Our country is one of growing diversity, especially in our schools. Many pupils come from families with direct personal experience of immigration. A third of all our children and young people under the age of 15 come from an immigrant background. Over 80 per cent of them are German citizens. This means that we have a new generation of German pupils, a situation to which not only teachers and curricula must adapt. Textbooks also need to take this societal development into account. As Erich Kästner once put it: “Every now and then, cast a critical eye at your textbooks! They did not originate at Mount Sinai, and usually not even in a sensible manner; rather, they are based on old textbooks, which are based on old textbooks, which are based on old textbooks, which are based on old textbooks. People call it tradition. I call it something else”.

How can migration and integration be adequately conveyed in the light of these demographical and societal developments? What can we do to foster an inclusive use of language in textbooks in order to inspire a sense of belonging among all pupils and to avoid exclusion? This study, which I commissioned from the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in cooperation with the Centre for Diversity, Democracy and Inclusion in Education at the University of Hildesheim, examines whether and how textbooks reflect integration and migration, as well as the social diversity they bring. The study inspires critical discourse and provides the foundations for developing and improving textbooks. One key result, for instance, has been that, in the textbooks analysed, migration is primarily depicted as a subject of conflict or crisis. Only rarely do we see an approach that portrays diversity arising from migration as something normal. At the same time, there are several examples that – when prepared well – can provide a basis for a productive discussion, but which at first glance, and by a certain percentage of pupils in the classroom, may be perceived as discriminatory, such as caricatures that are loaded with clichés.

We are a country that welcomes migrants. Let us work together on transporting this image of ourselves into our textbooks.

AYDAN ÖZOĞUZ
Minister of State to the Federal Chancellor
Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration