



# The Year Before Starting School

A Guide for Parents



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# Foreword

Dear Parents,

Starting school is a significant event in your child's life, and indeed for the whole family.

This new phase comes with mixed emotions: happiness and worry, anticipation and uncertainty. As a parent, you can help your child navigate these waters. He or she will be entering a new world as a school pupil, so your support and encouragement will be very reassuring. Talk to your child about school. Show an interest. Ask your child to tell you what he or she thinks school will be like. Together, you and your child can use the year leading up to primary school to approach this new phase of life with excitement and curiosity.

This parents' guide provides answers to the key questions that come when you're preparing your child to attend school, and is designed to help you support and encourage your child. You are not alone: the final year of nursery school will also give priority to preparing your child for school. Take advantage of the opportunities presented by this collaboration between the different educational institutions and of the services they provide to promote your child's development.

I wish you and your child all the very best with this important transition.



Christian Piwarz  
Saxon State Minister for Culture



# 1 Development during the transitional year

All children develop at different rates. Every single child is unique. To ensure a successful transition to primary school, the following areas of development are of particular significance:

## Mental development

Mental, including cognitive, development refers to the ability to recognise, classify and comprehend oneself, other people and one's environment, and to get to grips with these. It is a highly multi-layered process, in which perception, thinking, learning and remembering are all closely linked. These are skills that are strongly dependent on attention, awareness and motivation.

As they play, children learn to recognise colours and shapes; and they are often unbeatable at memory games. On outdoor walks, they notice tiny details, and take in sounds and smells. They make up stories. They observe and comprehend, compare and classify.

### Mental development

"Look, a butterfly!"

The girl in the red jumper says, "I think it's a common brimstone."

The boy in the glasses says, "That sounds like a blackbird."

The child in wellies says, "I wonder if my boat will float."



Geistige Entwicklung

## Emotional and social development

In the first few years of life, emotional development is closely connected with caregivers. Love, security and safety are important prerequisites for giving children a basic sense of trust. This in turn encourages children to be aware of, and courageous when dealing with, their own feelings. Children learn by doing and by copying how to make friends, compromise and persevere, as well as how

to express their own wishes. Together with the people around them, they make decisions on issues appropriate to their age, and work out solutions to problems. This engenders a sense of self-confidence. In the course of everyday interactions, children learn how to cope with setbacks, how to understand other people, and how to tackle tasks by working together.

### Emotional and social development

The child in the green top says,  
"I don't like this game, I always lose."

The girl in the pink top replies,  
"But everyone has to lose sometimes."

The child in the stripy jumper says,  
"Let's share it out fairly."



Emotionale und soziale Entwicklung

## Physical and motor development

Children's development in the early years is characterised by physical growth and the improvement of motor skills. Motor skills are divided into two groups: gross motor skills – walking, throwing, balancing; and fine motor skills – manual dexterity, hand-eye coordination. Engaging in a wide movement enables children to become aware of their bodies and develop balance and dexterity.

Exercise through sport and play, both outdoors and indoors, helps children learn to persevere, compare themselves with others, have fun, and be aware of boundaries. They explore their capabilities by getting dressed and undressed, painting, making creative work (modelling, folding, cutting), jumping and catching. Physical health, resilience and wellbeing are all important prerequisites for learning.



### Physical and motor development

The woman suggests, "Let's go and sail the boats later."

*Körperliche und motorische  
Entwicklung*



## Language development

Human beings have inbuilt language skills. Attention, lots of contact with caregivers, and intensive linguistic input are crucial to children's language development. It is important to talk a great deal with children, and to allow plenty of time for discussion. This enables them to learn how to listen, ask questions and understand other modes of expression such as facial expressions and gestures. Reading aloud is an excellent stimulus for lan-

guage development, providing templates for children's own stories or expanding their vocabulary, for example. Encounters with a range of different books sparks pleasure in reading and encourages language development. New media such as tablets and smartphones can be incorporated into the process in an age-appropriate and controlled manner. Language is essential for learning.

### Language development

*The child wearing headphones says, "My CD's finished. Shall I tell you what I was listening to?"*



*Sprachliche Entwicklung*

**Here are some more suggestions on how to support your child, particularly in areas that are important for the transition to primary school:**

### **Mental development**

- Join your child as they experience the excitement of discovery and learning.
- Point out and repeat numbers, shapes and colours in everyday life.
- Give your child lots of opportunities learn more about the world.
- Talk to your child about what they notice or experience.
- Praise your child's achievements.

### **Emotional and social development**

- Give your child the chance to try things out and get involved.
- Agree everyday rules with your child and be consistent about applying them.
- Give your child opportunities to interact with other children.
- Spark their curiosity about school.
- Model how to cope appropriately with loss, disappointment and fear.



## Physical and motor development

- Give your child plenty of space and time for exercise, sport and play.
- Encourage good personal care habits.
- Ensure that your child has good posture and a healthy diet.
- Provide opportunities to engage in throwing, jumping and balancing, but also in painting, crafting and singing.
- Encourage your child to undertake everyday tasks for themselves.

## Language development

- Make time to talk to your child as much as possible.
- Read to your child and talk to them about their thoughts and feelings.
- Watch out for unintelligible speech.
- Ask questions and let your child ask you questions.
- Stimulate your child's interest in written language.

## 2 Everyday situations

Everyday life presents you and your child with all sorts of different situations. You can prepare your child for life and school anywhere: when you're eating together, at the playground, out and about in the natural world, before bedtime... Children learn by getting involved in everyday life and special occasions with the family. And these present lots of different opportunities for their development. The important thing in these situations is to encourage and reassure your child.

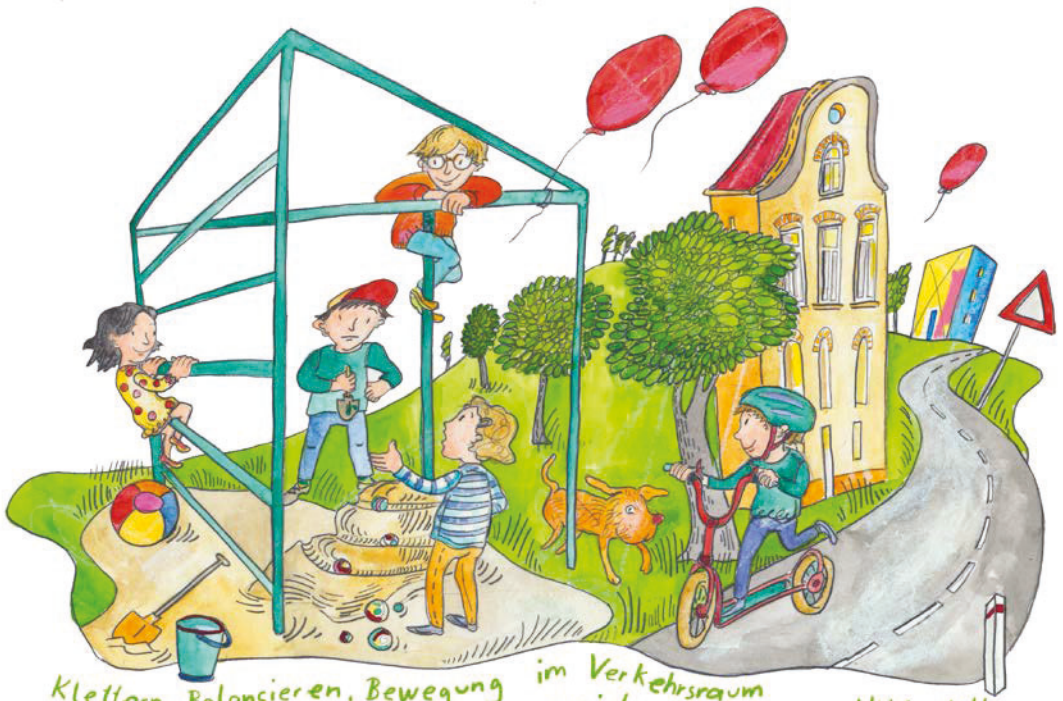
The following illustrations depict a range of everyday situations with suggestions for counting, storytelling, reasoning and copying.



Feinmotorik: Brote schmieren, Zuordnung von Besteck und mit Messer und Gabel essen, Tischsitten, Rücksichtnahme, Geschirr zur Anzahl der Personen

Fine motor skills: Buttering bread, eating with a knife and fork, table manners, being considerate. Laying the table with the right amount of cutlery and plates.

Climbing, balancing, road safety, negotiation, learning to be tolerant,  
social rules, asking for help, thinking together about fairness.



Klettern, Balancieren, Bewegung im Verkehrsraum  
Aushandeln, Aushalten lernen, soziale Regeln, um Hilfe bitten,  
gemeinsam über Gerechtigkeit nachdenken

Walking, persevering, jumping over rocks and sticks, breathing deeply, gaining more knowledge of the world, discovering new things, noticing the leaves on the trees, protecting the environment, talking about what you've found.



Wandern, durchhalten, über Stock und Stein springen, tief durchatmen,  
Weltwissen erweitern, Neues entdecken,  
sich Blätter von Bäumen merken,  
Umwelt schützen, über Entdecktes sprechen

Reading aloud, health, looking after your teeth, getting dressed by yourself and keeping an eye on the time, tackling a task on your own, completing a task, taking responsibility for something.



Vorlesen, Gesundheit  
Zahnpflege  
sich allein anziehen und  
allein eine Aufgabe lösen,  
Verantwortung

dabei auf die Zeit achten  
einen Auftrag erfüllen  
für etwas übernehmen



Look at the picture together with your child.  
There are lots of things for them to find that will pique their curiosity about school.





HULE



# 3 Preparing for school

Preparation for school doesn't just start in the last year of kindergarten, although the scope for children to gain experience and develop does increase as they get older. In preparing children for school it is particularly important to take account of children's individual learning requirements and create stimulating learning situations.

Primary schools start to take responsibility for the transition to school as soon as children are enrolled. Nursery schools and primary schools work closely together during this time. Most institutions have joint working agreements in place for this purpose, and parents and children are thus actively involved in the process.

As set out in the Saxon State Education Plan, nursery school provides children with lots of experiences and learning opportunities, including in the year leading up to primary school. Education professionals focus on the key issues for children's development through play and learning:

## Mental development

- e.g. discovering, sorting, memorising (maths and science education)

## Emotional and social development

- e.g. awareness of others' perspectives, understanding and respecting others (somatic and social education)

## Physical and motor development

- e.g. painting, dancing, balancing (somatic and aesthetic education)

## Language development

- e.g. listening, telling, asking questions (communicative education)

As learning is a holistic process, the different areas of development merge together in day-to-day education at preschool facilities. In joint projects and in play, children discover that learning encompasses a range of activities.

**Before your child starts school, you will need to make a number of appointments and some decisions.**

### The pre-school health check

Doctors from the Children and Young People's Health Service (Kinder- und Jugendärztlicher Dienst) examine all children due to start school. This health check is obligatory. It will take place at the school or health office before 31 January in the year leading up to primary school. You will be sent an appointment.

Parents and children are sometimes nervous about the health check, but there is absolutely no need to be. Every child's development is unique; as a parent, you will have been aware of this since your child was born and will have given your child appropriate support. The purpose of the examina-

tion is to check your child's development as it relates to what he or she will be doing at school. Your child will demonstrate through play what he or she can do. You will then compare notes with the doctor. He or she will provide information about any relevant support options from a medical perspective.

Healthy development also involves appropriate immunisation, in order to protect your child and others from infectious diseases. Please speak to your child's doctor about which booster vaccinations are recommended before starting school.

### Special educational needs

Children with pronounced issues in their development will be provided with extra support as they start school. Parents will have discussions with the school principal to inform and advise them about opportunities for development at the school. A diagnostic process is used to determine whether children have special educational needs and which school is best equipped to deal with these.

In principle it is possible for children with special educational needs to be taught at a mainstream primary school. If this is the case, children will receive special support from staff. Children with these needs often take a little more time to master a task, or may require special tools or individualised teaching materials. Sometimes they may learn

in different ways.

Depending on how these special educational needs manifest themselves, children can also be educated at a special school, which can make available specially equipped classrooms, individualised teaching materials, therapy and care, amongst other things. Staff trained in special educational needs provide children with support and individual assistance during the school day.

Section 4c paragraph 5 of the Saxon State Education Act states that as a parent of a child with special needs, you are entitled to participate in the decision as to which type of school your child will be taught at.

## A safe route to school

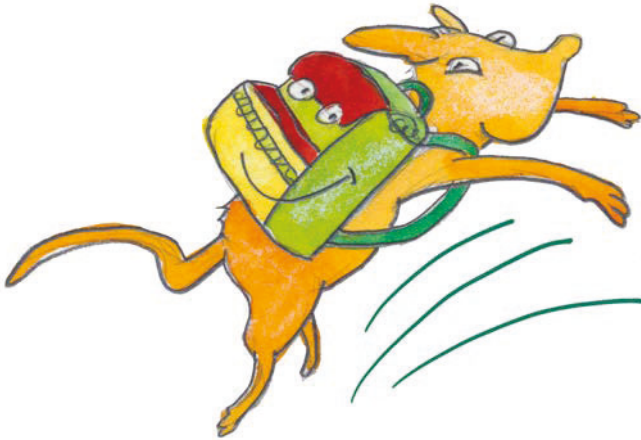
Making sure your child gets to school safely is an often-underestimated but highly important issue. As a parent, your help will be invaluable to your child.

Before they start school, talk with your child about which route to school will be the safest. This may not always be the shortest route. Take some time to practise the school route with your child. Highlight any potential hazards, or examples

of whereother road users are behaving incorrectly. Give your child the help they need so that they are quickly able to travel to school independently.

The most important thing is that children are visible, particularly in road traffic. Light and brightly coloured clothing, luminous markings on clothes and backpacks, and light-coloured headgear, are important signals for other road users.





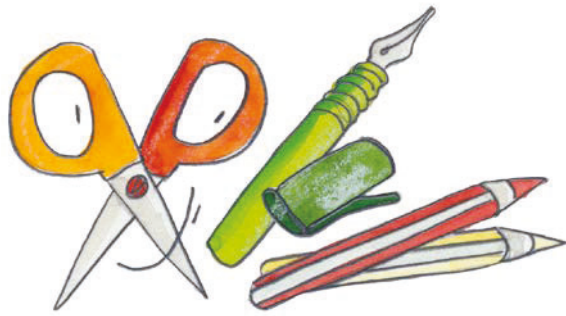
## The right school backpack

A school backpack is a decorative way for children to show that they have started school. Months before school begins, they will have their own ideas about what their backpack should look like, which colour it should be, and which of their favourite characters it should feature. You will need to give priority to very different issues:

- Which backpack is the best fit?
- Does it have enough space for all your child's school supplies?
- Is there room for a lunch box and water bottle?
- Is it easy for your child to open and close?
- Will it stand up on its own?
- Is it robust and waterproof?

All these factors should be coordinated with your child's wishes as far as possible. Please also bear the following issues in mind when selecting a backpack. Backpacks with luminous colours and reflective strips provide additional safety in road traffic. Extra-wide padded straps and back support make a backpack easier to carry. The size of the backpack and its weight when empty should be appropriate to your child's size and weight. As a rule of thumb, the weight of a backpack when full should not exceed 10 % of a child's body weight.





## School supplies

Once you have dealt with the big challenge of purchasing a backpack, you should wait a little while before buying school supplies. Each primary school will make its own decision on what supplies are needed.

At the parents' evening, which primary schools usually hold in the May/June before the start of

school, you will be told what school supplies your child will need. If you have any questions, school staff will be happy to help.

If your child is left-handed, this should be seen as a difference, not a weakness. A wide range of school materials is available for left-handers (e.g. pens, scissors, pencil grips).



## A new daily routine

Starting school isn't just a new phase of life for your child: your day-to-day family life will be different too.

Your child is taking a big step, and will need your trust and support in many different ways. Perhaps you can spend a little more time with your new school-starter, especially in the first few weeks of school. Ask them about their experiences at school. Share their excitement about any achievements. Help them if they need support with anything. Give them confidence.

Children starting school are at a key point in their physical development. A balanced daily routine is a good basis for enjoyable learning and achievement at school.

A calm start to the day, eating breakfast together, getting enough exercise, taking rest breaks, time for conversation and shared experiences, and enough sleep, will all make it easier for your child to learn at school.



## 4 Attending the after-school club



Whereas children are obliged to attend primary school, attending an after-school care club is voluntary. In Saxony, after-school places are provided on the basis of need. As a parent, you can choose whether you would like to make use of this service. If so, you must sign a contract of care with the facility provider and pay the relevant parental contributions.

You can ask about registering for an after-school care club when you enrol your child for primary school.

Primary school and after-school clubs are structurally two different facilities, but they take joint

responsibility for the education of the children in their care. As a parent, you are an indispensable partner in this process. Discussions with you and your child ensure that the requirements of everyone concerned are taken into account when the daily routines of the school and after-school club are organised.

How schools and after-school clubs work together will vary depending on local circumstances. To this end, facilities enter into joint working agreements, which ensure that learning experiences are designed so as to complement one another on a day-to-day basis.

## 5 Legal framework and time frame

The key requirements are set out in the Saxon State Education Act (SächsSchulG) and the Primary School Regulations (Schulordnung Grundschulen SOGS).



### Start of compulsory schooling

Principle – SächsSchulG section 27(1)

When the school year begins, all children who have reached the age of six by 30 June in the current calendar year must attend school. Children who have turned six by 30 September in the current calendar year and have been enrolled at school by parents are also obliged to attend school.

### Enrolment

Principle – SOGS section 3(1) to 3(7)

Parents must enrol school-age children at the primary school in their catchment area between 1 August and 15 September in the year prior to starting school.

#### Note

Parents will be notified of school enrolment dates in accordance with local practice.

### Early admission

Principle – SächsSchulG section 27(2); SOGS section 3(2)(2)

Primary schools may accept children who are not yet required to attend school at the beginning of the school year at the parents' request, provided their mental and physical development is at an appropriate level for school attendance.

#### Note

This decision should be made with educational guidance. Nursery schools may also be involved in the decision, subject to parents' agreement. Once the decision is taken, parents must ensure that the child then attends school. The child may not be unilaterally un-enrolled by the parents. Children must be enrolled for early admission by 28 February of the year in which they are due to start school.

## Deferring admission

Principle – SächsSchulG section 27(3); SOGS sections 4(3) and (4)

Deferring a child's entry to school is only possible in exceptional circumstances. If it transpires that a child cannot be expected to participate successfully in lessons due to their level of mental or physical development and if there is no evidence that this can be addressed by means of support for special educational needs, the decision will be taken by the school principal.

### Note

It is only possible to defer entry to school once. Thereafter, appropriate support measures will be arranged by the principle in liaison with parents and nursery school teaching staff.

## Notification of acceptance

Principle – SächsSchulG section 27(4)

Decisions are taken by the principal as appropriate.

### Note

Parents will be notified of the decision in writing in May/June.

## The pre-school health check

Principle – SächsSchulG section 26a; SchulGesPfIVVO section 4(4)

The pre-school health check usually takes place by 31 January of the year in which the child is due to start school. The examination is undertaken either at a suitable venue at the primary school or at the premises of the health office. The principal will inform parents of the time and place of the examination and will explain that at least one parent must be present.

## Attending a school outside the catchment area

Principle – SächsSchulG section 25(1) to (3), (5); SOGS section 3(5)

Every primary school has a catchment area. If parents wish to send their child to a primary school outside their school catchment area, they must apply to the primary school in question by 15 February of the year the child is due to start school, providing reasons as to why their child should attend.



## Enrolling at an independent primary school

**Principle** – SOGS section 3(1), (3) and (4)

Parents may enrol their child at an independent school. They must inform a primary school in their catchment area in writing of the name of the independent school by 15 September of the year preceding the start of primary school. This notification from the parents will be taken as enrolment at a primary school in the catchment area in accordance with SOGS section 3(2). In order for a child to be allowed to attend an approved independent school, parents must register the child for the pre-school health check with a public primary school in their catchment area.

### Note

The independent school will decide whether or not to offer the child a place.

## Nursery and primary school liaison

**Principle** – SächsSchulG section 5(4) and (5); SOGS section 5(2)

Teachers are allowed access to children's development records with the written consent of parents. This is particularly useful for children displaying anomalies in their development and enables their current level of development to be assessed at nursery school so that appropriate support measures can be agreed between the nursery school and parents.

### Note

Children's current level of development is usually assessed in the first few weeks of school.

## Enrolling children whose first language is not German or not exclusively German

**Principle** – SOGS section 3(6)

For children whose first language is not German, or not exclusively German, special educational guidance is available at the request of parents.

*The boy in the yellow top is saying "school" in Turkish. The girl wearing glasses is saying "school" in Russian. The dog is saying "woof."*



# 6 Curiosity about school

As a parent, you can support your child in the year leading up to primary school by

- accepting your child with all his/her strengths and weaknesses
- taking his/her needs and feelings seriously, and addressing these
- letting your child take part in a variety of everyday experiences
- responding to his/her questions and finding answers together
- encouraging your child to discover, exercise, talk about things, play
- taking a confident approach, including to mistakes, backward steps, or failures
- taking advice in relation to any difficulties, anomalies or uncertainties

## Celebrating the start of school

The start of school is always celebrated on the last Saturday before the first day of school. Many parents give their children a "Schultüte" (school cone) filled with sweets and small gifts (rubber, pencils...).











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