

The children are blossoming - ZUG4YOU

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Children with an English mother tongue are often bored during their regular English lessons. That is why they are now being promoted separately in the city of Zug.

The eyes of the lively American Stormy Berney light up as she talks about her students and her role as a English teacher at the schools in the City of Zug. For the past two years, she has been only teaching children with an English mother tongue who find themselves underwhelmed in mainstream primary school education. She adds: "It's so interesting for me to hear about where the children have lived, and about the experiences they've had."

Only English is spoken during the lesson. In general, children and parents alike insist on grammar and spelling as primary teaching goals. "Many of them speak the language very well and have a broad vocabulary, but have no sound grammatical and orthographic knowledge." This is where Stormy Berney picks up, and playfully introduces the children into the subject matter.

Stormy Berney from the USA teaches the English-speaking students in a playful way in the Burgbach schoolhouse

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She thereby has to be very flexible, because the performance gap and the age gap between the children are large. "They literally blossom when they can do something in their own mother tongue," says the mother-of-two, who is a professional English teacher. The year in which a child enters the course doesn't matter. "Each year's programme is put together anew, and stands for itself, and do not build on each other." Some children only participate in one cycle, others in several.

"There are not only children from expat families, but also Swiss children who have an English-speaking parent."

Stormy Berney has her head full of ideas and plans for what else she could do with the children, and she'd like to have more time for it. "But we definitely make the most of it in any case," she stresses.

High proportion of English speakers

11% of pupils in the canton of Zug speak English as their mother tongue. This corresponds to half of all the foreign speakers living here. "Many of them become bored in regular classes," says Sonja Zwyszig, a specialist in talent promotion at the Education Department of the City of Zug. "But they have to attend the lessons, because they will also have to take all the exams in this subject." Parents and children therefore welcome the additional language support.

From the autumn holidays up to the beginning of the summer holidays, Stormy Berney visits each of the seven primary schools in the city of Zug for five consecutive weeks for a half-day each, and gives in-depth lessons to English-speaking children. Participation is voluntary. "There are even various selectable options this year," adds Sonja Zwyszig.

In addition to the course itself, a book project, for example, is offered. "The pupils read a book of their choice and write a report about it. If they wish, they can present this to parents and the public at the usual end-of-year event."

In a joint project with the Pedagogical University of Zug (PHZG), the reports of pupils will be combined into a book, which will then serve as a recommendation for English-language readers. Students of the PHZ also support the subject teachers with other projects (*see box*).

Adaptation of timetables is not possible

The course takes place during regular school lessons. "Unfortunately, it's not possible to arrange that these classes take place instead of regular English lessons," explains Sonja Zwyszig. As the primary school children can take part in this course from third to sixth grade, it's impossible to adjust all the timetables accordingly. But this is usually not a problem for the children, who quickly make up for the missed school material.

Additional teaching material

Within the framework of a module at the Zug schools, students from the Pedagogical University of Zug (PHZG) have surveyed the children and their parents in order to investigate how the English-speaking students experience the regular English lessons. "Many of them said they were bored," says Sylvia Nadig, a lecturer at PHZG. There is also hardly any supporting material that the teachers could use in the lessons. In a further step, three groups of students are now investigating how, with a reasonable outlay, English-speaking pupils could be provided with support at their linguistic level during regular teaching. "The aim is to use the knowledge gained to develop teaching materials and make them available to the teachers," says Nadig. Various teaching materials are already available for download on the platform www.fremdsprachen.phzg.ch.

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