

German children must attend school by law (*die Schulpflicht*) between the ages of 6 and 18. The first nine years are full time and the final three full or part time. The schools are run by the individual states (*die Länder*), but all pupils have similar lessons wherever they live. Education in state schools is provided free of charge but parents are required to provide at least some of their children's books and materials.

A range of special schools (*die Sonderschulen*) meet the needs of pupils with physical or learning disabilities.

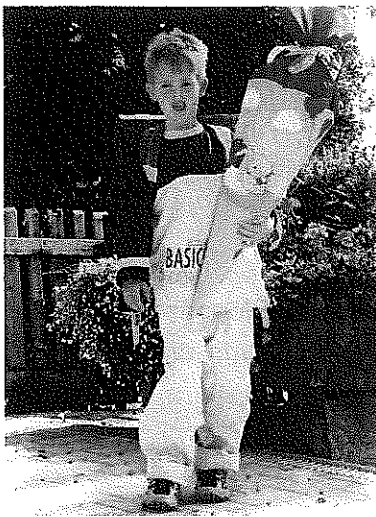
Before the start of formal education most children of pre-school age attend either *Kindergarten* or day nursery (*die Kinderkrippe*). School life (*das Schulleben*) proper begins with primary school (*die Grundschule*) at the age of six (see 'Festivals and traditions').

At the age of 10 (12 in Berlin and Brandenburg) pupils move on to a two-year 'orientation stage' (*die Orientierungsstufe*). During this stage the decision is made as to which school each pupil will attend.

One route at secondary level is to go on to the *Hauptschule*, which provides a general secondary education with a strong vocational element. From the *Hauptschule* pupils normally move on to a technical college (*die Berufsschule*) at 15 or 16 for sandwich courses to complement a three-year apprenticeship (*die Lehre*). As an apprentice (*der Lehrling*) they can take a whole range of specializations such as car mechanics, hairdressing and plumbing.

Another route is the *Realschule* where pupils study for six years for their intermediate school exams (*die mittlere Reife*). These are the equivalent of our GCSE examinations. From the *Realschule* pupils may go on to a training college (*die Berufsfachschule*) or an upper secondary school (*die Fachoberschule*).

For the most academically able pupils there is the grammar school (*das Gymnasium*), which takes pupils up to the *Abiturprüfung* (roughly equivalent to A Levels or Scottish Highers), a requirement for further study at university.

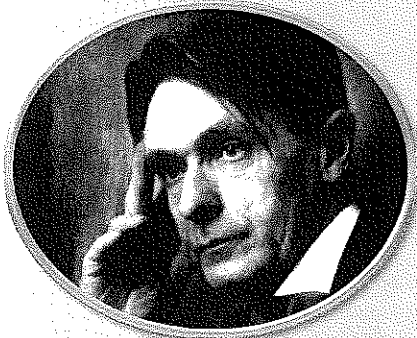


Starting school

Famous educationalists



Kurt Hahn (1886-1974) believed in the importance of challenging outdoor activities and having a spirit of adventure. He emphasized the value of initiative, self-discipline and self-reliance but also the need to learn to cope with adversity and failure as well as success.



Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was particularly concerned with children's inner spirit and the need to develop not just physically and mentally but also spiritually. Steiner schools emphasize the importance of play, developing imagination through storytelling, art and dance and exploring nature.

Some areas in Germany also have the equivalent of comprehensive schools (*die Gesamtschulen*), in which pupils of all abilities are taught under one roof. Private schools are far less common than in Britain and some are even supported by the state. Famous educationalists of the German-speaking world include Kurt Hahn, founder of Gordonstoun School and the inspiration behind Outward Bound initiatives, and Rudolf Steiner, on whose educational philosophy the Steiner-Waldorf School movement is based.



After completing their school studies (*der Abschluss*), pupils who have successfully completed their *Abiturprüfung* or *Abi* may choose to move on to study at a university. Unlike in Britain, students generally study at their local university and often continue to live at home whilst they do so. Founded in 1386, Heidelberg University (photo above) is the oldest in Germany, followed by the universities of Leipzig (1409) and Rostock (1419). Today there are over 90 universities and more than 30% of a given age group go on to higher education.

Read pages 16 and 17 and answer the questions.

1 a Up to what age do children attend *Kindergarten* in Germany?

b What is meant by *Schulpflicht*?

c What is the purpose of the *Orientierungsstufe*?

2 Using these pages and a dictionary compile a list of words containing the noun *Schul(e)* with English equivalents, for example: *das Schulleben* school life

3 Choose a topic and write a short paragraph in English.

a Describe the different types of secondary school in Germany and where their pupils go on to once they leave.

b Compare and contrast the school system in Germany with that of your own country.

c Use the Internet/the library to find out more about either Kurt Hahn or Rudolf Steiner.

Compulsory school age

Germany	6 - 18
France	6 - 16
Spain	6 - 16
UK	5 - 16

Average hours at school per year

Germany	733
France	765
Spain	980
UK	776

Average school days per year

Germany	188
France	180
Spain	170
UK	190

Average school holidays per year

Germany	14 weeks
France	16 weeks
Spain	18 weeks
UK	13 weeks



A typical school day

The school day (*der Schultag*) starts early in Germany with lessons beginning around 8am and finishing just after 1pm. Lessons typically last around

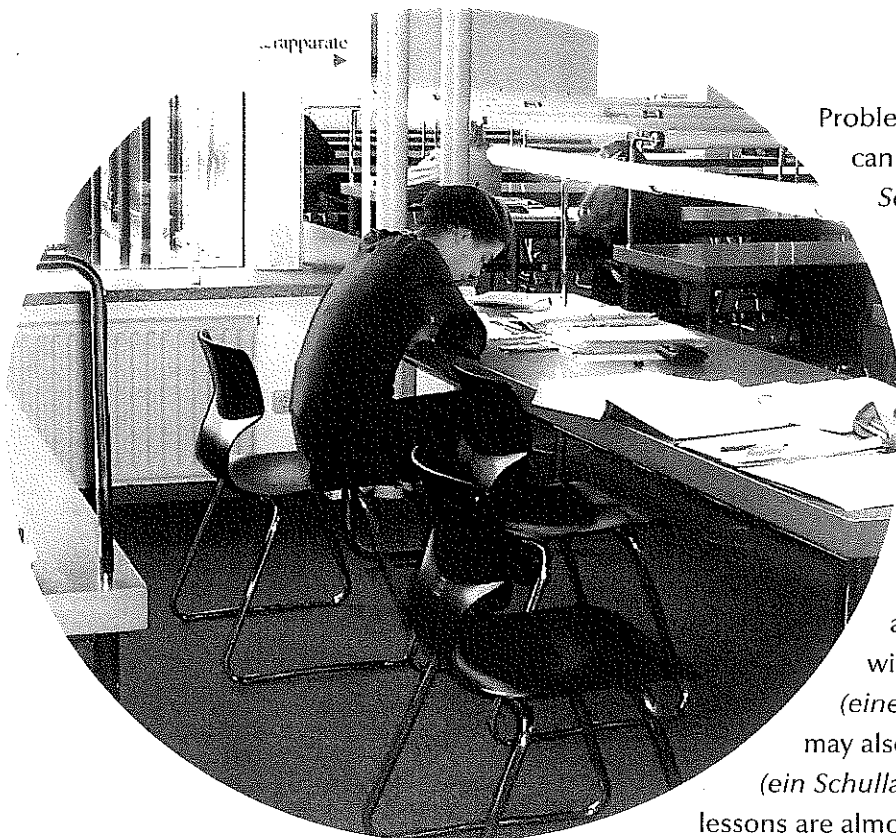
45 minutes with five minute breaks at changeover time. There are also a couple of longer breaks (*die Pausen*) during the morning. There is no lunch break for school dinners as in Britain. Instead, pupils bring snacks such as a sandwich (*ein belegtes Brot/Butterbrot*), a pretzel (*eine Brezel*) or fruit (*das Obst*) to eat at breaktimes either in the school hall (*die Aula*) or in the playground (*der Schulhof*).



In der Pause treffe ich mich mit meinen Freunden. Wir unterhalten uns und essen Butterbrote, Obst und Schokolade.

Schools in Germany have no school uniform, no assemblies and a fairly relaxed relationship between teachers (*die Lehrer*) and pupils (*die Schüler*). Teachers tend to be casually dressed, often in jeans, and if a member of staff is absent the class is free until their next lesson.

Pupils are, however, expected to work hard and many complain of the pressure (*der Schulstress*). During the course of the school year pupils take a series of written tests in class (*die Klassenarbeiten*) and, based on these, they are given grades (*die Noten*) in each subject, which they receive in their end of year report (*das Zeugnis*). If a pupil fails to reach the required standard in enough subjects he or she is required to stay down a class and repeat the year (*sitzenbleiben*). Parents are first warned of this by the arrival of a dreaded 'blue letter' (*ein blauer Brief*).



Problems and concerns amongst pupils can be taken to the school council (*die Schülermitverwaltung*) by their class representative (*der/die Klassensprecher(in)*). Overall control of the school is in the hands of the principal (*der Direktor*) who tends to have more of an administrative role and is generally less of a figurehead than in British schools.

School in Germany is not all work and no play though. Most classes will go on at least one school trip (*eine Klassenfahrt*) a year and classes may also stay longer at a residential centre (*ein Schullandheim*) in the country. Skiing lessons are almost a way of life for pupils living in southern Germany and exchanges with schools in other countries are very popular, especially to Britain. Learning a foreign language (*eine Fremdsprache*) is compulsory in Germany and language learning starts at a much younger age than in the UK.

After lessons pupils may choose to stay on at school for a school club (*die AG = Arbeitsgemeinschaft*) offering sport, music or drama. Each evening there is homework (*die Hausaufgaben*) to complete and some pupils have extra private tuition (*die Nachhilfe*) to improve their grades. Holidays (*die Ferien*) vary depending on the area with some schools releasing pupils at harvest time or in the skiing season.

What's in a name?

German schools often simply take their name from the area in which they are located. It is also common practice, however, to name schools after a famous person such as a politician, scientist or writer, often with links to the area. In the former GDR many schools have been re-named since reunification.

Max Planck, Käthe Kollwitz and die Geschwister Scholl all have schools named after them. Use the Internet or school library to find out about them.

Read pages 18 and 19 and answer the questions.

- 1 a Why is it important for pupils in Germany to bring snacks with them to school?
 - b What is the significance of a *blauer Brief*?
 - c What is the role of a *Klassensprecher(in)*?
 - d What do the initials AG stand for and what does this mean?
- 2 Look at the photos on pages 16–19. What similarities and differences do you notice compared with your own school?
 - 3 Choose a topic and write a short paragraph in English.
 - a Compare the structure of a typical school day in Germany with that in Britain.
 - b Why in particular might a pupil in Germany suffer from *Schulstress*?