

# NATIONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES 2018-19

Learning outcomes in primary school (Grades 2 and 5), lower secondary school (Grade 8) and upper secondary school (Grades 10 and 13)

*The INVALSI 2019 test results at a glance*

Learning outcomes  
Academic Year 2018-19

## The INVALSI 2019 tests

Legislative Decree no. 62 of 13 April 2017 introduced important **changes** in the way students are assessed, with implications also for the INVALSI tests and how these are connected to the final State examinations at the end of primary and secondary education. For the first time in the history of Italian school, an external standardised test carried out entirely *online* was introduced, including in the last year of upper secondary school.

This year also sees the completion of the system for assessing students' **English** language "receptive skills" (**listening** and **reading**). At three key moments of their schooling career – at the end of primary school (Grade 5), at the end of lower secondary school (Grade 8) and at the end of upper secondary school (Grade 13) – **all** Italian school students have the opportunity to test their English skills in relation to the internationally recognised criteria of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This is a very important innovation, from different points of view. Firstly, anchoring to the CEFR reinforces the importance of focusing on the communicative aspects of language, leading to the acquisition of skills that are key for taking an active part in today's society. In addition, schools, universities and families can have accurate information about the levels of English learning achieved by students regardless of their socio-economic background.

For the first time, a standardised test was introduced also at the **end of upper secondary school**. The test is linked to the State examination but without a direct impact on students' final marks. The INVALSI test takes place in March, is online and covers three disciplines: Italian, Mathematics and English (reading and listening). For Italian and Mathematics, the INVALSI test results are expressed in the form of a qualitative descriptor over an increasing 5-point achievement scale (from level 1 to level 5), while for English the CEFR levels are used. This innovation is important because test results are presented in terms of the skills attained by an individual student, with an explicit description of what the student can do in relation to the goals prescribed by the National Indications/Guidelines. Clearly, this solution represents a form of **assurance** for the entire system: it allows schools, students, families, universities and anyone interested to know in a direct and comparable way what skill level is attained by each student. Moreover, this takes place without interfering with the evaluation given by the student's school, which must consider elements that are not observable through a standardized test.

The INVALSI 2019 tests involved more than **1,100,000** primary school students (Grades 2 and 5), about **555,000** lower secondary school students (Grade 8), about **525,000** second-year upper secondary school students in (Grade 10), and about **475,000** final-year upper secondary school students (Grade 13).

The level of participation was particularly high for upper secondary school students. For Grade 10, the increase in participation recorded in 2018 was confirmed and consolidated. In 2019, more than 92.0% of these students took part in the INVALSI tests. Even more encouraging is the participation rate of students in the final year of secondary school (Grade 13). Their participation was a high **96.4%**. This result is even more interesting if we consider that the percentage of students admitted to the final state examination at the end of secondary education was 96.3% in 2019.

## The INVALSI computer-based tests (CBT)

As of 2018, all INVALSI tests in lower and upper secondary schools take place on the computer and *online*. Students underwent over 5,000,000 CBT tests over a period of almost three months, from March to May.

This year as well, the INVALSI CBT tests were carried out without particular difficulties, thanks also to innovations introduced following the experience gained last year. New challenges are opening up to further improve and to make all operations leaner and easier, but the path is now clear and defined.

The success of the operation was made possible in great part thanks to the **choral and generous effort of all schools in the country** which again this year deployed their best energies to ensure the final outcome of the operation. This is a major success story and confirmation for the Italian school system, because the efforts made have effects that last long after the INVALSI tests have taken place: the schools inherit equipment, technology and experience that are essential to develop students' IT skills.

CBT tests are not only a technological innovation, but they also determine a **general change in the structure of the tests**. The tests are assembled in different versions for each subject, maintaining the same level of difficulty and the same criteria of composition (number and type of questions, contents, topics, etc.). This solution allows for tests to take place on different days and according to flexible organizational methods decided by the schools. As is appropriate and convenient, the schools can divide the classes into several shifts, thus getting out of the “one student – one computer” logic.

## Main results

### ***Small differences in primary school can grow into significant gaps***

The test results in **primary schools** are very similar in all regions of the country and they are rarely statistically significant. Nevertheless, some indications emerge already, pointing at problematic aspects that contribute to determine very different outcomes across regions and across schools later, at the secondary level.

- For **Italian**, the **mean test results** at **Grade 2** are very similar in the entire country. For **Mathematics** on the other hand, values lower than the national average are found in some regions of the South (Campania and Sardinia), a trend that becomes more evident in subsequent school grades.
- At **Grade 5**, the differences in mean test results increase, with a polarization of results between the central-northern and southern regions. In some regions of the South (in particular Campania, Calabria, Sicily) there is a high number of students with very low achievement levels, especially in **Mathematics**.
- The Italian primary school students **do well** in the **English** tests. At **Grade 5**, **88.3%** of students reach the prescribed A1 level of the CEFR in the *reading* test and **84.0%** of students reach the prescribed A1 level of the CEFR in the *listening* test. In the North and Centre, about 90% of students reach level A1 in *reading*, versus about 85% in the South. In *listening*, instead, the students who reach level A1 are about 87% in the North and in the Centre, versus about 78% in the South.
- Compared to 2018, there has been an **appreciable improvement**, especially in the **Grade 5 listening** test and in particular in the southern regions. Probably, the introduction of English tests at the end of primary education has favoured a greater attention to *listening* than in the past.
- As of primary school, in **Italian, English** and even more so in **Mathematics** there are differences in results *between* schools and *between* classes in the southern regions. This means that the primary school in the South has more difficulty in guaranteeing **equal opportunities** to all, with obvious negative effects on subsequent grades.

### ***More reliable data for clearer information***

The results of the CBT tests for the **third year of upper secondary school** (Grade 8) are provided in the form of **increasing competence levels** (from 1 to 5 for Italian and Mathematics and from pre-A1 to A2 for English). For Italian and Mathematics, level 3 can be considered adequate in terms of the goals prescribed by the National Indications/Guidelines. For English, the National Guidelines explicitly indicate that students should attain the A2 level at the end of lower secondary school.

- For the country as a whole, the proportion of students who obtain **adequate or higher results** are as follows:
  - Italian: 65.60% (+0.03% compared to 2018)
  - Mathematics: 61.33% (+1.42% compared to 2018)
  - English-*reading* (A2): 77.58% (+3.68% compared to 2018)
  - English-*listening* (A2): 59.94% (+3.67% compared to 2018)
- Compared to 2018, there is a **slight improvement** of overall results. The most important and positive aspect, however, is that the improvement is observed **especially in the South** and for **weaker students**.
- In some regions of the South (in particular Campania, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia), there is a greater number of students with very low levels of achievement, especially in Mathematics and English, with peaks of 55-60% of the Grade 8 school population below the goals set by the National Indications/Guidelines.

- There is strong evidence of **educational inequality** in the southern regions, both in terms of lesser ability of the school system to mitigate the effect of socio-economic and cultural differences and in terms of differences *across* schools and *across* classes.
- The substantial **elimination of cheating** is confirmed also in 2019. This is important not only because it provides better quality data and information, but also because it translates into an opportunity to foster respect for the rules – a significant aspect with great pedagogical value.

### **Results in upper secondary school**

The INVALSI tests for **upper secondary school** are now also computer-based. The tested subjects are Italian and Mathematics for the second year (Grade 10) and Italian, Mathematics and English (listening and reading) for the last year (Grade 13).

#### **Second year of upper secondary school (Grade 10):**

- The participation of **grade 10** students was slightly higher than in 2018 (+0.2%), consolidating the improvement observed with the transition to CBT tests as of 2018.
- The considerable **differences between regions and courses of study** confirm what is observed already at Grade 8 and anticipate what is observed even more acutely at Grade 13.

#### **Last year of upper secondary school (Grade 13):**

- The tests are designed to provide results on a **single scale** for Italian, Mathematics and English, with respect to the goals set for the end of secondary education by the National Indications/Guidelines. Regardless of the course of study attended, the tests are designed in such a way as to provide each student with the opportunity to achieve the highest results.
- For the country as a whole, the proportion of students who obtain **adequate or higher results** are as follows:
  - Italian: 65.4%
  - Mathematics: 58.3%
  - English-reading (B2): 51.8%
  - English-listening (B2): 35.0%
- In some regions of the South (in particular Campania, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia) there is a **greater number** of students with **very low levels of achievement**, especially in Mathematics and English.
- At the national level, students who achieve **very low results in Italian** are about 13% of the total, but this proportion exceeds 20% in Campania, Basilicata and Sicily, and reaches a high 25% in Calabria.
- In the **reading** test, 51.8% of Italian school students reach level **B2**. On the other hand, 10.6% **do not reach level B1**, i.e. they have a very low level of competence after 13 years of schooling. In Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia, the percentage of pupils reaching B2 falls to 31.0%, 34.8% and 34.1% respectively. The gap versus the national figure is even greater for the percentage of very low achievers. The percentages of students who do not reach level B1 are: Calabria 21.7%, Sicily 18.2% and Sardinia 20.0%.
- In the **listening** test, only 35.0% of Italian school students reach level **B2** (the target prescribed for the end of upper secondary school). Moreover, 25.2% i.e. one student out of four **does not reach level B1**, i.e. they have a low level of competence after 13 years of school. In Campania, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia, the percentage of students reaching B2 falls to 19.9%, 14.6%, 14.8% and 20.7% respectively – compared with 49.3% in Veneto. The gap versus the national figure is even greater for the percentage of very low achievers (those who do not reach level B1). The percentages of students who do not reach level B1 are: Campania 41.7%, Calabria 47.7%, Sicily 46.7% and Sardinia 40.8% – compared to 10.9% in Veneto.
- There is a considerable difference between the results of the *reading* test and those of the *listening* test. These results suggest a prevalence of teaching practices oriented towards written texts. With the exception of the autonomous provinces and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the percentage of students at **level B1** of the CEFR does not differ much across regions. On the other hand, there are **great differences** in the percentages of students who **do not reach B1** or those who **reach B2** (the target set for all courses of study by the National indications/Guidelines).