

Welcome to the Estonian School!

A Guide to Parents

Tallinn 2010

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Dear parent!

„Welcome to the Estonian School!“ is a guide for families who have recently moved to Estonia from another country and whose children will be studying at the Estonian school.

The present book shall give a short overview of the Estonian education system, introduce the daily life at Estonian schools and suggest ways to help the child in adapting to the new environment.

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Estonian Education System

The Estonian school system is divided into four levels with each lasting three years. Thus, the general secondary education lasts for 12 years. It is compulsory for all children to pass the first three stages of study (i.e. nine grades) meaning that all children between the ages of 7-17 must go to school.

The stages of study are the following:

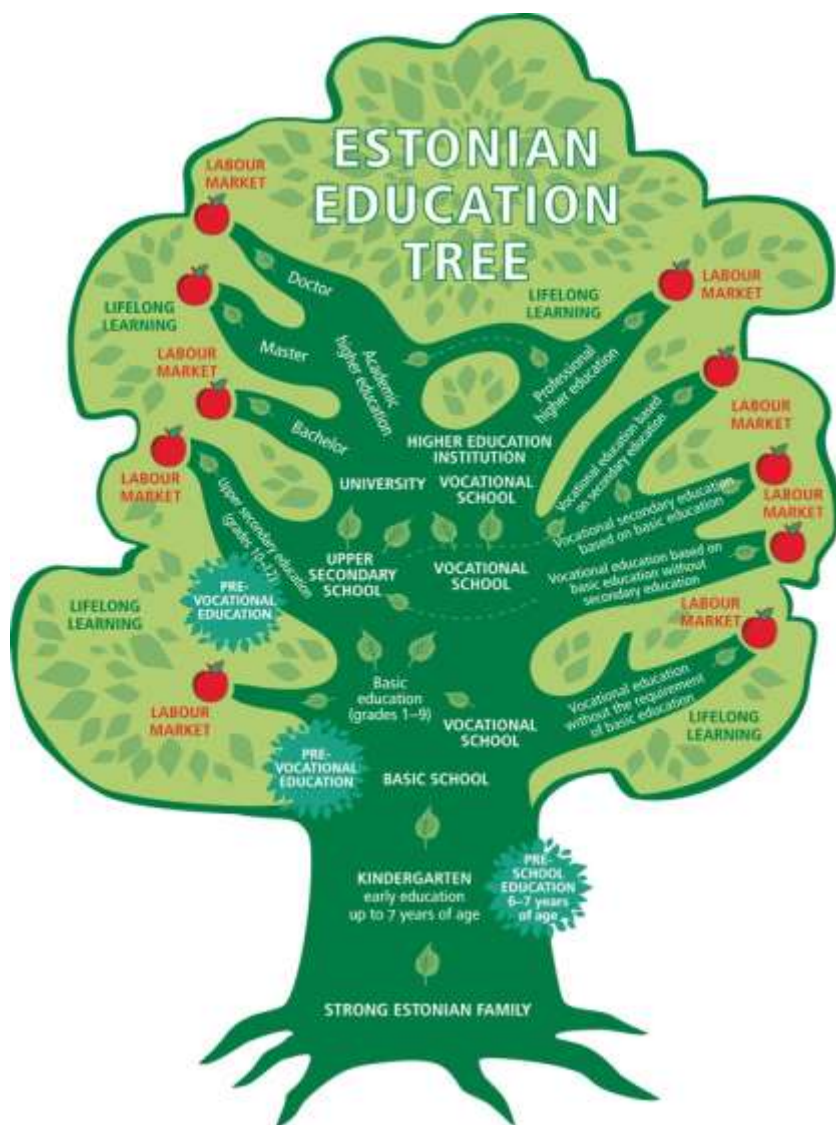
- First level: Grades I-III, age 7-10 years;
- Second level: Grades IV-VI, age ca 11-15 years;
- Third level: Grades VII-IX, age up to 17 years;
- Fourth level, i.e. secondary school (Gymnasium): Grades X-XII, age 16-19 years.

| | Basic School | | | | | | | | | | Gymnasium (secondary school) | |
|--------|--------------|---|---|----------|---|---|-----------|---|---|----|---------------------------------|----|
| | Stage I | | | Stage II | | | Stage III | | | | Stage IV | |
| Age | 7-10 | | | 11-15 | | | 15-17 | | | | 17-19 | |
| Grades | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |

There are also schools in Estonia especially for children with special needs (for instance hearing impaired children).

After completing the nine-year basic education programme, the students need to make a choice: either to continue studies at the secondary level (Gymnasium) or at a vocational school where in addition to the secondary education also a vocation may be obtained. In theory, however, children may also start working after graduating from the basic school.

After graduating from the secondary school, another choice needs to be made: whether to continue studies at a university, vocational school or start working.



Education is free of charge for all children until the graduation from the secondary school (Gymnasium). There are also a few private schools in Estonia with tuition fees.

School life is organised by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. Further information about the school system and the district schools may be obtained from the local government.

At what age do children start school?

In general children in Estonia start school at the age of seven. Starting school is compulsory for children who will have turned seven by October 1 of the given year. For instance, if your child turns seven at the end of September, he has to start school earlier that month.

What is the language of instruction in Estonian schools?

In most schools the instruction is conducted in Estonian. In 2010 there are almost 500 general education schools using the Estonian language and about ninety schools using Russian. However, also in Russian schools some subjects are taught in Estonian. There are also some private schools in Estonia with either Russian, Finnish or English as the language of instruction.

What is the size of schools and forms?

There are schools of various sizes, in some schools there are only about twenty pupils, in some several thousands. The typical school is a Gymnasium (secondary school) providing instruction for 12 years. However, in rural areas there are many smaller schools, mainly either basic schools until Grade 9 or elementary schools until Grade 6.

Also the size of forms differs:

- The number of pupils in class in the basic school is 24-28;
- There may be up to 36 pupils in a class at the Gymnasium level.

However, in some schools there may be fewer pupils in a class. As the recommended size of class is 24, the given number of pupils occurs most often.

Academic Year

When does the academic year begin and end?

In Estonia school starts on September 1 and usually ends at the beginning of June. The academic year consists of 175 school days, i.e. 35 study weeks and in most cases it has been divided into four terms (some schools use the cycle format with either fewer or more study periods).

Usually there are no lessons on the first day at school. Then there are habitually formal gatherings and the form teacher classes.

The first day at school is considered festive and thus the children wear formal clothes. Many pupils bring flowers to the teacher. The first grade pupils come to school with their parents. Also the parents of older pupils may take part in the first day gatherings if they want to, however, in most schools these are meant for pupils only.

What are the dates of school holidays?

School holidays will be determined by the Ministry of Education and Research and there may be some annual variations. The first term usually lasts from September to the end of October followed by a week-long autumn break for the pupils. The second term lasts from November to December. There is a longer vacation during Christmas lasting until early January. The third term lasts from January to March with a spring break in mid-March. The fourth term lasts from March to early June followed by the summer holiday lasting all summer – from June to the end of August. The pupils of Grades 9 and 12 also have an examination period in June and their holiday is therefore somewhat shorter.

The academic year ends with a formal gathering. In many schools there are gatherings also at the end of each term.

What are the study periods for my child?

Who work at Estonian schools?

There are numerous people working at the school you have chosen for your child. You will communicate with some of the staff members, some will communicate daily with your child.

All the people working at schools have attained respective training and they are competent professionals in their field. In cooperation with all the staff members, a safe and smooth school environment will be guaranteed for your child.

Headmaster

All schools have a headmaster or a director responsible for the functioning of the school. It is the leader of the school who in cooperation with other members of the board (deputy head, managers etc) makes and implements all the important decisions related to school life.

Deputy head

The deputy head is a member of the school board and the headmaster's closest assistant in organising the education at school. He is responsible for the provision of instruction, prepares the timetables for children and handles the daily practical organisation of studies.

School secretary

The school secretary is responsible for administering the documents necessary for running the school. For instance, it is the secretary who will take your child's application documents. In case you do not know whom to turn to, just call the school secretary – she will forward you to the appropriate people.

Class teacher

The most important person at school for your child is his class teacher. At the first school level, practically all lessons are given by the class teacher.

At other stages of study, the class teacher actually teaches a certain subject but keeps a close contact with the whole class and pupils may turn to her with any problems. The class teacher also communicates with the parents in connection with all questions related to the school life.

Teachers

Teachers teach your children various subjects. At the elementary school level almost all subjects are taught by the class teacher. Starting from the second stage of study, subject teachers usually start giving lessons. At the elementary school level, subject teachers give those lessons that the class teacher is unable to teach (for instance music, physical education and foreign languages).

School psychologist

The school psychologist is a qualified specialist who is the children's confidant. Children may turn to him with their smaller or bigger problems. Some pupils need special support to advance in their studies – it is the school psychologist's task to find out the reasons for the obstacles. The psychologist knows and implements various methods supporting the children suffering from fears or other problems. He uses a range of activities (for instance, discussions with the child, filling tests etc) to find the best options for the pupil. If needed the school psychologist may also counsel the parents.

Speech therapist

In many schools there is also a speech therapist assisting the children in reaching the level of written and spoken language appropriate to their age. The given service must be available at all schools. In case the school does not employ a speech therapist, they will organise the therapy by other service providers.

Social pedagogue

The social pedagogue is a qualified specialist working with pupils with learning, adaptation or behavioural difficulties. He monitors the school attendance and in case of more serious problems (for instance school violence), he is one of the support persons helping to solve the issue.

Extracurricular activities manager

Many schools employ an extracurricular activities manager who helps pupils to find suitable activities during their free time. He arranges various activities on the school premises (for instance hobby groups), coordinates the work of the student representative board, organises school gatherings, parties and other events in cooperation with pupils and teachers.

School nurse and dentist

The school must ensure medical care for children in case of emergencies. If a child falls ill during a school day or there is an accident, the school nurse shall provide first aid. The school nurse also continues the vaccinations begun by the GP. The parents will be notified beforehand of all future vaccinations asking their approval. The school nurse also follows the pupil's physical development, including the height, weight, sight and hearing. The school nurse does not replace your GP, thus in case of daily health problems you must consult with your family doctor.

In critical situations the school shall call for an ambulance that will provide operative assistance or take the child to the hospital if necessary.

In some schools there is also a dentist who checks children's teeth and advises on dental care. In Estonia, healthcare (including dental care) is free of charge for children (under 19 years).

Security staff

In some schools the main entrance is monitored by a guard/security staff who communicates with the people entering the building. The security guard's task is to ensure that the building is not entered by unauthorised people. In some cases all the visitors must register their visit. The security guard's instructions are mandatory.

Support staff

In each school there is also support staff with various tasks: cloakroom attendants, canteen staff, cleaners, library assistants and others.

Preparing for school

Most children in Estonia go to some childcare institution before starting school. Pre-school age children may go either to the kindergarten or pre-school.

Kindergarten

Parents may enrol their 3-6-year-old child at a kindergarten where children can communicate and play with others and also acquire the pre-school education preparing them for school (according to the national curriculum). At the kindergarten children are divided into groups and each group is monitored by a teacher and an assistant teacher.

A typical day at the kindergarten starts at nine o'clock in the morning and ends at about five o'clock (the kindergarten opening hours are generally 7-19). During the day children get three hot meals: in the morning, lunchtime and in the afternoon. In general the parents get information about the menus on the notice board.

The daily kindergarten schedule also includes a so-called quiet hour when the children got to sleep in beds (they usually change into pyjamas). Throughout the day the teachers engage children in various activities: they draw and craft, exercise and play, sing and dance. In addition, the children also acquire various skills and knowledge needed for school, for instance they observe nature, listen to fairy tales, learn the alphabet and the use of new words, they learn numbers and much more useful and constructive.

The children at kindergartens always learn through play. Playing develops thinking, creative skills and imagination. Playing also helps children to learn the language and develop the ability to communicate with both other children and adults.

In order to secure a place at a kindergarten, you must submit an application to the kindergarten manager and in case of available places your child may start the nursery school. In case there are no available places, the child will be included on the waiting list. The parents may choose the kindergarten of their own liking. In Estonia there are kindergartens with Estonian, Russian and English as the language of instruction. The information on available kindergarten places may be obtained at the local government.

Going to kindergarten is not compulsory, however, highly recommended for children whose mother tongue is not Estonian. By playing with peers, children learn the language quickly and thus will have less problems coping at school.

Pre-school

Many schools also offer pre-school education. Pre-school is a course for 6-year-old children preparing them for school. The aim of the preparatory course is to improve those skills that are needed for successful studies. The pre-school lessons usually take place twice a week in the afternoon. Some schools also offer pre-school classes in the morning. Generally the parents are responsible for bringing the child to school and later also fetching him after the classes. Most pre-school courses have a tuition fee and include an introduction to the school environment in a playful atmosphere (playing games, singing, reading, writing and doing calculations). The

instruction is led by an elementary school teacher. Pre-school is especially recommended for children who have not attended kindergarten and who may experience difficulties in adapting to the school environment.

Child goes to school

When your child reaches the compulsory school age in Estonia (i.e. 7 years) or is of compulsory school age upon arrival (7-17 years), he may go to school in Estonia.

What is school readiness?

School readiness means that the child wants to learn, acquire new skills and knowledge, and also follow the explanations and instructions given by adults.

In many schools children and their parents are invited to get acquainted with the school before starting elementary school and thus also the children's school readiness will be determined. The parents may be present at the interview with the child. During the given interviews the teachers do not assess children, but only their current level and development of school readiness.

With relation to school readiness, three important aspects in the child's development will be considered: **physical, social and mental development**.

Feedback on the child's health and **physical** development is given by the family GP or paediatrician. The child must be physically prepared for the school days and the distance between home and school, he must be able to control himself and his emotions, also be physically active and capable of manual activities.

In case of the **mental** aspects it is important that the child is able to listen and focus his attention also on somewhat uninteresting activities. He must also be able to express his thoughts coherently and explain situations appropriately to his age.

The factors of **social** readiness for school include the child's ability to consider and cooperate with his peers and teachers, persistency in finishing the activities and the desire to learn.

How is school readiness assessed?

In case of determining school readiness, the children may be asked to read a short passage, write, draw and do calculations, engage in activities with other children and answer the teacher's questions.

A child starting school must be able to attend to his immediate needs, for instance to put on his clothes, eat at a table, keep his things in basic order, go to the toilet by himself, and have the courage to ask adults for help if needed.

Which school may my children go to?

In the Estonian education system, each child is guaranteed a place of studies. The parent selects the school usually based on the location. However, the parent may also choose a school further away from home if there are vacancies. The most reasonable step to take is to turn for information to the local government authorities who have a good overview of the schools in the district. They may also inform you of the Estonian education system and give you the contacts of the particular school. Similarly, you may turn directly to the nearest school or look for information on the Internet.

Which documents do I need for school?

Foreign residents need to meet certain requirements to live in Estonia. Please turn to the Citizenship and Migration Department of the Police and Border Guard Board to check the requirements related to your family.

When you come to register your child to school, you need to have the child's ID documents with you (for instance the birth certificate, passport, ID-card). At school you are asked to write an application to register your child in the given school. In case of applying to higher forms, it is important to demonstrate your child's education so far, therefore you need to take with you all the documents related to his former schooling (for instance school reports).

In order to be accepted to the school, you also need a health card. For this you need to take your child to your family GP. Also the school nurse may assist you in getting the health card.

Even if you do not have all the documents mentioned above, bring your child to school anyway! The bureaucratic problems related to your child's education could be solved in cooperation with the school management.

In case for some reason you later want to change schools, you need to write a respective application to the headmaster. When leaving the school, the pupil is given all the necessary documents to submit to the next school that he will attend.

Which documents will be issued by the school?

1. Once the child has been accepted, he will get a **student card**. The given card is a document verifying that the pupil is studying in Estonia. The student card also entitles the cardholder to reductions in the local transportation system. The student card features the name of the school, the child's name, ID-code and date of birth, also the card's date of expiry. In order to issue the card, you must bring a document photo (3x4 cm) to school.
2. Some schools also issue **library cards**.
3. Individual schools have different arrangements for meals, photocopying etc.
4. At the end of the school year, each pupil will be given a report verifying that he has successfully completed the courses.

Which documents will be issued for my child?

Which school to select in case my child does not speak Estonian?

In case your child does not speak the language of instruction, it is recommended you contact your local government who will help you to find a school that also provides Estonian lessons for foreign children. At the local government there are education specialists coordinating the education system in the given area. They have the necessary information on the local kindergartens and schools and you will also get the specific contact details, telephone numbers etc.

Once the local government has found a suitable school, the parents will arrange a meeting with a school board representative (headmaster or deputy head). The parents will bring the child along to the meeting and to get acquainted with the school. It is during this meeting that they will determine which form is suitable for him based on the child's age and his former education. In case the child does not know the language and needs time to adapt, he will sometimes go back a grade with the parents' approval. This will give the child a kind of an extra year during which he will have more time to adapt to the Estonian school and language as he is already familiar with the content of the subjects.

There are many schools in Estonia where there have been no pupils from abroad and therefore they have no experience in arranging extra Estonian classes. However, there have been state-funded publication of study materials and teacher training sessions and therefore most schools are prepared for working with non-Estonian pupils.

Curriculum

The national curriculum provides a framework for all the instruction given in Estonian schools and it must be followed by all schools notwithstanding the language of instruction (there are a few schools in Estonia that follow the International Baccalaureate Organisation curriculum). Based on the national curriculum, each school will devise its own individual curriculum. Thus, some schools may teach certain subjects more than other schools, for instance there may be more language or science classes. They may also add selective courses, for instance lesser-known languages, environmental studies, project studies etc. When meeting the school management, you may ask about the particularities of the given school curriculum. Pupils who do not speak the Estonian language will be devised an individual curriculum.

What are the subjects on different stages of study?

According to the national curriculum the following subjects are studied on the basic school level.

I stage of study (Grades I-III)

The following subjects are studied on the basic school level: Estonian Language, Foreign Language, Mathematics, Nature Studies, Human Studies, Music, Arts and Crafts and Physical Education. In addition, there are up to eight optional subjects a week depending on the particular speciality of the school or the form. The maximum number of lessons in the first stage of studies has been given in the following table:

| | Lessons in a week |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| Grade I | 20 |
| Grade II | 23 |
| Grade III | 25 |

II stage of study (Grades IV-VI)

The following subjects are studied on the second level of studies: Estonian and Literature, Foreign Language A, Foreign Language B, Mathematics, Nature Studies, Human Studies, History, Social Studies, Music, Art Education, Handicraft and Technical Studies, Physical Education. In addition, there are up to ten optional subjects a week depending on the particular speciality of the school or the form. The maximum number of lessons in the second stage of studies has been given in the following table:

| | Lessons in a week |
|----------|--------------------------|
| Grade IV | 25 |
| Grade V | 28 |
| Grade VI | 30 |

III stage of study (Grades VII-IX)

The following subjects are studied on the third level of studies: Estonian and Literature, Foreign Language A, Foreign Language B, Mathematics, Nature Studies, Geography, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Human Studies, History, Social Studies, Music, Art Education, Handicraft and Technical Studies, Physical Education. In addition, there are up to six optional subjects a week depending on the particular speciality of the school or the form. The maximum number of lessons in the third stage of studies has been given in the following table:

| | Lessons in a week |
|------------|--------------------------|
| Grade VII | 30 |
| Grade VIII | 32 |
| Grade IX | 32 |

Estonian language

Children who do not speak Estonian will be studying Estonian as a foreign language according to an individual curriculum. The individual curriculum will be compiled by the Estonian teacher who will also select the study materials suitable for the pupil.

In general, the schools organise Estonian classes either as individual or group lessons (in case there are more than one child). All the language skills will be developed: listening, reading,

speaking and writing skills. In addition also pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar will be taught. In most cases the Estonian language is taught using Estonian, i.e. the teacher does not use any other languages in the classroom except Estonian. This method is quite typical of foreign language teaching, it may be somewhat unfamiliar at first, however, it is certainly more effective than teaching through translation.

The parents should enhance the children's language studies also at home, for instance by buying Estonian children's books, magazines and games, listening to Estonian radio and watching Estonian TV programmes. There are also numerous online activities suitable for language studies, for instance the website www.lastekas.ee includes suitable language study games and videos for younger children.

Foreign languages

Foreign language studies are compulsory in Estonian schools. The particular language courses taught depend on the school's choices. Usually schools offer English, Russian, German and French courses. There are also schools offering Finnish, Swedish, Japanese, Spanish, Hebrew classes and also other language courses.

The compulsory foreign language courses taught at Estonian schools are named according to the following system: the first language to be studied is called Foreign Language A. The studies of Foreign Language A start already in the first stage of study. The next foreign language to be studied is called Foreign Language B and the studies begin in the second stage of studies. In case there is also a third foreign language taught at the school, it is named Foreign Language C.

Foreign children who study at an Estonian school and in the Estonian language, may also study the other foreign languages. However, as it is important for them to master the Estonian language, they will at first have fewer foreign language lessons than their classmates.

Which foreign languages will be taught to my child?

The child's mother tongue and native culture

The instruction of the foreign children's mother tongue depends on the total number of pupils with the same mother tongue (it is stated in the Estonian legislation that mother tongue instruction will be organised in case there are at least 10 potential learners). In case the school

organises lessons of the foreign children's mother tongue, they will study it as the second foreign language (i.e. Foreign Language B). Information on the foreign children's mother tongue lessons will be given by the school's deputy head. The parents may always teach their children independently by developing their skills in the mother tongue and teaching their native cultural traditions.

Are there lessons of my child's mother tongue at the school?

Music

Music is a compulsory subject for everybody. There are long choir music traditions in Estonia and therefore many schools have also choir rehearsals in addition to the compulsory music lessons. Young children's, children's, youth and mixed choirs perform at school gatherings and other events. The most important event for the choirs is the Song Festival. The national Song Festivals are held at the Tallinn Song Festival grounds (but not every year) and it is an honour for each choir to be selected to perform there.

Arts and Crafts

Arts, Handicraft, Home Economics and Technical Studies are compulsory for all pupils. In lower grades the boys and girls are mostly taught together, however, later the Handicraft and Technical Studies classes may be taught separately for girls and boys. The parents are responsible for providing the means and materials used for the arts and crafts lessons. In some schools the teacher collects money from the parents and buys the necessary materials. Most schools have special handicraft classrooms with particular equipment – sewing machines for girls and woodwork and metalwork tools for boys. In many schools there are also special home economics classrooms with ovens, stoves and other means needed for cooking.

Physical Education

Physical Education is also a compulsory subject. Physical Education lessons take place either in a special sports hall or in other suitable rooms. Lessons are often taught also outdoors – either at the stadium or the schoolyard. Usually the stadium and sports halls are located at or near the school premises.

Physical Education lessons are very active and therefore children need to have special sports clothes that they put on in changing rooms. After the lessons, children will wash themselves in the shower. There are separate changing and washrooms for boys and girls. In case your child does not want to change his clothes or wash together with other children, you must inform the teacher so that individual facilities could be arranged. In case the lessons take place outdoors, children's clothing depends on the weather. In winter they will go skiing, sledging and ice-skating.

In case the school has a swimming pool, the swimming lessons will take place there. In case there is no swimming pool, the lessons will be taught somewhere else. In any case, the school will inform you how swimming lessons are organised. Children always go to the swimming pool together with their teacher. There are separate changing and washrooms for boys and girls. All children swim in the same swimming pool.

Sometimes the schools organise sports days. There are usually no other lessons on the given day and the children will compete with each other in various sports, for instance there are competitions in running, long jump, football, gymnastics, skiing, sledging, ice-skating, orienteering or relay racing.

In case the children have certain health issues preventing participation in sports, you must inform the class teacher. In case of chronic health problems you need to bring a doctor's certificate. In case your child has a temporary health problem (e.g. cold, influenza), you must write a respective note in the study journal and your child does not have to participate in the exercises on the given day.

The most popular sports practices in the Physical Education lessons in Estonia include gymnastics, track and field, basketball, volleyball, football, dancing and winter sports (skiing and ice-skating).

Religious Education

In Estonia, church and state have been separated. The most widely spread religion is the Lutheran faith, but there are also people of Orthodox, Catholic and other faith. Religious Education is not compulsory in Estonian schools (however, the school must be prepared to teach the classes in case there is a sufficient number of pupils who would want to take the course). Religious Education is an elective course based on the principle of freedom of thought and

religion. The lessons analyse various religions and religious movements, teach to detect the reflection of religion in cultural, social and individual life, and discuss different existentialist issues.

In case you want your child to attend Sunday school, these are organised by local churches of the particular faith.

Speech therapy

Children will be referred to speech therapy by a teacher in case he notices some problems in the child's linguistic development during classes. The speech therapist sometimes lets the child write dictations in order to determine the possible problems in writing skills. Speech therapy sessions usually take place once or twice a week.

Field trips and excursions

The school also arranges instruction outside the school premises. Field trips are always made with the teacher(s). Children will be taken either to museums, the zoo or other places of interest.

In many schools children are often taken to the theatre. In case there is an entrance fee, the teacher will inform the children and the parents who will give the money to pay for the tickets. Children wear formal clothing for theatre visits. It is recommended that you also give some pocket money to your child, so that he could buy either the programme or some drinks and snacks at the café.

During the school holidays and at the end of the school year, there are often excursions that may last for several days. For instance, they may go camping or visit partner schools. Some field trips are taken abroad. Group excursions are not free of charge and the attendance is not compulsory. However, excursions offer a good chance to be with classmates in other situations, see Estonia or other countries and get new experience. Also in terms of language studies, it is good for the children to be together on field trips and this way broaden their scope of vision and vocabulary.

Timetable and classrooms

Each grade will be given a timetable based on the school curriculum. At the beginning of the school year, on September 1, all pupils are given a timetable by their class teacher showing all the lessons for each day of the week. The weekly timetable will be written in the study journal.

In many schools the timetable is also available on the school website or the electronic system for the parents. The timetable may change in the course of the year (usually at the beginning of the term). In Estonia children go to school five days a week, i.e. there are no lessons on Saturdays and Sundays.

Where do the lessons take place?

All the lessons for the lower grades (except for Physical Education, and in some schools also Music, art and crafts classes) take place in the same classroom. Usually starting from the fifth grade various subjects will be taught in separate classrooms – Physics classes in physics classroom, English in English classroom etc. At the end of each lesson, the pupils pack their things and go the classroom of the next lesson. When a new pupil joins the group, the class teacher will show him around the school and also the classrooms where their lessons take place. All the classrooms in the school are marked either by numbers or name plaques.

In which classroom do my child's lessons take place?

Integration plan

Integration plan is an action plan including an individual curriculum and activities supporting the foreign children's adaptation and coping in Estonian schools.

Why is the integration plan needed?

In order to cope in the Estonian education system, children need to be supported. Without knowing the language it is impossible to participate fully in the school life. The integration plan will be devised to ensure children's better integration considering each child's individuality, former education and other needs.

Who will devise the integration plan and what does it include?

The integration plan is designed by the representative of the school management, subject teachers, the child and his parents. The integration plan is usually made for six months. It includes the detailed division of classes, the content of various subjects and other activities related to the school life (including extracurricular activities).

At first a suitable timetable is devised for the pupil. Usually the pupil attends the foreign language classes with his main form, but also Mathematics and subjects such as Music, Art Education, Physical Education, Handicraft and Technical Studies. During the lessons of other subjects, the pupil either has an assistant teacher preparing him for independent work, or he attends Estonian lessons or the adaptation course. The adaptation class brings together pupils who do not speak Estonian and they are attended by a language teacher. Often the class also brings together pupils of different age groups speaking different languages. Such classes are provided only by schools that have numerous foreign pupils.

In some places, the integration is organised so that an assistant teacher accompanies the pupil to each lesson and helps him if necessary. Sometimes assistance is given by other pupils (for instance, in schools where there have been foreign pupils for years already, they may become support persons for new foreign pupils).

In devising the integration plan, also other supporting activities may be found, for instance, the extracurricular activities offered by the school, the use of assistant teacher's services, lessons of the child's mother tongue and native culture etc.

How is subject teaching arranged?

Each subject teacher will compose an individual curriculum based on the subject contents considering the requirements of the national curriculum and also the child's former education. The individual curriculum also determines the taught topics, the expected learning outcomes and the methods used in attaining the learning outcomes.

Which questions will be asked in devising the integration plan?

In compiling the integration plan, answers will be sought to the following questions:

1. How will the child's studies of the Estonian language be organised (who will teach, how many lessons a week, what kind of the study materials will be used, will it be in the form of individual lessons, group or adaptation classes)?
2. Which subject lessons will the child attend? What will his timetable be like?
3. What will the subject syllabi be like?
4. How will his development be assessed?

5. What kind of support system the school has to offer (assistant teacher, support person)?
6. Are there any suitable extracurricular activities?
7. Is it possible to have lessons of the child's mother tongue and native culture?

You will receive further information on your child's individual curriculum and the organisation of studies at school, as different schools may have different arrangements.

Each child is unique and so it will take at least a year before he can learn all subjects together with his peers.

What is my child's integration plan like?

How is my child doing at school?

How is my child's progress assessed?

In the Estonian school system children are graded every year in all subjects. In the first two years, the grades may not be expressed in numbers but in words.

Children are graded on the scale from 1 to 5, the highest on the scale is 5 and the lowest grade 1. Positive results are expressed by 5, 4 and 3, and negative results by 2 and 1 (grade 1 is seldom used). Grades also have equivalents in words:

5 – very good (90–100%)

4 – good (70–89%)

3 – satisfactory (45–69%)

2 – unsatisfactory (20–44%)

1 – weak (0–19%)

The negative marks show that the skills or knowledge are insufficient and these must be improved and the tests retaken. The subject or class teacher will inform the pupil of the

possibilities to retake the tests. In many schools children will not be graded with marks during the first year.

There are two types of marks:

- 1) marks given for the tasks completed during the course of studies;
- 2) overall grades, i.e. average grade of the term or the whole academic year that will be written in the school report.

In addition, the teachers will give children oral evaluations.

The schools also observe children's behaviour. The rules for appropriate behaviour are written in the internal rules and regulations of the school. The class teacher will give children an overview of the rules and regulations at the beginning of the school year and they will be reminded of the necessary rules in the course of the year. These will also be given on the school website.

The schools have the right to acknowledge children for positive results or activities, and also reprimand them for inappropriate behaviour.

Parents and pupils are given feedback on their child's behaviour (including commitment) in written form at least twice a year.

Where can I see my child's marks?

Parents may follow their children's progress and marks in the electronic system designed for parents or the child's study journal. The overall marks are written in the school report at the end of each term. The overall mark at the end of the academic year is based on the end-of-term marks and this will also be included in the school report. At the end of the academic year, children will receive a school report signed by the headmaster.

What is the grading system in my child's school?

In case my child cannot come to school

All children must go to school and absence without sufficient reasons is not allowed. In case your child cannot come to school for some reason, you must inform the school immediately. It is in keeping with good practice not to arrange family vacations or any other trips with children during the school periods. In case of exceptional circumstances the school may grant the permission, however, then you must speak directly with the school management.

“Cold holidays”

There may sometimes be very cold periods in winter with the temperature falling as low as twenty degrees below zero on the Celsius scale. In case it is also windy, the so-called cold holidays will be announced. Depending on the school location and the children’s age, school attendance is not compulsory during “cold holidays”. Information on whether children have to go to school or not will be given by the school. Usually it is also announced on the school website.

In case my child is ill

In case of illness, either fever, cold or influenza, the children must not come to school. When the child is absent from school due to health problems, you must inform the class teacher. In case the illness is severe or lasts for a longer period of time, you must certainly contact a doctor. You must also inform the class teacher of any chronic health problems. In some cases it must also be verified by a doctor’s certificate.

Is there additional tuition available?

In case the child has been absent from school for a longer period of time, he may have additional tuition after school. Also, in case the child has shown no progress (i.e. he has attended the classes but has not learned the material) he should attend additional consultation classes. These lessons are usually given by the same subject teacher who teaches regular lessons. The additional lessons generally take place at the end of the school day after regular classes (in some schools also as the first lesson of the day). Each teacher usually has a specific time and day of the week when he works with children needing additional tuition. Pupils may also attend these extra lessons if they have not understood some topics in the regular lesson, they have failed a

test or merely want to ask the teacher something. Information on the additional consultations will be given by the class teacher.

What are the additional tuition options for my child?

School reports

The school report is a document including the pupil's overall grades of each study period. Depending on the school, the marks will be made available either in the electronic system or a paper version is issued. The pupils take the paper reports home to their parents and bring it back to the school at the beginning of the new term with the parent's signature. At the end of the academic year, children get a school report signed by the headmaster with the overall marks of each term and the whole year. The school report also includes the decision on whether the pupil will continue in the next grade or not.

State tests and examinations

On several occasions during the period of studies (at the end of each stage of studies and at the secondary school level) pupils must pass one or several extensive tests:

Grade III – achievement test in two subjects (in Estonian and Mathematics);

Grade VI – achievement test in two subjects (either in Estonian or Mathematics and in one other subject that will be announced at the beginning of the fourth term);

Grade VIII – end of year examination in one subject selected by the pupil in order to be transferred to the next grade;

Grade IX – in order to graduate from the basic school, examinations must be taken in three subjects (Estonian, Mathematics and one more subject selected by the pupil);

Grade X – end of year examination in a subject selected by the pupil in order to be transferred to the next grade;

Grade XI– end of year examination in a subject selected by the pupil in order to be transferred to the next grade;

Grade XII – in order to graduate from the secondary school, examinations must be taken in five subjects, at least three of these must be state examinations (in Estonian and in two more subjects selected by the pupil) and the remaining two school examinations.

The school has the right to carry out its own achievement tests and end of year examinations also in other grades in addition to those mentioned above. Information on all achievement tests and examinations will be given to the pupils at the beginning of the school year. The given information is also available on the school website.

The state tests are graded, except the state examinations at the end of the secondary school level which are graded with points (on the scale 0-100, the exam is passed with at least 20 points).

With the state tests and examinations, the state authorities wish to check whether the pupils have mastered the subject to the extent determined by the national curriculum. In case the pupil fails the examination, he must retake it. Before retaking the given exam, he must study the subject with his teacher for up to two weeks. He will then retake the examination.

Pupils studying according to an individual curriculum will take an achievement test based on his curriculum. The assessment criteria for the evaluation of the exams taken by foreign pupils are less strict than those for local pupils. Further information on exams and achievement tests will be given by the class teacher or the subject teacher.

Finishing the school year and graduating from the school

How is the school year completed?

In order to pass the courses of the school year, the pupil's overall marks of the academic year must be at least satisfactory and all the required tests and examinations passed. Then the pupil may continue in the next grade. In case the pupil has received an unsatisfactory overall mark in some subjects, he must study for further two weeks with the teacher of the given subject. In case the pupil has several unsatisfactory overall marks and the extended studies have given no positive results, it is recommended that the pupil repeat the year. The final decision on the matter will be made by the teachers' council together with the parents.

How do pupils graduate from the basic school?

All the pupils graduating from Grade IX must pass three final examinations. The compulsory examinations are in Estonian and Mathematics. The third exam is selected by the pupil among a certain number of subjects. Pupils whose mother tongue is not Estonian and who have only recently moved to Estonia may take the exam in Estonian as the Foreign Language examination (language B). If necessary, the foreign pupils may use linguistic study aids (for instance dictionaries) in taking the examination.

The school day

Knowing the way to school

Children may go to school either by foot, by bus or by car – it all depends on the distance from home and the available options. Children may also go to school by bicycle if the required safety measures have been taken (i.e. he has a bicycle helmet, bicycle lock etc) and there is a designated space for bicycles at the school. It is worth noting that the school is not responsible for the safety of the bicycles. Further information on the concessions in the transportation system is given by the school.

In case the child will go to school by foot, by bus or bicycle, he should first learn and practice taking the safest way to school with his parents. The child must be shown the safe pedestrian crossings and reminded of paying attention to the traffic while crossing the road only when the traffic lights have turned green.

Once the school year has begun, an adult (relative, family friend) should observe the child's movements on his way to and from school. Pedestrian reflectors (a reflecting badge or armband) must be worn in the dark in order to make children more visible to the drivers.

The beginning and duration of lessons

Lessons usually begin at 8 o'clock in the morning, in some schools a little later. The lessons are usually over by 3 o'clock in the afternoon (earlier for younger pupils). The schedule is available on the school website and the child's timetable.

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| When do my child's lessons begin and end? |
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It is in keeping with the school regulations and good practice that the pupil must be at school at least 10 minutes before the lessons begin in order to adjust to the school day without any hurry. After entering the school, the children first go to the cloakroom where they leave their outer garments and change their shoes for indoors footwear. Once the clothes have been changed, the pupils may enter the classroom.

Each lesson lasts for 45 minutes and the break between lessons is about 10 minutes. In the middle of the school day there is also one longer break (at least 20 minutes) when pupils have lunch. The school lunch is free of charge at the basic school level.

In the classroom, pupils must take the study materials needed for the lesson out of the school bag and place in the corner of the desk. The study journal must be taken out of the school bag in every lesson and depending on the lesson also the other study aids: the study book, workbook, notebook and writing instruments, or in case of arts and crafts lesson sheets of paper and drawing materials.

The beginning and end of the lesson is signalled by the school bell or some other specific signalling tune. After each lesson pupils leave the classroom for the break and the classroom windows will be opened to air the room. During the break pupils have some rest, go to the bathroom and communicate with friends. The rooms available for children during the break depend on the school – in some schools children are allowed to go to the schoolyard, in some schools there are special game rooms etc. Running in the school corridors is not allowed as pupils are then prone to accidents.

“Deskmate”

In many schools pupils sit in the classroom in pairs meaning that each pupil has a deskmate. The deskmate may be the pupil’s good friend, but also the teacher may help to find a suitable deskmate. If he wishes and there are available desks in the classroom, the child may also sit alone. There are also classrooms where each pupil has his own individual desk and chair and sitting in pairs is not allowed.

Which school supplies are needed?

Consult with the class teacher before buying school supplies for your child. You will certainly need to have indoors shoes and a schoolbag for books and notebooks. Smaller school supplies – pencils, erasers and other – are kept in a pencil box.

Study journal

The pupil's study journal may be bought in stationery shops, however, some schools offer study journals with their own logos including also the daily calendar of the school year. The study journal is recommended for basic school pupils (Grades I-IX). The pupils write their timetable, homework, grades received in lessons and other relevant information in the study journal.

Similarly the teacher may write notices for parents in the study journal. It is important that the parents check their children's journal at least once a week.

Study books and workbooks

At the basic school level the study books and workbooks are provided by the school. At the secondary school level some of the books must be bought by the parents. You need to put covers on the books to ensure their durability. At the end of the school year pupils will give the books back to the school so that new pupils could use them the following year. In case the book is damaged or lost, the parents must compensate it to the school.

The notebooks and other supplies needed for studies are usually bought by the parents.

Usually there is a separate notebook for each subject and during the lessons the pupil writes the tasks and exercises in it. Check with the class teacher what kind of notebooks will be used – depending on the subject you may need either notebooks with lined, grid or stave sheets. The class teacher will also tell you the required number of lines or the size of the grids and the number of sheets in the notebook.

What are the requirements for notebooks in my child's school?

What kind of notebooks are needed and how many?

School uniform

In general there are no school uniforms in Estonia. However, there are schools that use:

- 1) the school caps that are worn in spring and autumn;
- 2) T-shirts with the school logo;
- 3) school uniform designed specifically for the given school.

In case the school has no specific rules for the school uniform, it is recommended that children wear clean and comfortable daily clothes suitable for the weather, season and the child's age (long trousers for boys, long trousers or skirt/dress for girls). In case of festive occasions children usually wear a white shirt and a dark suit or trousers/skirt. In some schools there are special rules and regulations for clothing and shoes, the given information is available at school or on the school website.

What are the regulations for clothing in our school?

Other clothes and footwear

Children need various outer garments depending on the season. In autumn and spring, they need waterproof shoes (for instance Wellington boots), a lighter coat, a cap, a scarf and gloves. For winter, which in Estonia starts already in November, children need winter footwear, a warm coat or a snowsuit, a winter hat, warm mittens, socks and a scarf. In case you have no previous experience with cold climates, consult your family GP or the school or friends living in Estonia.

There are cloakrooms in schools (usually on the lower ground floor) for changing and keeping the outer garments. The pupils leave their outer garments and footwear in the guarded or locked cloakroom. Due to the changeable climate in Estonia, it is customary to take off the outdoor footwear and wear shoes suitable for the indoor. The indoor footwear may include sandals or comfortable shoes. By wearing separate indoor footwear, pupils keep both their socks and the school clean.

Clothing for physical education

In Physical Education classes pupils need sports shoes and two types of sportswear:

- 1) short sportswear (T-shirt and shorts);
- 2) long sportswear (long-sleeved top and long pants).

Sportswear is bought by the parents. These should be comfortable and made of breathing fabrics, similarly they should enable the ease of movement. Pupils change into the sportswear in a special changing room before the Physical Education class and these will be taken off again after the lesson. Usually pupils take a shower after the Physical Education class. For that they need to bring their own toiletries and towels. There are separate changing and washrooms for boys and girls. Sometimes the Physical Education classes take place outdoors. Then pupils need outer garments suitable for the weather.

In winter children sometimes go to skiing, ice-skating or sledging. The teacher usually informs the pupils whether they will need skates, skis or sledges. Sometimes you may rent skiing equipment from school or buy them second-hand.

In many schools there are also swimming lessons. For swimming lessons children need swimwear, a swim cap, swimming goggles, a towel and toiletries.

What kind of sportswear will my child need?

Materials for Arts and Crafts, Home Economics and Technical Studies

The teacher will inform the children of the materials needed for the lessons. The materials used in the Arts and Crafts, Home Economics and Technical Studies are usually bought by the parents.

1. In **Art Education** classes, children need drawing paper, gouache and/or pastel paints, brushes, a cup for water and a waterproof table cover. In addition children must have coloured pencils, felt-tip pens, crayons, pastel chalks, a glue stick, scissors and coloured sheets of paper. Younger children will also need an apron protecting the clothes against stains.

2. The materials used in the **Handicraft** lessons depend on the specific topic and therefore may vary. In most cases, they use fabric, sewing kits, yarn, knitting needles and a crochet hook.
3. The ingredients needed in **Home Economics** lessons (cooking) will be brought by the pupils.
4. The materials used in **Technical Studies** classes are usually provided by the school. In case the pupils need to bring along something themselves (for instance material for woodwork), the teacher will let them know well in advance.

Which materials will be needed for the given lessons?

What must not be brought to school?

Pupils may not bring to school toys or objects (for instance devices for listening to music or playing electronic games) that disturb their concentration on schoolwork. Pupils must not bring along any objects that may be dangerous to themselves or other pupils, for instance, knives, matches or lighters, tobacco products or other hazardous substances. In case pupils have brought such items to school, the school staff has the right to confiscate them. The objects taken from pupils are usually returned to their parents. In case the confiscated object is highly dangerous, the school will inform the police who will investigate the case further.

Many pupils have mobile phones. Schools may have special rules for the use of mobiles, for instance, during lessons the phones have to be either switched off or the sound set to silent.

It is in keeping with good practice that nothing may be recorded or photographed in the school (except for festive events involving the whole school). In case you need to take pictures, you must ask permission first.

School meals

Children eat their breakfast at home, as at school only lunch is served. Hot meals are served at school usually once a day, in most cases after the third lesson. Pupils go to eat in the canteen and there they also wash their hands. The meal usually includes the main course (may also be a

soup) and the dessert. The served drinks may include milk, buttermilk, juice, water or hot tea and cocoa. As a side dish, children are often served fresh vegetables or fruit. Slices of rye or wheat bread are always available.

A typical weekly menu may be as follows:

Monday

Pasta with minced meat

Stewed vegetables

Tea, rye and wheat bread

Tuesday

Mashed potatoes, sausages

Beet and apple salad, cabbage and tomato salad

Juice, rye and wheat bread

Wednesday

Pea soup

Pudding with whipped cream

Cocoa, rye and wheat bread, fruit

Thursday

Pork, rice, buckwheat

Fresh salad

Milk, rye and wheat bread

Friday

Chicken, rice, pasta, tomato and sour cream salad

Cucumber salad, fruit salad

Milk, tea, rye and wheat bread

In many schools, pupils may serve themselves. This means that the pupil must eat all the food he has placed on his plate. The Estonian food may seem somewhat strange compared to what your child is used to eating at home. Therefore parents should encourage their children to eat also other types of food.

After the meal, pupils clean the table after themselves and take the dirty dishes to the designated area.

In case it is decided by the family that your child will not eat the school meals (for instance, due to allergies, religious beliefs etc), he must have his own lunch with him. The child will eat his meal together with his peers during the lunch break.

School meals are free of charge for pupils in Grades I-XII. The meals at the elementary and basic school level are paid by the local government. In some schools there may be a special system for collecting money for school meals, the parents will be informed of the system at the beginning of the school year (for instance, in some areas, parents pay a small amount of money extra per each day). Usually the money is collected once a month. In many schools the payment may be made by a bank transfer. You will get further information from the class teacher.

In many schools there is also a cafeteria where children may buy snacks and drinks. However, the snacks bought in the café do not substitute the school lunch.

How are school meals organised in my child's school?

What do children do after school?

After the lessons have ended, children mostly go home. Younger children are usually picked up by a family member, but older pupils studying in the city schools go home by themselves. In rural areas pupils of all ages are driven closer to their homes by a school bus. You will get further information on the school bus route either on the school website or from the class teacher.

In case you work all day, your child may get tired of being alone. Therefore it would be a good idea to find him some hobbies or activities suitable for his age. The schools and local

governments offer various activities for children, the most popular ones are the so-called after-school groups and hobby groups at school.

What happens in after-school groups?

In some schools younger children (Grades I-IV) have the chance to stay at school after the lessons. In the after-school groups, children of different ages come together and either play games, engage in their hobbies or do their homework guided by the teacher.

The class teacher will give you information on the rules and conditions of the after-school groups in your school. In order to secure a place for your child in the after-school group, you need to write an application. The attendance in the groups often includes a fee (the fee may also include a light meal).

Is there an after-school group in my child's school and what are the conditions?

What happens in hobby groups?

In many schools there are also various hobby groups that get together after the lessons. For instance, the children may sing in the choir, participate in art or handicraft groups, do sports, act in a drama club or learn languages. Information on the extracurricular activities is available on the school website or the class teacher may guide you. In case there are no hobby groups in the school, you should search for interesting children's activities in the local cultural centres or clubs. There is usually a fee to participate in the hobby groups, but there may also be free clubs in the school.

Which hobby groups might be suitable for my child?

Homework

Children do not study only at school, but they must do independent work also at home. In most subjects pupils are given assignments for homework that they must do for the next lesson. The pupils write the exercises given for homework in their study journal.

Doing homework is very important for several reasons. The pupil must remember what they studied in the lesson and make sure that he understands what they have learned. Sometimes pupils are asked to write independent research papers.

Parents must make sure that their child has a separate quiet place at home for studying so that he could prepare for the next day's lessons in peace.

All pupils must do their homework. In case they have not done their homework for some reason, the parent must inform the school by writing it in the study journal. In case your child has been absent from school, information on homework could be obtained either from the electronic system (e-school) or from classmates.

Communication between the child's home and school

The communication between the child's home and school is arranged through different channels. Mostly information is passed either through e-mails, electronic system (e-school) or the school website – in most schools there is the electronic system through which parents can keep track of their child's marks and progress and also other issues related to the school. Your contact person at school is your child's class teacher – you may contact her or she may contact you if you want to discuss some issues related to your child. Written notices and marks are also written in the child's study journal.

The role and responsibility of the class teacher

The class teacher is the person assigned by the school to handle all the problems related to her class. The class teacher knows the pupils in her class better than other teachers. It is recommended that you inform the class teacher of your child's personal issues (including delicate matters related to the family, the child's health issues, religious beliefs, possible financial problems etc). If the class teacher is informed, she can avoid possible problems and help the child in difficult situations, if necessary also by contacting the schools psychologist, social pedagogue or other specialists.

You communicate with the school through your child's class teacher. She is the person you should first contact in case you have questions or you want to solve a problem.

You should also contact the class teacher if your child has problems with other teachers. In case your communication with the class teacher is disturbed for some reason, you may always turn to the deputy head (social pedagogue, school psychologist) with questions related to your child.

The class teacher also keeps records of the child's absences, behaviour, relations with classmates, whether he is late, whether his clothes are clean etc. In case your child cannot come to school for some reason, you should turn to the class teacher and inform her of your child's absence and the reasons for it. The class teacher meets the parents at individual meetings with the parents (including the student evaluation discussions) and also at regular parent-teacher meetings. At other times you may contact the class teacher through formerly agreed channels (telephone, e-mail etc). In case your child has problems or does not make any progress at school, whether he has health issues or some other worries, you should certainly contact the class teacher yourself. The sooner you get at the bottom of the problem, the quicker the solution is found.

What is the name of my child's class teacher and her contacts?

What is the suitable time to get in touch with her?

Using the electronic study journal

Most schools use an electronic study journal system that gives the parents information on their child's progress, grades and homework. Many schools use the e-school system.

All teachers may use the electronic study journal to contact the parents by writing notices or comments on their child's progress. The class teacher will give you a website address where you must register – you either get a password or enter the system with your ID card. In case you do not have a computer, you get the information on your child's marks and other issues from the regular study journal. If you have no access to computers, you should inform the class teacher.

General meetings

At least once a year, a general meeting is organised by the school inviting all the parents to discuss important matters related to the school, for instance they give an overview of the

previous school year (exam results, events etc). During general meetings parents are also informed of major changes at school and various documents. Sometimes there are also visitors who speak on various topics (for instance, health, safety, matters related to the children's age).

Parents' meetings

Somewhat smaller meetings for the parents of the children in the same grade are organised once a term, i.e. four times a year. During the parents' meeting the class teacher talks about the daily school life of the group and together they discuss current issues, for instance excursions etc. The younger the children, the more often the meetings take place.

Student evaluation

Student evaluation meetings are meant only for the pupil and either one or both of his parents. The student evaluation meeting is prepared and conducted by the class teacher. In some schools it is also called a family discussion.

The student evaluation meetings follow a specific structure by which they discuss various aspects of the child's development, including his friends, hobbies, plans for the future, progress at school and also matters that could be improved. Before the meeting, the teacher may ask you to fill in a questionnaire on your child and his development. Student evaluation meetings usually take place once in an academic year and the time of the meeting will be agreed upon well in advance.

Visiting the school

The parents only come to the school when invited (for instance parties, school events, parents' meetings, student evaluation meetings, discussion with teachers or specialists) or in case of urgent need (for instance concerns or problems). It is not recommended that you come to school just to see how your child is doing, as it may disturb other pupils. There are schools that organise open days for parents so that they could see their children throughout the school day. Further information on such events will be given either by the class teacher or on the school website.

Adapting to the life in Estonia

Adapting to the new home and life is strenuous for the whole family. There is a lot of new information and numerous things to arrange. Do not remain alone with your tasks. Try to find people who can support you and give you advice if necessary. Turn to your relatives or other people from your country. You may also get help from the social organisations, the church, social workers or neighbours.

Your child needs further support to adapt to the new surroundings. Usually things seem to go smoothly at the beginning when everything is new and interesting and the child is happy to go along with new activities. For some children, not all of them, there comes a decline after the period of adjustment – everything seems to be so complicated, they miss their home country and the friends and relatives who were left behind.

The most important thing is to be there for your child. He has come to a new environment and he does not know the language enough to make new friends and build his own support structures. Take some time to discuss it with your child, ask him about his progress at school and try to help him in case of problems. It is also recommended that you find activities that you enjoy doing together – go for walks and sightseeing, learn Estonian together, exercise together.

Another way to get over homesickness is to communicate with the people left behind. Call them and write letters, the modern technology also offers less expensive ways to get in touch with them (*Skype* and webcams).

During the adjustment period children also need to have plenty of rest. It is sometimes enough if he gets to sleep an hour or two after school.

Other important information

Delivering messages at school

Various messages are delivered to children during the school day. Different schools have different ways to pass them important information. In some places there is the school radio and the messages delivered from the radio centre or the teachers' lounge could be heard in all the rooms of the building. In larger schools there are also electronic information screens displaying messages to the pupils. Usually near the entrance or the teachers' lounge, there is also a notice

board with information on the school regulations, timetable, announcements, notices and advertisements.

How is information delivered in my child's school?

Safety at school

Safety at school is ensured by the school management and teachers. In case children need to be taken quickly out of the school building, the formerly agreed sign system will be used – either signalling with the school bell or making the announcement in the school radio. Ask your child's class teacher how the evacuation is organised. There are evacuation drills for the children at least once a year.

It is not allowed to smoke, consume alcohol or narcotic substances on the school premises. The given rule applies to all people, including pupils, school personnel, parents and visitors. Those violating the regulations will be handled either by the school management, social pedagogue, school security personnel or the police.

There may sometimes be conflicts and bullying among pupils. Bullying may be both physical and mental. You must tell your child that bullying is not allowed and he must tell about it to adults immediately. If you suspect that your child has become the victim of bullying, you must immediately inform his class teacher. Informing the teacher about bullying is not the same as telling on somebody.

Pets are not allowed in school. Sometimes there are events at school to which children may bring smaller pets with the class teacher's approval.

Security cameras

In larger schools there are security cameras in hallways and also in some classrooms filming what goes on at school. The school management has the right to watch the security camera recordings.

School photos

There is a tradition in Estonian schools that each year a group photo is taken of the form. On the day the photograph is taken pupils wear more formal clothes. The class teacher informs the

pupils of the given day well in advance. A professional photographer is invited to the school and he will arrange the whole group in the picture with the teacher. The photos will be brought to the school in a few days and the pupils may buy them as a keepsake.

Some school websites also have photo galleries of the school events. You should inform the class teacher if you do not wish pictures with your child published on the website.

Holidays and festivals related to Estonian culture and history

September 1 is the day of knowledge. September 1 marks the official beginning of the academic year and there are gatherings in schools related to the occasion. In some schools, the academic year is always begun on September 1 even if it falls on the weekend.

The Teachers' Day is in October. On the given day there are various events in the school, for instance instead of the teachers the secondary school pupils teach younger pupils, there are competitions between teachers and pupils and other fun activities.

The second Sunday in November is the Fathers' Day. The day is meant for the celebration of fathers and grandfathers. Pupils often make cards and gifts for their father or grandfather at school, sometimes there are also special events for them.

November 10 is St Martin's Day. St Martin's Day is a festival in the folk tradition, sometimes the schools organise events introducing the related folk traditions.

November 25 is St Catherine's Day. St Catherine's Day is a festival in the folk tradition, sometimes the schools organise events introducing the related folk traditions.

Christmas break includes the following holidays:

December 24 is the Christmas Eve, followed by the first and second Christmas days on December 25 and 26.

December 31 celebrates the end of the previous year and welcomes the New Year.

January 1 – the New Year's Day is a red-letter day in the calendar.

Advent: Before Christmas holidays there are various Christmas parties at school with children performing plays and singing Christmas songs. In many schools there is a tradition to exchange gifts. In order to get their present from Father Christmas, they sometimes need to sing, dance or recite poems.

According to the legend, there are Christmas elves peeping in the windows and checking whether children behave well. Especially the younger children believe that if they behave well, the Christmas elf will bring them some gifts. During the Advent period it is customary in Estonian families to put a slipper on the windowsill and at night Christmas elves will put small gifts (sweets or toys) there for well-behaving children. The Christmas elves bring presents from the first Advent until the Christmas Eve. If you want your child to be able to discuss Christmas experiences at the kindergarten or school, you should also get the slipper and tiny sweets to delight your child.

Shrove Tuesday is a movable feast. On Shrove Tuesday the schools usually organise winter sports days for children to have fun skiing or sledging. The Shrove Tuesday traditions include sledging, eating pea soup and Shrove buns.

February 24 is the Day of Estonian Independence. The day celebrating the independence of the republic is the most important holiday in Estonia. On the given day the blue-black-white national flag is hoisted at sunset with festive celebrations, there is a military parade and the fallen soldiers are commemorated. Pupils have a day off from school. Before the given date, there are also special gatherings at school for which children wear formal clothing. The national flag is hoisted and the national anthem is sung.

Easter is a movable feast. The Good Friday is the only day off from school for children. The Easter Monday is a regular school day.

March 14 is the Native Language Day. The anniversary of the first poet writing in the Estonian Language, Kristjan Jaak Peterson, is celebrated as the Native Language Day in Estonia. Often there are events related to the Estonian language, for instance a formal gathering with poetry recitals, quizzes etc.

April 1 is the April Fool's Day. On the given day people may play harmless practical jokes on each other. Sometimes there are also humorous competitions and other events organised at schools.

May 1 is the Spring Day. The Spring Day celebrates the working classes and students. The pupils have a day off.

The second Sunday in May is the Mothers' Day. On the given day mothers and grandmothers are celebrated. Pupils often make cards and gifts for their mother or grandmother at school, sometimes there are also special concerts or other events for them.

Celebrating birthdays. In Estonia both children and adults celebrate their birthdays. The birthday child is congratulated also at school, the whole group usually sings him birthday songs and gives him a small gift. Another tradition is that the birthday child brings some sweets to his classmates and they eat the candies together after the congratulations.

Other religious and cultural holidays. Each family has the right to celebrate the holidays related to their culture. In case the holiday falls on a school day, you should contact the class teacher and ask if your child may be absent from school on that day.

Important numbers and contacts

My child's class teacher

Teachers' lounge

School secretary

Deputy head

Headmaster

Teacher of Estonian

Local government representative:

Other important numbers

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Websites of government authorities

Ministry of Education and Research: www.hm.ee

Citizenship and Migration Board: www.politsei.ee

Estonian Health Insurance Fund: www.haigekassa.ee

Website for immigrants: <http://www.innove.ee/et/yldharidus/muu-kodukeelega>

Estonian news portals

Newspaper *Eesti Päevaleht*: www.epl.ee

Newspaper *Postimees*: www.postimees.ee

Estonian Television and Radio: www.err.ee

Websites for children

www.lastekas.ee – games and videos for children in the Estonian language

www.meieoma.ee – Estonian Public Broadcasting website for children

Other useful information

Information for applying citizenship

In English <http://www.workinestonia.com/coming-to-estonia/obtaining-citizenship/>

Police and Border Guard Board: www.politsei.ee

Useful words and phrases in Estonian

Tere! Hello!

Tere hommikust! Good morning!

Tere päevast! Good day!

Palun vabandust, et ma tundi hilinesin. I'm sorry for being late for the class.

Tere õhtust! Good evening!

Head aega! Good bye!

Nägemist! So long!

Aitäh! Thank you!

Palun! Please, here you are!

Palun teie abi. Could you please help me.

Mis kell? At what time?

Mis päeval? On what day?

Mis su nimi on? What is your name?

Minu nimi on ... My name is ...

Telefoninumber Phone number

Üks one

kaks two

kolm three

neli four

viis five

kuus six

seitse seven

kaheksa eight

üheksa nine

kümme ten

üksteist eleven

kaksteist twelve

esmaspäev Monday

teisipäev Tuesday

kolmapäev Wednesday

neljapäev Thursday

reede Friday

laupäev Saturday

klass class, classroom, form

eesti keel Estonian

inglise keel English

saksa keel German

vene keel Russian

matemaatika Mathematics

loodusõpetus Nature Studies

inimeseõpetus Human Studies

muusika Music

kunstiõpetus Art Education

käsitöö Handicraft

kodundus Home Economics

töö- ja tehnoloogiaõpetus Technical Studies

kehaline kasvatus Physical Education

kirjandus Literature

geograafia Geography

bioloogia Biology

keemia Chemistry

füüsika Physics

ajalugu History

ühiskonnaõpetus Social Studies

arvutiõpetus Computer Studies

usundiõpetus Religious Studies

vahetund break

söögivahetund lunch break

klassijuhataja class teacher

(aine)õpetaja subject teacher

söökla canteen

kohvik cafeteria

puhvet cafeteria

garderoob/rõivistu cloakroom

tualettruumid toilet

duširuum washroom

ujula swimming pool

‘külmapüha’ ‘cold holiday’

koolivaheaeg school holiday

järeleaitamistund/konsultatsioonitund consultation class

arenguestlus/perevestlus pupil evaluation meeting/family discussion

koosolek meeting

kõneravitund speech therapy

parandusõppetund remedial class

logopeed speech therapist

sotsiaalpedagoog social pedagogue

vahetusjalatsid indoor footwear

lõimumisplaan integration plan