

Active Dossier: SECURING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR OUR EUROPEAN SCHOOL

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STARTING POINT

For the academic year for 2013-14, the twin priorities from a pedagogical perspective were again the **sustainability and quality** of our children's education at EEB4.

These priorities reflected the ongoing challenge faced by our young school to develop its internal coordination, systems and middle management roles while heavily reliant on the expertise and goodwill of locally hired teachers on short-term contracts and a very small number of seconded teachers compared with other European Schools. The wider context of budget constraints and a huge shortfall in funding for teachers across the system only exacerbated this problem and hit our school particularly hard.

We proposed pursuing these priorities through an integrated approach consisting of:

- Developing our dialogue with the **school management** on the schooling of our children
- Increasing our engagement with parent associations of **other European Schools**
- Thereby, improving our influence with the **Board of Governors and other decision makers**

HEADLINE OUTCOMES (more detail in later sections below)

At the time of writing this report (mid November), the status update on the top three issues affecting the sustainability and quality of our children's education in EEBIV is:

- 1) The '**Whole School Inspection**' of our school, (to which parent reps of EEB IV contributed feedback to the inspectors in March) recognised that the "dedicated, committed competent and collegial teaching team is a strong feature of this school". It also recommended that "central office should consider extra supports and exceptional measures" for our growing and developing school. These recommendations (publicly available after approved by the Board of Governors in December) are welcomed by the APEEE board and are highlighted by parent representatives at every appropriate opportunity in our efforts to support the development of our school for the children in it now, as well as for the generations to come.
- 1) Progress on securing **sustainable funding** of teachers has not been fast or smooth this year with the agreement on cost-sharing reached by Member States coming finally only in June 2014 and still not addressing the shortfall in seconded teachers. Then publication of the draft EU budget for 2015 revealed a reduced contribution to the European Schools based on a contribution forthcoming from the ECB and EIB, but such a contribution is far from agreed with the banks and so *all* school budgets could yet be affected in 2015. Through INTERPARENTS we continue to have dialogue with both sides, urging them to come to an agreement as soon as possible so that none of our children are adversely affected, nor recruitment and retention to their institutions!
- 2) Activity related to reorganisation of the **Secondary Studies** programme continues to focus on follow-up on the implementation and consequences of the package of changes introduced to S1-3 in September 2014, input as stakeholders to the external evaluation of proposed changes to S4-7 and further contributions to the Working Group on a new marking scheme for Secondary.

DETAIL ON TACTICS

Planned for 2013-14

- Continue our working relationship with our School's Directorial team to find **EEBIV-specific solutions** (through the parent representation in the regular school Education Councils and interim meetings coordinated through the APEEE's pedagogical affairs group).
- Extend and focus our involvement in **'Interparents'** (IP) – the official representative of parents in the Board of Governors and its committees – and **'Sustain our Schools'** – the system of consultation developed with colleagues from parent associations in our sister European Schools in Brussels to look at the challenges from a Brussels perspective and to coordinate communication (via websites and open information meetings) and lobbying activities (of the Member States, Commission etc.)
- Establish a network of **parent representatives** from each section to **facilitate further lobbying efforts and internal communication** about these issues
- Develop a **team of EEBIV parents to work on specific sub-issues**

Actual for 2013-14

- A close working relationship enabled by the routine consultation/sharing established within Brussels through SoS and an EEBIV parent being elected President of INTERPARENTS has given us better opportunities to try and define and (importantly) **intervene in a timely and appropriate way with the 'critical pathways' by which decisions are made in the European School System on the key issues confronting our school.**
- **Within our school, communication and consultation with parents** on IP/pedagogical issues was achieved through the Bru4 APEEE website, information emails (and since the summer term, through the new APEEE newsletter), open meetings for parents (at our school and also organised collaboratively across Brussels) and class reps relaying points for the Education Councils. Latterly, parent participation in the Education Councils doubled, with preparation for these meetings prompted and facilitated by contact parents who were requested to collate and prioritise by Linguistic Section the many questions and concerns raised by our rapidly increasing parent population. (This pragmatic approach reflected the decision taken at the 2013-14 General Assembly to defer for a year the decision on establishing a fully fledged Sectional Representation system, such as exists in other European Schools, pending presentation of more detailed information of the precise roles and responsibilities for such Section reps.)
- Some parents also responded to calls to help research, analyse and monitor specific sub-issues including local contracts, careers orientation and student exchanges. Thank you!

Planned for 2014-15

- Continue and develop our integrated approach through our involvement in SoS and INTERPARENTS (the President mandate runs until February 2016) linked to the school-specific activities of the APEEE pedagogical groups.

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- Increase the monitoring and contribution of insights by parents on specific sub-issues.
- Formally embed the role of parent representatives from sections in the process so as to facilitate communication (within the parent body), collaborative projects (e.g. across Brussels and the IP network) and coordinated engagement/ lobbying (e.g. Of Member States) on pedagogical issues (see motion presented by the APEEE CA.)

DETAIL ON MAIN ISSUES

- **Funding for teachers** (the major cost of the schools) is still uncertain and EEBIV starts from a disproportionately low base: The European School System is built on a model of Member States seconding teachers to the schools. These are the teachers who undertake the bulk of coordination and middle management roles. Despite being a young school still trying to set up systems and policies, the population figures for November 2013 showed that our school still had far fewer teachers than comparable schools, both in terms of absolute numbers and as a ratio per child (e.g. Seconded teachers in Secondary EEBI: 114, EEBII: 107, EEBIII: 107, EEBIV: 20)

The aim of the plan proposed to the Board of Governors by the Schools' Secretary General on '**cost-sharing**' was for Member States benefitting from their children being educated by teachers seconded from other Member States to increase their contribution gradually and reimburse such secondments. Alternatively, Member States could fulfil their contribution by seconding teachers to sections in need. However, the plan finally agreed *in principle* by Member States in December 2013 **provided no solution for 2014-2015** and has a **substantial in-built funding deficit** which will never be resolved during its 5-year roll-out and looks likely to affect adversely our school in particular for years to come. Moreover, with the acceptance of this plan, The Board of Governors effectively opened the door for "non-native" teaching in all subjects of secondary, except for L1, which has many negative implications if out-numbering "native" teachers, not least quality assurance and preparation of students for university. At the April meeting of the Board of Governors, when the Member States were asked to agree the *mechanism* for cost-sharing, several were still querying the formula for calculating how much each would contribute to the putative cost-sharing fund. An agreement was finally announced in June 2014, still without any indication as to how the handful of posts which might be funded through the plan would actually be allocated among the 14 schools with unfilled posts. So finding funding from additional sources was clearly now becoming critical. In June, the draft EU budget for 2015 was published. As signalled last year, in this draft budget the Commission had removed the part of its contribution it considers to be covering the education of children of staff of the European Banks (principally ECB, EIB) in anticipation that these institutions will now make a commensurate contribution and so reduce the burden on the EU contribution to the schools budget. Negotiations between the institutions have reached an impasse and so, despite the Commission not questioning the budgets of any individual schools, there is a real risk nevertheless that the smaller overall budget will be stretched across all fourteen schools in 2015.

- The proposals for **Reorganisation of Secondary Studies relating to years S4-7** were submitted by the Board of Governors in December to an external evaluation which will make

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its final report in June 2015. This decision followed a period of intensive analysis, consultation, communication and lobbying by parents, spearheaded by SoS for INTERPARENTS. A big 'thank you' to parents who signed the petition and supported the campaign for a closer look at the implications of the proposals e.g. on university access for our school graduates with the EB. Since the evaluation project was awarded, INTERPARENTS has been closely involved as stakeholder and as a member of the Steering Group.

- On the proposals to reorganise **Secondary Studies in years S1-3**, as reported to the General Assembly in January 2013, the efforts of parents through SoS and INTERPARENTS did not persuade the Board of Governors on the issues of concern to us. Our further attempt at the April Board of Governors to iron out some glitches in the reorganisation, which had come to light as the implementation began in schools (group composition in ethics and religion due to the L2 rule and clashing of ICT and Latin only in S3), and to prevent the preemptive introduction of L2 as the language of instruction for any subject in S4 upwards while the external evaluation into S4-7 studies was ongoing) were also unsuccessful. As a result, September 2014 saw the introduction of a raft of changes to S1-3 which will be carried through to the coming years. We are working with the school management to learn from the implementation and impact of these changes. We also ask parents to provide feedback from the perspective of their children.

OTHER NOTEWORTHY PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES ADDRESSED IN 2013-14 on behalf parents at the level of the school, Brussels and/or system (INTERPARENTS/Board of Governors)

- **New marking scheme for Secondary** – addressed through participation of parent reps in the WG mandated by the Board of Governors to devise a new scheme and most recently, at the Joint Teaching Committee October 2014. To be followed up through 2015
- **Testing of a child's dominant language** – Through INTERPARENTS (IP) we called on the Board of Governors for a greater focus on establishing an environment of trust for testing e.g. through standardisation of testing and use of independent testers. This will be investigated by The Secretary General of the Schools with a promise of a review April 2015.
- **Increased use of non-native teachers.** With the current cost-sharing agreement encouraging under-seconding Member States to send teachers for unfilled posts across all sections, we have to expect an increase in the number of non-native speaking teachers as well as a further disconnect between the European School and national systems.
- **L2 teaching.** We continued to pursue this issue through the education councils throughout the year and discussion is ongoing. On the horizon is the possible eventual introduction of L2 in nursery. Discussion will continue at Board of Governors level this year.
- **Parental access to test/exam papers.** A working group mandated by the Board of Governors makes recommendations to ensure parental access to exam papers and has minimised the type and number of exam papers which need to be retained by schools for archive purposes, i.e. excluding routine tests. INTERPARENTS and the Education Councils will be monitoring the implementation and working with the school.
- **In-service training of teachers.** INTERPARENTS has highlighted the challenge of in-service training for schools dependent on a locally hired staff on short term contracts such as ours.

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- **Subject options and small groups in Secondary.** This has been an ongoing area of focus at INTERPARENTS level and is become a school level topic this coming year.
- **New assessment in Primary** - The Board of Governors in April 2014 decided that as of September 2014 a new school report for the primary will be introduced changing the current box-ticking system to a new 4 scale grid with more emphasis on evaluating pupils on the basis of specific competences acquired. Preliminary experiences with the new Primary School Report will be discussed with the school in the course of the current school year 2014-2015.
- **Teacher absences** is an issue raised also in other European schools. In ours part of the problem is the time needed for coordination roles in our school, given the relative lack of available seconded teachers and systems still in evolution. This issue will be followed up this year.
- **Management of the Baccalaureate** – Although EEBIV is still a couple of years away from its first Bac year group, it is important for us to learn lessons now so as to be forewarned and forearmed. When a problem with the Chemistry Bac written paper occurred in June 2014, INTERPARENTS became involved to discover the reasons, ensure students were not adversely affected in their transition to their destination university course and to make sure the same problems will not recur.

More information on the activities of INTERPARENTS and the APEEE's Pedagogical Affairs Group is available in the APEEE online newsletter via www.bru4.eu through which site archived minutes of Education Councils are also accessible.