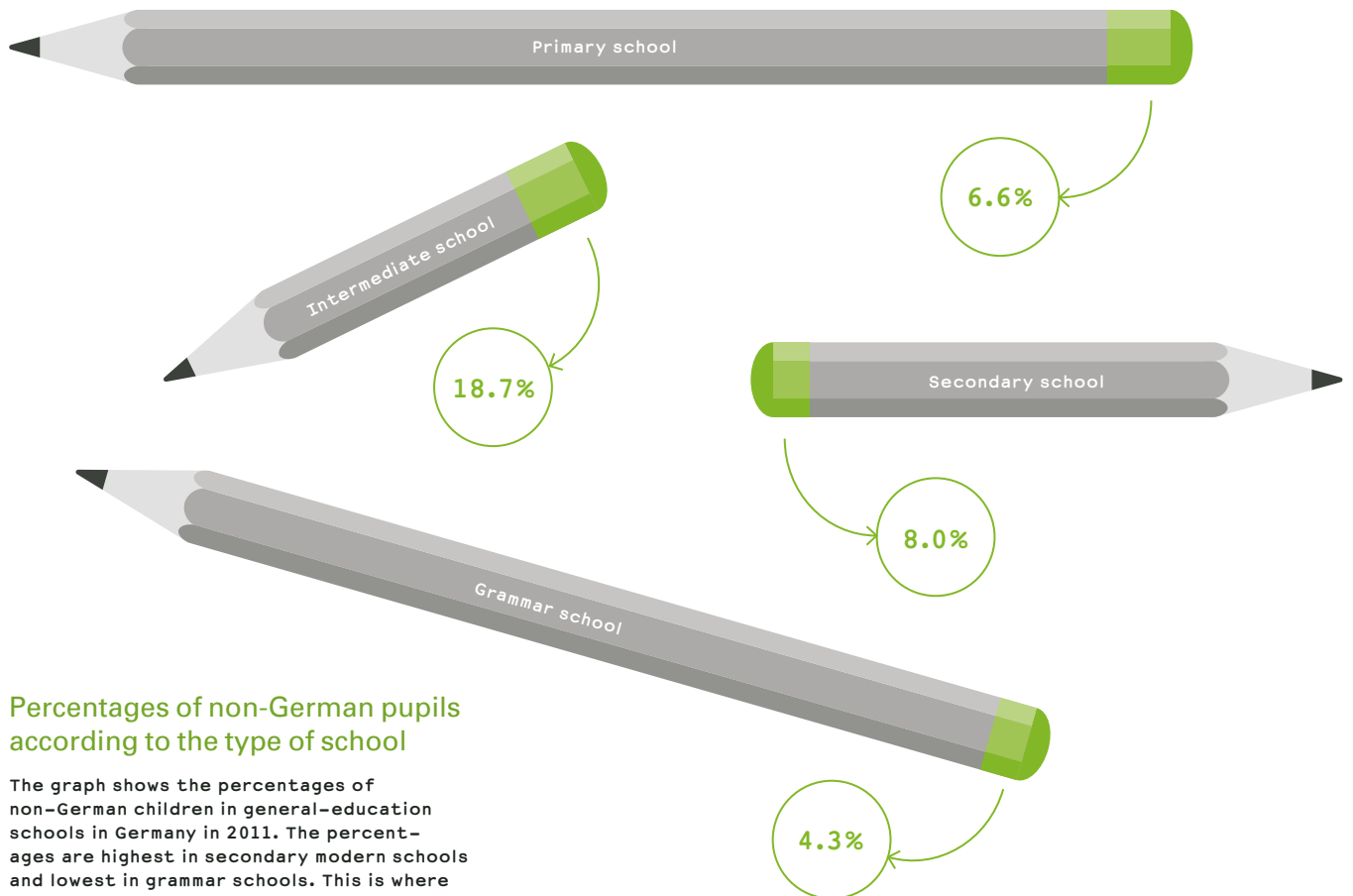


Early childhood education lays the foundation for a successful education system. In this pre-school childcare centre in Berlin, creativity knows no bounds.



A fair education system for everyone



Percentages of non-German pupils according to the type of school

The graph shows the percentages of non-German children in general-education schools in Germany in 2011. The percentages are highest in secondary modern schools and lowest in grammar schools. This is where education politics must begin to take action. Integration is still not succeeding.

- German pupils
- Non-German pupils*

* Pupils with a foreign passport or unclarified citizenship
Source: Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)

Whether for school children or adults, in international comparisons of educational performance, Germany only takes middle and even bottom positions in the overall rankings. The education system does not work because social background is more decisive for the opportunities of social advancement than merit, and too many young people leave school without graduating.

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Because our structured school system prioritises homogeneity, we separate our school children at a very early age in comparison to almost all other countries. This is said to “promote their performance”. International comparative studies confirm, however, that a longer duration of joint learning can produce more high-achieving and less low-achieving children. Why do we ignore these facts? Why do we sweep aside such insights with derogatory labels such as “egalitarianism” or “comprehensive school”, although longer periods of joint learning lead to a higher standard of education for everyone? And also to greater mutual respect. How can children learn to respect people from other social and cultural groups if they have been separated from each other at an early age? A longer period of commonly shared education must be well prepared, however, and it requires a teaching approach that embraces diversity. The failure to live out the intercourse with diversity in schools and the denial of the human right of inclusive learning are the central problems of our school system. We must allow the children a longer period of learning with each other, ideally until the age of 16. We would lose no-one but win many.

More time for learning

Children need time and trust. Not all children learn to walk at the same time and at the same speed; our schools should take this into consideration. Instead, we have even shortened grammar school attendance by one year. Pre-school groups, childcare facilities and day schools cannot compensate for the loss. We need more and qualitatively better nurseries, childcare centres and schools that offer full day care as soon as possible. We need the exchange year abroad and the voluntary social year. With a labour market that is changing faster than ever before, we should not save on education time.

Developing skills and capabilities

We separate too rigidly according to the motto of: school is responsible for the cognitive competences, all the rest takes place outside the curriculum. Guiding values and key competencies can also be learned and taught at school. To do this we must change the teaching methods, teach democracy, values, cultural and social competence and train the acceptance of responsibility. We should not narrow down the teaching contents too early. We must be able to build on this base over and over again for a whole lifetime.

More money for education

Money alone does not guarantee a good education system. Finland spends little more per child from the primary to tertiary level than Germany. Nevertheless, the difference in the educational results is considerable. Germany strongly curbs its expenditure above all in the early school years, in which compensatory learning is most important for the children. A new course is not only needed in this respect; the financially weaker federal states and “toxic schools” must receive more money and consequently more room to manoeuvre. For the welfare of our children, we need a federalism of solidarity and should reach our self-defined goal of investing ten per cent of the gross national product in education by 2015.

Networking the stakeholders

Time, contents, creativity and money – these are the elements with which we must build an infrastructure that will educate our children with qualified and well-paid staff. Parents also need our support, and the many stakeholders in the education system must be networked with each other. To this end we need collaboration between totally different institutions and professions. The federal, state and local governments must cooperate with each other for this purpose. However, local education networks are also enormously important. We need education chains: schools, youth authorities, youth centres and job centres must be much more closely networked. Warning signals must be recognised early. In this way, more children can be better educated than before. The efforts required for this will be worth it in every case – not only from the economic viewpoint but also regarding happiness and contentment.

A photograph of a diverse group of children in a classroom. In the foreground, a young girl with a white headscarf is looking towards the right. Behind her, a young boy with light brown hair and blue eyes is looking forward. To his right, another young boy with dark skin is looking towards the right. In the background, a person wearing a blue and white checkered shirt is partially visible. The children appear to be listening or participating in a lesson.

School classes with children from the widest diversity of countries are not uncommon, particularly in major cities. The photograph was taken at a primary school in Leicester, England. This town is the first in Europe in which more immigrant children than nationals are attending a primary school.