



Files on School Education

2009

School Education in France

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Overarching 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 overarching principles that were inspired by the 1789 revolution, added to and perfected by a set of legislative texts from the 19th century to the present day.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

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 are taught in 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. In elementary schools and *collèges* (lower secondary) textbooks are also free. In *lycées* (upper secondary) textbooks are theoretically paid for by parents but in practice the *conseils régionaux* (regional authorities) cover this cost.

NEUTRALITY

State schooling is neutral: teachers and pupils are subject to philosophical and political neutrality.

LAÏCITÉ (SECULARISM)

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. Staff have been secular since 30 October 1886. Respect for the beliefs of pupils and their parents means an absence of religious education in the curriculum, the prohibition of proselytising and the secularism of staff. The principle of religious freedom led to the introduction of one day off a week to allow for religious teaching outside school.

* from the name of the minister for state schools from 1879 to 1883

COMPULSORY SCHOOLING

Schooling has been compulsory since the 1882 Act. This applies to all French or foreign children over the age of 6 and resident in France. Originally the school leaving age was 13 but this was extended to 16 in 1959. Education is mainly provided by state schools and private schools that have signed a public contract. Parents can however, with prior agreement, choose to school their children at home.

The Structure of the School System

STRUCTURE					
Primary <i>(école primaire)</i> 3 - 11 years old	Nursery education <i>(école maternelle)</i> 3 - 6 years old	<i>Petite section</i> <i>Moyenne section</i> <i>Grande section</i>	cycle 1		
	Elementary school <i>(école élémentaire)</i> 6 - 11 years old	<i>Cours préparatoire (CP)</i> <i>Cours élémentaire 1^{ère} année (CE1)</i> <i>Cours élémentaire 2^e année (CE2)</i> <i>Cours moyen 1^{ère} année (CM1)</i> <i>Cours moyen 2^e année (CM2)</i>		cycle 2 cycle 3	
		Lower secondary <i>(collège)</i> 11 - 15 years old	6 ^e 5 ^e 4 ^e 3 ^e		
			Upper secondary <i>(lycée)</i> 15 – 18 years old (*)	General route Technological route	Vocational route <i>Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle</i> over two years (CAP: vocational training qualification)
				<i>Seconde</i> <i>Première</i> <i>Terminale</i>	<i>Baccalauréat professionnel :</i> <i>Seconde</i> <i>Première</i> <i>Terminale</i>

(*) This age range does not apply to the *lycées professionnels* as a *CAP* (vocational training qualification) can be followed by a vocational *baccalauréat professionnel* from *première* (year 11)

Devolution

Since the 1980s the state has been devolving competencies in order to strengthen the role of local authorities in the management of the school system.

Overview of competencies	Nursery and Primary	Lower Secondary (<i>Collège</i>)	Upper Secondary (<i>Lycée</i>)
Investment (construction, reconstruction, equipment, functioning)	Town (municipality)	<i>Département</i>	<i>Région</i>
Teaching materials	Town	State	State
Teaching staff (recruitment, training, postings, pay)	State	State	State
Curriculum	State	State	State
Awarding diplomas	-	State	State

NB. France has 26 *régions* (30 *académies* responsible for the local administration of education), 100 *départements* and 36 851 towns (municipalities)

The Mission of the School System

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The state school system contributes to equality of opportunity and must enable each pupil to develop his or her personality, raise his or her standard of initial and continuing education, integrate socially and professionally, exercise his or her citizenship. School education facilitates the development of the child by allowing him or her to become cultured, preparing him or her for the workplace and exercising his or her responsibilities as a citizen. It is the basis of lifelong education.

The 2005 *loi d'orientation* (Education Act) set the main mission of schools, aside from the transmission of knowledge, as the sharing of the values of the French Republic. Compulsory schooling must guarantee that pupils have the « necessary means to acquire a common core of skills the possession of which is crucial to the successful completion of schooling and the construction of a personal and professional identity. »

There are different measures of personalised support available for struggling pupils including the *programmes personnalisés de réussite éducative*. Introduced by the Act cited above, they target those pupils whose persistent difficulties are likely to compromise their acquisition of the common core of knowledge and skills.

The Acquisition of 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. This defines seven key skills in which pupils must be proficient at the end of compulsory schooling. The Core is the flagship measure of the Education Act of 23 April 2005.

A REFERENCE DOCUMENT FOR SETTING THE SYLLABUS

The Common Core of Knowledge and Skills is the reference document for setting the syllabuses of nursery, primary and lower secondary education. The text presents the set of values, knowledge, languages and practices that need to be mastered in order to allow each pupil to successfully complete his or her schooling, continue his or her education, build his or her personal and professional future and contribute to society. It defines that which should be possessed by all at the end of compulsory schooling.

THE SEVEN KEY SKILLS OF THE COMMON CORE OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

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

- command of the French language;
- proficiency in a modern foreign language;
- the key elements of mathematics, science and technology;
- proficiency in information, technology and communication;
- humanist culture;
- social and civic skills;
- autonomy and initiative.

Each of these key skills is designed as a combination of basic knowledge, the ability to apply them in a variety of situations and essential attitudes throughout life.

THE THREE STAGES OF EVALUATION

The first stage of evaluation, at the end of CE1 (year 2), relates to the acquisition of fluent reading and writing as well as the first elements of mathematics.

The second, in CM2 (year 5), allows the consolidation of parts of the seven key skills learned through primary education.

A third and final evaluation of the command of the seven skills is organised in troisième (year 9) by schools themselves.

The acquisition of the skills is gradual throughout compulsory schooling. Pupils who have difficulty acquiring the common core of skills are offered a personalised programme of support.



Nursery Schools

The specificity of the French school system is that pupils have access to nursery education before the age of six, the beginning of compulsory schooling. It is often divided into three “*sections*” *petite*, *moyenne* and *grande* according to the age of the children. A quarter of two year olds and almost all three to five year olds go to nursery school. It is where the majority of children are first educated outside the family.

Although it is optional, nine out of ten children attend nursery school and it is now part of regular schooling. It is here that children develop their main faculties, perfect their language and begin to discover the world of writing, numbers and other areas of learning. The main objective of nursery education is to allow pupils to have an initial successful experience of schooling.

The curriculum of nursery education is divided into five areas of activity:

- appropriating language and discovering writing;
- becoming a pupil;
- corporal movement and expression;
- discovering the world;
- seeing, feeling, imagining, creating.

The three stages of primary school (nursery education and elementary school)

Stage 1:

petite, *moyenne* and *grande section* of nursery education.

Stage 2 (Basic Skills Stage):

cours préparatoire (CP), *cours élémentaire 1st year (CE1)* and most pupils in the *grande section* of the *école maternelle* (nursery school).

Stage 3 (Further Skills Stage):

cours élémentaire 2e année (CE2) and *cours moyens 1ère et 2e années (CM1 et CM2)*



Elementary School

ORGANISED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Elementary school welcomes children from the age of six to ten. The syllabus is national and compulsory for all teachers and pupils.

Since 1990, the skills that are expected of pupils have been set by stage (see table, page 8). Teachers are provided with evaluation tools and national reference material to evaluate the progress of all pupils and better identify those who are experiencing difficulties. The current syllabuses contain suggested annual progression rates in French and mathematics.

LEARNING

The main priority of primary education during **the stage of basic skills** (*CP* and *CE1*: years 1 and 2), is learning the French language and mathematics. In addition to these fundamental subjects pupils learn 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.

During **the further skills stage**, literature, history, geography, experimental science and technology become more present. Information and communication technology are tools used in a variety of school activities and proficiency in this 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, awareness, motor skills and creative imagination are developed.

THE SCHOOL WEEK

As of the 2008-2009 academic year, pupils are taught for twenty four hours a week. Those who experience learning difficulties can also benefit from **personalised support** for two hours a week.

Pupils in elementary schools in education priority zones can also benefit from educational support (see inset p11)



Lower Secondary Education

[Le collège]

Le collège (lower secondary education) is the secondary school that takes all pupils from elementary school without an entrance exam. It allows all pupils to be schooled. Its primary objective is to enable all to master the Common Core of Knowledge and Skills.

LEARNING

Teaching in the *collège* is organised by subject: French, mathematics, history-geography (taught together), civic education, life and earth sciences, technology, art, musical education, physical education, physics-chemistry (taught together), two modern languages. The objectives are set by national curriculum.

STRUCTURE

The four years (*sixième* - *cinquième* - *quatrième* - *troisième*: years 6 to 9) of compulsory schooling in the *collège* are organised in three “cycles”.

Sixième (year 6): the adaptation cycle

The objective is to consolidate that which has been acquired in primary school and initiate pupils in the working methods of lower secondary education. Particular attention is paid to welcoming pupils and helping them with their work. In *sixième*, pupils learn a first modern foreign language or two if they are in a bilingual class.

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

The objective is to enable pupils to deepen their “knowledge and know-how”. This cycle is characterised by its consistency over two years and the gradual enrichment of the syllabus through the introduction of optional subjects. Particular attention is paid to those experiencing academic difficulties over the two years. Pupils are offered the opportunity to discover trades and vocational training (eg. through work experience).

In *cinquième* physics and chemistry are taught for the first time. Pupils can take one of the classics (Latin) as an option. In *quatrième* pupils choose a second modern foreign or regional language.

Troisième (year 9): the orientation cycle

The orientation cycle allows pupils to add to what they have learned in *collège* and to prepare themselves for general, technological and vocational study at the next level.

In *troisième*, pupils continue their learning of modern languages from *quatrième*. They can also choose an ancient language (Greek) or a module of 3 hours vocational familiarisation a week. Those who choose this option are dispensed from the second modern language.

At the end of the *troisième*, pupils sit an exam to obtain the ***diplôme national du brevet (DNB)*** which evaluates the knowledge and skills learned in *collège* 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-geography-civic education and, from 2011, a test in art history.

Educational Support

Families whose children attend elementary school in education priority zones (schools faced with a high degree of academic difficulty) and *collège* can opt for this additional support which is given two hours a day, four days a week, all year long. Four additional areas are offered: help with homework and classes, sporting activities, artistic and cultural activities and English (at *collège*).



Upper Secondary (Le lycée)

At the end of *collège*, pupils can take one of two routes.

The General and Technological route which leads to higher education. This route is for both pupils who intend to continue general academic studies and those who wish to take technological studies at the end of *seconde* (year 10), pupils enter the “*cycle terminal*” (sixth form) which includes *première* (lower sixth form: year 11) and *terminale* (upper sixth: year 12) working towards general or technological baccalauréats.

The Vocational route which allows entry into the world of work or further study.

In the *lycée professionnel* (vocational school) pupils enter *seconde* to study for the *baccalauréat professionnel* (vocational bac) over three years or a *CAP* (certificate of vocational aptitude) over two years. Pupils are apprentices in a *CFA* (Apprentice Training Centre) and with an employer. At the *lycée* the syllabuses are national.

THE GENERAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ROUTES

Seconde (year 10): The Initiation Cycle

In the curriculum of *seconde générale et technologique* pupils choose two “initiation subjects” which allow them to test their tastes and aptitudes with a view to choosing options in *première*.

There are also specific options in *seconde* to work towards the *Brevet de Technicien (BT)*: technician diploma) and technological *baccalauréats* (catering, techniques of music and dance).

Première and Terminale (years 11 and 12) : The Final Cycle

In *première* and *terminale*, pupils choose certain subjects (majors) in addition to the subjects that are common to every one within that section.

In the technological series teaching includes general disciplines and technological disciplines that are specific to each *baccalauréat*.

In the general route, pupils work towards further study.

It includes three *séries* (sections) : economic and social (ES), literary (L) and scientific (S). The options taken in *première* and the major taken in *terminale* mean that several study profiles can be chosen within each *série*.

- *Série L*: the classics / literature and languages/ literature and the arts/literature and mathematics.
- *Série ES*: mathematics/ social and economic science/ languages.
- *Série S*: mathematics / physics-chemistry / earth and life sciences /engineering science.

In the technological route, pupils work towards higher technological studies over two years or more.

The *baccalauréat technologique* includes 7 séries:

- *STL*: sciences and technology of the laboratory
- *STI*: industrial science and technology
- *STG*: science and technology of management
- *ST2S*: science and technology of health and social care
- *TMD*: techniques of music and dance
- Catering
- *STAV*: science and technology of agriculture and life (in *lycées* run by the Ministry of Agriculture).

At the end of the year of *terminale*, pupils sit the *baccalauréat* exam, the first higher education diploma. As such, it gives access to the first year of university study. Some parts of the exam are taken earlier in *première* (for example French).

THE VOCATIONAL ROUTE

The vocational route offers schooling related to business and trades. It enables pupils to acquire vocational skills as well as the knowledge and know-how related to a professional arena. All vocational diplomas can be taken at school, in a *lycée professionnel* (vocational lycée) or through an apprenticeship, in an Apprentice Training Centre (*CFA*).

At the beginning of the 2009 school year, the vocational route was renewed. The aim of this change was to help raise the qualification level of young people in the vocational route, to improve their transition into employment and to facilitate their access to further education.

The main measure changed the length of the period of study for the *baccalauréat professionnel* to bring it into line with that of the *baccalauréat général* and *baccalauréat technologique*. The period of study is now three years after *troisième* instead of four.

At the end of *terminale*, pupils sit the *baccalauréat professionnel*, a national exam that like other *baccalauréats* gives a level IV end of secondary schooling certificate (French classification, see inset on page 15) and the first higher education diploma. A level V intermediary qualification (*CAP or BEP*) is taken in the course of the three year period of study of the *baccalauréat professionnel* in order to reduce the number of people who leave education with no qualifications :

- *le certificat d'aptitude professionnel (CAP*: « certificate of professional aptitude »): level V, 2 years of study, more than 200 specialisms;
- *le baccalauréat professionnel* (vocational *baccalauréat*): 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.

Le lycée professionnel (vocational upper secondary)

In the *lycées professionnels* vocational and technological education takes up 40 to 60% of a pupil's timetable. It is taught in class and, depending on the specialism, in workshops, laboratories or building sites. On the job training is also offered over 22 weeks in three years for the *baccalauréat professionnel* and over 12 to 16 weeks for the two years of the *CAP*. The skills learned during these periods, as defined by the guidelines for each diploma, are assessed by an exam.

Academic subjects (French, mathematics, history-geography, science, modern language) take up around 50%.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are available from the age of sixteen and combine practical training with an employer and lessons in a *centre de formation des apprentis* (CFA: Apprentice Training Centre).

Apprentices have a work contract under the responsibility of the apprenticeship master. They can also train in public services.

THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF TRAINING

French classification	Education level	ISCED* classification
Level VI	No education beyond the end of compulsory schooling	0
Level Vbis	Education of no more than a year (leaving before <i>terminale</i>)	2
Level V	Education equivalent to the <i>BEP</i> or <i>CAP</i>	3c
Level IV	Qualification equivalent to the <i>baccalauréat</i> or <i>brevet professionnel</i>	3
Level III	<i>BTS</i> , <i>DUT</i> or end of the <i>1er cycle</i> of higher education	5b
Level II and I	Level comparable or above that of the <i>2ème cycle</i> of higher education	6

* UNESCO's international standard classification of education (ISCED) used for international comparisons (classification according to the diploma obtained).

French Schooling Abroad

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The French curriculum is followed in 453 schools accredited by the French Education Ministry in association with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 133 countries. The majority of these schools are private and fee-paying. 250 000 pupils around the world follow the French curriculum.

Most of these schools belong to two networks. *L'Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger* (AEFE: The Agency for French Schooling Abroad), a public body under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for monitoring and developing 253 schools and 164 000 pupils in 130 countries that follow the French curriculum. *La mission laïque française* (The French Secular Mission) brings together 86 schools in 35 countries attended by more than 30 000 pupils.

Some Key Figures [2007/2008]

Pupils in the <i>premier degré</i> (nursery and primary)	6 645 100
Of which 46 800 in schools that are specially adapted for disability (ASH)	
• In <i>écoles maternelles</i> (nursery schools)	2 551 100
• In <i>écoles élémentaires</i> (elementary schools)	4 047 300
• Percentage of public sector	86,4

Pupils in the <i>second degré</i>	5 371 400
Of which 104 000 in specially adapted for disability	
• In <i>collèges</i> (lower secondary education)	3 084 000
• In <i>lycées généraux</i> (general upper secondary schools) and <i>lycées technologiques</i> (technological upper secondary schools)	1 470 000
• In <i>lycées professionnels</i> (vocational upper secondary schools)	713 400
• Percentage of public sector	78,6

Teaching Staff	870 023
• Teachers of the <i>premier degré</i> in state sector	322 357
• Teachers of the <i>second degré</i> in state sector	404 226
• Teachers of the <i>premier degré</i> in private sector	46 379
• Teachers of the <i>second degré</i> in private sector	97 061
• Percentage of public sector	83,51

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Schools	
• Number of primary schools, <i>collèges</i> and <i>lycées</i>	66 747
• Number of <i>écoles</i> (nursery and primary)	55 329
• Number of <i>collèges</i> (lower secondary schools)	7 025
• Number of <i>lycées généraux</i> and <i>lycées technologiques</i> (general and technological upper secondary schools)	2 626
• Number of <i>lycées professionnels</i> (vocational upper secondary schools)	1 687
• Number of regional special learning schools	80
• Percentage of public sector	86,6 %

Budget	
Expenditure for education in 2006 in billions of Euros, total expenditure of French society for education (State, local authorities, business, households etc)	121,4
Education Ministry budget in billions of Euros	58

Source: *Repères et références statistiques 2008 - Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance* – Education Ministry

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