



BERLIN	
Senatsverwaltung für Justiz, Verbraucherschutz und Antidiskriminierung	
Ansprechpartner des Landes Berlin zu Antisemitismus	

**Joint recommendation
of the Central Council of Jews in Germany,
the Joint Federal and State Commission to fight antisemitism and protect Jewish life,
and the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on
dealing with antisemitism in schools**

**(Adopted by the Central Council of Jews in Germany on 18 March 2021,
adopted by the joint federal and state committee of antisemitism commissioners on 26
April 2021, adopted by the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural
Affairs on 10 June 2021)**

1. Introduction

Antisemitism has been present and culturally passed on in and beyond Europe for centuries. To this day it takes many forms in our society; it appears in all social strata, whether latently or openly, and sometimes it is manifested in physical violence and terror. Schools are a reflection of the society as a whole: they too are confronted with antisemitic attitudes and statements that create a climate of intimidation and violence. This holds true regardless of whether Jewish people are present.

Antisemitism poses a serious threat to open, free and democratic societies based on the rule of law. Each and every one of us is responsible to call out antisemitism for what it is and to take decisive action against it.

Schools' mission of instilling maturity and a sense of responsibility in children and young people means that they have a special significance – and a special responsibility – when it comes to preventing and combating antisemitism. All school stakeholders, classroom teachers and other educators, parents and pupils are called upon to act, as are teacher training institutions, education authorities and policy-makers.

2. Objectives and principles

The present joint recommendation provides orientation for dealing with different forms of antisemitism, describes their effects and highlights prevention and intervention measures. It is directed at classroom teachers and other educators at schools of all kinds and levels, who teach any subject, and at school directors, teacher training institutions and the responsible public institutions.

Tackling antisemitism in a preventive way strengthens our democratic society as well as the civic courage of teachers and pupils. In doing so, it helps to make our school culture more participatory and democratic.

Professional educational action on antisemitism in schools requires knowledge of the various forms of antisemitism and taking a clear moral stand in dealing with the topic, as well as cooperation with existing public and civil society advisory and support institutions.

Addressing the Nazi past and especially the Shoah in history classes is indispensable, but it is not sufficient for dealing appropriately with all forms of antisemitism. The present recommendation seeks to ensure that in classroom instruction, Jewish life is not reduced to the topics of persecution, the Shoah and the perspective of victimhood. "Awareness and recognition of the diversity and complexity of Judaism are key steps towards gaining understanding and reducing prejudice."¹ Confronting antisemitism includes engaging with the specific experiences of Jewish people in Germany.

For all who are involved in schools, it is important to understand that prevention, intervention and – if necessary – sanctions require both professional knowledge and reflection on one's own attitudes and mind-set.

¹ Joint declaration of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on the Teaching of Jewish History, Religion and Culture in Schools, 2016, p. 2.

3. Definition and forms of antisemitism

The following information provides an initial overview of the main forms of antisemitism. An in-depth and nuanced engagement with the issue is necessary for the development of preventive measures.²

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) defines antisemitism as “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.” A number of examples accompany the definition, including the statement that “Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity”.³

Antisemitism may be expressed in religious, social, political or racist terms, or as a mixture of them. It also has an emotional component, which is evident in perceptions of Jews as disturbing, dangerous, or the cause of one’s own failure. Antisemitism is not simply a variety of racism.⁴ It is to be distinguished from racism and other forms of group-focused enmity, even if it overlaps with them in some ways.

Religious antisemitism, also known as anti-Judaism, refers specifically to Christian anti-Judaism, which is based in part on blaming the Jewish people for the killing of Jesus Christ. It dates back to the writings of the early Christian church fathers and also appears later in Martin Luther’s teachings. The motifs that arose from this religious anti-Judaism – the demonisation of Jews, myths about host desecration and poisoned wells, and medieval legends of blood libel – continue to resonate in modern conspiracy myths to this day. The use of the term “Du Jude!” (You Jew!) as an insult also derives from an antisemitic tradition that originated in the depiction of Judas as the betrayer of Christ.

Social antisemitism is a form in which antisemites construe Jews as inherently advantaged or “chosen”. This includes stereotypes of Jewish “usury” and coded language about the American “East Coast” and “Wall Street” as well as the framing of Jews as especially influential in the financial sector.

In political antisemitism, the notion that Jews heavily influence the international financial market is expanded to include a political dimension. It alleges or insinuates that Jews are part of a conspiracy with the power to control political processes. Political

² The second report of the Independent Panel on Antisemitism, “[Antisemitismus in Deutschland – aktuelle Entwicklungen](#)” (Antisemitism in Germany: Current issues), p. 24–28, offers a helpful and detailed orientation

³ For quotes, see <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>.

⁴ For further detail, see Julia Bernstein, *Antisemitismus an Schulen in Deutschland* (Antisemitism at schools in Germany), 2020, p.282–288.

antisemitism appears, for example, where Jews are blamed for Communism or neoliberalism.

While nationalist antisemitism excludes Jews as outsiders who do not belong to the nation, racist antisemitism goes beyond this, claiming that Jews belong to a “race” with specific physical, physiognomic, mental and physical characteristics. This includes simultaneously ascribing both inferiority and omnipotence to Jews. This racist antisemitism culminated in the Shoah, the genocide of European Jews. Today this form of antisemitism has been taken up by racist right-wing extremist movements, and continues to pose a major threat through, for example, the terrorist attacks these groups commit.

Post-Holocaust antisemitism, which is also known as secondary antisemitism, has manifestations that include calls for Germany to “get over” the Holocaust: according to this line of antisemitic argumentation, the Shoah has already been sufficiently confronted and addressed, but “the Jews” cannot let it rest and persist in reminding “the Germans” of their guilt. This deflection of guilt and rejection of remembrance is expressed in relativising the Shoah and the responsibility for committing it, as well as in taboos on speaking about family members’ involvement in it. It also manifests itself as claims that Jews have instrumentalised the Shoah and reversals of the perpetrator-victim relationship. Post-Holocaust antisemitism ultimately culminates in relativising or denying the Holocaust.

Israel-related antisemitism holds the political actions of the State of Israel to special moral standards which are not applied to any other democracy. In some cases, it goes so far as to deny Israel’s right to exist. This form of antisemitism is also evident when antisemites treat Jews as inherent representatives of the State of Israel, and either ask them to justify its actions or hold them responsible for these actions. This circuitous tactic enables antisemites to criticise Jews without stating their antisemitism directly.

Antisemitic attitudes and mindsets are also evident in certain social contexts with a Muslim background. Such attitudes often relate specifically to the Middle East conflict and are expressed in narratives rooted in Israel-related antisemitism. Islamist movements also often imbue antisemitic stereotypes and conspiracy myths with religious connotations and justifications as part of their political instrumentation of antisemitism. These manifestations of antisemitism present particular challenges in and for the school context because they are so multifarious.

All of the forms of antisemitism discussed above may surface in conspiracy myths, especially in times of crisis and when people are seeking simple explanations for phenomena that are in reality complex and difficult to understand. Antisemitism thus manifests itself in a variety of contexts, adapting itself to the zeitgeist and to current

trends and events. It reaches deep into the mainstream of society, is instrumentalised politically and poses a major and often unrecognised threat.

Antisemitism instils fear and insecurity in those affected by it: they feel excluded and question their basic trust in society and in their own future in Germany. They are sent a message that being Jewish is a bad thing. Their reactions can range from withdrawal to hiding their own identity or distancing themselves from it; in some cases, people even internalise hostile stereotypes about themselves. Raising awareness of these dynamics is as important for prevention as imparting knowledge about the different forms of antisemitism – so that pupils can come to understand how antisemitism is expressed and what effects it has. This awareness-raising process follows a problem-oriented approach and aims at engaging pupils in self-reflection.

4. Dealing with antisemitism in schools

Children and adolescents need a system of values that provides them with orientation. Schools also have a responsibility for teaching values. That is why educational activities in schools are based on values derived from the fundamental rights in the Basic Law and from human rights that centre on human dignity. This is the position from which we must counter antisemitism.

4.1 Recognising, identifying and responding

Recognising manifestations of antisemitism

Given the many different possible manifestations of antisemitism, it is not always easy to identify antisemitic attitudes in oneself, one's pupils or one's colleagues. Antisemitism is expressed not only in crude antisemitic rhetoric, but often more covertly in coded language, indirect statements, insinuations and jokes. The tremendous significance of social media in spreading antisemitic statements and radicalising antisemitic tendencies demands specific attention and skills. The same applies to dealing with the topic of the Middle East conflict and Israel. Antisemitism can also appear in the absence of Jewish pupils.

Identifying antisemitic incidents:

Protecting people affected by antisemitism is a priority. That is why it is very important for antisemitic statements and antisemitic incidents to be identified as such and not to be played down, relativised, concealed or ignored. For those affected by antisemitism, it is important that their experiences be taken seriously and listened to with empathy. Antisemitic statements must not be treated as mere expressions of conflicts between pupils or teaching staff.

Paying attention to Jewish perspectives remains an important part of dealing with incidents. Antisemitism must be identified as such even if there are no Jewish pupils in the class or it is not known whether there are.

Responding to antisemitic incidents:

It is very important to intervene in every antisemitic incident and not to "look the other way" out of uncertainty, lack of time or fear of escalation. Downplaying antisemitism, relativising it, reacting defensively ("nothing like that happens here"), displaying false tolerance or even expressing understanding for antisemitism are all dangerous reactions because they normalise antisemitism. A teacher's failure to intervene could be interpreted by pupils or colleagues as acceptance or affirmation.

That is why it always needs to be made clear that antisemitism will not be tolerated in any of its forms. While the type of intervention could vary depending on

the situation, a substantive discussion focussed on the incident is indispensable. In such cases, educational work must also involve the parents, as the affected pupils often experience conflicts of loyalty between the normative expectations communicated in the school and the family's values. Teachers must also be aware that some pupils' antisemitism is entangled with their own experiences of exclusion and discrimination.

School administrators have a special responsibility to provide structural support through educational and sanctioning measures.

4.2 Classroom instruction and school life

It is not only pupils (and their parents) who spread antisemitic attitudes and prejudices; teachers can do so, too. That is why it is important to develop teaching practices in which all involved are aware that they are part of a society that has a problem with antisemitic attitudes and patterns of thought and speech. Antisemitism must not be externalised or ascribed only to certain groups.

Addressing antisemitism is not solely a matter for certain school subjects. It is called for wherever antisemitic incidents occur, regardless of whether those potentially affected by it are personally present. Protecting those affected and listening to their perspectives are priorities. In teaching about antisemitism in schools and how to deal with it, the following points should be taken into consideration:

- **Antisemitism as a subject of classroom instruction**

Imparting knowledge is a crucial part of dealing with antisemitism in schools, especially in terms of prevention. Instruction about Jewish life and culture past and present⁵ and about the history, forms and consequences of hatred of Jews can be incorporated into many different school subjects. This enables pupils to recognise and oppose antisemitism in all its forms.

- **A respectful and open learning environment**

Creating a respectful and open learning environment is a fundamental requirement for successful education. When dealing with antisemitism in schools, this means that education cannot be about exposing and labelling individuals as antisemites, but rather must instil awareness of the many different causes and forms of antisemitism, as well as its effects. Here it is important to take pupils' experiences and motivations seriously and in doing so

⁵ See [Joint declaration of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on the Teaching of Jewish History, Religion and Culture in Schools](#) (Resolution of the Central Council of Jews in Germany dated 1 September 2016; resolution of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs dated 8 December 2016) and annotated materials for teaching about Jewish life at <https://www.kmk-zentralratderjuden.de/>.

to enable them to reflect on their own involvement in the issue. This also includes self-reflection on the part of teaching staff.

At the same time, not every antisemitic statement is an expression of a consciously antisemitic worldview. That is why a nuanced view is important and finger-pointing is not helpful. Managing a conflict in an educational way means identifying motivations and finding ways to deconstruct antisemitic ideas. This can be achieved through proactive engagement with the effects of prejudices, stigmatisation, racism and antisemitism. Here it is possible to draw on the many offerings of extracurricular educational initiatives.

It is also appropriate to examine existing prevention and intervention approaches for dealing with verbal and/or physical attacks in the context of antisemitism.

- **Civic courage and argumentation strategies**

To enable the whole school community to recognise and actively counter antisemitic attitudes, statements and incidents, it is necessary not only to engage with the substance of the topic but also to introduce further measures that take personal relationships and patterns of communication into account.

Projects, training sessions and workshops in which pupils engage with issues of diversity, respect and courage, and are encouraged to develop their own positions and to participate actively in public debate, are suitable for prevention work. Dispute settlement, class councils and the establishment of rules and rituals can support the development of empathy and other individual capabilities that are necessary for actively countering expressions of antisemitism.

Developing and actively practicing effective lines of counter-argumentation is recommended as a way to counter threatening expressions of religious or political intolerance or intolerant worldviews as well as antisemitic argumentation strategies and hate speech. This approach can be implemented, for example, as part of further training opportunities for specific target groups such as pupil representatives, teachers and parents.

Beyond this, incorporating suitable online materials such as films, interactive quizzes and research tools not only strengthens pupils' media literacy and their ability to act. It can also help to address them at an emotional level and in doing so to deepen their engagement with the issue.

5. Educational policy and administration

The following individual measures are recommended as effective ways to combat antisemitism as part of an overall strategy.

For educational policy and administration it is recommended to

- adopt the IHRA definition as a working definition for schools and school administrative structures in order to create a common foundation for assessing antisemitism;
- provide training on the content and forms of antisemitism for teachers across different subjects and types of schools;
- include or expand, in line with this recommendation, material on past and present Jewish life and on antisemitism when revising curricular requirements;
- sensitise those responsible for approving and selecting textbooks to the need to address antisemitism across different subjects, and also to the danger that some textbooks could subliminally impart and reinforce antisemitism;
- enable pupils to encounter Jewish people, for example through visits to synagogues, the “Meet a Jew” programme as well as exchange programmes and school partnerships with Israel, including e-twinning;
- explicitly include antisemitism in civic education programmes as an established part of antidemocratic movements;
- seek to supplement, strengthen, and boost the effectiveness of schools’ existing prevention and intervention strategies in relation to antisemitism;
- support the inclusion of schools in advisory networks to ensure that antisemitic incidents are reported and addressed within the schools concerned;
- establish suitable monitoring of antisemitic incidents in the federal states in order to make incidents visible, target prevention measures more effectively and develop future approaches;
- ensure and expand the qualification and professionalisation of actors in schools, school leadership and educational administration;
- work together with universities to ensure that training for future teachers of all subjects includes mandatory modules on historical and present-day forms of antisemitism and on dealing with antisemitism;
- likewise, ensure through mandatory training in the second phase of teacher training for all teachers that future teachers develop prevention and intervention skills for dealing with antisemitism, taking into account both historical and present forms of antisemitism.

6. Conclusions

The Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Joint Federal and State Commission to fight antisemitism and protect Jewish life

- will work together to ensure that antisemitic incidents in the school environment are identified as such, investigated and combated;
- will work together to ensure that contemporary Jewish life is discussed at schools and encounters with Jewish people are made possible;
- call for knowledge of antisemitism, Jewish life and history, and the present-day Jewish community to be imparted more thoroughly in teacher training and offer to assist with the development of further training programmes;
- ask the teacher training commission (Kommission Lehrerbildung) to consider expanding their requirements (the “Ländergemeinsamen inhaltlichen Anforderungen für Fachwissenschaften und Fachdidaktiken in der Lehrerbildung” and the “Standards für die Lehrerbildung: Bildungswissenschaften”) accordingly;
- welcome the fact that the development of a pilot project on antisemitism as a topic in teacher training at universities is being explored;
- will organise a joint specialist conference on implementing the recommendation.

Appendix

(As at: 10 June 2021)

Selected relevant literature:

Bernstein, Julia: Antisemitismus an Schulen in Deutschland: Befunde - Analysen - Handlungsoptionen. Weinheim, 2020

Chernivsky, Marina/Lorenz, Friederike: Antisemitismus im Kontext Schule. Deutungen und Umgangsweisen von Lehrer*innen an Berliner Schulen. Berlin, 2020

Salzborn, Samuel/Kurth, Alexandra, Antisemitismus in der Schule, in: Salzborn, Samuel, Schule und Antisemitismus. Politische Bestandsaufnahme und pädagogische Handlungsmöglichkeiten, Weinheim/Basel 2020, pp. 9–65

Additional studies on the issue are available on the website www.kmk-zentralratderjuden.de.

International publications:

[International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Working Definition of Antisemitism](#), Budapest 2016

[European Commission/International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism](#), Luxembourg 2021

Federal and state-level German publications:

[Independent Panel on Antisemitism, Antisemitismus in Deutschland – aktuelle Entwicklungen](#), Berlin 2017

[Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs, Youth and Sport of Baden-Württemberg, Wahrnehmen – Benennen – Handeln. Handreichung zum Umgang mit Antisemitismus an Schulen](#), Stuttgart 2019

Recommendations and publications of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs:

[Remembering our past for our future – Recommendations for a culture of remembrance to form an object of historical and political education in schools](#) (Resolution adopted by the KMK on 11 December 2014)

[Joint declaration of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on the Teaching of Jewish](#)

[History, Religion and Culture in Schools](#) (Resolution of the Central Council of Jews in Germany dated 1 September 2016; resolution of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs dated 8 December 2016)

[Democracy as objective, subject and practice of historical and political education in schools](#) (Resolution adopted by the KMK on 6 March 2009 as amended on 11 October 2018)

[Recommendation of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on the promotion of human rights in schools](#) (Resolution of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of 4 December 1980 in the version of 14 December 2000)

Selected teaching material:

[Annotated collection of materials for teaching about Jewish life](#), compiled by the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs