



*This profile is part of the EU Study on Supporting School Innovation Across Europe. It presents one of the 24 schools in the study, giving an overview of the changes and experiences in that school. Find the rest of the materials from the study at:*

[www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation](http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation)

# School innovation in Europe: fostering individualised learning and collaborative learning at the Friedenauer Community School in Berlin



## About our school

- ◆ **Location:** Tempelhof-Schöneberg, Berlin
- ◆ **Established:** The school is a merger of four schools: the primary schools Uckermark-Schule and Barnimschule were merged and became Peter-Paul-Rubens-Schule. The secondary schools Luise-Wilhelm-Teske-Schule and Waldenburg-Schule were merged and became 8. Integrierte Sekundarschule (ISS). In a second stage the primary school Peter-Paul-Rubens-Schule and the secondary school 8. ISS were merged and became the community school Friedenauer Gemeinschaftsschule. The process of merging the four schools started as a pilot trial on 1 August 2012. The Friedenauer Gemeinschaftsschule was founded on 1 August 2015.
- ◆ **Status:** Public municipal community school that provides primary and secondary education (grades 1-10)
- ◆ **Number of pupils:** 850 (in 2016)
- ◆ **Website:** <http://friedenauer-gemeinschaftsschule.de/home/>
- ◆ **Contact person:** Sonja Reincke-Neese



## Why did we innovate?

The school is located in a disadvantaged area in the city of Berlin. Prior to merger, the reputation of the school was rather low. Since the process of establishment of a community school had been initiated in 2012, there were major improvements in the image and attractiveness of the school among local community. As a community school, the Friedenauer school aimed to create inclusive environment for its students, foster equity and meet diverse needs of newly arrived migrant students and students with learning challenges. In order to address these challenges and to target inclusion from different angles, the school has introduced a number of innovative approaches.



## What were our innovations?

One of the core structural innovations introduced in the school is its reconstruction into community school, as a result of the merger of four schools. It aims to transit from traditional tracking system to a more integrated system that has been promoted by the city of Berlin. 'Community schools' were initiated by the Berlin Senate for Education, Youth and Family and started as a model project in the 2008/09 school year in order to enable equal opportunities and individual support for all students. A legal provision from 2004 gave way to the model stage of 'Community schools'. According to this provision, all primary and secondary schools can apply for joining the model with the beginning of school year 2008/09 (Gesetze Berlin, 2010). According to this model, all pupils remain in the same school from the start of school until graduation. The decision to participate in the pilot trial as a community school was first taken by the school leadership and was later verified by all important committees including the teachers and the parents. The overall agreement with becoming a community school was 80%. Afterwards, the application procedure was initiated, which included the development of a project plan and time schedule.

As a community school, the Friedenauer school aims to foster equal opportunities for its students, promote individualised learning and support, develop mutual respect and tolerance and create a democratic space for cooperation between teachers, school staff, pupils, parents and non-school stakeholders. To achieve these aims the school implements the following innovations.

Since 2015 the school has gradually introduced the inter-grade learning with pupils of grades 1 to 3 and of 4 to 6 learning together. With the beginning of the 2017/18 school year, pupils of grades 7 to 9 will be also learning together. This provides more inclusive learning approach and does not differentiate pupils into different classes according to their learning levels and learning pace.

Another innovative approach in the school is the 'Learning office', aiming for individualised and systematic acquisition of qualifications in German, Mathematics and English through consecutive modules, which are completed by their individual speed and sequence. Mutual support among students, for example when more advanced students help those with slower learning progress, is an important element of this approach. Much of the learning activities consist of individual learning, but sessions with the whole class or small groups also take place.

Teacher acts as a learning advisor who supports students in the management of their work plans, answers to questions and tests the learning progress, while students work individually or in groups. Up to two teachers are in each class. Students can learn individually or in groups, weekly tasks are documented on the blackboard. Students work on different levels, this enables each student to proceed on the basis of their prior knowledge and competences. This approach facilitates the inclusion and support of students with migrant background and students with learning challenges. Goals and learning progress for each day and week are documented in the electronic logbook, an online planning and monitoring system, which includes not only content-related goals but also social and behaviour goals. Two times a year, parents, teachers and students have reflective talks. The main target of these talks is the planning of and reflection about long-term targets of the student.

Since 2015 the school implements practical learning. This is a special form of dual learning, which aims to enable practice-relevant learning and the attainment of a secondary degree, especially for pupils who find the traditional classroom environment challenging. It combines practical training (three days per week) in a place of student's choice and classes (two days) inside school and aims at individualised learning, integration of practical activities, personal development, and preparation for vocational training. In 2016, the school had three classes for practical learning.

Besides these core innovations, the Friedenauer school also fosters the environment of a 'team school'. This implies that teachers, pedagogues and social workers work in multi-professional teams with the school leader overseeing each measure. Furthermore, there is close collaboration between teachers, students and parents. For the evaluation of learning progress (and social behaviour), students conduct regular feedback talks with their teachers on the basis of their logbook. Two times a year, teacher-parents-students feedback meetings are conducted to discuss learning progress and social behaviour.



## What have we achieved?

### Pupils

Innovative approaches had a direct effect on pupils' academic performance and improved learning progress, as reported by the school staff. About 40% of students managed to attain their medium secondary certificate (*Realschulabschluss*) despite very low performance level at the time of entering the school. More students than before are now able to pursue a higher secondary degree after leaving this school.

The overall learning autonomy of students has improved, and they are able to express their own opinion and contribute actively to the lessons, according to the interviews with teachers.

The educational staff noted that innovations had a positive effect for pupils on the social-emotional level as they are happier and engaged with the school, there is also improvement in the behavioural aspects. Numerous students developed a problematic behaviour in grades 5 and 6 before and this trend has declined after the creation of community school. Teachers explained this by decreased pressure on pupils from teachers and parents.

### Teachers

Direct effects of the innovations on teachers and other school staff included higher satisfaction with the work environment, improved communication, and overall climate among the staff, and between teachers and pupils, as reported by the school staff.

The teamwork between teachers has improved; planning processes are now taking place as a team and teachers develop new ideas together. Teachers now feel better enabled to respond to the needs of each student, and to provide feedback and positive support.

According to the Berlin city evaluation (Senatsverwaltung für Jugend, Bildung und Wissenschaft, 2012), the creation of community schools had a direct impact on teachers' work and attitudes: they found more productive ways to deal with heterogeneity (e.g. they perceive diversity as a potential, they apply differentiated teaching methods, individual counselling and competence diagnosis are a focus activity).

### School as a whole

Since the establishment of the school as a community school, the external image of the school has improved, which was illustrated by high numbers of new applications to the school.

The school has received national quality labels for 'Germany is becoming inclusive', 'School without racism, school with courage' and is supported by the 'eEducation Berlin Masterplan'.



## The process of change: what helped us succeed?

### School level

Highly efficient teamwork and solidarity among the team, ambition and involvement into the process from the very start, the high motivation and high support of the school staff for the innovative approaches were the core enablers for the implementation of the innovations.

In the stage of development into a community school, it is very supportive that two of the fused schools (Uckermark-Schule and Waldenburg-Schule) were already experienced as schools fostering integration and inclusion. The Uckerman school had received a national award for integration in 1992. These experiences helped to implement ideas that other colleagues already had, but lacked the tools to bring them into practice

Parents of the school have considerably contributed to the successful transfer of the school to a community school. They held public campaigns and demonstrations together with students and teachers in support of the model of community school.

### Municipal level

Berlin's legislative framework for community schools (including the special position as a community school, and the autonomy for schools in deciding their own system of subject differentiation) was one of the key enablers for the development of school, according to the school staff.

Berlin authorities provided additional financial support for the school to have a special pedagogue for each grade and two school development advisors. In the first stage, the school was granted additional funds by the Senate for Education in Berlin for a 50% position of a person who was in charge of the management of the pilot project.

Berlin's Network of Community schools (*Netzwerk Gemeinschaftsschulen*) was very supportive in providing good practice, exchange of experience and specialised conferences.



## The process of change: what limited us?

### School level

The school does not have a higher secondary education level and students can only attain a medium secondary degree (after 10 years of schooling), but not a higher secondary degree (after 12 years of schooling). Therefore, many pupils leave the Friedenauer school after the 6<sup>th</sup> grade in order to attend a higher secondary school. Teachers perceive this as a general barrier in regard to the goals connected with high attractiveness of the school, high numbers of students (which comes with financial support for the school) and having high achieving students among their student body.

### Municipal level

The major barriers for innovation at this school are found at the political level. The Senate of Berlin and the district administration are led by different political groups, with different levels of openness towards innovation: on both levels – Senate and district – there are frequent changes in political orientation which leads to promises for improvements for school being breached. This continued to be an important burden to implement the planned innovations.

At the district level, school authorities of the Tempelhof-Schöneberg district did not approve the pilot trial for the community school and tried to stop the process. However, at the moment, City senate as well as district authorities are supportive for the school.

Closely connected with the political support, the school also faces financial barriers. Large investments into renovation measures of the school are needed (a total of 30 million EUR). The situation is particularly difficult due to the different buildings (former four different schools) of the school. Students and teachers have to change between buildings frequently, and are limited in space; teacher motivation suffers from the lack of improvement in this regard. Moreover, it also affects the external image of the school negatively.

The school staff has noticed an insufficient preparation of newly coming teachers to work with innovative approaches such as the inter-grade learning.



## Sustainability of change

The model project of the community school been positively evaluated and will be extended over time (Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Familie, 2016).

An external evaluation is obligatory according to Berlin school laws. An external evaluator visits the school and evaluates its performance based on a number of indicators. In case of good results, the next external evaluation is conducted after five years. In case of bad results, an external evaluation is conducted again after two years. The last external evaluation found positive results for the Friedenauer school.

The school has ensured an internal evaluation and learning with the help of teacher students, who spend their practical semester at the school and evaluate innovative approaches through course papers. Furthermore, in weekly feedback meetings, the school staff internally reflects on the implementation and progress of the innovative approaches.

To foster continuous learning and mutual exchange, a team of staff of the primary level has been assigned to regularly reflect on the implementation of the inter-grade learning while teachers forming grade-teams regularly discuss the progress of measures.

After the Friedenauer community school was founded, many schools have come to visit it and observe its methods. There is a particular interest in the way integration and inclusion are practised at this school: different learning pathways, inter-subject teaching, productive learning and the learning office.



## What did we learn in the process? Key messages

A shared vision and teamwork is crucial for any innovative process. To achieve organisational transformations, such as the reconstruction of the school into a community school, is only possible with a favourable policy framework and policy support.

Teachers need to receive appropriate ITE and CPD on the application of innovative measures. Observation visits to other schools are very effective for expanding teachers' competences and should be systematically supported.

Financial insecurity hinders school's ability to consider aspects of sustainability of innovations. Political orientation and policy provisions should aim to support innovation.

## Further reading

- **A full report** 'Supporting School Innovation across Europe' explores the conditions in the school education system that can enable or constrain positive change in schools.
- **12 case studies** explore the national approaches and individual school innovations. They include the perspectives of key national education experts and stakeholders who were interviewed and took part in workshops.
- **24 individual profiles** give a quick view of the changes and experiences in each school.

Available here:

[www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation](http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation)

- The school profiles also feature as part of the [European Toolkit for Schools](#), alongside a range of materials and many other inspiring examples of practice from European countries.

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