Hitler appeared to be very clear in his expectations of German young people (see Source A). They were the means to his end of creating a new, racially pure German Reich in the East: boys were to be conditioned for the tough life of soldiers and empire-builders, while girls would play their part in

**SOURCE A**

Hitler writing in *Mein Kampf*, 1924:

A less well-educated, but physically healthy individual with a sound, firm character, full of determination and willpower, is more valuable to the völkisch community than an intellectual weakling.

**SOURCE B**

The 'ideal' German family

- Study Source B. What clues does this piece of propaganda give you about how boys and girls were to be educated under the Nazis?

**Key terms**

Nazis

schools

youth

indoctrination,

anti-Semitism

Napola

National Socialism

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increasing Germany's population. Both would have to be prepared carefully for their new roles — so what was life like in the classrooms of the Third Reich?

**SOURCE C**

Mathematics problems from a 1930s German textbook:

1. The construction of a lunatic asylum costs 6 million marks. How many houses at 15,000 marks each could have been built for that amount?
2. A plane on take-off carries 12 bombs, each weighing ten kilos. The aircraft makes for Warsaw, the centre of international Jewry. It bombs the town. On take-off with all bombs on board and a fuel tank containing 1500 kilos of fuel the aircraft weighed 8 tonnes. When it returned from the crusade, there were still 230 tonnes of fuel left. What is the weight of the aircraft when empty?

www.johndclare.net/Nazi_Germany3_Youth.htm

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**The curriculum**

There were significant curriculum changes: biology lessons stressed the superiority of the Aryan race, history lessons emphasised German military greatness and the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles. Ideology and the study of warfare could even appear in maths textbooks (see Source C). Geography covered the German need for Lebenraum (living space) and sport became a more prominent part of the timetable, mainly at the expense of religious education. For girls, the study of eugenics and domestic science appeared in their timetable; they left school with little doubt of their role in Nazi society and the need to maintain racial purity by selecting a suitable breeding partner.

**The teachers**

The Nazis quickly targeted and sacked those teachers they considered to be ideological enemies of the Third Reich. Teachers were ‘encouraged’ to join the NSLB — the National Socialist Teachers’ League; by 1937 over 97% had done so. There were even special camps set up for those who remained unconvinced of the merits of Nazi ideology. Teaching qualifications eventually became less important than party membership when applying for posts within schools. Hitler reportedly considered using retired army sergeants to fill a growing shortage of trained teachers by 1937.

**How was anti-Semitism encouraged within schools?**

German children were left in no doubt of the differences between the ‘Aryan’ and Jewish races (see Source D). Teachers and pupils were encouraged to stigmatise Jewish children, and propaganda was increasingly used to encourage anti-Semitism. Stories such as The Poison Mushroom (see Source E) persuaded ‘Aryan’ children from an early age of the inherent threat posed by the Jewish race. Jewish men were often portrayed as deceitful, unshaven, fat and (often) preying upon young German women. The Nazis’ appreciation of effective propaganda is evident in the vividly coloured pictures.

**How were schools changed under the Nazis?**

The man in charge of education was Bernhard Rust, a former schoolteacher who had been dismissed in 1930 for misconduct. Rust had suffered a severe head wound while fighting during the First World War and this had certainly affected his mental state. He did, however, succeed in ensuring that control of education was taken away from individual states and placed firmly into the hands of the Nazis.

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**Poster entitled ‘German youth, Jewish youth’ displayed throughout Germany**
What were the effects of Nazi education policy?

The educational standards of students fell alarmingly from 1933 onwards. Behaviour became an issue because teachers were wary of disciplining pupils in a country where the word of one person could ensure arrest by the Gestapo. Many boys were tired of the constant demands of being members of the Hitler Youth (see Sources F and G) and lacked the capacity for further schoolwork. The sight of a young German boy tired and listless on a Monday morning after a weekend of marching and drilling with the Hitler Youth became a familiar one to many teachers. It is certainly true that the regime considered the Hitler Youth a far more reliable vehicle for the education and indoctrination of Germany’s young people than the schools.

Throughout the 1930s the number of teachers declined. It is not known for sure why this was, but certainly the fear of being reported by one of the pupils, the continued low pay, and the prospect of a better job elsewhere all played their part. The Nazis’ solution was simply to make it easier for less qualified people to become teachers, thereby helping to create even lower educational standards. Universities were eventually complaining that new entrants had not attained the basic educational levels in schools required for the study of a degree.

Was the standard of education any better in the elite schools?

There were two principal types of elite institutions set up for boys of school age during the 1930s: the Napolas (National Political Educational Institutions), and the Adolf Hitler schools. The Napolas (see Source H), which eventually came under the control of Heinrich Himmler’s SS in 1937, aimed to mould boys for the new ruling class of Europe in which they could expect to obtain the leading posts within the military, political and industrial sectors of the Third Reich. A heavy emphasis was placed upon discipline and physical fitness — individual classes were called ‘platoons’. Beatings were common and certainly not discouraged by those in charge of the schools, which were effectively boarding schools.

Report on education in Bavaria, 1937:

The extraordinary attitude displayed by large numbers of our young people to school in general...gives rise to concern for the future. Many pupils believe they can simply drift through for eight years and secure their school-leaving certificate with minimal intellectual performance. The schools receive no support whatsoever from the Hitler Youth units; on the contrary, it is those pupils who are in positions of leadership there who often display unmanners behaviour and laziness at school. School discipline has declined to an alarming extent.

From Germany, the Third Reich, 1933–45 by Geoff Layton, 2000
The Adolf Hitler schools were founded by Robert Ley, a leading Nazi in charge of the DAF (the German Labour Front), who like many others was becoming jealous of Himmler's influence over these elite establishments. The Adolf Hitler schools aimed to produce politicians as opposed to soldiers, and those selected certainly enjoyed a privileged experience consisting of sailing, fencing, horse riding and even flying.

**Elite schools**

Entry to the elite schools was open to all German boys, irrespective of social class; any working-class boy who successfully graduated would, in theory, have a far greater range of opportunities than he would have experienced normally. In this way the Nazis hoped they would create a *Volksgemeinschaft* (a people's community), in which social background mattered little compared to allegiance to the Führer and National Socialism itself.

Part of the elite school curriculum involved working alongside agricultural and industrial workers, since it was these people the boys would be commanding in their future roles. Anyone hoping to join an elite school would have to prove their ancestry back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is also worth remembering Hitler's natural distrust of teachers and schools - it was the youth organizations, as opposed to the teachers, which put boys forward for selection. The elite, it seemed, were being selected according to their ideological beliefs and not their intelligence.

There is little evidence, however, that educational standards were any better in the elite schools than in others. The heavy emphasis placed upon ideology and the preoccupation with the 'Jewish problem' (all Jewish children were expelled from state schools in 1938) meant there was no space left for independent thought or ideas. All subjects had to be taught within this strict ideological framework.

Compared to the normal schools, the Napolas placed a greater emphasis upon physical fitness and the playing of war games. Each entrant to the Napolas was given his own dagger. The majority of Napolas graduates went into the *Wehrmacht*, the German Army. This did not prevent complaints from the *Wehrmacht* that young men wishing to become officers were ignorant of many aspects of German life.

**Conclusion**

The Nazi regime did not require 'intellectual weaklings', and it is important to consider this point carefully when evaluating the standards of its educational system. The vast majority of young people consented to the regime and instances of opposition, such as the Edelweiss Pirates or Sophie Scholl and the Weisse Rose, were rare. Those leaving the Napolas and Adolf Hitler schools served their Führer faithfully on the Eastern Front in the USSR and elsewhere, many fighting with distinction. In this sense the Nazis had achieved their aim. Even in the last few weeks of the war Napolas boys were assisting in the defence of Berlin, under siege from a vengeful Red Army.