In France, no single structure exists suited to all pre-elementary-age children. France has a juxtaposed model providing two kinds of institution, each coming under different competent authorities, depending on children’s age-group. Children from birth to age three years can be received in other care structures or services that are not part of the national educational system. On the one hand, those are so-called collective or parental crèches, set up and managed, in most cases, by local authorities or by non-profit associations; on the other hand, they are individual care services [1] (nursery assistants) or home childminding.

Pre-primary (or pre-elementary) education is dispensed at nursery schools [2] ("écoles maternelles"), which take children from 3 up to 6 years of age. 2-years-old can be admitted if places are available. Almost all children attend nursery school from the age of 3 for the last 20 years, even though it is optional (RERS 2014). Such schools therefore form an integral part of the French educational system and are under the aegis of the Department of National Education, which draws up educational programmes and is responsible for training and recruitment of teachers.

Nursery schooling is secular and free of charge when it is State-run. From a legal point of view, nursery schools are not autonomous public establishments. They have no operating budget as secondary schools (collèges [3] and lycées [3]) do. Municipalities [3] are responsible for buildings and for financing of material expenditure.

The latest regulatory provisions on school hours and programmes are set out in the special Official Bulletin no.3 of 19 June 2008 [4]: "The main objective of pre-primary education is acquisition of rich, organised spoken language that can be understood by others. At nursery school, a child establishes relationships with other children and with adults. It practises its motor, sensory, affective, interpersonal and intellectual skills, progressively becoming a student. It discovers the world of the written word" (extract from the Official Bulletin special edition no.3 of 19 June 2008 [5]). The law on restructuring the Republic’s school system has entrusted nursery schools with a new mission, with consultation on a new draft programme for nursery schools held in autumn 2014. The programme, which should be finalised by the end of 2014, has two key aims. First of all, it prepares children for the education they will be receiving at primary school, while respecting each child’s pace of learning; secondly, it contributes to reducing inequalities from the earliest possible age, in particular with regard to language.

A child’s right to receive pre-primary education and the nursery school’s educational responsibilities are asserted in the two fundamental guidance laws for schools:

- the Guidance law no 89-486 of 10 July 1989 on Education [6] (Loi d’orientation sur l’éducation [7]) (Article 2, codified in Article L113-1 of the French Code of Education);
The most recent regulatory provisions on timetables and programmes are detailed in the Official Bulletin special edition no.3 of 19 June 2008[5].

**Reforms and policies**

Due to a change in education policy more favourable to the schooling of two-year-olds, the gross enrolment ratio for this age-group is up for the first time in 10 years, standing at 11.9% in 2013 (public + under-contract private sectors) overseas regions.

In 2013, in line with the European Union’s two quantified objectives following the 2002 Barcelona Summit (providing intake facilities for at least 33% of children under 3 years old and pre-elementary education for at least 95% of children between the age of 4 and compulsory school age), France provided intake facilities for 40% of children under 3 years old and pre-elementary education for all children between the age of 4 and compulsory school age.

**Source URL:** https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/france/early-childhood-education-and-care_en

**Links**