

Committee on Culture and Education
The Chair

Mr Giancarlo Marcheggiano
Secretary-General of the European Schools
Rue de la Science 23
1040 Brussels

D 302442 28.05.2021

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Subject: European Schools – follow-up to exchange of views and recent events

Dear Secretary-General,

The EP's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) has always been keen to follow the developments of and promote the system of European Schools, particularly considering the genuine European added value of this system. Following the exchange of views held with the Secretariat-General and the parents' associations of the European Schools in February 2021, the Committee has decided to deal with the current state of the system of European Schools, the challenges it is faced with and future perspectives of development in a structured manner aimed at facilitating improvements in the years to come. As a first step, an external study has been commissioned by CULT, designed to examine existing problems and provide recommendations for action to be taken at political level.

In this context, I also wanted to express our particular thanks to you and your Deputy, Mr Beckmann, for providing encompassing information and data on different aspects of the system of the European Schools in the wake of our February exchange of views, in particular pertaining to the financing of the system of the European Schools and the status of the improvements as regards the Schools' financial management, as well as the recognition of the European Baccalaureate and national equivalence tables. This information will significantly contribute to the work of our Committee as well as the forthcoming study.

We would appreciate if you could provide a comprehensive overview on the follow-up of the recommendations of the CULT Committee's report of 2011 on the European Schools ("Cavada Report"), as kindly offered by Mr Beckmann in his letter of 8 April 2021. Similarly, we would be grateful if you could share with us further information as regards the state of secondments of teachers from Member States, educational support and inclusive education, sustainable development, the situation of students without a language section (SWALS) and the situation of the European Schools in Brussels.

The latter is of particular concern to our Committee, not only due to the structural overcrowding of the Brussels-based schools, but also in view of recent developments and events, two of which I take the liberty of directly addressing given their time sensitivity:

1) Organisation of the end of the school year 2021:

Following complaints addressed to different Members of our Committee, and inquiries by the CULT Secretariat, we were surprised to learn of the decision of the directors of

the four Brussels schools to shorten school days to half days in the period from 22 June until 2 July. The reasoning provided by the schools is as follows: “[...] to allow for robust discussion and analysis of our pupils’ progress after what has been a challenging year for all. Online learning has had an impact on all pupils’ learning and development in all cycles. We must also take into consideration the social and emotional impact of the various hygiene and sanitary measures and the consequences of these for pupils’ wellbeing. The motivation for the decision was also to ensure that staff will not need to remain in class councils until late in the evening as is the usual practice. We wish to respect that they have also had a very difficult year and want to avoid that they will need to remain late into the evening in the final 2 weeks of school.”

Especially the latter part of the motivation appears to be questionable: In the context of the ongoing pandemic, there is a widely shared sense in Europe and around the globe that education is a fundamental right which needs to be upheld for the overall well-being and development of children and society as a whole. This includes that the provision of education should be ensured by all means available. As commendable as it is that the Brussels Schools want to properly assess the impact of the different measures adopted so far on the pedagogical, physical and psychological well-being and development of children, the time required to carry out this exercise can under no circumstances be to the detriment of the quality and quantity of education provided to pupils. Moreover, the argument that the last year was a difficult one hardly applies exclusively to the teachers of the European Schools, and it seems difficult to understand why it would be asking too much “to remain late into the evening in the final 2 weeks of school” when many of the parents concerned by this decision have done exactly that for many months.

Against this backdrop, and while fully respecting the autonomy of the European Schools when it comes to its internal organisation, we would ask you and the directors of the Brussels-based European Schools to reconsider this decision, which in the current context sends the wrong message to pupils, parents and the outside world alike.

2) Measures against harassment, intimidation and bullying:

Our Committee learned of the recent passing of a 17-year-old pupil at the Woluwe School, and our thoughts are with his mourning family, his friends, classmates and teachers. In the wake of this tragic event, hasty conclusions should not be made, and a proper assessment of the most adequate action to avoid similar tragedies in the future is required. However, this news undoubtedly reminds us of the need to step up efforts to actively and decisively address the persistent problems of harassment, intimidation and bullying in schools, including the European Schools. Thus, we would like to encourage you to ensure that these issues are decisively tackled in the European Schools and that adequate resources are made available to provide mental health support, inter alia by providing pupils with unhindered access to highly trained mental health professionals. In this regard, allow me to express the full support of the CULT Committee.

I would be most grateful if you could devote your attention to these two issues as a matter of priority, and I thank you in advance for providing the requested additional information related to the mid- and long-term challenges faced by the system of the European Schools, as addressing these challenges remains a priority for our Committee.

With kind regards and looking forward to continuing the trustful cooperation between the CULT Committee and the European Schools,



Sabine Verheyen

CC:

- Johannes Hahn, European Commission, Commissioner for Budget and Administration
- Gertrud Ingestad, European Commission, Director-General for Human Resources and Security