

Primary School in Germany

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School education in Germany is obligatory, and general requirements to it are enshrined in law.

Each of the sixteen federal lands has its own Education law, but they differ mainly in terms of the curriculum content and teaching methods. The structure of education throughout Germany is approximately the same (see the scheme below).

School type	Age range	Years	Students	Outcome/Qualifications
Primary school	6-10	1-4	Comprehensive, mixed abilities	Transition to secondary school
Secondary schools			Teachers provide recommendations and parents decide upon a secondary school for their kid	
Hauptschule (Intermediate period for choice and selection)	11-12	5-6	Trial stage	Transition to a suitable secondary school
	11-16	5-9	Preparing for vocational training	Leading to 3-year apprenticeship or secondary vocational school
Werkrealschule	11-17	5-10		Leading to 2-3 year apprenticeship, to a secondary vocational, general schools or attaining a high school diploma
Realschule	11-17	5-10		Leading to 2-3 year apprenticeship, secondary vocational, general schools or attaining a high school diploma
Comprehensive secondary school	11-18/19	5-10 (11-12)	For mixed abilities	Various: from apprenticeship to studying at university
Technical School/College	14-18/19	9-12/13	A range of courses with varied duration for the practical-minded	Various: from apprenticeship to studying at university/college
Sonderschulen	6-17	1-17	Special needs	Several options

What Is Primary Education in Germany Like?

The first stage of school education in Germany is primary. The country has about 16,000 municipal and about 6,000 private primary schools. All the private schools function with governmental support. School fees are defined by the schools themselves, based on the parents' income and vary from 100 to 800 euros per month.

In primary school children study from the first up to the fourth grade. The admission age starts at 6. Out of the 2.8 million primary school children, about one third speak Turkish, Greek, Russian, Arabic and other languages as native.

One year prior to school, all future first-graders have to pass an interview to check their readiness for in-school training. After the interview parents receive recommendations from a development therapist based on the outcomes of the interview. Also a year prior to school, kids pass a checkup with a pediatrician and a psychologist. As a follow-up to both checkups (at the local school or health department) parents are given recommendations on the choice of a school, consulting a speech or development therapist, etc.

Primary School Curriculum

Primary school subjects include literacy, math, science, a foreign language, religion, and computer skills. However, details of the curriculum are defined by the land authorities, so they may vary across Germany. Parents may choose to replace religion classes with classes of ethics, if available. Materials and equipment are provided by the schools, although parents may contribute to the expenses.

In primary school, children are taught to write essays, do simple math operations, basics of biology and natural science, rules of road safety, swimming, rules of behavior at outdoor picnics. Learning of the German language includes writing, spelling, reading, discussion upon reading. The level of proficiency in German is assessed and scored by dictation and essay.

Learning of math includes four arithmetic actions with numbers and values; representation of objects with numbers and values; solving simple tasks; understanding of the simplest shapes (symmetric figures, the cube, square, etc.).



The School Day in Germany

Traditionally, the German school day starts at 8:00 a.m. and finishes at 1:00 or 2:00 p.m., which is often still the case. But recently, some schools in Germany have started to offer a full day of school including hours for homework and extracurricular activities.

A school day includes:

- 4 classes (Grade 1),
- 4-5 classes (Grades 2-3)
- 5-6 classes (Grade 4).

The curriculum also includes doing homework with the help of a teacher (40 minutes for Grades 1-2 and 50 minutes for Grades 3-4). Giving homework for weekends is legally prohibited: on Friday school children leave home without homework for Monday.

If a child coming to the first grade does not yet speak German sufficiently, they have additional classes of German. Any gaps detected during studying in Grades 1-2 are also compensated with additional classes in motor functions, math and other subjects (i.e. sports). Every primary school has daycare groups. Children can stay there until 4-5 p.m. These groups also function on holidays.

The daycare groups are fee-paying (the fee also depends on the parents' income, but if parents live on welfare, they are released from payment). In a daycare group, children have lunch and snacks and can attend various free clubs and developing classes.



Scoring System

School children start to receive scores in the third and fourth grades. Twice a year a school child receives a report card with their subject scores from 1 to 6.

- 1 (very good)
- 2 (good)
- 3 (satisfactory)
- 4 (adequate)
- 5 (poor)
- 6 (very poor)

Constant repetition and in-depth understanding of subject matters are a must for classes. Written papers with scores are done from the third grade.

At the end of primary school there is assessment in the German language and math, as well as general development, ability and performance.

After the assessment, school children receive their report cards with the recommendations on the further (secondary) type of school. The recommendations are not mandatory, and the final choice of school is up to parents.

All lands are currently expanding their provision of education and care for children outside lesson time. A growing number of primary schools have introduced fixed

opening hours (approximately 7.30 a.m. to 1.00/2.00 p.m. depending on local conditions) so that parents can be sure their children are cared for even outside compulsory lessons. This involves amended school and teaching concepts, and offering activities which complement lessons and are run by non-school bodies. The children are looked after, amongst others, by qualified employees and part-time staff who as a rule are paid by the maintaining bodies providing the care, which also cover the material costs.

