

Uccle/Berkendael

Brussels, 14 May 2021

To:

Ms Gertrud Ingestad, Director-General Human Resources and Security, European Commission

SUBJECT: Proposed Half Days of European Schools in June 2021

Dear Ms Ingestad,

A series of staff surveys conducted by the European Commission has confirmed that parents in particular of younger children are unable to carry out their professional duties in an effective manner when their children are at home instead of being at school. These surveys moreover showed that staff members in such situation are more likely to suffer physical and psychological consequences from high levels of stress.

Against this background, we would like to bring to your attention concerns about the decision of the four Brussels European Schools to cut short the present school year. Specifically, parents have been informed that the four schools intend to teach half days only for Nursery to S3 students during the last two weeks of the school year from 22 June to 1 July and not at all on 2 July 2021, while S4 to S6 students will finish school between 23 and 28 June depending on the year level. We note that in the official annual school calendar, these days are foreseen to be full school days. The reason given by the management for the decision to cancel teaching hours during the last two weeks of school is that after a long and complicated school year, class council meetings normally held after teaching hours will this year be held during teaching hours in order to reduce the burden on teachers.

The EEBI APEEE regrets the decision taken and the impact this will have on students and their parents. This has been a tough year for the entire school community and parents appreciate the significant efforts by hardworking teachers in difficult circumstances and understand that this has taken a toll. Nevertheless despite the best efforts of teachers, students and parents, in many cases the pandemic has made it difficult for classes to master the full curriculum foreseen for the school year. We have already asked the Director of EEBI to reconsider this decision and have also contacted the Secretary-General of the European Schools to ask that he intervene.

The EEBI APEEE underlines that the decision is in contradiction of applicable regulations, which stipulate that:

- the school year must comprise of a minimum of 180 working days for pupils;¹

¹ General Rules of the European Schools, Annex 1, Rules Concerning the Schools Year. Please note that no Baccalaureate orals are taking place this year, and thus there is no reason to cancel regular class for



- class councils must take place outside school hours.²

The school therefore has no legal basis for holding class councils during what should be regular school hours, nor for curtailing the school year. The EEBI APEEE objects to any shortening of the school year against the spirit or text of the applicable rules.³ We believe that the present decision is particularly problematic given the considerable teaching time already lost this year as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to significant disruptions in students' education and social development. Primary and early Secondary parents in particular are concerned that they are again being asked to look after their young children during their working hours.

We appeal to the Directorate-General Human Resources and Security of the European Commission to intervene and ensure compliance with the applicable regulations governing the European Schools so as not to place further strain on parents again having to both, work and take care of their children during working hours during two additional weeks just ahead of the nine week-long school summer recess.

Kind regards,

Kathryn Máthé
President EEBI APEEE

Copy:

Mr Marco-Umberto Moricca, Director, Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security, European Commission

Mr Georges Vlandas, President, Local Staff Committees of the European Commission, Brussels

S4-S6 students or to prevent exams being held later in the month.

² General Rules of the European Schools Article 17, Convening and Chairing of Councils

³ <http://www.uccleparents.org/apeee/prises-de-position/180-jours-de-cours/?lang=en>. The APEEE has previously raised concerns about cancelled school days and a failure to adhere to the 180-days rule at EEBI Admin Boards in January 2019, September 2019, and January 2020.