

# Pisa-based Test for the European Schools (PTES) Frequently Asked Questions

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **1. What is PISA?**

PISA (the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment) is a comprehensive international study on the performance of education systems. It was launched by the OECD in 1997, first administered in 2000 and now covers over 80 countries and 600,000 15-year-old students providing comparative data on performance in reading, mathematics and science every three years.

### **2. What is the PISA for Schools project about?**

The PISA-based Test for Schools (PBTS) is a voluntary assessment intended to help school leaders and teachers understand their 15-year-old students' abilities to think critically and apply their knowledge creatively in novel contexts.

The PBTS is a comprehensive, competence-based student assessment project which provides the participating schools with a wide range of information on their performance and background. The areas of the tests, as well as those of the PISA study, are the key competences in reading, mathematics and science. In addition to these areas, the school reports also supply information on the participants' motivation and engagement, the school climate and students' well-being.

### **3. What is the relationship between the PISA-based Test for (the European) Schools and PISA?**

While PISA is intended to deliver national level results, the PBTS is designed to deliver school-level results for school improvement and benchmarking purposes and concentrates on the performance of the individual schools. Because both assessments are based on the same framework, the results are comparable, meaning that individual schools benchmark their performance with those of national education systems from around the world.

PISA-based Test for the European Schools (PTES) is the name that has been given to the PBTS project running in the European Schools based on cooperation with the OECD (the 'owner' of the programme) and the International Platform Provider (Janison Solutions PTY Ltd).

### **4. Are the test questions on PBTS the same as for the main PISA international tests?**

The PBTS questions have been developed on the basis of the same assessment frameworks as the main PISA international test questions and have been validated by an international linking study<sup>1</sup>.

To find out more about questions in the test, see: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/test/>

---

<sup>1</sup> Okubo, Bastianic, Fragoso, Tse (2021). PISA-Based Test for Schools: International Linking Study 2020, OECD Education Working Papers, No 244. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/ef1356ae-en>

**5. What does the PISA-based Test for Schools measure?**

The PISA-based Test for Schools measures students' skills and creative application of knowledge in **reading, mathematics** and **science**. This cognitive assessment is followed by a short student questionnaire, which delivers valuable insights into socioeconomic background, attitudes toward learning and school climate.

To find out more about questions in the test, see: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/test/>

The test is designed as a school-level assessment, all results are aggregated to the school level, **no student-level results are stored or reported**.

**PURPOSE OF THE PISA-BASED TEST FOR THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS (PTES)**

**6. What is the aim of conducting the Pisa-based Test for Schools in the European Schools?**

The main expected outcome is to gain an evidence-based analysis of the students' performance and their ability to retrieve and creatively apply knowledge. The results will also provide valuable information on the learning climate within the schools.

**7. The European Schools are presumably looking for data to guide their pedagogical development. What is the system looking to do with these results more concretely?**

**Will changes be made to the syllabuses or organisation of studies in light of the results of the test?**

There are expectations regarding the wealth of data with which the PTES could provide the ES. The results of the PTES will be used for research, benchmarking and, most importantly, school improvement purposes. They will help the system determine priorities and set goals for improvement in student outcomes. **The test is not intended as a high-stakes assessment or for accountability purposes.**

The organs of the European Schools, i.e. the Board of Inspectors, the Joint Teaching Committee and the Board of Governors, will indicate, discuss and decide the way forward. The roadmap as designed is quite straightforward: pupils will be tested, reports for each school and for the whole set of participating schools<sup>2</sup> will be delivered. Not only the tests, but also the content of the background questionnaires which pupils will complete, will provide the System and its governing Bodies with an abundance of interesting insights.

**8. What is the concrete short-term outcome of the test?**

Each school will receive a comprehensive school report in electronic format detailing the school's performance and environment, as well as students' engagement and socioemotional skills. A group

---

<sup>2</sup> For information about the OECD eligibility criteria, see point 9.

report will also be generated to assess the joint performance of all ES. A sample of the school report and the reader's guide are available on the OECD Website.

Sample school report in EN at <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-for-schools/PISA-for-Schools-School-Report-Template.pdf>

Reader's guide: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-for-schools/PISA%20for%20Schools%20-%20Reader's%20Guide.pdf>

**9. Is there any specific condition that the school must meet in order to receive a school report?**

To be eligible to receive a school report, schools have to have tested a minimum number of 42 eligible students (i.e. those who are aged between 15 years and 3 completed months to 16 years and 2 completed months at the time of testing) and the participation rate must be equal to or higher than 80% of the students sampled<sup>3</sup>. To ensure that the minimum number of 42 students per school is reached, it is recommended that at least 55 students be tested, assuming a participation rate of 80%.

**10. Are the schools' reports or the group report published by the OECD?**

No. The reports are not released by the OECD, unless specifically authorised.

**11. Will the schools' reports and the group report be made available/published?**

A school report will be returned to the given school, which will decide how to use the report. Schools are encouraged to share and discuss their results with teachers, staff, students and parents to foster deeper understanding of the overall performance of their school as a basis for future actions. It is also up to the schools to decide how and to what extent they publish or disseminate the data and the school report.

The Board of Governors will decide whether or not to publish the group report.

**12. What is the estimated timeline for the project?**

2021	May-December	Preparation of agreements Appointment of school coordinators Translation of documents and test items Training of coordinators and ICT support staff
2022	January-February	Recruitment and training of coders/markers
	March	Testing (10-17 March)
	April-May	Coding
		Training on data interpretation
	June	Delivery of School Reports
	August/September	Delivery of Group Report
	September-October	Analysis of results
		OECD post-assessment workshops
		PISA for Schools Online Community Forum meetings

<sup>3</sup> To find out more about the student sample, see point 20.

**13. The results are supposed to give information on the school's added pedagogical value: this only makes sense if there is some sort of benchmark to work from. How will this be established?**

Added pedagogical value can be measured in different ways. One of the most widely used methods is comparing the *actual performance* of the students (the outcome of the tests) with what is generally called *expected performance*, i.e. what would be reasonably expected based on the socioeconomic status of the students. This 'status benchmark' is, in the PBTS, derived from the outcome of the socioeconomic background questionnaire completed by the students after the cognitive tests. Put simply, added pedagogical value is the difference between the *actual performance* and the *expected performance* of the cohort tested. In the school report sample, you can find an example of how this is presented. (<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-for-schools/PISA-for-Schools-School-Report-Template.pdf>).

Given the nature of European Schools, it is important to compare students' achievements not only with local or national standards, but also with the performance of the world's top-performing school systems. There has been growing interest in comparing student performance against international benchmarks, both as a gauge of how prepared students are to participate in a globalised society and as a means of setting targets above and beyond basic proficiency levels or local expectations.

**14. Can a school opt out of the project?**

No. Mandated by the Board of Governors of the European Schools, the Secretary-General signed a contract with the owner of the project (OECD) ensuring the participation of all European Schools in the project. The results of the PTES will not be used for rating or ranking schools.

**15. Why does the project discourage rankings amongst schools?**

The PISA-based Test for Schools and its results are not meant to be interpreted or used as school rankings. The PISA-based Test for Schools does not provide for student-level performance reporting and is designed principally to support school improvement efforts.

Accordingly, the OECD does not produce or publish any rankings or lists of the schools that have participated in the PBTS.

**16. Instead of asking how a given school ranks, what types of guiding questions might we have when reflecting on the results?**

Generally speaking questions like the following can be raised:

What can we learn from the report to improve student learning outcomes? What proportion of the students are high-performing, proficient or below proficiency level? Which results confirm expectations and which results surprise? What kind of readers are the pupils in the ES? Are the students appropriately motivated and confident in their own abilities – and what can the ES system do about it? How strong is the performance in developing the deeper learning outcomes?

After analysis of the outcome and the concrete results, each school can develop an action plan on how to implement the findings of the test in order to improve teaching and learning and to achieve higher standards. Following the school reports and the group report, schools, as well as the Office of the Secretary-General and the inspectors, will receive guidance and support from the OECD.

**17. Will this be a one-off test or will it be repeated in the future?**

The Board of Governors made the decision to run the project in 2022. It is too early to say whether it will be the first of a long tradition, which might also depend on the balance between costs and benefits of the first experience. Should the Board of Governors decide to repeat the project in the future, the OECD will be ready to assist the European Schools.

**STUDENTS IN THE PTES**

**18. Who is eligible to take the test?**

Those students who are aged between 15 years and 3 completed months to 16 years and 2 completed months at the time of testing and have been enrolled in an educational institution for a minimum of 7 years. In the ES system, this means S3 or higher.

**19. Why 15-year-old students?**

Like PISA, the PISA-based Test for Schools is designed to access secondary school students near the end of their compulsory education.

**20. Will the students taking the test be sampled?**

All pupils who will be between 15 years 3 months and 16 years 2 months of age at the time of testing will be eligible to take the test. The eligible students will not be sampled except for the group that will take the test in their Language 1 (see point 25). Some students may be excluded from the sample because of special circumstances (see point 29).

**21. Should pupils revise anything or prepare in any way for the test?**

No studying or other academic preparation for the test is expected or provided. PISA draws on content that can be found in curricula across the world and looks at students' ability to apply knowledge and skills and to analyse, reason and communicate effectively as they examine, interpret and solve problems.

As such, PISA does not prescribe or promote any curriculum and pupils will not have to prepare to perform during the test. Pupils will only have to get acquainted with the way the tests will be delivered.

**22. Will pupils receive individual feedback about their results? Will teachers receive feedback regarding their pupils, or their classes?**

No. PISA and PISA for Schools are designed principally to support educational systems and individual schools respectively. As such, PTES does not provide a score report for an individual student or *particular* class, only school-level/system-level aggregated data.

**23. In which languages will the students have to take the test?**

In English, French and German, either Language 1 or Language 2.

**24. Why only EN, FR and DE?**

The OECD applies certain strict rules regarding the eligibility of the schools engaged in the project as far as the number of students is concerned. One of the several criteria is that the total number of students tested in one particular language (either in Language 1 or Language 2) must be at least 500. Only these three languages meet this criterion in the European School System.

**25. What do the cohorts to be tested look like in the ES?**

There are approximately 2280 students who will be between 15 years 3 months and 16 years 2 months of age at the time of testing. The test will be organised in English, French and German. A sample drawn by the OECD experts will be formed in such a way that approximately 1060 pupils will be tested in their respective L1 (i.e. English, French, German), while the rest of the cohort (approximately 1220) will take the test in their L2 (also English, French or German). It is important to note that students will take the entire test (all areas as well as the background questionnaire) in the *same language*.

The matrix below shows the areas of competence tested and the languages in which the test will be taken by the different sub-groups of the cohort, as well as the language of instruction (teaching and learning) of the subjects that best correspond to these areas. (Group 1: students taking the test in their L1, Group 2: students taking the test in their L2)

		Group 1	Group 2	SWALS*
Reading	Language of the test	L1	L2	L2
	Language of teaching	L1	L1	L1
Maths	Language of the test	L1	L2	L2
	Language of teaching	L1	L1	L2
Science	Language of the test	L1	L2	L2
	Language of teaching	L1	L1	L2

\*Note that SWALS (Students Without a Language Section) are a sub-group of Group 2 as they will take the test in their Language 2. The main difference is the organisation of studies for SWALS, whereby their medium of instruction in most subjects (including Maths and all scientific subjects) is their Language 2, whilst these subjects are taught to students with a language section in Language 1.

**26. Why will some pupils do the tests in L1 whilst others in L2?**

The only languages of tuition that can meet the PISA for Schools requirements are English, French and German (see point 24). In order to gather information also on pupils in other language sections, it has been proposed that other pupils being tested in their L2 should be involved.

**27. Will the students know in advance whether they have to take the test in their L1 or L2?**

Yes.

**28. How can pupils be capable of answering mathematical questions in L2 if they have always been taught the subject in L1? Will specific vocabulary be provided?**

PISA and PBTS draw on content that can be found in curricula across the world and look at students' ability to apply knowledge and skills and to analyse, reason and communicate effectively as they



examine, interpret and solve problems. As such, pupils will not be exposed to 'traditional' mathematics examinations.

The European Schools have at least two reassuring precedents relating to such a concern.

It might not be known that the European Schools in Luxembourg take part in the international PISA. Most pupils there are tested only in their L2. Results achieved by those two schools in the past are encouraging and can still be found on the schools' websites.

The European School, Culham participated in the pilot phase of PBTS, along with other schools based in the UK. With the school's approval, the school report was published on the OECD website and can be found at the following link : <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/PISA-Based-Test-for-Schools-European-School-Culham.pdf>

The entire eligible population at the ES, Culham took part, using the English language which, for most of them was their L2. Pupils in the EN-speaking section were only a fraction of the entire eligible population of pupils. The results were again quite reassuring.

***29. What about special measures for students with learning difficulty/disability/disorder who take the test? What about students with dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysphasia, etc.?***

For the moment, PISA and PBTS do not foresee any special measures.

Out of the full list of students, some students may be excluded from the sample because of special circumstances. PISA and PBTS standards specify that such exclusions should not represent more than 5% of the target population.

Some students may have a disability that prevents them from taking part in the assessment. School coordinators, in consultation with the OSG and following common guidelines on student exclusions, will identify those students who cannot take the test for a particular reason. The reason may be

- having a modified curriculum because of a specific learning difficulty (i.e. lacking Mathematics and/or Scientific subjects and/or L2),
- some sensory or motor conditions (e.g. blindness),
- having received less than one year of instruction in the language of the test.

Exclusion must operate in a harmonised way across the schools and every case must be justified.

Other learning difficulties/disorders/disabilities will not constitute a reason for exclusion. Students with such learning difficulties will take the test under the same conditions as children without any disability.

***30. Can an eligible student opt out of the test?***

We sincerely understand that the students will want to know why they are being asked to commit their time and energy to the test. The PTES is part of a formative, continuous improvement effort towards preparing students for the globally complex demands of the 21st century. What we would like to learn from the results of the PTES is how the students in the ES are doing compared with other educational systems and what areas might need to be improved in order to remain competitive. By taking the tests, students help the ES system to find ways to strengthen teaching and learning.

Because the PBTS is designed as a school-level assessment, all results are aggregated to the school level, no student-level results are stored or reported. As such, no student will receive a score report for individual assessment. In other words, the test is a low-stake assessment test.

Notwithstanding the low-stake and anonymous nature of the test, if a parent does not wish the child to take part in the PTES, the PTES School Coordinator will provide the parent with a refusal form in due time.

***31. What data are shared with the outside provider (OECD and Janison)?***

The OSG collated all of the primary sample information from the schools in a single spreadsheet. It contained the necessary data of all students who will be aged between 15y3m and 16y2m at the time of assessment. The data included were the name of the school, code of the student (specifically created for the project), age, gender, Language 1 and Language 2, SWALS status and the number of periods of Mathematics.

It is important to note that no student names have been shared with either Janison or the OECD and the PBTS responses cannot be used to personally identify students.

***THE TEST***

***32. When will the pupils sit the test?***

The test was originally scheduled for 10 March 2022, with a catch-up session on 15 March. However, due to the fact that the number of eligible students exceeds the number of computers available in the schools, instead of fixing one date and time for all schools, each school will conduct the test within a given time window in March 2022, in multiple sessions if necessary. The exact dates will be communicated in due course.

***33. How long will the testing session last?***

The testing is composed of two parts: cognitive assessment of skills in reading, mathematics and science (2 hours) and a student questionnaire on socioeconomic background (40 minutes).

***34. Will the test be paper-based or digital?***

We are going to use the digital version of the test (either on-line or off-line) using the equipment available in the schools.

***35. Is 'Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD) an option for the schools to provide the necessary number of devices?***

No students' devices will be used due to technical difficulties that may result in the failure of the testing.

***36. How will test results be corrected? Will teachers in the European Schools be asked to grade papers?***

Many items will be multiple choice ones: correction of those items will be automated.

Only open questions will require some human intervention. The OSG will look for volunteers, so-called *markers*, who will be properly trained in due course. The necessary number of volunteers is yet to be defined, but they will be recruited at the beginning of 2022.