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Schulpflicht & School System in Germany

Explanation of the German school system: compulsory education, school types, and what parents need to know.

Deutsche Begriffe: Schulpflicht | Grundschule | Gymnasium | Realschule | Hauptschule | Gesamtschule

Compulsory Education in Germany

In Germany, **compulsory education** applies — every child must attend school. This also applies to children of foreigners, regardless of residency status.

Duration

- **Full-time compulsory education:** 9-10 years (depending on federal state)
- **Vocational school obligation:** until age 18 (if no Abitur)
- Start: Children who turn 6 by **June 30th**

The School System

Grundschule (Grades 1-4)

- All children attend **Grundschule** together
- Duration: 4 years (in Berlin and Brandenburg: 6 years)
- Afterwards: Recommendation for a secondary school

Secondary Schools (from Grade 5 onwards)

School Type	Qualification	Duration	Goal
Gymnasium	Abitur (university entrance exam)	8-9 years	University
Realschule	Middle School Certificate	6 years	Vocational training / Technical school
Hauptschule	Main School Certificate	5 years	Vocational training
Gesamtschule	All qualifications possible	varies	Flexible

Which School for My Child?

At the end of 4th grade, the primary school provides a **recommendation**. In most federal states, **parents** decide — the recommendation is not binding.

Costs

- State schools: **free** (no tuition fees)
- School textbooks: depending on state, free or rental fee (approx. €30-50/year)
- School supplies (notebooks, pens): approx. €50-100/year
- **Bildung und Teilhabe (BuT)**: Families receiving benefits or with low income receive subsidies for school materials (€195/year)

For Immigrant Children

- **Willkommensklassen / Vorbereitungsklassen**: Children without German language skills first attend a special class for learning German
- Duration: 1-2 years, then transition to regular class
- **Free** and mandatory

Tips

- Register your child **immediately after enrollment** with the responsible school authority
 - The school informs about support options (tutoring, language courses)
 - Parent evenings and parent-teacher conferences are important — participate
- As of: March 2026. All information without guarantee.

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