Curriculum, subjects, number of hours

The scope of single structure education is determined by two elements: the national core curriculum and outline timetables. The core curriculum establishes curricular contents for single structure education. It provides a list of teaching and learning aims, and knowledge, skills and competences which pupils are expected to acquire at a given education level. The outline timetable specifies the weekly number of hours for pupils in individual grades (semesters) in a given type of school which are allocated to education classes, in particular compulsory general education classes (see below).

In the post-reform school system, teaching in single structure education (8-year primary education) is based on the new core curriculum, laid down by the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 14 February 2017 on the core curriculum for preschool education and the core curriculum for general education in primary schools, incl. for pupils with a moderate and severe intellectual disability, and for general education in stage I sectoral vocational schools, general education in special schools preparing for employment, and general education in post-secondary schools.

The core curriculum aims to present general and specific requirements (learning outcomes) which determine the range of knowledge and skills for pupils. The knowledge and skills acquired by pupils/students are, in general, subject to objective assessment through so-called external exams conducted by examination boards (including the eighth-grader exam at the end of single structure education, based on the legislation currently in force).

The core curriculum should be followed by each school. It is implemented through school curricula which describe how the aims and contents of education are implemented as part of individual classes. Teachers are free to implement curricula which they develop independently or other curricula which they choose, provided that they are approved for use by the school head, after consultation with the teaching council (rada pedagogiczna).

A curriculum can be:

- developed by the teacher individually or in cooperation with other teachers;
- chosen by the teacher from among the set of curricula developed by other author(s), for example, from among those available on the market;
- developed by other author(s) and modified by the teacher.

The curriculum proposed by the teacher should be adjusted to the needs and abilities of the pupils concerned.

School curricula are approved for the use at school by the head of a given school at the request of (a) teacher(s), after consultation with the school's teaching council.
Learning process in the single structure education (8-year primary school)

Stage I of the primary school covers grades I, II and III. Teaching at this stage aims to ensure smooth transition from preschool education to school education. It is organised on an integrated basis.

Classes are taught according to a timetable prepared by the teacher, with the duration of lessons and breaks determined by pupils’ activity.

The next stage (grades IV to VIII) comprises education divided into subjects.

The curriculum reform which was implemented between 2009/2010 and 2014/2015 (Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 27 August 2012 on the core curricula for preschool education and general education in individual types of schools) has been replaced by a new one based on the Law on School Education. The reform is linked to a comprehensive transformation of the schooling model in Poland. Further details are available in the section ‘Teaching and Learning in Primary Education: Curriculum, subjects, number of hours’ above.

The school reform has also introduced further changes in outline timetables. The Regulation of 28 March 2017, based on the Law on School Education, has been repealed by a new Regulation of 3 April 2019. It has been in force since 1 September 2019 as the final date by which the process of abolishing lower secondary schools was completed.

Outline Timetables in 2016/2017

1. Grades I to III of the primary school (Stage I: early school education), the minimum weekly number of teaching / class hours in the 3-year period:

Compulsory integrated teaching (Polish language, Social education, Natural sciences, Mathematics, Technology, Modern foreign language, Music education, Art education, ICT education, and Physical education): in total, 60 hours per week in the 3-year period. Hours are distributed among the individual types of classes by the generalist teacher who conducts classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Compulsory classes</th>
<th>Weekly number of hours by grade</th>
<th>Total in the 3-year period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Early school education</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hours left to the school head’s discretion</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As part of compulsory classes in grades I to III, 3 hours per week are allocated to physical education.

Separate regulations specify the number of hours for subjects such as Religion or Ethics; National or Ethnic minority language / the regional language; National or Ethnic minority history and culture, and geography of the country with which a national minority identifies itself; Sports classes; Additional classes; Sign language classes; and Counselling (psychological and educational support). These are not included in the total duration of compulsory classes.

2. Grades IV to VIII of the primary school (Stage II), the minimum weekly number of
teaching / class hours in the 5-year period:

- Polish language: 25 hours per week in total in grades IV to VIII;
- Modern foreign language: 15 hours per week in total in grades IV to VIII (plus, additionally, 4 hours in total in grades VII to VIII for a foreign language which is the second language of tuition in bilingual primary schools);
- Music and art: 4 hours for each per week in total in grades IV to VII;
- History: 9 hours per week in total in grades IV to VIII;
- Civic education: 2 hours per week in grade VIII;
- Natural sciences: 2 hours per week in grade IV;
- Geography: 5 hours per week in total in grades V to VIII;
- Biology: 5 hours per week in total in grades V to VIII;
- Chemistry: 4 hours per week in total in grades VII to VIII;
- Physics: 4 hours per week in total in grades VII to VIII;
- Mathematics: 20 hours per week in total in grades IV to VIII;
- Computer science / ICT: 5 hours per week in total in grades IV to VIII;
- Technology: 3 hours per week in total in grades IV to VI;
- Physical education: 20 hours per week in total in grades IV to VIII;
- Safety education: 1 hour per week in grade VIII;
- Class hours / Hours with the class tutor: 5 hours per week in total in grades IV to VIII.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Compulsory classes</th>
<th>Weekly number of hours by grade</th>
<th>Total in the 5-year period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>IV</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Modern foreign language</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Second modern foreign language</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Art education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Civic education</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Geography</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Technology</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17 Safety education - - - - 1 1

18 Hours with the class tutor 1 1 1 1 1 5

Total for compulsory classes and hours with the class tutor 24 25 25 32(+2)∗ 31(+2)∗ 137(+4)∗

Hours left to the school head’s discretion 4

Total 141 (+4)∗

* 2 additional hours are allocated to increase the number of hours for a modern foreign language which is the second language of tuition in bilingual classes.

3. Weekly number of teaching / class hours:

(1) The number of compulsory teaching / class hours for pupils in individual grades at Stage I is 20 for grades I, II and III. Additionally, throughout the early school education period, 3 hours are left to the school head’s discretion.

(2) The number of compulsory teaching / class hours for pupils in individual grades at Stage II (grades IV to VIII):

- grade IV: 24,
- grade V: 25,
- grade VI: 25,
- grade VII: 32 (plus 2 additional hours for the foreign language of tuition in bilingual schools),
- grade VIII: 31 (plus 2 additional hours for the foreign language of tuition in bilingual schools).

(3) The number of rehabilitation class hours for disabled pupils is defined separately.

4. Number of hours left to the school head’s discretion is defined by the school head for each school year, based on separate regulations.

5. Separate regulations define the number of teaching / class hours for Religion or Ethics; Education for family life; National or Ethnic minority language, or Regional language, and National / ethnic minority history and culture; and Sports activities in sports classes or sports schools, or schools of sports championship.

For more information, see the annually updated Eurydice publication entitled ‘Recommended Annual Instruction Time in Full-time Compulsory Education in Europe 2018/2019’ [1].

Teaching methods and materials

Pursuant to the legislation, teachers are free to choose forms and methods of teaching, based on achievements in education sciences. Methods depend largely on the number of pupils per class and the equipment available in the school (for example, the number of computers, audio-visual equipment and other teaching aids). Schools are free to choose teaching aids to be used in classes. Pupils should be divided into smaller groups for some classes (e.g. foreign languages, computer science). See the section “Age levels and grouping of pupils” above.

Teachers may choose to use or not to use a textbook, other educational resources or
exercise materials in implementing the curriculum. Other educational resources replace or supplement a textbook; these could be, for example, contents downloaded from the Internet, copied or created by the teacher in order to conduct classes (slide shows, presentations, notes, excerpts from literature, etc.). Textbooks for primary education should be chosen from among those approved for the use at school by the Minister of National Education. The school head publishes annually the list of textbooks and/or other educational resources and exercise materials to be used in a given school from the beginning of the next school year.

Since 2014, pupils in primary schools have been gradually provided with publicly funded textbooks and exercise materials for general education. As from 1 September 2017, all primary school pupils should have access to free textbooks. With such materials funded from State-budget grants, costs of education incurred by parents can be reduced.

Practically all primary schools in Poland have access to the Internet and enable teachers and pupils to use it. Thus, schools are required by law to install special Internet safety software in computers used for teaching and learning purposes. The software should protect pupils, in particular, against pornography, brutal and aggressive contents, and contents breaking social norms and promoting hatred and discrimination.

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