Student progress through the education system is being studied, together with the effectiveness or specific contribution of individual secondary schools in Iceland. School effectiveness is being studied from different angles, which all relate to the individual. These are student graduation and dropout patterns, mobility, and student progress at tertiary level.

The conceptual frame for the efficiency studies requires that we take into account the composition of the student body entering the school, the professional background of the teachers, the teachers–pupil ratio, and characteristics of the school organisation; we will also study both the study cultures among the students and the mode of teaching in the school; we will follow the students’ progress, inter alia their drop-out patterns (see Figure 1).

The study is a longitudinal study, where we trace the progress of a number of cohorts, starting in secondary education during 2002-2007 and follow them through to 2009. The basic data is the student registry compiled by the Statistics Iceland. Secondly, we use the results of the standardised tests at the end of the compulsory system (in 10th grade, age 16). Thirdly we presented questionnaires to students and staff in secondary education about their attitudes to learning and the schools. Fourthly we presented a questionnaire to the 10th grade students in 2007.

Figure 1. Multilevel conceptual framework for school effectiveness (based on Rumberger & Parlardy, 2005).

A central question is to what extent we can trace the differential effects of student progress to differences in the secondary schools. Furthermore, to the extent that the schools are involved, what factors are seen to be of most relevance in this context.