

Real French Life

*...read this BEFORE
setting foot in France*

by Stephanie Godwin
(BA.Hons, PGCE, MA.Education)

DISCLAIMER

Although this ebook deals with topics of interest to the buyer of property in France each individual will have their own particular circumstances, so advice in this ebook cannot be comprehensive.

The text in this ebook will provide you with a starting point and allow you to ask questions of professional advisors.

THIS EBOOK IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR SEEKING PROFESSIONAL QUALIFIED ADVICE.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
An Explanation of the French System of Education	6
The Basic Structure	7
Ecole Maternelle	8
Ecole Primaire	10
SEGPA	12
Catholic Schooling	16
The College System	17
Lycee	22
Testing, Testing and more Testing	25
Redoublement	27
A Philosophy of Education	30
A Conclusion of Sorts	40
A Guide to your Children's Welfare in France	42
Money, Money, Money	44
Electricity, Phone and Water	50
Healthcare and Benefits	52
Vaccinations and Schools	55
Insurance	59
Neighbours	62
Parental Responsibility	65
France, an Administrative Nightmare?	68
Real Day to Day Life in France	79
French Indifference	80
Opening Hours	81
The Mairies	84
Cars	85
Driving on the Roads	88
Animals	93
C'est Pas Francais, Madame	98
Basic Grammar for Beginners	115
In Conclusion	129

Introduction

Stephanie Godwin
Mayenne, France
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THERE are many titles on the bookshelves proffering advice and information about buying property in France.

And if the television shows are to be believed then it is possible to roll up one day and start living like a Frenchman, or woman, at the drop of a beret!

But what is the truth, where are the pitfalls and how can you help smooth your family's transition into a very different way of life?

The first thing to do is to read Real French Life and get up to speed on the education system, insurance, welfare benefits and the basics of learning the language.

This ebook provides hard won advice and information from my own family's experiences, and that of my friends and acquaintances.

But also from within the French education system as I have worked in schools in the west of France as well as taught French in schools back in the UK.

Since arriving in the Mayenne region I have seen that foreign school children face particular problems that are sometimes ignored because of the language barrier.

It is possible for English-speaking children to get a decent education in France but there is no beating about the bush it won't be easy for them.

The French system is very critical and perfectionist with school children driven by the stick rather than the carrot.

But you do not have to stand by and watch your child suffer; gaining an understanding of the system will provide you with the confidence to insist on your rights.

That is why Real French Life concentrates on the schooling system from nursery level through to the college system.

It clearly lays out how your children are assessed, the ways to work the system to your child's advantage and what problems to look out for.

But I also felt it was important to provide clear advice on other family issues like insurance, public services and living under the French system.

And I could not leave people stranded so I've also provided a basic guide to learning French from my own experiences of teaching the subject.

I hope this ebook will provide you a valuable insight into ensuring that living a Real French Life is as enjoyable as possible.

À bientôt

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephanie Godwin, has lived in France for more than four years with her husband Jeremy and three children.

The family moved from southern England to pursue their love of showing and breeding terriers and now run a small business from the Mayenne region of France.

Stephanie has an in-depth experience of the French schooling system having taught for sometime in schools when she first arrived in France.

These experiences have been supplemented by putting her own children Holly, 15, Max, 13 and six-year-old Joseph into the state system.

A qualified teacher since 1976 she has taught French in comprehensives and grammar schools across the south of England.

To visit Stephanie's own website please visit
<http://www.parsonrussellterrier.com>

An Explanation of the French System of Education

FIRST STEPS

For those of you who have come to France bringing your kids with you, you may have found the education that greeted them was not what you expected or hoped for.

Primarily, if you were like me, you might not have expected it to be so different. After all the aim of the European Union is to create one united continent with free passage of goods, people and knowledge between the member states.

However, every country is different, and to a certain extent, the educational structure of a country is what defines it and what perpetuates the values and operating beliefs of that society.

I believe that to be able to get the best out of the French schools we need to try and understand what the beliefs and values are that they are supporting; in other words what they are trying to achieve.

To be objective is to be constructive, and this is what matters when it comes to steering your children through a foreign maze.

THE BASIC STRUCTURE

France is divided up into *Academies* for educational purposes. There is the *Academie de Nantes*, which covers the Pays de la Loire for instance.

The rectors of these *Academies* are in ultimate charge; as you can see the power base is a long way from the consumer, which of course is a primary difficulty in getting anything done.

It is these *Academies* which appoint all the teachers and this means that head teachers have little or no say in what goes on in their own school.

This lack of autonomy and power means that they are often disenchanted and switched off from what is going on in their own school and are just waiting for retirement, or are looking for a posting which will suit them better.

The *Academies* also send round inspectors on a regular basis to check that teachers are teaching according to the rulebook.

If they are not, and are found out then it means a decrease in pay, which is not very big anyway!

These inspectors also check that the head teacher is staying within very rigid guidelines as to how a school should be run.

These can vary from trivia such as teachers using the right colour chalk to write on a particular area of the blackboard, as to how the lesson plan registers are filled out.

As you can imagine, there is not much job satisfaction here and in my experience the staff rooms are full of 'burnt out cases'.

ECOLE MATERNELLE

Ecole maternelle is the nursery. It is free and is open to every child from its second birthday as long as they are clean. And make sure they are!

Accidents are frowned on and can often merit a smack at least. One little boy in my son's class, (the equivalent of reception in England) was told off and made to clean his pee up.

As discipline is strict there is little or no bullying and everything is very ordered and organised.

Spontaneity is not encouraged but it is an environment where the child is monitored and occupied.

On the whole, I think the kids seem happy even though they are left at an early age for very long stretches of time. However, testing starts early and you will find that reports home are critical and tend to concentrate on what your child can't do rather than what they can.

Hours are 09:00 to 16.30 with supervised meal times and crèches either end of the day.

Lunch can be ordered and paid for from the *mairie* if you cannot have your child home to lunch and there is a school bus in country areas, which is also organised by the *mairie*.

On the whole, I think that if you come with a child of nursery school age it is advisable to get them into *ecole maternelle* as soon as possible.

The greatest acquisition of language takes place before the age of five and so your child has the opportunity to learn the language as a French child would.

Moreover, it may help avoid them having to redouble.

The obligatory age for starting school is six in France and this is in CP (*cours primaire*).

Many French children have to redouble, even at this early age because it is dictated by the state that they should be literate and numerate by the time they leave CP!

ECOLE PRIMAIRE

Your local primary school may have the *ecole maternelle* attached in which case the transition is easy.

Your child must go in the term he or she turns six, but if he or she is already in *ecole maternelle* you may find that the transition is not so straightforward.

According to birthdays and numbers in classes, your child may go from *grande section* to CP (*classe primaire*) the year before if they have an early birthday and either spend two years in that class, or if they are coping with the work go up to CE (*classe elementaire*) a year early.

This means that a bright, academic child may end up taking their *Brevet* when they are 14, not 15 or 16.

It is worth noting here that education is obligatory and parents who defy this may end up with a hefty fine to pay and even a prison sentence.

You generally have to send your children to the school in which catchment area you live.

However, it is worth seeing the head teacher and the school first and asking them point blank whether they have a problem with teaching foreign kids, if they have any special facilities in place and are prepared to order FLE classes (*Francais Comme une Langue Etrangere*) for your child if necessary.

There is an unfortunate attitude prevalent, especially in the primaries that a child who cannot speak, read and

write French, as its mother tongue must be mentally deficient.

If they struggle, which of course they do, the tendency is to mark them down as remedial and in need of *soutien* which is to be avoided at all costs as your child may already be on the route to SEGPA (school for those with learning and behavioural problems).

If you can find a school, which is receptive towards foreign children this would be a good start!

The classes go like this:

Classe Primaire	(CP) is for 6-7 year olds
Classe Elementaire	(CE1) for 7-8
	(CE2) 8-9
Classe Moyenne	(CM1) 9-10
	(CM2) 10-11

**This is the end of your free
introductory chapter...**

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