

Assorted shoes, mixed schools

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In front of many Swiss schoolroom doors today children's shoes of different sizes are lined up: very small ones next to larger ones. The shoe rack is an indication of what is happening inside the classroom. More and more primary schools are introducing classes of mixed age groups. Instead of teaching the children according to the year in which they were born, classes are being formed of kindergarten children along with

first- and second-year pupils. That is to enable children at the beginning of their education to learn at their own speed and acquire social skills. Such changes are immediately obvious, but there are others that are more far-reaching. Primary schools are currently adapting to a new curriculum, a curriculum that is changing their basic education concept. In addition to pure knowledge, schools in future will primarily convey learning strategies, that is, the skills to be able to confidently navigate the seas of knowledge.

All those for whom such changes cause worries complain that the "commodity of education", so important to Switzerland, is in danger of losing importance. One thing is for sure: Switzerland is investing a great deal in education. Around 37 billion Swiss francs is spent on it every year by the federal government, cantons and municipalities. This is always eagerly pointed out in educational debates. Those who look closely, though, put the numbers into perspective: in relation to our high gross domestic product, spending on education is quite average. Seen in this way, Switzerland ranks only in the middle field of the industrial nations – in 23rd place.

The debate about the primary schools of the future often seems to be somewhat academic. Something completely unplanned and unintended is also bringing about change: as our author Mireille Guggenbühler points out, fewer and fewer men are teaching in primary schools. They consider the wages to be too low. The majority of teachers in the classrooms are women. Without them, school life would collapse. But without men as teachers, children are being deprived of key role models. That is also one of the aspects determining the quality of schools.

And finally, on a personal note: the months of my interim heading of "Swiss Review" have come to an end. As of now I am editor-in-chief, responsible for the "Review", helping to shape it and further develop it – with the support of a great team. I hope that the "Review" succeeds in continuing to draw a coherent and valid picture of that which impacts and drives Switzerland. For this to happen we rely on the feedback of our readers. In times of growing media frenzy, the "Review" wants to remain as it is: solid and reliable.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo: It's all neat and tidy at the Spitalacker School in Bern. Photo: Adrian Moser