

## FACTSHEET

Estonia  
Basic Education

### Basic education

Compulsory secondary education was replaced by compulsory nine-year basic education (Grades 1 – 9) following the Law on Education in 1992. Estonian general education is divided into basic education (*põhiharidus*) (Grades 1-9) and general secondary education (*üldkeskharidus*) (Grades 10-12).

A child becomes of compulsory school age when he or she reaches the age of seven by 1 October of the current school year. A person ceases to be of compulsory school age when he or she reaches the age of 17 or when he or she has completed basic education. In order to make education accessible, the state and local governments maintain the requisite number of educational institutions. Schools are obliged to guarantee equal opportunities in education to all children subject to compulsory education resident in the service area of the school. Schools may admit children from outside the school's service area if there are vacancies. Education in public general schools is free of charge.

Compulsory school attendance may also be fulfilled at special education institutions or classes for disabled children as well as in the form of home study. Children in need of special education can study at the school of their area of residence or at specially created institutions.

The basic education institutions of Estonia aim at uniformity – the national curriculum (1996; 2002; 2010; 2011, 2014) ensures equal opportunities for all children to transfer smoothly from one grade to the next and from one school to another, when minimum requirements are met. On the basis of the national curriculum schools create their own curricula.

At school or class where instruction is not given in Estonian, Estonian language instruction is compulsory to the extent determined by the national curriculum, in order to provide the opportunity to continue studies in Estonian at the next level of education.

The school year at basic school (*põhikool*) usually lasts from 1 September in the calendar year to June of the following year. It consists of a study period, an examination period, and holidays that include one week in late autumn, two weeks at Christmas and one week in spring. The period of study is 175 days (35 weeks) long. One study week includes five study days. The maximum number of lessons per week varies from 20 (Grade 1) to 32 (Grades 8-9). The duration of a lesson is 45 minutes.

Compulsory courses at the basic school are: Estonian (*eesti keel*), Russian (*vene keel*), literature (*kirjandus*), foreign languages (A- and B-language) (*võõrkeel*), mathematics (*matemaatika*), nature studies (*loodusõpetus*), geography (*geograafia*), biology (*bioloogia*), chemistry (*keemia*), physics (*füüsika*), history (*ajalugu*), human studies (*inimeseõpetus*), civics and citizenship education (*ühiskonnaõpetus*), music education (*muusika*), art education (*kunst*), physical education (*kehaline kasvatus*), craft (*tööõpetus*), handicraft (*käsitöö*), home economics (*kodundus*), technology studies (*tehnoloogiaõpetus*). The first foreign language starts in Grades 1-3, and the second in Grades 4-6 depending on the school curriculum.

At the end of Grade 9 there are three final examinations with unified questions and tasks. Estonian language and literature (*eesti keel ja kirjandus*) or Estonian language (at schools where instruction is in a language other than Estonian) and mathematics (*matemaatika*) are

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compulsory. The third examination can be chosen from among a foreign language (*võõrkeel*), biology (*bioloogia*), chemistry (*keemia*), physics (*füüsika*), geography (*geograafia*), civics and citizenship education (*ühiskonnaõpetus*) and history (*ajalugu*).

After satisfactory completion of the study programme and passing the basic school final examinations, the students obtain the Certificate of Basic Education (*põhikooli lõputunnistus*) and can continue studies at a general secondary school (*gümnaasium*) or a vocational education institution (*kutseõppeasutus*).