

Brussels, 1st March 2020.

Dear Mr Marcheggiano, dear School Directors,

The parent community would like to thank OSGES and the individual school directors for their collaboration over the past week as we all look to understand the impact of COVID-19 on our school communities.

The current spread of COVID-19 in Europe and particularly in Member States where European Schools are located suggest that European Schools should be well prepared and ready to put in place necessary measures to prevent the spread of the disease and to ensure the pedagogical continuity of the schools.

For that reason, Interparents kindly requests the OSGES and the School Directors to reflect on the measures to be implemented in the coming days, either at central or at local level, to combine coordination with flexibility to address the local circumstances.

We have grouped our concerns and suggestions in different areas of interest:

1) School trips and inter-school events

Interparents has identified (without the intention to be exhaustive nor necessarily 100% accurate) the following upcoming multi school (or para-school) events and school trips:

A) Upcoming multi school events:

- i) 7 March 2020: BAC Euronight school party Luxembourg
- ii) 11-14 March 2020: FAMES in Luxembourg
- iii) 11-13 March 2020: Model European Council in Munich
- iv) 20 March 2020: CoSUP Spring Ball Brussels
- v) Week of 23 March: School Trips*
- vi) 31 March – 2 April: Model United Nations Brussels
- vii) 10-11 March: Budgetary Committee in Brussels
- viii) 14-17 April 2020: Board of Governors and Interparents meeting in Alicante
- ix) 26-29 April 2020: ESSS Karlsruhe

B) School trips:

All schools have trips planned over the coming weeks and months, many of which are international.

C) School Outings:

All schools have ongoing school outings planned be these cutlural, sport, historical or other in nature. These school outings should be reassessed regular in the context of the evolving situation.

The first weeks of March will be an extremely critical period for preventing virus transmission, and therefore, Interparents would like to suggest a coordinated and clearer communication especially regarding the March trips, outings and events. Interparents would also like to suggest a comprehensive plan of all international and inter school events for the remainder of the school year, including the estimated health, contagion and containment risk per trip on the basis of all official information (WHO, ECDC).

Until such assessment has been done, Interparents believe that it might be appropriate to leave it to the parents to decide whether students should attend events, outings and trips. Parents should be made aware beforehand of any financial costs, which may result from non-reimbursable cancellations.

2) **School Attendance:**

Given the rapidly evolving situation, it seems prudent to allow parents, if they so wish, to keep their children home (without the need for medical certificates) for at least a day or two starting March 2, 2020. This will allow schools to take stock of how many staff and students are impacted by the directives currently in place, as well as implement proper hygiene practices (hand soap, disinfectant and instructive posters) throughout the schools.

The lack of harmonized communication on this point has already led to some confusion amongst parents.

Summary: whilst the situation is constantly evolving, the final decision should rest with parents regarding whether to send their children to school (or as stated above, on school trips or to interschool events). This should be clearly communicated to all schools and all parents. Situation is valid only whilst OSGES takes stock of position and co-ordinates with relevant experts. In the immediate short term, parents should be allowed to keep children at home without medical certificates.

Within this context, school tests (for example, B tests in S4) should be postponed. School organisation, in general, should be more flexible because of anticipated absences of teaching staff and/or pupils. Sufficient efforts must be deployed on a daily basis in sharing best practices with teachers, school and APEEE staff in terms of prevention and hygiene.

3) **Remote teaching and learning**

Interparents would like to request OSGES for information about possible plans for remote learning, in particular concerning medium term solutions which might need some preparation time before putting into practice and taking the following into consideration:

- i) virtual classrooms
- ii) email assignments
- iii) technology platforms available for teachers & training for teachers (O365/Teams)
- iv) can we mobilise our parent community to support our schools?

Interparents considers it essential that teachers should provide full information on O365/SMS on the materials covered in each lesson, homework and assignments. This needs to be a priority as the length of absences in some cases might be lengthy.

A fortiori, BAC cycle pupils must be given priority in ensuring clear assignments and e-learning to minimise the disruption in the BAC cycle.

Interparents considers it important to leverage technological solutions to enable virtual classes for any schools current or future who may need to cancel lessons for some or all of their pupils. We understand that O365 can support video conference calls and thus virtual classrooms – and possibly also has the option to record virtual classes. If this functionality does exist, it is worth exploring as quickly as possible:

- Is it available to all schools?
- Have teachers received training? If not, how quickly can teacher training be rolled out?
- Are there any barriers to teachers being able to use this technology to support virtual classes, pod classes or individual teaching?

In any event, it is important to ensure:

For secondary:

- classroom materials and details in SMS for isolated absences (in O365 for the schools already using this functionality)
- virtual class solutions in the event that whole classes cannot take place face to face

For primary:

- for isolated cases: primary teachers should communicate material and assignments
- for systematic whole class cancellations, consideration of using some rotation with teachers interacting by video conference with individual pupils or small pods to support written communication of assignments and homework.

Beyond that, are OSGES considering how to share best practices for teaching remotely amongst teacher population?

Certain theoretical standards were set out by DG Security and OSGES following the terrorist attacks in Brussels in 2016. These could be followed under the current circumstances.

4) Common Hygiene Standards to be adhered to in all our schools

Interparents would like to request information about possible standards to be adhered in all our schools, in particular:

- i) public notices (i.e. posters, signs) to pupils in key areas re standard advice - keeping social distance, hand washing, use of hand sanitiser etc
- ii) education of pupils with class teachers
- iii) basic good practice regarding contagious disease, following national guidelines currently being communicated across Europe
- iv) the roles and involvement of medical staff and of the Schools' Prevention Officers

In order to maintain social distancing, does some short term rescheduling of break times need to be considered?

Practically, we recognise that Nursery and Primary pupils in particular may need to have specific hand washing time scheduled into their timetable, whilst for older pupils the installation of hand sanitiser pumps in each classroom could be considered as well as promoting the practice of using these pumps upon entering into the room.

We recognise the change that needs to take place in many of our schools in order to ensure that these basic hygiene measures are successfully implemented and therefore would also like to understand who and how the pupils will be educated in order to install new behaviours. Interparents understands from our parent community that many of our schools are lacking in basic provisions - particularly soap and hand sanitisers.

5) Information and Communication

During the difficult days, weeks and months ahead, Interparents believe that it is critical that information is shared across our school communities in a transparent and timely manner whilst respecting the individual rights of pupils, teachers and staff not to be identified by any statistics or information shared. We believe that it is appropriate to understand per school how many teachers, staff and pupils are or have been in quarantine and for how long. This will allow everyone to better understand the impact of the virus on our school communities and to have a view on whether the measures in place are appropriate or should be adjusted.

We suggest that the eursc website could be a suitable platform to communicate ongoing updates with perhaps a written message sent to parents and other members of the school communities more formally on a weekly basis. We take this opportunity to highlight the benefits of repeated recaps of previous communications.

6) Teacher/Staff guidelines in case of concern

It is essential to have a clear policy for teachers and staff on the procedure to be followed should a member of our school community be positively tested for coronavirus. This should include any steps necessary to determine contacts to prevent the virus from spreading. Interparents would also like to understand what contingency measures are in place, or could be put into place to ensure continuity of education in the event that multiple staff or teachers are not fit to work.

Interparents request that all teachers are reminded to ask pupils where they have been during the holidays or proceeding 14 days as appropriate. There should be a clear policy in place for teachers and staff to follow in the event that they suspect that pupils have been in a red zone in the previous 14 days. It goes without saying that all members of the school community should be kept fully up to date about what constitutes a red zone. In addition, it should be clear to teachers and staff the steps they should take if they suspect that a pupils is unwell.

We would suggest that it is the responsibility of each director and their management team to ensure that they track the local situation closely and reconcile the advice given by OSGES with local requirements including, where appropriate, liaising with other schools in the region to ensure consistency of approach and clarity of communication with key stakeholders.

Interparents would support any measure that school management considers necessary to prevent and contain the virus in the immediate term, including teacher absences.

7) Direct communication flow from commission experts

As per potential terrorist attacks, we received firm commitments and follow-up recommendations from the European Commission to support our schools on prevention and security. A similar situation should now occur with Covid-19, including a direct communication flow from Commission experts to all European schools and the quick transmission of information from experts to school directors through the Office of the Secretary General.

As always, Interparent representatives are at your disposal should you wish to discuss any of the points we have made in greater detail and we very much hope that you have found our summary helpful given the challenges that this week will bring.

Yours Sincerely,

Pere Moles Palleja
President
Interparents