

THEMATIC PROBE. Primary Education: an International Perspective

Country Description: Germany

This country description was compiled from the *INCA* Archive (www.inca.org.uk).

Note: In Germany, overall responsibility for education lies with the individual regions (*Länder*), rather than with national government. The information which follows aims to provide a general overview, taking account of some of the variations between *Länder*.

1. Organisation of school phases=

How are the early years and primary phases organised? (3-5yrs? 5-11yrs?)

Compulsory education in Germany lasts from age six to 18/19 years. Full-time attendance is compulsory either from age six to age 15 (nine years) or to age 16 (ten years) (depending on the *Land*). Attendance, at least on a part-time basis, then usually remains compulsory for a further three years (ages 15/16 to 18/19.)

Kindergarten is the traditional form of institutionalised pre-compulsory education for children between the ages of three and six. In addition to *Kindergärten*, some *Länder* provide preparatory classes (*Vorklassen* or *Vorschulklassen*) for children aged five to six years, whose parents wish to provide them with special assistance and preparation for primary school (*Grundschule*).

Compulsory primary education in the *Grundschule* begins at age six and usually lasts for four years (children aged six to 10 years). However, in the *Länder* of Berlin and Brandenburg, compulsory primary education caters for Years 1 to 6 of compulsory education, that is for six- to 12-year-olds.

Special institutions (*Schulkindergärten*, *Vorklassen*, *Vorschulklassen*, *Vorbereitungsklassen*, *Förderklassen* - depending on the *Land*) (or, in some *Länder*, special classes in the first Year of the *Grundschule*) have been established for children who have reached compulsory school age, but whose level of development does not yet allow them to cope with *Grundschule*. Legislation enables the school authorities to require such children to attend. Like the pre-compulsory *Vorklassen* for five-year-olds (see above), these institutions have organisational links to the *Grundschule* and aim to achieve a readiness for school enrolment by channelling the child's natural urge to play and engage in activity without anticipating the subject matter taught at school. The decision on deferment of six-year-olds to *Vorklassen* or similar is taken by the relevant *Grundschule* on the basis of an educational and psychological assessment and the school doctor's report. Where doubts still remain at the end of the period of deferment as to the child's suitability to attend a general school, the school's supervisory authority decides whether he or she should be required to attend a special school (*Sonderschule*).

	Pre-compulsory <i>Kindergarten</i>	Compulsory primary school (<i>Grundschule</i>)
Age range in most <i>Länder</i>	3-6	6-10
Age range in some <i>Länder</i>	3-6	6-12

What are the points of transfer between phases?

	Pre-compulsory <i>Kindergarten</i>	Compulsory primary level education in the <i>Grundschule</i>	Compulsory lower secondary education
Age range in most <i>Länder</i>	3-6	6-10	10-15/16
Age range in some <i>Länder</i>	3-6	6-12	12-15/16

2. Locus of control

What degree of control over curriculum content and other aspects of primary schools exists at the national, regional, local and/or school level?

General

In accordance with the Constitution, the school system and its supervision, educational legislation, and administration of the education system are primarily the responsibility of the *Länder* Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs. These regional Ministries have ultimate authority for the control and administration of institutions providing general and vocational education, such as schools and institutes of higher or adult and continuing education.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research is responsible only for policy coordination and legislation regarding out-of-school vocational training and continuing education, training assistance, the general principles of the higher education system and the expansion and construction of institutions of higher education. There is, however, a regularly amended agreement between the *Länder*, which guarantees a common basic structure of the school system in Germany. Among others, the agreement covers the duration of compulsory schooling, key elements of the curriculum, the grading/marking of school work and the designation and organisation of the various types of educational institutions. The *Länder* also generally recognise each other's school examinations and certificates. The instrument for cooperation in education between the *Länder* governments is the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* of the

Federal Republic of Germany (*Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*).

At local level, the administration of schools is usually divided into three levels. The top level is the *Land* Ministry of Education; the middle level is the *Schulaufsichtsbehörden* (*Land* authorities responsible for school inspection) or the *Oberschulämter* (the senior education offices); and, at the third/lower level, are the *Schulämter* (the education offices). As a general rule, the *Oberschulämter* are responsible for the monitoring and supervision of some types of secondary school; the *Schulaufsichtsbehörden* are responsible for vocational schools; and the *Schulämter* for primary schools (*Grundschulen*), some secondary schools and special schools.

Curriculum

There is no national curriculum in Germany. The Ministries of Education of the individual regional authorities (the *Länder*) develop their own region-wide curricula, with which schools must comply. These are usually developed in special curriculum planning commissions (committees) by teachers and headteachers, who are assisted by other specialists such as representatives of the school (administrative) authorities and school research institutes in the appropriate *Land* and, to a lesser extent, by subject specialists from institutions of higher education.

Once curriculum guidelines are formulated, headteachers are responsible for ensuring that these are implemented in their respective schools. The curriculum guidelines published by the various *Länder* are usually intended to be general enough in their formulation to allow individual teachers the necessary pedagogical freedom. Subject teachers in individual educational establishments, for example, usually collectively determine a general teaching method for the curriculum set by the Ministry, and a format for assessment.

Are there any shifts in the distribution of control between these different levels? (Is it possible to assign percentages to each level, to reflect circumstances in each country?)

In 2002, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Culture of the 16 German *Länder* agreed to the principle of common educational standards. Such standards already existed to some extent for the end of lower secondary and upper secondary leaving examinations. The recent agreement could mean that common educational standards are set for German, mathematics, science and the first foreign language (usually English) for students in each year group throughout education in Germany; that guidelines for what a student should know in each year of education could be drawn up; and that testing could be carried out at two- to three-yearly intervals. Such standardised tests would be used to evaluate ability and performance and could assist in developing curricula. The impetus for this new wave of cooperation was Germany's performance in the first round of PISA testing.

At what intervals is the curriculum reviewed? (eg are there established review cycles?)

Individual *Länder* Ministries of Education are responsible for curriculum review. School development and educational policy decisions play an important part in influencing *Länder* to update curricula. However, there are no established intervals for regular review. The review process and procedures vary considerably from one *Land* to another.

3. Curriculum content

What does the statutory curriculum consist of?

In most of the *Länder* of the Federal Republic of Germany, the core primary level curriculum comprises:

- German;
- mathematics;
- social studies (taught as *Sachunterricht* - factual education - at primary level, see below);
- history (taught as *Sachunterricht* - factual education - at primary level, see below);
- geography (taught as *Sachunterricht* - factual education - at primary level, see below);
- biology (taught as part of science, which is taught as *Sachunterricht* - factual education - at primary level, see below);
- physics (taught as part of science, which is taught as *Sachunterricht* - factual education - at primary level, see below);
- chemistry (taught as part of science, which is taught as *Sachunterricht* - factual education - at primary level, see below);
- art;
- music;
- sport; and
- religious education (see below).

Sachunterricht

Sachunterricht - factual education - is taught as a specific interdisciplinary subject at primary level. This provides an introduction to subjects such as economics, social studies, history, geography, science (biology, physics, chemistry etc) and technology, which students will encounter as separate subjects later in their school life. As an example, German students have no specific organised science education until Year 5 (age 10-11). However, *Sachunterricht*, often includes practical or applied science problems, such as 'how does a light bulb work?' or 'why do leaves turn brown in autumn?'

**What other aspects of the curriculum/teaching in schools are statutory?
Are time allocations for subjects statutory?**

Religious education

In accordance with the German Constitution, religious instruction should be part of the curriculum in public sector schools (except those which are non-denominational), and should be provided in accordance with the doctrine of the religious community concerned. These stipulations do not apply, however, in the *Länder* of Bremen and Berlin, where different regulations had already been specified by a *Land* law dated 1 January 1949, that is prior to promulgation of the federal Constitution. Brandenburg also makes use of this legal provision, whilst conceding to churches and religious communities the right to teach students according to their denomination on school premises. The Constitution further stipulates that parents of primary age children have the right to decide whether their child should receive religious instruction. Religious education in Germany is either Protestant, Catholic or secular. Recently the *Land* of Berlin also introduced the study of Islam as an option. Where children do not participate in religious education, they are usually taught 'ethics' as an alternative.

Foreign languages

The rules governing foreign language teaching at primary level vary between the *Länder*. Where introduced, the study of foreign languages usually begins in Year 3 (students aged eight onwards), and priority is on the oral language and learning through play, with very limited teaching of reading and writing, and no assessment or grades.

In September 2001, the *Land* of Baden-Württemberg began to introduce foreign language teaching to children in Year 1 (from age six). Additional staff are being employed for this purpose and the aim is that the *Land's* 2,500 primary schools will all offer modern languages education to Year 1 children from 2004. It is intended that teaching in Years 1 and 2 will involve listening, speaking and aural comprehension. Reading and writing will be taught from Year 3.

This move towards early foreign language teaching has been spurred on by the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, who has advocated that English should be taught as an "obligatory second language" from the first years of school.

Where modern foreign languages are introduced, English is the language most often chosen for study. French is the second most popular selection.

Are there statutory timings for the length of the school day/week?

In the *Grundschule*, the number of weekly class hours increases at rates which vary, depending on the *Land*, from 17-23 hours in Year 1 (children aged six to seven) to 23-27 hours each week in Year 4 (aged nine-10). One lesson usually comprises 45 minutes. Teaching takes place over five or six days a week, Monday to Friday or Saturday, in the morning. As a rule, in *Länder* with a six-day school week, there are two Saturdays each month on which no lessons take place. The total number of weekly lessons remains the same with a five- or six-day week. With a five-day school week, teaching usually takes place on 188 days a year on average and, in the case of a

six-day week, the number of days on which lessons are taught increases to around 208.

Although the half-day school (mornings only) is the traditional form of teaching in Germany, there are some all-day schools (*Ganztagsschulen*). Until recently such schools were the exception and most *Länder* did not plan any extensive expansion of this school form. However, in a bid to raise standards nationwide (following Germany's results in the first round of PISA), government funding has recently been provided to set up more than 10,000 all-day/full-day schools by 2007.

What changes have there been to the statutory/non-statutory elements of the curriculum?

See 'foreign languages' above in addition.

A recent agreement of the Ministers of Education of the 16 German *Länder* will mean that, from September 2006, all children in primary education will begin to study a foreign language from Year 3, aged eight onwards. Most *Länder* will add additional hours to the primary timetable (around two) to fit a foreign language into the curriculum. Specialist language staff may be employed by some schools, but increasingly existing primary school teachers are being requested to train so that they can offer a language in addition.

What government/other initiatives have been introduced? What has been their impact?

See above for information on common educational standards and all-day schools following Germany's results in the first round of PISA.

What other trends are emerging in curriculum development? (eg new subjects/areas of learning being introduced)

In their "recommendations for skills to be acquired in primary education", the Ministers of the 16 German *Länder* emphasise that primary education should provide children with knowledge and skills for later life. Particular emphasis is placed on:

- factual learning to prepare children for everyday life;
- the mastery of the German language (literacy);
- mathematics (numeracy);
- developing children's creative ability;
- developing children's capacity for independent learning, critical thinking and learning by experience;
- an introduction to a foreign language; and
- providing children with the beginnings of an education in their own culture, in the European dimension and a knowledge of the world.

In addition, subjects such as health education and environmental studies, media education, and use of technology are increasingly finding their way into the primary level curriculum.

What other levers may be having an impact on curriculum content? (eg international studies: PIRLS, IEA, PISA, TIMSS)

See above for information regarding the impact of PISA.

4. Organisation of the curriculum

What are the common features of curriculum organisation in the primary phase? (single subjects? planning subjects as 'topics'?)

How are subjects labelled?

What examples are there of 'areas' rather than subjects?

What examples are there of clusters of subjects (eg Humanities, made up of geography and history) being brought together?

In primary level education in Germany, there is one main cluster of subjects - *Sachunterricht*, factual education, which is taught alongside German, mathematics, art, music, physical education (sport) and religious education. These latter subjects are usually taught as separate, individual subjects, whereas *Sachunterricht* provides an introduction to subjects such as economics, social studies, history, geography, science (biology, physics, chemistry), and technology, which students will encounter as separate subjects later in their school life.

In addition, several of the subject areas in the primary curriculum, such as German, *Sachunterricht*, drama, music, art and handicrafts are often brought together to produce lively and varied work on specific topics.

From Year 3 (aged eight) onwards, children increasingly encounter subject teachers, which helps them prepare for the transition to compulsory lower secondary school where subject teachers are the rule. Teaching in the *Grundschule* therefore takes place both in lessons concentrating on a specific subject area and in cross-disciplinary classes.

What are the common features of timetabling? (eg weekly lessons in each subject, English and mathematics taught daily)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

5. Assessment

What is the purpose, nature and scale of assessment? (eg end of phase assessment, statutory, published test results, optional, national, local, timed tests, teacher-assessment)

Although there is no system of national assessment in Germany (due to devolved responsibility to *Land* level), and no form of standardised achievement test or assessment at the *Land* level (to compare student performance either in specific subjects or age groups), assessment is a common feature of classroom life.

There is a national six-point marking system (grades 1 to 6, where 1 is high, as indicated below) to monitor student achievement. This has been agreed by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the 16 *Länder*.

National grading system

Mark		
1	<i>Sehr gut</i> (very good)	Given for a performance which is well above the required standard.
2	<i>Gut</i> (good)	Fully meets the required standard.
3	<i>Befriedigend</i> (satisfactory)	Generally meets the required standard.
4	<i>Ausreichend</i> (adequate)	Shows deficiencies but, on the whole, still meets the required standard.
5	<i>Mangelhaft</i> (poor)	Given when a performance does not meet the required standard, but suggests that the basic knowledge is there and that the deficiencies could be made up in a reasonable period of time.
6	<i>Ungenügend</i> (very poor/unsatisfactory)	Performance does not meet the required standard. Basic skills are so incomplete that the deficiencies could not be made up in a reasonable period of time

Performance in all school years is assessed on the basis of ongoing observation of learning processes and applying oral, written and subject-based learning checks. Assessment covers all the work performed by the student, in particular, written work, oral contributions and practical performance. Oral assessments are based on assessment of student contributions in lessons, and practical tests/assessments take place mostly in subjects such as sport, music and art. Written work and tests are set at regular intervals throughout the school year, and the level and content of such tests comply with the appropriate syllabuses and curricula. Assessment also includes homework. Summaries of achievement are provided in mid-year and year-end reports. In principle, the assessment covers all the subject areas of the curriculum.

In Years 1 and 2 of primary education (children aged six to eight years), the focus is on direct observation of students. In Year 3 (aged eight onwards), children begin to be familiarised with written class tests in certain subjects (especially German, mathematics and *Sachunterricht* - see above.) In all years, student performance must be commented upon either by the teacher's oral comments or by simple written

comments. Once introduced, written tests take place regularly throughout the year; students are warned of them in advance and they are supervised. The marks received from the teacher for these tests are subsequently discussed with the child, and children are encouraged to take their tests home to show to their parents.

The purpose of this continuous assessment of student achievement is, primarily, to obtain information about the student's learning process and to serve as a basis for giving the student further assistance. Assessment also provides teachers with feedback on the success of their teaching and a basis for proceeding further.

Generally, students in all schools in Germany must achieve a grade 4 (in the national six-point marking scale detailed above) in their mid-year and year-end reports in each subject relevant to promotion before they can proceed from one class to the next. Marks of 5 or 6 in one subject can usually be compensated for with marks of 1 or 2 in another. Students are asked to repeat a year if their level of attainment is not judged adequate. On the basis of the total number of students in the primary sector, 1.8 per cent repeated a class in 1997. This figure had remained stable since 1994.

Decisions regarding transfer from primary education to one of the different types of (compulsory, full-time) lower secondary school are generally taken on the basis of the recommendation of the primary school which the student is leaving, in detailed consultation with the parents. Results from continuous assessment during the student's primary school career will have some bearing on the decision. That is, the standard of performance at the end of the school year - as measured by teacher-implemented continuous assessment throughout the school year, and marked on the basis of the nationally agreed grading system, determines whether students pass to the next school year; successfully complete primary level education; or are asked to repeat a particular year.

How far is the curriculum driven by assessments? (eg evidence of teacher preparation for testing, 'booster' or 'catch-up' classes in schools)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

6. Teaching profession/training

What changes can be identified in initial teacher training programmes?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What kinds of continuing professional development/on-going training are provided?

See above for information regarding foreign language training. No additional information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

To what degree are teachers'/schools' planning subject to scrutiny?

The supervisory authorities of each individual *Land* have the authority to check that schools are keeping to the prescribed curricula and assessment/examination regulations, by visiting schools and sitting in on lessons. They do not, however, have the authority to encroach upon the pedagogical freedom of the individual teacher.

To what degree are teachers using electronic formats to plan?

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

7. Pedagogy

Which teaching approaches are dominant or developing a higher profile, and which are receding? (eg collaborative work, whole-class instruction)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

What is the impact of ICT in teaching practice? (eg use of electronic whiteboards, intranets, managed learning environments/local grids)

No information is available via the *INCA* Archive.

To what degree are teaching approaches focusing on developing thinking skills, creativity and building on children's learning styles?

Amongst the "recommendations for skills to be acquired in primary education" agreed by the Ministers of the 16 German *Länder* are that primary education should develop:

- children's creative ability; and
- children's capacity for independent learning, critical thinking and learning by their own experience.

8. Resourcing

How far are resources to support teaching made available via government/central/local agencies?

Textbooks

To enable students, regardless of their income and social circumstances, to have access to all the teaching materials used in schools, all the *Länder* have rules whereby teaching materials, and textbooks in particular, are provided free of charge. The costs are borne either by schools' providing (funding) bodies, such as local authorities, or by the *Land* itself. Generally, students attending state schools are given textbooks and other more expensive teaching materials (such as pocket calculators) on loan, whereas expendable items such as exercise books and pencils and other educational materials (such as drawing instruments, materials for needlework and handicrafts) are provided

by parents and students. However, the rules vary from one *Land* to another and, in rare cases, students in publicly-funded schools may be expected to pay a minor contribution towards textbook costs.

The prices of textbooks are controlled at a 'reasonable' level. If a price is raised, approval of the textbook concerned (see below) may be withdrawn. In addition, competition between textbook publishers helps to ensure that prices remain reasonably low.

Visual aids

There is a national Institute for Films and Visual Aids (run by the 16 *Länder*), which produces all kinds of support materials for schools, including films, videos, and colour slide series. In addition, most of the *Länder* also have *Land* central agencies for the distribution of audio-visual aids to schools. Some *Länder* also have central *Land* agencies for computer education, which test commercially-produced computer software and make recommendations for its use in schools.

How far, and in which subjects, are resources statutory/recommended/subsidised? (eg textbooks, courses, lesson plans for teachers, web-based materials)

Textbooks

All textbooks used in schools, regardless of the type of school or level, must be approved by the School Book Committees of the *Länder* Ministries of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science. As a result, each *Land* regularly publishes a list of approved textbooks.

Approval of school textbooks aims to ensure that students do not learn from books which fail to meet the needs of the curriculum, or which, for example, contain racist thinking or similar.

Textbooks are generally produced by private, commercial publishers who, to a large extent, specialise in this type of work, and are usually approved if:

- they are in line with the general principles of the German Constitution and the educational objectives set out in Education Acts;
- they are compatible with curricula/syllabuses and with educational research findings;
- the quality of the binding is appropriate and the price justifiable.

Textbooks for religious education are approved with the agreement of the church authorities.

School staff select textbooks for use in their schools from the wide range of approved titles. This selection is generally made at meetings of subject teachers or of the whole staff. In some cases, the approval of the Schools' Inspectorate is required; some *Länder* also have rules for consulting parents' and students' representatives.=