

# Compulsory Education



## Building a solid foundation for students

Compulsory education has always been one of the most important aspects of education in Taiwan, as it is a part of the process of building a solid foundation for the future hopes of the nation. For many years, however, education in Taiwan has focused mostly on course content that was designed to enable students to pass exams. The system produced students with some of the highest test scores in the world, but the strong emphasis on test results has been criticised for placing excessive pressure on students and downplaying creativity in favour of rote memorisation.

In recent years, as Taiwanese society has become more open and liberal, more parents have begun to accept that education should enable students to demonstrate their talents instead of just scoring highly in exams. The MOE has, therefore, spent more than ten years carrying out education reform that seeks to transform a static and tedious learning system into one with a more dynamic and creative style.

The ultimate goal of the reform is to mould young Taiwanese people into becoming more competitive, adaptable in a changing world, creative in their thinking and humanistic in their outlook.

## Preschool and Compulsory Education

### Preschool Education

Education is not compulsory for children aged between two and six years old. Parents of children in this age-group usually send them to kindergartens. In SY 2009-2010, 182,049 children were enrolled in 3,154 kindergartens. This relatively high number is due to the rising number of families with both parents working.

To ensure that children from low-income families (including those from indigenous areas) have an opportunity to receive the same basic education, the MOE launched a financial support programme across

Taiwan in 2004. The project was initially only for five-year-old children on Taiwan's offshore islands, but later was expanded to cover all underprivileged children and those from families with an annual income of below NT\$ 600,000. Subsidies were also granted based on income level.

To better take care of people in need, children from outlying areas and aboriginal townships are eligible for kindergarten tuition subsidies starting from September 2010.

Also, children who go to public kindergartens in those areas will be free of charge. The government will fund



740 junior high schools in Taiwan, offering quality education to 2.54 million students.

In 1998, the MOE launched a project to downsize the average class size in Taiwan. The move was carried out to allow teachers to dedicate more time to their students.

attendance at private kindergartens by up to NT\$ 30,000 (US\$ 937) per year.

A child education and care law for preschool integration of nursery schools and day care centres is currently under Legislative Yuan review, hoping to offer overall care for young children.

### Compulsory Education

In Taiwan, public education has been compulsory from primary school to junior high school since 1968. In 1982, the government further announced the Compulsory Education Regulations, which stipulate that children of at least six years of age are required to begin primary schooling without taking entrance tests. After six years, they should graduate with a primary school diploma and need not take a test to enter junior high school. After three years, they are supposed to receive a junior high school diploma.

This is the basic coverage of the present nine-year compulsory education model.

Currently, there are a total of 2,658 primary schools and

Before the downsize, the average class size in primary schools in 1994 was around 38 students, and in junior high school was around 43 students. Now, the average class size in primary schools is fewer than 27 and junior high schools are fewer than 34 students. This decrease in class size in primary and junior high schools is an outcome of the drop in Taiwan's birth rate and the implementation of the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum (see below).

### Education Reform

In response to criticism that education in Taiwan focuses too much on test results, the MOE launched the Education Reform Action Plan a decade ago, outlining key policies emphasising pluralism and general education.

The MOE adopted the principles of diversity and tolerance in re-building a learning environment in primary and junior high schools that encouraged academic excellence and respected the students' individual traits and potential.

Students receive an education that seeks to develop



creativity and versatility by promoting sports and drama, with regular artistic performances also being staged on campus.

### Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum

Traditionally, the central government had the right to decide almost everything for schools at all levels in Taiwan, from the standard curriculum to students' school uniforms. The Education Reform Action Plan changed all that with the establishment of the Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum, which empowers local governments, schools and teachers to design the curriculum and teaching materials.

The Nine-Year Integrated Curriculum is one of the MOE's most important reform policies. Its ultimate objective is to diversify Taiwanese education. For example, instead of completely relying upon a national entrance exam to enter senior high school, junior high school students can now enter through what are called "multiple entrance schemes".

This integrated curriculum also places emphasis upon cultivating creativity by encouraging students to

conduct their own research when doing homework, rather than by simply relying on their textbooks. The curriculum seeks to develop versatile citizens capable of responding to the challenges posed by globalisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

After undergoing a trial run starting in September 2001, the integrated curriculum was put into full practice in September 2004.

Foreign language proficiency is another important aspect in cultivating versatile students. The MOE subsidises schools to bring in more qualified foreign teachers to teach English. To minimise the gap between urban and rural areas in terms of educational resources for English teaching, the MOE draws from a budget for subsidising disadvantaged groups, including indigenous peoples and lower income families, and trains qualified English teachers for schools in rural areas.

### Compulsory Education Policies Diversified Education

#### “One Standard, Multiple Textbooks” Policy

For the past several decades, students in primary and secondary education in Taiwan were required to use only the textbooks published by the National Institute for Compilation and Translation





(NICT). Students could do well in their Joint Senior High School Entrance Exams simply by memorising the contents of the textbooks. Some students would even refuse material taught by teachers outside the bounds of these textbooks on the grounds that it would not appear in exams set by an examination committee.

To reach the goal of diversified education, the core of its education reform, the MOE implemented the “One Standard, Multiple Textbooks” policy in 1999.

“Multiple Textbooks” means that the textbook market is no longer monopolised by the NICT or by just one publisher. Schools can organise a committee of teachers to select the textbooks to be used by the students at their schools.

“One Standard” means that the MOE allows students to take entrance exams that test their real academic level, by compiling comprehensive questions in accordance with the MOE's standards. The policy drew some complaints for increasing students' academic and economic burdens, but it is useful in terms of pushing Taiwanese education onto the next level – one that is diversified, creative and liberal.

### Localised Education Mother Tongue and Homeland Education

As Taiwanese society becomes increasingly liberal and open, other dialects such as Taiwanese, Hakka and indigenous languages are finding their way into the educational system, even though Mandarin Chinese is still the only official language in school education.

In 2001, the MOE asked public primary and junior high schools to design curricula based around the mother tongues of their students.

Aside from encouraging students to learn their native languages, the MOE also encourages students to learn more about the land of Taiwan by taking Homeland Education classes, a new subject that students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of elementary school are required to study.

In this subject, students are encouraged to foster an interest in the natural and humanistic aspects of their immediate environment and to carry out research to increase their knowledge of Taiwan's history and natural resources.



### Internationalised Education A Friendly Environment for International Students in Taiwan

As Taiwan is a part of the global society, there are increasing numbers of overseas Taiwanese returning, as well as foreign spouses joining the national family. To help children born to foreign spouses and international students to adapt better to the language requirements and regular schoolwork in Taiwan, the Ministry of Education is promoting tutoring programmes and after-school language programmes for those in need.

Taking the schools in Taiwan's largest city, Taipei, as an example, some schools such as Shi-Dong Elementary School and Xin Sheng Elementary School offer Mandarin language programmes for the children of returning overseas Taiwanese parents and international students who need to elevate their Mandarin skills.

Nangang Elementary School and Xihu Elementary School, located near the Academia Sinica, Neihsu Science Park and Nankang Software Park, offer bilingual classes for children of foreigners working in that area.

Also, schools regularly organise a "Country Week", when exhibitions are held focusing on the culture, customs and

traditions of foreign-bride countries. For example, during "Thailand Week", students are treated to delicious Thai food and watch performances by fellow students whose mothers come from Thailand.

### Digitalised Education Bridging the Digital Gap and E-Classroom

To bridge the digital gap between city schools and rural schools, in 2001, the MOE started promoting the College Information Volunteers programme, whereby college students formed digital volunteer groups to help teach children in rural areas to use computers. The programme also sought to improve the availability of digital information in remote schools and communities.

In addition, the MOE established an online tutoring system, with college students answering online questions from children in rural areas about their homework.

Since 2009, the MOE has offered subsidies to schools at all levels nationwide for the building of an e-learning environment, especially involving methods such as electronic whiteboards.

In an age of digitalisation, when many of our children spend more time on i-Pods, Wii systems and PS3s instead of reading books in the traditional way, the digitalisation of teaching is an attempt to recapture the attention of students.



## E-Future Classroom in Nanhu Elementary School



## Innovative Classroom Technology Keeps Students Interested

### Ren-ai Junior High School uses a portable e-whiteboard in teaching

**M**ag Lee, a Physics-Chemistry teacher at Taipei City's Ren-ai Junior High School, is holding a class on buoyancy in front of 30-plus students. However, instead of writing down the famous Archimedes' Principle on a traditional blackboard with chalk, she simply touches an icon on the big white screen of an e-whiteboard, which immediately morphs into an animation of a submarine and explains the physics principle.

In an attempt to recapture the attention of students, the Ministry of Education has promoted e-learning in recent years, especially using methods such as electronic whiteboards.

Consisting of a large interactive display connected to a computer and projector, the e-whiteboard's projector projects the computer desktop onto the surface of the board, where users can control the computer using a pen or other device, or simply with their hands.

The device allows greater interaction through its fascinating video and audio demonstrations as well as by providing online information.

This alternative mode of lesson delivery has proven effective in

attracting students' attention to lessons and making them more willing to participate actively in classes.

Lee, who has been using the new mode of teaching for more than a year, says she enjoys using the e-whiteboard in her classes because of the positive responses she receives from her students.

"They are more motivated to learn with the help of all these modern technologies such as animation and interactive software."

"I found the class to be more interesting with the e-whiteboard," says one of Lee's students Jesse Liao, while another student, Josh Lin, says he especially loves the part involving interaction with the device.



"I find the class to be much more interesting with the e-whiteboard," says Rachel Pan, a fifth grade student who has used the classroom.



**T**he recently launched e-Future Classroom at Nanhu Elementary School in Taipei's Neihu District is equipped with cutting-edge technology to support teaching in the digital age.

As the name suggests, the e-Future Classroom in Nanhu is designed in a futuristic style with the whole room painted in dark colours and its three sides plastered with banks of wall-mounted flat panel computer screens.

The tables and chairs in the room are arranged in several groups, each group equipped with a computer, so that students can engage in group discussions using a computer and online resources.

This alternative mode of lesson delivery has proven effective in attracting students' attention during lessons and making them more willing to participate actively in classes.

"Students are all very excited about coming to the classroom to learn," says Nancy Cheng, a science teacher at Nanhu.

She adds that e-Future Classroom is the perfect place for teaching her subject since it is very convenient for students to log on to the Internet to gather information and join in group discussions.