



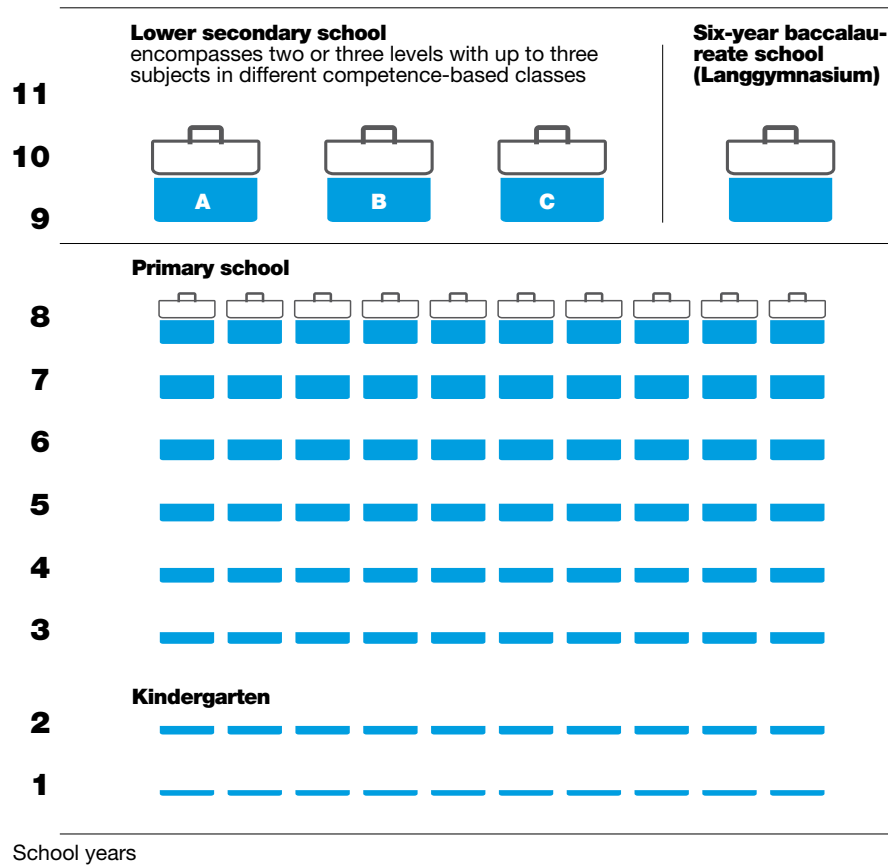
Canton of Zurich  
Department for Economic Affairs  
Office for Economy and Labour

# Educational System

Relocating to and living in Zurich – an overview for new and future residents



# State elementary school Compulsory education



## State elementary school

State elementary schools are free of charge and, as a rule, attended at the place of residence or at the nearest state school in the area. The local school authorities allocate the children to the respective schools.

State schools are politically and denominationally neutral and perform an important integrative function: children of both genders with different social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds attend the same school.

Compulsory school education comprises two years of kindergarten, six years of primary school and three years of lower secondary school. If required, a school year can be repeated or skipped.

## Enrolment, compulsory education, school year

Children who turn four by the set deadline begin kindergarten at the start of the following school year. Each year up until 2019, this deadline is being shifted by half a month, which is when it will coincide with 31 July. Compulsory education of 11 years starts with enrolment in kindergarten. The school year starts in mid-August and ends in early July of the following year. It consists of 39 calendar weeks of school, two-week autumn, Christmas, sports and spring breaks and five weeks' summer holiday.

## Transition to secondary school

Lower secondary school consists of two or three levels (A, B, possibly C). A is the most cognitively demanding level. Additionally, the pupils may be taught in separate competence-based classes –I, II or III– in a maximum of three subjects, with I being the most demanding. Competence-based classes are possible in the subjects mathematics, German, French or English.

At the end of primary school the pupils are allocated to one of the levels and competence-based classes of lower secondary school. The decision to allocate a pupil to a level is based on a comprehensive assessment of the performance, skills and talents in all subjects (overall assessment) and is taken in consultation with the parents and the pupil.

Transfer to a six-year baccalaureate school (Langgymnasium) after primary school requires taking a written entrance exam in German and mathematics.

# After compulsory education

Transition to upper secondary education follows after completion of compulsory education. The young adults have a wide range of vocational and academic education options to choose from. Most adolescents in Switzerland opt for the path of vocational education and training (VET) that offers excellent job and wage prospects. The general baccalaureate rate (excl. vocational baccalaureate and specialised baccalaureate) in Switzerland is 20%, which is considerably lower than in neighbouring countries. Many adolescents who would typically strive to earn a baccalaureate diploma in their country of origin are better off opting for vocational education and training in Switzerland. A key feature of the Swiss education system is its high permeability, also by global standards. In Zurich alone, there are as many as 21 different pathways to earning a university degree.

## Vocational education

### Basic vocational education and training

Vocational education and training (VET) lasts two to four years. Apprentices receive work-based training within their respective training company and school-based education in a vocational school (= **dual-track system**). Basic vocational education and training courses are based on statutory regulations and lead to a federal qualification (Federal VET Certificate or Diploma). There are approximately 200 types of apprenticeships to choose from. Almost 70% of all adolescents in Switzerland complete vocational education and training in the dual-track system.

### Vocational baccalaureate (Berufsmaturität)

Vocational baccalaureate school is an appealing alternative to general baccalaureate school for capable adolescents who are also practically gifted. It complements basic vocational education and training with extended general education. Upon successful completion, students are entitled to enter a university of applied sciences. Transition to a university is also possible with an additional qualification (Passerelle).

A vocational baccalaureate can be earned in tandem with basic vocational education and training (BM1) or, alternatively, on completion of basic vocational education and training (BM2) in a part-time or full-time course.

### Bilingual instruction (German/English)

Some vocational education and training schools offer bilingual courses.

### Bridge-year courses

Integration-oriented bridge-year courses are available for newly arrived adolescents. The courses are designed to help them improve their German and prepare for vocational education and training.

## Baccalaureate schools

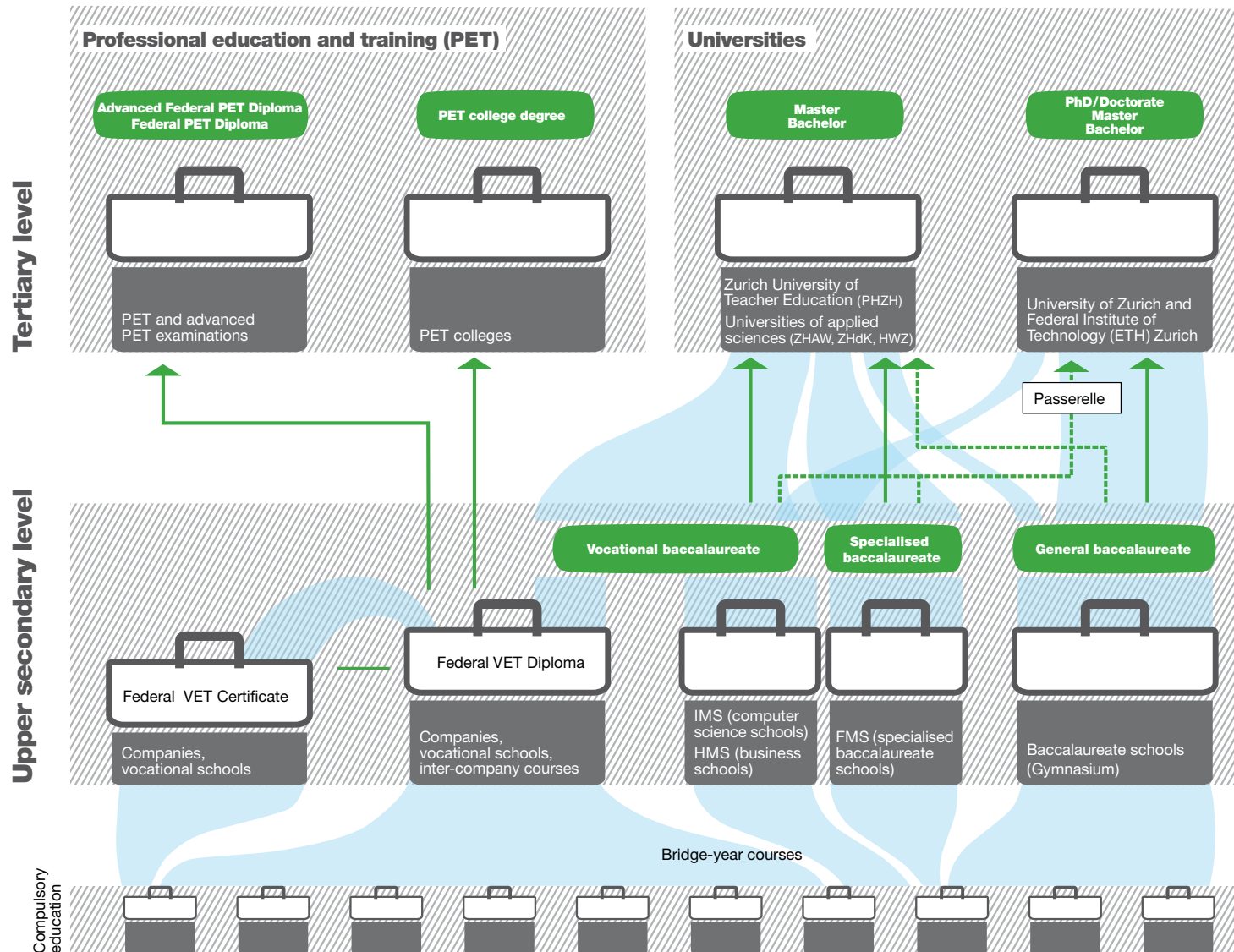
### General baccalaureate schools (Gymnasium)

The transition to a general baccalaureate school occurs after primary school (six-year baccalaureate school: **Langgymnasium**), or after two or three years of secondary school (four-year baccalaureate school: **Kurzgymnasium**). Admission to a Langgymnasium requires taking entrance exams in German and mathematics. For admission to a Kurzgymnasium, exams need to be taken in German, mathematics and French. Newly arrived adolescents with high performance potential may, in justified individual cases, be accepted and take the entrance exam after one year. With the transition to the third year of Langgymnasium, or the first year of Kurzgymnasium, the students choose a **baccalaureate profile** with a focus on specific subjects. Eighteen baccalaureate schools in the Canton of Zurich offer **bilingual education programmes** (German/English, German/French or German/Italian).

### Specialised school (FMS), business school (HMS), computer science school (IMS)

FMS, HMS and IMS are vocationally oriented education courses and offer students the chance to combine general education subjects with a specific training focus. FMS, HMS and IMS are independent upper secondary school types.

# After compulsory education



## Vocational baccalaureate (Berufsmaturität)

A vocational baccalaureate is awarded upon successful completion of the qualification procedure of basic vocational education and training (final apprenticeship examination) and the vocational baccalaureate examination. A vocational baccalaureate entitles students to enter a respective university of applied sciences without taking an entrance exam. There is an admission procedure for holders of a vocational baccalaureate wishing to study at the Zurich University of Teacher Education (PHZH). Transition to the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) Zurich or a university is also possible with additional qualifications (Passerelle).

## Specialised baccalaureate (Fachmaturität)

An upper secondary specialised baccalaureate school (FMS) lasts three years and leads up to an upper secondary specialised baccalaureate school certificate which entitles students to attend a college of professional education and training (PET). In a fourth year, a specialised baccalaureate can be earned which gives students access to certain courses at a university of applied sciences.

## General baccalaureate (Gymnasiale Maturität)

A federally recognised general baccalaureate earned from a baccalaureate school (Gymnasium) in Zurich entitles students to enter any university in Switzerland and prepares them to potentially study abroad.

## Additional qualifications (Passerelle)

Students who achieve an average grade of 5.0 or more in their vocational baccalaureate or specialised baccalaureate can attend a one-year Passerelle course, enabling them to enrol in a study programme of a university.

# State or private? Bilingual or international?

You decide whether your child is to attend a state school or a private school, a bilingual school or an international school. Here are some factors to consider when making the decision:

## Envisaged length of stay

The longer the sojourn in Switzerland, the more important it is for a child to learn German – as this constitutes the key to integration. To that end, the focus is on enrolment in a state school or a bilingual school. If you know your stay in Switzerland is limited to a few years, an international school with an internationally compatible curriculum is likely to be the best choice for your child.

If a child is to be educated in two languages or if all options are to be kept open – i.e. a potential transition to a state school, a transition to an international school or resumption of schooling in the child's home country – then the best way forward is to choose a bilingual school that follows the curriculum of the Canton of Zurich as well as international curricula.

## Age of child

The younger the child, the easier the enrolment in any of the schools mentioned. This becomes increasingly difficult from the age of ten up. For older children, depending on their first language and other existing language skills, it is therefore advisable to consult the responsible bodies and discuss the possibility of enrolment in a foreign-language or a bilingual school. Children are accepted into the state school system at any age and, if required, receive additional lessons in German as a second language.

## Advantages of the state elementary school (Volksschule)

- School is attended at the place of residence.
- Social integration of children at their place of residence.
- Continuity as regards the educational curriculum within the Swiss educational system.

## Advantages of a bilingual school

- Acquisition and maintenance of the German and English, French or Italian language at mother tongue level.
- Linguistic and social integration in the local community is encouraged.
- Continuity of a sense of community within the school class (few changes of pupils).
- Regular conducting of Swiss and international comparative performance tests for quality assurance.
- Curriculum of the Canton of Zurich plus orientation towards international curricula and standards.
- Transition to the state elementary education system, an international school or the educational system of an English-speaking (or French- or Italian-speaking) country is possible at any time.
- Federally (Swiss) and internationally recognised school leaving certificates.

## Advantages of an international school

- English, French or Japanese as main languages of instruction.
- Intercultural competence.
- Internationally compatible curriculum.
- Transition to same level of another international school is possible at any time.
- Internationally recognised school leaving certificate.



**State**  
Free of charge



**Private**  
Fee-based

Religiously, ideologically and politically neutral.  
Registration for your child to attend kindergarten and primary school is through the school administration of your community of residence.  
If needed, children whose first language is not German receive additional lessons in German as a second language.  
A range of childcare options supplementary to family and school are provided by the local communities.

Partly religiously and ideologically orientated or based upon progressive educational approaches.  
Mostly all-day schools.

The state elementary school (Volksschule) offers multilingual education (with German, English and French), but no bilingual classes.  
Various cantonal baccalaureate schools offer bilingual baccalaureate courses (German/English, German/French, German/Italian). Furthermore, the Literar- und Realgymnasium Rämibühl provides the option of a double qualification consisting of a Swiss bilingual baccalaureate and an International Baccalaureate (IB).

Wide range of bilingual crèches, preschools, kindergarten, primary, lower and upper secondary schools in German/English, German/French and German/Italian. These schools can vary considerably in their bilingual and pedagogical concepts.  
Mostly all-day schools.

The member schools of the Bilingual Way Association ([www.thebilingualway.ch](http://www.thebilingualway.ch)) offer bilingual German/English education from preschool up to university entrance. In keeping with the immersion principle, an equal number of lessons are taught in English and German. Native speakers teach in their mother tongue. Equally suitable for children from English- and German-speaking families. A switch or, as the case may be, a return to an international or a state school is possible at any time.

The international schools cater especially to children of internationally mobile parents residing temporarily in the Canton of Zurich.

Language of instruction: English and international curriculum IB/AP/A levels  
– Inter Community School (ICS), [www.icsz.ch](http://www.icsz.ch)  
– Zurich International School (ZIS), [www.zis.ch](http://www.zis.ch)  
– International School Zurich North (ISZN), [www.iszn.ch](http://www.iszn.ch)  
– Hull's School, [www.hullschool.ch](http://www.hullschool.ch)

Language of instruction: French and Baccalauréat Français  
– Lycée Français de Zurich, [www.lfz.ch](http://www.lfz.ch)

Language of instruction: Japanese  
– Japanese School in Zurich, [www.jszurich.ch](http://www.jszurich.ch)

**German**

Lessons according to the curriculum of the Canton of Zurich

**Bilingual**

Lessons according to the curriculum of the Canton of Zurich and international curricula

**Foreign language**

Lessons according to internationally accepted curricula

# Glossary/Links

**Association of private schools in Zurich (Verband Zürcher Privatschulen)**  
[www.v-z-p.ch](http://www.v-z-p.ch)

**Baccalaureate schools =  
Gymnasium, FMS, HMS, IMS**

Zurich's state baccalaureate schools are free of charge. For detailed information on educational profiles, orientation events, registration deadlines and entrance exams, go to [www.zentraleaufnahmepruefung.ch](http://www.zentraleaufnahmepruefung.ch).

**Childcare supplementary to school and family**

Public daycare structures (daycare centre, crèche, students club, daycare families, lunch supervision, all-day schools, holiday programmes) are organised locally and vary accordingly. As a rule, these offers are subject to a fee and co-financed by the parents taking their income into account.

**Choice of profession and apprenticeship**  
Regional vocational information centres (biz) offer consultations and orientation events.  
[www.biz.zh.ch](http://www.biz.zh.ch)

**DVD on "Schools in the Canton of Zurich"**  
The DVD with soundtracks in eleven different languages gives parents an overview and insight into elementary education in the Canton of Zurich. Available at [www.lehrmittelverlag-zuerich.ch](http://www.lehrmittelverlag-zuerich.ch).

**Extracurricular activities**

Most private schools offer a wide spectrum of extracurricular activities (sports, music, theatre, art, students clubs, holiday camps, holiday care, etc.). Such activities are also provided by the state schools. For more information, contact your community of residence.

**German as a second language (DaZ)**

DaZ courses are German language classes for pupils whose first language is not German. The aim is to enable them to participate in lessons and attend mainstream school as quickly as possible. [www.vsa.zh.ch/daz](http://www.vsa.zh.ch/daz)

**Immersion teaching**

Content-based teaching of a subject (e.g. history) where the language of instruction is a foreign language, not the native language.

**Local school authorities /  
School governing bodies**

For a list of the local school authorities in the Canton of Zurich and contact information of the school governing bodies, go to [www.vsa.zh.ch/schulen](http://www.vsa.zh.ch/schulen).

**Native language and culture classes  
(HSK classes)**

Children who are bilingual have the opportunity to expand their knowledge of their original language and learn about their current living environment and their country of origin in native language and culture classes (HSK classes). These courses are organised and funded

by the embassies/consulates of the countries of origin or by private sponsors. [www.vsa.zh.ch/hsk](http://www.vsa.zh.ch/hsk)

**Office for Baccalaureate Schools and Vocational Education (Mittelschul- und Berufsbildungsamt)**

Information about upper secondary schools is available at [www.mba.zh.ch](http://www.mba.zh.ch).

**Office of Elementary Education of the Canton of Zurich (Volksschulamt des Kantons Zürich)**

Information about the curriculum and lessons, timetables of kindergarten, primary and lower secondary school, as well as regarding the transition from primary to secondary school, is provided at [www.vsa.zh.ch/schulstufen](http://www.vsa.zh.ch/schulstufen). Extensive multilingual information for parents is available at [www.vsa.zh.ch/international](http://www.vsa.zh.ch/international).

**Register of private schools**

The Office of Elementary Education keeps a public register with all the authorised private schools within the ambit of compulsory schooling (kindergarten, primary and secondary school level). [www.vsa.zh.ch/aps](http://www.vsa.zh.ch/aps)

**School fees**

All private schools charge fees. It is advisable to clarify what exactly is included in the regular school fee.

**School-statistical information**

For charts and graphs of educational statistics, go to [www.bista.zh.ch](http://www.bista.zh.ch).

**Second-chance education**

Adults can also earn a general baccalaureate or a vocational baccalaureate through second-chance education. These qualifications give access to higher education at a university or, as the case may be, a university of applied sciences.

**Way to school**

In principle, after an appropriate period of settling in, the children should manage to walk to kindergarten and to primary school on their own. The school governing body will arrange appropriate measures if a child cannot walk to school for reasons of distance or because the route is too dangerous.

**Welcome – information for newcomers**

For a list of international and bilingual schools in the Canton of Zurich, and to download this publication, go to [www.welcome.zh.ch/schools](http://www.welcome.zh.ch/schools).

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**Tim**, from Denmark, moved to Switzerland with his family when he was 8. Although he had no prior knowledge of German, he went straight to the local primary school where he received five additional lessons of German as a second language (DaZ). Within a short time, he was proficient in German and no longer required any extra language tutoring. Tim continues to do well at school.

**David** from the US was in his final year of high school when, aged 18, he decided to join his family who had recently relocated to Switzerland. He only spoke English at the time. Since Swiss compulsory schooling ends at the age of 16, David enrolled in a state-run integration class for two years, which included an intensive German language course and assistance when applying for a local bilingual apprenticeship. Besides in-company training, these apprenticeships entail 1–2 days of school a week. David has always been interested in pursuing tertiary-level education. He hopes to get his vocational baccalaureate and subsequently earn an additional qualification (Passerelle), which will allow him to study at any Swiss university.

**Nigel**, aged 5, is from London. His mother recently signed a three-year contract to work in Zurich. His parents have not yet decided whether they will stay in Switzerland long-term or move back to London. Given this uncertainty, they have chosen a private international kindergarten for Nigel where he will be chiefly schooled in English.

**Andrew's** parents are originally from the UK and his home language is English. He completed Swiss lower secondary school aged 15, but failed the entrance exam to a baccalaureate school because of his results in German. Andrew subsequently decided to enrol in an IGCSE course at an English college in Zurich. He passed 9 IGCSEs achieving very good results. He is currently preparing for his A levels in economics, mathematics, physics and German. His goal is to study economics at the University of St. Gallen or at Royal Holloway, University of London.

**Oliver**, aged 4, is English, but lives in Switzerland with his family. His parents would have liked to have enrolled him in the local kindergarten. But since the kindergarten hours do not fit their respective work schedules and their length of stay in Switzerland is uncertain, they opted for a private bilingual preschool for children aged 4–7 which offers daycare and a curriculum that includes English reading and writing. Most children from Oliver's current preschool go on to attend the local primary school.

**Maddie**, from Sweden, moved to Switzerland with her family when she was 14. With no prior knowledge of German or Swiss German, she initially attended a 20-week integration course paid by the family's new community of residence in the Canton of Zurich. Thanks to the course, Maddie had no trouble transitioning to the local school system in the following semester.

## Educational paths

**Ivan, 12, and Irina, 9,** are from Russia. Their mother has been recruited to work for a Russian bank in Zurich. Before moving to Switzerland, the family visited Zurich several times to explore educational options for the children. Russian being their only language, they relied on a personal interpreter to communicate and become acquainted with the various schools. Given that the family plans to eventually relocate to the UK, or possibly return to Russia, they have opted for a private international school that offers a strong English as a Second Language programme. As this is an international school, Ivan and Irina's parents are also likely to meet other Russian-speaking parents with whom they can interact and socialise in their mother tongue.

**Adam**, who is bilingual (English/German) and dyslexic, scored top results in mathematics and science in Swiss secondary school but failed the entrance exam to attend baccalaureate school because of his grades in French and German. Adam recently transferred to a British-curriculum college in Zurich where he can focus exclusively on mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology. Thereafter, his prospects of studying at any university in Switzerland, or at a top university in the UK, are very good.