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Pedagogical Development Unit

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Creation of a Working Group on inclusivity and tolerance at school

Joint Teaching Committee

Meeting on 10 and 11 October 2019

INCLUSIVENESS: countering intolerance, bias and discrimination

Background

In 2008, the Board of Governors agreed that the protection, care, and welfare of children within the European Schools system are of paramount importance.[1] For that reason, they agreed in guidelines on Child Protection and recommended that in the areas identified in the document schools should ensure that they are taking appropriate action.

The Board of Governors also agreed that the *"ethos of each school should be founded on a basis of mutual respect between all members of the school community, in order to encourage the self-respect of the pupils and to preserve their right to emotional and physical privacy. It was also mentioned that the personal freedom and the right to human dignity is a fundamental constitutional right of everyone, including all participants in education..."*

Among the problems that were identified that the system faces in ensuring children's safety are the variables which are inevitable in a context in which there are twenty-eight nations with different laws, priorities and approaches, seconding teachers to thirteen schools in six different countries.

It was agreed that *"all European Schools should provide a respectful environment for pupils and all employees ensuring respectful class and out of class communication between teachers and pupils and protecting the pupils against any form of discrimination, therefore any stereotyping of pupils based on their nationality, gender, sexual orientation, race, handicap, special needs, etc. should be avoided by both teachers and students. In accordance with this goal schools should provide education in personal relations, encouragement of respect and opportunities and inclusion for all members of the school community, regardless of race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender, disability and special educational need."*

Education on inclusiveness

Discrimination and marginalisation are common forms of intolerance. But intolerance may also reveal itself in less visible forms, such as stereotyping, prejudice, and bias. The victims of intolerance may exhibit a variety of now familiar symptoms:

- Substance abuse
- Ongoing and repetitive illnesses
- Depression and anxiety
- Poor school attendance
- Underperformance at school and potential school drop out
- And – in the most severe cases- perhaps even attempted or achieved suicide.

Education on inclusiveness should be aimed at both students and staff. The goal should be to counter influences that lead to exclusion of others, and should help young people develop capacities for independent judgment, critical thinking, open-minded reasoning and resiliance. It implies respecting different: political, religious and social opinions; forms of expression; genders; affective choices; and ways of being human.

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[1]   Document 2007-D-441-en-5

Since 2008, it has become apparent that with the explosion of social networks, the seriousness of the situations that students need to confront has escalated. We are living in an environment where social media has a significant impact on the lives of our children. This has created, in practice, serious risk for students who are the target of social intolerance. In the most extreme cases, students may resort to desperate measures, but more frequently families turn to the schools to request urgent intervention. And once these situations have escalated to the internet, they are often irreversible.

As advised by the Child Protection document *"schools [...] should educate pupils on good behaviour on the internet and safe internet use in order to avoid cases of web-bullying or false accusations, etc."* Students need to be trained to be able to understand their own risks, including the potential disciplinary and criminal actions against them when they are involved in cyberbullying. Many students are not aware that what happens in chats is not a game but is real life with real victims and real consequences.

Measures supporting inclusiveness

But the need goes beyond the education of pupils and staff. The schools should also be given key guidance in putting Inclusiveness into action. A system-wide Diversity and Inclusion Charter may be drafted, and generic templates can be produced for policies and procedures supporting inclusiveness (templates which still allow each school to take into account its local legal context). Policy templates may include but should not be limited to: Bullying/CyberBullying Policies, Complaints Policies, Internet Use Policies, etc.

Schools should be encouraged to identify safe spaces and confidential advisors who can support victims of intolerance and other vulnerable populations. Management should be given guidance on potential areas where school rules should be interpreted in the best interest of the child.

Proposal

With regard to what is expressed in the above document, Interparents invites the Joint Teaching Committee to approve the creation of a Working Group on "**Inclusiveness: countering intolerance, bias and discrimination",** and to give a mandate:

1) to draft a system-wide Diversity and Inclusion Charter;

2) to propose the necessary measures to promote education on inclusiveness in the European Schools;

and 3) to provide concrete guidance to School Management on putting Inclusiveness into practice.

The composition of the Working Group could include:

- an inspector for nursery and primary,
- an inspector for secondary,
- one Director,
- one Deputy Director for Nursery and Primary,
- one Deputy Director for Secondary,
- a representative of the teachers,
- a representative of the parents
- a representative of the students

- the possibility to invite external experts.