



# Zurich cantonal elementary education

## Information for parents

### **Aims and core ideas**

The state elementary education system in the county of Zurich is committed to the fundamental values upheld by the democratic state; it is free from religious or political bias. Attending state elementary school is free of charge.

Elementary school promotes behavior that recognizes christian, humanitarian and democratic values. It offers boys and girls equal opportunities. It complements a child's upbringing within the family.

Elementary school teaches core knowledge and skills; it leads to an understanding of how things are linked. It encourages respect for others and for the environment, and aims to ensure that children develop into independent, socially-integrated people. All children living in the county of Zurich are entitled to attend state elementary school. Compulsory education lasts nine years (from 2008/2009 11 years) until completion of elementary school. Compulsory schooling can also be received through private lessons or by attending private school.

### **Starting compulsory education**

All children who turn four by 30 April are required to attend kindergarten at the start of the following school year. The local education authority allocates children to the different schools.

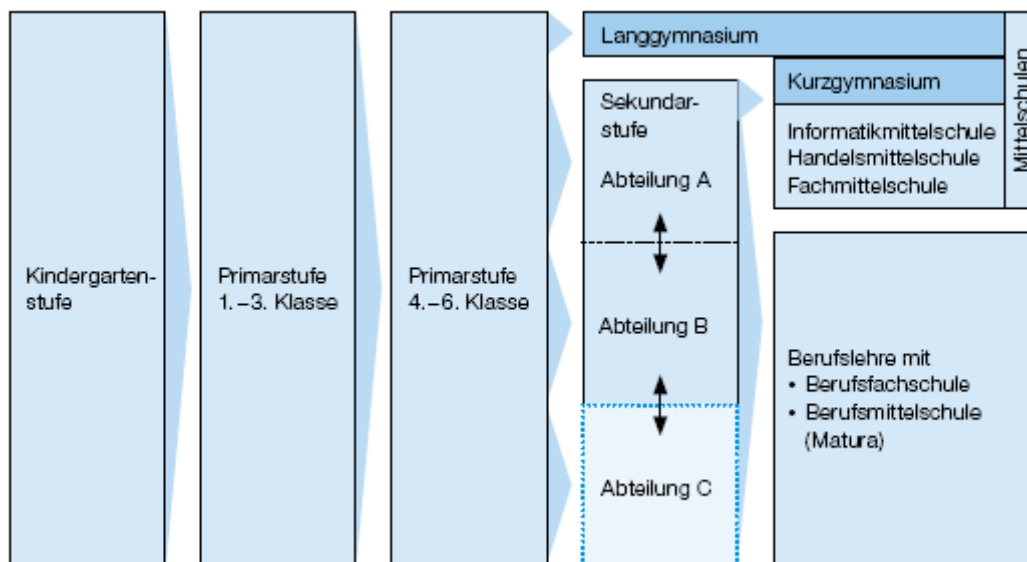
### **The school year**

The school year starts mid-August and lasts until early July the following year. There are breaks from school for autumn, Christmas, sports, spring and summer holidays. School lasts 39 calendar weeks.

### **A school day**

Lessons or supervision take place from 8 until 12 noon. This can be shortened by a maximum of 20 minutes per morning for school organizational purposes (e.g. school starts at 8.20am). Children have individual timetables in the afternoon. Parents have the right to all-day supervision. This service is subject to a fee.

## From kindergarten to primary, and on to secondary school



### Kindergarten lasts two years

Kindergarten supports and builds upon a child's upbringing. It encourages children's abilities, skills and special talents, and carefully teaches children to feel comfortable in larger groups. Kindergarten also prepares children for the demands of school.

### Primary school lasts six years

Six-year-old children go on to do six years of primary school. All children attend lessons at primary school together regardless of their origin, gender or educational achievement. As a rule, the class changes teacher after three years and, if possible, the make-up of the class changes too.

Primary school teaches reading, writing and arithmetic, i.e. math, German, English and French. Handwriting, crafts, art and music, sport, man and the environment are further important subjects.

Children receive a school report twice a year detailing their academic achievements, their attitude to work and learning, and their conduct.

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Children whose intellectual or personal development requires further encouragement receive special educational support with parental consent.

Depending on their achievements, children transfer to one of the two or three levels of secondary school at the end of primary school. Children who are particularly strong academically can take an entrance examination for an academic high school and thus leave elementary education to complete the last three years of compulsory education.

### **Three-year secondary school is divided into levels for strong and weaker achievers**

Secondary school reinforces and develops the knowledge acquired at primary school. In addition to the subjects taught at primary school, there is also biology, physics and home economics. Secondary school prepares young people for vocational or further education. Local authorities have two or three levels of secondary school education so that students benefit from learning that suits their competency level. Secondary A is the most demanding level. Secondary B has an intake of weaker students, and secondary C is for the weakest students. Local authorities can create different classes for certain subjects: I is the most demanding, while III is the least demanding.

Compulsory education ends when students finish secondary school. Most young people either complete an apprenticeship and vocational education, enter further education or, in addition to an apprenticeship, attend higher vocational college and attain a maturity certificate which allows them to enter higher education.

### **State elementary school and its services**

#### Location

Children attend elementary school in their place of residence. If a child does not reside at home during the week, he/she attends school in their 'day place' of residence. The schools governing board admits children to schools, and the school's management decides admissions to the classes and levels.

#### Timetable (teaching blocks) and day-to-day structure

Lessons or supervision take place from 8 until 12 noon. The school governing board can shorten this period by a maximum of 20 minutes per morning for school organizational purposes. Local authorities decide lunchtimes and lessons in the afternoon.

Lunchtime should be long enough for children to make their way home and back to school again, and eat a meal. Local authorities assess the need for out of school services (lunch clubs, child-care outside school hours and day schools etc).

### Extra classes

Voluntary, extra courses are in music and in a child's native language and culture (Heimatlicher Sprache und Kultur – HSK).

### Support services

These include the school's doctor, dentist, educational psychologist and the school's social services. All children undergo a medical and dental examination.

### **Cooperation and mutual support**

The education and upbringing of young people is the joint aim of elementary school and parents. An important requirement for success at school is effective cooperation within the triangle: **school – parents – students**.

**The school** regularly informs parents about their children's conduct and achievements. In special cases, the school governing board or school's management can make attendance of certain school events compulsory. Schools ensure parents' involvement through parent-teacher evenings, parent training, during school project week, school open days and the design of the playground etc. Parents are invited to be part of this 'general involvement', but are not required to participate. Parents have no collaboration rights regarding school staffing decisions, or methodology/teaching approaches.

**Parents** are responsible for bringing their children up, and ensuring they attend school regularly and complete compulsory education. Parents keep the teacher or school's management informed about their children's behavior and events in their surroundings which are relevant to school. Parents play a part in important decisions that affect their child, particularly regarding school career decisions.

**Students** fulfil their duties and play an active role at school. They are involved in decisions affecting them unless their age or other factors prevent this. The elementary school is aware of how far students can share responsibility and have a say according to their age and stage of development.

### What should I do if there are difficulties?

Teachers and parents keep each other up-to-date. Your first contact person is your child's class teacher. If difficulties cannot be solved by talking to the class teacher, you should contact the school's management. If this does not help, contact your local education authority.

Where can I find further information?

Contact your child's teacher, whose address you have. Or the school's manager. Your local council can provide you with information regarding important information and other services like the school's doctor or the school governing board.

Local education authorities have their own websites. Take the time to visit your school's website!

**Further Information**

You can find extensive information on the education department and the elementary school department websites:

**[www.bildungsdirektion .zh.ch](http://www.bildungsdirektion.zh.ch)**

**[www.volksschulamt.zh.ch](http://www.volksschulamt.zh.ch)**

The elementary school department website contains the telephone numbers for the most important information services.

Bildungsdirektion  
Volksschulamt\$  
Walchestrass 21  
8090 Zürich  
Tel. 043 259 22 51