



School Education Thailand



Australian Government

Department of Education, Skills and Employment

1. Governance and ownership

The Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) are the lead government agencies in the school sector. OBEC supervises basic education provision which includes pre-primary, primary and secondary education. OBEC is also responsible for creating general education policies, work plans, standards, core curricula, mobilising resources, monitoring and evaluation, and teaching innovation.

There are 12 years of schooling following a 6.3.3 model:

- six years of primary schooling (Pratom Suksa)
- three years of lower secondary schooling
- three years of upper secondary schooling (Matayom Suksa).

Education is compulsory from year one until the end of year nine (increased from year six in 2002), which is the completion of lower secondary education. Attending pre-primary or upper secondary schooling is not mandatory.



Approx. age	Grade/Year	Level of education
3		Pre-primary (not compulsory)
4		
5		
6		
7	1	Primary (compulsory) Referred to as 'Pratom Suksa'
8	2	
9	3	
10	4	
11	5	Lower secondary (compulsory) Referred to as 'Matayom Suksa 1,2,3'
12	6	
13	7	
14	8	
15	9	
16	10	Upper secondary (not compulsory) Referred to as 'Matayom Suksa, 4,5,6'
17	11	
18	12	

Although the Thai Government subsidises public school fees, some schools may also charge additional fees for foreign teachers, IT equipment or accident insurance. In addition, private schools can request partial funding from MoE, however, funding will only be allocated on the condition that the private school will not charge tuition fees higher than the maximum rate set by the government. Due to this restriction, some private schools decide not to request government funding.





After the completion of lower secondary education, students can then choose to continue with upper secondary education which consists of Matayom Suksa 4-6 and is more specialised. Categories of government upper secondary schools include general (academic) which leads to university or vocational which leads directly to employment. Comprehensive institutions offer both general and vocational programs. Approximately 83 per cent of year nine students continue on to the upper secondary level, with around 33 per cent enrolled in the vocational colleges, and 50 per cent enrolled in the general education secondary schools.

Admission to most public and private lower and upper secondary schools is by means of an entrance examination set by the school. There is also a government ballot to admit students into nearby, more prestigious public schools. Students who are not successful in the ballot but want to continue with their education may then choose to attend another public school which could be located a far distance away or could be less prestigious.

The Thai Government requires students to take national tests in year three, year six, and year nine to track their literacy and numeracy progress. The entrance exam for upper secondary school is normally held after the exam at the completion of Matayom Suksa 3 (year nine), with students choosing to specialise in the academic stream or the vocational stream.



2. Statistics and trend

According to 2015 government data (the latest available), the Office of the Education Council, MoE, reported that there are approximately 36,000 schools, 8.22 million school students and over 631,000 teachers in Thailand¹. Around 80 per cent of students are enrolled at public schools, while 20 per cent are enrolled in private schools.

Middle-class families tend to prefer sending their children to private schools at the pre-primary and primary school levels as they think it will assist their children with their English proficiency. On the other hand, students prefer to attend public schools for their lower and upper secondary education as they believe this may increase their chances of attending a renowned Thai university.

Among the schools nationwide, OBEC is responsible for 30,816 public schools, with the remainder under the auspices of other government ministries such as the Ministries of Interior, Fine Arts, Sport and Tourism. Some of these schools, such as the College of Dramatic Arts under the Ministry of Culture and the Sports Schools under the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, offer a specialised curriculum in addition to the national curriculum of MoE.

With regard to private schools, in 2015 there were 3,845 private schools in Thailand which operate under the supervision of the Office of the Private Education Commission, including 161 international schools licensed by MoE. The academic year for most international schools follows the northern hemisphere school year from September to June.

Popularity of international schools among Thais

According to the *Education in Thailand 2018* report published by the Office of the Education Council, MoE, the number of international schools in Thailand has risen from 143 schools in 2013 to 182 schools in 2017. There is an increasing trend of establishing new international schools across major provinces in Thailand, particularly in provinces with economic growth and a high number of expatriate workers.

¹ Statistics from the report of Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education. The number is excluding the number of TVET institutions, students and teachers.

Academic year	Number of international schools		
	Bangkok	Other provinces	Total
2013	93	50	143
2014	95	59	154
2015	95	66	161
2016	96	79	175
2017	94	88	182

In Thailand, the quality of both public and private schools is variable, so there is substantial interest in international schools from parents who are eager for their children to have an affordable, 'international' but domestic education. Attending such schools is considered by some to increase a student's chances of competing for places within international higher education. International schools generally follow an international curricula (for example, the International Baccalaureate IB) and many are linked to or affiliated with parent bodies in other countries (e.g. Europe or the United States). The following private schools in Bangkok offer a similar format to the Australian curricula in their school system:

- St Mark International School – follows the Victorian curriculum
- The International Prep Academy – follows the New South Wales curriculum.

Change in demographic – the downward trend of Thai student number

In contrast to the growing demand for high quality school education and the growing number of new international schools, Thailand's aging population has become a national pressing issue. Statistics from the National Statistical Office shows a declining trend in the Thai population aged between 15 to 24 years. During the past 10 years (2007 to 2017), the number of Thais aged between 15 to 24 has decreased by 5.31 per cent, from 9,435,378 to 8,959,966. It will be a challenge for the Thai Government and international school executives to tackle the downward trend of Thai student enrolments resulting from the population decrease.

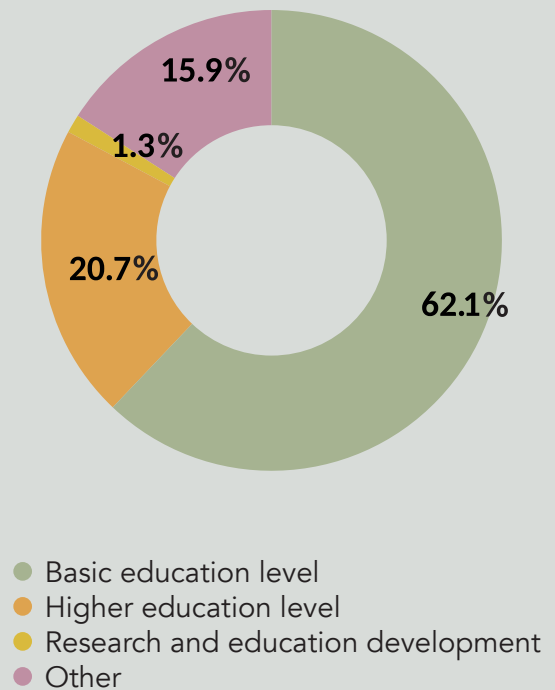
3. Finance

According to the *Education in Thailand 2018* report, 18.1 per cent (523,569.4 million THB) of the government budget, or 3.3 per cent of the GDP rate, was allocated to the education sector in the 2018 financial year. Most of this budget was used for the basic education level (pre-primary, primary and secondary level), followed by the higher education level.

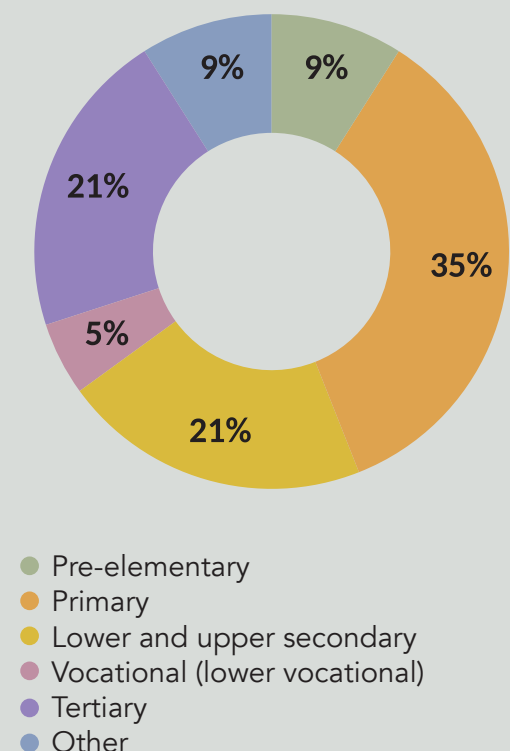
An online article by Thailand’s Equitable Education Fund (EEF)² illustrates that Thailand spends a large amount of its national budget in supporting education, compared to other countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) group.

The report from the EEF offers more analysis on the expenditure of Thailand’s education budget. In 2016, the primary sector had the largest allocation at 35 per cent, followed by the higher education sector at 21 per cent. Despite the relatively large national budget, Thai academics have criticised the effectiveness of MoE’s budget management. During 2014–2016, 74 per cent of MoE’s budget was spent on wages for teachers and MoE staff, leaving less funds available for project implementation and school operations.

MoE budget allocation (2018)



Expenditure on different Thai education sectors (2016)



² <https://www.eef.or.th/บัญชีรายจ่ายการศึกษา>

4. School policy and system update

4.1. Three urgent issues: education gap, teacher quality and lack of 21st century skills and competence

In July 2019, Mr Nataphol Teepsuwan, Thailand's newly appointed Minister of Education, gave an interview to the *Bangkok Post* newspaper highlighting three key issues that are persistent in Thailand and require urgent attention. These three priority areas are:

1. Disparity between students

Many schools in rural areas still struggle with a lack of funding and resources, lack of qualified and experienced teachers, and a lack of books and modern education technology.

2. The quality of teachers

The quality of the 400,000 teachers nationwide and improving their working conditions will need to be tackled.

3. Lack of 21st century skills and competence of Thai students

As the world rapidly moves towards a digital era, schools need to nurture the essential skills of the 21st century. These skills are:

- The 4Cs: Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity
- Digital Literacy
- STEM Education including coding skills.



4.2. Government strategy in tackling the education issues

Since coming to office, Thailand's Minister of Education has announced innovative strategies to tackle the three urgent priority areas:

- **Incorporating technology in the classroom**

The effective use of technology to improve the quality of education.

- **Reducing the number of small schools**

The number of students is declining due to the lower birth rate in Thailand. As a result, the number of schools must be adjusted in response to the declining youth population. In addition, the country is struggling with a severe teacher shortage and the quality of instruction, especially in smaller rural schools. In these schools, one teacher might be responsible for teaching all subject areas and this can lead to a lower reading proficiency in students. Despite public criticism, MoE plans to merge schools with less than 60 students with larger schools, starting from 2021.

- **Ease the burden of teachers by reducing unnecessary workloads**

The Minister believes that having quality teachers is the most important factor in ensuring student success. To assist with this, the Minister plans to improve the living quality of teachers and ensure that they have access to all necessary resources required for teaching.

- **Introduction of computer coding classes in schools**

MoE plans to make coding classes mandatory for all students, starting from the pre-primary and primary levels. In 2020, Moe plans to start implementing these coding classes into a few pilot schools as not all schools are ready to offer this subject due to a lack of teaching staff and computing resources.





4.3. English proficiency: an ongoing issue for Thailand

In addition to Thailand's three urgent priority areas, English proficiency is an ongoing issue which the Thai Government has struggled to resolve. In November 2019, Thai media outlets reported on the outcome of the annual English Proficiency Index, conducted by the global education company EF Education First³, in which Thailand's English proficiency fell for the third consecutive year. Thailand ranked 74th among 100 participating countries with a score of 47.62, which is considered "very low" English proficiency.

Due to the poor outcome of this English proficiency test, MoE plans to introduce a bilingual education program in the 2021 fiscal year, in approximately 2,000 public schools nationwide. To enhance the English proficiency among Thai school students, three different English programs will be offered, which are:

- 1. International Program (IP):** using an international curriculum and foreign teachers
- 2. Intensive English Program (IEP):** organising daily intensive English classes. The goal is for Thai students to be able to communicate proficiently in English
- 3. General English Program:** teaching the four basic English language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) to all Thai students from a young age. MoE plans to recruit English teachers who participated in the "English Boot Camp" project (a recent intensive English training program offered by MoE and the British Council) to teach students across the country without additional costs to parents.

Given the high demand for improving the calibre of English teachers in Thailand, there are opportunities for Australia to collaborate with Thailand in this area and scope out other potential market opportunities.

³ <https://www.ef.edu/epi/>

Resources

Education in Thailand 2018 report, the Office of the Education Council, MoE
<https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/1757334/lets-start-coding>
<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1714744/nathapol-to-tackle-quality-gap-and-digitization>
<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1763869/hunt-for-savings-starts-on-ground>
<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1727671/obec-schools-plan-to-teach-coding>
<https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1826134/rocky-road-to-academic-excellence>
<https://www.bangkokbiznews.com/news/detail/854416>
<http://www.en.moe.go.th/enMoe2017/index.php/articles/471-let-s-start-coding>
<https://www.eef.or.th/บัญชีรายชื่อการศึกษา/>
<https://www.ef.edu/epi/>





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