



**Kanton Bern**  
**Canton de Berne**



# Compulsory schooling in the German-speaking region of Canton Bern

## Information for parents

Elterninformation zur Volksschule Englisch

**Bildungs- und Kulturdirektion**



## **2 Compulsory schooling in the German-speaking region of Canton Bern**

Information for parents

### **Contents**

Introduction .....	3
Compulsory schooling .....	4
Structure of compulsory schooling .....	5
Promotion and support .....	10
Parents and compulsory schooling .....	12
Responsibilities / Definition of Terms Used .....	15

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## **Introduction**

This brochure provides information about the public school system of the Canton of Bern and provides answers to the following questions:

- How are kindergarten and school at the primary and lower secondary levels structured?
- What does the school expect from parents?
- What can parents do to help their children feel comfortable at school and get the most out of their education?

The teachers and head of the school in your municipality (*Gemeinde*) would be happy to provide further information.

## 4 Compulsory schooling in the German-speaking region of Canton Bern

Information for parents

### Compulsory schooling

#### General information

##### Allgemeines

As a rule, compulsory schooling lasts for a period of eleven years.

The period of compulsory schooling begins (entry to kindergarten) in the year in which a child is or turns four years old on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July. If they so choose, parents may postpone the start date by one year.

The school provides the teaching materials and school supplies to pupils at no cost.

Girls and boys are instructed together and the same learning targets apply to both genders.

Compulsory schooling is neutral with respect to religious denominations.

The School Commission (*Schulkommision*) and the heads of schools in each municipality are responsible for the operation of kindergartens and schools.

If parents choose to have their child attend a private school, they must pay the school's fees themselves.

Children who have disabilities or special needs that cannot be provided for in public schools may attend special education schools (*Sonderschule*).

#### Aims of compulsory schooling

##### Ziele der Volksschule

Compulsory schooling provides a solid basic education in general knowledge and skill development, which lay the foundation for future vocational education, for further schooling at the upper secondary level and for life-long learning. Furthermore, the school facilitates the development of competence, provides for a climate of mutual respect and tolerance and encourages pupils to act responsibly towards fellow human beings and the environment.

#### Lehrplan 21

Lehrplan 21 serves teachers from kindergarten through year 9 of school as a compass that helps them plan their lessons.

## Structure of compulsory schooling

	<b>Upper secondary level</b> <b>Sekundarstufe II</b> Vocational education and training or upper secondary school (e.g. apprenticeship or Baccalaureate school)	2–4 years	
<b>Compulsory schooling</b> Volksschule	<b>Lower secondary level (years 7–9)</b> <b>Sekundarstufe I</b> Sekundarschule requirements level or Realschule requirements level	3 years	
	<b>Primary level (years 1–6)</b> <b>Primarstufe</b>	6 years	Primary level 4 years
			Basisstufe/ Cycle élémentaire 3–5 years
<b>Kindergarten</b> <b>Kindergarten</b>	2 years	3–5 years	

### Kindergarten

#### Kindergarten

Children in the first and second years of kindergarten are taught together in one class. Kindergarten offers children a space to live, play and gather experience. Its aim is to stimulate and promote development and learning, while taking individual needs, abilities, and pace of learning into account.

As a rule, all children move into year 1 of the primary level after spending two years at kindergarten. In exceptional cases, based on the child's progress,

he/she may begin year 1 of the primary level, one year earlier or one year later.

[www.erz.be.ch/kindergarten](http://www.erz.be.ch/kindergarten)

In some municipalities, kindergarten children are taught together with the children in the first two years of primary school (mixed age groups) for all or part of the day in the *Basisstufe* or in the *Cycle élémentaire* (see table above).

[www.erz.be.ch/basisstufe](http://www.erz.be.ch/basisstufe)

[www.erz.be.ch/cycle-élémentaire-de](http://www.erz.be.ch/cycle-élémentaire-de)

## 6 Compulsory schooling in the German-speaking region of Canton Bern

Information for parents

### Primary level (years 1–6)

#### Primarstufe (1.-6. Schuljahr)

From year 1 to year 6, pupils receive instruction in a variety of subject areas, such as languages (*Sprachen*), mathematics (*Mathematik*) and design (*Gestalten*). The pupils take on increasing degrees of independence and responsibility for their own learning and work.

Starting in year 3, the pupils in the German-speaking region of the canton learn French as their first foreign language, in year 5 they start English as well.

After the primary level, children advance to the lower secondary level. In year 5, the school provides children and parents with detailed information about the procedure for the move to the lower secondary level.

### Lower secondary level (years 7–9)

#### Sekundarstufe I (7.-9. Schuljahr)

In the lower secondary level, pupils receive instruction either at the *Realschule* requirements level or at the *Sekundarschule* requirements level. Requirements at the *Sekundarschule* level are more demanding than those at the *Realschule* level.

Pupils are assigned to the appropriate level by their teacher, based on the probable course of their development.

Throughout the period of instruction at the lower secondary level, there is an emphasis on general education, as well as on the choice of future educational and career goals. The school plays a supportive role in this important decision-making process, and the students are assisted and advised by their parents, teachers, and guidance counsellors as they choose their career path.

[www.biz.erz.be.ch](http://www.biz.erz.be.ch)

### After compulsory education

#### Nach der Volksschule

After the period of compulsory schooling, students complete a two- to four-year programme of vocational education and training (VET) or attend an upper secondary school.

Further information on initial VET:

[www.erz.be.ch/berufsbildung](http://www.erz.be.ch/berufsbildung)

See the website below for information on specialised upper secondary schools and Baccalaureate schools:

[www.erz.be.ch/mittelschulen](http://www.erz.be.ch/mittelschulen)

## School year and school holidays

### Schuljahr und Schulferien

The school year begins in mid-August and ends in early July. Students attend 38 or 39 weeks of instruction each year. In a 39-week school year, holidays are spread over the year as follows:

- Autumn holiday in September/October: three weeks
- Winter holiday in December/January: two weeks
- Sports holiday in February: one week
- Spring holiday in April: two weeks
- Summer holiday in July/August: five weeks

The exact dates of school holidays and of public holidays (bank holidays), are posted on the website of the school or of the municipality.

## Timetable

### Stundenplan

Instruction takes place Monday through Friday. The duration of one lesson is 45 minutes. Pupils attend at least four lessons in the morning. Morning instruction starts and ends at the same time at all levels of compulsory schooling (“block” times). In the afternoon, the length of instruction varies from two to four lessons. Depending on the year (level) of school and the class, there may be one or more afternoons in the week when the pupils do not have school.

Parents are responsible for making sure that their child attends school in accordance with the timetable. During the hours of instruction, the school is responsible for supervising the children.

Outside of the hours of instruction and while on their way to or from school, children are considered to be in the custody of their parents. Exception: the school provides transport to a child because the trip to and from school is recognised as posing an unreasonable burden on the child.

## 8 Compulsory schooling in the German-speaking region of Canton Bern

### Information for parents

#### **Absences and authorisations for planned absences**

##### **Absenzen und Dispensationen**

A child must not miss instruction unless his or her absence has been excused. Parents are requested to notify the teacher of their child's absence as far in advance as possible, at the very latest, before the start of instruction. Acceptable grounds for excused absences are: illness of the child, death in the family, change of residence, visit to doctor or dentist.

Parents may take their children out of school for a maximum of five half-days per school year without giving the school a reason for the absence. The teachers must be notified in advance, however.

The head of the school can authorize a planned absence associated with the celebration of a high religious feast, an important family event, attendance of a course on the child's native language and culture (HSK), or a trial apprenticeship. Authorisation for a planned absence must be obtained well in advance.

#### **Homework**

##### **Hausaufgaben**

School learning takes place during the lessons. Homework assignments serve as a means of preparing for, or reviewing lessons. Children should be able to do their homework without the help of a parent or another adult.

Maximal times for homework per week:

- 30 minutes for years 1 and 2
- 45 minutes for year 3 through year 6
- 90 minutes for year 7 through year 9

Teachers tailor homework assignments according to the student's individual learning capability and potential.

## **Assessment**

### **Beurteilung**

The primary purpose of assessment is to encourage learning and growth; the aim is for the child to feel that assessments support his or her learning.

Every school year, the class teacher invites the parents to a private meeting (*Standortgespräch*). At this meeting, the teacher and parents talk about the pupil's performance at school and his or her learning progress and development. Additional meetings can be held at the parents' or the school's request.

Pupils receive a written assessment report at the end of year 2 and at the end of years 4 through 9. The reports contain assessments of the child's performance in the different subjects. Starting from year 4, pupils' performances are assessed with grades in the report.

See the website below for detailed information on assessment in multiple languages:

[www.erz.be.ch/beurteilung](http://www.erz.be.ch/beurteilung)

## 10 Compulsory schooling in the German-speaking region of Canton Bern

Information for parents

### Promotion and support

#### Special support

##### Besondere Förderung

Children who need special assistance in individual areas (e.g. language or mathematics) are entitled to receive the support of specially trained teachers.

If a child appears to have difficulty learning, an evaluation will be conducted (with parental consent) by an education specialist from the school or the canton (*Kantonale Erziehungsberatung/cantonal educational counselling service*). Trained child psychologists from the cantonal educational counselling service can assess whether special support is necessary. They also offer counselling to families and children experiencing challenging situations.

For information on the educational counselling service, see:  
[www.erz.be.ch/erziehungsberatung](http://www.erz.be.ch/erziehungsberatung)

In case a child fails to reach learning targets despite the support provided, he or she can receive instruction and be assessed on the basis of individualised learning targets.

Children in year 1 who need some additional time to process the subject matter being taught are allowed to take up to two years to get through the material.

Particularly intellectually gifted students may take part in a programme that promotes their development (*Begabtenförderung*). However, an evaluation by the educational counselling service is a prerequisite for taking part in this programme.

#### Special classes

##### Besondere Klassen

In many municipalities, children with learning disabilities, who are at the primary and lower secondary level, may attend a special education class (*Besondere Klasse*). The number of pupils in special education classes is kept at a minimum to enable the teacher to give the children more attention as they learn.

#### School social work

##### Schulsozialarbeit

The school social worker offers help and advice to children and adolescents experiencing social or personal problems. Teachers, heads of schools and parents may also consult with the school social work office.

## **Day school**

### **Tagesschule**

Municipalities offer day school for children who need supervision outside the hours of instruction:

- Supervision before the start of the school day
- Supervision during the midday period, with lunch provided
- Supervision after instruction ends in the afternoon or on afternoons when there is no school.

Day-school is optional. Parents who would like to send a child to a day school will be charged a fee based on their income, assets and family size.

For general information about day schools see:

[www.erz.be.ch/tagesschulen](http://www.erz.be.ch/tagesschulen)

Parents can obtain information about day school from the class teacher, the head of the school, or from the municipality.

Parents can obtain information about other childcare possibilities (day-care facilities for children, professional caregivers etc.) from the municipality:

[www.gef.be.ch](http://www.gef.be.ch) > Familie (family)

## **Health**

### **Gesundheit**

All students must undergo a medical examination in year 4 and year 8. The examination is compulsory and is free of charge.

All students must also undergo a yearly dental check-up carried out by the school dentist. This examination is compulsory and free of charge.

Parents will be informed should the doctor or dentist feel there is a need for further clarification or treatment.

## 12 Compulsory schooling in the German-speaking region of Canton Bern

Information for parents

### Parents and compulsory schooling

#### Cooperation

##### Zusammenarbeit

Parents and schools are required by law to cooperate. The regular exchange of information and also mutual understanding, trust and respect are important for this cooperation.

#### Sharing of information

##### Gegenseitige Information

The school will always inform parents about significant occurrences and plans relating to instruction (events, school trips, etc.) or school administration (assignment to school or class, times of instruction, teaching materials, school policies etc.). This information is provided in writing or at evening meetings for parents (*Elternabenden*).

Private parent-teacher meetings (*Standortgespräche*) are a key element for the cooperation between the school and parents.

Parents are entitled to attend a lesson at any time subject to prior arrangement with the teacher.

Parents are requested to notify the class teacher if a child is suffering from an illness, if a child needs to take medication regularly or in the case of an incidence or event that would compromise the child's development or ability to pay attention.

#### Translation

##### Übersetzung

It is important that parents understand what is being discussed at a parent-evening-meetings or at a parent-teacher conference. It is also important that parents are able to express their concerns and ask questions. If the parents' German or French language skills are not sufficient, a translator may be requested.

#### Important decisions

##### Wichtige Entscheide

All important decisions concerning a child's educational path (the move from the primary to the lower secondary level, for instance, or assignment to a special class) are discussed with the child and the parents.

Parents have the right to be informed, heard and advised by the child's teachers and the head of the school. Parents are entitled to inspect all files that concern their own child. The head of the school makes the final decision regarding the student's educational path and communicates this to the parents in writing, with an explanation for the decision. In cases where the parents are not in agreement with the decision, they have the option of submitting an appeal to the School Inspectorate (*Schulinspektorat*) within 30 days of notification.

## **Parental involvement**

### **Mitwirkung der Eltern**

Many schools have a parent council made up of one to two parent representatives for each class. These representatives are parents themselves and are elected at the start of the school year by the parents of the children in each class. The parent representatives of a class work closely with the class teacher. The parent council maintains contact between parents and the school.

Parents can find out more about parental involvement in the kindergarten or in the school from the class teacher or the head of the school.

## **Problems at school**

### **Probleme in der Volksschule**

Perhaps a child feels uncomfortable in class or maybe the level of his or her performance has suddenly slipped. A child might be having trouble with other children, or his or her parents might disagree with a teacher's decision.

## **Steps parents can take:**

1. The parents and the teacher establish contact with one another. They discuss the situation together and seek a way to resolve it. In most circumstances, this path leads to a satisfactory solution.
2. If the parents and the teacher cannot agree on a solution, and one or both sides deem it necessary, a meeting is held between the parents, the head of the school, and the teacher.
3. At any time, it is also possible to get specialised services involved, such as the school's social work office or the cantonal educational counselling service.
4. If no agreement can be reached, parents can appeal to the School Inspectorate.

The school can arrange for a translator if necessary.

## 14 Compulsory schooling in the German-speaking region of Canton Bern

Information for parents

### **Moving to the canton of Bern**

#### **Zuzug in den Kanton Bern**

Children between the ages of 4 and 15/16 are legally obliged to attend school as long as they are residing in Switzerland and intend to remain in the country for several months.

Parents who have recently moved to the canton of Bern, can obtain information about schooling from their municipality (Gemeinde) or on the website of the school in their place of residence.

Students who have difficulty with the language of instruction can obtain additional support in learning the language.

Students aged 13 or older who have no knowledge of the language of instruction, can attend the Regional Intensive Course (Regionaler Intensivkurs PLUS, RIK+).

Further information can be found at:  
[www.erz.be.ch/migration](http://www.erz.be.ch/migration)

## **Responsibilities / Definition of Terms Used**

### **Department of Education**

#### **Erziehungsdirektion**

The Department of Education is the cantonal education authority. It defines the framework for compulsory schooling in the municipalities, and it issues the curricula.

### **School inspectorate**

#### **Schulinspektorat**

The School Inspectorate is the cantonal authority that supervises compulsory schooling.

### **Municipality**

#### **Gemeinde**

The municipality is responsible for the organisation of compulsory schooling in the community. It provides the educational infrastructure: school buildings, furnishings and teaching materials.

### **School commission**

#### **Schulkommission**

The school commission ensures that children attend kindergarten and school in accordance with cantonal legislation and the requirements of the municipality. It is also responsible for the strategic decisions regarding its school.

### **The head of the school**

#### **Schulleitung**

The head of the school is responsible for running the school. Among other duties, he or she assigns the children to the individual classes and is responsible for decisions pertaining to the students' educational track.

### **Class teacher**

#### **Klassenlehrperson**

The class teacher is responsible for the educational and organisational leadership of the class. He or she is the first point of contact for all questions and concerns relating to your child's kindergarten and school attendance.

