

Uccle/Berkendael

Brussels, 7 June 2022

To:

Brian Goggins, Director, European School Brussels 1

SUBJECT: Management Decision to Shorten the Secondary School Calendar in June 2022

Dear Mr Goggins,

The APEEE is writing to voice our concerns about the decision taken by the school management to shorten the approved school calendar this year by 10 days for Secondary S1-S4 students and by 5 days for S5-S6 students¹. The APEEE has already raised concerns for several years regarding the school management's failure to comply with the European School calendar rules (ref. [General Rules of the European Schools, Annex I](#)), see our letters dated 20 April 2021 and more recently 5 May 2022 (Annexes 1 and 2), and we can only express disappointment that the school has again opted not to comply with system regulations. We also regret that this year's decision was communicated to parents very late (Friday 13 May, in the afternoon), thus making it difficult for families to organise alternatives for their children.

We are very well aware that the Board of Governors grants the European Schools the possibility of suspending regular lessons in the Secondary cycle during the days required for the Baccalaureate oral examinations at the end of the school year. Nevertheless, we would note that even in cases where the school management may opt to suspend regular lessons, they are still required to provide schooling for Secondary students through the end of the year in the form of replacement activities, which should be planned sufficiently far in advance to ensure a quality offer (ref. [2006-D-2810-en-2](#)).

The APEEE believes that all EEB1 students should be offered 180 school days (jours de cours) each year, without discrimination. For several years, we have urged the school to provide replacement activities when it chooses to suspend lessons and to ensure that these activities derive from the curriculum and are pedagogical in nature. (One option we have proposed is to organise a full-scale Project Week during this period, but other arrangements could also be envisaged.²)

¹ For those S5 students not participating in the one-week voluntary work-experience programme, the school year is actually shorter by 10 days. Based on parent feedback, it seems that many students have not been able to find work-placements due to weakness in the design of the work-experience programme and lack of support provided.

² We note that both the European School Alicante and EEB2-Woluwe have previously organised programmes that comply with the system rules and are highly appreciated by secondary students and families. In this regard, the Sport Day organised by our school in June 2019 was also considered a good start.



You may find the APEEE's full position on 180-days-of-school here: <http://www.uccleparents.org/apieee/prises-de-position/180-jours-de-cours/?lang=en>.

We are thus seriously concerned that the school management did not plan replacement activities for our S1-S6 pupils, with the consequence that our students will receive less school time than their Secondary peers at several other European Schools, not to mention across Europe. In your communications to parents (Annexes 3 and 4), you explain that:

1. *priority must be given to S7 students.* But the Bacculaureate is not an unforeseen urgency that would require prioritising of one group of students over another. In fact, preparation for the Bacculaureate already begins in S1 and missed schooling in lower years accumulates and inevitably impacts final results down the line.
2. *teachers and classrooms are being used for exams and are therefore not available for regular lessons.* But this does not explain why replacement activities cannot be organised. We also have figures from 2019 suggesting a high number of Secondary teachers (over 90%) is available each day.
3. *our calendar is set based on the timetable of external examiners and EEB1 is also used as an examination correction centre.* But we wonder why the schedule of a few external examiners and use of our premises for system-level administrative tasks takes priority over the schooling of more than 1500 students.
4. *it is an extremely busy period for everyone, including class councils, exam resits and correction of exams.* But according to the European School regulations, class councils must be held outside of school hours, and exam resits and corrections should be part the regular work of teachers (as it is in the December and January exam sessions).
5. *you have recommended that next year's school calendar be annotated with a short note that explains the missed days.* But we wonder how this measure addresses the already many years' failure to comply with the rules in place.

In all this, we find surprisingly little concern about the educational impact of such measures on our students. And we wonder how many days of school the management would feel it is acceptable to cancel based on the arguments laid out above. In sum, we are deeply concerned about this alarming trend. In this regard, we note that 10 missed days of school marks a new high for EEB1.³

We wanted to inform you that we will also be forwarding our concerns to the Secretary General and the Commission to urge compliance with the rules. We believe that this alarming trend of cutting school days for logistical reasons, with no will to find pedagogical alternatives, must be treated in the higher instances, so we will be requesting that both INTERPARENTS and the Commission bring the issue to the Board of Governors.

³ In 2018, Secondary pupils missed 7 school days at the end of the year, and in 2019, they missed 5 school days as 2 days of pedagogical activities were organised. It is worth underscoring that the actual school days provided to students are further reduced once missed classes during the school year due to inter alia non-replaced teachers absences are taken into account.



In the end, this year EEB1 Secondary parents have been left with no alternative but to pay for garderie-style care activities when they rightfully expected their kids to have proper schooling. We hope that we will not find ourselves in this situation again.

Valentina PAPA

President EEBI APEEE

Copy:

Susanne Künster, Deputy Director for Secondary

ANNEX 1

Uccle/Berkendael

Brussels, 20 April 2021

To:

Brian Goggins, Director, European School Brussels 1

SUBJECT: Proposed Half Days of school in June 2021

Dear Mr Goggins,

The EEBI APEEEE takes issue with the proposed measures related to the end of school year calendar and asks that the management reconsider their proposals in keeping with the European School regulations and good teaching practice.

In particular, the APEEEE points to the proposal to hold half-days of school for nursery to S3 students starting from as early as 22 June, in order to make it possible to hold class councils during regular school hours. (As we understand it, the school will also finish one day early for these pupils — on 1 July, instead of 2 July as stated in the official calendar.) Moreover, we are concerned about plans to cancel completely the last part of the school year (timing not yet announced) for S4-S6 pupils. At the meeting on 12 March, APEEEE delegates specifically requested that the school look into moving S4-S6 exams to the latter part of June — a measure which should be possible this year given the cancellation of the Bac Oral exams. This would give classes additional time to prepare for their B-Tests in a year that has been full of disruptions and irregularities for students and staff alike.

We probably do not need to recall that the measures proposed by the management are in direct opposition to the Rules of the European School as well as the APEEEE's longstanding position on 180-days of school (See: <http://www.uccleparents.org/apieee/prises-de-position/180-jours-de-cours/?lang=en>).

In support of our case, we draw attention to:

- **General Rules of the European Schools Annex 1, Rules Concerning the Schools Year (p. 57)**: “The school year may not begin before the second working day in September. Locally recruited teachers will start working on the first working day in September, that day being used for the General meeting, extraordinary Class Councils (appeals), testing of pupils etc. **The school year must consist of 180 working days for pupils (181 in leap years)**. The last day of the school year must be the same day in all the European Schools and will be 7 July or thereabouts.” (our emphasis)
- **General Rules of the European Schools Article 17, Convening and Chairing of Councils (p. 11)**, which covers inter alia Class Councils: “Councils shall meet outside school hours.”



-
- **Decisions of the Board of Governors December 2010** confirming decisions from January 2007 on the Length of the School Year in the European Schools (2010-D-173-en-4): “From a formal viewpoint, to grant the schools the possibility of suspending lessons in the secondary cycle during the days required for the Baccaalaureate oral examinations at the end of each schools year...”

In short, the school has no legal basis for holding class councils during what should be regular school hours nor for cancelling school for upper secondary students when no Baccaalaureate oral exams will be held. In our opinion, these latest proposals are in keeping with a worrying tendency in recent years to shorten the number of teaching hours and days of the school year against the spirit and text of the rules¹. We note in particular that the key role of the Administrative Board in determining local calendar measures has not been respected. We find such proposals particularly worrying this year given that the COVID pandemic has already led to significant disruption in students’ education. Primary and early secondary parents are also concerned that they are again being asked to look after their children during their working hours when children should rightfully be in school.

We thank you for your continued work and look forward to a timely response.

Kind regards,

Kathryn Máthé
President EEBI APEEE

Copy:

Susanne Künster, Deputy Director for Secondary
Tom Claes, Deputy Director for Maternelle and Primary, Berkendael
Simona Cajhen, Deputy Director for Maternelle and Primary, Uccle

1 Here we note for instance the lack of organised replacement activities at end of school year in contradiction to BoG recommendations as well as the worrying replacement for S5 students in March of a week of school with off-campus work experience, when the COVID pandemic made work experience placements for most students all but impossible.

ANNEX 2

From: Valentina Papa - President APEEE Brussels 1 <president@uccleparents.org>
Sent: jeudi 5 mai 2022 18:53
To: UCC DIRECTOR <UCC-DIRECTOR@eursc.eu>
Cc: UCC DEPUTY DIRECTOR SECONDARY CYCLE <UCC-DEPUTY-DIRECTOR-SECONDARY-CYCLE@eursc.eu>; UCC DEPUTY DIRECTOR NURSERY AND PRIMARY CYCLE <UCC-DEPUTY-DIRECTOR-NURSERY-AND-PRIMARY-CYCLE@eursc.eu>; BRK DEPUTY DIRECTOR NURSERY AND PRIMARY CYCLE <BRK-DEPUTY-DIRECTOR-NURSERY-AND-PRIMARY-CYCLE@eursc.eu>; APEEE VP for Uccle Primary Talia Boati - <vp_primary-uccle@uccleparents.org>; apee vp for berkendael gundars ostrovskis - <vp_berkendael@uccleparents.org>; Monika VELIKONJA <vp_secondary-uccle@uccleparents.org>
Subject: Organisation of the end of the school year

Dear Mr Goggings, dear Brian,

I trust you are progressing well in preparing the organisation of the end of the school year and that the school community will be soon informed about all the details.

The difficult pandemic time over the last two years forced students to spend a lot of time at home or in an isolation with important implications for their educational and social development. Therefore it is even more important to maximise school time to at least partially make up for this.

I would kindly ask you and your team to ensure that the end of the school year organisation will be in accordance with the European school rules. The APEEE position is that all EEBI students should be offered 180 working days (jours de cours) each year by the school (APEEE position attached).

This in particular concerns the organisation of Class Councils (outside school hours) and the organisation of school in the period prior to and during oral BAC examinations. We would assume that school can continue as regular outside the BAC oral period. We are aware that the Board of Governors grants the European Schools the possibility of suspending lessons in the secondary cycle during the days required for the BAC oral examinations at the end of the school year, but it also asks for replacing the normal lessons with replacement activities. It recommends that such replacement activities are planned a sufficiently long time in advance, so as to improve the quality of what is offered and to make them compulsory, if necessary, for pupils who register to participate in them, in order to avoid absenteeism and security problems. Organising a Project Week and/or festive activities during that time could also be viable alternatives.

As regards the nursery and primary cycles, we count on you not to repeat the unjustified practice of last year by shortening the school days during the last two weeks of the school year.

For additional information, see the APEEE webpage on 180 working days (<http://www.uccleparents.org/apee/prises-de-position/180-jours-de-cours/?lang=en>).

We are looking forward to your reply on this very important issue.

With kind regards,

Valentina



Valentina PAPA

President – APEEE Brussels 1
Présidente – APEEE Bruxelles 1
president@uccleparents.org

ANNEX 3

From: Bruxelles I <noreply@myschoolmanagement.com>

Date: 16 May 2022 at 12:53:05 CEST

To: vp.papa@gmail.com

Subject: End of year organisation - organisation de la fin d'année - S1-S2- S3-S4

Reply-To: blondige@eursc.eu



This message was sent by Mrs Gentiane BLONDIAU. Use blondige@eursc.eu to reply to this email.

On behalf of Ms Künster

Dear parents, dear students,

The decision to move forward the last day in school is due to the organisation of the Bac oral Examinations - Upholding the regular classes at the same time as the baccalaureate oral examinations is technically not feasible - Optimum conditions for our S7 students have priority and this has always been the case in the previous years.

Due to the pandemic, we have not had Bac orals since 2019 and thus the practice has not taken place. In future, parents shall be notified at the start of the year in future with the calendar.

The classes for S1-4 will finish in advance of the start of the Bac.

The APEEE Services is setting up a *stage* programme for the dates from 20/06/2022 to 30/06/2022, information about this will be sent to you on Thursday at the latest.

Best regards

Au nom de Mme Künster

Chers parents, chers élèves,

La décision d'avancer le dernier jour de cours résulte de l'organisation des épreuves orales du Bac - Maintenir les cours réguliers en même temps que les oraux du baccalauréat n'est techniquement pas faisable - Des conditions optimales pour nos élèves de S7 sont prioritaires et cela a toujours été le cas les années précédentes.

En raison de la pandémie, nous n'avons pas eu d'oraux de Bac depuis 2019 et donc la pratique n'a pas eu lieu. Nous communiquerons cette information en début d'année avec le calendrier à l'avenir. Les cours pour S1-4 se termineront en lien avec le début des épreuves du Bac oral.

L'APEEE Services met en place un programme de stage pour les dates du 20/06/2022 au 30/06/2022 , une information à ce propos vous sera envoyée jeudi au plus tard.

Bien cordialement

ANNEX 4

From: "GODEFROIDT Jimmy (UCC)" <jimmy.godefroidt@eursc.eu>
Date: 20 May 2022 at 11:30:24 CEST
To: president@uccleparents.org>, vp_secondary-uccle@uccleparents.org
Subject: RE: S3ENA&B Letter on End of School Year

Dear parents,

Thank you for your mail and the concerns that you have raised.

Firstly, I apologise for the lateness of the notification. As a result of the pandemic, we have not had oral exams for 2 years now and so the “memory” of our usual practice had been forgotten or not experienced by many parents in the younger year groups. We have already updated the school calendar for next year to include this detail so that no parent will be surprised in future years.

(For secondary pupils, classes end the last day before the oral bac exams (date to be confirmed in the autumn).*

This is not a new practice rather it has always been the case. Organising the oral exams have not been possible to run concurrently with the school timetable. Our school and indeed all other European schools suspend classes to allow the organisation of the oral Baccalaureate.

The oral baccalaureate involves all S7 students and the organisation of their 3 oral exams. The oral exam itself is a very time sensitive event, meaning that students arrive to the school at a designated time, they then chose their question at a designated time and they have to go to a preparation room (where they are supervised by staff) for 20 minutes following which they are brought (again supervised by staff) to the oral exam room itself. Here they will follow an oral exam of 20 minutes where their own teacher and an external examiner will be present. The external examiners are specific for exam subject and each language and they travel between the schools and so their timetable (decided by the OSG) is fixed. This means that we need to adapt our order of exams and students to fit the time tabled availability of the external examiner. Many external examiners will spend time in more than one school and in fact could visit schools in other countries as part of the timetabled work with the European Schools.

At the same time the school will have S5 and S6 exams taking place and the corrections and class councils to complete before the end of the school year. It is an extremely busy period for everyone.

In Brussels 1 we will have this year:

- Almost 900 oral exams to take place over 8 days. Final results are communicated to students on Day 9 and the proclamation is on Day 10.
- Monday 20 and Tuesday 21 are by far the busiest days with more than 150 exams taking place on each day
- We need 18 oral exam centres (Individual classrooms), 2 preparation rooms and 2 waiting rooms and an administration room. Total 23 classrooms silence and supervision to create optimal conditions for the exam.

- We will need between 90 and 100 teachers for the busiest days, with between 35 and 45 to be available at any given time.

Running alongside these exams:

- S6 exams finish on June 23 and S5 exams finish on June 16. – These all need to be corrected and results entered 24 hours in advance of the Class council.
- Class councils for the 6 year groups which take place directly after the end of the school day and take on average 4 hours per year level. Class councils start on 13 June and Finish on 28 June.
- Resits of S5 and S6 exams and any possible S7 resits also take place in the same time period.
- In Brussels 1, as a correction centre, we will also host more than 150 correctors from June 14 who will work in teams on the correction of the written Baccalaureate.

This information is only to try to highlight the complexity of the arrangements that are required to complete the examination process and the Baccalaureate in these final weeks. It is to show you that the organisation of the oral exams and trying to run a time table for other year groups is not compatible under the current organisational structure.

I hope that this will help in your understanding of the reasons for the closure of the secondary classes before the final day of the year.

On behalf of Brian GOGGINS, Director