

Lower Saxony  
Ministry of Education

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Frequently asked  
questions on the

## **Transition** from primary school to secondary school



**Lower Saxony**

## Foreword

# Making the transition a smooth one

### A message to parents, guardians and other readers,

Since the start of the 2015/2016 school year, pupils have been moving up to secondary school without specific school career recommendations. You are faced with the decision: which of the various types of secondary school (at junior level, i. e. up to Year 9) is right for my child?

This leaflet is designed to give you initial guidance about our differentiated education system in Lower Saxony.

In Year 4, additional input is available in the form of in-depth advisory discussions with the teachers as to your child's school situation. Please take advantage of this opportunity. You should also make use of information events on secondary schools, at which you can find out about the educational mandate, approaches to teaching and performance requirements of the various school types. Vertical mobility between different types of education is an important principle in Lower Saxony's educational policy.

You will find this a valuable basis for making a well-informed decision about your child's continuing education. The shared aim should be that your child is happy and keen to rise to the challenges of the type of education chosen.



Frauke Heiligenstadt  
Lower Saxony Minister  
of Education

## 1. What assistance is available to help me decide which secondary school is right for my child?

In Year 4 at primary school, at least two consultations are available to inform you how your child is progressing in his/her learning and to guide you in the choice of secondary-school type and educational path.

Bear in mind that the teachers know your child and how he/she is performing, both in his/her own right and in comparison with other pupils. You will also be briefed on the requirements and curriculum at an information event held at the end of Year 3 or at the start of Year 4, as well as options for switching between educational tracks, and about school-leaving qualifications possible. You must then decide about the next stage in your child's education and register him/her with a secondary school. Registration deadlines for secondary schools are 5–10 weeks before the beginning of the summer holidays.

If your child has special needs, please refer to the additional information for parents and guardians in the leaflet "Der Wechsel an die weiterführende Schule: Übergänge gestalten!" (Moving up to secondary school: help with making the transition).

This leaflet is available (in German) online at [www.mk.niedersachsen.de](http://www.mk.niedersachsen.de)

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(Services > Publications > Further Topics)

## 2. Are there mandatory requirements for these consultations?

A specific form for recording the outcome of the two consultations must be used for all pupils. Its purpose is to standardize the process and to help teachers ensure they have taken all important aspects into account. The following considerations constitute the basis for the discussions with you: your child's performance level and learning progress, as well as social behaviour and work habits. No average target grades are required, but the overall picture in terms of grades should be taken into account with a view to the desired track. Alongside learning outcomes, the development of the pupil's overall personality must be taken into account, as must any external circumstances.



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### 3. Where can I find out about the requirements of the different secondary-school types?

You can find out about the educational requirements of the *Hauptschule* (lower secondary school), *Realschule* (intermediate secondary school), *Oberschule* (integrated *Hauptschule* and *Realschule*), *Gymnasium* (upper secondary school) and *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive school) directly from the schools themselves. These schools hold information events, an Open Day and other similar activities.

The different educational mandates of the secondary schools can be described as follows:

The ***Hauptschule*** provides pupils with a basic general education that has a real-life emphasis. It also offers personalized careers guidance and enables each pupil to focus on particular areas with regard to vocational training. It encourages basic skills, work attitude, fundamental literacy and numeracy skills and independent learning. In lessons, a particular priority is placed on practice-oriented learning.

The ***Realschule*** provides its pupils with an extended general education and general vocational guidance. It helps students to piece together parts of a complex whole (holistic thinking) and enables them to become more independent learners. The *Realschule* enables each pupil to focus on particular areas called 'profile' areas: foreign languages, economics, technology or health & social studies.

The ***Gymnasium*** gives its pupils a broad, in-depth general education and enables general scholastic aptitude to be acquired. It encourages independent learning and a scientific/academic approach to work. The material covered enables each pupil to focus on particular areas, both at junior secondary level and at university preparatory level (*gymnasiale Oberstufe*).

The ***Oberschule*** provides its pupils with basic, extended or in-depth general education and allows each of them to focus on particular areas in keeping with their abilities and preferences. The *Oberschule* encourages basic skills and independent learning, as well as promoting social learning. It offers the following in Years 9 and 10:

- A main practical/vocational focus, including careers guidance and vocational training/education
- Different 'profile' areas: foreign languages, economics, technology, and health & social studies; additionally, upper-track-level teaching (if provided) helps pupils prepare to attend **university preparatory level**.

The ***Gesamtschule*** provides its pupils with a basic, extended or broad and in-depth general education. It encourages basic skills, independent learning and a scientific/academic approach to work, and allows each pupil to focus on particular areas depending on their ability and preferences. An integrated comprehensive school (*IGS*) provides pupils from various learning backgrounds with shared learning experiences and promotes social learning as they are taught together.

#### 4. Which school-leaving certificates are awarded on the different educational tracks?

In Lower Saxony, the following school-leaving certificates can be obtained at each of the following secondary-school types that provide general education:

At the end of Year 9

- *Hauptschule* (lower secondary) school-leaving certificate
- School-leaving certificate (with a special focus on learning) from a *Förderschule* (special-needs school)

At the end of Year 10.

- Secondary school-leaving certificate (junior level) – *Realschule* (intermediate secondary) school-leaving certificate,
- Secondary school-leaving certificate (junior level) – *Hauptschule* (lower secondary) school-leaving certificate.
- Extended secondary school-leaving certificate (junior level) that entitles the holder to attend the introductory phase of university preparatory level (*gymnasiale Oberstufe*) at a *Gymnasium* (upper secondary school) providing general education or at a *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive school), or a *berufliches Gymnasium* (academic and vocational upper secondary school).

In the upper level at a *Gymnasium* or a cooperative (*KGS*) or integrated (*IGS*) comprehensive school, the academic part of the *Fachhochschulreife* (technical-college / university of applied sciences entrance qualification) may be awarded, as may the *allgemeine Hochschulreife* (general higher-education entrance qualification). These schools issue certification of the general *Fachhochschulreife* when documentation is submitted of the vocational part of the *Fachhochschulreife*. The various vocational schools also enable students to obtain the above school-leaving qualifications. Depending on the qualification awarded, an individual may continue their studies at upper secondary level, at a *Fachhochschule* or a university.

#### 5. How do I register my child with a secondary school?

The child moves up from primary school (*Grundschule*) to a secondary school (*weiterführende Schule*) on the basis of the school report for the first half of Year 4, and in-depth guidance provided to the parent/guardian by the primary school. As previously, the parent/guardian registers their child at the secondary school



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(‘parents’ free preference’). For a child moving up to an *Oberschule* (integrated lower and intermediate secondary school) or a *Gesamtschule* (comprehensive school) the following scenarios are conceivable depending on how teaching is organized in Year 5:

- Children receiving lessons in Year 5 on a year-group basis (shared teaching) are registered with the *Oberschule* without the need to factor in any subsequent educational track that may be taken, or any later subject differentiation.
- If mathematics and English teaching in Year 5 is in equal-ability classes, pupils are included in these subject groups (based on the parents’ decision) at the level corresponding to the desired track.
- If teaching is largely provided on an educational-track basis, the pupil will be enrolled in the track desired by the parents.
- Work at an integrated comprehensive school (*IGS*) is year-based (within-class grouping). The pupil is registered without any specification regarding subsequent adoption of equal-ability grouping at class level.
- Work at a *kooperative Gesamtschule* (*KGS*, cooperative comprehensive school) may be organized into separate educational tracks or into mixed-track learning groups. Irrespective of this internal organization, pupils at a *KGS* are enrolled into whichever track the parents choose.

## 6. Can my child switch school type if it turns out he/she is insufficiently challenged and could achieve more?

The principle of vertical mobility between the different school types is of prime importance. The educational pathways at the secondary schools are 'aligned' so as to enable pupils to change between educational tracks. Under certain circumstances (i. e. depending on average grades), there may even be legal entitlement to switch school type, this being noted on the report card. In this case you, the parents or guardians, decide whether to go ahead with this change or not. You can also formally request a change of school type and the relevant administrative panel (*Klassenkonferenz*) will rule on this. It will consider whether, based on your child's progress in terms of learning and development, he or she can be expected to do well in the new track selected.

## 7. What happens if my child's performance shows that the demands of the school type I chose are too high?

Here, too, the principle of vertical mobility between educational tracks applies. Parents or guardians may request a change of school type.

At the integrated comprehensive school (*integrierte Gesamtschule, IGS*), pupils move up one year group without the need for official approval of this transfer. Thanks to within-class grouping and (starting in Year 7) subject differentiation into English, maths, German and the sciences, your child will receive teaching at a level that matches his/her own. This will prevent educational underachievement, and your child's options – with a view to obtaining the best possible school-leaving certificate – can be kept open for a long time.

At the *Oberschule* (i. e. a combined lower and intermediate secondary school), pupils are provided with a basic and extended general education 'under one roof' and, where these joint schools also include upper-track-level teaching, with in-depth general education. The ease with which pupils can switch tracks within the system, and the fact that the level of teaching is tailored to pupils' own learning and performance capabilities, means your child will not need to move to a different school type if there are changes in their learning performance.



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The cooperative comprehensive school (*kooperative Gesamtschule, KGS*) combines all three secondary school types – *Hauptschule*, *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* – as interrelated educational tracks 'under one roof'. Mixed-track teaching and option of switching tracks ensure vertical mobility and that the level of teaching is tailored to pupils' own learning and performance capabilities. Your child will not, therefore, have to switch to a different school type if there are changes in his/her learning performance.

A child who attends the same year group for two years or is not transferred in two successive school years may, if the relevant administrative panel (*Klassenkonferenz*) so rules, be transferred to a different type of school. This is to protect the child from an ongoing situation in which they are not coping, and to give them better prospects for development.

If no transfer takes place, the child will continue to attend the school they are at, moving up one year group.



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## 8. Can parents choose a particular school for their child or are there specified catchment areas?

If an education authority area has been established, your child is required to attend the school of the type chosen within this school district. Exemptions will be considered only in exceptional cases (if unreasonable hardship or special educational reasons apply). If your preference is for an all-day school but there are none in the school district where you live, your child may attend one in a different school district (although there is no automatic entitlement to attend such a school; see question 9, 'What happens if the number of available places exceeds the number of registrations at a given school?') If the school authorities have not divided an area into school districts, the child may in principle attend any of the schools there.

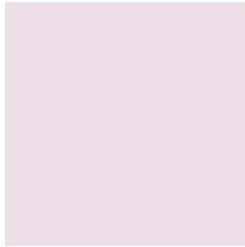


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## 9. What happens if the number of available places exceeds the number of registrations at a given school?

In all-day schools (other than *Oberschulen*, i. e. combined lower and intermediate secondary schools) and *Gesamtschulen* (comprehensive schools), the decision is made in such cases by the drawing of lots. This method may also be used for other secondary schools if the number of available places exceeds the number of registrations and not all registered pupils can be enrolled by other means. If it comes down to the drawing of lots, the school will develop appropriate criteria in close cooperation with the school authorities.

It may, therefore, be the case that your child does not obtain a place at the preferred school. They will, however, receive a place at a type of school at which the desired school-leaving certificate can be acquired.



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