

The French School System : from nursery school to High school

A child can attend nursery school from the age of two.

From 6 to 10 , he will be in primary school and will go through three cycles.

At eleven, he will go to the « collège » (secondary school/ junior high school). The « collège » covers the four years called 6^o, 5^o, 4^o and 3^o.

Then, after the collège, pupils join either the « lycée » (and take general or technological courses) or the « lycée professionnel » which provides vocational training as well as more traditional core subjects or even a « Centre de Formation d'Apprentis » (CFA ≈ training school) in a vocational course.

In the lycée, your child will be able to study for three years for a « baccalauréat » (≈ school leaving certificate/ A' levels / high school diploma...)

In the « Lycée professionnel » or in the CFA, he can study for a « CAP » (≈ vocational training certificate) or a « BEP » (≈ technical school certificate). He may then obtain a « bac professionnel »

If your child speaks no or little French when he arrives in France, he may benefit from extra teaching during school time. The contents of this remedial course and special measures to help him are different from a « département » (≈ county) to another. You must therefore ask for further information from the head of the school you enrol your child in.

Primary School

It is organised in three cycles and covers eight classes.

First cycle : Petite Section de Maternelle (for 2 and 3 year olds)

Moyenne section de Maternelle (for 4 year olds)

Second cycle : Grande Section de Maternelle (for 5 year olds)

Cours Préparatoire (for 6 year olds)

Nursery school

It is free and takes in children from 2 to 6

How can you enrol your child ?

You only have to go and see the headmaster or headmistress of the nearest school in your district to get information.

Even if your child doesn't speak French, he will be enrolled. The staff will then organise remedial teaching in order to help him in the best possible way.

How does it work?

During these three or four years in “Maternelle” , your child will learn how to express himself in French, how to discover and respect the school's rules of conduct. In the first year of the second cycle, in other words the last year of nursery school, teachers will help him to open up to the written word and the culture corresponding to his age range. He will then be ready to enter elementary school...

Elementary School:

It is free and compulsory from the age of 6. Children go to primary school until they are 10. School attendance is a right. Every child in age to go to school is to attend school regularly.

How can you register your child?

Exactly as for Nursery School, you will only have to ask the headmaster or mistress of the local school for information.

If your child doesn't speak French, he can be registered in a special class (CLIN, classe d'initiation: a class for beginners in French) before joining an ordinary class full time. Be careful, these special classes do not exist in every school. If there isn't a CLIN, he will be enrolled in the class corresponding to his age and the school staff will be in charge of organising remedial teaching.

In Primary school pupils are expected to respect certain rules.

School is both a right and a duty. Regular attendance is demanded, any absence has to be justified. School regulations organise the functioning of the school. It concerns both pupils and staff of course but also pupils' families. These regulations are to be respected: school hours, outings, behaviour etc.

There is direct contact between parents and staff through meetings or else indirect communication through messages on the "cahier de correspondance" (special liaison notebook)

Primary school covers 5 school years, in other words 5 classes. The school year starts at the end of August or at the beginning of September according to the organisation of the school and it ends at the end of June or beginning of July. The school head will give you a school schedule.

Don't forget that the person you can best liaise with is your child's teacher. Never hesitate to ask for his or her advice...

Secondary school

Le collège:

How to enrol your child in the "Collège"?

You should inquire at the local "collège" or directly apply to the Inspection Académique (Education Local Authorities) of the département (county)

If your child doesn't speak French, he may be enrolled in a special class but these classes do not exist everywhere. In any case, your child will always be inscribed in a collège class corresponding to his age.

The subjects taught in the collège are:

French/ Mathematics/ a foreign language (English, German etc)/ History and Geography /Biology / Technology / Art / Music / PE / Physics and Chemistry / Latin / Greek / a second foreign language...

In the collège, the pupils get ready to go into the "Lycée d'Enseignement Général" (Seconde) or "Lycée Technologique" or "Lycée Professionnel" or "Centre de Formation pour Apprentis".

Le Lycée:

Secondes

Première

Terminale

Specialisation:

"Baccalauréat général"

Baccalauréat L : art-orientated "bac"

Bac ES: "bac" focussed on economy and social studies

Bac S: bac with a scientific bias

"baccalauréat technologique"

STI: science and industrial technologies

STT: science and communication (tertiary sector)

STL: science and laboratory technologies

SMS: health care and social welfare

Le Lycée professionnel

This type of school enables pupils to prepare a “Brevet d’études professionnelles” or a “Certificat d’aptitude professionnelle” and then a “Bac professionnel”

Apprenticeship:

Young people can choose to become apprentices: they must be between 16 to 25. In this form of training, a work contract must be signed.