



Kanton Bern
Canton de Berne



Compulsory schooling in the French-speaking region of Canton Bern

Information for parents

Informations à l'intention des parents

Anglais

Direction de l'instruction publique et de la culture



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Impressum

Édition et droits d'auteur:

Direction de l'instruction publique et de la culture du canton de Berne (INC)

Office de l'école obligatoire et du conseil (OECO)

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Édition 2023

Download: www.be.ch/ecole-obligatoire

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 (*commune*) would be happy to provide further information.

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Compulsory schooling

General information

Généralités

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 31st 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 for both genders.

Compulsory schooling is neutral with respect to religious denominations.

The School Commission (*commission scolaire*) 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 (*l'offre spécialisée de l'école obligatoire*).

Aims of compulsory schooling

Objectifs de l'école obligatoire

Compulsory schooling provides a solid basic education in general knowledge and skill development, which prepare students for future vocational education, 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.

Curriculum (PER)

Le plan d'études romand (PER)

From kindergarten through year 11, the PER serves teachers as a compass that helps them plan their lessons.

Structure of compulsory schooling

	Upper secondary level Degré secondaire II Vocational education and training or upper secondary school (e.g. apprenticeship or Bacculaureate school)	2 to 4 years		
Compulsory schooling École obligatoire	Lower secondary level (years 9–11) Degré secondaire I (9^e à 11^e)	3 years		Cycle 3
	Primary level (years 3–8) Degré primaire (3^e à 8^e)	6 years	Degré primaire 4 years	Cycle 2
			Basisstufe/ Cycle élémentaire 3 to 5 years	Cycle 1
Kindergarten École enfantine	2 years			

Kindergarten

École enfantine

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. 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).

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Primary level (years 3–8)

École primaire (3^e à 8^e)

From year 3 to year 8, pupils receive instruction in a variety of subject areas, such as languages, mathematics and design (*activités créatrices et manuelles*). The pupils take on increasing degrees of independence and responsibility for their own learning and work.

Starting in year 5, the pupils in the French-speaking region of the canton learn German as their first foreign language, in year 7 they start English as well.

After the primary level, children advance to the lower secondary level. In year 7, the school provides children and parents with detailed information about the procedure for the move to the lower secondary level.

Lower secondary level (years 9–11)

Degré secondaire I (9^e à 11^e)

In the lower secondary level, pupils are assigned to the appropriate group, or *section*, based on their potential.

The three *sections* offered in the French-speaking region of Canton Bern are “section générale” (g), “section moderne” (m) and “section préparant

aux écoles de maturité” (p). Requirements are higher in section p than in section m and are lowest in section g.

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.be.ch/cop

After compulsory education

Après la scolarité obligatoire

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.be.ch/formation-professionnelle

Information on specialized upper secondary schools and Baccalaureate schools:

www.be.ch/ecoles-moyennes

School year and school holidays

Année scolaire et vacances

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

Horaires

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 (*horaires blocs*). 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.

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Absences and authorisations for planned absences

Absences et dispenses

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 as follows: 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 (LCO), or a trial apprenticeship. Authorisation for a planned absence must be obtained well in advance.

Homework

Devoirs à la maison

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 3 and 4
- 45 minutes for year 5 through year 8
- 90 minutes for year 9 through year 11

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

Assessment

Évaluation

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 (*entretien de bilan*). 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 4 and at the end of years 6 through 11. The reports contain assessments of the child's performance in the different subjects. Starting from year 6, pupils' performances are assessed with grades in the report.

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Promotion and support

Supportive measures

Mesures de soutien

Children with a foreign language background can receive additional instruction in German as a second language.

Following an assessment, children with unusual intellectual gifts may take part in a programme designed to promote their intellectual development.

Learning difficulties

Difficultés d'apprentissage

Subject to parental consent, children who appear to have difficulty learning will be assessed by a specialist or the cantonal educational counselling service, Service psychologique pour enfants et adolescents (SPE).

www.be.ch/spe

Simple special-education measures

Mesures de pédagogie spécialisée ordinaires

Simple special education measures, such as integrative promotion, speech therapy and psychomotricity, serve to support pupils attending regular schools.

Compulsory children in year 3 who need some additional time to process the subject-matter being taught are allowed to take two years to work through the material.

Children who do not reach learning targets despite receiving support can receive instruction and be assessed on the basis of individualised learning targets.

Special classes

Classes spéciales

In many municipalities, children who have learning disabilities may attend a special education class (*classe spéciale*) at the primary or lower secondary level. 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.

Enhanced special-education measures

Mesures de pédagogie spécialisée renforcées

For children who need more support than the combination of classroom instruction and these support measures can provide, there are also enhanced special-education measures available – either in the regular school or in a special school.

Day school

École à journée continue

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.be.ch/offres-complementaires-ecole

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.fambe.sites.be.ch/fr

School social work

Travail social en milieu scolaire

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.

Health

Santé

All students must undergo a medical examination in year 6 and year 10. 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.

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Parents and compulsory schooling

Cooperation

Collaboration

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

Information mutuelle

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 (*réunions avec les parents*).

Private parent-teacher meetings (*entretiens de bilan*) 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

Traduction

It is important that parents understand what is being discussed at the evening meetings with parents 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

Décisions importantes

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 (*inspection scolaire*) within 30 days of notification.

Parental involvement

Participation

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

Problèmes à l'école

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:

Marche à suivre

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.

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Moving to the canton of Bern

Arrivée dans le canton de Berne

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 (*commune*) 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 PLUS (Cours intensif régional plus, CIR+).

Further information on CIR+ can be found at: www.bkd.be.ch/migration

Responsibilities / Definition of terms used

Department of Education

**Direction de l'instruction publique
et de la culture**

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

Inspection scolaire

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

Municipality

Commune

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

Commission scolaire

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

Direction d'école

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

Maîtresse ou maître de classe

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.

