



Study

School Segregation in Germany

The Extent, the Effects and Recommended Actions for Better Educational Opportunities

Executive Summary

Segregation is no longer a marginal phenomenon at German schools, especially in urban areas. One of its negative consequences is to limit the educational opportunities open to pupils with a migration background. Desegregation, however, cannot be forced top-down. Instead, a set of targeted measures that improve the learning opportunities at segregated schools holds more promise of success. The SVR Research Unit has identified six recommended actions for actors in schools, school authorities and education ministries of the German *Länder*.

The segregation of pupils with and without a migration background is particularly visible in Germany's urban areas. The SVR Research Unit's analysis of the 2011 PIRLS and TIMSS student achievement data shows that in large cities, just under 70 per cent of migrant children attend a primary school where migrants account for a majority of pupils. For children without a migration background this figure is as low as 17.1 per cent. This segregation can have serious consequences because many young migrants are not only disadvantaged by a lack of family support; their educational achievements are also impeded by their often poorly performing classmates. This dual disadvantage is primarily caused by three factors: residential segregation in German cities, parental school choice and unequal access to the academically advanced tracks in Germany's secondary schools.

This study asserts that having a high percentage of migrants in the classroom does not necessarily have a negative effect on the performance of individual pupils. It is rather the social background of the classmates and in particular their average achievement levels which play an important role. Nevertheless, parents, particularly those who are educated, still avoid schools with a high number of migrants because most parents associate them with inadequate learning opportunities and a troubled social environment. As a result, in large German cities, right around 40 per cent of all primary school pupils with a migration background study in classes with low-achievers; this figure is only 5.7 per cent for children without a migration background. This segregation negatively affects the skill acquisition of pupils with a migration background.

Both in Germany and abroad, numerous attempts to desegregate schools have failed, including school vouchers and busing schemes. Many of these measures have also stirred up considerable



political and social resistance. Clearly, a more balanced mix of pupils cannot be forced 'from the top down'. In order to lower the negative impact that school segregation has on pupil performance, measures need to be implemented to systematically improve learning opportunities at segregated schools. Therefore, it is important that the schools affected as well as the school authorities and the education ministries of the *Länder* work together more effectively and pursue joint strategies. Isolated measures undertaken by individual stakeholders as supposed cure-alls are counterproductive.

In this study, the SVR Research Unit develops six recommended actions to improve the learning opportunities at segregated schools and thus increase pupil performance over the long run. These recommendations are primarily based on the latest findings from two key research areas: school effectiveness research and school improvement research. Furthermore, the recommendations were drafted as part of an intensive exchange with experts in schools, school administration, policy-making and civil society.

Segregated schools should open up to the social, cultural and physical-mental diversity of their pupils and their families in three core areas:

- (1) **The entire school**, e.g. by systematically training all teachers to equip them for diversity as an everyday phenomenon.
- (2) **Teaching**, e.g. by supporting pupils' language acquisition across the entire curriculum.
- (3) **Teacher-parent collaboration**, e.g. by communicating with parents according to their respective linguistic, cultural and technical abilities.

To ensure that this process can be effective and take hold locally, the school authorities and education ministries of the *Länder* have to provide long-term support in three areas:

- (1) **Qualify staff adequately**, e.g. by making diversity training and early teaching experiences a compulsory part of teacher training.
- (2) **Adjust the overall framework**, e.g. by allocating additional staff and funds to segregated schools based on social indicators which measure the strains imposed by their oftentimes troubled communities.
- (3) **Support long-term collaboration**, e.g. by supporting local networks made up of schools, kindergartens and other non-school facilities which work together to improve the educational opportunities at segregated schools.