

PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Characteristics

Primary education in the Czech Republic follows on from preschool education and the child's upbringing in the family. The system of curricular documents has two levels; the state and the school levels. The Curriculum Framework defines the binding educational framework at the state level. Schools then draw up their own School Curriculums on the basis of this framework.

The objectives

- to enable pupils to adopt learning strategies and motivate them towards lifelong learning;
- to encourage pupils to think creatively, reflect logically and resolve problems;
- to lead pupils towards multifaceted, effective and open communication;
- to develop in pupils the ability to cooperate and respect the work and successes of themselves and others;
- to prepare pupils to express themselves as independent, free and responsible personalities, to exercise their rights and to fulfil their obligations;
- to create in pupils the need to express positive feelings in their conduct and actions and in the way they experience life situations; to develop perceptiveness and sensitive relationships with people, their environs and the environment;
- to teach pupils to actively develop and protect their physical, mental and social health and to take responsibility for it;
- to lead pupils towards tolerance and consideration for other people, their cultures and spiritual values and to teach them to live together with other people;
- to help pupils get to know and develop their own abilities in association with what they are realistically able to do and to apply them together with the learned knowledge and skills when making decisions on their own lives and when setting their professional goals;
- to help pupils get their bearings in the digital environment and to guide them towards safe, confident, critical and creative use of digital technology at work, during lessons, in their free time and when engaging with society and civil life.

The organisation of primary education

The school year starts on 1 September and lasts until 31 August of the following year.

The summer holidays last from 1 July to 31 August.

Children enter primary school at the age of 6 or 7 and they are subject to so-called **compulsory school attendance**. Compulsory school attendance lasts 9 years and it applies to everyone, including foreigners, who spends longer than 90 days in the Czech Republic. **The compulsory school attendance starts at the beginning of the school year that follows the day when the child turned six years of age, unless the child has been granted a deferral.**

A legal guardian is obliged to register their child for **enrolment in compulsory school attendance** in the period between **1 April** and **30 April** of the calendar year, in which the child is supposed to commence their compulsory school attendance.

The acceptance of a child into a primary school is based on the law and the school is designated according to the pupil's place of residence (the so-called school catchment area – the school assigned to the address at which the child is registered as being resident). A school cannot refuse to admit a child for any reason other than full capacity. If the school's capacity is full, it is necessary to contact the Education Department at the appropriate municipal authority. The children of foreigners may not be refused admittance to a primary school on the grounds of their lack of knowledge of Czech. It is also possible to register a child for a school that lies outside the given catchment area, but the acceptance of any such child depends on the availability of any free capacity and the fulfilment of any acceptance criteria at the given school.

If a child is not sufficiently ready to enter the first year of primary school, it is possible to apply for a so-called **deferral of compulsory school attendance** or to enrol the child in a **preparatory class**. The child's legal guardian must apply for a deferral of the compulsory school attendance during enrolment. Any such application must be submitted to the school principal in writing and must be substantiated with a recommendation from an educational advisory centre (where the parent must make an appointment for the child and may choose which educational advisory centre to attend) and from a specialist doctor or clinical psychologist (a recommendation from a paediatrician is sufficient). The legal guardian must apply for a deferral of the child's compulsory school attendance at the latest by 31 May of the calendar year, in which the child is due to commence their compulsory school attendance.

The Czech Republic also has a system of **special education** designed for pupils with **special educational needs** (on the basis of, for example, mental, sight, hearing or speech disabilities). However, the education of all pupils at regular schools takes precedence. The inclusion of a child at a special school must be confirmed by a doctor and an advisory centre and it may only occur with the consent of the child's legal guardian. Insufficient knowledge of the Czech language does not constitute grounds for the inclusion of a child in the special education system.

PRIMARY SCHOOL

Primary school is usually attended by pupils between the ages of 6 and 15. Primary school consists of two levels; the first consists of five school years (Years 1-5) and the second of four (Years 6-9). Some pupils transition to an eight-year grammar school course after the completion of the 1st level of primary school.

The education at public primary schools is free of charge. Pupils who are fulfilling their compulsory school attendance are entitled to the free loan of textbooks and teaching texts. Parents contribute financially to the pupils' personal needs, some supplementary school materials, courses held outside school, meals, the after-school club and so on.

Each school has its own **School Rules** which involve a document that regulates the internal life of the school. They are valid and binding for all the pupils, their legal guardians, the employees and any participants at school events held both within and outside the school buildings.

The school year

The school year starts on 1 September and ends on 31 August of the following calendar year. The school year is divided into two terms: the first term (1.9. - 30.1.) and the second term (1.2. - 31.8.). Pupils have two months of **summer holidays** in the months of July and August (1.7.- 31.8.) when they do not go to school.

Other holidays:

- autumn holidays – three days around 28 October
- Christmas holidays – usually from 23 December to 2 January
- end-of-term holiday – one day around 1 February
- spring holidays – a week in February or March, the time changes every year
- Easter holidays – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Monday

Pupils also do not attend school on **public holidays:**

- 28 September: the Day of Czech Statehood
- 28 October: the Day of the Establishment of the Independent Czechoslovak State
- 17 November: the Day of the Fight for Freedom and Democracy
- 1 May: Labour Day
- 8 May: VE Day

The schedule for the current school year is available on the school's website.

Marks and school reports

Teachers evaluate the results of their pupils' education using **marks**. They range from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates the best result and 5 the worst. Some schools use **word assessments** or a combination of word and numerical assessments. The evaluation is entered into the (paper or electronic) **pupil's notebook**. The legal guardian can access the pupil's marks by logging on to the school's website; nobody else has access to these marks.

A school report involves a general assessment of the pupil for the previous term in the individual subjects, including the pupil's behaviour. Children receive a school report twice a year. In the second level of primary school, each individual mark is designated with a set phrase as follows:

- 1 – excellent
- 2 – commendable
- 3 – good
- 4 – satisfactory
- 5 – unsatisfactory

The marks 1, 2, 3 and 4 on a school report mean that the pupil has **passed** the given subject in that school year. The mark 5 means that the pupil has **failed**. If a pupil fails any of the subjects at the end of the second term, they may do a **resit**. If they fail the resit, they must **repeat the year**.

The lesson timetable

Pupils attend school from Monday to Friday during the week. There is no school on Saturdays and Sundays. One **teaching lesson** lasts 45 minutes and is followed by a break of 10 to 20 minutes. In Years 1 and 2, the pupils have 18-22 teaching lessons a week, while they have 22-26 in Years 3 to 5. The number of lessons increases to 28-32 in the second level of primary school.

The school day usually starts at 8:00 am and the length of the school day depends on the number of teaching lessons that the pupil has on a given day. This is designated by the **timetable** that the pupil receives at the beginning of the school year and it is also available on the school's website. The timetable is binding for the pupil and the pupil is obliged to attend all the prescribed lessons. Pupils in the 1st level of primary school finish lessons at around 12 o'clock and pupils in the 2nd level of primary school finish between 1 and 3 o'clock.

The school subjects

The 1st level of primary school:

- **Czech:** pupils learn to read and write, as well as grammar and literature,
- **a foreign language:** (at the latest from Year 3) most commonly English,
- **mathematics:** numbers, numerical operations, the basics of geometry,
- **informatics:** the development of informatics thinking,
- **the basics of the humanities and science** (Years 1-3): the place we live, society, nature and a healthy life,
- **natural science** (Years 4-5): this follows on from the basics of the humanities and science in the area of natural science,
- **national history** (Years 4-5): this follows on from the basics of the humanities and science in the areas of geography and history,
- **music:** pupils learn to understand music and to interpret and create it,
- **art:** pupils learn how to perceive, interpret and create visual art,
- **physical education:** pupils acquire motor skills,
- **work activities:** pupils learn practical work skills.

The 2nd level of primary school:

- **Czech:** reading with comprehension, writing texts, formal language and literature,
- **a foreign language:** pupils acquire knowledge of a foreign language to the A2 level,
- **mathematics:** arithmetic operations, dependencies, geometry,
- **informatics:** the development of informatics thinking and the principles of digital technology,
- **history:** Czech and world history,
- **civics:** how society and political and other organisations function,
- **physics:** the properties of substances, the movement of bodies, energy, sound and electricity,
- **chemistry:** the composition of substances, organic and inorganic compounds and their reactions,
- **biology:** nature, general biology and ecology,
- **geography:** the regions of the world – social and economic environments and the geography of the Czech Republic,
- **music:** pupils learn to understand music and to interpret and create it,
- **art:** pupils learn how to perceive, interpret and create visual art,
- **physical education:** pupils acquire motor skills,
- **work activities:** pupils learn practical work skills,

School meals

There is a longer break between lessons for a snack, which pupils bring with them from home. Pupils can also have lunch in the **school canteen** every day. There is usually a choice of several meals, of which one is usually vegetarian. Pupils either have lunch after completing their lessons or during a lunch break in the middle of lessons (at least 30 minutes long). **The pupils' legal guardians have to pay for school meals**, but the price is subsidised by the state and is therefore relatively low. The price for one lunch ranges from 20 to 30 CZK.

The after-school club

Primary schools offer their pupils the opportunity to attend an **after-school club** from approximately 6:30 am before lessons start and then again after they have ended, usually until 4 or 5 pm. The pupils participate in activities, including a wide range of games, artistic and sports activities and also rest, under the supervision of school staff at the after-school club. **Parents must pay** for pupils to attend the after-school club and the price is usually between 100 and 250 CZK per month.

Leisure time activities

A number of schools offer pupils a variety of activities after the end of lessons either as part of the after-school club or outside it. These leisure time activities (so-called **clubs**) enable pupils to acquire new skills, make friends and practice their Czech.

The activities on offer are available on the school's website and they usually include:

- music clubs: playing the recorder, solo singing and so on,
- artistic activities: ceramics, drawing, photography, drama club,
- sports activities: aerobics, ball games, athletics, football, martial arts and so on,
- language courses,
- computer clubs.

Some schools offer these leisure time activities free of charge, but it is usually necessary to pay to take part. The prices for a single term range from 100 to 500 CZK.

Communicating with the school

Every pupil will receive a **pupil's notebook** (in Years 1 and 2) which is used to record any marks and school notifications. These notifications may involve any exceptional activities within the framework of lessons (trips, excursions et cetera) or also the behaviour of the child at school. The majority of schools use a so-called **electronic pupil's notebook**. This is accessible on the school's website and parents can find their child's marks there, as well as all the school's notifications.

The pupil's notebook contains a so-called **absence sheet**, where the pupil's legal guardians are obliged to excuse any absence of the pupil from lessons.

The school will organise **parent-teacher interviews** at least twice a year so that the parents will have the option of meeting the teachers and finding out how the pupil is doing at school and asking the teacher any questions. The school will inform the parents of the date of the parent-teacher interviews using the pupil's notebook and also online.

It is also possible to arrange a personal meeting with the pupil's form teacher or any other teacher. Most schools offer **consultation hours** with the teachers or it is also possible to arrange individual meetings as needed.

Rights and responsibilities

The pupils have the right:

- to receive an education and school services,
- to information on the course and results of their education,
- to issue a statement on any decisions pertaining to the essential matters of their education, whereby any such statement must be attended to in compliance with their age and level of development,
- to information and advisory assistance from the school or an educational advisory centre with regard to any matters pertaining to education.

The legal guardians of pupils who are minors have the right:

- to information on the course and results of the education of pupils who are minors,
- to elect and be elected to the school council,
- to issue a statement on any decisions pertaining to the essential matters of the education of pupils who are minors,
- to information and advisory assistance from the school or an educational advisory centre with regard to any matters pertaining to education.

The pupils are obliged:

- to attend the school or the educational facility as required and to be duly educated,
- to adhere to the school rules and the regulations and instructions of the school and the school facility aimed at protecting health and safety, with which they have been acquainted,
- to comply with the instructions of the teachers of the school and the educational facility issued in compliance with the legal regulations or the school rules.

The legal guardians of pupils who are minors are obliged:

- to ensure that the pupil duly attends the school or educational facility,
- to attend in person any discussions on serious matters pertaining to the pupil's education upon being requested to do so by the school principal,
- to inform the school or the educational facility of a change in the pupil's health, any health problems or any other serious circumstances that could influence the course of the pupil's education,
- to substantiate the reasons for any absence of the pupil in compliance with the conditions stipulated by the school rules,
- to notify the school or the educational facility of any information that is essential for the course of the education or the safety of the pupil, including any changes to said information.

Source

- Act no. 561/2004 Coll. on preschool, primary, secondary, upper secondary and other education (the Education Act)
- The Curriculum Framework for Primary Education