

5 The parents as partners with the school

A child's parents are responsible for his or her education. It is, therefore, natural that they are seen as partners of the school, and this brings both obligations and rights.

Obligations

Obligations describe what parents **have to do**. They primarily involve the child's attendance at lessons.



Compulsory nature of education

The parents ensure that their child attends school **daily**. This means that:

- › they make sure that the child gets up, has breakfast and sets off in time for school;
- › they ensure that their child has his/her schoolbooks, exercise books and writing implements with them (this is necessary with younger children in particular);
- › they ask their child to report on what he/she has learned at school;
- › they make sure their child does his/her homework (refer to their homework diary).

Taking note of communications from the school

The school provides the parents with **written information** about school-related matters. This may include:

- › school rules and federal-state-wide arrangements (e.g. prohibition on weapons);
- › timetable, changes to the timetable;
- › specific information for the parents of a particular child, e.g. requesting attendance at a parent-teacher meeting.

Parents need to read these communications **carefully and act upon them**.

If so requested, they must confirm with their signature that they have received the information in question.

Informing the school that the child is ill

If the child is ill, the school must be informed, first by telephone, and later in writing.

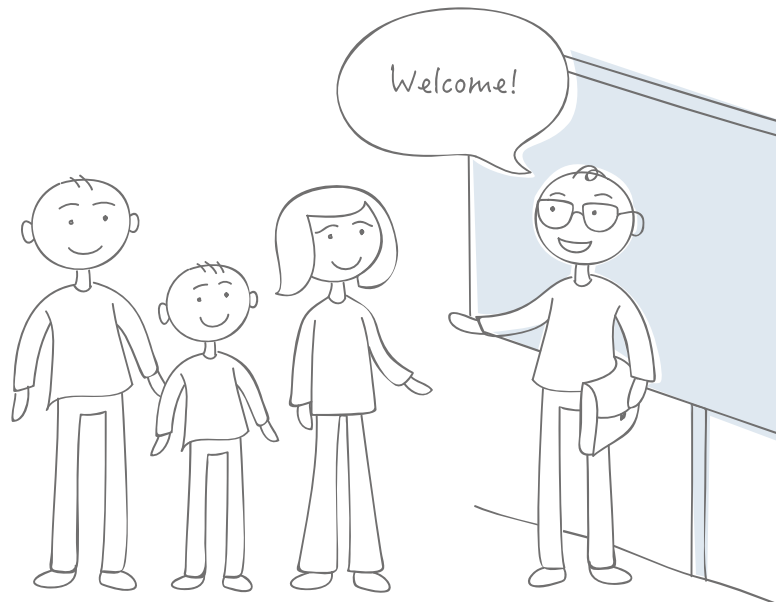


Religious holidays

If the parents want the child to take part in a religious festival during school time, they must request in writing beforehand that the child be excused from classes. If the school agrees, the child must catch up on the teaching missed through his/her absence.

Going on family holidays

Children may go on holiday trips only during school holidays. Requests for children to be excused from classes so that the family can go on holiday are generally not granted – and neither is an extension of school holidays.



Parental rights

Parents' **rights** describe what they **are allowed to do**. They primarily involve school-related matters and involvement in decisions.

Individual meetings with teachers

Parents are entitled to be informed about their child's schoolwork and, in particular, about his/her performance. They do not have to wait until the school informs them on its own initiative. Instead, they can themselves seek contact with the school and its teachers, and arrange an individual appointment.

The best opportunity to speak with all of the child's teachers is at the school's **parent-teacher conferences**. These take place at least once a year, often shortly after the half-year reports are issued. Additionally, **class-based parents' evenings** are held several times in a given school year. Here, parents are informed about schoolwork in this class and have the chance to ask questions and input their own thoughts.

Half-year reports as the basis for guidance

A particularly good opportunity for communication between school and parents is afforded by the half-year reports at the end of January. These indicate how the child is doing after the first half of the school year.

- 1 = very good (*sehr gut*)
- 2 = good (*gut*)
- 3 = satisfactory (*befriedigend*)
- 4 = fair (*ausreichend*)
- 5 = unsatisfactory (*mangelhaft*)
- 6 = poor (*ungenügend*)

The school reports identify the child's strong subjects and where he/she is having particular difficulties in acquiring the knowledge and skills required. The following grades are usually awarded at most schools between years 3 and 10:

If a child receives the grade '**unsatisfactory**' or '**poor**' in two subjects, the child is at risk of being held back (i.e. repeating a year) at the end of the school year instead of moving up a year. At many integrated comprehensives (*integrierte Gesamtschulen*), traditional reports (*Zeugnisse*) are replaced by a school progress report (*Lernentwicklungsbericht*). At the end of the school year, pupils move up a year group without this needing to be formally approved by the conference of class teachers. The teachers advise the parents on how their **child can do better** with, for example, additional practice exercises, homework support or remedial teaching.

Ways in which parents can get involved in the school

Collectively the parents can, in many cases, play a part in decision-making. To this end, they elect representatives who have children in a given class, and these form the parents' association (*Schulelternrat*). Parents are also represented on the School Board (*Schulvorstand*). Ultimately, the chairs of the parents' associations also work together at both municipal and federal-state level to represent parents' interests vis-à-vis the school authorities and Lower Saxony's Ministry of Education. All parents are invited to make use of these opportunities to get involved. This applies especially to the parents of non-German nationality with a migration background.

