



BREZEL-NEWS

First Edition, March 2012

Newsletter of the German Saturday Schools Islington and Hackney Wick

Dear Saturday School Friends,

Welcome to the first edition of our Saturday School Newsletter, the "Brezel-News". We have been planning this project for at least the past 13 years, ever since I took over Saturday School management – and it's a small miracle that we have finally done it. Many thanks to our editor-in-chief Martina Köpcke.

The Saturday School Islington has become huge since then, and it really did all start before my time. Since September we also have our Hackney Wick branch. To promote closer contact and the exchange of information, the "Brezel-News" is going to come out once per term. This first edition will give an overview of our Saturday School's history; in future we intend to turn to more topical subjects. As always, contributions will be much appreciated.

At the beginning of last year, we became a Limited Liability Company, although we still count on our families for help. If parents didn't do their bit, we wouldn't be what we are today. The atmosphere would be a different one, and – to put it bluntly – we would not be able to maintain our price levels, which are very reasonable for London. Hence, I'd like to thank all of you who have contributed to the Saturday School's success over the years.

A big thank-you to all of our fantastic teachers, too. Without you, Saturday School couldn't exist. Our teacher's highest priority is to make the lessons fun for the children. We don't want additional school stress on a Saturday morning, but simply hope that our children enjoy coming

to Saturday School. That way, our children will be quite happy to speak German and able to enjoy their international perspective.

Happy reading!

Yours, Cathrin xx

Cathrin Cordes, School Director



Children and teachers in 2004.

Photo: Alexander Hug

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FROM TINY ACORNS

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR GERMAN SATURDAY SCHOOL

The Early Years

More than 20 years ago, when most of our current Saturday School parents hadn't perhaps spent much time pondering the challenges of bringing up a child bilingually, the foundations of what has now become an important weekly fixture in our calendars were already being laid. A group of like-minded parents started meeting way back in 1991 to create an informal German language environment for their toddlers. Over the years, the get-togethers took place in a succession of Islington venues, such as community halls and nurseries, before eventually moving to the school's current premises at Drayton Park in 1998.

One of the longest-serving Saturday School parents is Yasmine Burnett, who joined with her three-year-old daughter in 1992 and has been a member of the teaching staff for the past 11 years. "We used to meet on Saturday mornings at the Gillespie Centre in Blackstock Road, and we were already called German Saturday School then," she remembers. "There were about 20 children. We only had one room and used partition screens to create separate spaces for the children." Although the school has grown and changed almost beyond recognition, Yasmine remains loyal to the cause. "It's much more highly organised now. And it's still a lot of fun," she says. "It's like being part of a family."

When Klaudia Baker's eldest daughter first attended German Saturday School in 1996, the meetings took place at Highbury Nursery. "We had two rooms for two groups of children," she recalls. "The younger children were in a room that was full of toys they weren't allowed to touch. And the room for the older children had a table but no chairs."

Move to Drayton Park

Despite its popularity, the German Saturday School was unable to expand beyond two or three groups because of space restrictions. Finally, in 1998, the school rented a number of classrooms at Drayton Park Primary School - new premises providing the potential for growth. By the time Cathrin Cordes took over school management the following January, there were approximately 30 children being taught in three classes. Since then, the school has gradually expanded to its current size of about 150 children in twelve classes, with ages ranging from three to 16. Although student numbers have increased quite dramatically over the years, the school's objective

remains the same: to provide a fun and vibrant environment for the children to expand and improve their knowledge of German language and culture.



Saturday School children since 1998, and still with us today!

To allow non-German speaking parents to get more out of the Saturday morning get-togethers, an adult class, initially organised by some non-German speaking parents, was added in 2002. The opening of a second adult class - a beginners' class, alongside the now advanced original group - followed in 2009. "These adult courses are very important and not just for my students, but for the whole family," says Carola Kornfeld, who has been teaching the grown ups for the past four-and-a-half years. "When the parents are studying German, it's really motivating for the children."

Music, Music, Music

Despite the continual expansion, Saturday School routine has remained much the same. Music is of special importance as it is an excellent vehicle for language learning. Since the earliest days, mornings have started with communal singing. For many years, the singing was led by Martina Schwarz, a professional songwriter and musician, and her accordion. A Saturday School parent since 1993, Martina introduced us to a range of her own fun compositions, including the much-loved "Hey, hey, hallo", which was especially written for us and still kicks off our Saturdays now. Although she left in 2008, we are fortunate enough to have Martina's continued support on many special occasions, such as our lantern walks and Carnival, which quite frankly wouldn't be the same without her.

Since Martina's departure, Hildegard Maier has

become our new musical maestro, leading Saturday morning singing with guitar accompaniment. Hilde is also the choirmaster of our “Islington Meistersingers”, started by music-loving parents who sing together while their kids are in class. The choir have contributed many an enjoyable performance to Saturday School events, with favourite numbers including “Badewasser” and “Die Forelle”.

Extra-curricular activities and special events

The school celebrates all the major German festivals, such as the Carnival, Easter (complete with mega-Easter Egg Hunt) and “Nikolaus”, when Father Christmas visits all of the classes, delivering small gifts. In November, the children make lanterns and participate in a traditional lantern walk.



Carnival

Over the years, a number of stalls have complemented the German cultural experience. The video (now DVD) library was first introduced in 1998, making a whole range of German-language movies available to both parents and children. Veteran volunteer Alexander Hug has been dispensing films for more than nine years, currently alongside Alexander Schmidt and Georg Holthausen. “It feels more like 20 years,” he says after another busy morning. Most popular DVDs for grown-ups at the moment are “Tatort”, of which the Saturday School has about 20, and other crime films. The children’s current top choice is “Hände weg von Mississippi” and the all time classic “Sendung mit der Maus”. “What I don’t like,” says Alexander, “is that everyone always looks guilty as soon as they see me.” So please remember to return your overdue DVDs and you won’t have to

try and “dodge” Alexander and his team in future.

The German cultural experience would not be complete without coffee and cake. Hence, one of the main attractions on Saturday mornings is the German baker who first set up his stall selling a range of German breads, other baked goods and waist-expanding specialities in 2002. Tea and coffee-making facilities are supplied by Michela and Andreas Staab, who have faithfully ferried kettles, mugs etc to and from the school for the past three years and to whom we are very grateful.

Regular special events at Saturday School include the very popular “day of professions” where parent volunteers visit the older children in their classrooms to give them an idea of the work they do. Each year we look forward to introducing a broad range of different professions and have so far enjoyed visits by (among others) a milliner, a psychologist, a camera man, a lawyer, a journalist, a gynaecologist and many others.



Gaby and her class on a “day of professions”.

One-off events have included mock parliamentary elections in 2009 where results differed somewhat from the real thing and the Green party romped home with a staggering 50.9% of the vote. In November that same year, Saturday School commemorated the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. East German parents and those who happened to be in Berlin on that memorable day were invited to share their memories with the children. A number of Saturday School families later visited a related art exhibition at the German Embassy. Other extracurricular activities have included children’s theatre productions, pub evenings and even a wine-tasting.

Summer School

In 2010, the school in Islington reached capacity,

i.e. it had filled all of the available classrooms at Drayton Park Primary School. That same year, with more than 100 children still on the waiting list, Cathrin decided to introduce a new German summer school programme. Her team included artist Martina Geccelli, puppeteer/storyteller Yasmine Burnett and musician Martina Schwarz and enabled 30 children, aged 4 to 10, to come together in three groups for a week of music, art and theatre. In 2011, the summer school was back by popular demand, this time adding a dance element to the programme, courtesy of performance artist Regina Fichtner. Opening a fourth class also allowed us to bring the total of attendees to more than 40.

Hackney Wick

After 13 very successful years at the helm of Islington's German Saturday School, Cathrin Cordes has apparently never been further from retirement. Spurred on by an ever-growing waiting list at Drayton Park (and disregarding humorous comments about "empire-building"), she has set up our new Saturday school in neighbouring Hackney. With premises at Gainsborough Primary School, the German Saturday School Hackney Wick first opened its doors in September 2011. We do seem to like big sporting arenas – while in Islington we are right next to the Arsenal Stadium, Gainsborough is the nearest school to the new Olympic Stadium, where the "youth of the world" is about to meet this summer. We currently teach about 35 youngsters from four to seven in three classes.



The opening event at Hackney Wick

The Hackney parents are a very well-organised group. They have to be, as Cathrin can only be in one place at the time and runs it kind of from the distance. Cathrin sends a regular weekly email message on Thursday evenings and the Hackney teaching team supported by Nina Böger and many others take the lead on a Saturday mornings.

They already run their own coffee kitchen, plus a lovely parent & toddler group in their cosy school hall. They have also organised their first Lantern Walk in Victoria Park, their own special Christmas do with cello accompaniment, and while Islington had "Kölner Karneval" as Martina is from Cologne, Hackney Wick celebrated "Mainzer Fastnacht" with Regina and Julia from Mainz leading the way.

And there grows another little acorn...

Our keys to success

The German Saturday School in Islington has an incredibly low turnover of children, and our families' loyalty is a real indicator of our success. In turn, most of our teachers have also been extremely loyal. Many have been with us for more than five years, some for very much longer. A number of them were qualified teachers before joining us; others have discovered their passion for teaching at Saturday School and gone on to do PGCE courses. Many thanks to all of you! *

At this point we should also mention our students' considerable academic achievement over the years. Since the first group of Islington children took its GCSE exams in 2005, there have been more than 40 successful GCSE candidates, and almost 20 at AS and A2-Levels. All of them have excelled in their exams.

We have also formed very strong relationships with our English partner schools. The boat in the playground of Drayton Park School has become a symbol for many young Saturday School children, and we all appreciate Gary the caretaker who has been simply fantastic. We have been very fortunate with our landlords at Drayton Park, and we are very optimistic about forming a similarly good relationship with our new landlords at Gainsborough Primary School. We are also grateful to St. Mary Magdalene Academy just around the corner in Islington and Fortismere Secondary School in Muswell Hill where many of our older students have been able to sit their exams.

For more than 20 years, the German Saturday School in Islington has provided a vibrant German-speaking community in North London, and after a very promising start we are confident that our new school in Hackney Wick will follow suit. Under Cathrin's management, our school has gone from strength to strength. At heart, however, it remains a parent initiative and would not have become the overwhelming success that it is today without the support of Saturday School families. Almost all of our

teachers are parents of Saturday School children. The school directors – Cathrin, Charlotte Schulze, Andreas Staab and long-serving Treasurer Ursula Yates (on the team for an impressive 12 years) – are all dedicated parents. There are many other volunteers who help ensure the smooth running of our Saturdays, not least Connie Dickgreber, our playground duty “enforcer” and Carlos Falco Korn, Cathrin’s partner who has always supported the Saturday School in many ways. For the past year, Ulrike Hensel has been taking on a large part of the school’s administrative work, also for new sister school in Hackney. There are many other parent helpers, too many to mention here. You know who you are and you are much appreciated.

**Namely since 1998: Anja Berger, Anke Wolf, Anne Field, Barbara Bentele, Birte Meyer, Boris Born, Carola Kornfeld, Charlotte Schulze, Christine Müller, Christine Pleines, Daniel Ludwig, Diane Falkenberg-Hassan, Esther Munteanu, Frauke Ehmke, Gaby Kienle, Gabriele Wölfe, Inge Diamond, Jana Scholze, Karin May, Karin Schmid, Karin Schuck, Katharina Kraska, Katja Forreiter, Klaudia Baker, Klaus-Dieter Rossade, Maria Mikl, Martina Geccelli, Martina Köpcke, Martina Schmid, Martina Schwarz, Petra Wonnemann, Quirin Maderspacher, Regina Fichtner, Sabine Ballata, Sandra Sanpher, Susanne Dietz, Tanja Bridge, Sonja Bucherer, Sue Jannoch, Svenja Erich, Verena Kahn, Yasmine Burnett.*

By Martina Köpcke



The Islington teaching team.

Photo: Alexander Hug

A typical school day in Hackney Wick...

...or why we get up on a Saturday

Hello,

My name is Daniel. I'm a teaching assistant at the newly-founded German Saturday School in Hackney Wick. We in Hackney Wick are based near the Olympic Stadium close to Stratford. A branch of the German Saturday School in Islington, we currently teach three classes of children aged four to six years. We all share one goal: to learn and improve our German through games and interactive exercises.

How can you picture a typical morning in Hackney Wick on a Saturday? What is so exciting that kids get up early in the morning, even before their parents, and can't wait to go there? Let me give you an idea of how children and parents experience a typical German Saturday School day in Hackney Wick:

It all STARTS with the ring of an alarm clock: BEEEEEP BEEEEEP BEEEEEP. It's Saturday morning, sunny and blue sky. The kids are awake already, after waiting seven days for another Saturday! It's like waiting to open your presents at Christmas - only much better. After getting plenty of energy through a power breakfast, we all get ready to go to the school. Some take the bus, some take the overground train, some even cycle to school - the traditional German way. However, we all have one thing in common - we see or pass by the Olympic Stadium in London. So - real international "multikulti", and right next door. Recharged by a wave of international feeling brought on by our Olympic location, we enter the school. Greeted by Tony, the Italian maintenance man, we get together in front of our three classrooms for the traditional wake-up songs! For ten minutes we sing, we laugh, we have fun!! After our morning music we are all awake and shortly afterwards, at 10:45am, the SHOW begins.

Divided into three classes, the kids learn German through interactive storytelling, games or workgroups with our teachers, Regina, Sabine and Frauke. It's like being in a different world. In a German-speaking territory, but still in the United Kingdom. The first session lasts 45 minutes, but seems to fly by. Sometimes we do crafts or we paint. We let our imagination and creativity flow. Suddenly we are speaking German and have already forgotten that a few hours ago we spoke English. 11:30 break time!!!

We rest and recharge our batteries in preparation for the "second leg" of the school day. The best way to recharge batteries is with a traditional snack when the German baker comes to our school! Pretzels,

pastries, cakes and all that delights a young German heart is on offer - the traditional German way. So you see, it isn't just the German language that is being trained, but also the young German heart.

Full of energy we start our second round. 45 minutes of fun, stories and activities enable kids to become more confident in speaking German and to improve their listening and communication skills. At special events we celebrate Christmas or carnival and also learn about some of the traditions in German-speaking countries. This not only expands the children's knowledge of German customs, it also allows them to compare the different ways of life in the United Kingdom and German speaking countries. Time flies by - 12:20pm, 12:25pm, 12:30pm THE SHOW IS OVER - almost. After tidying up together, we already start to plan for the following Saturday. Our countdown begins again: another seven days until next Saturday... 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1...

The anticipation for next Saturday is huge, and maybe some kids even keep speaking German at home and ask themselves: Was it "Hallo" or "Servus"?

By Daniel Ludwig



The Hackney Wick team

We are united by language – everything else is diverse.

The German Saturday School in London, who attends it? It's only for German children, say some. Or is it for children who are brought up bilingually – one parent German, one English? That's more accurate, as this reflects the largest section of our parents.

Altogether just under 200 children and their families - about 155 in Islington, 35 in Hackney Wick, plus younger siblings – come together at our two Saturday Schools every Saturday morning. In Islington, we also teach 20 adults in two groups. Islington is the largest Saturday School in the country, and despite setting up the new branch we still have approximately 100 children on our waiting list.

The minimum requirement for children attending our school is that they understand German well, as our teachers are native German speakers and only German is spoken in class. In practice, some of our children do speak fluent German, while the overwhelming majority clearly are native English speakers with more or less good knowledge of German. Our aim is to raise their general linguistic competence as closely as possible to the level of native speaker. For the younger children this means the expansion of their vocabulary and a growing confidence in their ability to speak and master the German language. Later on, reading and writing in German are added, and for the older children we offer preparation for their GCSE, AS- and A2-Level exams, which most of our children take early and with great success.

The majority of children come from families where one parent speaks German. Some have two German-speaking parents. Often they are from Germany, sometimes from Austria and occasionally from the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Sabine, for example, one of our new teachers at Hackney Wick, is Austrian.

Many of us used to think that it would be quite easy to bring up our children bilingually, just by each parent speaking in their own language. In an English-language environment, however, this is more difficult than you think. Even if both parents are German, the nanny, for example, might be English-speaking. And as soon as the child starts school, the language spoken at home often changes to English. Saturday School intends to support families persevere with the project of bilingual education.

Our traditional clientele is increasingly joined by

other groups. In some families, another language is spoken alongside English and German. The children of our director Cathrin, for example, also speak Spanish, as their father Carlos already grew up bilingual with Spanish and German. Yasmine, one of our longest-serving teachers in Islington, also grew up bilingually – her mother is German, her father Bengali. Yasmine has provided her daughters with a “second generation” bilingual upbringing, so to speak. And with great success, as her oldest daughter Manon is studying German at University and has already completed a work placement as a teacher in Germany.

Families who have spent time in a German-speaking country are keen to maintain their children's knowledge of German. As a young boy, Gabriel used to live in Vienna with his family and was able to keep up and improve his German not least thanks to Saturday School. Edmund and Alice's parents are British, but their mother is a German graduate and has always had a penchant for the German language. That's why she has spoken German to their children since birth. Umut is a “Turkish-German” mother, raised in Oberammergau, and now sends her daughter to our German school in London. There are three families in Islington who have a French-speaking background and their children's full-time school is the French School in Gospel Oak. One family is from Ethiopia and lived in Germany for eight years. Tigist and Jonas, who went to school in Germany, speak better German than many of their “German” class mates at the Saturday School Islington.

And even our native German speakers aren't always German, Austrian or Swiss. Our long-serving teacher Klaudia is Italian, from German-speaking South Tyrol. For many years, a German mother from Namibia used to come to our Saturday School with her son. And Eric, a father at Hackney Wick, grew up an ethnic German in Brasil, where he attended the German School in Rio de Janeiro.

To cut a long story short: We cherish the value of multilingualism and are united by a desire to maintain our children's German. This desire can often not be satisfied by our children's English schools, as German either isn't taught at all, or it is taught at a level that doesn't cater for the language skills of bilingual children.

By Charlotte Schulze and Cathrin Cordes

Results of our logo and name competition

In each of the two categories of our logo and name competition we have two winners. The “Shooting Star” was Adam Holthausen. His suggestions have won in both categories. For the logo he submitted a joint suggestion with Leon Truman. Similar suggestions were made by Yasmin Gross, Alice Adonis, Lukas Roninger (not pictured) and Max Hess.

Two boys from different age groups independently arrived at the same suggestion for a name. Anton Hague and Adam had the idea: “Die Brezel”.

All of the winners will receive vouchers for our “Brezel-Baker” Kusche. And a special thank-you to Martina Geccelli’s and Barbara Bentele’s classes for all of their artistic contributions.



Photo: Alexander Hug

The winners (left to right): Anton Hague, Max Hess, Leon Truman, Adam Holthausen, Alice Adonis and Yasmin Gross.

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