

Delaying school attendance by a year – deferment

Fundamentally, school attendance is compulsory in Baden-Württemberg from the age of 6. This means that all children who will be six years old by the reference date (30 June) start school in the following September. This does not apply to children who are not yet ready for school, owing to their physical or mental development, who can start school a year later. This is known as deferment or “Zurückstellung” in German.

When can deferment be a sensible idea?

It can be a sensible idea to defer school attendance if a child is developing somewhat slower than other children. The parents, the specialists in the kindergarten or doctors may notice this. Before the decision is made, it is always considered whether the child can successfully take part in lessons. If the child’s development shows that this is probably not the case, it is advisable for the child to start school later. This is regulated in the Education Act of the federal state of Baden-Württemberg.

Often the decision about deferment is made during the school enrolment examination (German: “Einschulungsuntersuchung”). This takes place during the last two years of kindergarten. The health office checks whether the development of the children is appropriate to their age or if they would benefit from special support. A few months before starting school, the employees responsible then check whether the child is fit enough for school lessons (ready for school or “Schulbereitschaft”).

What happens if parents would like to defer school attendance for their child?

Independent of the school enrolment examination, parents are also able to apply for deferment for their child themselves. This can be a good idea if they notice that their child still needs some time before he/she can successfully start school. The parents can then ask for a meeting with doctors, pre-school educators, psychotherapists or occupational therapists. The development meeting in the kindergarten also provides an opportunity for parents to discuss the issue.

The parents can then make an application for deferment to the Grundschule responsible for their child. However, they should get advice before they do this. For example, they can contact the head teacher, cooperation teacher, advisory teacher of the Grundschule or the state education authority.

The application to the Grundschule must be made in writing but can be made informally (meaning that it does not need to follow a specific format). The Grundschule then examines the application and informs the parents about the decision in writing. In doing so, it considers an assessment from the health office. In accordance with the Education Act, the school can require the child to have a school suitability examination and an intelligence test.

Who decides about deferment?

The head teacher of the Grundschule in the district in which the family resides is responsible for the decision about deferment.

What does deferment mean for the child?

For children who are not yet ready for lessons, deferment can be an opportunity. They can learn for an additional year without pressure and develop more easily. At school, they may struggle and experience constant frustration.

Deferment can also give the child the opportunity to register for a support class (Grundschulförderklasse). This means that the child does not stay in the kindergarten. In the support class, the children are prepared for attending school in an even more targeted way.