

## Primary Schools in Japan

### Overview

Japanese primary school lasts for six years. In Japan, the school system is generally called the “6-3-3-4 year system,” which expressly places primary school education as the foundational stage of the entire school system. Although there are kindergartens for preschool education, these kindergartens do not form a part of the compulsory education system. Compared to the kindergarten enrollment rate of 60%, the primary school enrollment rate exceeds 99%, proving primary schools to be the essential institutions responsible for the fundamental education of all Japanese citizens.

The obligation to provide education and the right to receive education are stipulated in the constitution in Japan. Accordingly, the School Education Act obligates Japanese citizens with children under their guardianship to enroll the children in schools suitable to their educational stage for nine years. Among these nine years of compulsory education, the first six years fall under primary school.

For enrollment in primary school, the age-grade system was adopted to enroll children according to their date of birth. Under this system, children enroll in primary school as first-graders on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, immediately following their 6<sup>th</sup> birthday. Also, under the principle of the age-grade system, children neither skip grades nor are they held back to repeat grades based on their academic performance. Similarly, in principle, children who take a long leave due to sickness or some other reason almost always return to the grade suitable to their age.

Primary schools’ academic calendar begins in April and ends in March. The calendar is based on the five-day week system, and classes are held in a standard of 35 weeks a year (34 weeks in the case of first-graders). A period of 40 days beginning at the end of July and ending in early September forms the long recess called summer vacation. Winter vacation takes place for a span of two weeks from the end of December until the beginning of January, and two weeks of spring vacation begin in late March and end in early April. A school year is divided into three terms spaced with these long recesses. In certain areas, flexible measures are taken to cope with circumstances specific to the regions, such as shorter summer vacation and longer winter vacation for schools in cold regions, etc.

While some national and private primary schools do exist, their respective numbers of 74 and 213 only represent 0.003% and 0.01% of the total number of primary schools in the country. Generally, primary schools are public schools run by different municipalities. Most of the national primary schools are affiliated with the faculties of education in national universities.

When a municipality has more than one school, school attendance areas are specified, allowing

each resident to have only one school of choice. In recent years, however, some localities allow their residents to choose from multiple schools within the same municipality to enroll and study in. Some municipalities keep to the principle and forbid residents from practicing so-called cross-border enrollment, where pupils enroll and study in schools outside the designated school districts, demonstrating different levels of flexibility on the matter between regions.

Ordinary timetable of a day at primary schools is as follows:

Arrival at school	8:00~8:30
Morning assembly for the whole school, homeroom, etc.	8:30~8:40
1 <sup>st</sup> class	8:40~9:25
2 <sup>nd</sup> class	9:30~10:15
Break	10:15~10:35
3 <sup>rd</sup> class	10:35~11:20
4 <sup>th</sup> class	11:25~12:20
School lunch	12:10~12:55
Lunch break*	12:55~13:15
5 <sup>th</sup> class	13:35~14:20
6 <sup>th</sup> class	14:25~15:10
End-of-the-day homeroom (for 5 classes)*	14:20~14:30
End-of-the-day homeroom (for 6 classes)*	15:10~15:20
Dismissal	15:30

\* After the lunch break or the end-of-the-day homeroom (depends on the school), pupils clean their classroom and/or common parts of school building. In such a case, lower grade pupils (first and second grade) are supported by elder pupils.

In most cases, a first-grader's school week consists of four days with five school hours and one day with four school hours, and for second-graders, every school day has five school hours. Generally, a third-grader's week has three days with five school-hours and two days with six school-hours, and fourth- to sixth-graders usually have two days with five school hours and three days with six school hours. The number of classes varies in accordance with the difference in total school hours laid out in the Course of Study.

The above is just an example of an ordinary timetable; in reality, the schedules may vary depending on circumstances surrounding grades, classes, or due to special activities, etc. Pupils usually spend their break time playing around in schoolyards, on the rooftops, etc.

A classroom teacher is in charge of each classroom and, in principle, teaches all subjects. Team teaching, however, has been increasingly introduced these days in an attempt to lessen the teachers' workload and to improve teaching. Also, specific subjects for upper grades, such as science, music, and home economics, are often led by specific subject-based teachers. All subject

classifications, themes to be taught under each subject, numbers of school hours per subjects, etc., are provided in the Course of Study established by MEXT. The Course of Study has been updated approximately once a decade. The present Course of Study, the eighth version since the Second World War, was initially introduced in primary schools in 2009 on a gradual basis and has been fully implemented since 2011 (details of the guideline will be described later in this paper).

Pupils' performances on subjects and record of day-to-day life are kept in the teaching-learning record (*Shido-Yoroku*) for each term. Most schools compile a grade report card for each pupil including their academic performance, record of special activities and integrated studies, attendance record, observations of daily life, classroom teacher remarks, etc., and send it to their guardians once every term. An ordinary grade report card has spaces where the guardian affixes his or her seal of acknowledgement, and many such cards have columns for the guardian to write notices to the school.

Most primary schools provide school lunch. School lunches are either prepared at school lunch centers, where the lunches for several schools are all prepared together and delivered to each school by trucks, etc., or at school lunch preparation room attached to individual schools. Usually, pupils alternately take charge of serving meals. In most cases, pupils eat their lunch in their classrooms, while some schools use spare classrooms as dining rooms where pupils from different grades dine together.

School lunch is an integral part of school life as well as a part of the educational activities. Sometimes, traditional local specialties are also served as school lunch. An ordinary school lunch menu consists of a staple food (bread, rice, or noodles), a main dish or soup, a drink (milk or fat-free milk), and a dessert. School lunch menus are supervised by nutrition teachers, and all children are served the same menu unless they have allergies or other special conditions.

Although guardians are supposed to pay for the school lunch, some municipalities cover the entire cost as a countermeasure against the declining birth rate and population size. While it varies depending on grades or locality, the cost per meal ranges from approximately 200 yen to 280 yen.

Textbooks for all subjects used at primary schools are provided free of charge. This policy has been in practice since 1963. Textbooks are prepared by private publishers and go through the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's screening. The ones successfully authorized are then made available for schools.

In many schools, children carry school bags called *radoseru* on their back to school. (This is apparently a corruption of the Dutch word *ransel* (rucksack). Rucksacks introduced to the armies in Meiji era are said to have been adopted in schools) While the majority of schools allow children to wear plain clothes at school, some regions impose uniforms or dress codes.

Special activities include school events and ceremonies, forming a part of the curriculum. School events include ceremonial events (entrance and graduation ceremonies); cultural events (school concerts); health, safety, and gymnastic events (athletic meeting/sports days (*undokai*)); excursions and group stay experiences (excursions and school trips), etc. Sports days are often organized as community events and scheduled on weekends to enable families and guardians to participate in the event. A program often has team competitions such as footraces, obstacle races, tug-of-war, ball-toss games, as well as attractions such as gymnastic formations, group calisthenics, drum and fife band performances, and cheering performances. Some programs engage parents in the competition. School trips almost always take place in the final year of the school, and pupils generally visit scenic sites far away from home and stay overnight.

Dimensions of school buildings and schoolyards for the elementary schools are regulated by the minimum standards specified in regulations issued by MEXT. The size of a school building and schoolyard depend on the enrollment numbers: a school building with minimum size of 500m<sup>2</sup> is required for a school with 40 or fewer children,  $500 + 5 \times (\text{pupil number} - 40)$  m<sup>2</sup> for a school with an enrollment of between 41 and 480 pupils, and  $2,700 + 3 \times (\text{pupil number} - 480)$  m<sup>2</sup> for a school with an enrollment of 481 or more pupils. As for schoolyards, 2,400m<sup>2</sup> or wider area is required for an enrollment of between 1 and 240 pupils,  $2,400 + 10 \times (\text{pupil number} - 240)$  m<sup>2</sup> for an enrollment of 241 to 720, and 7200m<sup>2</sup> for an enrollment of 720. Also, a school building has to have classrooms (ordinary classrooms, special classrooms, etc.), a library, a school clinic, and a staff room. Apart from a school building and a schoolyard, a school is required to have a gymnasium. Although not stipulated by law, most of the primary schools are equipped with swimming pools.

## **1. Historical Transition of Elementary Schools**

Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the Japanese government decided to establish the school system based on existing various schools already commonly in place since the preceding Edo era, and by referring to western countries' education systems. The government started the preparation for drafting the system by gathering necessary materials and, in August 1872, promulgated the educational system.

Under the country's initial modern education system, which commenced with the promulgation of the Educational System Ordinance, the institution designed for primary education was called the elementary school, or *shogaku*. The *shogaku* was divided into upper and lower courses, with the lower course consisting of a four-year term including children between ages of 6 and 9, and upper course consisting of four-year term for children between 10 and 13.

According to the stipulation of the educational system, a *shogaku* was supposed to be built in a

school district encompassing an average population of 600. In 1873, the number of elementary schools was 12,558 nationally, and in the following year of 1874, a total of 20,017 schools, almost equivalent to today's number, were founded nationwide. This rapid expansion of elementary schools was facilitated by the fact that the existing temple schools and popular learning houses called *terakoya*, said to have reached several ten thousands in total in the last days of the Edo era, were actively utilized. In fact, the status of school building usage of the period shows that approximately 40% of total elementary schools rented buildings from temples, and 30% were leased private houses. In other words, elementary school buildings exclusively prepared for school use accounted for a mere 30% of total schools.

In 1886, the Elementary School Order was promulgated, dividing elementary schools into 4-year ordinary elementary schools and 2-year higher elementary schools. Whereas the preceding stipulations had not expressed the strict implementation of compulsory education, the new Elementary School Order's articles explicitly announced three to four years of compulsory education at ordinary elementary schools.

With the revision of the Elementary School Order in 1900, full implementation of the compulsory education system was decided upon. Elementary schools were reformed to fit a four-year system, and higher elementary schools introduced a two- to four-year system. Also, the beginning and end of the academic year was determined together with the adaptation of an academic calendar commencing in April. Furthermore, collection of tuition fees at public elementary schools was abolished as a principle. The law stated that teaching instructions were to be provided by the Minister of Education. In 1907, the Elementary School Order underwent a partial amendment, by which the term of compulsory education was extended to six years, causing the elementary schools' term to expand to six years accordingly. The term for higher elementary schools became two to three years. At that time, the curriculum for elementary schools consisted of ethics, Japanese language, arithmetic, and physical education (optional choices of drawing, singing, and handicraft, or in case of girls, sewing, were available when circumstances allowed). Subjects for higher elementary schools were ethics, Japanese language, arithmetic, Japanese history, geography, science, drawing, singing, physical education, and for girls, sewing.

Enrollment rates of the school-age children in 1873 were 39.9% for boys, 15.1% for girls, and 28.1% in average. Although the rate gradually improved, it remained 58.2% for boys, 22.6% for girls, and 41.2% in average in 1879. This means that merely four out of ten school-age children were enrolled in schools. The low enrollment rate came from the fact sending children to schools for education during their school-age years was not generally accepted. Another reason may be that the public school operations were funded by tuition fees collected from families, an expensive amount compared to the average income of ordinary citizens of the time.

After the schooling obligation was reinforced and incentive measures were employed, the

enrollment rate rose by degrees with temporary reversals, reaching 65.1% for boys, 31.1% for girls, and 48.9% on average after the promulgation of Elementary School Order in 1890. Once the principle of free education at elementary schools was declared in the 1900 revision of the Elementary School Order, eight out of ten school-age children were enrolled in schools for the first time, with the rates of 90.6% for boys and 71.7% for girls, totaling at 81.5% on average. Two years later, in 1902, nine out of ten school-age children were enrolled at schools, with the rate of 95.8% for boys and 87.0% for girls, resulting in the average of 91.6%. Finally, in 1915, 98.9% of boys and 98.0% of girls averaging at 98.5% were enrolled at schools, and this high enrollment rate has been maintained to this day.

As we have discussed here, elementary school education in Japan was formed after the promulgation of the educational system and finally became fully functional after the revision of the Elementary School Order in 1900. During and after World War I, the country's education was influenced by new education movement gaining momentum in western countries. With the influx of various movements, the Japanese education system was ushered into the age of upgrades and expansion.

Following the Manchurian Incident in 1931, education in Japan became increasingly affected by the war. The outbreak of World War II urgently pressed for the establishment of a wartime education system, in which the Elementary School Order was abolished in March 1941 and replaced by the National School Order, and elementary schools began to be called "national schools." Article 1 of the National School Order states that "national schools shall provide primary ordinary education in the spirit of the empire and serve the purpose of disciplining the nation at the foundation level," demonstrating extreme chauvinism in regarding the elementary schools as the place to train children and mold them into small citizens loyal to the country.

After being defeated in the war in August 1945, Japan was placed under the control of the Allied Forces. Immediately after the war, the Ministry of Education issued instructions on urgent matters concerning the transition from a wartime education to a peacetime one. The factor that gave a definitive impact on the direction of education policies was the GHQ's order on the management of the education system. For primary education in particular, an order entitled "Governing Policy on Education System in Japan" was issued in October 1945, prohibiting the dissemination of militarism and radical nationalism. In December of the same year, orders on national Shinto and shrine Shinto, and on suspension of ethics, Japanese history and geography were issued consecutively, resulting in the deletion of expressions related to Shintoism that appeared in every textbook and teachers' reference book.

In November 1946, the Constitution of Japan was promulgated following the amendment procedure provided in the Constitution of the Empire of Japan. Accordingly, the Fundamental Act of Education and the School Education Law were enacted and promulgated in March 1947,

defining the fundamental principles of education and the school system structure, and prompting an educational reform to take place. In April of the same year, national schools returned to their old name of elementary schools and were restructured to take charge of the first 6 years of the so-called 6-3 year education system. The existing advanced course was abolished and replaced by the newly introduced three-year junior high school system, completing the establishment of nine-year compulsory education system.

The biggest change made in elementary school education was the educational content. The May 1947 Ordinance for Enforcement of School Education Act designated Japanese language, social studies, arithmetic, science, music, arts and handicrafts, home economics, physical education, and independent study as the standard subjects, and suggested that schools follow the standards of the Course of Study prepared by Minister of Education, to enable children throughout the country to receive equal standard of education. In March of the same year, the “General Curriculum Guidelines (Tentative Plan)” was issued, preceding the implementation of a new educational system. Preparation of guidelines for each subject followed, and was completed by December of the same year. As for textbooks, the existing nationally approved textbook system was abolished and replaced with the inspection system, in which private publishers publish and distribute textbooks upon authorization by regulatory authorities (in practice, the Ministry of Education). Since the first revision of 1951, the Course of Studies has gone through a total of seven revisions, namely in 1956, 1961, 1971, 1980, 1992, 2002, and 2011, in order to reflect the trends of the time.

## **2. Present Status of Primary Schools**

### **Numbers of Schools, Pupils, and Teachers**

As of 2010, there were a total of 22,000 primary schools (including 21,730 main schools and 270 branch schools). Among these, 74 schools were nationally run, 21,713 were public, and 213 schools were privately owned. Compared to last year, there are 258 less schools in total. Number of nationally run schools remains the same, whereas public schools decreased by 261 and private ones increased by 3 from last year.

Number of enrolled pupils is 6,993,376 (3,579,418 boys and 3,413,958 girls), approximately a 70,000-person decrease from last year.

Number of classrooms is 277,503,700 decrease from last year. Number of pupils per classroom is 25.2, 0.2 pupils less than last year. Number of pupils per teacher is 16.7, a 0.1 decrease from last year.

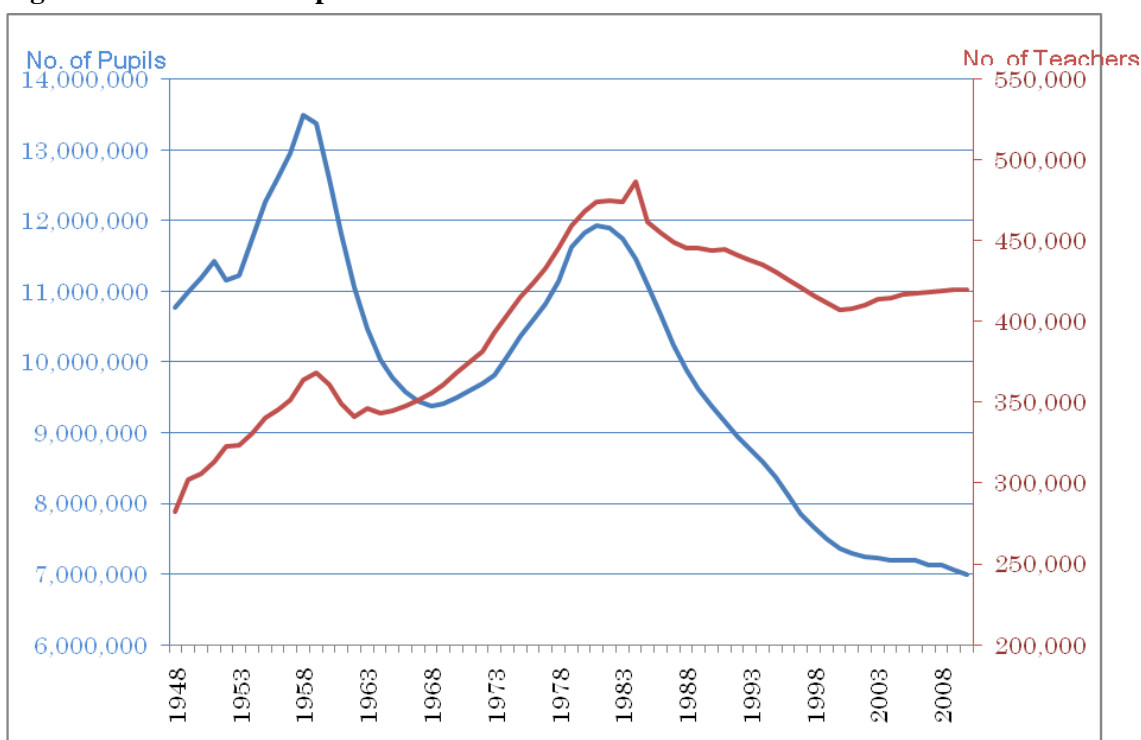
As a result of the dwindling birth rate in recent years, the number of schools in 2010 was approximately 20% less than the highest record of 26,988 in 1957. Similarly, the number of pupils

was almost a half of 13,492,087, the highest record achieved in 1958.

Number of teachers is 419,776 (including 156,030 males and 263,746 females), with female teachers accounting for 62.8% of the total. Compared to last year, number of teachers has increased by 258.

Figure 1 shows the transition of headcounts of pupils and teachers from 1948 to 2010 (Source: MEXT, School Basic Survey 2010 and School Basic Survey 2011)

**Figure 1: Numbers of Pupils and Teachers**



### Existing Course of Study

The existing Course of Study was first announced in 2008, implemented in advance in 2009 with the commencement of a transitional period, and has been fully put into action since 2011. The latest revision was envisaged in response to the argument that the previous revision and consequential drastic reduction of learning content, the full implementation of 5-day school week, and the introduction of the period for integrated studies, all in an attempt to reinforce the more relaxed education policy, have contributed to the decline of academic standards.

While paying due respect to the previous guideline's key phrase, "Zest for Living (*Ikiru Chikara*)," the latest guideline aims to foster a balanced growth of intelligence, morals, and physical strength. Through the revision, total school-hours, which had so far continued to dwindle



since revisions in the 1980s, have increased for the first time in 30 years. The total number of hours a pupil spends in school has increased by 278 hours to become 5,645 hours. In particular, hours for Japanese language, social studies, arithmetic, science, and physical education have increased by 10% in the total of six years of education. Accordingly, school-hours per week have increased by two hours for first- and second-graders, and one hour for third- to sixth-graders.

Improvement of education in linguistic ability, math and science education, education in traditions and cultures, hands-on activities, moral education, and foreign language education are the target themes of the educational content revision. In particular, the introduction of foreign language activities in the fifth- and sixth-grade curriculum is one of the most remarkable changes.

Table 1 shows the number of hours per subject as indicated in the Course of Study. One school-hour consists of 45 minutes.

Table 1: Annual Standard School-Hours per Subject

Figures in brackets in the cells are number of school-hours per week.

Category		1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Subjects	Japanese Language	306 (9)	315 (9)	245 (7)	245 (7)	175 (5)	175 (5)
	Social Studies	-	-	70 (2)	90 (2.6)	100	105 (5)
	Arithmetic	136 (4)	175 (5)	175 (5)	175 (5)	175 (5)	175 (5)
	Science	-	-	90 (2.6)	105 (3)	105 (3)	105 (3)
	Living Environment Studies	102 (3)	105 (3)	-	-	-	-
	Music	68 (2)	70 (2)	60 (1.7)	60 (1.7)	50 (1.4)	50 (1.4)
	Arts and Handicrafts	68 (2)	70 (2)	60 (1.7)	60 (1.7)	50 (1.4)	50 (1.4)
	Home Economics	-	-	-	-	60 (1.7)	55 (1.6)
	Physical Education	102 (3)	105 (3)	105 (3)	105 (3)	90 (2.6)	90 (2.6)
Moral Education	34 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	
Special Activities	34 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	35 (1)	
Period for Integrated Studies	-	-	70 (2)	70 (2)	70 (2)	70 (2)	
Foreign Language Activities	-	-	-	-	35 (1)	35 (1)	
Total School-Hours	850 (25)	910 (26)	945 (27)	980 (28)	980 (28)	980 (28)	

\* Standard school hours are the standard hours the government deems as necessary to

cover all of the content under each subject. Each school is allowed to allocate hours exceeding the provided standard if appropriate in the actual circumstances.

Purposes of each subject are as follows:

Japanese Language	To develop in pupils the ability to properly express and accurately comprehend the Japanese language, to increase the ability to communicate, to develop the ability to think and imagine and have a sense of language, to deepen interest in the Japanese language, and to develop an attitude of respect for the Japanese language.
Social Studies	To facilitate pupils' understanding on social life; to nurture an understanding of, and affection toward, our land and history; and to nurture the fundamental capacity as a responsible member of the community who is capable of forming a peaceful and democratic nation/society that thrives in the international community.
Arithmetic	Through mathematical activities, to help pupils acquire basic and fundamental knowledge and skills regarding numbers, quantities, and geometrical figures; to foster their ability to think and express with good perspectives and logically on matters of everyday life; to help pupils find pleasure in mathematical activities and appreciate the value of mathematical approaches; and to foster an attitude to willingly make use of arithmetic in their daily lives as well as in their learning.
Science	To enable pupils to become familiar with nature and to carry out observations and experiments with their own prospectus, as well as to develop their problem-solving abilities and nurture hearts and minds that are filled with an affection for the natural world; at the same time, to develop a realistic understanding of natural phenomena, and to foster scientific perspectives and ideas.
Living Environment Studies	To help pupils become interested in the relationship between themselves and people around them, society and nature through concrete activities and experiences, and to have them contemplate themselves and their own lives and in the process; to help them acquire basic habits and skills essential for life and develop the foundation for independence.
Music	To encourage pupils to cultivate their sentiments and fundamental abilities for musical activities, as well as a love and sensitivity toward music through music-making and appraising.
Arts and Handicrafts	To enable children, by means of activities involving expression and appreciation, to savor the joy of creating while bringing their sensitivity into play. Also, at the same time, to foster the fundamental abilities underlying the creative activities that take the form of shaping and molding, thereby nurturing a rich fund of aesthetic sensitivity.
Home Economics	To enable pupils to acquire basic and fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for everyday life through practical and hands-on activities relating to food, clothing, and housing; to foster a sense of cherishing family life; and to develop a positive attitude towards a better family life as a member of the family.
Physical Education	To help pupils — through proper exercise experience and an understanding of health and safety, and by considering physical and mental aspects in an integrated manner — develop basic qualities and the abilities to participate in enjoyable physical activity throughout their lives, maintain and improve their health and fitness and cultivate

	an appropriate attitude towards leading a pleasant and happy life.
Moral Education	Through the entire educational activities at school, to nurture morals in pupils' mentality, judgment, willingness to practice, and behavior. Moral education classes should stand on the basis of the above moral education purposes to closely connect moral lessons learned through each subject, foreign language activities, integrated studies, and special activities, to supplement, deepen, and integrate these lessons through well-planned and constructive instruction, and to deepen their consciousness on moralistic values and ideas on how one should live, and nurture the ability to practice one's morals.
Special Activities	To enable pupils to think in their own way about life through cross-synthetic studies and inquiry studies, while fostering the qualities and abilities needed to find their own tasks, to learn and think on their own, to make proactive decisions, and to solve problems better. At the same time they acquire the habits of studying and thinking, and cultivating their commitment to problem solving and inquiry activities in a proactive, creative, and cooperative manner.
Period for Integrated Studies	To enable pupils to think in their own way about life through cross-synthetic studies and inquiry studies, while fostering the qualities and abilities needed to find their own tasks, to learn and think on their own, to make proactive decisions, and to solve problems better. At the same time have them acquire the habits of studying and thinking, and cultivating their commitment to problem solving and inquiry activities in a proactive, creative, and cooperative manner.
Foreign Language Activities	To build the foundation of pupils' communication abilities through foreign languages while deepening their understanding on languages and cultures through actual experiences, fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and familiarizing them with the sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages.

(Source: [http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/eiyaku/1261037.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/eiyaku/1261037.htm))

### 3. Issues and Direction

#### Foreign Language Activities

The 2011 revision of the Course of Study made foreign language activities a compulsory subject for fifth- and sixth-graders. Since 1994, foreign language activities for primary schools have been experimentally introduced at some primary schools designated as pilot schools for research purposes. By 2009, 99.9% of primary schools had introduced foreign language activities in their curriculum in some way or other. Since this year (2011), the foreign language activities have been made compulsory, and 35 hours have been secured annually for the activities to take place one hour a week.

In principle, English is the subject of the foreign language activities, where listening and speaking are in the focal point of instruction. While classroom teachers are basically responsible for the

lessons, an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) or native Japanese fluent in English often joins the class to engage in the team teaching.

The purpose of foreign language activities at primary schools is to deepen understanding of languages and cultures, and to foster fundamental communication skills in a foreign language. Pupils are not graded on their linguistic abilities in this activities.

### **National Survey on Academic Abilities and Education Conditions**

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology has been organizing National Surveys on Academic Abilities and Education Conditions (National Survey) since 2007 to grasp pupils' academic abilities and learning conditions at the national level, in response to the increasing need to comprehend the present circumstances and issues surrounding school education, such as declining academic standards and deteriorating motivation for learning, as demonstrated in the result of an international survey on academic ability. The survey also intends to respond to the heightening need for the establishment of structure to ensure the quality of compulsory education.

Results of complete surveys conducted from 2007 to 2010 revealed that pupils' overall abilities to utilize knowledge and skills were in need of improvement. As for the discrepancy between metropolises, medium-sized cities, towns, villages, and isolated areas, no significant differences were observed. Pupils' interest, willingness, and behavior were represented by remarks such as "I love mathematics/arithmetic," or "I understand the Japanese language very well," showing improvement in many aspects. The survey also revealed the effectiveness of competence-based small-group teaching and the need for customized teaching targeting individual pupils.

### **Foreign Pupils**

Since the amendment of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990, the number of residents with foreign nationalities in Japan has almost doubled. Although foreigners in Japan are not obligated to send their children to primary schools in Japan, such pupils are accepted in Japanese public schools if their parents wish so. Once foreign pupils are accepted, they shall be entitled to treatment equal to Japanese pupils, such as exemption from the obligation to pay tuition fees and the provision of textbooks free of charge.

In accepting foreign pupils in public primary schools, however, special attention is required in instructing them in Japanese, and in daily and academic activities. In view of this, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology provides several special measures, such as arrangement of a teaching framework, the provision of training for teachers, the establishment of a Japanese language teaching curriculum, etc.

## Reference

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([http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/eiyaku/1261037.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/new-cs/youryou/eiyaku/1261037.htm))

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<Taro Numano>

## 日本の小学校 (記述の要点)

### 概要

小学校は修業年限が6年間の学校で、9年間の義務教育期間の最初の部分にあたる。就学率は99%以上である。就学に関しては原則として年齢主義をとっており、満6歳になった最初の4月1日に第1学年に就学する。成績不良による原級留置や優秀な児童に対する飛び級は行われない。

学年は4月に始まり翌年の3月に終了する。1年を3学期に分け、各学期の間には休暇が設けられる。2010年5月1日現在の学校数は22,000校、99%以上が公立学校である。公立学校に通う児童は、住所のある自治体の学校に通う。

一日のスケジュールは8時～8時30分から始まり、14時～15時30分に終わる。その間には5ないし6校時の授業と給食、中休みなどが含まれる。学級担任制をとっており、ほとんどの授業は学級単位で担任の教師によって指導される。

### 歴史の変遷

わが国における初等教育の歴史の変遷について、明治初期の小学の創設から、それ以降の第2次世界大戦終了に至るまでを概説した。

小学

尋常小学校

国民学校

第2次世界大戦後の新学制

学習指導要領

### 現状

小学校の現状を示すために、学校数・児童数・教員数の統計情報および2011年から実施された学習指導要領について概説した。

### 課題

今年度から施行された学習指導要領の中で、これまでと大きく様相を異にした外国語活動、学習指導要領改訂の内容に影響のあった全国学力・学習状況調査、近年急速に増加した外国籍児童の課題について概説した。

外国語活動

全国学力・学習状況調査

外国人児童