate of Aptitude in Secondary Teaching (Certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'enseignement du second degré, CAPES):
- The Certificate of Aptitude in Physical and Sporting Education teaching (Certificat d'aptitude au professorat d'éducation physique et sportive, CAPEPS);
- The Certificate of Aptitude in Vocational Teaching (Certificat d'aptitude au professorat de lycée professionnel, CAPLP);
- The Agrégation (more selective than the CAPES and leading to different teaching conditions).

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859,300 teachers including 720,655 in the state sector. **375,200** teachers (including 7,400 trainee teachers) at primary level. 484,100 teachers (including 8,400 trainee teachers) at secondary level.

Source: Repères et références statistiques 2011 - The State of Schools - Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance (Assessment, Forward-Planning and Performance Directorate), - Ministry of National Education, Ministry for Higher Education and Research)

The Common Core of Knowledge and Skills

Nursery, elementary and lower secondary education must allow pupils to acquire the Common Core of Knowledge and Skills. It is based on the recommendation of the European Parliament and the European Council on 'key competences for education and lifelong learning'.

■ THE FRAMEWORK FOR DRAFTING SYLLABUSES

The Common Core of Knowledge and Skills is the 'cement' of the nation and constitutes a framework for developing the curriculum for primary and lower secondary education.

The text presents the set of values, knowledge, languages and practices that need to be mastered in order for each pupil to successfully complete his or her schooling, continue his or her education, build his or her personal and professional future and be a successful member of society.

It sets out the minimum standards to be attained by all by the end of compulsory schooling.

For modern languages, the curriculum has been designed and drawn up in application of the 'Common European Framework of Reference for Languages' (CEFRL).

KEY COMPETENCES

The Common Core of Knowledge and Skills is organised around seven key competences:

- 1. command of the French language;
- 2. proficiency in a modern foreign language;



- the key elements of mathematics, scientific culture and technology;
- 4. mastery of ordinary information and communication skills;
- 5. humanist culture;
- 6. social and civic skills;
- 7. autonomy and initiative.

Each of these key competences is intended to be a combination of basic knowledge, skills to be used in various contexts and essential attitudes throughout life.

■ THREE STAGES OF THE COMMON CORE OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The first stage of assessment is at the end of CE1 (year 2 at primary school). It measures the acquisition of three competences: proficiency in the French language, basic mathematics, social and civic skills. The second stage is also in primary at the end of CM2 (last year of primary) and allows pupils to be assessed at the end of primary in the seven competences.

There is a third and final assessment at the end of compulsory schooling, usually in troisième (year 9), last year of lower secondary.

Since 2011, command of the seven skills — as certified by the head teacher at the end of *troisième* — is a compulsory prerequisite for the *Diplôme National du Brevet* (DNB), the end of lower-secondary school exam.

Competences are acquired progressively throughout compulsory schooling. Pupils who have difficulty acquiring the common core of knowledge and skills are offered a tailored programme of support. This syllabus can be continued in lower secondary as needed.

The Structure of the School System

Children can attend nursery school from the age of 2 subject to available places. Almost all attend school from the age of three even if school is not yet compulsory.

	The structure of	the school system	
Primary (école primaire) 3 - 11 years old	Nursery school (école maternelle) 3 - 6 years old	- Petite section - Moyenne section - Grande section	
	Elementary school (école élémentaire) 6 - 11 years old	- Cours préparatoire (CF - Cours élémentaire 1 ère - Cours élémentaire 2° a - Cours moyen 1 ère année - Cours moyen 2° année	année (CE1)
	Lower secondary (collège) 11 - 15 years old	6) _e
		5°	
		4e	
Cocondon		3°	
Secondary (secondaire) 11 - 18 years old	Upper secondary (lycée) 15 - 18 years old (*)	General route Technological route Seconde Première Terminale	Vocational route Seconde Première Terminale
		Baccalauréat général et technologique	Baccalauréat professionnel

^(*)This age range does not apply to the lycées professionnels as study can combine a two-year CAP or a three-year baccalauréat professionnel



Primary School

A NATIONAL STRUCTURE

Since 1990, the skills that are expected of pupils have been set by stage (cycle) (see 'The Structure of the School System' table). Teachers are provided with assessment tools. As such they have access to national benchmarks in order to measure the attainment of all pupils and better identify those who are experiencing difficulties. The curriculum proposes annual improvement in almost all disciplines.

As of the 2008-2009 academic year, pupils are taught for twenty four hours a week, spread over eight or nine half days. Those with learning difficulties can also benefit from tailored support for two hours a week.

NURSERY SCHOOL

The specificity of the French school system is that pupils have access to nursery education before the age of six, when compulsory schooling begins. It is often divided into three levels according to the age of the children. Although it is optional, nine out of ten children attend nursery school from the age of three.

The curriculum of nursery education (early learning cycle or cycle 1 – up to 6 years old) initial is divided into five areas:

- appropriating language and getting ready to read and write;
- becoming a pupil;
- corporal movement and expression;
- discovering the world;
- seeing, feeling, imagining, creating.

The main purpose of nursery education is to allow pupils to develop their full potential and to have a successful first experience of school.

The emphasis is on the acquisition of language and its development, the discovery of the world of writing and that of numbers as well as learning to 'live together'.

■ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The main priority of elementary education during the basic skills cycle or 'cycle 2' (GS-CP and CE1 – up to seven years old – see inset), is learning the French language and mathematics.

In addition to these core subjects there are foreign languages, activities for discovering the world, artistic practices (visual arts and musical education), the history of art, physical education and, in some schools, a regional language.

The development stage or 'cycle 3' (CE2, CM1 and CM2 – up to 11 years old) is a continuation of 'cycle 2'. New disciplines are introduced in addition to the core subjects, history, geography, experimental science and technology.

Information and communication technology are tools used to support a range of school activities and proficiency in it leads to the first level of the Information technology and internet brevet qualification (B2i).

Schools take into account the different aptitudes of each pupil. In addition to reasoning and intellectual thought, a taste for experimentation, sensitivity, motor skills and creative imagination are developed.

■ SUPPORT FOR PUPILS EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTIES

'Tailored' responses for pupils experiencing difficulties in the form of two hours support is provided by teachers every week.

Refresher classes aimed at pupils in the last two years of primary school (CM1-CM2) who show serious shortcomings in French and maths are provided in addition to the tailored support. These courses are spread over three periods: one week over the spring holidays and the first and last week of the summer holidays. They take place over five days with three hours of daily teaching tailored to the needs of the pupil.



Educational Support is aimed at pupils from elementary schools in priority education zones and is provided after class. The scheme offers help with homework and classwork, practising a modern foreign language or a sport or familiarisation with art and culture. It is a 'bridge' between the school and the family.

Lower Secondary School: le Collège

Lower secondary schools take all pupils from elementary school without an entrance exam from the age of 11. Its primary objective is to help all to master the Common Core of Knowledge and Skills.

It also prepares pupils for the rest of their general, technological or vocational schooling.

■ WHAT IS TAUGHT

Teaching in the lower secondary is organised by subject: French, mathematics, history and geography, civic education, life and earth sciences, technology, art, musical education, physical education, physics and chemistry, two modern languages as well as the cross-curricular teaching of the history of art.

The objectives are set through a national curriculum.

ORGANISATION

The four years (sixième - cinquième - quatrième - troisième: years 6 to 9) of compulsory schooling are organised in three stages or cycles.

Sixième (year 6): the adaptation cycle

The purpose is to consolidate the achievements of primary school and initiate pupils in the working methods of lower secondary education.

Particular emphasis is placed on integrating pupils particularly when they make the transition from primary to lower secondary school. This link favours joint-working between the teachers of last year of primary and those of first year of lower secondary, ensures continuity of learning and allows the pupil's difficulties to be tackled in the most appropriate way ['Programme personnalisé de réussite éducative — passerelle', tailored support...].



All pupils benefit from two hours tailored support a week. In *sixième*, pupils continue learning the modern foreign language taken up in primary. In so-called 'bilangue-two languages' classes they take up a second modern foreign language.

Cinquième and quatrième (years 7 and 8): the central cycle

The objective is to enable pupils to develop their 'knowledge, skills and behaviour'. This cycle is characterised by its consistency over two years and the gradual enrichment of the syllabus through the introduction of optional subjects. A pathway for familiarisation with the world of work and training is offered to all pupils.

In *cinquième* physics and chemistry are taught for the first time. Pupils can take Latin as an optional module and continue learning it in *quatrième* and *troisième*.

In quatrième pupils choose a second modern foreign or regional language.

Troisième (year 9): the orientation cycle

It allows pupils to build on what they have learned in lower secondary and to work towards general, technological and vocational study.

Pupils continue learning the modern foreign languages studied in *quatrième*. They can also choose, as an optional module, an ancient language (Greek) or a three hour weekly module of vocational familiarisation. Moreover, families can also request entry to a vocational preparation class with an adapted syllabus to reconcile mastery of the common core of knowledge and skills with developing educational plans at the end of *collège*, focussing on the vocational route.

At the end of this year, pupils sit an exam to gain the *diplôme national du brevet* (DNB) which assesses the knowledge and skills learned in lower secondary and certifies the command of the Common Core of Knowledge and Skills. It takes coursework into account and includes three written tests in French, mathematics, history and geography, civic education and an oral exam in art history.

Pupils who experience serious academic difficulties when starting college can, through referral units, the sections d'enseignement général et professionnel adapté (SEGPA), over four years of collège – benefit from tailored support, adapted timetables and vocational familiarisation. Upon the successful completion of these classes, which draw on the same syllabuses and skills as mainstream collège, pupils sit the certificat de formation générale (CFG) or even, in some cases, the Diplôme national du Brevet (DNB).



Upper Secondary School: le lycée

Pupils attend the *lycée* at the end of 3^{ème} and can take one of three routes:

■ GENERAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ROUTES

To gain access to these routes pupils attend a seconde in a *lycée général et technologique*. At the end of this year they enter the *'cycle terminal'* made up of *première* (lower sixth) and *terminale* (upper sixth). The general route leads holders of the *baccalauréat* towards extended study whereas the technological routes favour the continuation of higher technological study, mainly in technical careers (over two years) and, beyond, towards vocational bachelors and masters or engineering studies.

How teaching is organised:

Seconde (Year 10): The Initiation Cycle

It teaches all pupils general culture which allows them to discover new literature, artistic, scientific or technological subjects or go on to further study. The second modern language is incorporated into these classes and is compulsory for all pupils.

Upper secondary school pupils choose two compulsory exploratory disciplines, one of which is in the field of economics. The second exploratory subject is to be chosen from a list which includes:

- scientific and technological courses (scientific methods and practices, engineering science, science and laboratories, technological creation and innovation, basic principles of the economy and management and design culture);
- literary courses (literature and society, languages and cultures of Antiquity, that is Latin or Greek, Modern Language 3);
- artistic courses (artistic creation and activities).

These choices do not determine access to a particular specialism for the last two years of upper secondary. Première and terminale: the last two years of upper secondary school Pupils specialise gradually: they choose a general or technological route. This cycle leads them to the baccalauréat.

At the end of the last year, pupils sit the *baccalauréat* exam – the first higher education diploma – which entitles the holder to enter the first year of university study. Some parts of the exam are taken the previous year (for example a French paper in all series).

■ THE VOCATIONAL ROUTE

The vocational route allows pupils to gain vocational skills as well as knowledge and know-how in a given field.

The reform of this route in 2009 helped to raise the qualifications of young people, improve their entry into the world of work and facilitated further study in higher education where relevant.

In the *lycée professionnel*, pupils attend seconde to prepare for a *baccalauréat professionnel* over three years or a first year leading to the *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (CAP) over two years.

Part of provision is delivered in the work place. Skills gained during these periods, defined by the framework for each diploma, are assessed through an exam.

At the end of final year of upper secondary, pupils sit the vocational baccalaureate, a national exam that, like other baccalaureates, gives a level IV end of secondary schooling certificate (French classification, see inset).

A level V intermediary qualification (CAP or BEP) is taken in the course of the three year period of study to ensure that each young person gains a qualification.

Through an apprenticeship, young people can also work towards a vocational diploma in an Apprentice Training Centre and with day release



to an employer. They have a status of young private sector employee and report to a head tutor or can also work in the public sector.

Qualifications:

- Certificate of professional aptitude (CAP): level V, 2 years of study, over 200 specialisms;
- Le baccalauréat professionnel (vocational baccalaureat): level IV,
 3 years of study, 70 specialisms;
- Le brevet professionnel (BP): level IV, (only through apprenticeship) 2 years of training after a CAP, 68 specialisms;
- La mention complémentaire (MC: optional qualification): level
 V or IV, one year after the CAP or baccalauréat professionnel,
 57 specialisms;
- Le brevet des métiers d'art (BMA: arts vocational qualification): level IV, 2 years after a CAP in the vocational arts, 26 specialisms.

■ FRENCH CLASSIFICATION FRAMEWORK

French Classification	Qualification Level	ISCED International classification equivalent (2)	European Qualifications Framework Levels
Level V	Short vocational secondary diploma such as Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle – CAP	3с	3
Level IV	Diploma such as the baccalauréat professionnel (Vocational baccalauréat)	3	4
Level III	Diploma after two years of post-baccalauréat education such as the Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (BTS) or the Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie (DUT) (1)	5b	5
Level II	Bachleor type diploma such as the <i>Licence</i> Professionnelle (1)	6	6
Level I	Masters-type diploma (such as the <i>ingénieur</i> diploma) and doctorate ⁽¹⁾	6	7 and 8

⁽¹⁾ These diplomas are awarded by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research.

^{(2) &}quot;International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) created by UNESCO.



■ THE REFORM OF UPPER SECONDARY

It relates to several key points:

- 1. the gradual orientation of upper secondary pupils;
- 2. tailored support for all pupils (see inset);
- 3. learning of and proficiency in two modern languages.

Core classes make up around 60% of the timetable of pupils in *première*. This reform facilitates changes of course and allows pupils to choose a different series during or at the end of *première*.

This reform will be completed in all series by the start of the 2014-2015 academic year.

Tailored support

A major reform of the *lycée*, tailored support is offered to all pupils. It is included in their timetable and does not add to their overall workload.

In seconde and première, the two first years of upper secondary school, tailored support allows pupils to adapt to the demands of work at upper secondary and to learn the methods to prepare them for higher education and develop their career plans.

It includes:

- support for pupils experiencing difficulties;
- building on existing knowledge or a different approach to the disciplines studied;
- methodological support;
- careers guidance.

Equal Opportunities Policy

PRIORITY EDUCATION

The priority education policy aims to correct the effects of social and economic inequality in educational attainment, ensure command of the common core by all pupils at the end of compulsory schooling and reduce the attainment gap between pupils. This policy targets, first and foremost, schools with the greatest difficulties.

As such, at the start of the 2012 academic year primary and secondary schools tackling academic ambition, innovation and success, the écoles, collèges et lycées pour l'ambition, l'innovation et la réussite (ECLAIR) programme involves:

- 2,189 nursery and elementary schools, i.e. 6% of school pupils;
- 303 collèges, i.e. 5.5% of lower secondary pupils;
- 21 vocational lycées;
- 11 general and technological lycées;
- 4 boarding schools.

The objectives of the 'ECLAIR' programme are to improve the academic results of pupils by:

- establishing an academic environment which favours success for all;
- reinforcing the stability of teams;
- favouring equal opportunities;
- developing academic ambition.

Secondly, and more generally, priority education also encompasses réseaux de réussite scolaire (RRS) (Academic Success Networks) which welcome a more socially heterogeneous group of pupils. They include nearly 8,000 primary and secondary schools.



■ BOARDING SCHOOLS FOR EXCELLENCE

Boarding schools for Excellence are for girls and boys who are motivated and do not have a suitable environment for studying and succeeding. It offers these pupils additional support and living conditions that boost their chances of academic success and contribute to their personal development.

In boarding schools. pupils benefit from an environment that is favourable to study, systematic help with homework, cultural and sporting awareness delivered through partnerships which favour international awareness.

Attending a boarding school develops self-esteem through the active participation of citizens in school life and favours individual academic ambition. This choice – offered by the school or requested by the family and pupil – is part of the pupil's academic plan.

At the start of the 2012 academic year, 45 *Boarding Schools for Excellence* were opened across the country. Ultimately, all boarding schools in their diversity must offer excellence to pupils who attend to contribute to equal opportunities and success for all.

French Schooling Overseas

Schools overseas which deliver the French curriculum in primary and secondary schools approved by the Ministry for Education in agreement with the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

Their purpose is to extend the public education service overseas for the 110,000 pupils who attend. They also contribute to the cultural influence of France by providing schooling for 190,000 foreign pupils. Most of these schools have a private status and charge fees.

Two networks oversee the pedagogical quality of provision and bring together most of these schools:

1. The Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger (AEFE: The Agency for French Schooling Abroad), a public body under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Agency is responsible for managing, supporting and coordinating the global network of French schools.

A few figures:

- 300,000 pupils including 110,000 of French nationality;
- 485 schools established in 130 countries;
- Around 12,000 pupils pass the baccalauréat each year;
- Over 6,500 Education Ministry staff and 15,000 local recruits.
- 2. The *Mission laïque française* (MLF) has 118 member schools established in 48 countries and attended by 47,000 pupils.

Key Figures (2011)

PUPILS AT PRIMARY LEVEL Of which 126,300 in adapted schooling and disabled schools, including 43,000 pupils attending CLIS (Classes pour l'inclusion scolaire: Classes for Social Inclusion)	6,664,300
– In nursery schools	2,539,200
– In elementary schools	4,080,800
– ASH: special Schools and Schooling for Disabled Pupils	44,300
PUPILS AT SECONDARY LEVEL Of which 75,100 in adapted secondary schools, including 20,200 pupils attending ULIS (Unités localisées pour l'inclusion scolaire - Local Social Inclusion Units)	5,353,200
– In lower secondary schools collèges	3,126,400
– In general and technological upper secondary schools	1,425,700
– In vocational <i>lycées</i>	705,500
- Adapted secondary schooling: referral units (SEGPA: Sections d'enseignement général et professionnel adapté)	95,600
TEACHING STAFF, PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SECTOR (TOTAL) As of January 2011, the National Education Ministry was paying 984,800 people of which 846,200 public sector staff and 138,600 private sector staff in a contract with the state. 87.3% of these were teachers.	859,300
– Primary school teachers (43,7 %)	375,200
– Secondary school teachers (56,3 %)	484,100

SCHOOLS

125.000 staff serve as administrative, technical managers, school leaders, inspectors, educators, career's guidance advisors in state schools, local education authorities or central administration.

 Number of schools, including 56,404 state schools 	65,173
– Number of primary schools	53,798
– Number of collèges	7,018
– Number of general and technological upper secondary schools	2,640
– Number of vocational <i>lycées</i>	1,637
– Special Schools	80
BUDGET	
– Domestic education spending 2010 (i.e. 7% of the GDP): including schooling	€ 134,8 billion, €95,5 billion,
– Average expenditure by pupil or apprentice at primary or secondary level	8,150€
– Average expenditure per inhabitant	2,080€

Source: Repères et références statistiques 2011 – The State of schools 2011 – Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance (Assessment, Forward-Planning and Performance Directorate), – Ministry of National Education, Ministry for Higher Education and Research)

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