



# BREZEL-NEWS

Sixth Edition, December 2013

## Newsletter of the German Saturday Schools Islington and Hackney Wick

Hello, dear Saturday School families and loyal readers,

The school year began with some excellent news: Charlotte Schulze, co-director of our Saturday School Company, has accomplished a major achievement for us. For the very first time we have been officially acknowledged and supported by the Central German Agency for German Schools Abroad (Zentralstelle für Auslandsschulwesen, ZfA) with funding towards teaching materials. In the forefront Charlotte did a lot of important networking and worked very hard on the comprehensive application. Many thanks!

Our Fairy Tale Summer School at the end of August was a marvellous opportunity for children and teachers from our two Saturday Schools to spend some time together. Frauke Ehmke explains her artistic approach to Saturday School, which during summer school successfully transformed the playground into fairy tale land. Frauke is our first teacher to introduce herself and her ideas about teaching in the Brezel News, intended as the beginning of a series.

From January we will have a new treasurer: Janet Kroll whose son Julian attends the Islington School. Ursula Yates has decided to give up her job after it temporarily looked as though her daughter would not be able to come to Saturday School any longer. Ursula and I have had a great working relationship full of trust for the past 13 years and I particularly value Ursula's much more pragmatic English point of view. And there were further implications. Should I give up as well when my younger son will probably finish Saturday School in May? I have decided to carry on. The Saturday Schools are in an exciting phase, I still enjoy the work and we are an amazing team.

Ulrike Hensel-Burg has taken over as School Director in Hackney Wick. She is very committed and her presence on Saturday mornings is

appreciated by all involved. In Hackney we are now teaching 60 children and since September we have three new teachers there: Jenny, Inka and Markus – Markus, by the way, has previously had a very special career at the Islington Saturday School which is particularly relevant during the Christmas season ... and there will be about 160 Saturday School pupils waiting for Father Christmas in Islington this year.

We wish you a happy Christmas Season – enjoy the holidays, whatever you believe in or whatever you may do – all the best for 2014! Cathrin & Co.

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



Teachers and children at this year's German Summer School

### Contents

Career Fair	Page 2
Exams	Page 3
Art in Teaching	Page 6
News in Brief	Page 8

# WHY GERMAN ?

## Career Fair at the German Embassy

More than 300 school and university students attended a career fair at the German Embassy in London on November 7th. The objective was to show participants the many job opportunities opening up through German language skills and German firms. Exhibitors included companies such as BASF, BMW, Commerzbank, Doktor Oetker, Haribo and other organisations such as the European Commission Representation in the UK and the employment agency Fresh Minds.

The programme offered four slots, two for students from Year 10 to 13 and two for university students. Short presentation demonstrated the advantages of foreign language skills in career development. Jana Witt, for example, explained to students in the first group how she was able to come to England to study natural sciences at university straight after finishing secondary school in Germany. English had been a compulsory subject at school from an early age. Her knowledge of English was instrumental in opening up a different life perspective – today she is “STEM Ambassador” in Wales and campaigns not just for the study of mathematical and science-related subjects but also for the study of languages. Other speakers were Dr. Prashant Desmukh (Research and Development at BASF), Dr. Angeliki Petrits from the European Commission and Steve Eadon from the “Double Club” of Arsenal FC. For many years Arsenal has been supporting the study of foreign languages in cooperation with local partner schools and motivating students using Arsenal activities.



Photo: German Embassy

Well-known German companies exhibited at the Career Fair

So why Germany and why German? Germany is the UK's biggest trading partner with a trade volume worth almost 110 billion Euro in 2011. Stefano Weinberger, cultural attaché at the German Embassy, compares: “Britain's trade volume with the heavily industrialised federal state of Northrhine-Westphalia is as large as its trade

volume with the whole of Brazil.” Especially for this reason 50% of British employers rate German as the most worthwhile foreign language to learn. German companies employ more than 315 000 people in Great Britain, about 1% of all British employees.

Dr. Angeliki Petrits emphasises the value of German language skills. Of the 24 official languages in the EU, three are the working languages of the European Commission – French, English and German. The 40 000 employees of the Commission need to have knowledge of all three languages. 95 million people in Europe speak German – about one fifth of the population. It is the official language of four member states – Germany, Austria, Luxemburg and Belgium. At the moment only 4% of the Commission's employees are British. It should be 12%, but British applicants often lack the necessary language skills. Anyone from Great Britain who does have those language skills has good prospects at the Commission.

With our knowledge of German and (possibly) British citizenship we Saturday School students (or ex-Saturday School students) are ideal candidates for internships, work placements and future careers with countless companies and organisations. Whether you choose German at university or decide on another subject, the acquired German skills are very much in demand and open up perspectives.

I am studying Geography at UCL and my knowledge of German and French have been a big advantage. I studied for my German A-level at the Islington Saturday School and learned French at my English school. Thanks to my language skills I am able to study abroad for a year next year, and of course I also have my Saturday job as assistant in Hackney Wick.

Francesca Murphy, who took her GCSE with the Saturday School group two years ago, was also thrilled. She brought along a friend from her English school and both came back laden with Haribo bags, keyrings etc. They had spoken with almost all of the exhibitors. Francesca and I strongly recommend this informative event for all Saturday School students, especially if more companies and organisations are going to exhibit next year.

by Helene Schulze



# Exam Jungle

## Getting the kids ready for German exams at Saturday School

Some of our Saturday School families had reason to celebrate this summer – their children's impressive exam results. This summer we had a record number of 14 GCSE and 7 AS-level exams, all with grades from A\* to B. Congratulations to everyone!

In 2014 there will be a further marked increase: Altogether 36 (!) Saturday School students in Christine Pleines', Boris Born's and Melanie Dietze's three classes are preparing for their exams for next year. Since our first pupil Natalia took the GCSE exam in 2004, in total 63 of our students have successfully passed their GCSEs, 24 the AS- and 12 the A2-exams so far.

Having fun while learning and speaking German is the motto of our Saturday School, we strongly believe in our more informal approach of schooling on a Saturday morning and do not want to succumb to rigorous exam preparation. However, after those many years of Saturday get-togethers it is a great achievement to obtain proof of performance in the form of an excellent German exam.



Exams... what's that? Rhea, Amalie and Lucy quite relaxed at summer school.

### GCSE, AS- and A-level

Parents of our younger Saturday School children may not be quite aware of this yet – at the end of our children's Saturday School career there is most likely to be a GCSE exam in German, followed in many cases by AS- and A-level exams. As our Saturday School children usually take these exams ahead of normal exam age, many of us parents have a rather vague notion of these exams when they suddenly happen. We do some research on the internet, gather information and have a thousand questions: What do these exams look like? Where will the exam take place? What is an

exam board? To top it all, the requirements for these exams change with great regularity.



Gaby's GCSE students from last year are currently working towards AS- and A-levels with Boris Born and Mascha Shennan and the new books funded by the ZfA donation.

We prepare our students for the three possible German exams in the English school system: GCSE, AS- and A-level. The GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) corresponds roughly to the German "Realschulabschluss" (school leaving qualifications at approximately 16 years of age) and is usually taken at the end of Year 11 in English schools. At Saturday School, our children usually take this exam in Years 8 – 10. The exam currently consists of four parts: The so-called "Controlled Assessment" part of the GCSE consists of an oral and a written test. Also included are a reading and a writing test.

After their GCSE, students are able to take the AS- and finally the A-level exams. These are the English Sixth Form qualification, which in theory correspond to the German "Abitur", Swiss "Matura" or the IB (International Baccalaureat) as far as the age of students and the academic preparation for university is concerned. However, the range of subjects is not as broad as on the Continent where students have to carry on with at least six subjects from all areas of the curriculum, but here the subjects are taught in greater depth with about eight periods per week in each subject. In the first year (Year 12) students usually choose four subjects in which they sit the AS-exams (Advanced Subsidiary Level) at the end of the year. This is a standalone exam as most students drop one of their subjects at this point and continue through Year 13 with only three subjects up to A-level.

Saturday School students who intend to take further academic German exams after GCSE have

two options: They can prepare for their AS- and A-level exams at Saturday School alongside their lessons at their English School, or after successfully taking their Saturday School GCSE they find a Sixth Form that offers German and choose German A-level there. Both options have their advantages: via Saturday School students can gain an additional fourth A-level qualification and broaden their range of subjects, or at the English school they have the opportunity to achieve a good grade in a subject that is considered one of the more difficult academic subjects.



Happy faces after completing their AS-exams at the Fortismere School: Nelson, Leon, Maya, Susan and Edmund with Cathrin Cordes.

In both cases it is advisable to stay at Saturday School post-GCSE, either to register for the next exam after two to three more years, or to keep up the good practice before starting their English Sixth Form. Following the GCSE exam, at Saturday School we provide a year of German lessons without succumbing to the relentless exam regime at the English Secondary Schools in order to expand the students' German language competence on a level that corresponds to students' age and level of development.

Having been prepared at Saturday School, many students can take their GCSE exams at their English Secondary Schools. This is more problematic with AS- and A-level exams as fewer schools offer German at this level and are therefore unable to conduct these more demanding exams. Over the past years we have built a partnership with Fortismere School in Muswell Hill where our Saturday School students can sit their exams as external candidates. Every year we get a lot of positive feedback from the examiners and our

children also feel very good about sitting the exams at Fortismere. Ute Merkel-Jordan, the school's Head of Modern Foreign Languages: "Your GCSE students' oral exams went fantastically well and I am sure they have achieved top marks. Of course we are happy to test your nice students alongside our A-level students as they are extremely well prepared."

By the time they take their exams our children definitely realise that their feel for the language gives them an advantage over other children who learn German as a foreign language. "Some children finished the writing test early and hardly used the dictionary", said Gaby Kienle about her GCSE students last year. "In the oral exam our children have the great advantage to be able to "freely" conduct a conversation – and that means extra points. Most children seem to find the last exam – "reading and listening comprehension" – very easy. You can practice the exam papers quite well in lessons and at home. Although we had three different exam boards this year, the topics are very similar.

### The Exam Boards

The examination boards are the institutions which carry out the nationwide exams for all schools: AQA, Edexcel and OCR are the most important ones. These exam boards also decide how the points achieved translate into a scale from top grade A\* to G. Language teaching is guided by the requirements of the exam boards. Each individual school enters into a contract with an external exam board. The exam boards' requirements vary slightly but test the same four skills in languages: speaking, reading, listening and writing. There are rumours that some exam boards are tougher than others, but this is probably some kind of urban myth.

### Exam Reforms

As the exams were deemed to be getting easier over the years, there have been many complaints, including from the current Minister for Education Michael Gove. After more than 20 years of continually improving grades and the corresponding moans about lowering of standards, many secondary school students were in for a shock in the summer of 2012: Thousands performed worse than expected after the exam boards changed the number of points required for better grades. Our four A-level students of that cohort were also disappointed, as instead of the expected A\*s they "only" achieved As. But the disappointed soon gave way to joy when for example the University of Bristol accepted former



Saturday School student Daniela's A in German as one of the A-level grades required for her chosen university course.



Melanie Dietze and Natalie Denby with their GCSE class.

The government is also implementing a complete reform of all GCSE, AS- and A-level examinations. From 2016 onwards all modern foreign languages in England are taught with new content and structure. At GCSE level the so-called “controlled assessments”, which students could prepare ahead of the examination, will be abandoned. In the Sixth Form, exams will be taken after two years (with the first exams taking place in 2018), without the AS-part. The AS-level will be kept as a standalone exam, but only for the subjects you want to study for just one year. The new curriculum will be introduced from 2016. This means that the first new A-level exams for German will take place in 2018. All of these changes need to be taken into consideration for our Saturday School lessons and our teachers and management team have to continuously keep an eye on the latest development. This is where our work with partner schools such as Fortismere or Wanstead High, where our current GCSE teacher Melanie Dietze teaches, is also very helpful.

Whether the reforms are entirely justified is questionable. “Of course there is criticism of the current exams,” says Christine Pleines, Saturday School teacher with many years experience in exam preparation. “However, on the whole the exams are very well thought out and build on one another. The topics, for example, gradually move from a personal point of view and everyday examples to more societal aspects and more complex, abstract discussions. The speaking and writing parts of the GCSE can all be prepared at home. At AS-level you have to apply your language skills in the exam by answering unprepared

questions, but you can still choose choose language tools that you are comfortable with.

All the exam topics relate to society. Students have to have read and considered these topics and need a vocabulary different from that used during visits to Grandma and Granddad in Düsseldorf. At A-level you have to be able to present complex arguments and additionally translate a short text into German whereby you are forced to reproduce prescribed concepts as exactly as possible.”

Ute Merkel-Jordan advises our Saturday School students: “It is important for bilingual students to understand that the intuitive feel they have for their language is not enough at A2 level, especially not for an A/A\*. Even a native speaker has to learn to discuss things in German, to argue, to quote examples, explain thought processes etc. It’s a question of practising discussion and learning to express and develop opinion at an advanced linguistic level.” That is exactly what we are trying to teach our Saturday School students from a very young age and in a positive and often informal way.

### **The future of languages in English schools**

We can only speculate as to what influence the reforms will have on language teaching in England. German, which is considered a relatively difficult language, has clearly lost in popularity over the past years. Between 2009 and 2012, GCSE exams in German have dropped by 21% and is now only in third position after French and Spanish. Only in 2013 the trend reversed and the number of GCSE exams in German rose by 9%. This is maybe linked to the introduction of the so-called English Baccalaureat, a performance measure for Key Stage 4 which includes a foreign language. We are curious as to how this trend will develop.

The negative trend for A-level exams has increased. In 2012 the total figure for German A-level exams in England slipped below the 5000-mark and five of these A-level students came from the Islington Saturday School – which represents 0.1% of the nation’s German A-levels, a significant percentage. In 2013, national numbers decreased by a further 11% and were down to 4200. Currently, the Islington Saturday School has 10 A-level candidates preparing for the exam in 2014 – an amazing achievement for our Saturday School!

by Martina Köpcke

# Abracadabra

## Art in Saturday School Classwork

My name is Frauke Ehmke and I'm in my third year of teaching at the German Saturday School Hackney Wick. I have a BA in Fine Arts and over 20 years experience in the arts sector, both in the UK and abroad. I have previously worked with children in museums such as the Hayward Gallery and the Camden Arts Centre. Since becoming a parent myself in 2006, I have developed an interest in and better understanding of children's education which corresponds with my philosophy of art coexists.



Two young artists from Frauke's class.

I have established many innovative, playful strategies to build up children's confidence and to enhance their language skills. I try to use art to engage children to communicate and interact in German. The children often inspire my ideas. Some of you may have wondered why the children make art at Saturday School and I'd like to take this opportunity to address this question by looking at how I have used art in improving German language skills.

During the German Summer School in August I developed a workshop on fairy tales where the children created their own fantasy world, expressing their dreams and fears on paper and on large cardboard boxes. Stimulating the children to engage with all their senses, I provided big paintbrushes and large sheets of paper, inviting them to take off their shoes and to step into their imaginary landscapes. In a relaxed atmosphere, with classical music playing in the background, the children were delighted to have the freedom to express themselves. After each session we reflected on and talked about the paintings together. Children who were initially less talkative were at ease when receiving praise for their "secrets". I recorded the children's ideas and this text became part of our fairyland exhibition.

Here is what they came up with: What is there in our fairy tale forest? ... Mysterious plants, trees bearing fruit... where we should ask ourselves: What appears delicious at first sight, may prove to be poisonous in our forest. Therefore, be careful around the apple or pear trees! ... Berries grow on trees here, and not on bushes. Some of them can talk, like the tree of wisdom and the clever world tree. The sticky tree grows high up in sky and the birds love to stick to it ... Where fir trees sway in the wind and magic rivers flow, there are anxious vampires who are up to mischief. When they run, sweets come out of their feet. Magnificent fireworks glow in the woods, the loud bangs audible in the far distance. It's raining mud and there are witches. Giant flowers grow as tall as trees and naturally there are also fairies in our fairytale forest. They wear rose ribbons and have big hearts ... Many thingamajigs wander through the fairytale forest. Some thingamajigs have eight feet and live in tree houses. There also is a giant spider with a pistol and many, many more secrets...

It was wonderful to see how the children understood the principal of fairytales and how their work and language reflected this.



Having great fun during a large-scale art project



At the Saturday School I think of strategies focusing on how children can experience and remember language. I like to motivate children in a playful and meaningful way. The visual work is always made in connection with a story or a topic we have previously discussed, for example after reading the book "How the Mole Got His Trousers" by Zdenek Miller. In this story, the children learn how flax is turned into fabric. We looked at our own clothes and examined the different materials of our garments. We also looked at the labels to see in which country they were made and searched the different countries on a world map. Afterwards the children went shopping in our own pretend fabric shop and chose their own fabric to become tailors and make their own clothes. They were later able to describe their own designs.

At the next lesson the children worked in pairs to draw each others outline. After colouring in their own clothes, we talked about patterns and why we wear certain clothes. The work was quickly rolled up into tubes and turned into a speaking tube.

This term we looked at rules: Developing rules together, we started talking about where we find rules, what they mean and why rules can be useful. The children drew a bear while listening to the story bear tale by Janosch in which a boy has enough of his parents' rules and turns into a bear: he ventures outside and behaves according to his own rules.

Afterwards each child developed a game on paper and then we positioned the games next to one another. Equipped with a dice and a Playmobil figure the children had to adapt to different rules. The rules changed every time they moved onto a new game square. The children made up the rules and the inventor of each game explained her/his rule to the rest of the group. Taking turns, we jumped over rivers and fires, went through tornados and reflected on rules and new words.

This is a playful attempt to make children think



Frauke in action at the Summer School this year.

about rules and also a demonstration of how children can engage through art in the complexity of rules. The visual part of the task allows the students to reflect and supports the process of expressing their ideas in German through interaction.

Children are creative and resourceful by nature. I think it is important to allow them to use their own initiative to experience the world around them on a very personal level. Through the medium of art children can gain a sense of belonging, which helps to strengthen their confidence and improves fine motor skills which all play a crucial role in the cognitive development.

by Frauke Ehmke

## Upcoming Saturday School Dates

### 14th December

Christmas party and last date of term

### 11th January

First day of classes in Islington and Hackney Wick

### 1st February 2pm

Teacher Training on LÜK and Reading and Writing Introduction



## Islington Meistersingers

It's peak season for our "Islington Meistersingers" as they sing their way from one Christmas Fair to the next ... the opening of the German Christmas Market at the Southbank was the fulminant beginning, followed by performances at the German Church in Kings Cross, at our Islington host school Drayton Park Primary and at the Swiss Church in Covent Garden.

## Slightly different majorities

On September 29th, we held our second "Election before the Election" at the Islington Saturday School and many of our classes also engaged with the topic of elections and politics in Germany and the teenage students from our eldest class helped run the election. The Green Party maintained a comfortable lead as the strongest party although it lost the absolute majority it had won in 2009. Instead of endless coalition debates we continue to count on our Saturday School families' general consensus.

PARTei	STIMMEN	PROZENT
FDP	4	38%
CDU/CSU	21	20%
Die Grünen	45	42.9%
SPD	26	24.8%
Die Linke	9	8.5%
	-105	

## Generous donation towards teaching materials from Germany



Our financial situation is a constant challenge - our only income are the tuition fees and we would like to keep these as low as possible so as not to exclude anyone. At the same time rent, salaries, insurance, CRB checks, teacher training, materials, newsletter and our external accountant all cost a lot of money. On top of that we had to pay for our company incorporation in January 2011, and have also taken the financial risk of founding the second school location in Hackney Wick in September 2011. This was an effort to offer Saturday School places to more of our waiting list families and luckily Hackney Wick is just

about breaking even. Our calculations are often tight and the voluntary efforts of many of you and at both locations are an important contribution.

For some time we have been thinking about how we can maintain our school in the long term, whether we should further expand due to our long waiting list and how we can face our continually growing financial, personnel and administrative demands. Now we have finally managed to chalk up a first success, not least thanks to our impressive exam numbers and the Brezel News, which both demonstrate our successful work: as a result of an application supported by the German Embassy in London, the Central German Agency for Schools Abroad (ZfA, Zentralstelle für Auslandswesen) has granted us a donation of 3000 Euro towards teaching materials. All of our exam candidates for 2014 are already working with text books financed through this money. Furthermore, we have acquired a large selection of books, language games, DVDs and several class sets of LÜK boxes and booklets for both schools, to be used by all classes. We are very pleased with this official recognition!

Editor: Martina Köpcke  
 Layout: Maugan Hague  
 Email: [islington@samstagsschule.co.uk](mailto:islington@samstagsschule.co.uk); [hackney@samstagsschule.co.uk](mailto:hackney@samstagsschule.co.uk)  
 Website: [www.samstagsschule.co.uk](http://www.samstagsschule.co.uk)

"Deutsche Samstagsschule Islington", "German Saturday School Islington", "Deutsche Samstagsschule Hackney Wick", and "German Saturday School Hackney Wick" are the trading names of The German Saturday School

A non-profit company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales No. 7487272