

Interparens Memo on JTC meeting 7-8 February 2019

The European Schools' Joint Teaching Committee (JTC) gathered for its regular meeting early last month in Brussels. With this info letter InterParents would like to inform all parents associations about the main points of discussion and the decisions taken.

The (enlarged) JTC comprises representatives of all stakeholders of the European Schools: the Office of the Secretary General (OSGES), the European Commission (DG HR), directors, deputy directors, teachers, parents and students. The Member States are represented by their inspectors.

New marking scale: IP suggestions welcome

The WG presented its latest results - the document was made available only on the day of the meeting. During a lively discussion about the new marking scale, several stakeholders raised concerns and reserved further judgement until the document could be studied fully. IP made three points on the general approach which were welcomed by stakeholders, namely by OSGES and the directors.

- 1) There is a need for a closer follow-up of how the implementation of the new marking scale is proceeding.
- 2) In particular, we need to know whether all teachers are applying the scale in the same way.
- 3) We have to make sure the "outside world" understands the new system fully. It is the responsibility of the system to guarantee this, as only then can our schools expect equal and fair treatment by tertiary education institutions of the MS (In this context, IP notes with dismay that Germany has decided to prematurely formalise an equivalence table).

New syllabi - IP asks about intended benefits

Up for discussion were: New Science, Maths, Integrated Science, Chemistry, Physics, Lithuanian LI, Slovak LI, Philosophy S6-S7 2 periods, Political Sciences complementary course S6-S7, Sociology complementary course S6-S7. Only first two were discussed.

There was just a brief general discussion about the new science and maths syllabi which are very much still work in progress (OSGES). In the context of syllabus reform, IP argued for an inclusion of the trans-school competitions like the science symposium ESSS and the art event FAMES to be included in the syllabus.

As there were short discussions only on Maths, IP sent other interventions (on, Integrated Science, Physics, and the future organization of the European Schools' Science Symposium) to the WG coordinators, supporting in particular the need to integrate experimental work as a key element in the science curricula.

IP welcomes new handbook on ESSS but calls for more transparency in candidate selection

A good way of insuring selection transparency would be to have local science and arts festivals preceding the main events where students would be selected for them. This would also raise awareness of and indirect participation in the main events.

Interim report of the WG for induction of new teachers: IP calls for stronger role for directors

In some Member States, the national legislation limits the role of the inspector in the selection process of seconded teachers. IP therefore believes it to be essential that the directors have the opportunity to validate the candidates, notably concerning their ability to teach in a foreign language and their capacity to use mandatory tools like the calculator for higher level secondary maths and science.

The WG (which has 11 participants, incl. representatives of directors, deputies, teachers, accredited schools and parents) has completed its surveys among management, teachers and inspectors and is in the process of analysing the findings. A final draft report will be presented in October.

Statistical report on Education Support (ES): IP calls for harmonisation of practices

Some interesting facts emerged from this report which does not give any recommendations (there are two different reports providing this and they were discussed later): Since 2015, the number of pupils receiving ES has risen by 4,24% to 1100 (23%) in all EEs. More than half of teachers involved in ES are specifically qualified or experienced. IP noted with gratitude that progress is being made with ES provision but that better harmonisation is needed as different schools take different views on supposedly same type of support.

Follow-up report of the IT pedagogical WG - OSGES hopes for approval of its new IT policy, "Digital Education Vision for the European School system (DEVES)" at BoG meeting in April.

BAC: Controversy about new pre-BAC rules

This year for the first time schools were not allowed to work with the original exam scripts, resulting in thousands of copies having to be made. Also, the results cannot be shown until six weeks after the last exam in January. Deputy directors called this "unsustainable" and "pedagogically unsound". Student and parent reps agreed with the criticism, calling also for students to be involved in the preparatory work in the WG. OSGES acknowledged the problems raised and asked the JTC to mandate a WG with students included.

Draft action plan on Educational Support (ES) and Inclusive Education: evaluation of inclusiveness policy to start this summer. WG has provided draft concise action plan.

In autumn 2020, a report by the European School system is due to be delivered to the UN, following the recommendation of its Committee on the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) of 2015. By then, the policy evaluation, which is to be "independent" and "external", is to be concluded. IP stated its support for the exercise and welcomed Commissioner Oettinger's public confirmation of it, while at the same time urging to resist attempts to reduce the broad scope of the external evaluation.

The Greek BoG presidency has also initiated a pilot project on **Early Identification** "to develop instruments/tools for primary school teachers in order to support them in the identification of contextual variables that may affect the functioning of children with ADD and/or ADHD". IP generally supports the project but pointed out the discrepancy between the project's title (broad scope) and its description (narrow aim). OSGES would like to identify the pilot school. The project is scheduled to start in September this year.

Educational Support.

Changes to the procedure and template to request Special Arrangements for the BAC cycle: IP welcomes transition to new electronic system but raises concerns about new application deadline (moved back half a year from April to October in S5).

Brexit

In the discussion about BREXIT and the unexpected letter of the UK authorities sent to all our UK teachers early this year, Interparents expressed again the opinion that Pedagogical continuity and the best interest of the students in our system should always prevail over any political consideration. Inter Parents mentioned, in that respect, that one of the measures included in the package to increase the attractiveness of the schools should address the Brexit impact on teaching staff by allowing to offer permanent contracts to ex seconded UK teachers. OSGES stated that new deadline stands but promised to show flexibility.

Plans for European Schools to create “middle management structure” are welcomed by all stakeholders in general, but various concerns are raised.

The current draft proposes the creation of a new post of Assistant Deputy Director, but it might come at the cost of Educational Adviser posts. Interparents recalled that providing attractive career opportunities in the schools is important in securing the best staff, but clearly challenging, especially with the disparity between seconded and locally recruited staff.

Language Policy in the European Schools - IP welcomes the adoption of their suggestions, but says definition and role of “dominant language” still unclear.

Equally, the Setting and Streaming practices for L2 and L3 courses vary greatly in individual schools and continue to be controversial. The issue was put on the agenda of the next meeting of the Pedagogical Reform WG upon request by OSGES.

Regarding “dominant language”, IP reiterated its position that the concept “does not and should not replace the concept of ‘mother tongue’ in a wholesale manner as seems to be the case in the current document”. IP strongly criticized the new practice of “comparative testing” for language proficiency as “an excess of time, energy and money spent on determining small differences between languages which might, in the end, serve a child equally well in his education”. IP believes that if a language is spoken in the home, no testing should be needed—when unclear a single test should suffice to know if a child meets the expected standard. IP urged that the working group look specifically at the criteria used to determine which children are sent for testing.

Draft Proposals to Increase the Attractiveness of the European Schools for Teaching Staff: IP supports proposals and urges their speedy implementation.

OSGES stated that they hope to get BoG approval possibly already in April for the first measures.

Various

At the JTC the Dossier of Conformity- Ecole Européenne de Paris la Défense was approved and the Regulations on Accredited European Schools was further discussed.

About the Creation of a Lithuanian language section in the European School Lux 1, Interparents recalled that we particularly oppose any compulsory change of section during the pupil's time at the school due to the social and pedagogical impact that this entails.

In the discussion about the new document on career guidance Interparents noticed in its intervention that there is a significant modification leading to the reduction of the help given today to the students, who wish to study outside Europe. Interparents asked also to add the possibility to request the preparation of a dossier from the school even after the acquisition of the BAC.

At the end of the meeting Interparents took also the opportunity to bring the subject of "Diversity and Inclusion in the European Schools" at the attention of the JTC stakeholders, insisting on the expectation of the parents that our schools are safe, inclusive and respectful places for all learners. Interparents called for a working group to be set up to look at what can be done to ensure that we implement best practices regarding Diversity and Inclusion, something that goes beyond educational support as it is currently envisaged.