



## Background

Two former pupils of the European school of Brussel I (Uccle) has published an article about the mental health issue, which seems a call for help. This problem is not new among practitioners and students' community but this seems a clear message that actions are urged and solutions to be found.

### **Mental health crisis in European Schools community**

<https://www.neweurope.eu/article/a-mental-health-crisis-in-the-european-schools-community/>

Below in Italic, only few interesting pieces ...

The article starts with the tragic incident occurred in the ES of Munich ...however,

*In our research, we have been led to conclude that this was not a one-off oversight, but instead that the **European Schools are struggling to meet even the most basic needs of students**. Interviews with students, teachers, parents and management across the prestigious institutions show **wellbeing to be an overarching issue that goes unaddressed, due to structural weaknesses and the resulting social tensions**.*

...

*These 27,000 or so students are feeling the adverse effects of a **chronic lack of resources, combined with understaffing on top of overcrowding and a problematic one-of-a-kind organizational structure**. This and a **high-demand curriculum results in a climate conducive to bullying, mental health issues and drug abuse for the impressionable minds placed in its care**.*

B. Goggins has been interviewed and recognises the issue ...

*"There is a massive pressure for other things – these people [middle management and experts] need to be paid, therefore it is hard to provide funding for many things since they all draw on the budget. [...] Mental health in schools is absolutely key, and I think that is something that should be delivered in schools and funded, but the European Schools are not the only schools requesting resources and not getting them", he says.*

*The school in Uccle, like most, employs a part-time psychologist 3 days per week to intervene in emergency cases, but not intended to provide in-house therapy. When this year, the student body and the Parents' Association jointly tried to increase her presence for the 1960 secondary students in a bid to improve mental health and reduce stigma, the Board of Governors adduced budgetary priorities.*

We do believe that this is a general problem, not specific to ES (see ESPAD Data). Unfortunately, the prolonged coronavirus crisis has amplified its magnitude.

## Actions WELL BEING WORKING GROUP

**APEEE Well-Being working group aims to work on mental health on 360 degree as we see that the school even if willing and capable to move from its position -as a big institution- will move slowly.**

We are collaborating with CdE and the school psychologist to address the issue. We are also in contact with other ES in Bruxelles to share ideas and thoughts. The group is also in contact with the management of the school, where we are discussing to identify and integrate in the curricula well-being activities (Belgian EVRAS, DRUGS, Phylo, ...),

More attention to the well-being topic was also confirmed recently as it has been discussed in several meetings and papers ...

- INTERPARENTS JTC proposal "Creation of a WG on inclusivity and tolerance at school" (October 2019)
- EEBI Admin Board – psychologist request; Child Protection Policy request; Drug Programme/Anti-Addiction Policy request (2019-2020)
- Student article on the "Mental health crisis in European Schools community" (September 2020)
- INTERPARENTS and COSUP proposals to include "mental health and well-being" into Whole School Inspection Criteria and Pedagogical Reform work (October 2020-January 2021)
- EEBI Admin Board – psychologist request; risk registers (25 January 2021)
- Commission DGHR Groupe d'Accompagnement with parent associations and local staff committees (5 February 2021)
- COSUP JTC proposal - "Student Well Being" (February 2021)

Five years ago the issue was already discussed in the world of education, and the mental health issues seems only starting in secondary and continuing at university. The sooner to tackle, the better it is. It does not affect specifically the ES. ESs could however have some specific features, and below some ideas about main causes:

- ES is a complete but small system, suffering of diseconomies of scales vs much better resources and much larger national systems. The ES face chronic **underfunding**;
- **Overcrowding** has a huge impact on mental health ( 1 teacher for 30 students, no space in the courtyard ... rise to high number of conflicts, fighting for space, )
- Mental health survey Woluwe, with worrying results ... self-harm main worry and unstable and weak mental health;
- Stress of teachers;
- High demand curriculum;
- Slow and bureaucratic governance;
- COVID, and its measures, are obviously worsening the mental health, therefore putting enormous pressure on students well-being.

Results from studies conducted in 2018, show how students would expect from parents, teachers, student advisors, educators in general a **more emotional preparedness, together with pedagogical preparedness**. This would allow them to have/build up the tools to go through the transition from one phase to the next in their school life ( from early secondary to upper secondary, from upper to university and lastly to the work life) in a healthier way. In EEB1 discussions are ongoing ... however we can share some ideas about how APEEE could support:

**Kicked off and actions under discussion**

- Mental health survey in UCCLC;
- Increase Psy support through number of Psychologists;
- Intervention for students “Covid impact on teenagers: fears, feelings, experiences, what did we learn from it, effects, etc.” in the context of Value Project
- PWC Capacity Audit
- Key facilities: Uccle Primary “Calm Room”
- Key policies: Child Protection Policy and supporting policies and structures (e.g. pastoral care); Homework Policy

Some ideas to be discussed:

#### **“Long-Term” Mental Health**

- Create a Mental health culture, alongside the physical health culture
- Promote wellness among students: sleeping, nutrition, physical exercise, socially active ( not isolated)Mental health annual check-up (few minutes during annual visit ... to assess feasibility)
- Mental health day or week both for students and teachers
- Mental health programs as part of the ethics/moral curricula (values, mindfulness & stress management, art therapy on self-harm, trauma experienced, influences about educations)
- Key policies: Mobile Phone Policy, Bullying/Cyberbullying Policy
- Key structures: personne de confiance, peer counselling, development of extracurricular activities/projects
- Key facilities: development of free active and quiet spaces

#### **“Short-Term” Well Being during COVID**

- “Video On” Practice
- Renewed interest in movement and outings during school day
- Letter to secondary teachers (ala Laeken)
- Other?

**Anything interesting to share?**