

**National summary sheets on
education system in Europe
and ongoing reforms**

2009 Edition

German-speaking Community of Belgium

SEPTEMBER 2009

1. Education population and language of instruction

In January 2008, 34.57 % of the DG ⁽¹⁾-population (74 169) were aged 29 or less and about 12 000 pupils were of compulsory education age (6 to 18). Considering the smallness and the border situation of the German-speaking Community, these figures are of no real statistical value (with 12.1 % of enrolled pupils and students in mainstream education coming from outside the Community – mainly from the French-speaking part of Belgium (8.4 %), from Germany (2.19 %) and from Luxembourg (1.53 %) and – on the other hand – many pupils and students domiciled in the German-speaking Community being enrolled in schools in the French Community and in Germany. The language of instruction is German (in a few primary schools, children of the French-speaking minority are taught in French).

2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

In 2008/09, 71.5 % of pupils and students in primary, secondary and higher education attend public-sector schools (run by the Community, a municipality or another public-right body), while 28.5 % attend grant-aided private catholic schools, which receive the major allocation of their financial support from the German-speaking Community budget. There is no private sector in its strictest sense (i.e. receiving no subsidy from the Community budget).

In federal Belgium, responsibility for education devolves to the three Communities. This implicates that the Parliament and the Government of the German-speaking Community are the top-level authorities for education in that Community. They respectively have legislative power and executive authority as regards the management and administration of education in general. They lay down general regulations for all schools, in accordance with constitutional and legal provisions. The organising bodies are responsible for the management and administration of the schools they are running.

⁽¹⁾ DG = *Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft* (German-speaking Community of Belgium).

In case of 'Community schools' (former State schools), the organising authority is the Community Government itself, represented by the Minister of Education. The municipalities are similarly responsible for the schools they run themselves, while a non-public body – an association of catholic private persons – is responsible for private-sector grant-aided catholic schools, the so-called *freie Schulen*. The *Autonome Hochschule in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, a higher education institution created in 2005, is run by a governing board with a public-right status. All schools are expected to comply with Community decrees and regulations relating, among others, to security and health standards, to the award of officially recognized certifications and qualifications, to the school structure and curricular organisation, to the adoption of core competences, framework plans and minimum competence attainment targets that all pupils should reach at a particular moment of their school career, ...

Besides some civil servants of the Ministry carrying out a general administrative control, there is also a Pedagogical Inspectorate and Counselling. This inspectorate counts five teachers or school heads freed from teaching duties. One purpose of it is to enable the Community to ensure respect for the administrative duties incumbent on school organising bodies and, in particular, the correct use of the Community resources available to them. The inspectorate acts across the entire school system and exercises academic and legal supervision and counsel.

3. Pre-primary education

This distinctly separate level of the education system is called *Vorschulerziehung* and is always provided in Kindergarten. Kindergarten classes are always administered by regular primary school heads and located on the primary school premises. Pre-primary and primary school classes together form the so called *Grundschule*. Pre-primary education is free of charge and not compulsory. Pupils registered for it at the beginning of the school year (1 September) are aged at least 3 years. But younger children also may enrol in September if they will be 3 before the end of the calendar year. Pre-primary education comes to an end in June of the year in which children reach their sixth birthday. Parents may be asked to assist with meals, transport, and out-of-class activity and supervision. Kindergarten classes are always administered by regular primary school heads and mostly located on the primary school premises.

Participation rate in 2008/09 is around 98 % of the total population of the age range concerned (3 to 5). 10 % of the children involved are coming from outside the German-speaking Community (mainly from the French Community: 8 %).

4. Compulsory education

(i) Phases

Primarunterricht (Primary education)	6-11 years of age
Sekundarunterricht (1. Stufe und erstes Jahr der 2. Stufe): Secondary education (1 st stage and first year of 2 nd stage): (1) <i>Allgemein bildender Unterricht</i> (1. Stufe und erstes Jahr der 2. Stufe) und <i>technischer Übergangsunterricht</i> (erstes Jahr der 2. Stufe) General education (1 st stage and first year of 2 nd stage) and technical education of transition stream (first year of 2 nd stage) (2) <i>Technischer Befähigungsunterricht</i> (erstes Jahr der 2. Stufe) Technical education of qualification stream (first year of 2 nd stage) (3) <i>Berufsbildender Unterricht</i> (erstes Jahr der 2. Stufe) Vocational education (first year of 2 nd stage)	12-15/16 years of age

In Belgium, compulsory education takes twelve years: from the age of 6 to the age of 18. But full-time education only is compulsory from 6 to 15, except for pupils who have not yet completed the first two years of secondary education. In this case, compulsory full-time schooling ends at the age of 16. From then on, education remains compulsory until the age of 18, but pupils may continue it on a part-time basis. If pupils have not completed the first two years of secondary education by the age of 15, they have to continue their full-time schooling at least until they are 16.

The six years of primary education are divided into separate stages of two years each. Grouping of classes may diverge from this division.

Secondary education also includes three stages each lasting two years (three years in the 3rd stage in vocational education), the first stage and the first year of the 2nd stage being considered as a part of **compulsory full-time** education.

(ii) Admissions criteria

Primary education normally starts in September of the year in which children celebrate their sixth birthday. There are no specific admission criteria for entering *Primarschule*. In general, pupils are aged 12 when they enter *Sekundarschule* (secondary school). They can usually secure admission to the first year if they have obtained the *Abschlusszeugnis der Grundschule* (Primary Education Final Certificate), but the acquisition of this certificate is not a prerequisite for admission into secondary education.

Parents are free to choose their children's school at both primary and secondary level. As a rule, compulsory schooling is free of charge.

(iii) Length of school day/week/year

In primary and secondary education, activities are pursued five days a week from Monday to Friday in the morning and afternoon, with the exception of Wednesday afternoon. School may start at 8 a.m. and last until 5 p.m. (4 p.m. in primary education). In primary education, there are 28 periods of 50 minutes teaching a week and, in secondary education, between 32 and 36/37 periods a week. The school year lasts 37 weeks (between 180 and 184 school days). School is closed in July and August.

(iv) Class size/student grouping

There are no regulations or recommendations for maximum or minimum number of students in a class.

In most schools, the six years of primary education are provided in classes for each year separately. A grouping of pupils per stage or even stage-overlapping is possible too. This is always the case where the school population is not large enough to form a class for each age group. In primary schools, teachers are generalists, but subject specialists are possible for French, physical education, religion and non-denominational ethics.

In secondary education, as a principle, each class corresponds to an age group. Nevertheless, because of an important school failure rate and dropout, classes may sometimes be very age-mixed. All subjects are taught by specialist or semi-specialist teachers.

(v) Curriculum control and content

For all subjects in primary education and the first stage of secondary education essential skills, curriculum guidelines and competence attainment targets (in the sense of minimum requirements for all pupils) have been drawn up and agreed by the Parliament of the German-speaking Community in June 2008. They are compulsory for all schools and have to be integrated into the

curricula, which have been devised by the Organising Authorities or Bodies (or by the school network they belong to) and approved by the Minister of Education.

The primary education curriculum includes the following compulsory subjects: the language of instruction, sports, music and arts, mathematics, natural sciences and technology, history and geography, first foreign language, religion or non-denominational ethics. There is a common curriculum for the first stage of secondary education, giving gradually way in the second year for a greater number of optional subjects. The compulsory common curriculum includes the language of instruction, mathematics, history, geography, natural sciences, a foreign language (French), arts, technical education, sports and religion or non-denominational ethics. At the end of the first stage of secondary education, pupils choose – in upper secondary education (2nd and 3rd stage) – a pathway in general, technical or vocational education stream.

There are no prescribed textbooks or teaching materials, and schools have considerable latitude as regards teaching methods.

(vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

In education, assessment is one of the areas in which freedom of each school (or network of schools) as regards teaching matters is guaranteed. Thus each organising body may, in accordance with the relevant legal minimum requirements, determine its own kind of assessment and the way in which results are to be communicated. Individual teachers assess their own pupils in relation to their aims and teaching activity in respect of the school project. A school report sent to parents three or four times per school year informs them as to the progress and results obtained by their children. Observations and marks in the course of ongoing assessment are supplemented by examination results. The class teacher, the school head and, possibly, other teaching staff members form the *Klassenrat* (class council) decide whether a pupil's school year has been satisfactorily completed. Pupils are awarded the *Abschlusszeugnis der Grundschule* at the end of the sixth year of primary education if they master in a satisfactory way the competence attainment targets laid down for this level as to be aimed for. There is no legal obligation to pass a special examination. The decision to award this Certificate is a prerogative of the *Klassenrat*. Passage to secondary education is possible at the age of 12 and is not depending on the acquisition of this Certificate.

5. Post-compulsory education/upper secondary and post-secondary level

(i) Types of education

<p>Sekundarunterricht (zweites Jahr der 2. Stufe und 3. Stufe) – Secondary education, (second year of 2nd stage and 3rd stage)</p> <p>(1) <i>Allgemein bildender Unterricht</i> (zweites Jahr der 2. Stufe und 3. Stufe) und <i>technischer Übergangunterricht</i> (zweites Jahr der 2. Stufe und 3. Stufe)</p> <p>General education (second year of 2nd stage and 3rd stage) and technical education of transition stream (second year of 2nd stage and 3rd stage)</p> <p>(2) <i>Technischer Befähigungsunterricht</i> (zweites Jahr der 2. Stufe und 3. Stufe)</p> <p>Technical education of qualification stream (second year of 2nd stage and 3rd stage)</p> <p>(3) <i>Berufsbildender Unterricht</i> (zweites Jahr der 2. Stufe und 3. Stufe)</p> <p>Vocational education (second year of 2nd stage and 3rd stage)</p>	15-18 years of age
<i>Teilzeitunterricht</i> – Part-time secondary education	15/16-18/19 years of age
Lehrvertrag und mittelständische Ausbildung – Apprenticeship/training	15/16-18/19 years of age

Postsekundare berufliche Ausbildung – Post-secondary vocational education and training	18-21 years of age
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------

Students may leave compulsory full-time education, when they are 15 or 16, but most of them continue in full-time upper secondary education (2nd and 3rd stage) in one of the three existing subdivisions mentioned in the table.

Pupils who leave full-time secondary education at the age of 15, 16 or 17 have to remain in compulsory part-time education (*Teilzeitunterricht*) within a school or – outside the school – by signing an apprenticeship contract or undergoing a special training in industry (until they reach the age of 18).

Post-secondary education only exists in the form of a vocational education and training programme in one single specialisation for intending hospital nurses (called *Ergänzender berufsbildender Sekundarunterricht*).

(ii) Admissions criteria

In full-time secondary education, pupils are accepted in upper secondary education when they attended successfully the first stage of secondary education, mastering at least the competences laid down for this stage by a decree dated 16 June 2008.

Pupils aged 16 (or 15 if they have completed the first stage of secondary education) may enter part-time vocational education, or begin apprenticeship or training. Education and training at this level are free of charge and parents are free to choose the institution for their children.

(iii) Curriculum control and content

The curricula in full-time upper secondary education are within the responsibility of the organising bodies. They submit them to the Minister's approval. There are no prescribed textbooks or teaching materials, and schools have considerable latitude as regards teaching methods. Inspectors ensure that the quality of education is entirely satisfactory.

The management staff at centres for part-time education is responsible for drawing up a detailed curriculum. Courses for the pupils concerned combine general education with preparation for a job.

Apprentices receive practical training three or four days a week and undergo theoretical vocational training in a learning Centre during the remainder.

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

In secondary education, each organising authority or body may adapt its assessment procedures to the different stages and education streams (general, technical, vocational), the various subject specialisations and circumstances peculiar to the school environment. However, in order to avoid excessive disparity, it is recommended that schools should adopt as consistent an approach to their work as possible. Assessment takes place three to five times during the school year within the *Klassenrat* (class council) supervised by the school head. Until now, pupils in difficulty can repeat any year in secondary education. It has been envisaged that this only may occur at the end of the first and second stage (i.e. the second and fourth year in secondary education), when certificates are to be awarded to pupils who have successfully completed these stages of studies. This consideration will probably be dealt with in the imminent draft of a decree on secondary education.

In full-time upper secondary education, an *Abschlusszeugnis der Oberstufe des Sekundarunterrichts* (Secondary Education Final Certificate) is awarded to those who have successfully completed the final two years (= the third stage, i.e. the fifth and the sixth year) of general or technical secondary education. For pupils undergoing vocational education, the fifth and

the sixth year of study lead to a qualification certificate. The Secondary Education Final Certificate, giving access to higher education, may be delivered in vocational education after the successful completion of an additional, seventh year in secondary education.

Part-time education is formally recognized, and may result in the award of a qualification certificate equivalent to the one awarded on completion of full-time vocational education.

Apprenticeship leads to the award of a certificate of vocational aptitude and/or an apprenticeship certificate (*Gesellenzeugnis*) awarded on the basis of continuous assessment and a final examination.

6. Higher education

(i) Structure

There is no complete higher education structure with three cycles. There only is one single higher education institution (the *Autonome Hochschule*), which has been created by a decree from 27 June 2005, taking in this way the place of three small institutions which gave up their autonomous existence in 2005. Presently only the first cycle is organised, covering two departments: 'Health Sciences and Nursing' ('Nursing' section) and 'Educational Sciences' ('Teaching' section). Three years programmes (courses and training) at ISCED level 5B prepare the students for entrance into professional life as graduate nurses or as teachers (for pre-primary and primary education only).

University education and other forms of higher education of long-term studies are not provided in the German-speaking Community of Belgium. Most students – approximately between 70 and 80 % of them – are studying in the French Community of Belgium, the others mainly in Germany.

(ii) Access

To enter higher education, students have to hold an Upper Secondary Education Final Certificate (or equivalent).

(iii) Qualifications

The decree of 27 June 2005, creating the *Autonome Hochschule* is in line with the implementation of the Bologna process. At the higher education institution, the academic degree of *Bachelor* has been awarded for the first time at the end of the academic year 2007-08 to students who enrolled in 2005/06.

7. Special needs

Special education caters for children aged between 3 and 21 who suffer from a handicap which prevents them from mainstream education. To be admitted to a special school, a pupil's special educational needs must be determined explicitly. A new decree has been voted on May 11th, 2009. It is based on three principles:

- first: difficulties have to be diagnosed at an early stage, best in ISCED 1, special needs in reading and writing need an individualized help, that can take place to a larger extent in mainstream education. Extra hours are dedicated to the regular schools that give specific help to students. These capital of hours can be used for complementary education for regular teachers as well as for the individual help that is given by specialized tutors to the student.
- second: enhance the cooperation between schools that provide education for students with special needs with mainstream education at level ISCED 1 and 2.

- third: creation of a centre for education on the basis of special needs. This centre encompasses the existing special schools on the level of ISCED 0, 1 and 2. Two new professions are introduced: a guiding function for pedagogic advice in special needs to the school and a guiding function for psychosocial tasks.

At the same time, the AHS (*Autonome Hochschule*) offers a new programme in education for special needs on the basis of ECTS. This programme is either an optional programme for students or a complementary course for already teaching personnel in schools for students with special needs.

Moreover, experienced teachers in working with children with special needs will get the opportunity to take supplementary training and certification in cooperation with a specialised Institute in Switzerland.

In 2008/09, 286 pupils, i.e. some 2.57 % of all pupils in primary and secondary education age attended institutions of this kind.

8. Teachers

Pre-primary and primary school teachers must hold a teaching diploma awarded on completion of three years in a teacher training institution. Primary school teachers usually are generalists who teach all subjects in the syllabus. For some subjects, specialist teachers are possible too. Secondary school teachers are specialists in the subject(s) they teach. Different qualifications exist for teachers in lower secondary education (three years of 'non-university' study in higher education institutions, bachelor) and upper secondary education (four or five years of study at a university, master). Teachers in higher education are generally holders of a university qualification, master. For the first time, a newly voted decree makes it possible for an experienced primary school teacher (with a diploma awarded by a (non-university) higher education institution or a bachelor) to be recruited by the Department for Educational Sciences of the *Autonome Hochschule*, the only Higher Education Institution existing in the German-speaking Community, for some specific courses. All teachers are recruited according to statutory rules by the organising authority or body of their institution. Initial recruitment is on a temporary basis, possibly followed after a few years by a permanent appointment with a status that is almost identical to a civil servant status.

9. Current reforms and priorities

Bearing in mind reform movements in the other Communities of Belgium and in neighbouring countries, the Government of the German-speaking Community – in the mid-nineties – had drawn up a plan for the reform of basic (pre-primary and primary) education, as well as secondary education, higher education, special needs education and adult education. The implementation of this plan began in 1998 and will probably not be completed before 2010.

A first step was set in August 1998 with a Foundation Decree concerned with the responsibilities entrusted to school providers and staff and with general provisions of an educational and organizational nature for mainstream primary and secondary schools. It was followed – in April 1999 – by a Decree on basic mainstream education (pre-primary and primary) and in December 2002, by a decree fixing for pre-primary education development goals and for primary and lower secondary mainstream education key competencies, which should be acquired by all pupils. The latter has been replaced by a decree from 16 June 2008 establishing essential skills and curriculum guidelines in education. In December 2008 the Ministry edited and disseminated the documents for German, French, Mathematics, History and Geography, sciences, music and art as well as sports. Seven working groups had prepared these documents for a period of three years.

German-speaking Community of Belgium (September 2009)

A decree concerning the use of languages in education has been voted on 19 April 2004 and gives a legal base to CLIL provision in primary and mainly in secondary education. The higher education reform started in 2005 (Decrees of January and June 2005). Three small-sized higher education institutions in the German-speaking Community have been fused in 2005 into one *Autonome Hochschule*. At present, this institution is challenged by developing further education programmes for teachers and nurses and by making international contacts in the field of research related to practice.

The decree on special needs education has been voted by Parliament in May 2009, whereas a decree restructuring secondary school will probably be introduced into Parliament in 2010.

Essential skills, curriculum guidelines and competence attainment targets for the second and third stage in secondary education (in the three education forms: general, technical and vocational) have still to be worked out in teachers-working-commissions and afterwards agreed by the Parliament of the German-speaking Community (PDG).

The Ministry doesn't organise central examinations for all schools and pupils. It formally recognises the schools' authority to award certificates. External school evaluation was experimented for 2 years in 6 primary and 3 secondary schools. Since January 2009, external evaluation has become compulsory in regular education and special needs education. At the same time, numerous primary and secondary schools started with internal evaluation.

For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (<http://www.eurydice.org>)