

From primary school to lower-secondary level

The transition from primary school to lower-secondary school is an important step in a child's education in Switzerland because this is when streaming first takes place: Depending on how well they do in primary school, students are assigned to different performance groups in lower-secondary school.



COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Most students complete compulsory education (i.e. primary and lower-secondary school) in the public school of their commune of residence.

Only around 5% attend a private school. Public (i.e. state) schools fulfil an important integration function: children with different social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds attend the same school. The cantons are responsible for compulsory education. The communes run the schools. Attendance of public school is free of charge.

At the start of compulsory education, children are generally four years old. Compulsory education lasts for eleven years. Primary school – including two years of kindergarten or (in some cantons) the first two years of the first primary-school learning cycle – lasts for a total of eight years.

Lower-secondary school lasts for three years. In the Canton of Ticino, lower-secondary school (Scuola media) lasts for four years.

TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL TO LOWER-SECONDARY SCHOOL

Not all children have the same aptitudes in school. Not all have the same talents, interests and abilities. Some are very intellectual, others are good at music, socialise well with others or are particularly good at crafts. And some struggle frequently with the demands of school.

At this juncture in a child's education, it is therefore important for him/her to be assigned to the right performance level in lower-secondary school.

EXPECTING NEITHER TOO LITTLE NOR TOO MUCH

Generally speaking, students are twelve years old when they start lower-secondary school. Their grades at the end of primary school, their teacher recommendation (often in consultation with the parents and, in some areas, performance in an entry test or during a trial period in lower-secondary school all determine what stream the child will be assigned to.

Tips and suggestions for parents

As a mother or father, it is all right to acknowledge and accept weaknesses. You need to be able to say: "My child is not as good at school as I had imagined." If you can accept this fact, then new opportunities open up for your child.

The school works best as a community. As parents, you should perceive school, the classroom, as a whole and not seek to obtain special favours for your own children.

Get involved in school activities, contribute to the school and discuss matters with teachers. If it is clear that you take the conditions and interests of the school into account, then you will also be listened to if you express criticism.

Avoid putting pressure on your children. You should not expect them to constantly improve their grades.

Allow your children to develop their own interests and accept that these interests change over time – so your child will change his/her mind again and again.

Avoid putting your children under time constraints. You should allow your son or daughter to take the time needed to make his/her own decisions.