

Education for children

See <https://www.vlaanderen.be/en/studying/compulsory-education>.

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Compulsory education

Compulsory education means parents have to make sure their child or children receive education. The federal government decide the duration of compulsory education for the whole country. This does not mean that kids *have* to go to school. They have to be educated, either by their parents, private teachers or the schooling system. Kids who are not educated by the regular schooling system, have to take tests that determine if their level of education meets the specified criteria. More information about that can be found below. A study year starts on the first of September and lasts until the end of June, specific end dates depend on which school your kid goes to. School normally starts at 8:30 am. The end of a school day is around 4:30 pm, but can vary depending on the school. Most schools have a half-day on Wednesday.

A general overview about the education system in Belgium can be found [here](#). Keep reading to get a shorter, more basic and slightly more understandable version.

The structure of secondary education

The Belgian education system: pre-school, primary and secondary levels

Pre-school in Belgium

Working parents are facilitated by a large choice of childcare facilities, and almost all children attend preschools during their formative years. Prior to formal education, nurseries are available for babies and children up to two-and-half years, after which kindergartens (kleuteronderwijs/enseignement maternelle) provide daycare facilities for children until they reach school age. This can be

free, though mothers in full-time work are given priority where places are limited. The kindergartens are often attached to local primary schools, which allows for an easy transition into formal education.



Child in kindergarten shot by [Lucélia Ribeiro](#), from Flickr

Primary school in Belgium

Children stay at primary school (*lager onderwijs/enseignement primaire*) for six years during which time they study a range of subjects with an emphasis on languages and mathematics. Learning a foreign language will likely be part of the curriculum, for example, French in the Flemish-speaking areas, or Dutch or German in the French community. Homework is also part of the educational structure from early on. In Belgian schools there is a strong tradition of parental participation.

The culmination of primary education is the attainment of a 'Certificate of basic education' (CEB) for the French community, the *Getuigschrift basisonderwijs* for the Flemish Community and the *Abschlusszeugnis der Grundschule* for the German community. The certificate is important when moving to secondary education.

Secondary school in Belgium

Secondary school (*secundair onderwijs/enseignement secondaire*) progresses through three stages, starting off with general studies in the early years, after which students can specialise in general, vocational, technical, or artistic streams depending on individual choice and ability. Assessment is ongoing and rigidly enforced. Several educational certificates are awarded, including the Certificate of Lower Secondary Education and the Certificate of Higher Education.



Secondary school students, shot by [Walsall Council](#), from Flickr

When students begin to specialise, their courses of study focus on one of four areas:

- General education: prepares students for the transition to higher education and is mainly focused on training theory and general knowledge.
- Technical education: similar to general education but focuses more on practice and technical teaching, preparing students for either a profession or further studies.
- Vocational: provides direct access to a profession at the end of the course

of study and is heavily focused on practice. Students also receive one or more additional years, called fourth degree.

- Art education: organised in exactly the same way as technical education, but the elective options are within arts and non-technical subjects. Students can go on to higher education in either a specialised institution, such as an art college, or to a university or college, depending on the subjects studied.

All these courses provide access to higher education with the obtainment of the certificate of secondary education (CESS), except vocational education, which must be completed to the seventh grade in order to obtain the certificate.

Most schools have a half-day on Wednesday, though the afternoon is sometimes given over to sporting or cultural activities. These can also happen on a Saturday morning. Often, your children can be cared for on Wednesday afternoons.

Organisation of secondary education

Mainstream secondary education is subdivided in three stages of each two (or three) years.

For pupils with special educational needs an offer in special needs education has been developed. This offer is discussed under 'educational support and guidance', in addition to special needs policy in mainstream education.

First stage

The first stage in secondary education exists of a general basic programme: the A-stream. This stage is not subdivided in various types of secondary education. There is also an offer for pupils who enter secondary education without having obtained the certificate of primary education or for pupils who are less apt at theoretical education: the B-stream. When successfully finishing the first grade of the B-stream pupils can move to the first grade of the A-stream or they can continue with a pre-vocational second grade.



Image 3: Secondary education (www.vives.be)

Second and third stage

The second and third stage offer a choice between four types of secondary education:

- general Secondary Education (gse)
- secondary education in the arts (sea)
- technical Secondary Education (tse)
- vocational Secondary Education (vse)

The gse/sea/tse primarily prepare for moving on to higher education, while vse is aimed at the execution of a profession.

In the third stage of vocational education it is possible to comply with compulsory education by means of the alternance training system with a fulltime engagement but only part-time compulsory education.

In the third stage it is also possible to take a 3rd year, the 7th school year:

- In vse a 7th year is necessary in order to be granted a certificate of secondary education
- gse and sea offer a preparatory year for higher education
- In tse and sea there are specialization years: the Se-n-Se programmes (secondary-after-Secondary)

The structure of secondary education in a school or school community

A school organises one or more stages. Offering only the second or third grade or only the first and third grade is not allowed since it is the intention to allow a pupil as much as possible to pass through an entire secondary study pathway in a school.

Schools are free to organize themselves in a school community. One of the goals of a school community is the organisation by the participating schools of a common offer, which is valuable and diversified in the interest of the options of the pupils. A school community must therefore have a multi-sectorial study offer. This implies that at least 6 school year levels must be present (exclusive the third school years of the third stage) as well as the types of secondary education gse, vse and tse.

Information about compulsory education

Web

Eurydice: [education system in Belgium - Flemish Community](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/home_en)

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/home_en

Eurydice: [national reforms in school education - Belgium - Flemish Community](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/home_en)

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/home_en

[Studying | Flanders.be](https://www.vlaanderen.be/en/studying)

<https://www.vlaanderen.be/en/studying>

Publications

[Check out our English language publications](https://www.vlaanderen.be/en/publications) -> search for **education**.

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General information

Contact our call center [Infolijn](#) [Onderwijs](#)
<https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/contact/> or call this number:

+32 2 553 50 70 from abroad

1700 (free of charge) from Belgium