

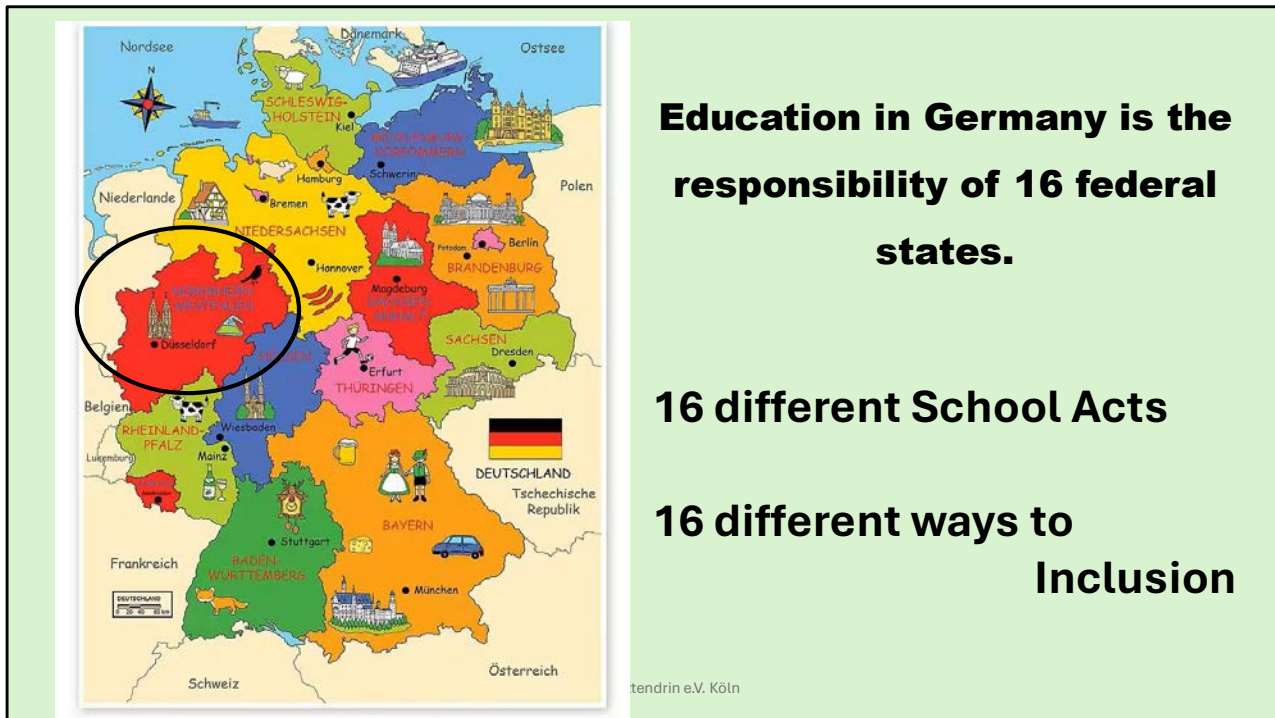
Inclusion

in the German School System

especially in Nordrhein-Westfalen

Kannen - mittendrin e.V. Köln

To give you a better understanding of the ways of inclusion in the German School System, it's necessary to explain the setup of Germany as a federal state. The different responsibilities of individual state governments and the federal government help to explain a lot of the issues with the way inclusion works in German schools.



Germany is made up of 16 individual states with their state government and an overarching federal government. Very similar to the United States of America.

In 2009 Germany signed the UN-Convention on the rights of people with disabilities. To put this into German law, the federal government developed an „Actionplan for Inclusion“. This concerns mainly topics like rules for employment of people with disabilities, building and workspace regulations, etc. to enable participation.

However, education and the school system is the responsibility of each state government.

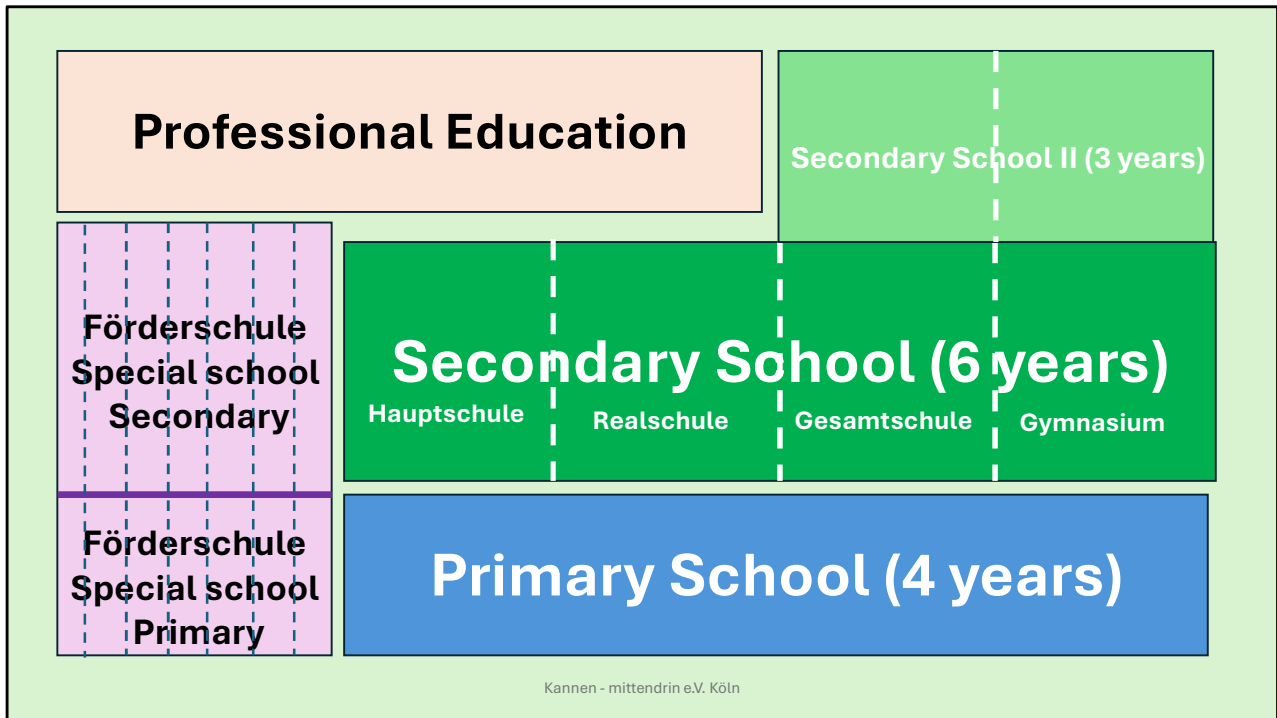
(1) With 16 different sets of rules, there are 16

different ways to Inclusion. (2)

Some states do more to achieve Inclusion in their school system than others. Interestingly, the northern states are more advanced in integrating inclusive principles in their schools than the southern states – there is a noticeable north-south effect.

(3) Nordrhein-Westfalen is somewhere in the middle – geographically as well as concerning the realization of Inclusion.

I will be talking about the experiences I've made in „Nordrhein-Westfalen“. Therefore I'll first give you an overview how the School System in „Nordrhein-Westfalen“ is organized.



(1) Primary School is the school for all pupils from the age of 6. It normally lasts for 4 years and then the pupils have to change to a Secondary School. And that means really a change to another school location, for a lot of pupils even to another city.

(2,3,4,5,6) The Secondary Schools are separated in different levels. Traditionally all over Germany we have the three types: *Hauptschule* (lowest level), *Realschule*, *Gymnasium* (highest level). In addition, most of the states have introduced a „*Gesamtschule*“ since about 40 years – a school type which allows all pupils to stay together and not to be separated by levels.

It is for ideological and political reasons that all these systems exist in parallel. Secondary School in all systems lasts 6 years. 10 years of school education is mandatory for everybody. After those 10 years, further education is split into ongoing school education and professional training.

(7) Further school education is offered in Secondary School II, which is possible in „*Gesamtschule*“ and „*Gymnasium*“.

(8) Professional Training has a lot of different specifications and is mostly coupled

with practical work. In general, Professional Training opens a lot of possibilities to young people to get higher qualifications.

(9,10) In parallel to this School System we have in Germany the „Förderschul“-Special school system. This system also is divided in Primary School and Secondary School. And it is divided in specifications of disabilities: mentally handicapped, physically handicapped, blind and visually impaired, deaf and hearing impaired, disabled in emotional and social behavior, disabled in learning, disabled in speaking

This highly specialised system of Special schools – you perhaps can imagine- is a very expensive system. These schools receive in relation more teachers, better room conditions and more expensive materials than the other schools. Partly, they also have additional experts for health and trainings and so on.

In spite of that, we try to realize Inclusion in normal Primary and Secondary Schools. But those schools don't have such luxury features as the Special schools. Inclusive Schools only get a small part of extra features, for example one special teacher for a whole Primary School with about 200 pupils, or one special teacher for about 120 pupils in a „Gesamtschule“. And mostly from this 120 pupils about 12-15 are labeled as pupils with disabilities.

And this is one of the big problems we have with Inclusive Education in Germany: we have two parallel systems the Special school system and the „Inclusive System“. But we don't have the money to finance both systems in same way. And so it is a political decision how much money can go to Inclusion.

To realize the UN-Convention most federal states established „the parents' choice“. It means that parents can choose Inclusion or Special School. But as long as there are better conditions in Special Schools, a lot of parents will choose this system, when in fact it means **exclusion** for their children: they are transported to special schools, they don't have contact to same aged children in their neighbourhood.

Parents' Choice

Nordrhein-Westfalen (School Act):

- **Every child has the right and the duty to go to school.**
- **Special education for pupils with special needs is usually organized in Regular Schools.**
- **Parents can choose whether they want their child to be taught in a Regular School or in a Special School.**

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(2) The fact that every child has the right to be taught in a regular school means that the regional education authorities must ensure that every child whose parents decide in favour of inclusion is given a place in a regular school.

(3) In practice that means that we try to distribute pupils with special needs to Inclusive Schools so that there are not too many in one class. As a result, we typically have on average about 3 pupils with different kinds of special needs in one class. You'll find this in Nordrhein-Westfalen in „Hauptschule“ und „Gesamtschule“ nearly everywhere and in „Realschule“ quite often. But you won't find so many pupils with special needs in „Gymnasium“. The reason is that the „Gymnasium“ is allowed to dismiss pupils because they do not reach a level of grades and the other schools have to offer places for those pupils.

In summary we have two parallel systems Special schools and Inclusive Schools. And Inclusion is mostly realized by „Hauptschule“ und „Gesamtschule“. And as the schools often don't get enough resources, we find the most engaged and innovative teachers at „Hauptschule“ and „Gesamtschule“.



Teacher for Primary School

Teacher for Secondary School

**Teacher for Special School
with different specification**

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A short information to teachers qualification:

In general we have:

People decide, which kind of teacher they want to be and depending on that they get a special qualification, a special study.

That means not all the teachers learn about children with special needs and how to work inclusive. Actually it may depend on the University or faculty if they offer studies of special needs or Inclusion to all students.

And Special Needs teachers receive even different education and training in their studies.

And as the conditions for work for teachers in Special schools are often better than in inclusive schools, we have a lot of teachers for special needs who try to get a job in a Special School.

15 years after signing UN-Convention

- still 55% of children with special needs are going to Special schools

	Rate of Inclusion	Rate of Exclusion
2008/09	18,8%	81,2%
2022/23	44,4%	55,6%

number of pupils in Special schools

2009: ca. 380.000

2023: ca. 350.000

- In relation to the total amount of pupils the rate of pupils with special needs increased:
from 5.9% to 7.6%

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The result of 15 years UN-Convention:

(2)And if you compare the rates of Inclusion and Exclusion it seems to be a positive development.

(3)BUT: The number of pupils in Special schools is still nearly as high as it has been 15 years ago.

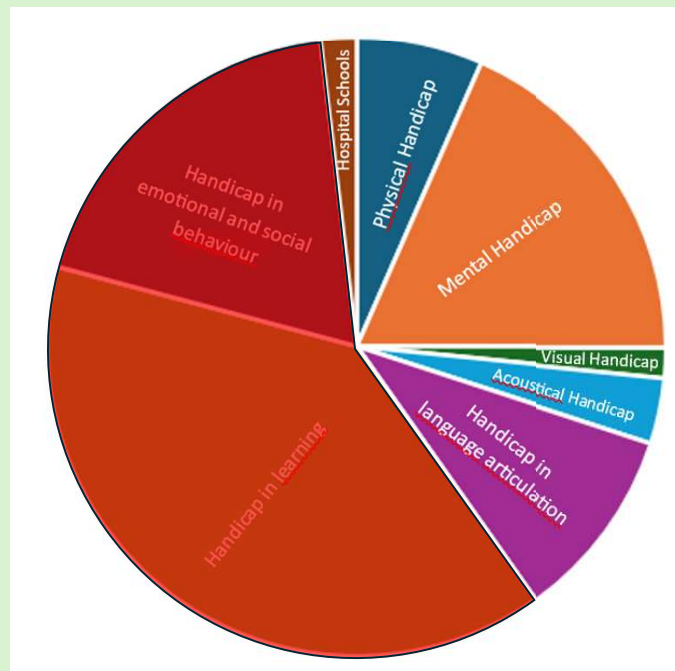
You may wonder: How is that possible?

(3)Fact is that the total rate of disabled pupils, pupils with special needs increased during the last 15 years – in average about 1.5 to 2%.

Also a rather mysterious development. How is possible that many more pupils are disabled?

It's a question of diagnosis!

Distribution of handicaps in 2023/24 (NRW)



This pie chart shows the different kinds of disabilities we differentiate in Germany.

(2) This pie chart also shows that 50% of children with special needs are labelled as disabled with a diagnosis of „emotional-social Handicap“ and „Learning Handicap“.

And especially these two diagnoses are mainly school-diagnoses. That means they are performed by teachers without medical indications. The diagnosis is done by one expert-teacher for disabilities and a second teacher from a regular school.

This diagnostic problem is currently subject of a tough debate. Some scientists define it as a self-fulfilling system: pupils get more difficult and so we label more pupils as those with special needs to get more resources. In Nordrhein-Westfalen we currently discuss to change that system of diagnosis.

Alltogether it is a very critical and difficult situation as we have no rules that **all** schools get the best resources and conditions. And beneath we still have

separate systems of teacher qualification.



Teacher with inclusive attitude



Quelle: <https://taz.de/Inklusion-in-Schulen/!5044179/>

Inclusive Schools

different ways of learning
learning with sens ^{GH0}
cooperative learning
respectful and friendly climate

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(1) Despite all this, we have many teachers with an inclusive attitude, (2) we have schools working inclusively – and good schools which get awards for their cooperative and inclusive structures.

And a lot of these schools are following special projects, which allow them exception from the normally very separating and exclusive system, which organizes our schools.

(3) Some items you'll always find in those inclusive schools are:

Folie 8

GH0 Was soll „learning with sens“ bedeuten?
Gregor Happ; 2025-05-20T19:10:25.095



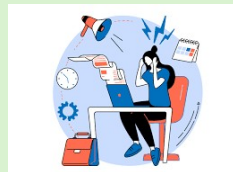
**Institute for the
support of schools**



**inklusive
schulische
bildung**

Das Angebot bietet Unterstützungsmaterialien für Schulen, unter anderem zur Lern- und Entwicklungsplanung, Schulkultur und Vernetzung, sowie Praxisbeispiele.

<https://www.schulentwicklung.nrw.de/q/inklusive-bildung/>



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And teachers who want to realize Inclusion, can find support:

The official institute in Nordrhein-Westfalen: QUA-LIS NRW

(1) All around the subject „Inclusion“ they offer input and material to work with in your school, for example:

- (2) teachers cooperation,
- (3) use of digital devices,
- (4) classroom-management,
- (5) strategies of intervention and prevention,
-and a lot of more subjects concerning inclusive schooling.



Institute for the support of schools



erziehung
und
prävention



ganztage
in der
schule



interkulturelle
bildung



geschlechter
sensible
bildung



individuelle
förderung



unterstützungs
angebot
ukraine

This institute also has a lot of other platforms to give support to school management and teachers:

Education and prevention, whole-day-schooling, intercultural education, gender-sensitive-education, individual-learning-support or actually:

How to support ukrainian pupils



Beneath the official institute for school-support, we have many private or common institutions, which offer support for Inclusion:
„Montag Stiftung“ offers especially support for planning new inclusive schools

- (1) barrier-free buildings
- (2) Open spaces for alternative methods
- (3) Or special markings for blind people

(4) But only new schools get sometimes such conditions. Most schools have to deal with traditional buildings and the problems this brings.



And there are a lot of other organizations which finance special projects or offer support and material for schools.

And, of course, the organization I'm working for is doing that.

A few examples:

The organization „Aktion Mensch“ is a very big organization which supports and finances many projects. And they offer a really good pool of material, for example videos for youngsters concerning the subject of Inclusion.

Also „Bertelsmann Stiftung“ and „Robert Bosch Stiftung“ are very big and important organizations concerning Inclusion. They organize awards and spend rather good money to schools with special efforts and success in Inclusion.

Last example is the organization I work for. We give support to all kinds of disabled people to realize their right of Inclusion in schools, in the job, in living conditions and so on. And a very important subject is the question how to apply for the finances for special needs. Actually we are running a special project for young people with mental handicap to get better job-qualifications.

Folie 12

GHO Möchtest du hier sagen: „wie das Geld angewendet wird“ oder „wie man sich für die Finanzierung bewirbt“? Ich habe es für Letzteres formuliert.

Gregor Happ; 2025-05-20T19:33:06.718

Most important for Inclusion at school

Teachers' attitude



Quelle: https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=einstellung+haltung+clipart&vhid=z4Dv2_zmOvnrM&vssid=_ENaYaju3GbPp7_UPqK6Qw_38

individual support for every child



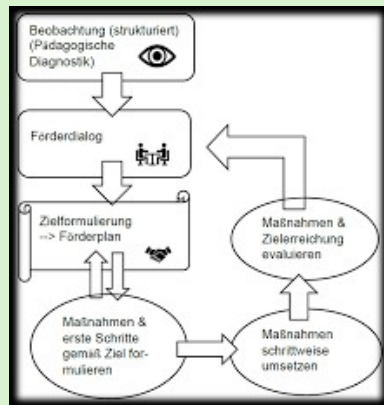
Quelle: <https://www.regierung-mv.de/Landesregierung/bm/Kindertagesfoerderung/Uebergang-in-die-Schule/Elternunterrichtung>

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As result of all my experiences with Inclusion I would say: Most important is

- (1)The attitude of the teacher and all people who are dealing with children in their daily work. If the teacher lives an attitude of respect, tolerance and high regard to everybody, this will determine the atmosphere in a group. And the children or young people will feel that atmosphere and will be able to show their talents in a climate of safety and security.
- (2)For us in Nordrhein-Westfalen the expression „individual support“ is very meaningful. The legal school-act defines the right of every child to receive individual support. To the teachers this opens possibilities to give a lot of support despite the requirement to rate them in comparison to peers, performance averages, scores or something like that.

We in Germany have a very selective School System, particularly because of that hard cut after the fourth grade. And for teachers it's often very difficult to fulfill the demands of the school curriculum and the demand of individual support.



Individual plan for children with special needs

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An important instrument for Inclusion is the individual support plan for children with special needs. It is mandatory for teachers to write such a plan. Mostly the expert-teachers are responsible to write the plan. But they need to communicate it among all the teachers who are dealing with that pupil and they have to communicate it with the parents.

This plan is the basic of all measures and interventions and is also an instrument of documentation as it is continuously written. In such a plan, all special agreements or methods are fixed.

Examples



Quelle: <https://www.dreamstime.com/illustration/autism-signs.html>



Quelle: <https://www.istockphoto.com/de/search/2/image?mediatype=illustration&phrase=wegweiser+wandern>



Quelle: <https://www.istockphoto.com/de/search/2/image?mediatype=illustration&phrase=ohrsch%C3%BCtzer>



Quelle: <https://www.boell-brandenburg.de/de/was-ist-das-wahl-geheimnis>



Quelle: <https://www.istockphoto.com/de/search/2/image?mediatype=illustration&phrase=ausgang>

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Here are some examples of methods and interventions I came to know during my working life:

For pupils with autism there are sometimes very creative methods necessary:

- (1) to have marked ways they can move in the classroom
- (2) or to use professional hearing protection to help them to focus
- (3) or a visual protection – like they are used for election cabins
- (4) or the permission to leave the classroom during the lessons and to go to a special place to cool down
- for some pupils we installed a sand bad to cool down – just to box it
- for others it's important to know exactly what will happen next, they always need a briefing of what will happen at the beginning of lesson.
- or they need a special rhythm for working – they can get an hourglass to have control of their timing for exercises
- and so on



Quelle: <https://www.rbk-direkt.de/schulbegleitung.aspx>



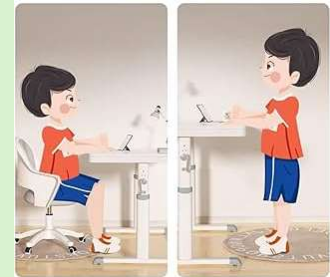
Quelle: <https://www.shutterstock.com/de/search/blind-clipart>



Quelle: <https://de.dreamstime.com/stockbild-der-blinde-junge-und-der-computer-image7170621>



Quelle: <https://de.vecteezy.com/gratis-vektor/h%C3%B6ren>



Quelle: <https://www.amazon.de/NIZAME-Studientisch-H%C3%B6henverstellbarer-Sitz-Steh-Schreibtisch-Computerarbeitsplatz/dp/B0CN6D6TX9>

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(1) Sometimes we can get assistance for a pupil. That means that for some lessons or even for whole school-morning we get a person who is only caring for and accompanying that special child. To get such an assistance, it needs a (2) medical indication and an application at social authorities.

By such applications you also can get special aids as

- (3) special optical aids
- (4) or hearing aids
- (4) or special desks or chairs

And beneath all those additional aids, you need the possibility to modify all the learning material and the methods:

- visualize explanations
- different ways of presentation
- different quantities and levels of exercises

GHO Hast du „Erklärungen visualisieren“ gemeint?
Gregor Happ; 2025-05-20T19:33:35.012

It is normal to be different.

Richard von Weizäcker

Help me to do it on my own.

Maria Montessori

Kannen - mittendrin e.V. Köln

Finally I have two quotes for you:

First from our former president Richard von Weizäcker: ...

And the second one from the great educator Maria Montessori: ...