

Schools during the pandemic Recommendations for organising the school year 2020/21

Policy Recommendations of
the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's
commission of experts

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Mandate of the commission and thanks

The Corona pandemic and its effects represent a turning point. That applies to both public life and many people's everyday experience. This is particularly true of the realm of education – and first and foremost for students, their parents, teaching staff, school heads, education policy and administration.

All have responded with considerable effort and commitment to the rapidly and radically changing situation and have come up with short-term solutions under the most difficult circumstances. But it is also already clear that the coming school year 2020/21 will not be a 'normal' one, either.

Depending on the occurrence of infection, further school openings, continuing the mixture of face-to-face and distance learning, but also a resumption of school closures are all possible. In any case, the events of spring 2020 will affect the whole of the coming school year.

In response to this state of affairs, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung set up a commission of experts in May 2020. Its mission was to focus on the next school year and to come up with concrete recommendations for various areas of activity and challenges.

Twenty-two experts from the educational sciences, didactics, education law, medicine, educational psychology, school administration and municipal representatives, school heads, teaching staff, students and parents have laboured in mixed working groups on a range of topics and the results are presented in this opinion. Key to the success of this endeavour was the commission's independence and the inclusion of various perspectives and professions.

In the course of three weeks the experts held discussions in plenary sessions and in working groups via video conferencing. Papers were drafted digitally and in collaboration, and jointly adopted. Many thanks are due for the high level of motivation and strong commitment they showed during this period.

But the work of the commission would not have been possible without the strong dedication of two people in particular.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung offers special thanks to Prof. Dr. Kai Maaz, executive director of the DIPF | Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education, who chaired the commission.

The Stiftung also cordially thanks Burkhard Jungkamp, retired state secretary and moderator of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's education network, for moderating the commission.

It is thanks to the work and strong commitment of Professor Maaz and Mr Jungkamp that the commission has produced the results presented in this opinion in such a discursive, but also such a focused manner.

Preparations for the coming school year have seldom been as important as they are now. The findings of our expert commission are intended to contribute to that.

Dr Martin Pfafferott

Head of Education and Science
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Members of the commission of experts

Chair: Prof. Dr. Kai Maaz, executive director of the DIPF | Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education

Other members:

Johanna Antony, teacher at the Kurt Schumacher School, Berlin-Kreuzberg

Prof. Dr. Michael Becker-Mrotzek, Director of the Mercator Institute for Literacy and Language Education and German as a Second Language, University of Cologne

Azalea Chapman, Berlin Bilingual School, member of the district students' committee, Berlin-Pankow

Dr Martina Diedrich, Director of the Institute for Education Monitoring and Quality Development, Hamburg

Dr Joanna Eger, specialist in general medicine, infectious diseases, Munich

Prof. Dr. Birgit Eickelmann, chair of school pedagogy at the University of Paderborn and head of the National Research Centre of ICILS, 2018

Prof. Dr. Felix Hanschmann, Humboldt University, Berlin, law faculty

Klaus Hebborn, German Association of Towns and Cities (Deutscher Städtetag), head of the education, culture, sport and equal opportunities department

Prof. Dr. Martin Heinrich, scientific director of the faculty of educational science, Oberstufenkolleg Bielefeld, professor of educational science and school research

Gülay Iscan-Pilic, teacher at the Pestalozzi School, Durlach

Prof. Dr. Dominik Leiss, Dean of the education faculty at Leuphana University, Lüneburg, professor of empirical educational research in the teaching of mathematics

Ines Mühlens-Hackbarth, head of Fichtenwalde primary school

Miriam Pech, head of the Heinz Brandt School, Berlin-Weißensee and chair of the Berlin ISS teachers' association

Dr. med. Christine Scheinkönig, specialist in general medicine, Berlin

Matthias Siebert, chair of the regional association of educational psychology, Berlin e.V.

Dr Ute Teichert, MPH, specialist in public health care, head of the Academy of Public Health Care, chair of the federal association of doctors of the public health service e.V. (BVÖGD)

Lucia Wagner, regional student representative Rhineland-Palatinate, member of the federal delegation

Stephan Wassmuth, chair of the Federal Council of Parents

Prof. Dr. Birgit Werner, Heidelberg University of Education, director of the Institute for Special Needs Education

Dr Anna Aleksandra Wojciechowicz, University of Potsdam, Centre for Teacher Training and Education Research

Prof. Dr. Michael Wrase, WZB Berlin Social Science Centre and professor of public law, specialising in social and educational law at the Hildesheim University Foundation, Institute for Social and Organisational Pedagogy

Moderation and advisory member:

Burkhard Jungkamp, former state secretary and moderator of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Education Network

Introduction

February 2020: students are studying in all areas open to them, they interact, they, organise; they largely study without any worries, plan their winter holidays and beyond; everything is customary and familiar.

March 2020: empty classrooms, specialised classrooms and gymnasiums, an eerie silence in corridors and schoolyards. School trips and school hikes have been cancelled, teachers' conferences called off. In normal times teaching would be going on here, voices would be heard from classrooms, cheers from the gym and individual students would be seen in the corridors. Now nobody is here. The school has been forced to shut down. But learning needs to go on. School closures do not mean that teaching can come to a halt. Teachers are supposed to remain in contact with their students, home learning under the guidance of the maths teacher and the German teacher has been announced. Digital technologies have come into focus. Schools that have already made some progress with this have found it easier to encourage digital study. For others – and a not inconsiderable number – this is new territory.

Late April, early May 2020: schools are opening gradually, initially for exams, then slowly for selected school years. Teaching goes on only in smaller learning groups. Some are permitted to attend school again, others are not.

Furthermore, a lot has changed. Shaking hands, sitting next to one another in the classroom or in the teacher's room, playing sport together, or discussion groups, formerly regular forms of behaviour have become potential hazards in this period of crisis. Those who want to show some kind of intimacy have to keep their distance. Physical distancing is the order of the day, as is complying with hygiene quality standards. The Corona pandemic is having serious consequences – for the school system, schools and, in particular, the people who go there.

Also now, in late May 2020, face-to-face teaching is still the exception and it tends to be combined with distance learning. What we are seeing is numerous teachers making an exemplary contribution, networking, supporting and communicating with one another. They not only send their students study materials, but also provide them with support, especially in the run-up to exams. Communications with parents also seem to be more intensive than normal, and there are WhatsApp groups and regular emails, regardless of whether there's a particular occasion, day of the week or hour of the day.

But we are also seeing some children left to their own devices, increasingly isolated, having contact with neither their teachers nor their friends from their own class, and for many others, important social contacts have been possible only sporadically in recent weeks. And once again, those in socially privileged families are at an advantage

because they receive additional support at home and have the computer and internet equipment they need. Others are at risk of falling further and further behind due to the lack of support. The digital divide is increasing educational injustice.

The school system is fully in the grip of the Corona pandemic and its effects will also be felt in the 2020/21 school year. We cannot say, at present, how the number of new infections will develop. It is certain, however, that children and young people can catch it, too. They may also be infectious themselves.

Despite all the uncertainties diligent preparations are needed for the coming school year. This is because the quality of a school is largely determined by the quality of its working processes and organisation. During the Corona pandemic, organising successful teaching and learning processes, ensuring a high level of reliability in planning and, at the same time, adapting to rapidly changing conditions is a challenge of unprecedented complexity. Maintaining a balance between stability and flexibility, and re-establishing it repeatedly, if need be, requires from policymakers, the school authorities and school boards, not to mention the schools themselves, professionalism and early and forward-looking planning.

In order to cope with the upcoming challenges, and thus to provide orientation, the expert commission set up by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung has developed the following recommendations on the relevant fields of activity.

Based on three scenarios, dependent not least on the relevant state of the occurrence of infections – face-to-face teaching as the norm (Scenario 1), a mixture of face-to-face and distance learning (Scenario 2) and distance learning as the norm (Scenario 3) – it provides suggestions on how, given stricter infection protection and hygiene measures, high quality teaching and learning can be ensured.

It concerns, for example, the organisation of teaching in terms of premises, scheduling and staff, especially opportunities for the deployment of teachers in so-called 'at-risk groups'. This is related to maintaining the requisite medical and hygienic standards in schools, during the school day and to and from school. Also at issue is establishing a pedagogically and psychosocially amenable rhythm in terms of periods of presence and absence, in order to provide teaching and advisory services to reduce educational disadvantage.

Also at issue are the necessary methodological, didactic and substantive focus and adequate procedures for assessing, as well as preparing and implementing (final) exams. Finally, in the medium term it concerns the establishment of a reliable digital infrastructure, and in the short term better provision of digital devices for schools so they can lend them temporarily to students in need of support – hand in hand with further training for teachers, preferably compulsory. Digital technology is not an end in itself, but should be used only when it makes pedagogical sense.

Schools' and teachers' primary task is to organise and provide support for distance

learning, which follows from the state's educational mission, within the meaning of Art. 7 para 1 Basic Law. At present, key components of this mission have, as one might expect under the circumstances, been transferred to parents and those with parental authority. Delegating this responsibility can foster problems within the family and subsequent psychological stress. This should be avoided. Fundamentally, reconciliation of work and family life should be ensured. School authorities, school boards and schools should jointly develop creative solutions given the need for hygiene and protective measures in the face of a shortage of teaching staff and suitable classrooms.

August/September 2020: End of the summer holidays. Start of the new school year, also a challenge for everyone involved. Students must not lose a school year. The experiences of the past school semester have shown that policymakers, school boards, school managements and teaching staff, but in particular students and their parents have developed substantial commitment, organisational talent and creativity in response to all the challenges and problems in order to enable the best possible education. Now the task is to harness this positive force in the preparation and organisation of the new school year and the provision of support.

Prof. Dr. Kai Maaz

Chair of the commission

Burkhard Jungkamp

Moderator of the commission

Summary

Based on the relevant occurrence of infection, ensuring effective follow-up of contact persons and the available free capacities in the curative health sector, the commission recommends that three scenarios be distinguished for the 2020/21 school year: Scenario 1, face-to-face teaching as the norm; Scenario 2, a combination of face-to-face teaching and distance learning; and Scenario 3, distance learning as the norm. The hygiene and protective measures that need to be adhered to in each of the scenarios directly affect schools' organisation and substantive design. For the commission, in essence this gives rise to the following recommendations for the coming school year:

- The planning of the new school year should not be based on a return to business as usual in schools. It should take place on the basis of Scenarios 1 or 2.
- The older the students, the more face-to-face teaching should be reduced and distance learning increased. If there is a need to choose which classes should be taught face to face, younger years should take priority.
- As far as possible, students should have a fixed contact person from the school who is available for personal consultation at least once a week. Low-threshold counselling services should be available for students with psycho-social problems.
- Distance learning should be conducted on the basis of mandatory hourly or weekly plans and participation in distance learning should be documented.
- Students without their own equipment should as far as possible be provided with digital devices on a temporary basis at the beginning of the school year. Free study materials also includes digital devices for students.
- The *Länder* should lay down minimum requirements for pedagogic use of digital technologies and make attaining the appropriate qualifications widely available for teaching staff, depending on need and their own skill level.
- There should be no abridgement of schedules solely at the expense of so-called 'minor subjects'. Instead, the notion of a comprehensive general education should be adhered to.
- In primary schools in particular basic mathematical and linguistic competences should be inculcated, while at secondary level a grounding in specific subjects should be provided.

- Promoting digital skills and using digital technologies should build on the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs' strategy 'Education for the digital world', taking into consideration the new conditions in the expanded list of aims for school education.
- For the school year 2020/21 there should be cuts in the syllabus and in expected performance targets in all subjects. This should not be at the expense of the quality of education, but rather allow teaching staff the necessary leeway to cope constructively with the hygiene-related restrictions on teaching and learning options.
- Accordingly, the range of exam contents should be reduced in each subject and directly reflected in teaching practice. This does not imply a lowering of quality standards, because demanding examinations are also possible within a quantitatively reduced spectrum of material.
- The number and scope of exam situations, as well as class work or tests, should also be reduced. Instead, feedback should be obtained from work assessments more frequently than hitherto, so that students have the opportunity to correct and adapt their study processes.
- As far as possible alternative forms of examination, alternative forms of performance assessment (changes in exam settings) and other forms of performance appraisal (instead of marks) should be used.
- Decisions on transitions and the awarding of certificates should as far as possible be disconnected from grades and the traditional measure of repeating a year should be avoided.
- Attractive compensatory options both during and outside lesson time (summer and vacation schools) should complement integrated school support measures.
- Learning should be sensitively adapted to students' home circumstances, taking particular account of disadvantage.
- Study time should be as flexible as possible to take more account of individual learning circumstances, for example by completing the last two years before the intermediate school leaving certificate (MSA) in three years, or by extending the qualification period at upper secondary school level by one year.
- Schools should receive back-up from external education providers and cooperate with education experts.

Recommendations

1. Hygiene and protection measures – rules of behaviour and consequences for school organisation

Challenges

The aim of the following recommendations is to keep the risk of infection with SARS-CoV-2 in schools at the level of other everyday activities and to protect people at higher risk of serious illness. Key to this is recognising new infections, swiftly isolating contagious people and identifying contacts as quickly and fully as possible.

These recommendations are based on the current state of knowledge (May 2020). To date in Germany relatively few people under 15 years of age have tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. It must be pointed out, however, that children's disease progression is often asymptomatic or mild and thus tested less frequently. At the moment, we should assume that children can be infectious, even when they present no symptoms. As things stand three transmission paths are probable: *droplet infection* through face-to-face coughing, sneezing or talking ('damp articulation'); *aerosol infection*, contagion through Covid-19 pathogens spread in exhaled air; and *smear infection*, transmission by a contaminated hand, if it is brought into contact with mouth and nasal mucosa or with the lining of the eyes (conjunctiva). The majority of infections, it is currently believed, are via droplet and aerosol infection. Transmission via smear infection appears to be less important.

The risk of droplet infection can be considerably reduced by maintaining social distancing, and to a lesser extent – above all to protect others – by wearing face masks that cover mouth and nose or other measures that protect against sputum. Aerosol infection can be counteracted by staying outdoors or in well ventilated areas; smear infection can be counteracted through handwashing and surface hygiene.

To ensure that SARS-CoV-2 does not spread in schools, and children and young people do not make a significant contribution to the spread of Covid-19, the existing hygiene framework should be extended to include the following measures (and those listed in the Annex). It is clear that this will involve challenges for all those that have anything to do with schools, whether directly or indirectly.

Recommendations

1) Three scenarios: Based on the specific occurrence of infection, ensuring effective contact tracing and the existence of free capacities in the curative health care sector, it was recommended that three scenarios be outlined. Because the number of new infections is expected to fluctuate in the coming months, with considerable regional

variations, it may be necessary to take a different approach in the course of the school year. Schools, teaching staff, students and parents must be prepared for that.

If a shift in approach proves necessary, it should be kept in mind that the effects of easing the lockdown (for example, a shift from Scenario 3 to 2, see below) on the occurrence of infection can be judged only after a few weeks have passed.

Scenario 1: Face-to-face teaching as the norm

If effective contact tracing is possible in the event of a lower occurrence of infection and, as a result, a possible increase in the number of new infections is nipped in the bud, splitting up classes should be avoided. This is conditional on the formation of fixed learning groups.

This approach seems appropriate for primary school level, first and foremost. It should be considered at secondary school level if, as far as possible, fixed learning groups can be formed. Specifically, we recommend the measures detailed in the Annex.

Scenario 2: Mixture of face-to-face teaching and distance learning

If, for example, in the event of a higher occurrence of infection a further increase in new infections is to be avoided smaller, unchanged learning groups should be formed so that social distancing of 1.5 metres can be maintained in classrooms. Specifically, we recommend the measures detailed in the Annex.

Scenario 3: Distance learning

If, for example, because of a higher occurrence of infection or intensive care units look to be in danger of overloading, efforts are directed towards reducing the number of new infections, face-to-face teaching should be suspended in primary schools and lower and upper secondary school level, depending on the relevant occurrence of infection nationally, at *Land* level or regionally. In that case, we consider it particularly important, for medical and psychological reasons, to ensure a daily and weekly rhythm by means of continuous distance learning, for example with mandatory digital attendance on the basis of a timetable, as well as encouraging social contacts with fellow students (for example, through digital group work).

2) Basic protective measures

Protection of others

Basically, scenarios 1 and 2 involve restricted access to schools. People with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infections or symptoms of Covid-19 may not enter school buildings. The same applies to asymptomatic close contacts of people with symptoms of Covid-19, until this transmission chain can be assumed to be safe. In case of doubt, a clean bill of

health can be attested by a medical certificate. When a SARS-CoV-2 infection has been ruled out in the case of a sick household member the student has to participate in face-to-face teaching once again.

Teachers or employees who while at school present symptoms that are suspected to indicate Covid-19 must immediately be isolated under supervision and be collected or go home straight away. The persons affected or their parental guardians should be urged to undergo immediate testing for SARS-CoV-2.

If sickness levels rise conspicuously the local health authorities should be involved.

Parents should be informed in writing what they should do in case students or household members show symptoms similar to those of SARS-CoV-2. According to what we currently know, these include – in particular – fever, coughing, sore throat and loss of the senses of taste and smell. Information should be documented and regularly repeated. Information should be made available to schools centrally.

Parents and people who do not have anything to do with the school should be allowed on school property only in justified cases (for example, acute illness or accident of a child) and wearing face masks. Visits to the school by outsiders must be documented in writing.

Self-protection of groups at risk

Persons at risk are those who, in the event of an infection, run the risk of serious illness from Covid-19. Anyone worried that they might be a 'person at risk' in this sense must have it certified by a (specialist) doctor and present the certificate to the school. Everyone over 60 years of age are deemed to be persons at risk. The persons at risk who are supposed to be protected by the present recommendations include:

- members of the school community (students and school staff); and
- members of the same household as members of the school community.

The main measure for the purpose of self-protection is currently the avoidance of face-to-face situations in contact with a lot of people. The concept of self-protection here includes protecting the members of one's household ('shielding').

Self-protection measures – such as exemption from face-to-face teaching for students, teachers and other pedagogic staff or the possibility of home working for secretarial staff – should be voluntary and enabled by the school at the request of those concerned.

Children who are unable to participate in face-to-face teaching because of their own illness or the presence of persons at risk in their household must be provided continuously with distance learning, which in an equivalent manner ensures that the

state's educational mission is fulfilled for the students concerned.

Pregnancy

Pregnant women must be permitted, given the novelty of the virus and, as a consequence, the lack of reliable data, to stay away from school for the duration of the pandemic, to the extent that this is associated with numerous face-to-face contacts.

3) Measures to protect others in relation to particular groups of students

In the case of certain groups of students the hygiene regulations cannot be adhered to for medical reasons, for example, students with (also combined) visual and hearing impairments, who rely on tactile perception or teachers' mouthing, or in the case of students with severe cognitive impairment and/or multiple disabilities. For this group, as far as possible, face-to-face teaching must be maintained or home schooling provided.

Part of this group, because of further illnesses or disabilities, can be expected to run a heightened risk of severe illness as a result of Covid-19.

For these groups the risk of infection in school can be reduced by repeated diagnostic investigations. Suitable for this purpose are, for example, sputum or smear tests with rapidly available results at the outset of each school year for all students and teachers in the learning group.

This is conditional on whether these tests will be available in sufficient quantity and quality in the 2020/21 school year, which is not the case at the moment. Depending on the sensitivity of the available tests students at a low risk, or if the tests are very sensitive also for students at a higher risk of severe illness from a Covid-19 infection, face-to-face teaching would be possible with no need for social distancing, even when the rate of new infections is high.

4) Further measures

Students suffering from psychosocial stress should be offered low-threshold counselling: opportunities to talk and (preventive) support structures should together form an organised counselling system, involving multiprofessional cooperation (for example, care teams, mentoring schemes, cooperation between teaching staff and care workers and educational psychologists). Central here is the promotion of (psychological) health. Crucial to this is the assistance of *Land* and municipal counselling and support systems in educational psychology and special needs teaching, but also the framework conditions created by education policymakers and educational administration to cope with the special circumstances of the 2020–21 school year.

Carrying out accompanying research studies: because currently there is no approved vaccine and it cannot be foreseen whether a sufficient proportion of the population will be immune in the 2021/22 school year, advantage should be taken of the coming school year to study the effects of measures on the occurrence of infection. Hygiene and protection measures should also be regularly monitored during the 2020/21 school year and adapted to the latest findings.

2. Organisation of schools and the school year, school transport

Challenges

In the 2020/21 school year, too, schools in all probability will not be able to return to 'normal operations' like the period before the Corona pandemic. Whether organised as face-to-face learning, as a mixture of face-to-face learning and distance learning or as distance learning alone, over the coming months studying will have to take place under strict hygiene measures to protect against infection.

The central aim under these conditions must be to organise school and teaching operations in such a way that schools are nevertheless able to comply with their statutory educational responsibilities. Pedagogical ideas, personnel resources and available premises, technical equipment and student transport must be bundled into a uniform approach, and different responsibilities – especially those of *Länder* and municipalities – must be merged into an overall concept. Also of decisive importance for the successful implementation of all this is the individual responsibility of all those involved, not least students and their parents.

Organisational models need to be developed that can reliably ensure as much teaching and individual support as possible. Decisions on the distribution of face-to-face teaching and distance learning require a pedagogically well-founded approach, tailored to different age groups. Taking into consideration the availability of personnel resources and at-risk groups among the teaching staff and other specialist pedagogical staff, a detailed and flexible approach is needed for staff issues.

Recommendations

Against the background of the challenges mentioned above, the following measures are recommended with regard to the organisational design of the 2020/21 school year.

1) Early preparation of the school year on the basis of Scenario 2 or 1:

Plans for the new school year should not be based on the assumption that there will be a resumption of business as usual as regards school operations. School administrations and schools should reach agreement on the basis of Scenario 2 or Scenario 1, and include preparations for a possible switch to other scenarios.

The school administration should issue overall guidelines for organising the 2020/21 school year, set mandatory emphases in curricula (see Section 3) and provide guidance on the nature and frequency of performance measurement and evaluation, the promotion of students from one year to the next, and the organisation of final examinations. Minimum requirements should be laid down for the organisational and substantive design

of distance learning and – if this has not yet been done – a model hygiene plan should be made available to schools, drawn up in coordination with the health authorities. Through the requisite staff allocation – for example, new appointments, transfers, redeployments, employment of student teachers and candidates for teaching posts – it should ensure (to the extent that this is still possible in a period of teacher shortages) that schools are properly staffed and make available to them a budget for flexible recruiting on their own responsibility. In the case of schools with a high proportion of teachers who belong to risk groups the school administration should ascertain whether a balance can be achieved, perhaps with the secondment of younger teachers from schools with young colleagues.

School authorities need to create the conditions necessary for complying with hygiene measures and protection against infection (such as adapting contracts with professional cleaning firms, hand hygiene options when entering classrooms). They should also ensure that schools are provided with the technical conditions they need for successful face-to-face teaching and distance learning.

Schools should draw up an organisational plan in good time for the start of the school year, at least for the first semester of the 2020/21 school year. This should contain information on the organisation of teaching in the various school grades (staggered teaching times, rules on staggered break-times and so on), as well as organisational measures for protection against infection (size of learning groups and classes, keeping them intact, social distancing rules, separate entrances and exits, among other things). Schools should also appoint a hygiene representative, who would have to obtain the requisite qualifications and be responsible for implementing and updating the hygiene plan.

The organisational plan should be communicated to parents and students before the start of the school year. Furthermore, parents should also be informed in detail about the infection-protection and hygiene measures that have to be complied with so they can practice them with their children (especially those just starting school) and provide confirmation in writing at the latest at the start of the school year.

2) Fastest possible return to school:

The start of the new school year should take place in such a way that, at the latest by the end of the second week, the students in all grades should receive face-to-face teaching in the subjects set out in the timetable. Beginner classes (the first two grades in primary school and the first grade in secondary school) need to be dealt with at an early stage. It would seem to be particularly important that children and young people, as part of their initial integration into a new school, should be provided with psychosocial support when resuming their school routine.

Right at the start of the school year and at regular intervals thereafter class teachers should practice the relevant infection-protection and hygiene measures with their students.

3) Consistent but also flexible organisation of lessons:

In response to the necessary measures concerning hygiene and protection against infection (see Section 1 and Annex) fixed learning groups should be formed and separated from one another temporally, spatially and organisationally. To the extent that, for example, specialisation, choice of subjects as regards elective modules or the choice of minor and major courses make it difficult to establish unchanging learning groups, extended learning groups should be defined – as far as possible – at the various grades that remain together both during and outside teaching. To the extent that it is feasible the same teaching staff should work with these (extended) learning groups.

Consistently reliable lesson plans are particularly important for teachers, students and parents. Lesson plans should be oriented towards timetables laid down for each grade. During the examination period for those in their last year at secondary school an appropriate amount of face-to-face teaching should be available for courses related to the school leaving certificate (*Abitur*).

Concerning the circumstances of parents with children at various schools, as well as from an organisational standpoint (for example, the organisation of student transport by the school authorities) forms of organisation for the different schools and types of school should be agreed locally in municipalities.

4) The younger the student, the more face-to-face teaching:

As regards the ratio between face-to-face teaching and distance learning the following rule of thumb should apply: the older the student, the less face-to-face teaching and the more distance learning (see Section 4).

As regards switching between face-to-face teaching and distance learning, several organisational models come into consideration across all grades (for example, block scheduling with weekly or daily switches, individual block teaching days, classes in the morning and afternoon, a rolling system). Schools should decide on what model to choose based on local conditions (provision of teaching staff, space and so on), and as far as possible in agreement with the school authorities. Depending on availability, it should also be investigated whether premises outside schools can be used for teaching and supervised distance learning (such as libraries or rooms in community centres).

5) Set lesson plans and weekly schedules based on particular pedagogical approaches also for distance learning:

Based on the minimum requirements laid down by the school inspectorate as regards the organisational and substantive design of home learning, schools should ensure that distance learning at home is implemented on the basis of fixed weekly or lesson plans, as far as possible in accordance with uniform principles (for example, agreement on the nature and frequency of communication with students, the nature and scope of tasks, evaluation of work done at home).

School managements should establish communication and cooperation structures so that both teachers and pedagogical personnel, as well as teaching staff and students can regularly exchange views and experiences and coordinate their activities. School managements, teaching staff and other pedagogical staff should also be accessible, in particular for students and parents (for example, by announcing weekly office hours).

6) Equal access to technical and other assistance for all students:

An indispensable condition for implementing forms of distance learning is a viable technical infrastructure in schools (if possible, broadband access, WLAN), as well as needs-oriented provision of devices. To this end, the *Länder* and school authorities need to reach agreement on equipment standards. Besides that, the setting up, maintenance and use of digital infrastructure, as well as devices, must be properly supported. The school or school authorities should provide students without equipment of their own with devices on loan, if possible, at the start of the school year. For that purpose disbursement of the resources of the Digital Pact should be accelerated and the 500-million-euro federal programme used immediately. *Land* and municipal schemes, especially for set-up and support, should complement the Digital Pact. Digital devices should be recognised as basic work equipment and provided to teachers. Free learning materials should also include digital devices for students. The federal state, *Länder* and municipalities should reach agreement as soon as possible on joint and permanent promotion of digital education in schools.

7) Mandatory training provision for teaching staff:

The *Länder* should establish minimum requirements for use of digital technology for teaching purposes. In order to ensure that digitally supported teaching and learning processes can be shaped by all teaching staff for the promotion of learning, mandatory further training options are needed, to which teaching staff can have access as the need arises and in accordance with their own level of competence.

8) Involve all teaching staff in pedagogical activities:

As a rule, pedagogically qualified personnel should be deployed for pedagogical tasks and other staff for organisational tasks. As far as possible teaching staff should teach their own subjects. Teaching staff who belong to an at-risk group (see Section 1) and are exempt from face-to-face teaching, however, should be deployed elsewhere and involved in pedagogical activities (for example, implementing distance learning, digital learning support).

It would seem sensible to form teaching-staff teams, consisting of teaching staff who are involved in face-to-face teaching, and other pedagogical specialist staff (for example, people belonging to an at-risk group or student teachers), who organise distance learning from home in coordination with face-to-face teaching staff, or are available for regular subject-related consultation hours by telephone or videoconferencing.

9) Support for communication, cooperation and participation:

Conferences involving all school bodies should, as a rule, be conducted in the form of video conferences. The *Länder* should provide conference systems and obtain the requisite licences.

Schools should support the work of school bodies on a continuous basis, in particular the participation of parents and students, and, should the need arise, provide their members with digital devices on loan.

10) Provide all-day care, where possible:

Besides face-to-face teaching and distance learning, with a view to avoiding psychosocial problems and financial difficulties for working parents, as well as meeting students' support needs, all-day care is essential, to the extent that this is not precluded by necessary hygiene or protection measures. The general rule should be that care be made available for younger children, if they are not participating in regular face-to-face teaching (help with homework, support, recreation, sport).

Generally speaking, this should take the form of all-day provision in schools or day-care facilities, although in the scenarios described above this is not easy to achieve. All-day and day-care provision should be provided above all when groups comprise only students from the same school learning group.

In order, as far as possible, to adhere to the principle of keeping groups intact and to synchronise the temporal arrangement of the school and after-school day, cooperation is needed between school and after-school management. In the difficult circumstances of the Corona pandemic cooperation between schools and youth welfare services in the conception and implementation of care provision appears more vital than ever.

11) Student transport in coordination with organisational approaches:

Student transport needs to be tailored locally to how teaching is organised in schools. To the extent that transport is provided by ÖPNV this is likely to be easier in developed transport areas than in rural areas. Adaptation will prove a problem with regard to so-called special student transport in its various forms. Problems can arise here if schools choose different organisational models that make transport necessary at different times. This could lead not only to financial, but also to organisational problems. It is thus essential that schools' organisational approaches be coordinated with the provision of regional transport companies from the very outset.

Approaches should be coordinated between schools, at least for the different types of schools. The school authorities should therefore be involved early on, and implement coordination. Furthermore, in organised student transport, protective and hygiene measures should be implemented, especially the social distancing rule and sufficient ventilation in closed passenger compartments. Schools should encourage the use of bicycles or alternative means of transport and include them in their teaching work.

3. Objectives of school education during a pandemic

Challenges

For many people in our society the period of the pandemic and the suspension of the institution of the school for several weeks has renewed their sense of the importance of schools in a way they are unlikely to forget. It is not only a *learning space* for acquiring knowledge and skills that has remained closed, but students have been missing a *living space*, in which they usually spend many hours a week. Parents also point to the enormous importance of school friends, teaching staff and the pedagogical personnel who provide support systems for their children's development. They have also called attention to how essential schools are for the reconciliation of work and family life.

It is striking how these experiences resulting from the crisis tally with the fact that, although the objectives of school education have always been diverse, there is a basic consensus in terms of both education theory and education policy on what school education can offer learners on the way to becoming responsible citizens:

- imparting knowledge, skills and capabilities (in the sense of competences)
- independent critical judgement and action, as well as creative activities
- readiness to engage in social action and political responsibility
- inculcating a sense of freedom and democracy and respect for other beliefs
- discussion of (different) ethical norms and cultural values
- preparation for the world of work

In particular in times in which thought needs to be given to schools' contribution to crisis management and the diverse demands that go with it, school education – regardless of the present crisis scenario (see Section 1) – should be broad in scope and aim at forming personality, promoting emotional and social skills, and developing cognitive performance.

At times when the school system is unable to run as normal, all actors in the system come under increasing pressure to justify themselves, on one hand to maintain their general entitlements, but on the other hand, recognising the crisis situation, purposefully to undertake necessary reductions in the quantity, but not the quality of school education. At this point the *Länder* are obliged, in light of the pandemic, the reduced options for educational work and the additional psychosocial stresses on all participants, to quickly come up with a coordinated list of measures for adapting the aims of school education.

The following recommendations on teaching and studying in the school year 2020/21 should serve as orientation for this purpose. This is based, also in order to offset the real danger of reducing everything to cognitive performance targets, on the broad and

inclusive educational concept outlined above, as a normative setting, following school educational research over the past few decades.

When it comes to implementing these recommendations it is essential that there be interaction between education-policy administrative context-management, which creates favourable framework conditions, and concrete local operationalisation in the respective schools, which has to be organised and supported by the whole school community. School managements must act as intermediaries between education-policy and administrative demands, on one hand, and the pedagogically grounded needs of individual schools, on the other. The school managements in this situation need to be strengthened for this purpose.

Recommendations

1) No one-sided cuts in minor subjects and the importance of a broad general education:

In the 2020/21 school year any necessary cuts should not be implemented one-sidedly at the expense of minor subjects. Regardless of the particular importance of the so-called core subjects for individuals, society and the economy a *broad general education* is required, especially in order to be able to conceptualise and get to grips with the current situation. This includes in particular the teaching of democracy, education for sustainable development and cultural education. Although at primary level it would appear necessary to prioritise the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, in fact this should be regarded as the continuous task of all subjects.

2) Step up the focus on digital skills:

Against the background of general societal change, but in particular the new learning conditions in times of crisis, fostering digital skills – in the sense of an interdisciplinary cross-sectional competence – and transmitting them at all school levels would appear to be indispensable.

3) Teaching skills pertaining to the design of learning processes:

The unusual combination of phases of face-to-face teaching and independent learning requires of students a considerable degree of self-management, ability to impose structure, and independence, especially in cases in which parents cannot provide constant support. In order to foster the learning-optimised organisation of one's own learning processes, one needs, besides subject study, also the passing on of skills of learning process design. This does not involve general learning about learning, but rather (subject-) specific options in order to successfully promote individual knowledge and knowhow substantively, methodically and emotionally.

4) Abridgement of curricula and expected performance objectives of all subjects

in the 2020/21 school year:

Because curricula developed for normal operations cannot be used, abridgements must be made in curricula and in expected performance objectives in all subjects in the 2020/21 school year, based on a broad notion of skills involving learning by example rather than a linear accumulation of knowledge. To this end, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) must come up with concrete proposals for abridgement in good time before the start of the new school year (such as the cosine theorem in intermediate mathematics or a reduction in content that comes up again in different grades, such as poetry in German literature). This must not be at the expense of the quality of school education, but should give teaching staff the room they need to cope – in an educationally positive way – with the hygiene-related restrictions on teaching and learning.

5) Supplement skills featured in educational standards:

The narrowing down to the transmission of pure knowledge and practical skills (for example, worksheets with only computational tasks or digital learning platforms) sometimes encountered within the framework of distance learning should be supplemented with skills featured in educational standards for the different subjects (for example, mathematical modelling of real growth and distribution processes).

6) Handling complex issues within the framework of an interdisciplinary approach:

Not least against the background of current challenges, such as fake news, it would seem particularly important to be able to cope maturely with real problems. In that context, the removal of structure-giving learning conditions from schools (single and double periods, separation of learning processes in separate subject teaching ...) provides an opportunity to handle more complex issues within the framework of an interdisciplinary approach and thus, as the case may be, an approach more suited to particular problems. One obvious possibility for a complex problem situation of this kind is the current Corona crisis, whose complexity could be the object of a wide range of technical discussions (a biological approach to viruses, ethical questions on how societies cope with crises, mathematical modelling of exponential processes and so on).

7) Personality development of learners:

Besides the thematisation of technical aspects learners' personality development should also be ensured. That includes both relationship development between teachers and learners, which represents an important basis for successful education, as well as the explicit thematisation of and reflection on such aspects in the case of various substantive, methodological or social elements of individual subject teaching.

8) Reflection on teaching and learning conditions and everyday reality as another subject of teaching:

Accompanying the crisis-related challenges for psychological health, places and times (circle time, student parliament, chat and so on) should be made available in which the psychological experience of the current teaching and learning conditions, as well as everyday reality overall, can be considered and become the object of teaching (for example, changes in motivation, perception of self-efficacy, pleasure in learning, perception of capacity for self-regulation, school work at home getting out of hand with a loss of recreational opportunities and so on).

4. Recommendations on the methodological and didactic design of teaching and learning processes

Challenges

The reorganisation of schools and teaching requires a new look at the design of school teaching and learning processes. The goal must be, from the didactic and methodological standpoints, proper preparation and the best possible implementation of the 2020/21 school year. That means that the educational administration, schools and teaching staff get to grips with feasible organisational options for teaching and learning processes at an early stage.

The methodological and didactic arrangement of teaching and learning processes is differentiated into three scenarios to cover the possible courses of infection: (i) face-to-face teaching as the norm; (ii) a mixture of face-to-face teaching and distance learning; and (iii) distance learning alone (see Section 1). The particular challenge for each scenario is to design teaching and learning processes from a methodological and didactic standpoint in such a way that studying for all learners is of the highest possible quality and imposes the lowest possible psychosocial stress due to the special circumstances, regardless of social situation and the sharply varying levels of support at home.

In this respect, face-to-face teaching in scenarios 1 and 2 not only requires different time spans, but it assumes different functions in the didactic and methodological structure of teaching and learning processes. The same applies to distance learning, which in scenario 2 has to be thought about and planned together with face-to-face teaching, while in scenario 3 it stands alone and needs to meet all requirements concerning the best possible organisation of school teaching and learning processes. Practices of face-to-face teaching tried and tested before the advent of the pandemic can no longer – or only to a limited extent – be implemented. This represents a major challenge to students, teaching staff, parents, school managements and educational administrators and must be tackled decisively in the interests of the young generation.

At the same time, however, new opportunities are emerging for the didactic-methodological organisation of school teaching and learning processes. Digitalisation is clearly forging ahead. The challenge here is to design digitally supported learning and teaching in such a way that students and their study processes, not technology itself, remain in the foreground and digital opportunities are implemented in ways that benefit learning.

It must be kept in mind that the development of the requisite new didactic-methodological approaches is resource- and – above all – time-intensive, and so its introduction has to be broad-based in the run-up to the new school year.

Recommendations

We offer the following recommendations for the methodological-didactic design of school learning and teaching processes with an orientation towards a broad conception of education (see Section 3) and learning provision that reaches all students.

1) Adhere to basic teaching principles that enhance learning:

The guidelines and principles of good teaching and effective learning familiar from school and education research need to be attended to in all three scenarios. The following basic principles are particularly important in this regard:

- It must be ensured that students receive high quality feedback on their learning processes and how they complete their tasks. This can be done in a number of ways, for example, written feedback from the teachers, peer feedback, self-assessment of learning progress, discussions in face-to-face teaching (if there is any) or through automated feedback in the case of digital learning formats. The feedback should be formative in nature.
- For the purpose of home learning, students should be given tasks that are cognitively, socially and emotionally stimulating ('good' tasks), which can be worked on at different levels and in part also collaboratively. In that way, cooperation between students can also be fostered, for example, by telephones or digitally.
- Students' ability to regulate themselves can be reinforced with the right help. This can be done, for example, interactively or through surveys on self-assessment. Learning assignments and tasks should be designed in such a way that students are able to work on them independently or in groups of fellow students.
- Methodologically and didactically, teaching and learning processes must not be reduced to *unproductive rote learning*, for example, by simply supplying large quantities of study tasks. This applies above all in the case of mixed distance learning and time-limited face-to-face teaching, which is particularly vulnerable to this.
- Basal skills, especially literacy and numeracy as key qualifications, should be fostered continuously and in the teaching of all subjects. From a methodological-didactic standpoint suitable intelligent subject-specific exercises seem appropriate.
- So-called 'learning causes' should be addressed specifically in order to develop digital skills, such as using computers, information search and evaluation, cooperation and production by means of digital media. Only in this way will the use of digitally supported learning options be established and extended for all students.
- The basic principles of the 4C model – communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking – which are non-automatable skills, even in the broader sense, should be promoted in the methodological-didactic nexus of learning and also spontaneity, intuition and lateral thinking.

2) Take cautious advantage of the didactic-methodological potential of digitally supported learning arrangements:

The didactic-methodological potential of digitally supported learning arrangements should be exploited cautiously under pandemic conditions. This includes the following learning arrangements, taking into account the variety of circumstances at different schools, the varying availability of digital devices, and learners' different degrees of access to high-speed internet:

- use of digital options, for example, messenger services and videoconferencing to support relationship work, joint learning and remaining in contact with students, as well as students among themselves;
- use of the particular options of digitally supported learning for personalised study at one's own pace, in different study locations, to connect learning to different study locations, and to support different learning conditions, rates of learning and learning interests, among other things by means of learning management systems;
- support for subject-related and generic learning via digital learning options, digital learning content and embedding in suitable didactic-methodological study formats designed to enhance learning processes. Also worth thinking about are manifold approaches, such as joint research, preparation of a digitally distributed text, the preparation of presentations and, above all, the use of digital subject-specific learning media;
- expansion and use of digital options for the diagnosis and determination of students' respective learning statuses in order to provide learners with suitable learning options and to identify those whose studies are lagging behind.

Taking due account of the three different scenarios, we recommend that in particular the following digitally supported approaches should be integrated:

For scenario 1 – face-to-face teaching as the norm – above all those students should be provided with digitally supported learning options who, for example, for health reasons, are unable to participate in face-to-face teaching, although naturally digital media can always be used in face-to-face teaching. Digital options make it possible for such students to remain in contact with their teachers and fellow students and to take part in collaborative learning processes.

In scenario 2, the combination of face-to-face teaching and distance learning, various digital technologies provide particular options for combining study phases and learning processes in both learning locations and for coordinating them with one another.

For scenario 3, distance learning alone, which was tried during the period when schools were closed, very innovative formats for digitally supported distance learning have been developed. These can – and we recommend that they should – be used and further developed. Because direct communication is not possible due to the lack of face-to-face

periods, in this scenario the emphasis is on enabling communication structures between teachers and learners, and among learners themselves.

In order to be able to implement the recommendations envisaged under this point comprehensively, suitable provision of digital equipment is required. If it is not available, appropriate preparations must be made for it in the run-up to the school year (see Section 2).

3) Follow differentiated methodological-didactic approaches for primary and secondary levels:

In all three scenarios learning needs to be designed methodologically and didactically in accordance with age group and learning development stage.

At primary school the acquisition and practice of basal linguistic skills is of central importance, also from a methodological-didactic standpoint, because they are needed above all for independent learning. Furthermore, teaching that is linguistically aware and oriented towards a broad approach to literacy is also a good idea for all subjects.

At secondary level basal linguistic and mathematical capabilities should be fostered, for subject-related reasons (see Section 3), in particular when difficulties have been detected. In this way as many students as possible are able to benefit from newly developed – and those still in the pipeline – learning options and learning pathways. If a decision is needed on which grades are to be taught face-to-face, younger years should take precedence over older ones (see Section 2), because older students are in a better position for independent study at home and appropriate methodological-didactic approaches are more likely to be effective.

4) Address individual schools as pedagogical units:

When it comes to the conceptual design of school-specific methodological-didactic approaches the burden of responsibility shall fall on individual schools. We therefore recommend the following.

School managements should encourage the teaching staff to exchange views and experiences despite, but above all because of the new challenges and systematically to understand school development activities as their common task. In this context the focus of methodological-didactic design should be on establishing and orienting towards the pedagogical goals of the individual school.

- Schools should be encouraged to develop specific approaches for learning settings adapted to their individual circumstances. These approaches should serve as orientation for both teaching staff and parents and children. To this end we recommend that the school authorities urgently develop a concrete support package.
- Schools and school managements must ensure training formats and staff development processes that put teaching staff in their own school in a position to

guarantee just the methodological-didactic design of teaching and learning processes they need. In doing so they should draw on both the teaching staff's own expertise and external provision and materials.

5. Summative performance appraisal and evaluation

Challenges

Summative – in other words, carried out at the end of a learning process – performance appraisal and evaluation perform different functions, which are of key importance for students in their ongoing learning process, but also for their current and future educational career. It is crucial to distinguish here between:

- (a) *Feedback function*: test results and marks provide individual feedback on the level of accomplishment. That makes them a key instrument in helping students to form a realistic self-assessment of their learning. At the same time, they play a role in study motivation and taking pleasure in learning. Performance appraisal that is designed accordingly, however, also – as a diagnostic instrument – gives teachers feedback on the performance level attained by individual learners and the group as a whole. It thus forms an important basis for the further didactic-pedagogical planning of the learning process.
- (b) *Certification function*: examinations and qualifications certify successful learning processes and enable access to further qualification trajectories, such as training or higher education. This also applies to certificates, at defined thresholds of the school system, and certainly when binding decisions on transitions are linked to certain marks.
- (c) *Enabling comparison*: performance evaluations, on one hand, create an opportunity for social comparison within the learning group. On the other hand, they ensure – at least nominally – comparability over time, in other words, comparison between different years.

Given the limited schooling options that the Corona crisis allows, problems connected to summative performance appraisal and evaluation may arise that are likely to persist or could even be exacerbated if, in the coming school year, a significant proportion of teaching occurs as distance learning, or at least in a mixture of face-to-face teaching and distance learning. The school system must respond to this if it does not want to contribute to a permanent lack of fairness and, related to that, an increase in social inequality.

In view of the establishment of a trajectory linked to certain thresholds – which is what marks and certificates amount to – in the current circumstances it should be considered critical that, generally speaking, performance cannot be assessed unambiguously. Because at present educational performance largely takes place at home there is no way of clearly telling what proportion is independent work and what proportion can be attributed to the parents or other help. Although this generally applies in the case of homework, its extension to the bulk of regular teaching has intensified it. A corollary of

this is that traditional examination settings – that is, besides final examinations, also class work or tests taking place in the classroom – cannot be realised for the time being. As a result, cheating cannot be ruled out due to the lack of supervision by teaching staff. In particular the certification function of marks, certificates and exams is thus seriously being called into question, but clearly recognisable problem areas are also arising at the moment in relation to individual performance appraisal.

On top of that, in contrast to regular face-to-face teaching, the oral and other participation that makes up a significant portion of performance appraisal is just not – or scarcely – possible. If there is a further reduction of teaching in school in the coming school year this situation will continue, because it is unlikely that it will be possible to come to a realistic assessment of a student's non-written performance based on fewer hours of teaching. From a legal standpoint it is also not permitted to determine and assess students' performance from their written work alone, because oral and other forms of performance also have to be taken into consideration appropriately for an overall evaluation.

Finally, we can assume that the current situation, also from the standpoint of performance appraisal and assessment, will lead to an exacerbation of social inequality and further widen the achievement gap between more and less socially advantaged students. Depending on their family background students have different levels of access to resources, which is in turn reflected in performance in terms of marks and examinations.

Recommendations

Given the above-described challenges concerning fair performance appraisal and assessment we recommend, in the event of the maintenance of distance learning alone (scenario 3) or even in the case of a mixture of face-to-face teaching and distance learning (scenario 2), that the following counter measures be taken.

1) Reduction of the spectrum of learning and test content in all subjects:

Analogous to teaching, when it comes to examinations there should be a reduction of the study contents on which students are to be examined. What is tested in the coming school year cannot be the same as in previous years. This process must be managed pragmatically. There can be no protracted convening of educational planning committees because of the urgency of the situation. Rather, based on a smart didactic view and a high level of technical penetration, but also exercising courage, it has to be decided what contents are dispensable in the coming examination rounds. This is not the same as a lowering of the qualitative level of requirements, because demanding exams can also be set within the framework of a quantitatively restricted spectrum of material. Decisive in this will be that the selection be directly reflected in teaching practice and integrated with it, so that teaching takes place on the basis of a smaller

quantity of material. A restriction to individual subjects, by contrast, contradicts schools' educational mission and is incompatible with the objectives of school education.

2) Extension of individual diagnostic elements:

In particular during times in which there has to be less personal interaction between teachers and learners, the need increases for instruments that allow individuals to diagnose their current study level and where they may need to improve, both at the end and – in the sense of a formative performance assessment – during the learning process. Appropriate (compensating) support is achievable only based on meaningful individual diagnosis. Accordingly, we need to develop and make available suitable instruments, which also extends to consideration of the skills laid down in educational standards. Limiting the quantity of material may not be permitted to result in an unnecessary reduction of the depth and complexity of learning.

3) Reduction of the frequency of summative and certifying exam situations:

Given the impairments noted above, exam situations such as class tests should not be conducted to the same extent as previously. Because of the restricted options for helping students in their individual learning this would be inappropriate and pedagogically wrong. Instead, situations of performance appraisal and assessment should perform more of a feedback function so that students receive the opportunity more frequently and in more sophisticated ways than previously to correct and adjust their learning processes. Teachers should use their existing discretionary leeway within the framework of the relevant regulations and administrative rules and generally speaking to the benefit of students. Basically, stressful circumstances that are no fault of the students themselves should be taken into consideration.

4) Broadening the range of alternative forms of examination:

In conjunction with the restrictions on learning and performance processes and the – as a result – still limited application of traditional formats for assessing performance, individual subjects should seize the opportunity to depart from familiar paths and consider alternative forms of performance appraisal (modified exam settings), as well as other forms of performance evaluation (instead of marks). This would not only boost learners' motivation, but also provide teachers with a real opportunity to obtain a much more nuanced picture of students' performance capacities than traditional test formats permit. Needless to say, it also depends on safeguarding the legal framework within which alternative exams – perhaps also digitally – can be held beyond traditional school settings.

5) Decoupling of decisions on transitions, qualifications and marks,

strengthening counselling:

In the current situation it seems inappropriate, and legally perhaps only partly possible, to maintain the full importance of marks as regards transition decisions, but also the awarding of qualifications. In these circumstances, the traditional recourse to repeating a year should be dispensed with. Furthermore, qualifications that are obtained without a separate exam¹ (basis and intermediate school leaving certificate in some types of school and *Länder*, technical college *abitur*) should be decoupled from the grade point average. Instead of relying on formal decision-making mechanisms ('no going on to the next year unless a grade point average of x is attained') individual counselling of students and their parents on the option of repeating the year voluntarily, mentoring and supporting them in reaching a decision, should play all the more of a role. Of course this presupposes certain structural conditions; for example, a repeat year should not be counted towards the length of time spent at the primary and secondary levels. At the same time, teachers need to be ready and able to redouble concentration on their informational mission and pay attention to individual learners.

6) Enabling equal access to technical and other resources for all students:

The educational mission enshrined in the Basic Law requires, in connection with the fundamental principle of equal opportunities, that students are not disadvantaged as a result of their family background. To the extent that technical and/or other resources are needed for – in particular, digitally based – distance learning, the school authorities must ensure that all students have access to the same conditions in terms of what is required of them (as the case may be, by providing them with the relevant hard- and software).

7) Continuation of educational and school monitoring:

Also and especially in the current situation the instruments of school and educational monitoring retain their function: they diagnose students' skills development and provide starting points for changes in approach to teaching. Thus they provide systematic information on whether the present generation of students are suffering long-term damage to their learning because of the Corona pandemic. Especially in the current difficult circumstances this function of differentiated description and linking to practice is all the more important because in many areas we are entering uncharted territory and it is still difficult to be certain what effects this will have on students' learning. Maintaining systematic monitoring, however, depends on sufficient face-to-face teaching in school, so that a massively reduced duration of face-to-face teaching is not reduced even further as a result of external evaluation measures.

¹ As distinct from the Abitur, for example. There are qualifications that are obtained just by finishing a normal school year and are not linked to sitting an examination.

6. Reducing educational inequalities

Challenges

When it comes to education the fundamental principle of equality enshrined in the Basic Law says that access to education and opportunities for self-development must be open to all. No one may be favoured or disfavoured because of their sociocultural origin, language or disabilities. Educational research has shown for many years, however, that this fundamental principle does not correspond with social reality in Germany and that social inequalities may be found in all areas of education resulting from social origin, immigration background and gender. Particular attention is paid to inequalities in the school system, for which the relationship between educational attainment and such characteristics has been well documented in many studies. This includes, among other things, participation in certain educational programmes or activities, skills acquisition or school qualifications.

As a result of the school closures caused by the Corona crisis and the shift of learning processes into the private sphere of the family more substantial differences are to be expected between students at the beginning of the new school year, if only because children and young people are differently equipped to deal with the situation. Attainment differences may be exacerbated because of difficult study conditions in families, mixed with social origin factors and disabilities. It will thus be a challenge in the new school year to cope with greater heterogeneity in students' school attainment and in this context to pay attention not only to individual attainment levels, but also to bring children and young people from socially challenging situations up to speed and provide them with help and support. This concerns not only the area of cognitive development, but also the different facets of children's and young people's socio-emotional development. After all, school is more than just a key venue for transmitting knowledge, it is also a space for social and emotional development. It has a crucial socialising function.

Recommendations

Reducing educational inequalities and paying particular attention to children and young people in socially challenging life circumstances require an integrated approach to the individual. Against the background of the scenarios developed in Section 1 the following recommendations could help to complement the recommendations of Sections 2 to 5 and thereby reach as many children and young people as possible, regardless of their learning conditions and possibilities, as well as their social situation, and enable their participation in the education system and in society.

1) Reliable provision and structures for social contacts and school learning:

Successful learning is based primarily on stable, familiar and reliable relationships. Socially insecurely attached children and young people, in unstable family relations or in

uncertain, precarious life circumstances need, first and foremost, social and emotional stability in order to be able to tackle what are often cognitively demanding topics. Such personal relations should be continuously ensured and without significant fluctuations of the people concerned. During the period of distance learning it is recommended that these students have, if possible, a fixed contact person from school who keeps personal contact with them at least once a week. Both contact times and learning structures (contents, forms of organisation, learning formats) must be organised on a continuous basis with a regular rhythm.

With regard to both recommendations possible ways should be explored of making use of educational spaces and educational personnel also outside school, for example, through cooperation between teaching staff and learning facilitators (among other things with resources from the education and participation package, student teachers) or low-threshold, socio-spatial options, such as children's and youth centres, after-school childcare services and so on. Furthermore, in particular students with challenging behaviours and with special needs should have regular and continuous social contacts and learning in school. Neither disabilities nor disadvantages may be permitted to become exclusion factors with regard to institutional education provision.

2) Ascertaining learning progress as the basis for subsequent support:

It is generally agreed that learning support should be provided to children on an individual basis and in keeping with their particular learning requirements and progress. But this aspiration is difficult to apply even under normal circumstances. In the current situation it is even more difficult to meet this goal because it is not clear what schools' input was during the period of school closures, and how students were able to study properly.

Ascertaining students' learning progress as the basis for subsequent support and planning of learning processes would appear to be key to meeting students' needs in the new school year. This does not mean the across-the-board deployment of standardised learning assessments, but the utilisation of tried and tested performance assessment procedures. In this process, besides learning progress in particular subjects, learning requirements should also be ascertained. In particular for students from families in socially challenging situations the question arises of what they need in addition to school support in order to get to grips with their school work again (sustainable relationships, motivation, clear work structures and transparent processes, such as familiar rules and rituals, professional handling of perhaps destructive behaviour, opportunities for physical activity, respectful culture of dialogue, strategies for coping with fears and anxieties).

3) Attractive compensatory options to complement integrated support:

Once students have fallen behind with their studies it is not really possible to recover

lost ground in the teaching context alone. Multi-method approaches that link integrative and additive elements to one another can better attend to students' individual needs. It is also important to offer students attractive compensatory options to get them to respond as quickly as possible to their learning deficiencies. This can be done during the school year or in the school holidays, too.

In particular when it comes to activities in the holidays options should be attractively designed for specific target groups, so that taking them up is perceived as an opportunity. Summer school and holiday courses offer an opportunity to combine learning content and the targeted development of German as the language of education with, for example, experiential-education, art therapy or drama therapy options. Students 'experience' school work (languages, mathematics, skills) by active doing in nature and in games. In this context it can be easier to tackle different learning requirements and approaches (auditory, visual, motor-kinaesthetic). Such provision is only feasible in cooperation with local external education providers and participation is not subject to financial restrictions.

4) Flexibilisation and modification of the curriculum and flexibilisation of learning times:

In particular distance learning but also time-restricted learning periods in school call for flexibilisation of the curriculum. Learning provision should be sensitively adapted to disadvantaged students' life circumstances: what options and support – also apart from specialised topics – do students generally need in their particular life circumstances in order to be able to participate in school learning opportunities? In other words, learning provision need not be conceived of solely from the perspective of the normal curriculum, but also from the perspective of the learner. What can a student really achieve at present in terms of their school work within the given familiar and school-institutional framework? What aspects of educational standards are currently meaningful and achievable for students? The curriculum needs to be modified to try to avoid chains of failure and boost learning motivation (see also Section 3).

Learning times and tasks in an age-related grade-level context should be flexibilised to make it easier to take more account of individual learning progress. Individualisation measures should be approached on a cross-year basis: for example, the last two years leading up to the certificate of intermediate education (MSA) can be extended to three years or the qualification phase at the upper secondary level at gymnasium can be extended by a year.

5) Enhanced use of individualised feedback instruments:

Given the different conditions underlying home study, differences should be taken into account in performance assessments, for example, by focusing more on individual

learning progress. In particular, stressful situations and excessive performance pressure should be avoided. To this end more individualised feedback instruments can be used. For the new school year initially there needs to be an adaptation and modification of conventional evaluation systems, as well as resort to informal procedures on the basis of and the use of criteria (for example, derived from learning objectives) and intra-individual guidelines.

6) Accompanying small learning and support groups:

The model of student and study mentoring is already being successfully implemented in many schools. As additional support for children and young people with special needs study partnerships between students, along the lines of time-limited work in tandem or in small groups enhance the development of curricular and social competences and boost independent learning between face-to-face teaching and distance learning. For this purpose students need close pedagogical support, binding agreements on concrete goals and regular exchanges concerning the content and design of common work. Maintaining motivation, recognising their commitment and help with conflict resolution are important pedagogical inputs here.

Parent networks are also particularly important at schools in socially challenging circumstances. With school closures low-threshold forums for exchanges of ideas and experiences were lost. Teachers often have the necessary basis of trust in order to stimulate contacts between parents, cultivate dialogue and support parents in the joint development of creative solutions to foster their children. They can draw on their insight into current informational and support needs in order to convey information to families via existing networks, as well as help with making contacts.

7) Cooperation with external education providers and education experts:

Although at this juncture the need for compensatory options for individual students cannot be estimated, we can assume that it will not be possible for all schools to provide everything that is needed to help those who have fallen behind to catch up. It should therefore be considered in individual cases whether structured cooperation with external education providers with pedagogical expertise can help to furnish individual students with temporary additional provision or expand it. This includes both non-profit provision (for example, corona school e.V.) and institutions that operate commercially, such as learning therapy institutions, which have considerable expertise in the area of individual development. It is important in this context to integrate this additional expertise with what schools provide to ensure that it does not result in parallel worlds of learning between schools and external learning locations.

In order to reach children from socially challenging situations it must be ensured that such additive provision is cost-neutral for families. It should also be investigated how

teaching staff with foreign qualifications, who are not in the teaching profession, but who are familiar with how things work in schools and possess pedagogical and specialist knowledge can be involved in compensatory educational provision.

8) Reliable, also multilingual information and support structures:

Particularly in periods in which daily contact cannot be guaranteed between students and their teachers in school, it is important to keep families properly informed about what is going on at school and how their children's studies are progressing. When it comes to ensuring reliable and multilingual information structures it is not just a matter of maintaining the flow of information, but also making it easier for students who, in the case of language barriers, also have to play the role of translators. For families in which unfavourable conditions and burdens multiply and whose internal relations are stressful and strained, it is important to (continue to) make available provisions that can support and relieve the burden on families and to foster families' access to these professional services. Parents should be helped to obtain the information they need on counselling and support options in the region, as well as with making contact with these services. In this context schools can take advantage of multilingual (school) staff to reach families that do not speak German well enough.

ANNEX to 1. Hygiene and protection measures – rules of behaviour and consequences for school organisation

Scenarios

Scenario 1: Face-to-face teaching as the norm

If effective contact tracing is possible in the case of a low occurrence of infection and a possible increase – as a result slowed down – in the number of new infections appears possible, classes should not be split up. This is conditional on the formation of fixed learning groups.

First and foremost this approach appears suitable for the primary level. It would be appropriate at secondary level if fixed learning groups can be formed, as far as possible. Specifically, we recommend the following:

- general hygiene measures (see end of this Annex)
- formation of fixed learning groups in regular class sizes, no social distancing within this learning group
- teaching in one of these learning groups always in the same classroom. Exemptions can be made for using specialist rooms in compliance with the general hygiene rules (see below)
- availability of a fixed work place for each student
- separation of learning groups, as far as possible also at break time, as well as before and after teaching
- teaching by as few teachers per learning group as possible
- formation of teacher groups – as far as possible – to whom fixed learning groups are assigned
- activities wherever possible both during the school day and also outside during breaks
- in the case of frontal (lecture-style) teaching and student presentations: maintaining a minimum distance of 2 metres from the rest of the class
- if desired, provision of a suitable visor for teachers and students giving presentations
- avoiding situations in which many students from different learning groups come together, for example, by proper time, space and route planning
- maintaining the generally valid social distancing rule and the rules on covering nose and mouth outside one's own learning group, if meeting other people cannot be avoided, including adults
- guidance of students by teachers on maintaining the social distancing rules in force at that time for the population, as well as regulations on wearing masks covering nose and mouth

Scenario 2: Face-to-face teaching and distance learning

If, for example, in the event of a higher occurrence of infection a further increase in new infections needs to be avoided, smaller, unchanging learning groups should be formed, so that social distancing of 1.5 metres can be maintained in classrooms. Concretely, we recommend the following measures:

Primary and secondary school 1:

- general hygiene measures (see end of this Annex)
- formation of fixed learning groups in reduced class sizes, so that social distancing of 1.5 metres can be maintained in classrooms
- teaching in one of these learning groups always in the same classroom. Exemptions can be made for using specialist rooms in compliance with the general hygiene rules (see below)
- availability of a fixed work place for each student
- separation of learning groups, as far as possible also at break time, as well as before and after teaching
- teaching by as few teachers per learning group as possible
- formation of teacher groups – as far as possible – to whom fixed learning groups are assigned
- activities wherever possible both during the school day and also during breaks outside
- in the case of frontal (lecture-style) teaching and student presentations: maintaining a minimum distance of 2 metres from the rest of the class
- if desired, provision of a suitable visor for teachers and students giving presentations
- as far as possible, avoiding situations in which many students from different learning groups come together, for example, by proper time, space and route planning
- maintaining the generally valid social distancing rule and the rules on covering nose and mouth outside one's own learning group, if meeting other people cannot be avoided, including adults
- guidance of students by teachers on maintaining the social distancing rules in force at that time for the population, as well as regulations on wearing masks covering nose and mouth. In the case of very young children within the learning group refrain from strict enforcement of social distancing rules.

Secondary level 2:

- general hygiene measures (see end of this Annex)
- school years defined as fixed learning groups that, as far as possible, do not mix with other learning groups, even at break time. In the case of very large school

years: if possible, divide it into two or more fixed learning groups

- adapt class sizes to the social distancing rule of 1.5 metres also during teaching; the wearing of nose and mouth coverings should also be recommended in the course of teaching
- teaching as far as possible in the same classroom allocated to a specific school year. Exemptions can be made for using specialist rooms in compliance with the general hygiene rules (see below)
- teaching by as few teachers as possible from as few teaching groups as possible
- formation of teacher groups – as far as possible – who teach only at secondary level 2 – even better, who teach only a single year
- in the case of frontal (lecture-style) teaching and student presentations: maintaining a minimum distance of 2 metres from the rest of the class; for those giving a presentation wearing a visor is recommended
- maintaining the generally valid social distancing rule and the rules on covering nose and mouth; corresponding awareness raising and guidance from teachers

General hygiene measures:

- **Consistent hand hygiene:** proper washing or disinfecting of hands on entering the classroom, after coughing, sneezing or blowing one's nose, or after touching potentially contaminated surfaces. This means that classrooms need to be provided with washbasins. If no washbasin is available an alternative approach to hand hygiene must be developed as part of the school's hygiene plan. Washbasins must be provided with sufficient soap dispensers and disposable towels. Suitable taps and disinfectant and soap dispensers are required that do not result in hand contamination.
- **Coughing and sneezing etiquette:** coughing and sneezing should be done in the crook of one's arm or a paper tissue, as far as possible from other people.
- **Ventilation:** ventilation of school rooms at least after every lesson with the window wide open; it should be long enough for a complete change of air.
- **Cleaning:** there should be a daily cleaning of the school's interior space, especially a thorough cleaning of classrooms and students' work places; there should also be thorough cleaning between use by different learning groups; as needed, daily or several times daily cleaning of hand contact surfaces, such as door handles, table surfaces, window latches, stair rails, switches, taps, toilet handles. Contact surfaces of commonly used materials must be cleaned before being passed on to the next person. All users must be made aware of hygiene rules for commonly used equipment, including computers, whiteboards and other teaching materials.
- **Handling coverings for nose and mouth:** There must be instruction and practice with regard to proper handling of coverings for nose and mouth by the hygiene officer and teaching staff trained by the hygiene officer (see Section 2) to prevent contamination of nose and mouth coverings.
- **Eating and drinking:** generally accessible drinking water dispensers must be put out of operation; common use of eating areas is permitted only if social distancing is observed; canteens with self-service or buffets are out of the question. People with Covid-19 symptoms may not participate in food preparation.
- **Hygiene-critical activities** must be modified. For example, activities during which a lot of aerosols are produced (such as singing, sport, performing arts) must be practiced only if social distancing rules are observed and not in closed spaces. Common materials that are difficult to clean, for example, in specialist rooms, should not be used.

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Editors: Burkhard Jungkamp, Prof. Dr. Kai Maaz, Dr Martin Pfafferott, Marion Stichler

Responsible and contact:

Dr Martin Pfafferott

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, martin.pfafferott@fes.de

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