



# The school system in Nordrhein-Westfalen

## Explained quickly and easily



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## Information and guidance

The school programme in North Rhine-Westphalia covers a broad spectrum. It offers all children and young people very good educational opportunities, according to their abilities and preferences. This flyer gives you an overview. You can obtain more detailed information at schools, local education authorities and district councils. People with a migrant background can also contact the municipal integration centres. The integration centres advise in particular on the transitions between the educational levels – from kindergarten to primary school, right through to the transition from school to work.

You can find the contact persons for your municipality here:  
**[www.mkjfgfi.nrw/kommunale-integrationszentren-0](http://www.mkjfgfi.nrw/kommunale-integrationszentren-0)**

Comprehensive information about the school system in Nordrhein-Westfalen is available at: **[www.schulministerium.nrw](http://www.schulministerium.nrw)**

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## Compulsory school age

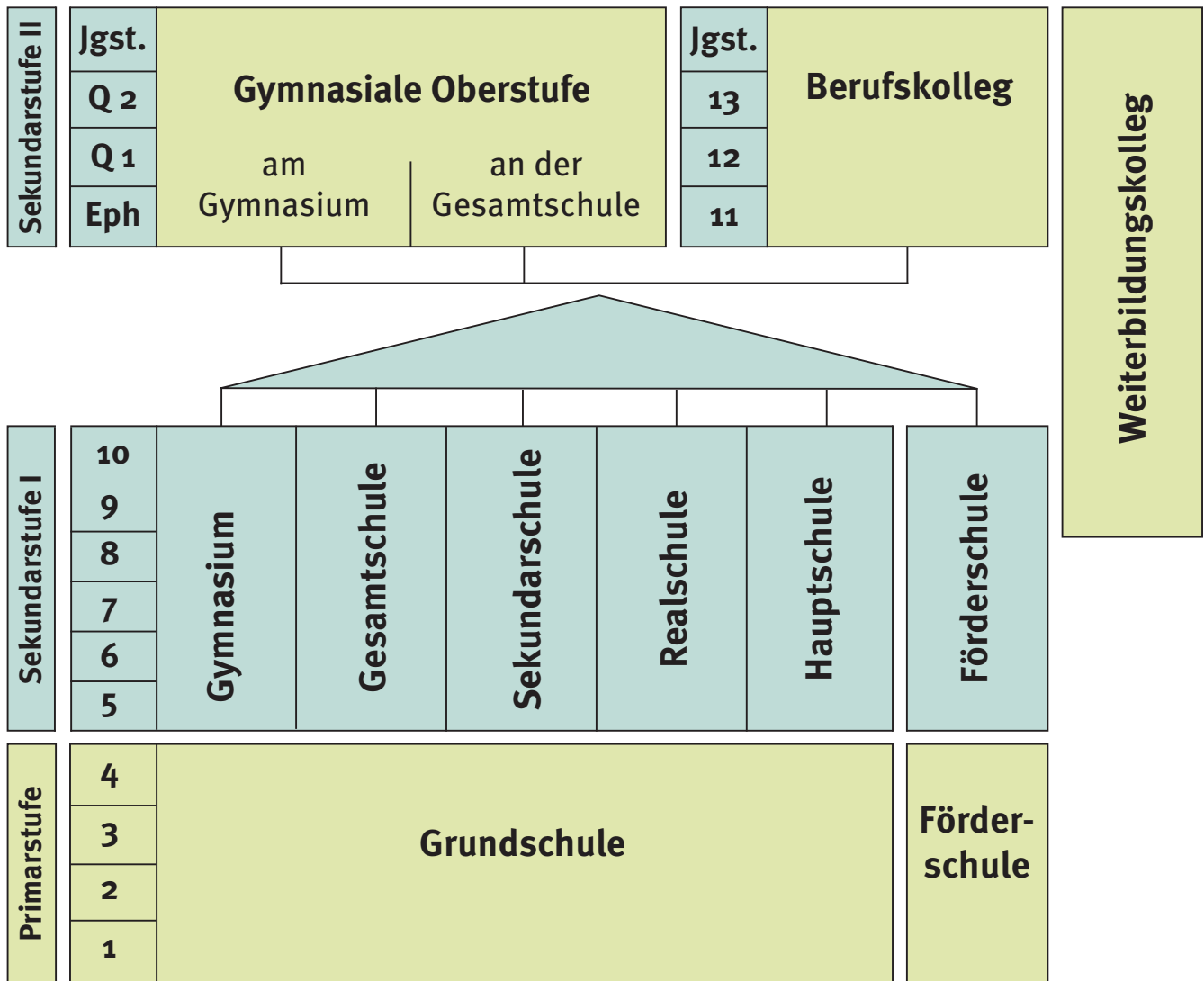
In Nordrhein-Westfalen, the Education Act requires children to start school in the year in which they reach the age of six by 30 September. The new school year always starts in the summer. Children and young people attend school for at least ten years. Firstly, from year 1 to year 4, they attend primary school (Grundschule). They then attend school from year 5 to the end of secondary level I. Young people must attend either a vocational college or the sixth-form style 'gymnasiale Oberstufe' until the end of the school year in which they reach 18 or graduate from a full-time secondary education programme at secondary level II. Those starting a vocational training programme before reaching the age of 21 must continue to attend until it finishes.

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## Grundschule

A child's school education begins in Grundschule. It comprises grades 1 to 4. The children are individually supported from the very beginning, taking into account their personal requirements and interests. Basic knowledge, abilities, skills and values are taught.

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## Sekundarstufe I

Sekundarstufe I builds on primary school. In Nordrhein-Westfalen, the following school forms offer secondary education:

- ▶ **Hauptschule** (grades 5 to 10)
- ▶ **Realschule** (grades 5 to 10)
- ▶ **Gymnasium** (grades 5 to 10)
- ▶ **Gesamtschule** (grades 5 to 10)
- ▶ **Sekundarschule** (grades 5 to 10).

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## Hauptschule

The Hauptschule provides students with a basic general education. The teaching is highly practice-orientated. The students receive intensive support at an early stage with their professional orientation, career choice and start of vocational training. Regular internships at companies enable students to gain insight into the world of work. The business and world of work learning area prepares students for work-related life situations, and makes the living environment – insofar as it is characterised by work – tangible and transparent to them.

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## Realschule

The Realschule provides students with an extended general education. In the lessons, practical and theoretical abilities and skills are promoted on an equal basis. Accordingly, the teaching is practice orientated, but also offers scientific perspectives. Work-orientated competencies acquired and the subject of economics enable students to continue their educational path after completing the tenth grade, either in a vocational training programme or at the Sekundarstufe II in the gymnasiale Oberstufe.

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## Gymnasium

The Gymnasium provides a more in-depth general education. Students acquire knowledge and skills that are a prerequisite for university studies or highly demanding vocational training. In a continuous education programme, it comprises both Sekundarstufe I (grades 5 to 10) and the subsequent three-year Sekundarstufe II with gymnasiale Oberstufe.

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## Gesamtschule

With a differentiated teaching system, the Gesamtschule prepares for vocational training and for studying at a university. There, students with different learning abilities can learn together. The students are not assigned to specific training programmes as at a Hauptschule, Realschule or Gymnasium. In order to accommodate the different knowledge and skills of the students, teaching is offered at two levels (basic level and extended level) in some subjects. The Gesamtschule comprises both Sekundarstufe I (grades 5 to 10) and the subsequent three-year Sekundarstufe II with gymnasiale Oberstufe. Gesamtschulen usually operate as all-day schools.

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## Sekundarschule

In Sekundarschule, students with different knowledge and abilities can learn together for longer. Within the framework of their professional orientation, it prepares students for vocational training as well as for the transition to gymnasiale Oberstufe. From the beginning, the teaching also meets Gymnasium standards, and covers grades 5 to 10. Every Sekundarschule has a binding cooperation with at least one gymnasiale Oberstufe. Sekundarschulen usually operate as all-day schools.

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## Förderschule

Some students require special support due to a learning and development disorder or disability. These students are entitled to so-called „sonderpädagogische Unterstützung“. There are seven different „special educational“ support key areas:

- ▶ Learning
- ▶ Language
- ▶ Emotional and social development
- ▶ Sight
- ▶ Hearing and communication
- ▶ Mental development
- ▶ Physical and motor skills development.

General schools are the standard support locations for students with special educational support needs. However, parents also have the right to choose a Förderschule for their children.

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## Sekundarstufe II

The Sekundarstufe II continues and expands the education and upbringing work of Sekundarstufe I. It is split into a general education branch, the gymnasiale Oberstufe and a vocational training branch, the Berufskolleg.

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## Gymnasiale Oberstufe

Students continue their general school education in the gymnasiale Oberstufe. In Nordrhein-Westfalen, upper secondary school can be attended at a Gymnasium, a Gesamtschule or a Berufliches Gymnasium. At the end of upper secondary school, the Allgemeine Hochschulreife (general university entrance qualification) is obtained by passing the Abiturprüfung (final secondary school examinations).



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At a Berufskolleg, it is also possible to obtain a general university entrance qualification in conjunction with a vocational qualification. With an Abitur (university entrance qualification), one can register for degree programmes at universities of applied sciences or universities.

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## Berufskolleg

At a Berufskolleg, students can attend vocational training programmes that offer

- ▶ a professional orientation
- ▶ preparation for work or study
- ▶ a vocational qualification or
- ▶ further vocational training.

In parallel, all training programmes at vocational schools offer the possibility to obtain or catch up on general education secondary school qualifications up to the level of Abitur.

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## Weiterbildungskolleg

The Weiterbildungskolleg offers education to working people of different ages or to people with previous work experience. In the training programmes Abendrealschule, Abendgymnasium and Kolleg, all secondary school and upper secondary school qualifications can be obtained subsequently. A special offer is the „Abitur-Online“ training programme with lower attendance requirements at school.

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## More information:

You can obtain further information at schools, local education authorities and district councils, as well as on the Internet at: **[www.schulministerium.nrw](http://www.schulministerium.nrw)**

You can find the contact persons for your municipality here:

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### Imprint

Published by: Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen  
Völklinger Straße 49 | 40221 Düsseldorf | Telefon 0211 5867-40 | Fax 0211 5867-3220  
poststelle@msb.nrw.de | [www.schulministerium.nrw](http://www.schulministerium.nrw)

Foto: iStock@kali9

MSB 10/2022