Curriculum, Subjects, Number of Hours

The agreement [1] reached in December 1993, as periodically amended, by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder [2] (Kultusministerkonferenz – KMK) concerning the types of schools and courses of education in lower secondary level (‘Vereinbarung über die Schularten und Bildungsgänge im Sekundarbereich I’) lays down a framework schedule for grades 5–9/10, requiring certain core subjects in every type of school and course of education: German, mathematics, the first foreign language, natural and social sciences. Music, art and sport, at the very least, have to be among the other compulsory or elective subjects offered.

A second foreign language is mandatory at Gymnasium in grades 7 to 10. In the course of the expansion of foreign language lessons in the primary sector, at the Gymnasium lessons in a second foreign language are often given from as early as grade 6. At other types of school, a second foreign language may be offered as an elective course.

An introduction to the professional and working world is a compulsory component of every course of education and is provided either in a special subject such as Arbeitslehre (pre-vocational studies, also called Economics-Work-Technology or Work-Economics-Technology) or as part of the material covered in other subjects or subject groups.

Religion [3] is subject to the respective regulations in each Land, according to which religion is a standard subject in nearly every Land. For the situation of Protestant and Catholic religious education, see the reports of the Standing Conference of 2002. An amended version of the report on the teaching of ethics was published in February 2008.

Where courses are taught according to level of proficiency at Schularten mit mehreren Bildungsgängen (schools offering several courses of education), this teaching begins in grade 7 in the case of mathematics and the first foreign language, in grade 8 for German, as a rule, and in grade 9 at the latest, and from grade 9 onwards in at least one natural science subject (physics or chemistry).

With regard to the curricula or education plans, generally the remarks for the primary level apply, according to which the Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder are principally responsible for developing the curricula [4]. As a consequence of the results of international comparative studies, the curricula have been thoroughly revised over the past years. In most Länder the revision focused on the following main areas:

- in the Hauptschule course of education: acquisition of basic competences in German and mathematics, orientation towards professional practice and promotion of social competence
- definition of compulsory key areas of learning, provision of scope for measures to activate pupils and inspire problem-solving thought processes
- development of educational standards binding for all Länder, which are based upon the areas of
competence for the individual subject or subject group, that determine the capabilities, skills and knowledge students should dispose of at a certain stage of their school career.

To implement the Bildungsstandards (educational standards) of the Standing Conference for the Hauptschulabschluss and the Mittlerer Schulabschluss, the subjects in the curricula have been adapted accordingly. The educational standards [5] binding for all Länder specify the goals themselves, whilst the curricula of the Länder describe and structure the way to achieve these goals.

The courses in German, mathematics and the first foreign language take up three to five periods each per week, natural and social sciences two to three periods each. As of grade 7, at the latest, another three to five periods per week are spent on a second foreign language as a compulsory or elective subject, depending on the type of school. The amount of time devoted to other compulsory or elective subjects (music, art, sport, pre-vocational studies) and religious education varies depending on the subjects and type of school the total of weekly instruction being 28-30 periods. At lower secondary level of the eight-year Gymnasium [6], the number of weekly periods is generally increased by two to four weekly periods.

**Foreign language teaching**

Foreign language teaching is an integral part of basic general education at all lower secondary level schools as from grade 5 and a core element of individual specialisation as from grade 7. On transition to lower secondary level, foreign language learning connects with sound competences acquired in the primary sector and continuously expands on them. The prerequisite for this is institutionally guaranteed cooperation between the primary and secondary sectors. Foreign language lessons in lower secondary level are characterised by systematic learning and a higher level of abstraction. They also aim at increasingly independent and autonomous management of and reflection on learning. Compulsory and elective foreign language offers take account of differences in aptitudes and biographies, and the interests of pupils. The development of foreign language competence up to the end of the lower secondary level is geared to competence level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The objective of functional multilingualism requires that pupils be given the opportunity to acquire fundamental knowledge in at least another foreign language. Language lessons that have been continuously attended since lower secondary level may be supplemented by bilingual teaching and learning in other subjects. More information can be found in the KMK resolution [7] "Recommendations of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany on strengthening foreign language competence" (Empfehlungen der Kultusministerkonferenz zur Stärkung der Fremdsprachenkompetenz) of December 2011 and the report [8] Concepts for bilingual teaching (Konzepte für den bilingualen Unterricht) of October 2013.

**Teaching in MINT subjects**

At all levels of the education system the strengthening of natural science and technical education (MINT – mathematics, information technology, natural sciences, technology) is currently of particular importance. The Standing Conference has repeatedly addressed the development of school teaching in MINT subjects. By introducing educational standards in this area, it has facilitated the description of demanding and achievable objectives in the form of competences. Against the background of the predicted need for specialists in mathematics and natural sciences, the Standing Conference adopted “Recommendations to strengthen mathematics, natural sciences and technical education” (‘Empfehlungen zur Stärkung der mathematisch-naturwissenschaftlich-technischen Bildung’) in May 2009.
Cross-curricular topics

The Standing Conference emphasises the significance of these topics in schools through resolutions and recommendations on individual lesson contents. These are generally interdisciplinary lesson contents that relate mainly to questions of historical-political, economic and cultural education. Apart from this, it is also about topics such as health education, media education and vocational guidance:

- Vocational Orientation
- Sustainable development education
- Democracy education
- Educating about Europe
- Health education
- National Socialism and the Holocaust
- Intercultural education
- Jewish history, religion and culture
- Cultural education
- Media education
- Human rights education
- Road safety education
- Economic education and consumer education
- Digital education
- Gender-sensitive education

In addition, the Länder set their own priorities.

Vocational Orientation

In the "Recommendation on Vocational Orientation at schools" vom Dezember (Resolution of the Conference of Education Ministers of 7 December 2017), the Länder advocate a curricularly anchored and individual vocational orientation in all lower and upper secondary education programmes in order to set the course for a viable career choice decision at an early stage and thus for a successful transition to training, study and occupation. For the Standing Conference and the Länder, a successful transition is of central importance for the educational and vocational biographies of young people. The activities for Vocational Orientation in the Länder are published in the „ Documentation on Vocational Orientation in general education schools" (Dokumentation zur Beruflichen Orientierung an allgemeinbildenden Schulen’) (Resolution of the Conference of Education Ministers of 7 December 2017).

Education for sustainable development

Within the scope of the United Nations’ World Decade of “Education for Sustainable Development”, the Standing Conference and the German Commission for UNESCO (Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission – DUK) in June 2007 adopted a joint recommendation with regard to “Education for sustainable development at school” (Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung in der Schule). Also in June 2007 the Standing Conference and the Federal Government published a Cross-Curricular Framework for Global Development Education (Orientierungsrahmen für den Lernbereich Globale Entwicklung). The cross-curricular framework can be taken as a basis for the development of the curricula, teacher training and work in schools. The revised version of the cross-curricular framework from June 2015 provides concrete recommendations for the inclusion of sustainable and global development topics in the curricula of almost all subjects (natural sciences, foreign languages, mathematics, German, art, music, sports, politics, economics, religion, ethics, geography) and shows what pupils can learn in class if these topics are dealt with. The cross-curricular framework hereby aims at empowering the
individual to play an independent and responsible role in shaping the individual and social challenges of the future.

**Democracy education**

In October 2018, the Länder published the recommendation "Democracy as an objective, subject and practice of historical-political education and upbringing in schools" ("Demokratie als Ziel, Gegenstand und Praxis historisch-politischer Bildung und Erziehung in der Schule") in a fundamentally revised form. In the future, the KMK will continue to promote democratic school and teaching development and encourage all participating institutions and people to assume responsibility and participate in shaping schools and civil society. In order to further strengthen the commitment of teachers, specialists and pupils to democratic development at school and in society, the Länder have agreed to support various measures. These include, among other things, expanding the anchoring of democracy education in the guidelines and curricula of all subjects and developing democratic bodies and forms of work in order to enable real participation by pupils. It is seen as the task of school and teaching development and of all subjects as well as extracurricular activities to strengthen pupils' commitment to the democratic rule of law and to resolutely oppose anti-democratic and inhumane attitudes and developments.

**Media education**

With its resolution on "Media Education in Schools" ("Medienbildung in der Schule") in March 2012 the Standing Conference reacted to the new technological developments and their impact on society and on every individual. The attainment of media competence through media education in schools includes the constructive and critical examination of the media world on the one hand, and the sensible use of the possibilities it offers for individual learning processes on the other. Young people should be put in a position where they can handle media autonomously, correctly, in a socially responsible, communicative and creative way, use these for their own education processes and to extend their scope of action, to find their way around in media and non-media environments and to take value-based decisions.

**Human rights education**

In October 2018, countries adopted a revised version of the "Recommendation on human rights education in schools" ("Menschenrechtsbildung in der Schule"). According to this recommendation, addressing and implementing human rights, and thus also children's rights, is part of sustainable and comprehensive education and school development. This is regarded as a task for all teachers and all professionals working in schools and as an important object in the cooperation between schools and the domestic environment. As a cross-cutting theme for the entire school life, human rights education is also the subject of interdisciplinary teaching. Although subjects such as history, politics/business/social studies/professional knowledge, languages, biology, religion and ethics/philosophy have a special potential for value creation oriented towards human rights, all other subjects are also called upon to make their contribution. The Länder have agreed on measures to implement and further develop these recommendations.

**Education in the digital World**

Against the background of the possibilities and challenges that the progressive digitisation of all fields of life entails, the Standing Conference resolved the “Education in the digital world” strategy (Bildung in der digitalen Welt) in December 2016. This strategy formulates clear goals for digital education and specifies the content orientation. In addition to the pedagogically sound inclusion of digital teaching
and learning materials, the Standing Conference formulates the goal of incorporating the competences for the digital world described in the strategy into the curricula of the individual subjects. The strategy also describes the opportunities offered by digital educational media for creating multimedia learning worlds. For teachers, this opens up new possibilities for the provision of learning media suitable for the target group in increasingly heterogeneous learning groups. Digital educational media can be individually adapted to the level of competence achieved and can be put together specifically on the basis of the learners' interests. For the school sector, teaching and learning in the digital world have to follow the primacy of the pedagogical – in other words the educational mission. This means that a consideration of digital changes serves the objective of supplementing the current educational policy guidelines and of encouraging independence through changes in the content-related and formal organisation of learning processes and of allowing a better development of individual potentials within inclusive education through the use of digital learning environments too.

Cultural education

Cultural education as a key prerequisite for cultural participation has been firmly anchored in the everyday life of schools and cultural establishments for years now. With its February 2007 "Recommendation on cultural education for children and young people" (‘Empfehlung zur kulturellen Kinder- und Jugendbildung’) and the choice of this subject area for the feature chapter in the 2012 Education Report, the Standing Conference underlined its importance for education in schools. In October 2013 the Recommendation was amended. As a result of more recent developments, such as the expansion of all-day schools, inclusion, interculturalism and participation, further education or anchoring cultural education as an interdisciplinary topic are paid more attention in the curricula. The aspect of collaboration between schools, cultural establishments and extracurricular education for children and young people is emphasised more clearly.

Health education

Building on its recommendations on "Health education in schools" ('Gesundheitserziehung in der Schule') of June 1979 and on "Addiction and drug prevention" ('Sucht und Drogenprävention') of July 1990, in November 2012 the Standing Conference adopted the “Recommendation on health promotion and prevention in schools”. The updated recommendations on health promotion and prevention are consistent with the advanced understanding of modern addiction and the interaction of behavioural and relationship facets, and take up the key aspects of school prevention work such as strengthening pupils’ life skills and the interprofessional networking of all stakeholders involved in health promotion and prevention.

Consumer education

Consumer education at schools aims to develop responsible consumer behaviour, by informing about consumption-related content and developing competences with respect to a reflected and empowered consumer behaviour. In September 2013 the Standing Conference adopted a recommendation on “Consumer education at schools” (Verbraucherbildung an Schulen) which focuses on the following topics:

- finances, market activity and consumer rights
- nutrition and health
- media and information
- sustainable consumption.

The content of the recommendation includes central targets and general principles of consumer
education at schools, measures for educational administration and education policy, advice for implementation in school, support and advisory systems and cooperation with non-school partners.

**Intercultural education**

In a globalised world, intercultural competences are increasingly important as key qualifications for all children and young people. The Standing Conference therefore emphasised, in its December 2013 amended recommendation “Intercultural education at school” (*Interkulturelle Bildung und Erziehung in der Schule*) the potentials of cultural diversity, and developed cornerstones for the work at schools which are rounded out by suggestions for educational administrations and for cooperation with non-school partners. Intercultural competence here is understood to not simply mean engaging with other languages and cultures but most of all the ability to consider one’s own perceptions of other people and to put them in context, and being aware of and reflecting on the social framework conditions in which these perceptions have developed.

**Culture of remembrance**

In December 2014, the Standing Conference resolved “Recommendations on a culture of remembrance to form an object of historical-political education in schools” (*Empfehlungen zur Erinnerungskultur als Gegenstand historisch-politischer Bildung in der Schule*). The recommendations take up earlier resolutions on individual topics from the field of political education and have been developed with the involvement of relevant institutions and associations. The aim of a common “culture of remembrance” in schools is to enable young people to describe and evaluate historical developments and to understand that they have the ability to shape and change our world with their own actions. The recommendations are directed at teaching staff, at those with management responsibility in education, in teacher-training, further training of teachers or extracurricular education, training and learning venues.

**Teaching of Jewish history, religion and culture in school**

The "Joint declaration of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Standing Conference on the teaching of Jewish history, religion and culture in school" (*Gemeinsame Erklärung des Zentralrats der Juden in Deutschland und der Kultusministerkonferenz zur Vermittlung jüdischer Geschichte, Religion und Kultur in der Schule*) of December 2016 aims to present Judaism in schools in its diversity and authenticity, and to provide students with a lively and differentiated picture of Judaism. According to the declaration, awareness and recognition of the diversity and complexity of Judaism are key steps toward gaining understanding and reducing prejudice. The manifold perspectives of historical and contemporary Judaism should be discussed in as many grades and subjects as possible. A special responsibility is attached to subjects and projects of historical and political education. The analyses of current political developments and past events and processes are inseparable in this regard.

In April 2018, the Standing Conference and the Central Council of Jews in Germany (*Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*) presented an annotated collection of material [9] on the teaching of Judaism in schools at a joint symposium to support teachers.

**Gender-sensitive education**

The guidelines [10] adopted by the Standing Conference and the Conference of Ministers for Gender Equality and Women's Affairs of the Länder (*Konferenz der Gleichstellungs- und Frauenministerinnen und -minister, -senatorinnen und -senatoren der Länder – GMFK*) in October 2016 on securing equal opportunities through gender-sensitive school education and upbringing (*'Leitlinien zur Sicherung der Chancengleichheit durch geschlechter sensible schulische Bildung und Erziehung*) give concrete form...
to the mandate of Article 3 of the Basic Law [11] (Grundgesetz) for the effective enforcement of equal rights for women and men and the elimination of gender-related disadvantages in the school sector. Among other things, curricula and textbooks are increasingly raising awareness of the need to break down restrictive gender role models and behavioural attributions with the aim of personality development according to individual abilities and inclinations.

**Teaching Methods and Materials**

Teaching in schools in Germany is governed by regulations of various kinds laid down by the Länder. The prescribed curricula include guidelines on the treatment of the various topics of instruction, distribution of materials and various didactic approaches. Of increasing importance are interdisciplinary coordination of material taught and teaching objectives as well as interdisciplinary activities in such areas as health education, vocational orientation, computer literacy, environmental education and the treatment of European topics.

In almost all Länder, measures for the promotion of a professional approach to the increasing heterogeneity of learning groups in terms of pre-conditions and performance have been brought on the way. Such measures include, without limitation:

- the internal differentiation of learning groups (*Binnendifferenzierung*)
- self-regulated learning
- pupil-oriented instruction

The measures aim at enhancing individual promotion on all performance levels, in particular of pupils with migrant backgrounds or from difficult social backgrounds but also of particularly gifted pupils. In the further development of in-service training for teachers [12], the approach to heterogeneous learning groups also plays an important part.

The use of digital media (multimedia) is becoming increasingly important not only as a subject of teaching and learning, but also as a digital environment for teaching. In March 2019, as part of the DigitalPact School 2019–2024 (*DigitalPakt Schule 2019–2024*), the Federal Government and the Länder agreed, among other things, to strengthen the digital infrastructure of schools across the board. The latest information about the use of new media can be found on the Education Servers provided by the Länder Ministries and is also available on the information portal maintained centrally by the federal and Länder authorities, the German Education Server [13].

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