



COMITE CENTRAL DU PERSONNEL

CCP – II/vdn

Note for the attention of Ms Georgieva Vice-President of the Commission

Subject: European Schools: Urgent issues raised by parents' associations

The parents associations, in particular those of Brussels, are seeking better cooperation with the Staff Committees because, in the past, they have found European Commission representatives in various fora (Central Enrolment Authority, Board of Governors, Groupe de Suivi, working groups) to be deaf to parents' concerns and lacking any coherent agenda beyond cost savings.

The Central Staff Committee has met the parents associations and would like to inform the Commission of serious issues affecting parents over the long term and urge the Commission to better represent their employees' best interests on these matters that are in more detail explained in the annex to this note.

The CSC is ready to engage in direct discussion with you and the relevant services to redress the situation.

Ignazio IACONO
CSC President

Copies: Mr. K. Kivinen, General Secretary EE
Mr. G. Marcheggiano, Deputy Secretary-General EE
Ms. I. Souka, General Directeur, HR
Mr. M.U. Moricca and Ms. M. Saude, HR
Parent Associations/Interparents
LSCs and CSC

Summary of Issues Covered

Brussels Issues:

- **Lack of Longer Term Strategy for Brussels Schools**
- **Berkendael**
- **Safety and Security in the Brussels Schools**
- **Lack of Centralised System for Replacement Teachers**

System-Wide Issues:

- **Secondary Reform Process**
- **Cost Sharing**

Brussels Issues

1. Brussels Schools Overcrowding:

EEBI: capacity 3100; currently 3381

EEBII: capacity 2850; currently 3027

EEBIII: capacity 2650; currently 3010

EEBIV: capacity ~2900; currently 2520 (*S7 not yet opened*)

- **Lack of Longer Term Strategy for Brussels Schools¹:**

Stakeholders have yet to be presented with a long-term strategy for the Brussels Schools, despite repeated requests. In the most recent update from the Belgian government, it was suggested that pre-fabricated buildings would be used on our campuses starting from 2017 while we await the elusive fifth campus². At the same time, the Secretary General continues to move ahead with plans to fill the Berkendael site with the “spillover” from the Brussels student population (an additional 450 pupils are predicted for next year). The process is flawed and decisions with long-term consequences continue to be driven by the expediencies of the annual enrolment policy. Moreover, as population growth outstrips the supply of infrastructure, there is a real concern that the system will soon be unable to accommodate all category I students.

Parents would like to see a 10-year plan with contingencies based on the infrastructure possibilities³. Such a plan has been requested from the Secretary General of the schools at the Central Enrolment Authority (CEA) and Groupe de Suivi (GdS) by parents and even directors, with little or no support from

1 Beyond Brussels, there is a strong need of a vision and proper strategy for the development of the European Schools at the remote (JRC) sites to preserve the attractiveness of the sites.

2 Note, the infrastructure shortage is not specific to the Brussels schools; Germany and Italy have also failed to provide the infrastructure required by the schools within a reasonable time period.

3 Specifically related to the proposed fifth school, it remains unclear where it will be (3 proposed sites), which language sections and levels might eventually be located there, and how the structure of the school might affect the existing school populations. The means envisioned for populating the school (all at once with forced transfers or gradually by new parents or some combination) as well as the its relation to the proposed Berkendael campus also remain unclear.

the Commission. Several Member States also requested transparent long-term planning at the December 2014 BoG.

Action:

- The Commission should request the Secretary General's Office to provide a long-term plan for the Brussels schools and should support any planning process with detailed forecasts of population growth. Plans should be presented and discussed with stakeholders in the relevant consultative bodies (i.e. Groupe de Suivi, Budget Committee and Board of Governors).
- **Berkendael, and specifically the treatment of the future parents of Berkendael:** The Berkendael/Primary Campus proposal sent to the 2014 Board of Governors suggested a double standard would be set, with Berkendael families receiving different treatment from other families in the system, specifically:
 - they would be forced to re-enrol their children in secondary with no assurances as to the site;
 - funding for infrastructure/resources would be limited;
 - seconded teachers would likely not be supplied in some sections;
 - and there would likely be extreme difficulty in the provision of transport, canteen and extra-curricular services.

Parents likewise raised concerns that the school would be populated from the bottom up, an approach which effectively creates a prolonged "learning curve" for the school administration, teachers and parents association.

Despite the defeat of the Berkendael/Primary Campus proposal in December 2014, the Berkendael/EEBI Annex proposal currently being floated suffers from the same problems. Beyond this, the new proposal puts EEBI at risk, creating a legal responsibility for pupils admitted to the site without clarity about the long-term provision for these children. The proposal likewise fails to address the emerging problem of overcrowding in the secondary level of all four Brussels schools. Finally, the Secretary General's Office has once again relied on the inefficient practice of splitting and thinning existing sections in order to fill the new site. Parents and directors have drawn attention to the adverse effects of such a practice on the sections and schools already in place. Better long-term planning could address these issues.

Actions:

- The Commission should consider the specific needs of the future parents of Berkendael and should ensure an equity of treatment for families across the system.
- The Commission should put pressure on the Belgian authorities to provide a suitable permanent site in due time.
- (See above) The Commission should request the Secretary General's Office to provide a long-term plan and should support any planning process with detailed forecasts of population growth.

2. Safety and Security in the Brussels Schools:

Parents have repeatedly raised concerns about safety and security in the schools, and have managed to gain some attention for the issue; however two years after EEBI suffered a serious gas leak that exposed fundamental weaknesses in the school's preparedness, the European Schools system has still to implement basic measures to address this.

Basic measures include:

- appointment of a qualified individual (or alternatively the creation of a Risk Management Unit) in the offices of the Secretary General to oversee safety, security and regulatory compliance in all the European Schools;

- appointment of management-level safety and security officers reporting directly to the headmaster in each school. This is in keeping with the recent Commission's safety and security audit recommendation;
- development and implementation of an safety and security audit, to be administered periodically (e.g. biannually) in all schools according to a standard template and preferably to be undertaken by independent external experts;
- inclusion of safety and security reports as a regular agenda item for the Board of Governors to ensure the topic gets the needed attention in the higher levels of the governance structure.

Parents believe that gaps and lapses in safety and security constitute a failure of governance. The Board of Governors has by definition a fiduciary responsibility to the staff and pupils in the schools.

Actions:

- The Commission should oversee the creation of a post/unit to oversee safety, security and compliance in the 14 European Schools.
- The Commission should work with the Secretary General and the Board of Governors to put in place a robust and independent safety and security audit process.

3. Lack of Centralised System for Replacement Teachers:

Teacher absences in our schools can result in days and sometimes weeks of missed classes. Replacing absent teachers for most language sections remains difficult. It has been suggested that centralising the replacement procedure for the Brussels Schools would create efficiencies, particularly for the six language sections (enrolling a majority of the students) which are located at more than one school. Currently, each school stands as an independent institution, and the rules prevent the SG's office from managing such a centralised list of teachers. Rules should be changed to facilitate such centralised services.

Action:

- The Commission should examine the possibility of creating centralised services, such as a centralised replacement list, and should work with the Secretary General's Office to overcome legal barriers and logistical obstacles in order to streamline our system.

System-Wide Issues

1. Secondary Reform Process:

In December 2013, the BoG's voted for an external review of the secondary reform proposals developed by the Secondary Studies Working Group. The final report by the Institute of Education (London), delivered in summer 2015 and accepted by the Secretary General's Office, has deemed both the proposals and the current system unfit-for-purpose. The staffing of the schools has been identified as a real problem with recommendations for training and a rethink of limited-term secondment, which result in a loss of institutional memory.

Parents have called for a task force comprising both internal and external experts to consider the findings of the report, and specifically to develop a new curriculum from the top down. In the Secondary Studies Working Group, reconvened in September to treat this issue, parents demands were broadly supported. Parents would specifically welcome the involvement of DG EAC in the reform process and would urge the Commission to bring internal pedagogical expertise to bear in the continued development of the European Schools.

Nevertheless, parents are becoming more and more concerned that there is no plan to explore and invest in the “improvements to teacher capacity” that the Institute of Education deemed a pre-condition for reform. The Commission should respond to questions related to the staffing of the schools, the need for middle management, the utility of the 9-year contracts, the competitiveness of the local-hire salaries and benefits and the induction and training of the teachers in situ. The reforms will, simply put, require an investment of resources, funds which Member States and the Commission seem unwilling to spend even if efficiencies are made elsewhere.

Actions:

- The Commission should continue to support the Task Force and should commit to funding the reform process from planning through to implementation. Ideally, the DG EAC will be closely involved in the early work to set the curriculum standards.
- The Commission should review the “staffing question,” related to contracts, induction and training, inspection and the workload and roles (including coordination tasks) set for individual teachers. If necessary, the Commission should call for a working group to be formed on the staffing question.
- The Commission should guide the progress on local contracts⁴ by engaging in negotiations with Belgium and the Secretary General's Office to ensure that more favourable contracts are in place before the start of the next school year. The Commission should continue to urge Member States to inspect locally contracted staff.

2. Cost Sharing:

After years of haggling, a cost sharing agreement was passed in 2014. Parents had low expectations of this agreement, and they have not been disappointed; the European Schools system remains under-financed and over-burdened. Limits on the number of seconded teachers put in place by several Member States still remain, and the stress on the individual schools is increasing. A cost sharing solution should still be sought.

We believe that the Commission should take the lead on this file and encourage an out-of-the-box discussion beyond short-term budget expediencies. Those funding the system should specifically consider a shift from the direct contribution of Member States (through the secondment of staff) to an indirect contribution to the EU Budget. Ideally, contracted teachers could be offered permanent civil servant status, with salary and conditions comparable to equivalent EU staff.

Actions:

- The Commission should re-initiate discussions on equitable burden sharing in the European Schools and consider a range of funding models. A Memorandum of Understanding signed between Member States and the Commission would be an important milestone in what promises to be a long process.
- (As above) The Commission should guide the progress on local contracts by engaging in negotiations with Belgium and the Secretary General's Office to ensure that more favourable contracts are in place before the start of the next school year. The Commission should continue to urge Member States to inspect locally contracted staff.

4 In some of our schools (e.g. Laeken), locally hired staff make up almost 50% of the total number of staff.