



BREZEL-NEWS

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Newsletter of the German Saturday Schools Islington and Hackney Wick

Hello, dear Saturday School families in Islington and Hackney Wick,

Our two summer fairs take place this weekend and yet another school year is nearly over, while preparations for the new school year are already in full swing. At the same time, we are preparing for our summer school at the end of July, and we promised you this newsletter with the results of our survey earlier this year. With about 300 students in both schools and about 30 teachers and assistants, it is quite a challenge to get Saturday school right for everyone.

Meanwhile in Russia, England narrowly defeated Colombia on penalties, in a FIFA World Cup in which many favourites have been eliminated and new countries suddenly stand a chance. The German national team also had to bid an early farewell and our joint football viewings in the Drayton Park Pub came to a sudden end after the well-attended opening match. It's a pity, also regarding our pub visits together, but after decades of success for the German team, it was probably about time that "we" were eliminated in the preliminary round. We do not only have German and English parents at Saturday School, but also Belgian, French, Brazilian, Russian and Swedish, whose teams are still in the running...



Our summer school will take place again at the end of July – memories of 2017

Not only the football world is changing - not least because of the narrow Brexit decision which has unbalanced the European Union; other alliances, too, are not what they used to be. Many people in and outside Great Britain are feeling unsettled about the future. The big exodus of Saturday school families has so far failed to materialise - the number of families moving to Germany is marginally higher than before the Brexit vote, and our waiting lists are not getting any shorter either.

At Saturday School we have a new baker, but otherwise we are very glad that our survey has shown that on the whole you agree with our concept. Thank you for your participation and support!

Natalie Denby, who was mainly in charge of the survey project, presents the results in detail in this newsletter. Following the tracks of baker Kusche, Martina Köpcke explores the intertwining of bread and culture, and we report on a creative teaching project in Martina Geccelli's class in Islington: Her 9-year-olds have created great German picture books.

We wish you all nice summer holidays, and good luck for England in the quarter finals on Saturday afternoon!

Yours Cathrin

Cathrin Cordes, Managing Director
German Saturday Schools Islington & Hackney Wick

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What is your opinion?

Results of our Parent Survey earlier this year

In January/February we undertook our first ever Saturday School survey to find out how our parents in Hackney and Islington feel about our two schools. It has been a project long in the making. When we finally designed our survey, we aimed to make it simple to complete and did not wish to take too much of our parents' time. We also wanted to be able to get clear responses. At the same time, we wanted to give participants the opportunity to provide us with as much feedback as they wanted via the various comment sections. The survey was to be anonymous to encourage honest feedback and comments that would help us to identify weaker areas to improve our schools.

We aim for our schools to have a very open presence and in addition to being available via email our management teams are usually on the premises for parents or children to approach us with any concerns or suggestions. We wanted the survey to offer another avenue of communication.

The survey went out to each parent on our distribution lists for both schools. Currently we have about 120 families in Islington and 80 in Hackney. Survey language was English to also offer non-German speaking parents the chance to participate. Across both schools the response rate was 42% with a slightly higher response rate of 46% for Hackney and 37% for Islington. We are very pleased with this strong participation across both schools.

More families with younger children under 11 completed the survey which is mainly due to the fact that all Hackney children (currently about 100) are under 11 at the moment. In Islington, we teach about 95 children aged 4-11 and about 80 students over 11 in our GCSE and A level preparation classes, so currently about two thirds of our children are under 11. Looking forward, we are also heading for GCSE preparation with our eldest class in Hackney now and should have the first Hackney students taking their exams in 2020.

The majority of families have a comfortable all-round journey time of up to 40 minutes and only just over 10% take up to an hour. Journey time does not affect how happy families are with our schools. However, from experience and talking to individual families over the years, we are well aware that a long commute can be a reason to ultimately abandon the Saturday School experience.

There was a near even split between respondents attending under 1 year (34%) and 1 to 4 years (35%), 25% between 5 and 9 years and 8% attending 10 years and more. This is likely due to the above-mentioned bulk of younger children enrolled with us, a fair amount of new families in

Hackney in the last school year, and potentially more survey enthusiasm among new parents.

It was particularly interesting for us to find out how families rate their children's level of German. Here we asked them to consider their oldest child. There was a near equal split between children who are fluent or have good or fair understanding. 31% of our families think their children's German is fluent, 34% consider it to be good and 27% think it is fair. Only 8% of our families feel their children speak and understand very little German. It seems for those families in particular, attending Saturday School will improve their children's language level. A frequent comment, which coincides with our observations over the years, is that younger siblings often have a less proficient level of German. A very encouraging comment was that "Saturday School does make a difference in that the children speak German in another than just the family context and that they are socialising in German with other children."

The vast majority of respondents are very happy with Saturday School, both in terms of organisation and in terms of teaching which we had split into two questions. Close to 100% of respondents across both schools are happy or very happy (48% respectively) with the overall learning environment such as the general atmosphere, premises, organisation, communication and class sizes. For happiness relating to our schools' approach to teaching there was also a good, albeit slightly lower, outcome of 83% (46% very happy, 37% happy). In both these questions we strongly relied on the comments to gain more insight.



Saturdays School mothers in Islington discussing life – and enjoying the sunshine

Over half of respondents explicitly commented that their children enjoy Saturday School. Here, a frequent answer was "It's sometimes hard to get them going in the morning, but once they are at school, they enjoy it." Others particularly value the friendships their children formed over the years, and we feel these friendships are often the key to

Main survey results:

- Great encouraging overall response rate of 42%
- 98% happy or very happy with the schools overall (organisation, communication, premises)
- 83% happy or very happy with the teaching at the schools
- Very similar results for both schools in all areas
- Equal weighting of community and teaching as areas of importance to our parents
- Many suggestions for new initiatives to further enrich our community where we would welcome parental involvement

success. For effective teaching to take place, our environment needs to focus on the children's wellbeing. But we are well aware that it is a challenge for children to stay motivated to attend an extra morning of classes at the end of a busy school week.

A fifth of respondents feel they do not receive enough information from the school, the teachers or their children regarding what is going on in the classrooms and of their children's progress. We would like to stress that, in addition to the annual parent teacher consultation, our teachers operate an open-door policy and are happy to talk to parents before or after lessons, and many parents use this avenue of communication. However, please be mindful of times when a teacher is clearly busy with classroom preparation, and parent discussions should not infringe on class time. Most teachers would also be happy to be contacted via email or have messages forwarded to them via the Saturday School email.

We also offer regular open classes where parents can observe their children's class. We send out regular emails to provide information about organisational issues like term dates, special events and payment information. We provide background information to school specific topics in our newsletter, The Brezel-News, and, as a school-wide measure, plan to introduce our curriculum in in the autumn edition. We also have a website and Facebook group, with the latter two not being very lively. We find it very hard in this age of information overflow and different channels of communication to effectively contact parents with relevant information, and often realise that parents do not take available information on board.

A further point of criticism is keeping in touch with families on our waiting list. We have more than 200 families on the waiting list. Most of them have children under 4 who are still too young for our Saturday School classes. Unfortunately, it exceeds

our capacity to contact these families on a regular basis. We fill places by age and waiting time and answer inquiries as well as possible.

A few parents would like to see teachers setting homework for their classes, at least on a voluntary basis. This has not been suggested widely and as we are mindful of not undermining our positive and creative teaching focus, we would not wish to action this as a regular feature of Saturday School. Homework is set for the classes preparing for examinations and class teachers are happy to suggest further activities to any parent who would like their children to do more work. If children return after class with a worksheet or similar, this should obviously be seen as a pointer towards what the children have been engaging in and what families could practise or talk about further at home to deepen the learning that has taken place in the classroom.

Some comments related to "fun" homework or extensions, such as films, reading lists or suggestions of resources by the teachers. As this can be combined across age groups and classes and the two schools, we would like to compile a resources list of German language books, films, TV programs, music and apps by age groups and suitable for our bilingual learners. Here we would look for parental involvement in collecting suggestions from all parents for wider distribution.



Parents visiting Nina and Barbara's class in Islington

With regards to which aspects of Saturday School are most important to our families, all five areas - improvement of language, participation in culture, socialising with German speaking children and adults, GCSE and A level preparation and fun activities - received a near equal weighting. We are particularly pleased that the social and cultural aspects are considered equally as important as the actual language learning and exams and we feel encouraged to continue with our parent-led, community-oriented approach that has enabled us to grow our schools successfully over many years. In fact, there have been various suggestions to further increase our social activities.

This was backed by comments like “German School has given our children a sense of belonging and understanding to another culture which we cherish a lot” or “Being part of an Anglo-German community in a positive inclusive way is really important so that possibly old-fashioned ignorant images and stereotypes can be shrugged off as being unrealistic or irrelevant to kids’ self-identity as German or part German” or “The parent-friendly setting really encourages contact, friendship, networking and solidarity among families which to us is equally if not sometimes in fact more important than the simple teaching.”

We would not wish to change our overall structure and will continue to ask parents to stay on the premises, participate in our community and supervise their children during break. We understand that being able to drop off children for the duration of the morning would make the practical aspect of Saturday School much easier for some families, but we have to stress that it would change our whole concept, stretch our limited teacher resources too much and would also significantly add to the cost of Saturday School.

Families are welcome to share childcare arrangements, but children have to know who is responsible for them during the morning. Please keep in mind that out-of-classroom supervision is your responsibility. There are activities on offer while you are at the school that help build relationships and are part of the overall Saturday School experience, such as tea and coffee making facilities, adult classes, 2nd hand book tables and our choir in Islington. In response to the survey, in the summer term we have further increased these activities by setting up a toddler group in Islington, reviving the book club in Hackney (there is now a German book club at both schools) and Kerstin Klein and Jana Riedel have introduced a DVD rental in Hackney. The DVD rental table in Islington has long been a contact hub for parents. We welcome parents to take the initiative – adult classes, choir and book club originally came to life due to parents’ ideas and we are very grateful to the parent volunteers who support us on a regular or one-off-basis.

A few of you feel we do not currently do enough as schools to make new families feel welcome. In Islington we have in the past had a termly “New Parents Meet Up”, also run by parent volunteers, and in the new school year we will make an effort to organise this again in both schools.

One of the suggestions of the survey which we have already actioned in Islington is our toddler group. It became clear just how many younger

siblings there are every Saturday, waiting for their older brothers or sisters to finish their classes, and that a dedicated space for them is welcome. A few years ago, parents organised such a group in Hackney and we previously attempted to establish a group in Islington, but the idea never took off on a long-term basis. In Islington we have asked Rebecca Johnson to kick-start this group and Petra Arnold, who also leads our singing circle, has been singing with the toddlers. We want to establish a similar group in Hackney but have to stress that such groups need parental involvement on an ongoing basis.



Easter egg hunt in Islington

With regards to time spent on the premises, the suggestion has also been made how beneficial it would be if all children also spoke German outside of actual class time. We do not believe that we should enforce this. Instead, we believe in leading by example and ask parents and carers to speak and positively encourage German speaking whenever possible. We are disappointed when we overhear German speaking parents addressing their children in English precisely while at Saturday School.

We are very appreciative that over 80% of respondents affirmed that our fees are reasonable and compare well with other activities. We are a not-for-profit organisation but wish to pay our teachers and management a fair salary, have to pay rent, insurance, accountancy etc, and also need funds for materials and for additional activities such as our popular lantern walk or Easter egg hunt. At the same time, we do not want to exclude anyone who undertakes the effort of multilingual upbringing and try to keep the fees as reasonable as possible.

To conclude, we really appreciate the large amount of feedback and suggestions. We have taken all comments from the survey on board but could not list them all specifically in this article. Specific feedback for individual teachers has been passed

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The Ramble of the Dot

Saturday School kids design German picture books

"Hello, my name is Dot - I live in a colourful computer." This term, the 15 girls and boys in Martina Geccelli's class in Islington worked on a great creative project and produced their own picture books. The 9-year-olds then presented them to their and other interested parents in the school hall as well as to our two youngest Saturday school classes.

Over four Saturdays, the children worked on their books during the second part of Saturday School lessons. In groups of four or three, they developed and illustrated their individual stories. The only guidelines given were the main character - the dot as in the computer .com - and the colouring technique – in ink. It was an exciting process: The children had to come up with stories as a team, then paint the pictures to the story, write a text in German and create the book from the individual pages. The story was aimed at 4- to 5-year-olds.

"The intention was to develop a story in a team and thereby expand the children's less proficient German writing skills," explains Martina. "The children were encouraged only to speak German during their group work. It was not easy for everyone, but it got better and better! Part of the team work was deciding who should paint which picture and how the text was created for each picture. Here, the fluent speakers could help those whose German was a little weaker. The children had to think about how to build tension and how to then dissolve it. After the first and second revised drafts of the texts by the children, I corrected the writing, and sometimes animated it using direct speech. But the children came up with the complete content."

The children worked very independently on their picture books, they were highly motivated and communicated well with each other. During group work, each child could show his/her strengths. Another important part of the process was to present the finished books and to receive praise and recognition for the project work. The picture books were first presented to the children of the two youngest Saturday school classes (in Anja's and Klaudia's beginners' class and in the second youngest class taught by Nina and Barbara) and then to parents in the school hall. A little shy, but very proud, the children read their stories. Again, they took turns reading each other's pages and working together.

The younger children had a lot of fun watching and listening. Teacher Anja, who also enjoyed the reunion with her ex-students, reports: "Martina's book project was so great! It was so emotional for me to suddenly see my old students whom Klaudia



The picture book by Ben, Mathilda, Chiara and Kiara

and I taught in the beginners' group 4 or 5 years ago. When they started proudly presenting and reading their books, I was speechless! It was incredible how each one had developed. As well as their German! Now they all sat and read from their own written and drawn books. Great stories! Our little ones listened intently and were thrilled. They found it really gripping. In the end, the little ones were full of questions: Did you do this alone? Even the story? And painted it? How long did it take? Will we do that too when we are as old as you are? It was so cute and we all had so much fun! Great work, Martina!"

The adults in the hall were also impressed with the children's work. It is noteworthy that the children were clearly shyer in front of the adults than in the classes with the younger children. Corinna, Althea's mother, reports: "The pictures were surprisingly expressive and creative. I was amazed that colour, motif, and storyline came together so well, and the books really combined text and images. I also liked the size of the book - they really did 'make/write/illustrate' a book." And Veronika, Sophia's mother, adds, "It was a great pleasure to watch the children making their presentations and to get a little more insight into the life (and work) of my children. Somehow they normally tell me very little!"



Antonia, Lukas and the two Sophias presenting their picture book in our beginners' class

Wonderfully told by Sonny, Frederick and Otto, we heard the story of the dot that lives in the computer and makes friends with the number 1, and together they go on a journey back in time and visit an old-fashioned calculator... Kiara, Chiara, Ben and Mathilda's dot lives in a mobile phone and would like to seek adventures all over the world. The dot in a story by Antonia, Lukas and the two Sophias lives in a colourful computer and his best friend is the comma, and the two visit each other when the computer is switched off and experience fun adventures... albeit in fear that the computer's owner will turn it on when they are not there... Everything without dot and comma, that's just not on. And Frida, Althea, Eleni and Felix talk about two dots: Big.com and Little.com who visit the junkyard together... and discover lots of old-fashioned stuff like for example a computer...

Martina as the teacher was "impressed by what flowed from the children's pen in ink and writing. I wanted to encourage the children to speak



Althea and Eleni talking about Big.com and Little.com

German and above all to write in German. The self-confidence gained in this process, especially by presenting the books, will help the children to progress."

By Martina Köpcke und Cathrin Cordes

What is your opinion?

Survey article continued from page 4

on. If you feel you want to discuss anything in particular, please let us know. Please approach our management team or our teachers in person or by mail. We liked this comment of a long-standing parent "Of course there were during the last 10 years stretches when we were less happy, but the school showed always a great amount of awareness for that as well as fairness towards the teachers." and we fully intend to continue in this style.



Break time in the playground in Hackney Wick

Let us know if you would like to get involved in any of the following:

- toddler group
- organising informal meet-ups for new parents or parents of specific classes
- organising and participating in social activities like our choir or our book clubs
- setting up a working group to compile a list of German language resources (books, films, TV programs, music, apps)
- join our closed Facebook group (DSS Islington & Hackney Wick)

Many thanks to all the parents who took the time to complete our survey and particularly to those who gave us very in depth and detailed feedback. Thank you for the many positive comments as well as suggesting points for improvement. We look forward to your continued support.

By Natalie Denby

Gerd Kusche – A Baker’s Life

Or: How bread and culture connect

His farewell visit on May 19th was an emotional affair – Baker Kusche had, after all, supplied our Saturday School families with tasty bread and other German victuals for the past 18 years. In April, the well-travelled baker gave up his business and now wants to enjoy his retirement in Germany.

"I always wanted to become a baker," says Gerd Kusche, whose career began more than 45 years ago in Hesse. He is a baker with heart and soul, has gone through many difficulties and deprivations "for the cause" and even converted to Islam in the course of his career. It all started with a sound thrashing. "I started an apprenticeship in a freight forwarding company, which I did not like at all. When I switched to baking, my father actually got the cane out," laughs Kusche. In the meantime, he looks back on many successful and exciting years in baking, and as a sales representative in the baking industry he has extensively travelled all over the world.

Mr Kusche first went through an apprenticeship in a small bakery in his home town of Kassel: "Then in 1967 I received my master craftsman's certificate and accepted a job with a US company which sold white bread throughout Europe. We introduced this "toast" bread everywhere - from Finland to Spain. I got my pilot's licence and flew to the different countries in my own plane." In the 1960s he also came to London to bring "that squashy white bread" (of which Mr. Kusche is not a great fan) to the UK.

"Previously, England had a bread culture similar to Germany," he explains. "They baked with yeast, soda, barley, rye, etc. This bread culture was then completely destroyed. If you knew what is in the white bread, you would keep your hands off it: fat, enzymes, etc. Making bread this flexible is only possible through the use of chemistry.

On behalf of the German development aid, baker Kusche also toured the Middle East and Africa. Before a planned visit to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia, a special concession was required: the cities are on holy ground that non-Muslims are not allowed to enter. Kusche pragmatically took lessons in Islam and converted. "My new religion had to be registered in my passport. Once I was even tested on entry into Saudi Arabia and had to recite the testimony of faith."

"I have seen a lot of the world. One of the most beautiful experiences was in the Nuba Mountains in Sudan. We set up a bakery on behalf of German development aid. That was in the early 1980s. Initially, there was no electricity and no water. We flew from Cairo to Sudan, then travelled by truck, the last two days on a camel into the mountains. All

that at temperatures of 40 to 45 degrees. I was meant to bake there. After we arrived on camel-back, the first thing I did was to take a shower. I was puzzled because somebody came every two minutes and he seemed more and more grumpy. Then I found out the reason: I shouldn't use too much water, otherwise we couldn't bake. They had to fetch the water in a 2,000-liter tanker and it took three days each time." The baker and his team spent about four weeks in the Nuba Mountains until the local bakers were able to take over.

Mr. Kusche's experience in Tehran, at the time of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, was less positive: "I worked for a company with links to the Shah that was set up to feed the poor. All the other foreigners were already gone... We Germans were the last ones there. One morning I drove to the bakery and got into a shootout between followers of Khomeini and the Shah's troops. I was actually wounded. I was in a very precarious situation: I had no money, no passport. Shah-friendly soldiers finally smuggled me out to Dubai. There I had to go to jail first as I didn't have a passport. I called the embassy, who then got me out there. "



Baker Kusche serving children at our summer school

After German reunification in 1989, Gerd Kusche took over a bakery in Leipzig. There he met his wife Carola, a trained baker and one of his employees. At the beginning of the 90's the couple first had contact with London. Kusche supplied customers with bread from his bakery in Leipzig, which expanded rapidly. "Every second day we took a van to the UK. At the same time, the bakery in Leipzig grew very fast and I lost track of things a bit. I got into debt and shut down the shop in 1994. "In the same year, the couple moved to the island and opened the Backhaus in Ham, South London in 1997. The Kusches were the first German bakers to offer fresh German baked goods every day in London. The German community in South London was only too happy to enjoy a little taste of home, and the bakery was an immediate success. "The demand was there," says Kusche. "People used to

bring bread in their suitcases. We barely advertised, it was all word-of-mouth. "

Soon, the Kusches expanded their range of goods. From their deli shop they supplied the German exile community with the whole range of what Germans far from home long for, from Spreewald gherkins to white asparagus and "pig ears". 70% of customers were Germans, the rest mainly other Europeans, but also some British. Most of the goods were delivered from Germany. "We ordered everything in Germany except sugar and yeast. We had around 2,000 products sent to us. For seasonal things we made the trip ourselves, for example at Christmas and Easter."

Regular customers included the German Embassy and the Goethe-Institut as well as the Saturday School in Islington. The contact to Saturday School came about through a Saturday school father. "The man had called us and asked if we would sell German bread there. We went there, met Cathrin. That was 18 years ago - that's half a generation. We have seen lots of children grow up. They were in their pushchairs, and now they are so big!"

Cathrin recalls: "At first we had to persuade Gerd a bit to not just make pre-ordered deliveries, but to open a kind of stall... Soon the baker's stall became a successful part of our school. Sonja, one of our long-standing teachers, for example, observed: "I always liked it when the children themselves shopped at the baker's, in German of course. Having the German baker at the entrance door kind of initiated the switch to German culture."

And Cathrin reminisces: "The baker has contributed to German culture in the Saturday School in many ways. One highlight used to be the mustard-filled Berliners at carnival. When the school was still small and manageable, we had Berliners - three of them filled with mustard instead of jam by Carola and Gerd. As a reward for the unpleasant surprise, there was a bottle of sparkling wine for each "victim". Stutenkerle, "German" white asparagus, onion tart, stollen - I do not think that my children could classify all of this as easily if Gerd had not always supplied us so well."

Last but not least the baker left a lasting mark on our newsletter. Before our first edition in 2012, we ran a little competition among our pupils to find a name and a logo. No less than 6 students suggested the "Brezel" as a logo, and two boys also suggested it for the name, and the "Brezel-News" it was.

Thanks to their German specialties, the Kusches were able to make a good living for many years...



Baker Kusche looking back on 18 years of Saturday School in Highbury

until Brexit came along. As a result, they lost some customers who moved back to their home countries. In addition, the cost of many imported goods has risen sharply and profit margins have fallen due to the collapsed British pound. The baker couple worried that prices would rise even more with impending import duties on baking ingredients and products. "We are not exactly cheap, as we import," explains Kusche. "We cannot raise prices much higher. I'm always optimistic, but not since Brexit. We are an example of how Brexit threatens smaller livelihoods."

His successor Ronny Wollenhaupt, previously an employee of Kusche's Backhaus for eight years, maintains a more optimistic attitude. He has taken over the bakery and the delicatessen business and now also supplies us every Saturday morning, as "Ronny's German Delicatessen". Ronny's concept is different - he's not a baker, but a salesman and a manager, has bakers who work for him and is not always personally present in Islington. From September onwards, he will hopefully deliver to our school in Hackney with a second bakery van.

The Kusches have since said good-bye to London and plan to spend their retirement in Leipzig. Any baking will be for home use only.

We were especially pleased that Gerd and Carola Kusche came to school on their last visit to London. Our Meistersingers performed two songs for our favourite baker - our traditional farewell song and a "song of praise" to our favourite baker. As a farewell present he received an Arsenal Highbury jersey in the Arsène Wenger look, and during Gerd Kusche's farewell speech it wasn't just he who had tears in his eyes, some of our parents were also a little overcome as his words conjured up the many years at Saturday School where all of our children grew up thanks to his good German bread.

By Martina Köpcke