

School Advice



The School System of North Rhine-Westphalia

STADT
ESSEN



Kommunales
Integrationszentrum
Essen

English
English



Table of contents

Content

Introduction	3
Compulsory Schooling, Types of School and School Level	4
School Stuff	5
Subjects and School Life	6-7
Attendance and Absence from School	8
School Law and School Rules	9
Sick Note, Excuse Note and Leave of Absence	10-11
School Material for the Start	12
School Life and Timetable	13-14
Participation Opportunities at School	15
Support at Home	16-17
Healthy Breakfast	18
Digital Media and TV	19
Links and Contact Persons	20-21

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Introduction

Dear Parents, Dear Legal Guardian, Dear Reader,

we take a lot for granted in our everyday life, such as water, groceries in the supermarket or electricity. In terms of school we take for granted that there is school staff that care for the education and training of our children.

On a closer look we do understand the hard work and challenges of this presumed self-evident matter of course. And we conclude that the education of our children can only be successful if we, **the Parents/Legal Guardians, the School Staff and the Society cooperate** for this common goal.

Apart from knowledge transfer the democratic education is a big part of the school in Germany. Therefore, the school imparted **rules and values** that are needed to build an **independent and confident personality** to find one's way in the German society. Your child learns about his/her rights, obligations and opportunities which he/she needs for the free-democratic social cohabitation in Germany. For instance, this includes an equal treatment of boys and girls.

With your attention, interest and participation you as a parent/legal guardian can support your child/ward having good educational opportunities which enable him/her to develop his/her full potential.

This school advice should give you a first impression of the German School System and shows how you can support your child/ward in his/her school and personal education.

Kind regards,

Your team of the 'Kommunales Integrationszentrum Essen'

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des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen



Compulsory Schooling, Types of School and School Level

Attending school is compulsory for all children in Germany, for a specific age range. When your child/ward turns 6 years old before the 30th of September, this is the year he/she starts school. Compulsory schooling finishes the school year your child turns 18. If your child starts a training after the 10th grade (or 9th grade at a 'Gymnasium'), he/she will attend a 'Berufsschule'/'Berufskolleg' at the same time. If your child decides to go for another school degree, he/she will visit school at a secondary school or a 'Berufskolleg'.

Beginning of a school year:	always on August 1st	§
End of a school year:	always on July 31st	
Beginning of age compulsory schooling:	with 5 or 6 years (Birthday until September 30th)	
End of the compulsory schooling:	with 18 years	
Attending school:	at least 10 school years	
School Forms and School Levels		
Primary School (Grundschule):	1th-4th grade	
Secondary School, Level I: Sekundarstufe I (Sek I): Hauptschule, Sekundarschule, Realschule, Gesamtschule, Gymnasium	5th-10th grade	
Secondary School, Level II: Sekundarstufe II (Sek II): Gymnasiale Oberstufe, Berufskolleg	11th-13th grade	

School Staff

A lot of people from various professions are involved in a well-functioning school system. From the cleaning staff to the secretary, all professions work together. A close cooperation is also needed between you as a parent or legal guardian and the social professions like teachers and social workers. The common aim is recognizing the individual needs of your child and supporting his/her development.

Example:

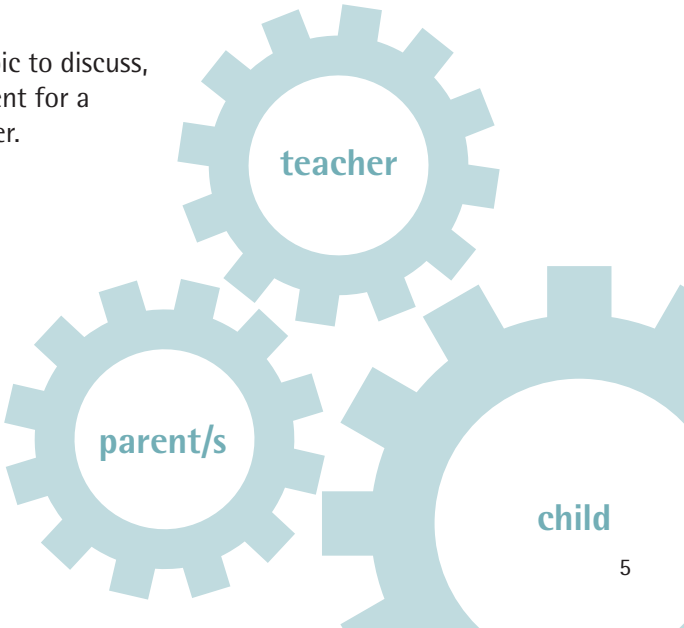
Your child has difficulties to focus during math lessons.

In this case the math teacher exchanges ideas and opinions with the class teacher (and if needed with a teacher for special needs) to figure out what might help your child in this situation. One option could be a special support (different tasks/ material etc.) during the lesson or in a smaller group together with other pupils with the same/similar needs/difficulties.

Additionally, you might get some advice and exercises from the teacher you can work on at home with your child.

You and the teacher inform each other about the progress. If still needed, you and your child get more support.

Important: If you have a topic to discuss, always ask for an appointment for a consultation with the teacher.





Subjects and School Life

Subjects at Primary School: ('Grundschule')	German, English, Mathematics, Music, Art, Religion, Science, Sport
Subjects of the Secondary School, Level I: ('Sekundarstufe I')	German, English, Mathematics, Social Studies (Geography, History, Politics, Economy), Science (Biology, Physics, Chemistry), Art, Music, Religion/Practical Philosophy, Sport The subjects mentioned above you can find at nearly every Secondary School, level 1. Later on some subjects, for instance an additional foreign language or computer science, will be added. The specific range of subjects depends on the individual school.
Education in the Original Language: ('Herkunftssprachlicher Unterricht (HSU)')	Children who grow up bilingual get the offer to take part in lessons for their mother tongue, for example: Arabic, Greek, Italian, Polish, Turkish. The school can offer this lessons in case there are at least 15 pupils with the same mother tongue at a primary school and at least 18 pupils at a secondary school registered at the school.

Work Groups: ('Arbeitsgemeinschaft (AG)')	A lot of schools (also primary schools) offer some work groups in the afternoon (for example: theatre, choir, computer science, football). The choice and participation is voluntary.
School Events: ('Schulveranstaltungen')	School Events include for example: project days/weeks (in the morning or afternoon), excursions (morning/afternoon/all-day) or class trips (trip to another place and overnight stay). The school excursions and trips are related to the school and social education. Therefore, the attendance is compulsory.
All-Day Care: ('Ganztag')	The staff of the all-day care cooperate closely with the teacher. If your child is registered for the all-day care, it includes doing homework, eating lunch, additional offer of support and work groups (sport, playing, theatre etc.). You can apply for a place by the time you register your child at the school or later during the school year for the next school term.

Attendance and Absence from School

Your child has to attend all lessons and all school events. The following regulations must be observed in the mentioned subject:

Religion

If there are at least 12 pupils with the same religion registered at one school, the school can offer that specific religion class or you can ask for it. With the registration on the school you – as a parent/legal guardian–decide about the religion class. You can ask if the school offers an Islamic Religion Class for example.

The German law defines a child of 14 years as religiously matured. From that age on your child can decide on his/her own about their religion and consequently about the religion class he/she attends. Thus, when he/she has reached the age, he/she can be exempted from Religious Education. Cancellation from classes is requested in writing from the school administration. The legal guardian will be informed about the exemption.

Before the age of 14, the legal guardian decides whether the child takes part in the Religious Class or not. Cancellation has to be done in writing. If a child does not attend Religious Classes, he/she will attend Practical Philosophy if the school offers it.

Physical Education/Swimming

Sports lessons also include participation in swimming lessons. Here, girls and boys take part in lessons **together**.

An exemption from Physical Education for a longer period is possible for health reasons. **This has to be certified by a doctor.**

Native Language Education and Working Group

Native Language Education is chosen in the beginning of the school year and does not end until the end of the school year. This also applies to the working group. Early leaving is not possible during a school year.

School Law and School Rules

The School Law

The School Law is the school's "Grundgesetz" in North Rhine-Westphalia. It describes the rights and obligations at school. The law consists of several parts, including: compulsory schooling, school relationship, school staff, teaching content and data protection regulations. For you as a legal guardian and your child, **the school relationship** is particularly important. Here, you find important information about **parenting advice** and **your child's responsibilities as a student**:

School Rules

Every school has School Rules. These rules are imposed by the school staff and should support the cooperation of all school members for the individual learning process. For instance, some rules describe the expected behaviour in the classroom, school building and school yard. Many schools publish their rules on their website or post them in the school building.

Often you can find phrases like:

- We respect everyone as she/he is.
- We treat each other friendly and politely.
- We help each other.
- We solve problems peacefully.



Sick Note, Excuse Note, Leave of Absence

Your child is required to attend school and must not miss lessons. However, if your child is ill or unable to attend school for a very important reason (e. g. because your child has an appointment at the health office or at the immigration office, citizen's office), then you have to inform the school about it.

This information has to be provided by telephone or in writing. Here are two examples:

Sick Note – call in the morning and inform



Hello! My name is (Your name)
My daughter/my son ... (name) goes to class ... (e.g. 1a) from Mr/Mrs ...
(name of the class teacher).
My child is ill and he/she cannot come to school today.
Thank you. Good bye.

Excuse Note (Entschuldigung)



city, date
Dear Mrs/Mr (name of the class teacher), My daughter/my son (name),
class (e.g. 1a) could not come on (date) until (date) to school, because
she/he was sick.
I apologize.
Kind regards,
.... name, signature

A written Excuse Note should be given at the latest when you send your child back to school.

If your child has been ill for a longer period of time, you can also ask your doctor to give you a certificate stating how long your child will be ill. This certificate must be given to the school (secretary or class teacher).

Medical Certificate (Krankschreibung)

A Medical Certificate is written by the doctor. This can be requested by the school if there is a reason for it, e.g. if your child often misses class or if your child is unable to attend classes for a longer period of time. This may also apply to sports classes, for example because he/she has an injury.

Leave of Absence

You can take your child's leave of absence for an important reason, e.g. to celebrate a religious holiday. Usually you can apply for one day per semester. To do so, submit an application as soon as possible to the class teacher and ask for a release.

Leave of absence shortly **before** or **after** school holidays is not allowed.

This following example shows you how to write a leave of absence (for handing it over to the class teacher).

Leave of Absence



city, date
Dear Mrs/Mr (name class teacher),
I want to take my daughter/son (name) on (date) leave of absence from
lessons, because we have a (reason: religious holiday, mandatory appointment at the health office, immigration office, citizen's office etc.).
I apologize for this.
I ask for feedback.
Many Thanks.
Kind regards,
.... name, signature

Medical Appointment

Please make sure that you arrange check-ups for your child outside of school hours, so that he/she does not miss class.

School Material to Start School

To be able to participate well in class from the first day on, some school supplies are needed.

This overview of materials helps you to get the most important school items in advance. Later you should ask for the list of materials for your child at the class teacher or the secretary's office so that you can get any school supplies or work-books that are missing.

Many school books are borrowed from your child's school. These must be re-turned at the end of the school year. Guardians have to buy some of the books themselves too.

Materials for Primary School und Secondary School I/II:

- 1 school bag
- 1 pencil case
- 2 pencils
- 6-12 crayons
- 1 sharpener
- 1 rubber
- 1 scissors
- 1 glue
- 1 ruler
- folder: 1 red, 1 green, 1 blue, 1 white, 1 yellow
- 1 x exercise book (squared)
- 1 x exercise book (lined)
- 1 notebook for homework
- Sportswear in a bag (sports shoes with a light shoe sole, sports trousers, t-shirt, hair tie if needed)
- Swimwear in a bag (swimsuit/trunks, shower gel, towel, if needed: hair dryer, hairbrush, hair tie)



Your child is not allowed to wear jewellery during sports and swimming lessons. He/she can submit this to the teacher before lessons.

School Life and Timetable

To let you and your child know how the class is organised, a timetable will be given by the class teacher. You will receive this timetable right before or after the school has started, so you can see when class starts and ends. For example:

Timetable of the 4th grade

hrs.	time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1.	8-8:45	German	German	Sports	Sports	Science
2.	8:45-9:30	Math	English	Sports	Sports	Math
Break 20 min.						
Breakfast 10 min.						
3.	10-10:45	Music	Math	Science	Math	German
4.	10:45-11:30	English	Music	Science	German	English
Break 15 min.						
5.	11:45-12:30	RE/Support	Science	RE/Native Language Education	Arts	Work Group
6.	12:30-13:15	Native Language Education/Support	Native Language Education	Swimming	Arts	Work Group

Primary school

Many primary schools offer an open start to class. The class doors are open and there are school staff for supervision. This gives your child time to take off his/her jacket and bag and get something to study, read something or chat with other children.

Please pay attention to the times in the timetable and send your child to school so that he/she will be there on time (before the class starts).

Example:

	start	end	arrival at school	pick up in front of the school
Open start to class	7.45 AM	1.15 PM	7.40-7.45 AM	13.15 PM
Class	8 AM	13.15 PM	7.50-7.55 AM	13.15 PM

Primary school: Bringing and Picking Up

If possible, walk to school together with your child. This way, your child will get to know the way to school, meet other children and get physical exercise beforehand. This will help your child to be able to follow the lessons in a relaxed way. After about 2 to 3 weeks, your child should be able to walk independently to school and class.

For a safe and undisturbed school start, it is important that you pick your child up in front of the school entrance/school gate. Only in special situations, such as having an appointment at school, you enter the school building.

Secondary School I/II

The Secondary School is often not close to your place of residence. Therefore, it is important to accompany your child at the beginning, e.g. on foot or by bus, so that he/she can go to school on their own later on. Your child should be at school a short time before class starts. Example: Between 7.50 to 7.55 AM, if classes start at 8.00 AM.

Tickets for bus, train, tram (public transport)

It is possible to apply for a school ticket. The application form can be obtained at the school's office or at the Ruhrbahn-Center, VRR-Center or on the Internet. This ticket is suitable if your child travels to school on a regular basis by public transport. Depending on how far the school is, the ticket can be obtained at a lower price. Ask the school secretary for advice on this.

Participation Opportunities in School

area	opportunity	description
school festivals	organizing, building up, addressing parents etc..	You have the chance to support creating a beautiful school festival for your child and for other children. The class teacher will inform you on time how you can support the school in this regard.
class trips	monitoring, organisation	On some class trips, your presence is very helpful. You support the teacher, e.g. in supervising a group.
class guardianship	giving advice, planning, getting information, choosing a representative for the class	The class teacher informs about the contents of the lessons, introduces planned class trips, discusses various topics with the parents and elects a representative for the class care. The class chairman ('Klassenpflegschaftsvorsitzende*r') later participates in the school board.
class chairman	representing interests of parents/legal guardians	If there is a topic that is important to all the children in the class, the class representative, i.e. the class chairman, is informed. After that, he/she can arrange an appointment with the class teacher and pass on information to the parents.
school guardianship chairman	giving advice, plan, getting information, electing the representative for school conference	The class chairman participates in the school board where he/she gets further information on what his/her participation in school can look like and how it can work out.
school conference	Participating on various issues, elections	In the school conference, the school chairman sits together with the teachers and the school management. Consultations, plans and elections take place on various topics (e.g. project days, pedagogical concept, school books, mobile holidays, etc.).

Support at Home

The educational goal is the common task of both, the parent/legal guardian and the school. There are many ways to support your child's personal and educational development. Here are some examples of how you can help your child at home and at school.

area	support	opportunities
school bag	school bag is too heavy	Check and tidy up the school bag together. There are many things that your child can leave at home or at school.
home-work	doing home-work	Your child gets homework that he/she should do at home alone. Your child needs the space to be able to do his/her homework calmly (without disturbing music or playing siblings).
	forgotten homework	Check the homework notebook. If there are no assignments, your child can ask another classmate, remind your child before school to write down the homework.
books	reading	Your child has the opportunity to borrow books from school or the city library. You can borrow a book together at the city library. Read together at least 15 minutes a day.
free time	e.g.: board games, taking walks, animal park, play-ground, swimming	Take some time doing things together with your child. For example, play a board game, maybe 'Ludo', have a picnic in the park or go to the playground together.

area	support	opportunities
sports	favourite sports (e.g. football, swimming, gymnastics, dancing)	Have a look for a sport your child might be interested in. There are many sports clubs where your child can join one session for free, before you register him/her on a long-term basis.
household	e.g. cooking, baking, shopping, cleaning	It is more fun together! Let your child help you with cooking or shopping. Therefore, you give up responsibility and support your child in his/her independence. Your child learns to follow the rules, to count, to calculate, to speak and much more.
learning	difficulties in a subject	If you see that your child is having problems or difficulties at school, such as doing homework on his/her own, ask for a consultation with the class teacher or the teacher for the subject. Talk about the problem. The school staff will help to support your child.
talks	every day life at school	Let your child talk about what he/she has learned or experienced at school. Talk about your day as well.
bedtime	sleeping	Your child needs a lot of sleep to be rested at school in the morning. It is important that your child gets at least 8 hours of sleep. Therefore, he/she should be in bed early enough.
digital media	mobile, tablets, PC, Internet, TV	Less is more! Pay attention for how long, when and what media your child uses. Draw up common rules, e.g. which Internet pages he/she is allowed to visit, or set up child protection for the Internet.

Healthy Breakfast

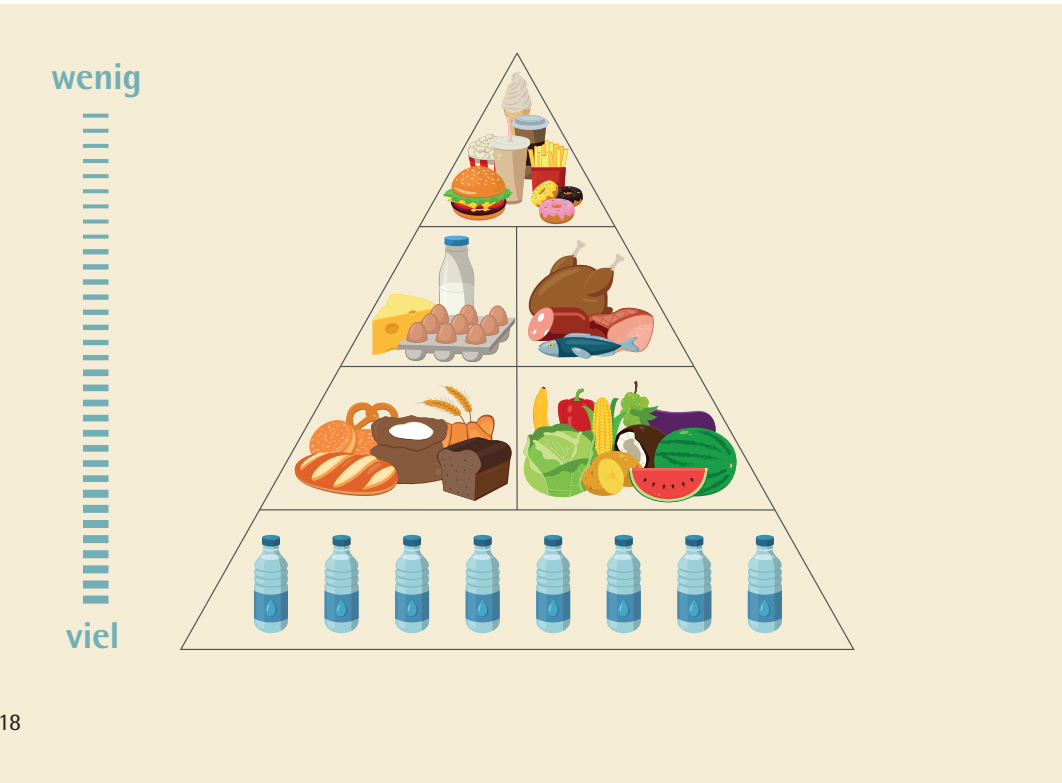
A day at school is long and exhausting for every child. In order to be able to concentrate and learn, a healthy breakfast is needed.

In the Nutritional Pyramid you can see what a healthy breakfast can look like.

Ideas for breakfast:

- Sandwich with egg, cucumber, sparkling water
 - Lavas (thin bread) with cheese, apple, water
 - Yoghurt, grapes, slice of bread with cheese, sugarless tea
-

An example: Give your child water or unsweetened tea to drink.
Use bread boxes to pack breakfast and refillable bottles for the drink.



Digital Media and TV

Learning is possible in many ways. Today, at school and at home, digital media, such as TV shows, tablets, mobile phones or PCs can help you repeating teaching topics or learning new things.

There are many pages of educational programme on the Internet, Apps or even soft-ware for PC. When using these media, care should be taken to ensure that they are designed for your child's age and that your child does not spend too much time with these devices.

These questions and tips can help to establish a healthy relationship with media:

Questions	Tips
When? Who?	Agree on rules when your child may use the media or when he/she may have to take turns with the siblings.
What? What for?	Talk to your child about what kind of device (mobile phone, PC, etc.) and what (study or leisure) the media can be used for.
Where?	Talk to your child where the media may be used, such as in the children's room or living room. Pay attention to mobile phone free times e.g. during eating times in the kitchen.
How long?	Agree on fixed times and the period of time media may be used. For example: Set a break/or do an exercise after 45 minutes. A clock in the room can help.

You can find more information on the use of digital media and online safety here:



www.elternundmedien.de/zuhause.html



www.klicksafe.de

Links and Contact Persons

The School Ministry of North Rhine-Westphalia offers all important information on school, dates and current events on its website **www.schulministerium.nrw.de**. In addition, you can also have a look at the website of the Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth: **www.bmbfsfj.bund.de**

Here are some important links:

area	link
Parents	https://www.schulministerium.nrw/im-blickpunkt-eltern
Religious Education	www.schulministerium.nrw.de/themen/schulsystem/unterricht/lernbereiche-und-unterrichtsfacher/religionsunterricht
Participation in School	https://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/eltern/schulmitwirkung
School Law	https://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/themen/recht/schulrecht/schulgesetz-fuer-das-land-nordrhein-westfalen
Children's Rights	https://www.kinder-ministerium.de/deine-rechte
School System	www.schulministerium.nrw/schulsystem

Financial assistance for school and extracurricular activities

To help children and teenagers fully participate in school and extracurricular activities, low-income families can receive financial assistance for:

- School supplies
- Field trips and school trips
- School lunches
- Academic support / tutoring
- Sports, cultural, and recreational activities

Feel free to ask at your school, the Jobcenter, or directly at the relevant organisation.

• Counselling Centre for School and Family Matters

The „Regionale Schulberatungsstelle für die Stadt Essen“ informs and advises on all questions and areas related to the subject of school.

Regionale Schulberatungsstelle der Stadt Essen

Gildehofstraße 1a, 4. Etage, 45127 Essen
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• Initial Counselling for Newly Immigrated Children and Young People

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Would you like a personal consultation or do you have any questions?

You can find all the information about our opening hours and how to book an appointment on our website: **www.essen.de/KI**



Initial school counselling/booking appointments and consultation hours: Initial school counselling for newly immigrated children and young people and their parents or guardians: **www.essen.de/schulische-erstberatung**

There you will also find a complete overview of our counselling services and support. We can assist you in many areas – from school-related questions and funding opportunities to our integration projects.