

GERMANY

(Baden-Württemberg)

Introduction

Education in Baden-Württemberg – between tradition and innovation

Traditionally, Baden-Württemberg has a tripartite education system on the level of secondary schools dating back to the historical era of the class society. After four years of elementary school, it branches off into three different types of secondary school: the *Hauptschule* (for the students alleged to be gifted in practical aspects), the *Realschule* (for the students equally gifted in theoretical and practical aspects) and the *Gymnasium* (for the students gifted in theoretical aspects who intend to go to university after school). This tripartite structure is complemented with a very elaborate system of vocational education and traditionally also a whole range of different schools for students with special educational needs.

Until very recently, the decision which type of secondary school a student should move on to after four years of elementary schooling was made by his elementary school teachers on the basis of the grades the student had achieved throughout the fourth year of elementary education. As of academic year 2011/12, it is now up to the parents to decide – after profound consultation with their child's elementary school teachers – at which type of school their son or daughter should receive their secondary education.

Although the good quality of the educational system in Baden-Württemberg is often praised when compared to the systems of other federal states in Germany, it has some shortcomings. First of all, once a child was assigned to a *Hauptschule* or *Realschule*, it was very difficult to move upwards due to the fact, for example, that the curricula of the different types of secondary school are not sufficiently synchronized. Second, there is considerable inequality of educational opportunity within the tripartite system, as for example teachers teaching in the *Hauptschule* are educated at universities for a shorter time than teachers teaching at the *Gymnasium* level. As a consequence of all these equity issues in education, there still is too much of a correlation between children's family backgrounds and the educational success they can achieve. This especially affects socially disadvantaged individuals and individuals with a foreign background – children from immigrant families are often sent to the *Hauptschule* only because they are not yet proficient in the German language, with little or no consideration for the intellectual potential they might have. Third, the tripartite system is not sufficiently equipped to deal with the challenges of the future. Among these challenges are:

- the demographic development ensuing in a declining overall number of students – according to calculations of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the number of school students will decrease by almost 20% until 2025.
- the fact that in all types of schools the learning groups are becoming more and more diverse in terms of background and predispositions for learning.

In May 2011, a coalition government of the Green Party and the Social Democratic Party took over the charge of governance in Baden-Württemberg. Since then, one of the main aims of the new government has been to improve the education system in a way that will guarantee each student – according to his or her individual abilities – the best possible educational success and to overcome as much as possible the tremendous influence of family background on educational outcome.

1. Aims

On the way to more individual and cooperative learning

For this purpose, the concepts of personalized and cooperative learning are being implemented in schools. They are a core part of the idea of the *Gemeinschaftsschule*, a new type of school that was introduced in Baden-Württemberg via an amendment to the education law in April 2012. The *Gemeinschaftsschule* revolves around the following principles:

- It is a school in which equality of opportunity is connected with a clear focus on and a commitment to learning.
- It is a school for everybody and therefore a school which is especially suitable for inclusive education.
- It is a school placing great value on the concept of cooperative learning in both heterogenous and homogenous groupings. Phases of instructive teacher input will typically alternate with times when students work on a task together with others or individually. The teachers see themselves as specialists in their respective fields, as experts at diagnosing students' individual level of skills and knowledge and as facilitators of a range of learning processes.
- Teachers from all three traditional types of school and teachers for special educational needs teach and collaborate at this type of school, and the schools benefit from this mix of teacher expertise and specific skills.
- The *Gemeinschaftsschule* operates with an all-day concept, providing a structured space for learning from the morning until the afternoon (typically 3:30 pm or 4 pm)
- Different levels of degrees are offered at this school.
- In a bottom-up process, all schools can become *Gemeinschaftsschulen*. Applications have to be submitted to the Ministry of Education by the councils of the towns where the schools are situated. An application has to contain a concept based on clearly defined criteria such as performance, strategies of dealing with student diversity, quality of teaching, responsibility and accountability, school climate and school as a learning organisation.

The basic requirements of the *Gemeinschaftsschule* are:

- Teachers ready to work with students on different skill levels
 - who are interested in initiating and conducting learning processes for students and who are not entirely focused on “teaching” subjects
 - who are willing to spend time with students even when their “lessons” are over
- a school administration which considers providing professional supervision as its main task and which does not see itself as a centralist authority in charge of making final decisions. This implies that schools are provided with more autonomy and public accountability.

42 schools have already started as *Gemeinschaftsschulen* at the beginning of academic year 2012/2013, another 87 will follow in 2013/2014. They are provided with additional resources in terms of staff for the all-day concept, for the individual support of students, for special pedagogical tasks and – during the first three years – for the process of making the change. However, the federal government intends to strengthen the individual support for students in the traditional types of schools as well and has therefore – on a smaller scale – provided the *Realschulen* and *Gymnasien* with extra resources too.

2. Strategies and activities

Revising the curricula

The *Gemeinschaftsschule* and the implementation of personalized learning require a revision of the curricula for schools in Baden-Württemberg. Until now, the curricula were revised roughly every ten years, most recently in 2004. There was a separate curriculum for each type of school, compiled by separate commissions working independently of each other. As a consequence, even some subject matters taught in all types of school were placed in different years, which made it very difficult for students to switch between the different types of school. To prevent this from happening in the future and to help provide every student with the best possible education, teachers from all types of school are now collaborating on a new curriculum containing educational standards for all types of school. These standards are subdivided into different levels of difficulty to ensure that all students are sufficiently challenged. Apart from that, the revision of the curricula aims at extending media education in schools as well as education for sustainable development.

Restructuring the teacher training system

The challenges and developments outlined above also require a restructuring of the teacher training system in Baden-Württemberg along the following guidelines:

- What constitutes a good teacher – now and in the future?
- How does the training of future teachers have to be organized so that – within the framework of a changing society – they are provided with the necessary qualifications?
- How can be ensured that the young people best suited for this profession become teachers?

To find answers to these questions, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Science, Research and Culture appointed a commission of experts in spring 2012. These experts – all of them from outside of Baden-Württemberg – were asked to make suggestions as to how the training of teachers in Baden-Württemberg could be further developed. The basic aspects of their recommendations are:

- Changing the currently differing courses of studies for the different types of schools to one course of studies in two steps, leading to a Bachelor of Education after six semesters and a Master of Education after another four semesters.
- Implementation of a common teaching degree for grades 5 through 10 and 11/12, which should qualify all teachers to teach on all levels of all types of school.
- Implementation of a mandatory cooperation between universities and colleges of education in so-called professional schools of education.
- Inclusion requires that all teachers acquire basic skills in special needs education.

3. Tensions and impediments

Limited financial scope – a serious challenge

A serious challenge for these changes is the fact that the previous government of Christian-Democratic Union (CDU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) left Baden-Württemberg with a huge amount of debt. Therefore, the current government is obliged to balance the budget of the federal state until 2020. As a consequence, the financial scope for reforming the education system is very limited. However, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is convinced that reforms are necessary and is committed to accomplishing as much as possible within the means at its disposal.