



BREZEL-NEWS

Eleventh Edition, October 2015

Newsletter of the German Saturday Schools Islington and Hackney Wick

Hallo, dear old and new Saturday School families and friends of the Brezel-News,

Another warm welcome to our many new families in Hackney and Islington. In this edition, some of you talk about your first impressions, ideas and expectations in the early days of your time at Saturday School.

This summer, we had the largest ever leavers' class of our Saturday School history in Islington. Martina examines how this group has fared over more than ten years with us. One Saturday in July, the "Native Scientists" turned our Saturday School into a scientific laboratory for two of our classes, and Luna introduces her mum: Anja Berger has been the Deputy Director of our Islington School since May, and she is also in charge of the finances for both schools.

Since 2011, our Saturday Schools are run as a Limited Liability Companies under English law. On September 1st, Ulrike Hensel-Burg, our School Director for Hackney Wick, also became one of our Company Directors. Ulrike began her Saturday school career as my assistant in January 2011, at the same time as the company was incorporated. From the very beginning, she was involved in the founding of the Hackney Wick School in September 2011, and since June 2013 Ulrike has been the School Director there.

Ulrike has taken Ursula Yates' place on the Board of Directors. Ursula, whose elder daughter Lizzy

also plays a part in this newsletter, was our treasurer from 2000 until 2013. She had been one of the Company Directors since its incorporation in January 2011 and has thus played an active role in our school until September. Ursula provided excellent support to our school as well as to me as the School Director. I could always rely on her and without her contribution Saturday School would not be what it is today.

Together, Ursula and I have experienced the astonishing transformation of our cosy little German group into the two big schools we have today. Over the course of time our job changed from voluntary commitment to proper work. Although we only get together on Saturday mornings, unfortunately the bureaucratic burden is often as big as that of a full time school. Our success story is impressive:

Around 250 children and 20 adults attend our lessons every Saturday. This year, 26 Saturday School students from Islington passed their GCSE, AS and A level exams, all of them with A*s, As and Bs. Circa 20 parents sing in our choir, "Islington Meistersingers", which has long become an institution with a momentum of its own. Many friendships have developed, and about 35 people work for us – be it as teachers, as a first job for our former Saturday School students who have become classroom assistants or – as school director.

Warmest greetings – Cathrin (Ulrike & Anja)

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



Ulrike and "her" school in Hackney Wick at the summer party in July

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New members in our Saturday School team

Luna Berger presents Anja Berger

Hello, my name is Luna and I have been coming to Saturday School for four years. My Mum is Anja, the new Deputy Director, and I would like to tell you a little bit about her.

Anja was born in Munich to a German mother and a Spanish father. Shortly after her birth, the family moved to Spain. She lived there for a while and attended a Spanish nursery and a Spanish primary school. Her mum always spoke German to her, read books and stories to her in German, sung German songs and taught her about German culture. Funnily, I just realised that my mum has been doing the same with me and my little brother here in London. Only, in Spain there was no German Saturday School, and together with other German speaking parents, Anja's mum organised German lessons during lunch break at the Spanish school.

When my mum moved back to Germany at the age of eleven, she could at least write and read in German and did not find it too difficult to settle into her new school in Munich. After finishing school, she moved to Brussels for four years, learnt

French and studied Languages and Tourism. After university she came to London, met my Dad and worked in events management until I was born. For the past four years, she has been teaching the beginners' class with Klaudia at the Saturday School in Islington. She enjoys it very much, and when Cathrin was looking for a deputy she thought it would be nice to get more involved in the Saturday School. I hope you will all give her a warm welcome.



Anja with her children Luna and Linus

Our new teachers and assistants

Our new teachers and assistants from left to right: Susan Müller, Claudia Mellentin, Karin May and Anna Steuber (Hackney) and Nina Gebauer and Isabel Obert (Islington).

Karin qualified as a primary school teacher in Germany. She taught in Islington for a year before the birth of her son in 2011, when she and her daughters moved to the new school in Hackney, where she occasionally worked as a supply teacher. Now Johannes is in the beginners' class and Karin teaches the consecutive second group. Susan was a member of the "Class of 2015" in Islington, but already sat her A levels in 2014 and then assisted in Yasmine's class in Islington last year. Now she supports Jana in the beginners' class in Hackney.

New to the team and to Saturday School are Claudia and Anna. Claudia is a primary school teacher at an English school in Walthamstow and teaches Jana's old class in Hackney. Anna is a linguist and, for the moment, assists in Inka's class. Claudia has brought her daughter Philippa along to Hackney, while her partner David and her elder daughter Charlotte are giving Islington a go.

Nina and her children Lara and Ben have been coming to the Saturday School in Islington since 2008. Having already taught German at the Steiner School in Islington, she has now taken on the second class in Islington. Isabel's background is in law and she has started her Saturday School "career" as assistant in Natalie's class.



New Families at Saturday School

First Impressions of Islington and Hackney Wick

The routine at Hackney: Since the foundation of the school, we have welcomed a new beginners' class with around 10 new families every September. Much to the disappointment of the families on our waiting list, that has not been the case in Islington for years as we filled the whole school building to capacity long ago. But after our largest leavers' class to date "left us" this summer, this allowed for eleven new families to join us. Our longstanding families have been marvelling at all the new faces. Perhaps their first impressions will bring back memories of your own first Saturday School day?

Fee: "We are a German (mother)-Australian (father) family and both parents have been living in London for about 20 years. Still or perhaps because of that it is important to us that their German heritage means something to our three children. How many times have I been criticised how irresponsible it is that my children were not growing up bilingually. It wasn't down to a lack of intention. Thanks to many holidays in Germany, a strict adherence to Nikolaus, Weihnachtsmann, Carnival etc., passionate cheering of the national football team as well as a good relationship with my German family, the children are definitely aware of their German background. Since we have started employing German au-pairs, the German language has finally become firmly established in our London family life. Now, two of our children have started at the Islington school and we are happy to see their language skills fostered even further. We hope the children will make German friends with whom they can quite casually "feel" a little German. If this also results in some nice friendships with other parents – so much the better!



New Saturday parents Fee & Daniel McNamara at a Saturday School World Cup viewing last summer.

After just a few weeks, the Saturday School has become a firm part of our weekend. Caspar and Maia both enjoy going and proudly take their handicrafts and new songs home at the end of a session. We as parents really valued the induction for new parents in the second week, after which we felt we had arrived and were accepted. You can tell

that the school has been operating for a long time and everything seems well organised. We are happy to be part of it!"



New families in Islington: Birgit, Sylvie, Matthias and Stephanie and their children

Stephanie also just joined us with her daughters Yasmina and Sophia: "We are a bilingual family, our family language is English, but from the beginning my instinct was to speak German with my daughters. Both (5 and 3) understand me well and speak quite good German. Unfortunately though our everyday life allows for fewer and fewer opportunities – school and other activities are in English, most of our friends, too – and at the weekends, when all of us are together, we speak more English. But being German is a part of me and it is important to me that my daughters share this – and can communicate well with their grandparents and the rest of my family, as their English is often not that good.

I registered my elder daughter when she was only 8 months old and just managed to get a place for her now. I hope that Saturday School will help to maintain or improve my daughters' German and help them feel a little pride in being German. I think it's great they are growing up bilingually and getting to know about German as well as English culture – and feel a certain affinity with both.

Yasmina enjoys the Saturday mornings. So far it has been more playful and not too much like ordinary school - but (and I really like this) very German. I also appreciate the other offerings (DVDs, baker etc.), and the opportunity for me to speak more German again for a change. We are looking forward to the other cultural events on the agenda – like St. Martin and Christmas – and perhaps this year we will be singing German songs on Christmas Eve."

Sylvie, Matilda's and Laurence's mum: "We too are a German-English family and I think it's fantastic to be able to learn two languages so easily, as the children absorb languages like a sponge, without the difficulties that adults experience when learning

a new language. Naturally I would like Matilda and Laurence to be able to communicate well with our family and friends in Germany, but I also feel that my mother tongue is an important part of my own identity, which I would like to pass on to my children. Not least German literature has a lot to offer and what is better than reading and understanding a masterpiece in the original? It is supposed to be easier to learn other new languages if you have grown up bilingually, because of the special connections made in the brain. How fortunate if you can send your children on this path. Our experiment is on!



Lesson for 5-year-olds in Karin's class in Hackney

We had mainly heard about the Saturday School's very long waiting list and that you should enrol your children straight after birth. I hope that the children learn about German traditions, songs and celebrations as well as grammar and literature, and that they realise that there are others who are growing up with German and English in London, as this brings the language to life. On our visits to Germany we always notice how their vocabulary expands when they play with other children. Also, someone once told me that you can only learn a language perfectly if you hear different native speakers talk and not just one person (such as Mama).

On our first Saturday I enjoyed various things: that the day starts with joint singing, that the class groups are small, that the German baker has a stall and that there is variety – there are games, crafts and learning. We will need to get used to having to leave the house on time on Saturday mornings (although it's just 11 minutes by bike). Also I may find it difficult to stay at school for two hours each week, even if we make new friends. Perhaps we could set up a group for playing board games (besides the choir), similar to what was described in the last Brezel-News."

Birgit, mother of Isabell and Sophia and also new to Islington, found it "useful to join the welcome groups. To see a few new faces who were in a similar situation of being new, and it was helpful to find out more about the organisation." She finds the

school's size a little intimidating, and all the established groups who have known one another for many years, although she quite happily sits down with a book somewhere. She would like to know which families and children are in her children's groups. "Perhaps it would be nice to organise a get-together with the children/families within the groups." Long-term Birgit likes the prospect that the Saturday School offers GCSE and A level preparation (something that is planned for Hackney, too, as soon as the oldest pupils are ready).

Julia: "In our family, both parents have their roots in Germany, and we would therefore like our children to get to know the languages and traditions. And all this in good company. The Saturday School was recommended to us by other families. Our first impression is a good one. Juri happily goes to Saturday School which until now had not been the case with any other school. With great pleasure he sings the German children's songs and plays the games he's learnt there. They are games that we remember from our childhood, such as "Mein rechter, rechter Platz ist frei." The German baker, the children's songs... it feels a bit like a "home-coming" when we go to Saturday School."

Claudia, our new teacher in Hackney, first heard about the Saturday School when she met Frauke at a training course at the Goethe Institute: "I want my children to speak German because it is my mother tongue, and because bilingualism has many advantages, and because we love the German language and are interested in German culture. The children, my husband and I hope to meet nice people and we are hoping for inspiration and creativity with the German language. My first impression is that there is a good community spirit amongst the German expats who have chosen to live in England/the partly Germans and the aspiring German speakers. So, my family feels at ease and I really enjoy teaching."

And Florian: "Three weeks ago, I and my son Nils (5 years) and my daughter Selma (2 years) came to the Saturday School in Hackney Wick for the first time. Like all parents I was a little anxious and wondered how Nils and I would like it. Especially as I generally belong to the - well, let's call it the apprehensive-critical type of parent. The ice was soon broken. Nils fully joined from the very beginning and as we were approaching the school on our second Saturday, Nils happily shouted "There is my school". Now he has already been asking me on Tuesdays when it is time for German school again. And I, too also feel accepted in the parents' community. A total success."

Many thanks to Fee McNamara, Stephanie Sharro, Sylvie Lachmann, Birgit Kay and Julia Mahnhold (new parents in Islington) and Claudia Mellentin and Florian Peschelt (new parents in Hackney).

The Class of 2015 – A retrospective

Farewell after up to 14 Years of Saturday School

“I can’t actually remember a time without Saturday School”, says Nelson. That’s right. Lizzy, Cosima, Laurenz, Edmund, Maya and Nelson were already with us in 2001. Nelson was just three years old and as Cathrin has been in charge of our School since 1999, he had been “dragged along” to Drayton Park plenty of times before.

The youngsters do not really remember their first Saturday as they were so little. “I was three,” says Maya, looking back on her time at Saturday School. “I remember that we always did lots of crafts and sang lots of songs. When I started Saturday School I didn’t speak much German. I could only say “Ich bin fertig” or “Danke”. My time at Saturday School was definitely worthwhile. It was a wonderful time.”

From September 2001, Martina Schmid was Nelson’s and Maya’s teacher. Then as now Cathrin likes to look for teachers among the Saturday School’s parents. “But you do have to come regularly and on time,” Cathrin said to Martina, who had been attending Saturday School more or less regularly with her older son Emi back then. Until the summer of 2007, when her younger son Freddy was born, Martina rarely missed a Saturday with “her” class.

Alexander, Leon and Lukas joined in the school year 2002/2003, and Alexander’s mother, Martina Geccelli, has been a Saturday School teacher since September 2003. Leon especially remembers the construction of the Arsenal stadium: “It started in 2004 – in my second school year. Every Saturday on our way to Saturday School we saw how the building work at the stadium was progressing. Apart from that I can’t really remember the first years at Saturday School. There were highlights but when you come for so many years everything becomes blurred. But everything was fun and helpful for learning German. I enjoyed it.”



Nelson and Father Christmas in 2005

“I can remember that we dressed up”, says Alexander. “Nelson was a magician and I was a dragon. I also enjoyed the lantern walks. We always used to put chocolate on our pizza. And the Berliners at Carnival! There was always one with mustard and I was always the one to get it. And I hate mustard! Those were good times. Without Saturday School my German wouldn’t be as good and I probably wouldn’t have sat the A level.”



Martina Schmid remembers how they painted their own house together

Martina Schmid also has many fond memories of her six years with the class. “They always had such great energy and did everything joyfully. Once we all painted a portrait of a cake. I had baked a lemon cake and brought it into class. The children then had to figure out which ingredients I had used to bake the cake. We then read a picture book on that topic by a Swedish author. As a group task we drew an enormous cake with all the children’s favourite ingredients. On another occasion, we drew a large picture of a house after we learnt and sang the song “Wer will fleißige Handwerker sehen” (Who wants to see the busy craftsmen) together. We did the actions for all the tools and then built an imaginary house. We used the songs “Der Cowboy Jim aus Texas” (Cowboy Jim from Texas) and “Der Rattenfänger von Hameln” (Pied Piper of Hameln) as a stimulus in lessons and went on to act them out and to practice singing in German. I had lots of fun with my class and wish them all the best for the future.”

This year, Nelson, Maya, Leon and Alexander sat their A level exams. Their class has been our greatest success story so far. Susan, Tommas and Gabriel were part of this group, too. Gabriel returned to London from Austria in 2007 where he



AS levels bagged in 2013: Nelson, Edmund, Leon Susan and Maya

had lived a year with his English parents. “I came to Saturday School when I was nine. 2006/2007 I had lived in Vienna and learnt a bit of German. My Dad didn’t want me to forget it. He also speaks German – but not with me. He teaches German at Swansea University.” With the help of Saturday School lessons, Gabriel has managed to retain his German quite well. He sat the GCSE exam, but did not want to take further exams afterwards that and just kept coming for the sake of his German.

Edmund, too, has no German parent – his mother Kathyne is passionate about German and supported her children’s bilingual upbringing by employing German nannies. “Yes, I am English”, says Edmund. “My Mum studied at the University in Trier and always spoke German to my sister and me. We also always had German nannies – until I was 10 or 11.”

In the school year 2007/2008 the group was taught by Gaby Kienle, whom some of the students already knew from previous classes. In 2008 we were looking for a new teacher when Quirin was recommended to us – a young Bavarian who was doing community service at the North London Rudolf Steiner School and had now moved on to university in London. The perfect “role model” for the “wild guys” in the group, and so we tried the experiment. Over the next two years Quirin performed his task with excellence, reading *Krabat* and venturing forward into the depths of German grammar, not stopping – unforgotten – at the pluperfect.

“I well remember the first time I came to Drayton Park School to teach my first lesson,” says Quirin. “It was in September 2008, almost exactly seven years ago. I was probably more nervous than the children! I didn’t know then just how much fun it was going to be to teach the group. Whether Momo or *Krabat*, pluperfect or dative – together we managed to master even the most difficult

exercises. I was particularly happy with the way the children supported each other and built a sense of community within the class, where everyone could feel at ease and join in. That is something very special which they will hopefully sustain and develop in future. Now they are starting a new chapter in their lives – without Saturday School! I’m interested to learn what the students are planning and would love to be kept up to date. With their positive attitude, their great language skills and all their individual talents I am sure that their future will be as successful as their time at Saturday School was.”

After two years Quirin moved to Paris for a year, just in time for Christine Pleines to successfully steer the students towards their GCSE exams. Christine had previously experienced the group: “I remember that I assisted in Martina Schmid’s class once. They were all about 9 or 10, and in the first hour they were sitting in a circle and Martina had to continually remind them to sit still (that was very strange for me as my grown-up students usually don’t have a problem with sitting still); then in the second hour we did drama and everyone joined in brilliantly. I can remember that Nelson was swaying like a tree in the wind. That also surprised me because I would have felt rather embarrassed to be swaying like a tree in the wind. Then I once taught the class by myself and that was totally chaotic in the first lesson (I’m not going to say WHO was rolling around on the floor), but the second hour was better and the topic was “birthday”. Why I took over the class in the end I can’t remember. Cathrin must have suggested it and talked me into it. Luckily I was supported by the fantastic Gaby Wölfle in the first year. Every time we bump into each other in the corridor now, we roll our eyes and say “Ah, do you remember how exhausting that was back then?”!



Quirin with Tommas, Nelson and Alexander (front), Laurenz, Alexander, Father Christmas, Cosima and Lizzy (back)

Then Christine went off to Vienna for a well-deserved break from Saturday School and Quirin returned for another year to delve further into the pluperfect. In 2012 Christine returned as teacher of the group and A levels have become her speciality. At this stage, the students were a lot calmer and absolutely no one was rolling around on the floor. “I had an excuse to prepare topics that I myself was interested in, and I could show my favourite films,” says Christine. “And I could always rely on them to have good ideas. I was sometimes frustrated when no one could remember afterwards what we had been doing (which happened quite a lot). Most of them enjoyed our discussions. Not always on topic (and not always in German), but the standard of the arguments was unbelievable. I can remember that we got onto the Nazi era, and Alexander and Gabriel started a discussion – across the heads of several other students (and even in German). It had nothing to do with the lesson’s topic but was very impressive. I can also remember that once just before the GCSEs we read an article about the pianist LangLang and everyone stayed in the room at break time to watch a YouTube clip of him. That was something that absolutely never happened. It certainly never got boring in my group. Also, the students, as in all other groups too, were all very different and it was really nice to experience how they grew from children into young adults.



All have fond memories of our parties: Carnival in 2004.

Not every Saturday School student has to sit their A levels with us. Tommas and Lizzy stopped lessons in 2013. Tommas started the English Sixth Form at Woodhouse College, and although he never took German at his English Secondary

School and prepared his GCSE at Saturday School, he was able to choose German at A level. His mother, Carola, is still with us at Saturday School – as the teacher of one of our adult classes.

Lizzy decided not to take German at A level, but as her German is excellent, she became one of the first of our ex-students to work as a classroom assistant at Saturday School. For the past two years she has been supporting Christine Müller in one of the younger classes. There she does all the things she herself enjoyed so much at Saturday School, for example the making of lanterns in November. She enjoys working with Christine and it’s a good opportunity for her to practice her German: At home mostly English is spoken. Those of you who come to the Islington School might have noticed that Alexander, Maya, Nelson and Leon could not give up Saturday School just yet. Since September, they have been assistants in the classes of Caroline, Yasmine, Martina Geccelli and Barbara Bentele.

Martina Schmid, too, has been back at Saturday School for the past three years – as a Saturday School mum with her son Freddy, and as an occasional supply teacher. Could it be that Saturday School is addictive after all?

by Martina Köpcke



On their last day as Saturday School students: Edmund, Leon, Gabriel, Maya and Lizzy (back), Nelson, Alexander and Laurenz (front).

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Natural Sciences in German

The “Native Scientists” - Dual Mission

The 12- to 15-year-old Saturday School students from Charlotte’s and Melanie’s Islington classes deserved something very special following a work-intensive year of GCSE and A level preparation. In July we were visited by the “Native Scientists”. They are natural scientists who speak more than one language fluently, and they introduced us to their research work: A neurobiologist, an astrophysicist and two microbiologists – all native German speakers working at research centres in London – offered short mini workshops in natural sciences, all in German, of course. The format was a bit like speed-dating – each scientist had a group of six youngsters and exactly 15 minutes to tell them about their research or conduct a short experiment. Then the group moved on until all of the groups had visited all four stations.

Ingo, the astrophysicist, talked about the solar system, failed space missions and storms on planets. By way of illustration he had a meteorite, models of the Philae Landers and the Rosetta space probe, as well as a fragment of a failed space mission that had dropped back to Earth. Microbiologist Stephanie’s station was hands-on: 15 minutes are not a lot of time to isolate an onion’s DNA. She had brought along ice, reagents, Eppendorf vessels, knives and pipettes and of course an onion. As soon as the elusive DNA was in the Eppendorf container, time was up and the group moved on to the next station. There it was all about the periodic table. The single elements printed on the sides of a die were combined to create different scientific terms. Kerstin took the opportunity to more closely examine the characteristics of certain elements.

Finally there was the neurobiologist, another Stephanie, who had brought along a giant model of a brain. Our student Giulia reports: “I learned how the brain functions and that different parts of the brain have different tasks. We divided the brain into its parts and examined each part.” Stephanie is studying brain phenomena such as perceptual illusions that can occur as a consequence of brain injuries. She introduced different tests that are used



Saturday School transformed in a science lab to explore such illusions and to associate certain perceptual illusions with concrete areas of the brain.

The “Native Scientists” (www.nativescientist.com), founded in 2012 in London by Portuguese scientists, have two main objectives. Firstly they want to be role models for children who are growing up bilingually and support their other language, and secondly they want to introduce children and young people to the profession of the natural scientist and raise their curiosity. Their repertoire already included Portuguese, French and Spanish – the project at our school was the pioneering event in German.

The students’ feedback was very positive. My son Caspar enjoyed the versatility of the different stations – all activities were different from each other and previously unknown to him. He was particularly enthusiastic about the DNA experiment.

Anton, too, was enthusiastic: “I found the morning with the Native Scientists really interesting, because we learnt the German words for scientific terms, for example the German names of the elements. Most of all I enjoyed crushing the onion in the mortar and isolating the DNA. As a topic I found space technology most exciting. For example, we found out that NASA’s Mariner rocket had to be destroyed because a programmer had made a tiny little mistake: He omitted a hyphen (“-”) in the code, the rocket deviated from its course and could have become a danger to shipping.” Giulia, too, thought the space technology station was great: “We saw models and could examine photos from space. There was research as well as technology.”

We hope that the German-speaking scientists will soon be able to motivate other groups students in Islington or Hackney or at another Saturday School in the country.

by Charlotte Schulze

