

THEMATIC PROBE. Primary Education: an International Perspective

Country Description: France

This country description was compiled from the *INCA* Archive (www.inca.org.uk). Additional comments were received from Monsieur Michel Favier of the Ministry of Education in France.

1. Organisation of school phases=

How are the early years and primary phases organised? (3-5yrs? 5-11yrs?)

Nursery education	Ages 2-6	Ages 2-5 - 'first learning cycle'
		Ages 5-6 first year of the 'basic learning cycle'
Primary education (known as 'elementary' education)	Ages 6-11	Ages 6-8 final two years of the 'basic learning cycle'
		Ages 8-11 - 'consolidation cycle'

Pre-compulsory education is optional between the ages of two and six, that is, parents have a right to ask for it, although for two-year-olds it may not always be available. A nursery place must, however, be made available for any three-year-old child whose family requests it, either in a nursery school (*école maternelle*) or an infant class (*classe enfantine*) attached to or in an elementary (primary) school, as near as possible to the child's home.

Compulsory education begins at age six and is provided in an elementary school which usually comprises five classes divided into two cycles:

- the basic learning cycle which begins in the upper section (last year) of nursery school (children aged five to six years) and continues in the first two years of elementary school; and
- the consolidation cycle which covers the final three years of elementary school (known as CE2, CM1 and CM2 respectively) before admission to secondary level education in the *collège*.

What are the points of transfer between phases?

Nursery education	Ages 2-6
Elementary education	Ages 6-11
Lower secondary education (<i>collège</i>)	Ages 11-15
Upper secondary education	Ages 15+ (aged 15-16 compulsory)

Children start elementary school in the September of the calendar year when they become six. School places are usually allocated on a strictly geographical basis and, as a general rule, parents are required to enrol their children in the school area in which they live.

2. Locus of control

What degree of control over curriculum content and other aspects of primary schools exists at the national, regional, local and/or school level?

The national Ministry of Education is responsible for education at all levels, from nursery education to university level, and for teacher training, and assumes overall responsibility for education policy. Although some aspects of education have become decentralised in recent years (primary level schools, for example, have taken on increasing responsibility for their own operations and administration; at secondary level this has extended to schools' financial affairs too) central, state control of the curriculum has remained.

Ministry-defined national curricula and an official text prescribe the skills to be acquired in the course of each cycle of compulsory education. Official guidelines do not prescribe specific teaching methods, but the curricula defined by the Ministry must be respected.

In producing curricula, the national Government is advised by the National Curriculum Council (the *Conseil national des programmes, CNP*). This is a consultative body which "advises and submits proposals (to the competent Ministers) on the general concepts of education, important objectives to be achieved, the adaptation of curricula and subject areas to achieve these objectives, and their adjustment to developments in knowledge". The Council advises Ministers with regard to school and higher education curricula and, more particularly, it ensures that there is continuity between the school education system and curricula and higher education. It comprises 22 members, chosen for their skills by the appropriate Minister(s) and its proposals and recommendations are published. Draft curricula stipulating content and method are drawn up either in groups according to subject, in interdisciplinary groups, or in groups set up according to educational phase.

Are there any shifts in the distribution of control between these different levels? (Is it possible to assign percentages to each level, to reflect circumstances in each country?)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

At what intervals is the curriculum reviewed? (eg are there established review cycles?)

There are no established review cycles for the primary level curriculum in France, although the curriculum is regularly reviewed.

A revised primary level curriculum began to be introduced in September 2002, prior to that the primary curriculum dated from 1995. Whenever revised curricula are introduced, implementation is gradual.

3. Curriculum content

What does the statutory curriculum consist of?

There have been very recent changes to the primary level curriculum in France.

Until September 2002, children in elementary level education in France studied the following compulsory subjects

Six- to eight-year olds The basic learning cycle	French; mathematics; 'discovering the world' (<i>découverte du monde</i>) which combines science, technology, and history and geography in one subject area; civics; physical education and sport; and music and art.
Eight- to 11-year-olds (combines The consolidation cycle	French; mathematics; science and technology aspects of physics, chemistry, biology and geology with technology in one subject area); history and geography; civics; physical education and sport; and art and music.

Reform of the primary curriculum was announced in February 2002, and began to be **implemented in September 2002**. This has introduced some changes to the subjects taught at primary level in France, as follows:

Six- to eight-year-olds in the the basic learning cycle	study literacy and French; mathematics; 'discovering world' (<i>découverte du monde</i>) which combines science, technology, and history and geography in one subject area; 'living together' (<i>vivre ensemble</i>) (civics); foreign or regional languages; physical education and sport; and art (which includes art and music). Running throughout the cycle is the essential notion of improving literacy through all subject areas.
Eight- to 11-year-olds in	study four main subject areas:

the primary consolidation covers cycle

French language, literature and humanities which covers writing, speaking, grammar, conjugation, spelling and vocabulary, a foreign or regional language, history and geography and a weekly debate on living together (civics/citizenship).
Science, technology and mathematics, which are studied as science education.
Artistic education which comprises music and art.
Sport and physical education.
In addition, children also have civics education lessons and the theme of literacy runs through each of the subject areas

The most significant change is an increased emphasis on literacy, with teachers being expected to ensure that basic literacy activities (reading, writing and speaking) are covered across all subject areas.

What other aspects of the curriculum/teaching in schools are statutory? Are time allocations for subjects statutory?

Modern foreign languages

Since September 1998, children in the final year of elementary school education (aged 10 to 11 years) have had to study a modern foreign language.

In addition, in recent years, modern languages have increasingly been offered as optional subjects even during the very early years of elementary school (children aged six onwards) even if only for very short weekly sessions. English is usually the language studied and this is usually during what would normally be French lessons.

With the introduction of the revised primary level curriculum from September 2002 onwards, children in both phases of primary level education are expected to study either a foreign or regional language (such as Breton, Catalan, Corsican, Occitan, Basque, Alsatian and Flemish, still in use in certain areas of the country). In addition, parents are being encouraged to select a language other than English, such as Arabic, for their children to learn. Teachers are being supported in the introduction of this initiative by the development of new teaching materials and language specific teaching during their initial training.

(In elementary schools, the teaching of regional languages may take the form of initiation in the regional language or bilingual teaching, in which the regional language is both the language being taught and the language in which the teaching is being carried out.)

Religious education

Since public sector schools in France are secular, religious education is not taught as a subject in its own right in France except, for historical reasons, in the three regions of the Upper Rhine, the Lower Rhine and the Moselle. However, topics related to

religious and moral education may be covered in other subject areas. Indeed, following the recommendations of a study into religion in schools, completed in late 2001, the French Education Minister has announced new programmes for religious instruction for primary schools. This move aims to expand children's cultural knowledge and understanding of world events. The new programmes do not introduce religious studies as a subject in its own right but rather strengthen integration of the topic throughout the curriculum.

Other subjects

Health education, environmental education and information technology are usually also taught in compulsory elementary school education in France. Health education is generally taught in science and civics lessons; environmental education is often included in history-geography, but may also be studied in other subject areas such as science; and information technology is intended to be used as a tool for the teaching of all subjects.

Time allocations

Since 1 January 1992, there have been 26 hours of lessons per week in elementary schools in France.

Overall time allocations for each compulsory subject area are defined by central government (see the tables below). Some flexibility is, however, afforded to individual schools permitting them, for example, to increase or decrease by a maximum of two hours, the time allocated to each subject area. This flexibility is designed to enable the individual teacher - aware of the strengths and weaknesses of his/her class - to devote extra time in certain subjects to those children who need it.

Compulsory subjects and time allocation to September 2002

Basic learning cycle - elementary school children aged six to eight years

Compulsory subject area	Number of hours
French	9
Mathematics	5
'Discovering the world' (sciences, technology, history-geography) and civic education	4
Art (and music), PE and sport	6
Supervised study	2
Weekly total	26

Primary consolidation cycle- children aged eight to 11 years

Compulsory subject area	Number of hours
French and/or modern foreign languages	9
Mathematics	5.5
History/geography; civics; science and technology	4
Art (and music), PE and sport	5.5
Supervised study	2
Weekly total	26

Note: Up to one-and-a-half hours of French teaching could be taken up by modern foreign languages. From September 1998, the study of a foreign language was compulsory in the final year (children aged 10-11).

Compulsory subjects and time allocation from September 2002

Following the September 2002 reform of the primary level curriculum, the school week continues to be based around 26 hours of teaching each week. However, one of the major changes being introduced is the provision of greater flexibility for teachers to adjust curriculum organisation to better meet the needs of individual classes and their own teaching style. Teachers are, however, required to ensure that all children carry out reading and writing tasks across **all** curriculum areas on a daily basis. Teachers of children in the first two years of elementary school (six to eight years old, in the final two years of the basic learning cycle) are required to ensure that two-and-a-half hours each day is devoted to such reading and writing activities. (This, too, is a requirement for children in the final year of pre-compulsory nursery education; the first year of the basic learning cycle.) In the remaining three years of elementary school (eight- to 11-year-olds in the consolidation cycle), children are expected to spend two hours daily on reading and writing skills.

Basic learning cycle (elementary school children aged six to eight)

Subjects	Minimum Hours	Maximum Hours
Literacy and French language	9h	10h
Living together (civics)	0h 30 (weekly debate)	
Mathematics	5h	5h 30
Discovering the world (science, technology, history and geography)	3h	3h 30
Foreign or regional language	1h	2h
Artistic education (music and art)	3h	
Physical education and sport	3h	

Daily Activities	Minimum Hours
Reading and writing (composition or copying)	2h 30

NB. It is expected that the daily activities are carried out within the teaching of all subjects; the time spent on these activities is therefore included in the time allowance for the subject.

Consolidation cycle (children aged eight to 11)

Subject area	Subject	Minimum hours	Maximum Hours	Total hours for area
French language, literature and humanities	Literature (speaking reading and writing)	4h 30	5h 30	12h
	French language (grammar, conjugation, spelling and vocabulary)	1h 30	2h	
	Foreign or regional language	1h 30	2h	
	History and geography	3h	3h 30	
	Living together (civics/organised debate)	0h 30	0h 30	
Scientific education	Mathematics	5h	5h 30	8h
	Science and technology	2h 30	3h	
Artistic education	Music and visual art	3h		3h
Physical education and sport		3h		3h

In addition:

Cross-subject area subjects	Hours
Literacy and French language	13 hours across the various subject areas, of which two hours daily must be used for reading and writing.
Citizenship education	1 hour across the various subject areas 0h 30 for the weekly debate

Are there statutory timings for the length of the school day/week?

At primary level, the school week is organised by the local *inspecteur d'académie* (the director of the area [*département*] services for national education), although (both in primary and secondary education) school starting and finishing times may usually be modified by the mayor of the locality.

There are generally 180 days, or 36 weeks, of classes in the school year (between September and June). The annual minimum number of teaching hours is 846.

Schools are usually open six days a week (Monday to Saturday), but no classes are held on Wednesdays or on Saturday afternoons. However, the local *inspecteur d'académie* may modify the weekly timetable, at the request of the majority of the members of a school governing board. However, any changes may not shorten the number of teaching hours in the school year, nor their allocation to the groups of subjects as determined by the national Ministry of Education, see above. Consequently, increasing numbers of schools, 25 per cent according to an assessment

which took place in 2000, are opting for a four-day (as opposed to the traditional four-and-a-half-day) week. That is, children in these schools attend all day on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, cutting out the Saturday half-day. The missing hours are usually made up by shortening the school holidays.

What changes have there been to the statutory/non-statutory elements of the curriculum?

The changes being introduced to the primary level curriculum from September 2002 aim to "provide children with the tools they need for life and future learning". Literacy is at the centre of these reforms, teaching children to read and write whilst focusing on language and the cross-curricular elements of literacy. The new curriculum also promotes the teaching of foreign and regional languages. See above.

What government/other initiatives have been introduced? What has been their impact?

Literacy campaign

The new literacy strategy, introduced as part of the revised (September 2002) primary level curriculum, introduces, as mentioned above, a daily compulsory period of reading and writing activities to be implemented across all curriculum subjects.

In addition, the campaign aims to ensure:

- the production of materials for teachers, which may help in the identification of the most common problems;
- the introduction of pilot projects to identify the best ways of helping those children with the most severe difficulties;
- the development of literacy activities for out of school clubs and summer schools; and
- specific provisions for children with the most serious difficulties or particular problems such as dyslexia or speech and language difficulties.

This new literacy strategy builds on a previous campaign launched in May 1999. This stressed the need for remedial action to start as early as nursery school and resulted from evidence that between 15 and 20 per cent of children entering compulsory secondary education (in *collège*), aged 11+, did not have basic competence in reading - the standard considered necessary to succeed at secondary school. Research also identified that nearly a fifth of children moving on to compulsory primary level education from nursery school were at risk and likely to face major difficulties later when learning to read. As a result, at the beginning of the 1999 academic year, the following measures to combat illiteracy were introduced:

- more structured work at nursery school (which, although not compulsory, is attended by virtually all three- to six-year-olds);
- improved liaison between nursery school and elementary school and between elementary school and *collège*; and
- the use of new technology.

(The Government did, however, stress that, whilst nursery education should lay the foundations for oral skills and a progressive introduction to writing, the marking/grading of pre-compulsory infants' work would be premature and harmful.)

Foreign and regional languages

Prior to the introduction of the revised 2002 primary level curriculum, which introduces a foreign or regional language from the beginning of compulsory elementary education (children aged six onwards), various government initiatives had been introduced to encourage the early study of foreign languages. The study of a foreign language in the final year of elementary school (children aged 10 to 11 years) had, for example, been compulsory since the start of the 1998-99 school year.

ZEPs

Government schemes to help children living in deprived districts known as the education priority zones (*zones d'éducation prioritaire, ZEPs*) have recently been revitalised. Originally introduced in 1982, the zones are determined by such factors as the local unemployment rate, parents' qualifications and type of work, numbers on income support and the proportion of immigrant families. Schools in the priority zones receive an additional 10 per cent state funding which is used to reduce class sizes, finance more teachers and fund a payment bonus to teachers working in *ZEP* schools. In 2002, some 1.8 million students (around 15 per cent of primary age children and 18 per cent of secondary students) were taught in 7,700 *ZEP* schools.

Teaching assistants

A government youth employment scheme, *emplois-jeunes*, introduced in 1998, aimed to introduce the young and unemployed to working life, by providing jobs across five different government departments, including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of Education has been the single largest employer of young people under this programme, who have become known as *aides éducateurs*. Most of the young people work as classroom assistants and are involved in supervisory duties, providing study help and library services, assistance with new technology, and cultural and sporting activities.

The *aides éducateurs* programme is due to come to an end in September 2003. As part of a programme to ensure some continuity of provision, in September 2002, the Ministry of Education announced that, from the beginning of the school year 2003, it will be creating new positions known as *assistants d'éducation*. Initially, 11,000 posts will be created and it is intended that the role will be more flexible than that of the *aides éducateurs*, in the hope that *assistants d'éducation* will be even better able to respond to the needs of individual educational establishments.

What other trends are emerging in curriculum development? (eg new subjects/areas of learning being introduced)

See above.

What other levers may be having an impact on curriculum content? (eg international studies: PIRLS, IEA, PISA, TIMSS)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

4. Organisation of the curriculum

What are the common features of curriculum organisation in the primary phase? (single subjects? planning subjects as 'topics'?)

How are subjects labelled?

What examples are there of 'areas' rather than subjects?

What examples are there of clusters of subjects (eg Humanities, made up of geography and history) being brought together?

In the first learning cycle of primary education in France, the basic learning cycle for six- to eight-year-olds, the study of science, technology and history and geography is combined into one overarching curriculum area 'discovering the world' (*découverte du monde*).

The second learning cycle of primary education in France - the consolidation cycle for eight- to 11-year-olds - includes a statutory curriculum area entitled 'science education'. This combines aspects of the study of physics, chemistry, biology and geology with technology and mathematics as one subject area.

The subject area 'French language, literature and humanities' covers writing, speaking, grammar, conjugation, spelling and vocabulary (French), a foreign or regional language, history and geography (studied together) and a weekly debate on living together (civics/citizenship).

In addition, the study of art or 'artistic education' throughout primary level education in France includes the study of both music and art.

Monsieur Michel Favier of the Ministry of Education comments that primary teachers are encouraged to develop links between subjects/subject areas, such as 'mathematics and science', 'aspects of biological science and physical education and sport', 'music and foreign languages (songs)', or 'history and art (artists through the ages)'.

What are the common features of timetabling? (eg weekly lessons in each subject, English and mathematics taught daily)

Since the introduction of the revised primary curriculum in September 2002, teachers of children in the first two years of elementary school (six to eight years old) have been required to devote two-and-a-half hours daily to reading and writing activities - across all curriculum subjects. (This, too, is a requirement for children in the final year of pre-compulsory nursery education, aged five to six.) In the remaining three years of elementary school, eight- to 11-year-olds are expected to spend two hours daily on reading and writing skills.

5. Assessment

What is the purpose, nature and scale of assessment? (eg end of phase assessment, statutory, published test results, optional, national, local, timed tests, teacher-assessment)

Although there is no national primary (elementary) school leaving examination in France, there are various types of national assessment currently in use which are applicable to the primary level of education, as follows:

- national, mass diagnostic testing involving all children in a specific age group, generally aged eight (during primary level education), 11 and 15 (secondary level education);
- continuous, periodic teacher assessment to test what children have learnt;
- orientation assessment, involving all children at specific stages of their school career; and
- end of year testing of selective samples of children, which is carried out from time to time for use in the course of national or international surveys or for international comparisons.

Some elementary schools have also recently piloted national mass diagnostic assessment tests (see below) at age 10 (in CM2, that is on entry to the final year of primary education).

At national, regional, school and classroom levels, evaluation and assessment devices allow the Ministry of Education to monitor the education system and its development and to make decisions based on the pedagogical evidence they provide. The information thus processed gives policy-makers an overall view of education in the country from different points of view: benchmarks of success or failure of students at different stages, evidence of attainment of curriculum objectives, and comparisons of students' achievements over time.

National mass diagnostic testing

Compulsory mass diagnostic national testing of children aged eight (in primary education), 11 and 15 years (secondary phase) has taken place in both public- and private-sector schools in France since September 1989. The primary goals of this assessment are to:

- provide teachers with a tool to gauge children's progress;
- assist teachers in choosing the teaching activities most suited to the individual child's needs; and
- assist teachers in planning their teaching of the curriculum accordingly.

In elementary school education, the assessment tests are closely related to the curriculum and assess eight-year-olds' strengths and weaknesses in reading, writing, and mathematical skills, at what is considered to be a particularly important stage in their education - that is **on entry** to the consolidation cycle of elementary school education.

Assessment takes the form of a formal, written national test in French and mathematics at the beginning of the academic year (September). Compulsory testing takes place in alternate years. Eight-year-olds were recently tested in 1997, 1999 and 2001, for example, and will be tested again in 2003. In the intervening years (1998, 2000, 2002 etc) 11-year-olds were statutorily tested. Schools may, however, also choose to test children every year. Should local departments of education decide to implement voluntary mass diagnostic testing in the intervening year, a protocol (test papers, children's test books, coded marking papers etc) is made available for this purpose by the national Ministry of Education. (In a May 1996 survey of teachers, conducted by the Ministry of Education, only 12 per cent of teachers of eight-year-olds [and 25 per cent of teachers of 11-year-olds] said they would **not** implement diagnostic testing in the year when it was not compulsory.)

Although national mass diagnostic testing covers only French and mathematics at elementary school level, some cross-curricular skills such as observation, spatial awareness and temporal awareness are also included.

A sample of scripts from the national mass diagnostic tests is used by the Ministry of Education to conduct a survey to establish national standards. These results are disseminated to enable the actions of teachers, headteachers, policy-makers and all other stakeholders to be informed by the results.

After the assessments have taken place, teachers can investigate further to establish the thought processes used by children to reach certain answers. To help them in their interpretation, teachers are provided with guidance on possible reasons for incorrect answers.

Research has indicated that teachers find the results of compulsory mass diagnostic testing often serve as a useful starting point for discussions with parents, as the nature and timing of these national assessments (at the start of a specific cycle of education) convince parents that the results are objective and that their child's individual needs are being taken into consideration. In this way, parents are persuaded of the need for any remedial action that may be necessary and can be encouraged to involve themselves with their child's learning.

The majority of teachers also appear to view mass diagnostic assessment as an aid to their professional work. In a 1995/96 survey of the opinions of lower secondary school teachers, for example, almost two thirds of those questioned felt that the results helped them to identify children's needs and reach decisions as to how best to meet those needs. The survey also confirmed that teachers adapted their teaching in the light of national assessments to, for example, target the specific difficulties of individual children (through prolonged remedial teaching) and to address the more general needs of the whole class (through possible adjustments to the timetable). Results of the assessments completed in the first year of secondary school are also passed to feeder elementary schools for information.

Continuous assessment

Children are assessed at regular intervals during each of the teaching cycles in primary level education, to test their knowledge and retention. This assessment generally takes the form of regular, usually weekly, tests, made up and conducted by the class teacher/teachers of the cycle. Typically marked out of 20, the results of these tests are recorded and reported in children's report books at the end of each term.

Attainment targets (known as *notions*) are set for each cycle, rather than for each year, and the amount of time spent in each cycle can be extended or reduced by one year to "suit the learning rhythms of each child". Children may only repeat a year once they reach the end of a specific cycle.

Assessment is regarded as a fundamental part of work in cycles, as it enables the teacher to follow the development of a child's skills and thereby plan their own teaching strategies. Teachers are expected to record whether specific *notions* have not been acquired, are in the process of being acquired or have been acquired.

Continuous monitoring and assessment by teachers also assists them in noting children with particular difficulties (in one or more subjects). As a result, those children concerned may either receive special help within their existing class or, should their difficulties make it impossible for them to take part in normal class lessons, they may enter special classes organised within the same school. In more severe cases they will attend a special school.

The Teachers' Council of each cycle (which generally comprises all the teachers of that cycle) promotes children from class to class within a cycle on the recommendation of their teacher, who bases his/her recommendation on his/her continuous observation and assessment of the child, and on discussion and consultation with parents and with members of teaching teams.

End of year sampling testing

End of year testing of selective samples of children during compulsory education is carried out from time to time (usually at the end of the academic year and under Ministry instruction) for use in the course of national or international surveys or for international comparisons.

How far is the curriculum driven by assessments? (eg evidence of teacher preparation for testing, 'booster' or 'catch-up' classes in schools)

No specific information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

National mass diagnostic testing

As national mass diagnostic testing takes place at the start of a specific cycle of education, there may be less evidence of or opportunity to 'teach to the test' in the French system than in some others. (Note from probe compiler.) Certainly, research has indicated that parents are prepared to accept that the results of mass diagnostic testing are objective precisely because this assessment takes place on entry to a specific cycle.

Monsieur Michel Favier of the Ministry of Education also comments that assessment has a considerable influence on teaching in class - in the sense that teaching is often adapted as a result of diagnostic assessment to suit the specific needs of individual children - but that assessment has little influence on the programmes of study as such.

6. Teaching profession/training

What changes can be identified in initial teacher training programmes?

Foreign languages

In 2000, about 85 per cent of children in French *elementary schools* were learning some form of modern language. The emphasis of these lessons was on oral language and opening children's minds to other languages and cultures. Recent changes to the primary curriculum (see above) mean that language learning is set to become one of the key disciplines at this level. Teachers will be supported by the creation of new teaching materials and language-specific teaching during their initial training.

What kinds of continuing professional development/on-going training are provided?

Monsieur Michel Favier of the Ministry of Education comments that continuing professional development is not statutory for primary school teachers in France, but that every primary school teacher has a right to an average of around one week of continuing professional development for each year of teaching, to be taken as suits the individual. Professional development programmes are generally organised by those regional agencies representing the national Ministry of Education and often reflect ministerial priorities.

Assessment

In order to better understand assessment, the Ministry of Education's directorate of assessment and planning (*direction de l'évaluation et de la prospective, DEP*) encourages agencies for the continuing professional development of teachers (*missions académiques à la formation des personnels de l'Éducation nationale, MAFPEN*) to organise training and information courses on assessment for teachers.

Compulsory national mass diagnostic assessment

Once children's needs have been identified through national mass diagnostic assessment (see above), in-service training is organised to equip teachers with the appropriate methodology and techniques to meet such needs. Where appropriate, support materials and further assessment materials are also provided by the Ministry of Education to tackle particular areas of need which have been identified at national level.

To what degree are teachers'/schools' planning subject to scrutiny?

National education inspectors visit primary schools and monitor the performance of teachers. Teachers are free to select their own teaching methods, providing they are

following the appropriate programmes of study. Inspections aim to ensure that this is happening.

To what degree are teachers using electronic formats to plan?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive. Monsieur Michel Favier of the Ministry of Education comments that it is generally accepted that this practice is currently increasing rapidly, but that, as research has not been carried out in this area, it is difficult to report formally.

7. Pedagogy

Which teaching approaches are dominant or developing a higher profile, and which are receding? (eg collaborative work, whole-class instruction)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive. In addition, Monsieur Michel Favier of the Ministry of Education comments that no research is available providing information on dominant teaching approaches. Teachers remain free to select their own teaching methods. However, time in class is usually divided between whole class teaching (predominant); active (usually group) investigation and research on the part of the children; and individual children completing teacher-set exercises working independently. Classes are usually organised by age. However, in small schools, of which there are a considerable number in France, multi-age classes are often the norm. Indeed, the 2002 primary school curriculum revision does recommend some multi-age groupings for all children at this level, as this is believed to be useful for younger children, particularly in language acquisition.

What is the impact of ICT in teaching practice? (eg use of electronic whiteboards, intranets, managed learning environments/local grids)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

Monsieur Michel Favier of the Ministry of Education comments that research has recently begun in this area (the results of which are not yet available), but that ICT is increasingly being used in primary level education. For example, children use word processing packages in the presentation of their work, use the Internet or databases for research, or use e-mail to correspond within and outside their own school. The availability of ICT equipment can, however, vary considerably between areas of the country and individual schools.

To what degree are teaching approaches focusing on developing thinking skills, creativity and building on children's learning styles?

No specific information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

There has been much discussion in France regarding teaching to children's 'learning rhythms'. As a result, some schools teach mathematics and French earlier in the school day, when children are believed to be at their most receptive, and aspects of the broader curriculum later in the day. (Comment from probe compiler.)

8. Resourcing

How far are resources to support teaching made available via government/central/local agencies?

Textbooks

Textbooks intended for use in school must be approved by the national Minister of Education and are usually provided free of charge to children.

In elementary school education, the local *commune* (the lowest administrative subdivision in France) is responsible, via the municipal budget, for ensuring that there are adequate funds in its budget to pay for textbooks. In about 10 per cent of cases, however, parents pay. This is usually in small *communes* in which budgets are restricted.

Generally, textbooks are loaned free of charge to children in compulsory education and must be returned on completion. Teachers also receive the teacher's textbook free of charge (on demand) and are able to keep this for their own use. Headteachers receive a specific budgetary credit per teacher and per subject for this purpose. Credits not used for this purpose (that is, not required for textbooks) can be used to purchase other educational materials, such as audio-visual equipment, video cassettes etc, especially that which is produced by the *Centre national de documentation pédagogique (CNDP)* (National Centre for Educational Documents/Information).

Modern languages

With the introduction of the revised primary level curriculum from September 2002, which includes the study of either a foreign or regional language for all primary level children, new teaching materials have been developed centrally to support teachers in the implementation of this initiative.

Online resources

Bienvenue sur education.fr is an online website portal providing access to various French Education Ministry and Agency websites and also to online teaching resources. Its url is <http://www.education.fr/>

How far, and in which subjects, are resources statutory/ recommended/ subsidised? (eg textbooks, courses, lesson plans for teachers, web-based materials)

Textbooks

Although textbooks are officially **approved**, there are **no prescribed** teaching methods or materials for elementary school education. Teachers are free to choose their teaching methods, course books and other materials. Teachers in each school usually agree on the particular materials they wish to use from the approved range available from private-sector educational publishers.

Teachers are expected to develop clear criteria for the selection of school textbooks from those approved by the Ministry of Education. One of the criteria for selection is usually expected to be that the textbook stands alone, that is, that it does not depend on the provision of support documents. Groups of teachers in each subject area meet under the chairmanship of the school principal (or equivalent) to discuss their proposed criteria for the selection of textbooks and their proposed list of textbooks. These criteria and the list are then put before the school's *Conseil d'administration* (board of governors), which includes some parent members. This *Conseil* makes its opinion known, but the final decision is that of the 'teaching council' (that is, the council of all relevant subject teachers). Their decision must be made public no later than the June preceding the start of the relevant school year. Textbooks must leave teachers free to choose their own teaching methods, which can be suitably adapted in accordance with the needs of different groups of children.

Headteachers use their own commercial judgement to select the publishing house/bookseller from whom to acquire the approved textbooks chosen by subject teachers.

Under French law, the textbooks produced by private- or public-sector educational publishers for the various levels of school education are based on the curricula and official recommendations of the (national) Ministry of Education. Once publishing houses have received the Ministry's official recommendations/guidelines, they have a minimum 14-month period in which to produce the textbook(s). Textbooks must comply with the agreed curriculum and the cover or title page must state which class and level of education the textbook is intended for. Textbook publishers also produce teachers' manuals to accompany the relevant student text and workbooks. Such manuals are, however, the sole responsibility of the author and, consequently, do not replace official texts providing guidelines on teaching methods and the curriculum.

Teaching materials are usually published and approved for use nationwide. Local or regional associations and documentation centres sometimes produce teaching materials as a local supplement to those published for national use.

It is generally expected that a school's list of recommended textbooks should not be changed too often. Four years is the recommended replacement period for textbooks in France. Any change of textbook or purchase of supplementary textbooks during the course of the school year is prohibited. =

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