

# Education in Germany - Current Developments

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Educational legislation and administration of the education system in Germany are primarily the responsibility of the federal states, the *Länder*. This applies to the school system, higher education and the adult education/continuing education sector. The education politics throughout the country, however, is coordinated and harmonised by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany (*Kultusministerkonferenz*).

Under the Basic Law of Germany (*Grundgesetz*) and the constitutions of the *Länder* the entire school system is under the supervision of the state. Schools are, as a rule, institutions of the local authorities. In addition, there are church-run or other privately-run schools.

In the German school system, fundamental changes are currently being implemented under which special importance is attached to the various efforts for quality assurance and quality development. In all these, the principle goes: The focus of interest is the individual promotion of pupils. And it's the aim to achieve "getting ahead through education".

The introduction of national educational standards and the establishment of an "Institute for Educational Progress (*Institut zur Qualitätsentwicklung im Bildungswesen* – IQB)" marked the beginning of a paradigm shift towards an output-oriented control of the education system.

In the course towards an output-oriented control of the education system school autonomy and responsibility is being further expanded. This includes in particular the extension of the financial autonomy of the schools and the development of school-specific programs in which the individual schools specify the main focuses and objectives of their work.

With increasing institutional independence of schools the school supervisory authorities are legally required to respect the individual pedagogical responsibility of the schools.

The state's influence on schools is increasingly exercised via the approval of school-specific programs and the determination of target agreements with the individual schools or head teachers, respectively.

The school supervision is supplemented by mandatory external evaluation (*Schulinspektion*) which is intended to provide the individual schools with information regarding their quality development.

During the past years, the scope of duties of the head teacher has expanded due to measures for the legal autonomisation of schools. As part of securing the quality of the lessons, the head teacher is additionally responsible for lesson development, staff development and organisational development as well as for the planning of further training, staff management and, where applicable, for the administration of budgetary funds.

Not only the schools, also the teachers have been given increasingly pedagogical freedom. The teacher is guaranteed this freedom in the interests of the pupils, as pupil-oriented teaching can only take place if the teacher has an adequate amount of freedom in selecting the content of lessons, teaching methods and assessment. As the case may be, the pedagogical freedom of the teacher is to be seen in relation to the requirement of acting in a professional manner, and to the pedagogical responsibility of the school. For example, the teachers are bound by the basic pedagogical concepts laid down in the school programmes.

A lot of reforms relating to teacher education and training for the improvement of professionalism in teaching have been started. Following measures, amongst others, are important:

- a more extensive practical orientation during teacher training;
- intensification of the relations between the theoretical and practical phases of training;
- particular significance of the induction period for newly qualified teachers;
- measures to improve teaching practice with regard to diagnostic and methodical competence.

Common nationwide standards for teacher training at university have been developed, too.

Demoscopic surveys provide dramatic evidence of a loss of image on the part of the teaching profession. The Länder are counteracting this decline of the image of the teaching profession with, for example, special advertising campaigns, the reduction of mobility restrictions between the Länder and programs enabling teachers to gain subsequent qualifications in certain subjects.

Besides the teachers' conference, every school has a school conference. It exists as the highest organ at school governing cooperation between the head staff and teachers, pupils and parents as well as external cooperation partners. It is constituted in different ways in the individual Länder. Sometimes teachers, parents and pupils are represented in equal numbers in the school conference, and sometimes teachers and/or parents are more strongly represented. But in all states the school conference gets more and more rights, it may also deal with general educational and teaching questions. In some Länder, the school conference has a say in the selection of the head teacher.

All Länder have strengthened the rights to collective participation of parents at school. It is generally the case, that parents have an opportunity to make their views felt at two levels, the lower level being the individual class and the upper level being the school as a whole.

In the last years, there was a very large expansion of all-day school types in Germany. This has significantly increased the trend towards involving external learning partners in the school-based social and academic educational work.

The cooperation between the pre-school sector, the day-care facilities for children, and primary schools has been made mandatory, too. And all Länder have introduced foreign language teaching in English as early as primary school.

A lot of measures were taken to promote children with migrant backgrounds. Especially, the language abilities of all children and young people with migrant backgrounds who have deficits in the German language are to be promoted, enabling them to take part in instruction and education on an equal footing with others.

The Standing Conference adopted 2007 an action framework to reduce the number of pupils leaving school without a first general education qualification.

Special efforts are also made to teach children with special educational needs.

In the face of changed conditions within society, teachers in their capacity as experts for instruction and education increasingly act as part of a personal network which is supported by cooperation with school social workers, psychologists and scientists.

In Germany vocational training is carried out in two places of learning: at the workplace and in a vocational school. This is described as a dual system. The training is based on a training contract under private law between a training company and the trainee. The trainees spend three or four days a week at the company and up to two days at the vocational school. The training companies assume the costs of the on-the-job training and pay the trainee a training allowance in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement in the sector concerned. The amount of the allowance increases with each year of training and is, on average, about a third of the starting salary for a specialist trained in the corresponding occupation. This successful dual system has to be modernized every time.