

My Child and the German School Nairobi

What you need to know about the German Education System

Text by Karin Häggmark, Shital Shah June 2013

In this document, we would like to summarise the most important aspects of the German School System, (and thereby the German School Nairobi), and highlight the main differences between this system, and other popular systems in Kenya, such as the British, the American and of course the Kenyan system.

The German Education System

Germany is a Federal State, and not unlike in the USA, the curriculum in each of the 16 States varies. At the German School Nairobi, we follow the curriculum of the federal state Thuringia. Teachers, though, come from all over Germany and Switzerland, and there are a few locally employed teachers, as well.

Although details in the different states vary, the general education system comprises of two main sections: Primary and Secondary Education. Primary School comprises of Classes 1 -4 (sometimes up to Class 6, dependent on the Federal State).

The Secondary School section is split into a three tier system: the *Hauptschule*, the *Realschule*, and the *Gymnasium*. There is a fourth type of more inclusive school, the *Gesamtschule*, which would correspond more to the British Comprehensive School.

The *Hauptschule* has a more practical approach(as opposed to an academic one), and prepares students more for a vocational qualification. It finishes with an examination at the end of Class 9/ 10, (depending on the Federal State), called the *Hauptschulabschluss*. The *Realschule* has a broader range of emphasis for intermediate students, and finishes with a national examination in Class 10, *Mittlerer Schulabschluss*. This qualification is also available to students in the *Gymnasium* after class 10 (*Realschulabschluss*). The *Gymnasium*, ending in Class 12, prepares students for university, with a final examination, the *Abitur*. This would be the British equivalent of an Advanced Level Examination. The *Abitur* qualifies students to study at universities and colleges in Germany at an affordable rate, and is recognised by all EU member states, as well as the majority of non-EU countries. At the German School Nairobi, as of the academic year 2012 / 2013, we have been offering the DIAP (German International Abitur Examination) as the final *Abitur* examination. Further information on DIAP in English is available on:

http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/pdf/Bildung/Auslandsschulwesen/DIAP/EN_PO_DIAP_17-06-05.pdf

Schools in Germany are traditionally half-day schools, and only as recently as the beginning of the 21st Century has there been development in full-day schools. Boarding Schools are scarce, and are often very expensive private schools.

The German School Nairobi

The German School Nairobi is a German School Abroad, one of 141 such schools worldwide, and it is partially supported by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. The school was established in 1969 and named after Michael Grzimek, the son of the world famous zoologist Bernhard Grzimek. The German School is a co-educational, multi-ethnic, non-denominational school. In 2011, the school was awarded the seal of an "Excellent School Abroad."

Primary School	6 years	Class 1	Subjects taught in the Primary School : German, Mathematics, Science, English, Religious Studies*, Art, Textile and Design, Sports, Music, IT
	7	Class 2	
	8	Class 3	
	9	Class 4	
Textile and Design is no longer taught in the Secondary School. All of the above subjects, are continued at Secondary level, and the following new subjects are introduced in different classes			
Lower Secondary	10	Class 5	Biology, History, Geography
	11	Class 6	French
	12	Class 7	Chemistry, Physics
	13	Class 8	Social Studies only class 8 and 9
	14	Class 9	
Upper Secondary	15	Class 10	French (beginners)
	16	Class 11	
	17	Class 12	

Below is a summary of how the school is organised, and when various subjects are introduced to the students.

**Religious Studies in the Primary School is interdenominational. From Class 5 onwards students may choose between Religious Studies and Ethics.*

The medium of education in most subjects is German. From Class 8 Geography is taught in English, and from Class 9, History is taught bilingually. In the DIAP examinations, students may do up to 50% of their examinations in English.

The German School offers its students an examination at the end of each school tier, to accommodate all three, *Hauptschule (HS)*, *Realschule (RS)* and *Gymnasium* students. Most of the students are *Gymnasium* students. There is no specific curriculum for *HS* or *RS* students, and they are taught in the same classes as the *Gymnasium* students. However, with differentiated teaching materials, books and examinations, there is a class internal differentiation in the education of these students.

Most Kenyan students who join the German School, especially the scholarship students are *Gymnasium* students, and would proceed to do the final examination at the end of Class 12.

The German School is a full-day school, with a large variety of extra-curricular activities available in the afternoons. Participation in these activities is optional, and most of them are included in the school fee. The school also has its own Boarding House for students who do not live in the vicinity of Nairobi, or even for international students, who may want to attend the school.

Main differences between Kenyan /British and the German School Nairobi

There are several differences between the German school systems and other popular systems in Kenya. Here, we would like to highlight some of the most obvious ones.

1) The School Year

Unlike in Kenyan schools, where there are three terms, the school year in the German system is split into 2 semesters: the first semester is from the end of August to the end of January and the second semester is from February to the beginning of July. There are a minimum of 180 teaching days in an academic year. There are school holidays in December (normally 4 weeks), April (2 – 3 weeks) and in July / August (7 weeks).

2) Testing, assessment and examinations

A) National Examinations and comparisons to other education systems

Apart from the *Haupt / Realschulabschluss* and the *DIAP*, there are no final examinations. Students do not do an examination at the end of Primary School (such as the KCPE), or the Lower Secondary School (such as GCSE / IGCSE).

Students in the British system typically choose 3-5 subjects for their AS / A-Level course. In the German system students are obliged to take ten subjects for the *DIAP* examination, which include at least two foreign languages, and at least two sciences, or one language and three sciences. In this sense, the *DIAP* is more similar to the KCSE, where students are obliged to take between 7 and 9 subjects. Clearer distinction between the courses taken during class 11 and 12 (10), and the exams taken (5)

The *DIAP* is very comparable to the *International Baccalaureate (IB)*, with its broad range of subjects and focus on critical and independent thinking (Theory of Knowledge)

As up to 50% of the *DIAP* examination can be done in English, the University of Nairobi recognises this qualification as a valid requirement to entrance into Nairobi University. The school in conjunction with the University of Nairobi have equated the grades achieved in the *DIAP* to the KCSE grades. Additionally, our students have been successful in securing a place at private universities in Kenya,

B) Internal assessment in the school

Students take state assessment competence tests (in Classes 3, 6 and 8) in German, Mathematics and English. The students are not graded for these examinations: its purpose is to give the subject teacher and the school management an indication of how the students are faring compared to other students in Thuringia, and to make relevant amendments, if deemed necessary.

Testing is otherwise in the form of written examinations and continuous assessment by each subject teacher in each class. Typically, a student will do 3 to 4 written examinations over the course of an academic year in each subject. In between, the student is assessed regularly on his/her performance in class. This takes various forms, such as short tests (to test understanding of work covered recently), presentations and exercises covered in class, the student's participation in oral work among others. The final grade for each semester is calculated using a 50-50 ratio of written examinations and continuous assessment.

Students get a report at the end of each semester.

3) Promotion to the next academic year

Promotion to the next academic year is not automatic in this system, i.e. one cannot automatically assume, that having completed Class 3 for example, a student will move to Class 4 in the next academic year. If a student does not meet the requirements stipulated, s/he may have to repeat the year, absolutely common practice in Germany.

Scholarship students are also required to meet certain stipulations to maintain their academic scholarships.

4) Role of parents

The biggest difference between a Kenyan school and the German School Nairobi lies perhaps in the role of the parents in the school. The school considers parents as partners in the education of their children. At the German School, it is not uncommon to see parents forming a swimming team in the Swimming Gala, volunteering to organise festivals at the school, offering extra-curricular activities etc. If there is an event at the school such as a theatre production, or a musical performance, it is expected that parents will attend to support the school. Instead of holding traditional Parents' Days, the school holds "Co-operative Study Plans" twice a year. Both the student and the parent participates in this meeting with the teacher. The student is encouraged to self-evaluate his / her own performance, which is then compared to the teachers' evaluation. The aim is to come up with an improvement plan (in conjunction with the student), which has very concrete measures that the student needs to take in order to improve in the subjects s/he is performing below ability.

In addition to participating actively in school life, a lot of parental support is required for the student at home. The aim of the German school system is to create independent students; this means the responsibility of working lies more upon the student, and less upon the teacher. This starts as early as the Primary School where homework is given on a weekly basis. The entire week's homework is given at the beginning of the week in a homework plan, and it is up to the student to manage it well, so it is spread out over the week. This must be done with the assistance of the parents, of course. As the students get older, they are responsible for copying down the homework themselves, and ensuring it is done regularly. The same applies for revising for tests and examinations.

We hope that we have managed to provide you with some essential details regarding several aspects of the German Education System, and the German School in particular. Please do not hesitate to contact the school should you have any queires.