



JANUARY 2021

# Berkendael School

Newsletter



## NEWSLETTER OF BERKENDAEL CLASS REPRESENTATIVES

FOR PARENTS BY PARENTS

2020 n'a pas été une année facile mais à l'heure du bilan, il ressort que beaucoup de sujets ont avancé positivement pour les élèves de Berkendael.

Tout d'abord pour nos P5 actuels, le droit à la poursuite des études en secondaire à Uccle ou le choix prioritaire pour l'un des autres sites des écoles européennes a été acquis. Ensuite, une rapide intégration des suggestions des parents concernant l'enseignement à distance et la prise de fonction d'une nouvelle équipe APEEE en dialogue avec la direction des écoles européennes. Nous proposons d'approfondir également d'autres sujets d'importance dans cette newsletter comme les travaux du groupe pédagogique, du groupe pour les enfants surdoués et du groupe sur le bien-être à l'école.

Bonne lecture et tous nos vœux pour une année 2021 pleine de joie et de santé !

2020 was certainly not an easy year, but it turns out that many issues have moved forward positively for the pupils of Berkendael.

First of all, for our current and future P5 pupils, we have finally obtained the automatic right to pursue their secondary curricular in Uccle or, upon priority request, at the school of their choice in one of the other European schools in Brussels. A swift inclusion of the parents' suggestions for the home schooling comes next, together with the fact that our APEEE team has started to liaise with the board of the European schools. In this newsletter's edition, we therefore invite you to dig in other issues of importance such as the works carried by the pedagogical group, the gifted children group and the well-being group.

Enjoy the reading! We wish you all a happy and healthy year 2021!



# ISSUES THAT MATTER TO US

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## **Distance Teaching and Learning**

The APEEE has made great efforts to support the adoption of a clear Distance Learning (DL) Strategy: by cycle/level by the school, harmonising practices and tools. A Distance Teaching and Learning Policy was adopted, and the final version will be published in January, together with some best practice guidelines to complement the policy. All European schools should comply with these requirements.

Parents' feedback on distance learning was communicated to the direction during the Educational Council on 8 December. Parents representatives handed over a parents' feedback report with constructive proposals. School informed that a few changes would be introduced in the distance learning compared to the November DL period.

**Nursery:** lessons to be organised in smaller groups (max. 9 pupils), 4 days a week. No lessons on Wednesdays.

**P1-P5:** The time schedule for the morning online connexion remains. No more compulsory meeting/lesson in the early afternoon. Instead, the teacher prepares a video about the course material, so pupils have this info always available, thus allowing more flexibility. Teachers remain available on Teams throughout the school day. Pedagogical Council (CE) reps pointed out that measures foreseen are identical for P1 to P5, while parents do see a necessary differentiation of approaches depending on levels (importance of correction of exercises in P3 to P5 that can be done online, real need for the video capsule in P1-P2)

**L2:** Online lessons to be carried out 4 days a week (no Wednesday session) in addition to offline work.



## **Enrolment policy and guidelines 2021-2022**

This year enrolment policy of the European schools brings a major change for Berkendael pupils. Indeed, starting from this year:

All Berkendael children have the right, once they complete P5 at Berkendael, to continue their secondary education at the Uccle site of our school EEB-1<sup>1</sup>. Their younger siblings would however not be transferred with them and would remain on the Berkendael site until they complete P5 as well.

In addition, all children currently inscribed at Berkendael, whatever the level, will obtain the additional right to request a compulsory transfer to EEB-2 (Woluwé), EEB-3 (Ixelles) or EEB-4 (Laeken) when they complete P5 at Berkendael. This transfer request will be given first priority for available S1 places<sup>2</sup> in these schools. When requesting such a transfer, they will be able to ask for a joint transfer with their younger siblings at Berkendael. This additional right will not apply to any children joining Berkendael as of September 2021. Those children will automatically continue their education at Uccle site once they complete their P5 at Berkendael.

This change is a major improvement over the past situation, children completing P5 had to request a 'compulsory transfer' to one of the four European schools in Brussels, without certainty as regards the school in which there would be places for them. Indeed, such a transfer gave children enrolled at Berkendael priority over other enrolments, but it did not entail the creation of new classes to accommodate them.

The new policy brings an end to the unfair situation where children enrolled at Berkendael did not enjoy the same certainty as all other children in Brussels-based European schools, who could continue their secondary education in the same school they completed their primary education.

As parents association, we have been fighting this situation for years. This autumn, we managed to bring the issue to the Board of Governors of the European Schools, which defines the yearly enrolment policy. Our requests received the support from the European Commission and eventually the Board of Governors decided in December to adopt the policy described above. We warmly welcome this.

Details are available in the guidelines for the 2021-22 enrolment policy, published [here](#).

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<sup>1</sup> This applies to the French, German, Spanish, Italian and English sections where there is a corresponding section in Uccle. Children from the Greek section will continue their education in Ixelles, Latvian children will continue to Woluwé (SWALS) and Slovak children to Ixelles (SWALS).

<sup>2</sup> In practice, this means that they would come before any other inscription for the available places (which are the places left - up to the maximum number of pupils per class - once children already enrolled in that school and moving from P5 to S1 have been accounted for). However, no new classes will be created to accommodate them



## **APEEE General Assembly 8 December 2020**

Over 200 members attended the meeting, and successfully practiced digital vote. The annual activity and financial report as well as a 2020-2021 budget were approved. There was a presentation by the direction as well as a discussion on COVID prevention measures, pedagogical continuity, assessment future of the Brussels schools, and relations with the school. [Documents](#) have been uploaded to the APEEE website.

You can find there a presentation by the APEEE about **successes and areas for improvement** in 2020, the 2020 **activity report**, as well as a document listing all **questions that have been addressed** by parents to the school management.

Most notably, many parents asked Mr Goggins, the EEB-1 Director, about the reasons behind the extension of the distant learning period from 7th to 17th of January 2021. Reference was made to a survey run in the FR section which showed that a majority of parents of that section was in favour of a return to school in situ by 11th January and did not understand the school management's decision. The same feedback was obtained from a large majority of parents from other sections as well. However, Mr Goggins strongly reiterated his position, claiming that this decision had been made based on the directors' responsibility for health and safety, in consultation of the relevant authorities and medical staff. Teacher representatives had welcomed the extended home schooling period in January.

At the return to school in January, there is no change for the canteen: no meals are allowed for primary pupils due to Belgian federal decision; nursery classes are currently using the main canteen. Adaptation will be done once authorised by the national authorities.

Although it can be challenging for the APEEE to find a consensus among and within the different language sections on all issues, in all situations the APEEE focuses on concrete elements that can help all parents. On the divisive question of partial or full closure of school and distance learning periods, the APEEE focused on asking questions to management, targeting problematic situations (e.g. vulnerable families), promoting a "Culture of Prevention" (hygiene, distancing, mask wearing, ventilation, Coronalertapp, APEEE website COVID-19 Update), and ensuring pedagogical continuity in all scenarios.



# PARENTAL NETWORK

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## **PEDAGOGICAL GROUP - interview with Marc Guitart, coordinator of the group**

**Hello Marc, could you please introduce yourself to our readers?**

I am one of EEB1 parents, as all of us. I have been more involved with the APEEE for the last couple of years, with the aim to improve the wellbeing of our kids, having always their interest as leitmotiv. My background is in child clinical psychology. We came to Brussels in 2005 and have kids in S6, P5 and P3. Our P5 son was in the Berkendael site during the years Fabiola building was closed.



**What has the Pedagogical Group been focusing on so far, and what are the priorities and challenges for 2021?**

The Pedagogical Group functions as an umbrella group for several issue-driven subgroups and dossiers, as you can see in the [APEEE web site](#), and always needed of volunteer parents wishing to be involved in any of them: Educational Support, Languages, Baccalaureat, Interparents, Sport, Science and Technology...

The priority and main challenge of the PedGroup for 2021 is, as you can imagine, the school distant learning strategy. Our main concern is how to ensure the pedagogical continuity in a range of scenarios: for quarantined or vulnerable individuals who cannot attend classes in situ, for quarantined classes or levels; for teachers teaching from home; and for scenarios requiring hybrid (rotation) or full distance teaching.

We have received positive feedback from families on the efforts from the school to ensure a more harmonised programme across all cycles and sections, as APEEE has been asking for since March. We have also been reassured by increased communication to parents of the arrangements put in place, so I would encourage more frequent and formal consultation of parent representation on the strategy and specifics proposed.



### **How do you see Berkendael's involvement in the PedGroup?**

There are several very active parents from Berkendael in the PedGroup. I do not like saying that Berkendael is well represented in the group, because PedGroup does not function as a political party. We are just parents from both sites wishing to improve the quality of life and learning of our kids.

### **Is there anything else you would like to share with us?**

All of us are under great pressure in difficult or very difficult circumstances, with professional, familiar and personal challenges. We need to put all what we do under this perspective.

I believe dialogue helps to overcome these added difficulties. In the same way that under the PedGroup the different sections reps discuss and share ideas and proposals, Interparents exchange regular information, share best practices and work together for the interest of the ES communities. I truly believe that, with open, sincere and frequent dialogue between the parents and the school, we will all overcome more easily the challenges Covid is imposing. I would like to advocate from this tribune to the parents' access to the school sites as soon as possible. We are school allies and an essential part of this great community.

## **PARENTS NETWORK FOR GIFTED CHILDREN - interview with Arantzazu Golderos, coordinator of the network**

### **What are the main objectives of the Gifted Children Network?**

Having been part of the Special Education Needs group of the APEEE for some time, I felt that, as a mother of a gifted child, the existing educational support did not cater for the specific needs of gifted pupils.

Existing formally since January 2020, the objective of the Network is to create an effective educational support strategy for gifted pupils so that our children can thrive and meet their full potential.





At the same time, we want to establish a support network for pupils and parents. Parents can feel very lonely in this process, especially when they just find out and have not references or support network.

As a first step in achieving those objectives, we have just launched a **survey** to identify among our children those who are gifted. You can access the survey [here](#). We invite anyone who knows or suspects that their kids could be in this group to fill it in.

### **When is a child "gifted"? Are not all children gifted in their own way?**

Certainly all children have their talents. However, statistically only 2 in 100 children of the same age group are gifted, meaning that their IQ is higher than 130.

### **If they are so clever, why is it so important that they benefit from special educational support?**

Giftedness is often misunderstood. Gifted children are fundamentally different. First, it is not only that their cognitive development is usually ahead of his/her age. Often, they experience a mismatch between their cognitive and emotional development. In general, they are also highly sensitive, intense, perfectionistic kids that tend to react more strongly to external stimuli (for example, noisy classroom).

Second, it is believed that, because of their intelligence, they can develop their skills on their own and/or excel in every area. That is not true. On the one hand, gifted children have also their strengths and own interests. Those interests may become a focal point so that they do not concentrate on those subjects they find uninteresting/unworthy of their time.

On the other hand, they need to be challenged in order to develop their own potential. Insufficient challenge can lead to boredom, frustration, behavioural issues and, in the worst cases, school dropout or more serious psychological conditions like depression. It is estimated that 20 to 25% of gifted children have social and emotional difficulties (about twice as many than the general population of students). Up to 25% of gifted students drop out of school. Therefore, many gifted kids become underachievers.

A school and learning environment that is not responsive to their needs can affect very negatively their development. That is why specific educational support may be vital.

### **What is it like to be the mother of a gifted child?**

Parenting a gifted child can be very demanding. From an early age, you need to juggle their intellectual demands while ensuring their emotional wellbeing. They can appear very mature for their age and at the same time be extremely sensitive and fragile. Combined with an innate intensity, makes raising gifted children a constant challenge.



### **If I suspect my child is gifted, would you advise testing him/her?**

Definitely, yes. The benefit is that it allows parents and hopefully the school to identify potential issues and what tools to use to address their needs. Understanding our children is essential for parents and teachers alike.

If anyone has questions or would like more information about testing or in general about the network, I invite them to visit our [webpage](#) or contact us directly (for Uccle: [arantzazu.golderos@ec.europa.eu](mailto:arantzazu.golderos@ec.europa.eu); for Berkendael: [savova.margarita@gmail.com](mailto:savova.margarita@gmail.com)).

### **WELL-BEING GROUP - interview with Sara Dagostini, coordinator of the group**

Well-being - a word that has become increasingly popular in recent years. The dictionary gives the following definition: the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy. Who wouldn't want to feel like this today? With the global crisis we are facing and our children spending more time in front of screens than ever, providing them with a safe and comfortable environment is extremely important. It turns out that the parents of the EEB1 school, Uccle site, have set up a working group a few years ago, which helps the school to make it a more and more friendly place.

#### **Sara, what was behind the idea to create the well-being group, why did you feel that such a body was needed in the European school?**

I was not there at the origin of the group, as I took over the coordination only two years ago. Personally, I feel that the need of having such a group is to ensure a personal and social development of pupils in parallel to the pedagogical development. Today the importance of developing skills such as self-esteem, ability to manage emotions, assertive communication and awareness of new digital risk has become of paramount importance.



I strongly believe that the school has an important role to create/reinforce these skills, to build a cushion against addictions and contribute to the well-being of the children. School should be a safe and happy place.



### **What issues does the well-being group specifically deal with?**

The Well-being working group aims at accompanying the pupils, via the school and the parents, to build a healthy personal, mental and social development. The members of the group, through parents' feedback and active contribution, look into the challenges faced these days by children and parents and sometimes teachers.

Our focus is recently on prevention of addictions, bullying and cyberbullying, EVRAS, mindfulness and safe internet and social media.

### **What is your group's work like? How important is parents' involvement in this project?**

Parents, who volunteer and, beside their busy life, find some time to manage a well-being project, are the backbone of the group. Parents' involvement is essential and never too much.

We are organised in sub-working groups per topic. Each member is responsible for one topic/project and manages it independently. For some topics, group members are part of a task force, together with school management. They are regularly in contact to discuss, share updates and progress; communication is mainly via email or via phone. Meetings are usually organised twice a year.

The group proposes projects for students and parents' conferences, and submits them via the APEEE funding calls. In general, funding calls are launched two times per year, and all parents/teachers/working groups can apply from both Uccle and Berkendael for all types of projects (well-being projects are part of it). An independent award panel recommends to the APEEE Board, which makes the final decision about the awarded projects.

### **Do you operate at both seats of the school? Have you organised any project at Berkendael?**

The group is part of the APEEE of EEB1, including both sites. Parents/ members are volunteers, some are from Uccle and only a few from Berkendael. We are actually still looking for volunteers from Berkendael. Having a new Deputy Director this year, it is a perfect moment to join us, get in contact with the school management and together discuss about the needs, priorities and future projects. If you are interested in our activities, please contact the secretariat at [info@uccleparents.org](mailto:info@uccleparents.org)

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