



# Dear Parents



The new Elementary School Act offers up many new challenges. The aim is and remains «elementary education for everyone», offering equal opportunities, a high quality of teaching, and suitable conditions for all learners. The Elementary School Act provides the elementary school with a solid base from which it can continue to develop without losing sight of its values. All those involved need to work together to achieve these goals. I am looking forward to being part of this important step in my role as Director of Education.

The elementary school (for pupils aged 4 to 15) can look back on a long and successful history as it celebrates its 175th anniversary. Since it started, it has contributed greatly to the positive development of the canton of Zurich and to a respectful coexistence. It is the foundation stone for all other levels of education, which means its quality is of particular importance. We have a good education system now and we are happy to celebrate its anniversary this year with a degree of pride when we look at what has been achieved.

For the elementary school to continue to satisfy society's needs in the future, it needs to undergo change again and again. On 4 June 2005, the vast majority of the Zurich electorate voted for the new Elementary School Act. The result is a clear signal to implement the education reforms carefully, efficiently and thoroughly.

As parents you will also experience the changes to the elementary school through your children. This brochure aims to inform you of the most important reforms as a result of the Elementary School Act.

I would like to wish the pupils, parents and all those involved in the schools great success.

Councilor

Regine Aepli  
Director of Education

**This brochure provides you with information concerning those elementary education reforms that have the greatest impact on parents. In many areas, local councils have a certain degree of freedom.**

**You can find further information concerning the Elementary School Act under:**

 [www.volksschulgesetz.ch](http://www.volksschulgesetz.ch)

→ **Parents**

→ **Realization of the new Elementary School Act**

**In this document the term 'elementary school' refers to kindergarten, primary school and secondary school education for pupils aged 4 to 15.**

## IMPRESSUM

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## Shaping Education Together

The new Elementary School Act means that recognized and valued educational elements remain, while tested reforms are introduced in the entire canton.

Elementary school is the basis for our education system as a whole. While schools in the canton of Zurich undergo change as a result of the new Elementary School Act, the principles of elementary school will not change. They remain of vital importance to the new act. Children and young people continue to receive full encouragement as it is the school's priority to educate; upbringing is the parents' responsibility. Tasks concerning education and upbringing are described in paragraph 2 of the Elementary School Act:

- 1 The elementary school promotes behavior orientated towards Christian, humanitarian and democratic values. As such, it protects freedom of beliefs and conscience and shows consideration for minority groups. It offers boys and girls equal opportunities.
- 2 The elementary school complements teaching within the family. Education authorities, teaching staff, parents and, where necessary, youth services work together.
- 3 The elementary school fulfills its duty to educate through its lessons and the social life at school.
- 4 The elementary school provides considerable knowledge and skills; it leads to an awareness of how things are connected. It encourages respect for fellow human beings and the environment and works towards children becoming independent people who are capable of living in a community. The school endeavors to encourage pupils to retain a willingness to learn and achieve. It especially encourages a sense of responsibility, a readiness to achieve, the ability to accept criticism as well as the ability to communicate. Lessons take individual children's strengths and preferences into account and achieve a basis for a lifetime of learning.

### THE MOST IMPORTANT REFORMS

- The Elementary School Act sets out clear rights and duties for parents and pupils.
- The Elementary School Act relies on parents, pupils and teaching staff to take joint responsibility. As a result pupils and parents have different collaboration rights.
- Locally-managed schools, which are the key element of the new Elementary School Act, mean there is more freedom for schools to adapt quickly to local requirements and pupils' and parents' concerns. Teaching staff find support from the school's management and parents have a further point of contact besides their child's teacher.
- The new act means that kindergarten becomes part of elementary education and is therefore compulsory. As a result, children are now required to attend school for 11 instead of 9 years.
- Secondary schools are structured in a more flexible way. Instead of just the two existing models: «Streaming» and «Three-part Secondary School», other variations can be opted for.
- Changes in society concerning the way families work are reflected in the canton-wide introduction of teaching blocks in the mornings as well as the requirement of local councils to provide out of school services.
- The new Elementary School Act focuses on integration: both pupils with special educational needs and pupils who are particularly talented are encouraged within their regular class as far as possible.
- All schools with a large percentage of non-German speaking children receive additional specialist and financial support.



→ New quality assurance and quality development instruments ensure standardized, good quality education in the whole canton.

The new Elementary School Act is an investment in open, diverse and effective schooling for everyone. It guarantees alignment with realities in education and society, ensures equality, and makes an important contribution to social cohesion.

## ATTENDING SCHOOL IS FREE

Every child who turns four by 30 April is eligible for school at the start of the next school year. Children have a right to free education in their place of residence. Should the child not reside at home (e.g. with a foster family), the rights are the same at the child's 'day place' of residence. If a child's way to school presents difficulties such as distance or danger, the child can be transferred to a school outside their local area. As a rule, such arrangements are decided on between the local councils.

In the case of serious matters, parents can appeal to the school governors for their child to be transferred to another borough. The local council in question decides such an appeal and determines the school fees. If the child can no longer attend school in their own borough, the school fees must be paid for by the transferring council. If the cause of the transfer stems from the child or the parents, they may be required to pay the fees themselves.

## PARENTS HAVE RIGHTS AND DUTIES

The Elementary School Act clearly states rights and duties of parents which are di-

vided into the following areas: information, collaboration and duties.

Parents have the right to be informed about school organizational matters in a timely manner (school / class placement, location of lessons and timetable). The same applies to school events (open days, special events etc.). If a pupil is having difficulties, something unusual happens, or unusual behavior develops, it is the duty of the teacher and the parents to share information with each other.

The act also grants parents collaboration rights. This includes collaboration rights regarding school career decisions (see Assessment and Promotion), arrangements for, changes to or termination of special educational needs and planned statutory disciplinary measures. There are no collaboration rights for school organizational matters such as placement in a school or class, instructions for daily life at school, awarding grades and assessments. Important information needs to be exchanged for collaborative decisions. If a pupil is having difficulties, his / her parents are both entitled to and expected to take part in the talks. If the involvement of all parents is required, the school management can make certain functions compulsory.

Parents' general collaboration rights must be recorded in the Organization Statute of the school's local council. According to the Elementary School Act, parents or their representatives are allowed to con-

tribute to the putting together of the school program. Nevertheless, parents cannot be made to become generally involved.

In addition, the Elementary School act clearly states certain duties. It is the duty of parents that pupils

- attend classes regularly and rested;
- are appropriately dressed and equipped for lessons and special events such as school trips and excursions;
- can complete their homework in the right environment (suitable workplace, quiet etc.).

A further important point is that parents are responsible for the pupil's way to school. Anyone who is intentionally in breach of



the statutory duties of parents can be fined up to 5000 CHF by the School Governors' Office.

## **PUPILS SHARE RESPONSIBILITY**

It is the schools' priority to promote the pupils' welfare. However, pupils are also expected to fulfill their duties and be actively involved in lessons. Like parents, pupils also have certain collaborative rights. They are involved in decisions suited to their age and aptitude. Shared responsibility and having a say appropriate to their development status is laid down in the Organization Statute and the school program.

## **DISCIPLINARY MEASURES**

If there are discipline problems the teacher cannot immediately resolve in the classroom, different measures can be worked out with the school's management.

These include talks, a written reprimand or transfer to another class. Further measures such as exclusion from optional subjects (excepting compulsory subjects), temporary exclusion from compulsory subjects for up to a maximum of four weeks, transfer to another school or exclusion from the final year of school can only be imposed by the school governors.

Parents must be informed of such measures in a timely manner.

If a pupil's behavior endangers others or seriously disrupts lessons, the school governors can arrange for special schooling. If parents do not agree with such a measure, the education authority has to inform the authority responsible for the protection of children. If a pupil's welfare is threatened, the teacher and the school must also inform the aforementioned authority.

## **The Elementary School Act also includes a code of conduct for pupils:**

- 1 Pupils are respectful towards the teacher and the school's workforce. They should carry out the teachers' instructions and refrain from doing anything that could endanger themselves or anyone else physically or psychologically. They should handle equipment and material with care.
- 2 Pupils are forbidden from
  - a. bringing and consuming alcohol, tobacco or other drugs on the school premises or at school events
  - b. bringing replica weapons onto the school premises or to school events.
- 3 The ban on the consumption of alcohol and other drugs as described in point 2 of the code of conduct is in force from the beginning to the end of the lessons, including lunch breaks and school events outside the school grounds.
- 4 The school management and teachers can stop pupils from bringing other dangerous objects onto the school grounds and to school events. Dangerous objects are those designed to endanger and intimidate others.
- 5 The school management and teachers will confiscate objects described in points 2 and 4 of the code of conduct. If necessary, they will inform parents.

## Changes to School Organization

Changes in Society are reflected in locally-managed schools, integration and child-care provision.

### MANAGED SCHOOLS – MORE ORGANIZATIONAL FREEDOM

Establishing a school management team is a key reform that has already proven itself in many boroughs. Cooperation between all those involved in the team is a feature of managed schools. If everyone pulls together, it increases the quality of the school from an educational as well as an organizational perspective. Parents can direct questions of general concern to the school management for discussion with or without the child's teacher. Moreover, important questions that affect the pupil can be discussed in detail with the parents, teachers and the school management as required.

The school management is in charge of school organizational matters and is responsible for educational issues together with the school's teachers' committee. In this way the school can and should respond to local and specific needs.

The teachers' committee creates a school program including the educational priorities and goals for the next three to five years. This is approved and published by the school governors. The school program incorporates the systematically recorded opinions of parents and pupils. Parents' feedback is obtained through parents' general involvement. Annual planning helps to put the school program into practice in a targeted way.

The school is assessed by the cantonal specialist department for school assessments every four years. Parent questionnaires are also circulated as part of this assessment.

### KINDERGARTEN BECOMES PART OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

From 2008, kindergarten will be cantonalized, thereby becoming part of elementary school. Kindergarten will be obligatory and compulsory school attendance for the academic year 2008 / 2009 will increase from 9 to 11 years. As a rule, this includes two years of kindergarten, six years of primary school and three years of secondary school education. Therefore, elementary school regulations apply to kindergarten as well.

All children who turn four by 30 April are required to attend kindergarten from the start of the same year's school term. Provided that the child's level of development is appropriate, the school governors can allow early entry from the start of term after the child has turned four by 31 July. In such cases, the school governors listen to those involved, and if necessary, consult specialists or arrange further investigative measures.

The language in which lessons are conducted is partly standard in kindergarten and the standard in primary and secondary school.

### REDUCTION IN SPECIAL NEEDS CLASSES, INCREASE IN INTEGRATION

Children with special needs and also particularly talented pupils are encouraged within the regular classes as far as possible.

Many districts in Zurich have already integrated a part of their special educational needs program. This has shown that integration is more effective than the exclusion of pupils with special educational needs. Reorganizing the previously varying special needs provision will mean standardization across the boroughs.

Teachers will receive support and advice from special needs experts. All children will benefit from the involvement of these specialists in the class and the school will be strengthened as a whole. Education authorities continue to offer special needs classes to those children whose needs are not sufficiently met in the regular or small classes, and therapies support some pupils individually to complement their lessons.

A new allocation process for special needs provision takes the perspective of all those involved (parents, teaching staff, school management etc.) into consideration and strengthens joint responsibility. Regular reviews look at the need for and the effect of this provision.

From the 2008/2009 academic year, schools in the canton of Zurich will phase in special educational needs provision in line with the Elementary School Act.

## GOING TO SCHOOL FROM 8 TO 12

As a result of the new Elementary School Act, teaching blocks have been introduced for the 2008 / 2009 academic year for all levels of schooling. Teaching blocks guarantee either continuous teaching or free supervision for the whole morning from 8 until 12 noon. These daily lessons or supervision can be shortened by a maximum of 20 minutes per morning for school organizational purposes.

Schools can timetable compulsory lessons for the teaching blocks, or compulsory lessons supplemented by free supervision. If the school provides supervision as part of the timetabled teaching blocks, it is free and optional.

## CHILDCARE OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS

Teaching blocks ensure that children are supervised by the school in the morning. In addition, the Elementary School Act requires local councils to provide appropriate childcare outside school hours from 2009 / 2010 (out of school services such as Breakfast Clubs, Lunch Clubs, After School Clubs etc.). The council must clarify the need for such out of school services, for example by means of a questionnaire for parents.

Parents can choose on which days and at which times (from 7.30 to 18.00) they require childcare outside school hours. Councils can charge parents up to the total cost of the out of school services. The local council decides how childcare outside school hours is structured and subsidized.

## HOMEWORK

Homework should be done at home. Parents are required to provide suitable conditions in which their child can complete their homework (see parents' duties).

Councils can provide free supervised homework sessions and, in special cases, make participation thereof compulsory. Supervised homework sessions are not designed to assist children with their homework, but to provide a suitable environment so that children can complete their homework in a quiet, relaxed atmosphere.

## CANCELLED LESSONS

As a rule, parents can assume that lessons will take place as timetabled. If a teacher is absent, another teacher or the school management takes over the class until a substitute can be found. Parents are informed of changes to the timetable (e.g. lessons cancelled due to teacher training) via a schedule for the semester or for the coming six months. It is up to the local council to decide if provision for childcare outside school hours will be made for the teaching blocks in the mornings.

## OPEN DAYS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Local councils are required to arrange at least two half-day open days in schools every year. These half-day open days and other special events (e.g. the last day of a project week, opening of a school building) can also take place on a Saturday. Half-day open days and other special events that take place on a Saturday are compulsory for pupils and teaching staff and cannot be compensated for on another weekday.

## BEING ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND JOKER DAYS

Parents must inform the school immediately if their child is ill or cannot take part in lessons for any other reason. If parents know that their child is going to be absent from school, they must request permission in advance.

If there is sufficient reason, the school governors can grant the child permission to be excused from attending school. Sufficient reasons include:

- Infectious disease in the child's family.
- Special occasions in the child's family.
- Special religious or denominational feast days.
- Preparation and participation in important cultural or sports events.
- Special artistic or sports training for specially talented children.
- Work placements and other similar events for career options.

All the rules concerning being excused from school now newly apply to kindergarten as well.

Pupils can be excused from school for two days (joker days) per school year without having to request special permission. Joker days are a holiday allowance of two days or half days (which also count as one whole day). Parents do not need to make a special request before using the joker days but just need to inform the school in advance that their child will be absent on a particular day.

The school governors can block certain days – special school events or open days – when joker days are not allowed. In addition, they have to decide if joker days



can also be combined (kindergarten, first to third year of primary school, fourth to sixth year of primary school and secondary school).

## **ASSESSMENT AND SCHOOL CAREER DECISIONS**

Pupils are not just assessed on their average exam results. Children are assessed on their knowledge (educational attainment), social skills (experience within the family, school and surroundings) and personal skills (attitude given the stage of development).

In principle, there is an agreement process for moving up a year, moving into the next class and transferring within secondary school. This means the teaching staff concerned, the school management team and the parents are involved in the decision-making process. As a rule, teachers and parents discuss moving into the next class or level. If they fail to agree, the school management team becomes involved in the discussions. If an agreement cannot be reached, the case is forwarded to the school governors who decide on an outcome.

## **APPEALS**

As mentioned, parents are usually part of the agreement process in areas where they have collaboration rights. However, if parents do not agree with the decision, they can take the matter to the next level. In other words, if parents cannot agree with the teaching staff, they can involve the school management team. If no agreement can be reached, the school governors make a decision. Appeals against decisions made by the school governors can be made to the district council.

## **HEALTH ASSESSMENTS**

Children have a check-up in kindergarten and secondary school which the local councils pay for. The schools doctor checks immunization, height, weight, and there is a test for vision and hearing. The health assessment at secondary school level can also include a consultation with the doctor on request. Immunization only is checked in the fourth year.

Parents can request that the health assessment is made by a private doctor; however, in such cases parents are required to cover the costs of the check-up. If the local council does not organize medical examinations for the pupils, parents are entitled to a voucher. Parents are then required to have the health assessment made by a private doctor.

## **PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND PRIVATE LESSONS**

Compulsory school attendance requirements can be met by going to a state school or a private school or through homeschooling. Private schools need to be recognized by the Education Directorate.

Homeschooling can include one-to-one lessons or small groups of up to five pupils. No authorization is required but as for private schools, the learning goals according to the Zurich educational plan have to be achieved. If private lessons continue for more than a year, they can only be taught by a qualified teacher.

If parents decide to send their child to a private school, they have to pay the costs themselves (school fees and other services depending on the conditions of the

agreement). Nevertheless, parents have a right to certain public services. For example, all the compulsory set material can be acquired free of charge. This service is provided by the school governors in your place of residence.

School-age children from private schools are entitled to free therapies in the same way as elementary school children. The required speech therapy, school psychology or other checks are free. The school governors decide which service should be offered and under which conditions.