

Position Paper

**Requirements for the quality of all-day care for
children of primary school age
from a family perspective**

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BACKGROUND

Following the introduction of a legal entitlement to a place in a daycare centre for children up to primary school age and the subsequent expansion of childcare places, many parents are asking what opportunities there will be for reliable, high-quality all-day care when their children start school. The "all-day childcare and education setting", in the form of all-day schools or a combination of school and after-school care, is, alongside the family, an important place of education for primary school children and nowadays also the most important place for many to make and meet friends. For parents, the lack of all-day childcare and/or schooling is a major obstacle to returning to their jobs or pursuing or expanding their careers, which can lead to stress and emotional and material strain in families.

Against this background, the German government, in its coalition agreement of 2018, has sanctioned the expansion of all-day childcare for children of primary school age. The aim of the ongoing negotiations between the federal, state and local governments is to establish a legal entitlement to all-day childcare for these children by 2025. In 2019, the AGF, in support of this legislation and finding a political solution to what is an urgent problem for many parents and children, took this as the theme for its conference.¹

Other associations and institutions have already set out high quality positions on the quality requirements that are necessary for the implementation of a legal right to all-day care.² This AGF position paper aims to draw together and evaluate important aspects of the discussion from the perspective of family associations and to identify necessary steps in the implementation process.

DIVERSE DEMAND FROM FAMILIES FOR ALL-DAY CARE

Families are diverse and have different needs and wishes for all-day care for children at primary school age. Even at the level of the Länder, major differences can be seen in this respect. In 2017, for example, in eastern Germany, 93 percent of parents expressed a demand for childcare, while only 68 percent of parents in western Germany did. The difference is even more pronounced in relation to parents of children in the first grade of school: in Saxony, Thuringia, Brandenburg and Hamburg, almost all parents said they had childcare needs, whereas this was true for only a little more than half the parents in Baden-Württemberg. It can be assumed, however, that if all-day childcare at primary

¹ Conference report at <https://www.ag-familie.de/news/1573553136-tagungsberichtgt.html>.

² The following are just a few examples: AWO-Bundesverband 2017, Bertelsmann Stiftung et al. 2017, Rat für kulturelle Bildung 2018, AGJ 2019, Bundesjugendkuratorium 2019, Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V. 2019, Pesch & Radisch 2020. The discussions in the workshop series on all-day care initiated by the following institutions are also very relevant: Arbeiterwohlfahrt Bundesverband, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Robert Bosch Stiftung and Stiftung Mercator.

school age is introduced throughout the country, the demand will rise in those regions that have so far reportedly expressed below-average need for it.

Parents' wishes also differ between the federal states with regard to the form of all-day childcare. Daycare centres are mainly requested in those Länder states where this is already the dominant form of all-day care, i.e. mainly in the eastern German states. All-day schools are desired where there is a well-developed network of all-day schools, i.e. mainly in the western states. Where there is no well-developed all-day provision, there is no pronounced preference for either form of care (Alt et al. 2018).

Depending on the family structure, the parents' participation in the labour market, their ideas about education and their family images, there may be differences in the demand for care, for example with regard to the extent, flexibility and degree of expectation of attendance. However, the states that have already successfully introduced all-day childcare report that parents tend to express increased and more consistent approval of and demand for whatever forms of all-day childcare become available to them. A similar trend was observed with the introduction of the legal right to a daycare place.

All-day offers have the potential to reduce the social inequalities among children at the beginning of their school careers. However, this potential has not yet been sufficiently exploited. It is not only the existence of all-day childcare and schooling that is crucial, but also its content and quality. The different competences of children in different situations must be systematically taken into account in all-day care.

All-day childcare at primary school age offers great opportunities for reinforcing the intercultural co-existence in the sense, for example, of inculcating mutual respect, appreciation of multilingualism and awareness of discrimination and exclusion. In these care and school settings, children experience themselves not only in learning situations, but also in leisure time, playing sports, making music and eating together. All-day childcare thus has the positive effects of instilling intercultural skills in children and professionals and offering opportunities for intercultural cooperation with parents.

How do parents see "quality"?

Parents usually put the well-being of their children first. However, it is not always easy for parents to identify what this means in terms of all-day childcare. The question, which structures and pedagogical concepts could be the optimal solutions for the goal of the child's well-being are also part of the discourse of educational politics and scientific experts. The found answers to these questions are usually not clear. For this reason, the current discussion about the right to all-day childcare also represents a learning and opinion-forming process for parents.

In general, parents want their children to enjoy activities that provide an emotionally safe environment and are intellectually stimulating. Also, all-day childcare should promote health-promoting effects by ensuring they have high-quality food and access to a healthy lifestyle culture. From the point of view of most parents, all-day childcare should also ensure that the children are not burdened with any more homework after the end of institutional care.

Parents prefer a full-day offer "from one source" or an offer that is well coordinated between school and after-school care, so that efforts to provide care are not duplicated. This applies, for example, to parent–teacher conferences, parties and parent committees, as well as sickness leave and the general exchange of information. This is not offered to parents everywhere in a coordinated manner between the school and the care sector. There is a need for development here if the models of care in school and after-school care are to continue to exist as planned.

It is also important for parents that their children's sporting and artistic–cultural activities continue to be possible outside of all-day childcare, or are linked to all-day childcare in such a way that these activities and social relationships

do not suffer. The wishes of some parents for the most flexible all-day childcare must be reconciled with the commitment and planning of the services that are necessary for high-quality care and coordination between care and educational activities.

"Life themes" and age-specific needs of children of primary school age as a basis for quality

Children of primary school age have needs and developmental milestones to reach that differ significantly from those of younger children. For children of primary school age, it is about (based on Enderlein 2015)

- being with children of the same age to explore roles in social groups
- discovering the world in the living, school and after-school care environment independently of adults
- learning to organise leisure time in a self-determined way
- experiencing and practising physical motor skills
- competing with others
- experiencing and testing the limits with regard to behaviour that is forbidden, risky or inappropriate
- experiencing themselves as useful and competent
- getting more in touch with their own feelings.

From this it follows that the full day for primary school children must contain elements beyond those of the classical educational mission of the school. Children in this age group need to move about, and teaching, time and space must make provision for this. There must also be time and space for recreation and temporarily withdrawing from engagement in activities. Children need space for unsupervised play with their peers, albeit under adult supervision overall. In all-day care, children want to experience themselves not solely in the role of a pupil, meeting strict behavioural expectations: this requires a culture of trust and openness, a culture in which the children can always have recourse to adults to support them and to mediate and offer protection in more serious conflicts.

In addition to the curricular obligations and the forms of learning traditionally used in school lessons, children are also interested in other educational activities, but they want these to be predominantly self-directed, cross-curricular activities and other more participatory forms of learning.

Children want to be much more involved in the design, structure and content planning of all-day care. If they experience for themselves the changeability of their living environment, they are more likely to mature into people capable of democracy. The ability to shape the environment also contributes to children's health and feelings of self-efficacy. This is the prerequisite for understanding health-promoting behaviour as effective and meaningful for themselves.

FROM A "PLACE OF LEARNING" TO A "PLACE OF LIVING" – QUALITY REQUIREMENTS ON ALL-DAY CARE FOR CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE

The long days children spend in all-day school/daycare mean that both schools and after-school care centres must meet two requirements: they must be both places of learning and places of living.

All-day childcare for primary school-age children, whether organised as all-day schooling or as a combination of school and after-school care, should always be based on the integrated objectives of education, upbringing and care. Education should be understood in its broadest sense, encompassing cultural, artistic, physical, sports and health-related content, as in Article 29 (1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This provides for a broad spectrum of objectives for the education of children. They include "the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential", but also, inter alia, respect for human rights, different cultural identities and languages, peace and tolerance, gender equality and the natural environment.

For the planned legal entitlement to all-day care, the coalition agreement of the current federal government plans to take up and strengthen the all-day models, some of which are already well developed in the Länder, with all-day schools or a combination of school and after-school care. This position on the part of the federal government is reasonable. From the point of view of families, however, equality of living conditions must also be ensured. This requires a uniform nationwide quality framework that must be adapted to the local situation and implemented in quality agreements between the federal government and each of the Länder. The following dimensions should be reflected in these agreements.

Orientation towards the age-specific needs of children

- The quality of all-day care must be based primarily on the well-being of the children. This means taking into account their age-specific needs such as exercise, non-instructional play with peers, learning about their own limits and specific social, cultural and educational needs.

Participation

- Good all-day care requires a high level of participation by children so that "school as a place of learning can become school as a place of living". To this end, children must be able to play a greater role than before in shaping the structures and processes of all-day care, regardless of which model of all-day care is chosen locally.
- Good all-day care also requires a high degree of participation by parents. With the increasing amount of time children spend in all-day care, parents have a growing need to participate in this important part of their children's lives or at least to be able to follow their development in this area. It is desirable to improve the exchange between the school/after-school care systems and the family. New formal and informal forms of parental work are needed to achieve greater transparency in both directions. Parents are looking for opportunities for involvement and participation in their children's care, both in the formal structures of parents' councils and school conferences, etc., and in informal forms. The family, social and cultural backgrounds of the parents and the interests and opportunities associated with them should be taken into account. Participatory processes on the quality development need to be regularly assessed, as it cannot be assumed that parents' wishes will remain constant over a longer period of time.

Time

- Parents must be able to avail themselves of an adequate amount of childcare. The timeframe currently under discussion is for the childcare to be offered for eight hours on the five school days of each week, as well as in at least ten holiday weeks. This is a good starting point for the AGF. However, in order to achieve the goal of a better work–life balance for all groups of employees – including those working shifts – and for single parents, needs-oriented childcare must be provided also during off-peak out of school hours. This should be considered in the planning from the outset and the financial implications calculated.
- The function of homework must be reconsidered, as it is a frequent trigger of conflicts between parents, children, teachers and educators. Parents and children are often overwhelmed by the time required to complete traditional homework at the end of the day. In addition, parents and children have a right to "purpose-free" family time that is not dominated by educational tasks. Educational research also observes that the desired effects of classical homework, such as consolidation of knowledge and repetition, are seldom really achieved and that children would only benefit socially selectively. However, "homework or schoolwork" could be a possibility within the all-day care centre if it were better adapted to the different learning speeds and strategies of the individual children.

Specialists / Training

- Qualified personnel and successful cooperation are central quality features in day-to-day work. All-day care needs a good staffing ratio and well-qualified multi-disciplinary teams. These include multilingual specialists, including

those with their own or family migrant backgrounds. The federal government and the Länder are responsible for ensuring that the training requirements for teachers, educators and (school) social workers are such that enough skilled people are available and that high-quality training courses focus on the special features of all-day care at primary school age.

- At the moment, there is not only a lack of skilled workers for all-day childcare. The training capacities of technical schools and universities are inadequate and the demand for suitable university teachers cannot be met. Furthermore, the specific field of all-day care for older children and the inherent need for cooperation has not yet been sufficiently embedded in the curricula of training courses for teachers, educators and social workers. Specific joint training of students from those professions could be useful to prepare them for working together.

Cooperation

- All-day childcare must allow the actors involved wide scope for cooperation on an equal footing. This requires continuous development of the cooperation culture and corresponding structures in the institutions. While an all-day childcare model is being conceived and developed, experts from school administrations, teachers, trainers, social educators, parents and children have to work in conjunction with school supervisory authorities, youth welfare organisations, etc. These are very demanding processes. The requirements for cooperation change once the service has been implemented, but remains high. Everyday operations also place increased demands on intra-professional cooperation (e.g. between teachers or between educators) and inter-professional cooperation (e.g. between educators, teachers and school social workers). The cooperation between the occupational groups of educators, teachers and school social workers must take place on an equal footing and be structured in a much less hierarchical way than is often the case at present. One contribution to this would be, among others, to require that the daycare area in a full-time school be run by an academically trained head.
- These diverse cooperative relationships require clear rules for overall responsibility and the responsibility of sub-areas of the all-day care. However, this does not alter the fact that, from a family perspective, curricular and non-curricular education, upbringing and care are equivalent parts of full-day care for children of primary school age. Therefore, the areas of competence of the teachers, educators and social workers should be considered equally important. To ensure high-quality all-day care, an express culture of mutual appreciation and willingness to cooperate must be ingrained in the system. However, the responsibility for this lies not only with the schools and after-school care centres, but also with the political parameters.
- In addition, explicit multi-professional cooperation, e.g. between school and after-school care and with those in the socio-cultural sphere, such as sports clubs, music schools and cultural initiatives, is vital. Physical activity and cultural education contribute significantly to the physical, social, emotional and cultural development of children of primary school age. For such socio-cultural entities, however, cooperation must not mean just promoting performance or recruiting children for their own extracurricular activities, but also providing a broad range of educational opportunities. Schools and after-school care centres must develop an understanding of how the voluntary sector works. Politics must be aware of the limits of voluntary work and provide financial support for the establishment and operation of professionalised structures for the training and coordination of volunteers in order to facilitate collaboration with schools.
- The federal government and the Länder must recognise how different forms of cooperation play their essential part in ensuring the quality of all-day care. Therefore, they need to factor in sufficient opportunities for cooperation, both in financing in the implementation phase and during normal operations. This also applies to training to enhance the cooperation skills of the people in the various occupational groups.
- At school level, the framework for all-day care, irrespective of its particular form, must be laid out. This must describe the curricular and non-curricular areas in an integrated form, providing guidelines to which all those working in school and after-school care, as well as the pupils, parents and institutional partners, must adhere.

Well-being, exercise and health

- All-day education and care requires spaces and rules that meet the needs of children of primary school age. To develop self-efficacy, children must be able to experience themselves as competent and useful. They must have space and time for non-pedagogical engagement with other children, as well as for independent activities and exploration of the school neighbourhood.
- Indoor and outdoor spaces must provide adequately for children's need for movement, which must not be constrained by the rules for their use. From the family's point of view, all-day education and care should be designed in such a way that free play is encouraged and the desire for activity is well provided for. This also includes formal sports activities, which can be offered, for example, in cooperation with local sports clubs. There must also be space for creative activities, as well as for retreat and recreation.
- From the parents' point of view, there is an expectation that the legal right to all-day childcare and education encompasses a mission to raise the food culture in schools. School caterers must do more than just provide food: they should introduce children to healthy eating, encourage them to enjoy food, make pleasurable social interaction during meals a high priority and offer opportunities for co-designing meals.
- All-day care and education settings place higher demands on cleanliness and hygiene. What is sufficient for a half-day offer is not sufficient for all-day offers. The equipment and cleaning standards of toilets and washing facilities must be adapted to the requirements of all-day operation. In the coronavirus crisis, existing hygienic deficits have once again been clearly demonstrated. In the design of retreat and recreation areas, priority must be given to the needs and well-being of children, not to saving time or money on cleaning. Naturally, high standards of hygiene must be met, involving higher costs, which must be taken into account in the planning and funding of permanent provision.

Support and evaluation

- In order to implement new provision for all-day care at primary school age locally, but also to ensure quality development in normal existing provision, external support services are needed. Such support agencies should advise the schools and after-school care centres on the development of concepts and internal quality standards, promote the further development of the overall offer from interdisciplinary teams, advise management and staff, offer further training and help create resources for all-day care. The implementation processes should be evaluated, which could be coordinated by these agencies.
- The experience of all-day school development has shown that support should not be limited to the implementation phase but must continue throughout the operation of all-day institutions, in order to ensure and maintain quality.

Funding

- High-quality all-day childcare cannot happen without funding in line with needs. Unlike the way in which the projected costs are currently calculated, from the point of view of family associations, the following points are essential in calculating and then securing financial resources:
 - Costs of childcare in off-peak hour times
 - Costs of appropriate cooperation times between all the professional groups involved in all-day care
 - Training costs for the professions involved
 - Costs of cooperation between school/after-school care and sociocultural actors such as sports clubs, music schools and cultural ventures
 - Costs to support sports clubs, music schools and cultural initiatives
 - Costs of increased requirements for cleaning in all-day schools and centres
 - Costs of setting up a programme to improve catering in childcare settings and to enhance a food and healthy eating culture

- Costs of external support services for concept development and quality assurance.
- The federal and state governments need to raise sufficient funds to ensure that the expansion does not fail.³ However, the financial resources currently envisaged are not sufficient to guarantee good-quality full-time provision, according to our criteria. Funds are required on a continuing basis and the federal government should therefore make an appropriate contribution to ongoing running costs.

IMPLEMENTING LEGAL REQUIREMENTS WHILE ENSURING HIGH QUALITY

The temporary collapse of care structures during the coronavirus crisis has clearly shown how important reliable, high-quality care services are for families. For children of primary school age, schools and after-school care facilities are places of education and learning. But they are also places of living, where they can make friends, meet other children, engage in sports and cultural activities and master everyday challenges. All-day care at primary school age must fulfil both functions.

Parents need all-day childcare in order to cope with their various commitments. For many families, the lack of all-day childcare places enormous burdens and stress on them as they try to reconcile family duties and career and to achieve a gender-equitable division of responsibilities in the family. For the parents, the amount of time external childcare is available is therefore important, including childcare during off-peak hours and during holidays. But, above all, parents want high-quality care for their children and to participate in their children's full-day care. Often they are also looking for opportunities to engage with the school or the after-school care.

From the AGF's point of view, it is necessary to systematically include the question of quality in the current discussion on the establishment of a right to all-day care at primary school age. This discussion must be conducted openly, with the involvement of family and parent associations. Equally important is the early and comprehensive involvement of parents in putting the provision in place and in day-to-day operations on site.

In the early phases of this process, children, too, must be asked what they need, and they must have the opportunity to participate in the design of rooms and open spaces, as well as in the weekly timetable and the content of the educational offer.

From the point of view of the AGF, a nationwide uniform quality framework must be developed, which defines the cornerstones for all-day care offerings in the federal states. Guidelines should be laid down in state agreements, containing not only central quality aspects, but also specifying, for example, what form participation by family and parent associations should take.

Not only will the introduction of a legal right to full-day care for children of primary school age make it easier for many families to reconcile family and work, but it will also be a step towards improving equality of living conditions in Germany, by offering young families in the federal states, which to date have only a weakly developed structure of all-day care, the prospect of more equal opportunities in the labour market. The problems of reconciling family and career would be reduced. Furthermore, the AGF sees in this initiative the potential to contribute to more educational equity between children from families with different educational home situations and resources. The design of a quality framework is crucial in this respect.

The AGF therefore strongly supports the initiative of introducing a legal right to high-quality all-day care at primary school age. The AGF appeals to those responsible at federal, state and local levels to reach agreement without delay on the questions of start-up financing and long-term operational financial security and to introduce such a legal right.

³ In 2019, the DJI estimated the investment costs alone at between 5.3 billion and 7.5 billion euros by 2025, depending on the forecast model, and the annual operating costs from 2025 onwards at between 3.2 billion and 4.5 billion euros (Guglhör-Rudan and Alt 2019).

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Short portrait: The AGF

The Arbeitsgemeinschaft der deutschen Familienorganisationen (AGF) e.V. (Association of German Family Organisations) is made up of the German Family Association (DFV), the Protestant Family Working Group (EAF), the Family Federation of Catholics (FDK), the Association of Single Mothers and Fathers (VAMV) and the Association of Binational Families and Partnerships (IAF). The AGF is committed to families, gives them a voice and brings the family perspective into political discussions and decision-making processes. It promotes dialogue between the associations and interest groups representing families and those responsible for family policy. In addition, the AGF supports collaboration among organisations active in the politics of the family on a national and international level.

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