

Going to Elementary School in Germany

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Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

When do children begin school?

Usually, German children begin school when they are 6 years old. To celebrate the first day of school, parents or friends give the children a *Schultüte*, a big colorful cone filled with candy and school items such as a pencil case and a *Füller* (fountain pen). The fountain pen is the tool with which most school children are required to write.

What kinds of schools are there in Germany?

The school system in Germany is very different from the United States. Everyone goes to the *Grundschule* (elementary school) for grades 1 through 4. After the 4th grade, the children, their parents and their teachers choose the track in which the children will continue their schooling, according to their study achievements. Many go to either the *Hauptschule*, the *Realschule* (secondary school grades 5–10), or the *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive school). Other children go to the *Gymnasium* for grades 5 to 13, which prepares them for the university.

What are school schedules like?

In general, school starts at 8:00 a.m. and ends around 1:00 p.m. There is usually a short recess period around 10:00. Children go home at 1:00 p.m., when most families eat their biggest meal of the day, the *Mittagessen*, which is usually a hot meal. After school reforms have been introduced, some children stay at school until 4:00 p.m. If they get out of school early, they have a lot of homework to keep them busy in the afternoon.

What kind of classes do they take?

The classes are very similar to classes in the United States in the way they are taught, but some of the subjects are different. Children learn math, science, reading, music, and history. They also have a gym class and start to learn a foreign language either in *Grundschule* or latest in 5th grade. English is the foreign language most people learn, but some children also choose French, Spanish or Latin as a first foreign language. Later on they learn other languages.

Do they have many vacations?

German children have a shorter summer vacation than children in the United States. They only have six weeks off in the summer. It is common for families to travel during vacation to such countries as France, Greece, Turkey, Italy, Austria, Spain, or Denmark. More and more people are also visiting the United States. Since the summer vacation is so short, they have a two-week vacation around the holidays in December and January. There is another two-week vacation at Easter and one week in fall. In addition, children have the day off on many religious and national holidays.

Are German children good students?

Just as in the United States, there are good, average, and poor students in Germany. Instead of using the A–F letter grading scale, German students receive numerical grades of 1–6 with 1 being the highest, or best score.