

The “Delfin 4” language assessment two years before starting school

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Language plays a central role in the every child’s development process. Language is the key and the basis for successful learning at school and for participating in society and working life.

The aim of this flyer is to draw your attention as a parent or guardian to the importance of the language assessment, which takes place two years before starting school. Participation is mandatory for all children who do not attend a day-care centre or whose parents or guardians have not consented to the development and educational documentation at the nursery.

More than one in five children does not achieve the required minimum standards in German and mathematics by the end of primary school.

This is mainly due to the fact that these children’s language development and language skills were not sufficiently developed before they started school. Therefore, it is very important to support them at an early stage. Assessing language proficiency two years before starting school should ensure that all children have access to early language support, if necessary. This creates the basic prerequisites for successful learning at school.

Assessing language development and any resulting support for children attending a nursery is the responsibility of the nursery itself.

The Delfin 4 procedures are organised under the responsibility of the state education authorities and carried out at primary schools.

This means that primary school teachers or social education specialists from primary schools carry out the individual “Besuch im Pfiffikushaus” test with these children.

The parents or guardians of the children concerned will receive a personal invitation and can accompany their child to the test. Children who require compulsory language support based on the results will usually receive this at nurseries or family centres. Regular participation in language courses is also compulsory for these children.

Kind regards,

Dorothee Feller

Minister for Schools and Education in the State of North Rhine-Westphalia

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Why is there a language assessment two years before starting school?

Children must have a sufficient command of the German language to be able to learn successfully at school. This language assessment is used to check whether a child's language development is age-appropriate. It is carried out two years before the child starts school so that children who need language support can be prepared for school at an early stage.

However, the language assessment does not check whether a child may need speech therapy for medical reasons.

Who takes part in the language assessment?

All children born between 01 October 2021 and 30 September 2022 will be assessed to determine their language proficiency at least two years before they start school. For children who attend a nursery, everyday integrated language learning is a regular part of the educational work there.

All other children must take part in a language assessment. This also includes children who are undergoing speech and language therapy.

Who does not take part in the language assessment?

Children do not take part in the language assessment if

- they attend a nursery and their parents or guardians have agreed to the development and educational documentation,
- they attend a special needs nursery or are receiving integrative support due to a disability and if it can be assumed that the test is not applicable to them or cannot provide any additional information.

When and where will the language assessment take place?

The language assessment will take place from 03 March 2026 at a primary school. It is carried out by the responsible local education authority. The parents or guardians will receive a personal invitation and can accompany their child to the test.

How is a child's language proficiency tested?

Children are tested individually by primary school teachers or social educational specialists from the primary schools. The procedure takes about 30 minutes. At the end of the procedure, the teacher informs the parents or guardians whether their child needs language support.

Do children have to take part in the language assessment?

Participation in the language assessment procedure is mandatory.

This is the only way to help all children who need language support. Parents or guardians who do not ensure that their child takes part in the language assessment may be subject to a fine.

What does "Delfin 4" mean?

The procedure for determining language proficiency is based on the "Delfin 4" instrument developed by Professor Lilian Fried from TU Dortmund University. The name is an abbreviation for "Diagnostik, Elternarbeit, Förderung der Sprachkompetenz In Nordrhein-Westfalen bei 4-Jährigen" – "Diagnostics, parental work, promotion of

What happens if it is determined that a child needs language support?

If a child does not yet attend a nursery school, parents or guardians are advised to enrol their child in a nursery school. If the parents or guardians do not enrol their child at a nursery, they must allow their child to take part in a pre-school language support programme. This measure can be carried out at a nursery or a family centre, for example. Failure to attend a language support course can be punished with a fine.

How long does language support last overall?

The children receive language support until they start school.

Is the language support free of charge?

Yes, the state government provides the funds for additional language support at nurseries. Travelling costs incurred are not reimbursed.

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