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Bildungsdirektion
Volksschulamt
Pädagogisches, Unterrichtsfragen

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Englisch

What parents and carers need to know about kindergarten

When starting kindergarten, your child also begins their journey into elementary school. In this first phase of elementary school, kindergarten supports children in many ways, helps them develop and prepares them for the next step into primary school. This brochure provides you with information about the goals, tasks and requirements for kindergarten.

Kindergarten goals

Going to kindergarten means children regularly spend time away from parents or caregivers. This opens up opportunities for them to explore new spaces for play, and new environments and experiences.

Children start kindergarten with diverse levels of knowledge, capabilities, development and language skills. The goal is to progress each child's own development and encourage learning among all children. Each child should be able to best develop their own potential.

What does «learning» mean for Kindergarten

Kindergarten, primary and secondary school are part of the same compulsory curriculum, namely the Zurich „Lehrplan 21“ (cantonal curriculum). The curriculum specifies the skills children are expected to develop at kindergarten. At the same time, new findings about children's development and learning are taken into consideration.

Play is very important and an integral part of class, enabling children to learn through play. Younger children especially learn through observation, imitation, participation, creativity and conversation; they enjoy testing and expanding their own skills. For children, play and learning are intertwined. Over the course of the first three to four years of school, children's ways of thinking and learning change. They are increasingly able to focus their attention on predefined learning content and learn in a more systematic way. Thus the focus of learning shifts to subjects such as languages, mathematics and crafts.

As a rule, teaching in kindergarten is in Swiss-German. The use of high German is possible in specific situations.

Observations and assessments in kindergarten

Children receive an overall assessment at kindergarten, the basis of which being the skills set out in the Zurich cantonal curriculum. The kindergarten teacher observes and assesses each child in terms of their development, knowledge, capabilities and motivation. This informs specific areas for development, educational decisions, engaging with specialists (such as special educational needs teachers or speech therapists) and with parents. Over-



all assessments highlight how each child is progressing. The assessment is shared with the child and the parents or caregivers. Kindergarten teachers invite parents to two meetings per year. You can choose not to have the second meeting if your child's teacher agrees.

After the meeting, parents sign a form to confirm talks have taken place. If parents choose not to have a second meeting, they also fill in a form accordingly. Forms are kept on file and are given to parents at the end of kindergarten (in the same way as school reports during primary school).

Deferred entry

Deferring your child's entry into compulsory education (starting kindergarten) is possible in exceptional circumstances, namely when access to special needs support is unable to address expected difficulties. Deferrals can also be exceptionally requested during the school year. Parents or the child's teacher are able to make a request for deferral. Decisions are made by the school board (Schulpflege). If parents are dissatisfied with the school board's decision, appeals can be made to the local council.

Transitioning to primary school

As a rule children go to kindergarten for two years. The transition to primary school is usually automatic. Transitioning is based on information within the curriculum that describes levels of competence for kindergarten. Children are not required to have already achieved all competency descriptors when they transition to primary school. In fact it is not until the end of year 2 of primary school that the curriculum sets out basic requirements children need to meet.

In the case of learning difficulties or developmental delays, an assessment can help to determine if special measures are needed. The teacher and parents jointly decide this. An assessment tool to evaluate your child's current level (Schulische Standortgespräch) is available to support this discussion. If no agreement can be reached, the school management and, if necessary, the school board are involved. The school governing board determines the outcome. As before, if parents are dissatisfied with the decision, they can appeal to the local council.

Absences, requests for leave and joker days

Attending kindergarten is compulsory. All the elementary school rules for absences, leave and joker days are also applicable to kindergarten. In practice this means that if your child is ill and cannot attend class, you need to contact the teacher and excuse your child from school.

If you plan in advance for your child to be absent from school, please submit a request for leave to the school management. Leave can be requested for special circumstances such as special events of a personal nature, important denominational festivals, special religious occasions or a contagious illness in the child's family. The school management is obliged to take the personal, family and school situation into consideration when approving time off from school.



Every child is entitled to two joker days. In other words, every child can take two days off school without formally requesting leave. Parents inform their child's kindergarten teacher when they intend to make use of their joker days. In general, you cannot accumulate joker days, so if you have not used them in any one school year they expire. The school informs parents about the terms in your local authority.

Parents have rights and duties

The Elementary School Act clearly specifies certain rights and duties parents have. Parents have the right to be informed in a timely manner about school organisational matters, such as which class children have been allocated to, where and when lessons take place and events at school. The teacher provides timely and regular information about the kindergarten.

Teachers and parents should also keep each other up-to-date as relevant. For example when your child is having difficulties, when extraordinary events are taking place or when your child's behaviour or performance is unusual.

Parents also have the right to participate at school at an individual and general level. As parents you can also take part in decision-making, for example about your child's education (transitioning to primary school), about special educational needs support (during talks to evaluate your child's current level or reaching a consensus on support needs) or about disciplinary measures. General participation rights such as being on the 'Parents Council' or other activities are voluntary and captured in the statutes of your local authority.

Attending kindergarten is free. This is your right for where you live. If a child does not spend time where they live during the day, but stays with their childminder for example, they can have the right to free education in the childminder's local authority. If there is good reason, parents can also appeal to the school board for their child to attend school in a different community. The authority in question decides an appeal on a case-by-case basis and may also specify school fees. In some cases the communities agree arrangements, for example if the way to school is long or dangerous.

The Elementary School Act specifies duties for parents and others who are responsible for the child. Parents and others are responsible for making sure the child attends class regularly and is rested for example. They are also responsible that the child is suitably dressed and equipped for class or for special events (trips etc).

Way to school

As parents you are responsible for your child on their way to school. In general, children should be able to manage their way to kindergarten on their own after a 'settling-in' period. If the way to kindergarten is too long or dangerous the school board implements suitable measures. This can include a service to accompany children to school or school crossing supervisors. These services are paid for by the council.

Block scheduling and class time

Block scheduling is used across elementary school. Local authorities are required to make sure supervision is available for the whole morning from 8 until 12. Lesson times or super-



vision can be reduced by a maximum of 20 minutes per morning for school organisational purposes.

A special feature of kindergarten is class time before lessons officially begin (Auffangzeit), which allows children to arrive at different times. This voluntary class time is available to each child. The teacher structures the lesson at this time to suit the group of children.

Compulsory class times are predefined by the Zurich cantonal curriculum (Zürcher Lehrplan 21):

- Year 1 of kindergarten: 20 lessons per week; lessons take place in the mornings as per block scheduling
- Year 2 of kindergarten: 24 lessons per week; lessons take place in the mornings as per block scheduling and on two afternoons

Daytime cover

School authorities are required to offer suitable out of school care, if necessary. This can be over lunch time, in the afternoon (until 18.00) or, if required, in the morning (from 7.30) before lessons start. This out of school care outside block scheduling hours is fee-based. You can request information about what is available in your local authority from the school's office or from your child's teacher.