



## **Education in France - Isabelle**

- Rob For families settling in Brittany, the system of schooling can seem complicated. The names of the various institutions are different. Collège doesn't mean college, for example, and, of course, exams are organised differently. We've asked Isabelle Rodallec, an experienced teacher of English at the Compostal school in Rostrenen, to explain how the education system functions in France. Isabelle, could you start at the beginning when the child goes to school for the first time?
- Isabelle Actually, in France, children start going to school at the age of three. This is called Primary school. So Primary school is divided into two parts actually. There is Maternelle and then Primaire which is CP, Cours préparatoire. When the children are around six and they start, um, learning writing and reading, then you get C1 which is Cours élémentaire numero un. They start being taught grammar and sentences and everything. Then you get C2 which is Cours élémentaire numero deux and then that the end of Primary school.
- Rob At what age would they leave Primary school?
- Isabelle They should start Collège at the age of eleven. So they should start..., they should leave at around ten and a half, eleven.
- Rob Now what is Collège? It's not college.
- Isabelle Collège is the first part of secondary school. So you get four classes again in Collège which is sixième, cinquième, quatrième, troisième. So, at the end of troisième you take an exam which is a bit like the GCSE in England and it is called the DNB, the Diplôme Nationale du Brevet. They take exams at the end of the year in the main subjects which are French, English, History, Geography, and all the other subjects are marked and all the marks, they are used for the final exams.
- Rob And what age would the children be at this time?
- Isabelle Fifteen, sixteen. Then you've got the senior high school which is called Lycée and you've got three different classes again. You've got seconde, première, terminale.
- Rob Terminale means the last year at school?
- Isabelle That's it uh-huh. Seconde is for everybody, so then they arrive in première if they want to and if they are able to. So they've got different possibilities which has got Première professionnelle,

professional premiere and you've got technological and you've got general and at the end of the Première, in any professional, technological or general Première, you've got to take an exam which is a French exam. French literature which is written and oral. There's a lot of pressure for each student to have good marks because these marks are being taken and integrated into the final exam in the following year....

Rob In Terminale.

Isabelle In Terminale.

Rob All the students go through this French exam?

Isabelle Uh-huh.

Rob OK, but not necessarily arrive at Terminale?

Isabelle No, no. That's the first part of the BAC.

Rob I suppose that's the equivalent to the AS-level in England.

Isabelle That's it. So afterwards they've got the Terminale. The Terminale is divided into different series which is chosen by the student at the end of Seconde. You've got Première S which is scientific - S for science. You've got Première ES which is which means Economics Science and you've got the third one which is Literature Première, Terminale L. Those students have got two extra classes, Première Terminale and the subjects are similar but a bit different though. So for example in Première Terminale L you've got three foreign languages.

Rob Three foreign languages apart from French - for example?

Isabelle Usually in France you've got English as a first foreign language, then you got German or Spanish for a second foreign language and then Latin or Italian or Breton for a third foreign language.

Rob Depending on availability of the teachers?

Isabelle That's it.

Rob Three languages, what else?

Isabelle French literature again. You've got Philosophy and you've got History and Geography. So that's seven subjects.

Rob Altogether and Philosophy is something we don't have as a specific subject in England. That's an interesting addition.

Isabelle Oh I think it's a way of making students, ummm, see life differently, become grown-ups. They are going to be around eighteen when they take their BAC so be able to vote and become adults.

Rob I always thought it was training to be argumentative, to be able to discuss which the French like doing so much. Thank you very much Isabelle.



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