

Germany's school system



Once your children are six years old, they are required to go to school, since school attendance is compulsory in Germany. Most German schools are run by the state and there is no charge for your children to attend. In addition, of course, there are private and international schools, which charge fees.

The individual states are responsible for education policy. This means that the school system will to some extent depend on the region where you and your family are living. Children do not always have the same curriculum in every state, and textbooks may differ as well. Individual states also have different types of schools. Basically, however, the German school system is structured as follows:

Grundschule (primary school): Normally, six-year-olds begin their school careers at primary school, which covers the first four grades. Only in Berlin and Brandenburg does primary school continue to the sixth grade. At the end of primary school, you and your child's teachers will decide, depending on your child's performance, which secondary school your child will attend.

Weiterführende Schulen (secondary schools) - the most common types are:

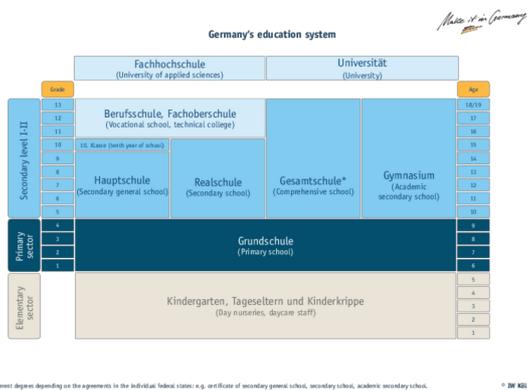
- Hauptschule (secondary general school for grades five through nine or ten)
- Realschule (more practical secondary school for grades five through ten)
- Gymnasium (more academic secondary school for grades five through twelve/thirteen)
- Gesamtschule (comprehensive school for grades five through twelve/thirteen)

Hauptschule and Realschule: Young people who have successfully completed the Hauptschule or Realschule are eligible for vocational training, or can transfer to the sixth form / senior high at a Gymnasium or Gesamtschule.

Gesamtschule: Combines the Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium and offers an alternative to the tripartite school system.

Gymnasium: At the end of the 12th or 13th grade, students take examinations known as the Abitur and if successful graduate from high school with a certificate of advanced secondary education entitling them to study at a university or at a university of applied sciences. However, they may also choose to undergo **vocational training** and enter the job market directly.

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School enrolment of children and teenagers newly arrived from abroad

If your children are of school age when they enter Germany you will no doubt be wondering how they can be found a place in a school. This is decided by the school management in consultation with the local education authority. As a general rule, children who have recently entered the country and due to their lack of German are not able to attend regular school lessons will be offered special trial lessons instead. The goal is to integrate them as soon as possible into regular school classes.

How to recognise a good school

As a rule you are free to decide which of the schools in your city your child should attend. So it is a good idea to take a look at a few schools. One sign of a good school is that it not only provides high-quality instruction, but also offers extracurricular activities such as theatre, sports, language and music clubs, and school trips. A good school also encourages parent involvement. In addition to finding out whether the school has a place for your child, you should also ask about extracurricular options. If your children are not yet fluent in German, make sure that the school offers German classes, usually referred to as "German as a foreign language". Here the teachers will make sure that your child understands the lessons and can keep up with the curriculum.

Information on the web

Association of German International Schools

Federation of international schools in Germany

Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Federal States (KMK)

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