

**“Town Hall” Meeting on 01.04.2019
Salle Polyvalente from 7 – 9 pm**

School admin: Mr. Manuel Bordoy (Director)
Mme. Isabelle Verwilghen (Deputy Director Secondary)
Mr. Markko Mattus (Deputy Director Maternelle/Primary)

APEEE: Kristin Dijkstra (President)
Karim Kettani (VP Pedagogical Affairs)
Dana-Adriana Puia (Moderator)

Parent Reps
Teacher Reps
Student Reps
Parents

I. Locally Recruited Teachers (LRTs) and Seconded Teachers

Unless otherwise noted, questions were answered by Mr. Bordoy

Q Moderator: Why such a sudden change this year from previous years?

Two exceptional circumstances in 2019:

- a. 321 Teachers were ‘missing’ in the system, in the sense of being locally hired and not seconded, therefore a lot of pressure was put on Member States to second more teachers
- b. All school directors were requested to submit a list of all available posts (i.e. LRTs)

One special circumstance for EEB4: we have the highest percentage of LRTs among Brussels schools therefore we received the most “expressions of interest” from the Member States (note that they have not yet sent us a single teacher, as they are due to come by the next school year).

Q Why was secondment process done so quickly and not spread out over several years?

The directors had no option this year on deciding which posts to put on the list; they all needed to be published. The Commission wants a 70/30 seconded/LRT balance as this is deemed ‘fair’ under the cost-sharing mechanism, though many Member States do not support this proposal. This was the final year of the current cost-sharing agreement.

Q Was there an exception for L1 EN teachers and was it applied at our school?

The Member States EN/FR/DE have historically seconded more teachers than other states because of L2 requirements. The UK decided years ago not to send more teachers, therefore the Commission changed rules so that non-native speakers (with a C2 level) can be seconded for all subjects except L1 and Philosophy.

Q Asked again: Why were native-EN LRTs not protected (i.e. so-called Brexit Clause)?

The clause talks about “those subjects that need to be taught in L1” so only L1 and Philosophy were protected. An appeal has been launched against this interpretation.

Q Why is L2 not treated as equally important as L1?

No need to have perfect native language teachers for L2 subjects, as the quality of teaching is more important than the native-language status.

Q How can the school control if the Member States are sending us good teachers?

We can check their language certificates for language proficiency. But these can be from any “independent inspection body” so not 100% reliable. For the rest, we simply have to trust the Member States.

Follow-up from Student Rep:

Students are being supported by Mr. Beckmann in their request for the Board of Governors to amend rule so that each school can individually check language proficiency of seconded teachers.

Q Teacher Rep: Why wasn't there more of a social plan put in place as this was known long beforehand by the school administration? What about pedagogical continuity?

“You are right, there was no plan”, simply a request that the schools list all posts. No one expected or could foresee the Member States expressing interest in so many posts.

Follow-up from Moderator: So we have learnt from this that we need contingency plans?

Of course. But this is the end of the cost-sharing agreement and the Secretary General (Marcheggiano) has said that this will not happen again.

Follow-up from parent/union rep:

Our school is facing the negative consequences of the system as a whole. The Sec Gen is being asked to improve the rights of teachers, e.g. taking the social aspects and pedagogical continuity into account when making redundancies. A thank you to Mr Bordoy for trying to help individual cases.

Q How are seconded teachers evaluated?

Member States each recruit their own teachers using various methods, then those recruited are sent to the European Schools. In a few countries, the schools themselves can participate in the selection process, but not in others.

Q Is there a difference between the four Brussels schools about the number of LRTs losing their jobs this year?

No numbers at hand

Q On what basis were the decisions made which teachers to let go?

There are no rules for this in the European Schools system. In talks with teacher reps, unofficial criteria were established and these were applied by the deputy directors.

Please note that, for the time being, not a single seconded teacher has been confirmed. So far there are only “expressions of interest” from Member States for certain positions. So this has been a purely theoretical exercise. The talks were held with the teachers earlier than usual this year because there were so many new posts opened up and also because of a request made by the teachers to inform those leaving in order to allow more time to find new jobs.

Follow-up from moderator:

Moving forward, we need to ensure that retention criteria are refined, encoded and then applied uniformly throughout the European Schools system.

Q If our school currently has good EN LRTs (i.e. those with high levels of pedagogical competence), is there a plan how to keep them?

Isabelle Verwilghen: Priority is being given to native speakers for L1/L2/L3.

Q What if it is clear that a seconded teacher lacks the pedagogical qualifications to ensure successful teaching? He/she might eventually improve, but in the meantime the students are suffering.

The first evaluation of a seconded teacher happens after 2 years, the next one after 5 years. If both the school and the National Inspector agree that the teacher is unqualified, the Member State can remove that teacher. But if the National Inspector does not agree, then we are stuck.

If the parents are unhappy with any teacher, they can inform their class rep, section rep, and school administration who will then monitor the situation.

Verwilghen: we offer mentoring programmes, workshops, skill development trainings etc to all new teachers to ensure they are up to standard.

Q What will happen if some of the LRTs find new jobs but then the Member State decides not to second for that position?

Verwilghen: we are insisting that the Member States give us feedback and definite numbers as soon as possible. We now have a clearer idea of how many students will be taking which options in the coming year so we can already tell some Member States that they will not need to second for certain positions. But there is no deadline for Member States to give us definitive answers – sometimes teachers are still sent in October!

Follow-up from Moderator:

If parents have any connections with National Delegations, the APEEE can help those parents contact them to ensure a more successful recruitment process.

Q Whom do we lobby to get these crazy rules changed?

Kristin Dijkstra: The system is clearly not working. APEEE has written letters to Board of Governors and all National Inspectors. There is also a working subgroup on this topic. Interparents are very active in this area. If you feel there is a problem with the teacher, please get in touch with your Class Rep and Section Rep. And excuse us for not feeding information back to you as quickly as we should – just trying to keep our heads above water with all the ongoing work.

Karim Kettani: parents need to lobby at the level of the Commission for there to be any significant changes to the system.

Q If any parents are interested in getting more involved, could they have copies of the documents being prepared for the Board of Governors meeting next week (i.e. cost-sharing process, attractiveness of teacher contracts, budgets for next 8 years)?

Dijkstra: of course APEEE is always open to any help offered. Please make yourselves known to your Section Reps. Summaries of the documents mentioned could be made available, though the documents themselves cannot be shared widely until they are confirmed at the Board of Governors.

II. The Recent Fires

Q Moderator: What lessons have been learnt from the two fires at the school on 19 and 20 March?

Bordoy: Very, very shocked by the incidents. Staff risked their lives to put out both fires. Evacuations did go as planned and the fire department said all procedures were followed correctly. However, there are currently no smoke detectors in the bathrooms which needs to be remedied. Also, two separate smoke detectors need to detect smoke before the general alarms goes off – this also should be re-evaluated. The Régie des Bâtiments has been contacted. All paper objects were removed from the bathrooms for two days. Things are getting back to normal, but still need to find a solution for hand dryers. Cameras have been installed outside all bathrooms and as a temporary solution domestic smoke detectors have been installed inside all bathrooms.

Messages on social media in the following days were very upsetting. How can pupils think arson is funny? School management appreciates the help of the Comité des Élèves in getting the posts taken down.

Lesson: need to be more vigilant, everyone has to be aware of the dangers.

Q Have those responsible been identified? What sanctions will be imposed?

Verwilghen: The perpetrators from the Tuesday fire have been found. There will be a Discipline Council on 2 April, with parents and teacher representatives also present. It is a formal session to underline the seriousness of the accusations. Sanctions will be proportional and pedagogical. Let us not forget that these are emotionally immature teenagers.

As for the second fire, the school is still searching for those responsible. The school would appreciate help from parents if their children know anything at all about the event.

Q Why are these students being given another chance? They should be expelled immediately.

Bordoy: There will be 8 people on the Disciplinary Council making a decision about punishment, so that the outcome is seen as fair by wide range of participants. This is a school, we must educate all our pupils even in the most difficult circumstances. Our framework will always be based on a pedagogical approach.

Q Will the consequences/sanctions be communicated to all students?

Bordoy: Need to see how to do this.

Parent suggestion: inform class teachers and ask them to verbally communicate with their students.

Bordoy: good idea, we will do it this way.

Q Is the school planning lessons for the students about the fires?

Verwilghen: The fire department has been contacted about giving workshops. In addition, an expert at Europol has been invited to discuss the legal consequences of arson with the students. The 75 class reps in Secondary were shown photos of the fires in the bathrooms, which was very effective at getting the message across of how dangerous arson really is.

Follow-up from parent: will these pictures be shown to all students? What about videos/photos of burn victims?

Parent Rep: As a doctor, I can say this would be highly irresponsible and psychologically damaging to the children.

Follow-up from parent/union rep:

The on-going budget cuts have led to a lack of adequate security. Also, less personnel to observe students. Parents need to put pressure on the Commission to ensure the safety of students and staff (as well as quality of education and life).

Q Do the teachers know how to deal with fires?

Markko Mattus: in maternelle and primary, the teachers have all had extensive training and there are regular drills.

Follow-up from APEEE member in charge of Somerfesto and Community Building:

These fires are a symptom of something bigger, i.e. a lack of identity with the school community. It would help if parents show their dedication and appreciation of the school so that pupils feel the same way.

Q What about the false “lockdown procedure” that was broadcast?

Verwilghen: we are in the process of installing a new Public Address System. The mistaken alert has allowed us to identify many bugs in the system which the responsible firm (Securitas) is currently working on. Definitely agree that more practice sessions and trainings are needed, especially for the younger students.

Follow-up from parent: Teachers and kids in the canteen could not hear the alarms, also at least one new teacher had no idea what to do

Bordoy/Mattus: gave a detailed response regarding systems, alarms, fire brigade, how to communicate to adjacent buildings, trainings, drills, etc.

III. Miscellaneous APEEE issues

Q What is being done about bullying issues in M/P?

Mattus: Introduction of KIVA programme will help this.

Q What about a specific incident recently where a child fell and there was no supervision?

Mattus: there is always supervision. Need more details about this case, but this is not the venue.

Follow-up from Teacher Rep:

Teachers are monitored to ensure that they are undertaking their supervision duties. All attempts are made to avoid dangerous or disruptive situations, but it is a big school with a very large population, therefore we do need to show a certain level of trust in the pupils. In Secondary, issues with a specific pupil are sent to M. Moreau (Head Advisor) who always deals with them in a timely manner.

Follow-up from another Teacher Rep:

There is an active working group regarding supervision and study hall – their solutions will hopefully be implemented soon.

Q Can the use of free periods in Secondary be improved?

Verwilghen: Starting in September, and based on recommendations by the working group “Supervision”, there will be a new chill-out room plus a new study hall where students can work (quietly) together.

Input from Parent Rep:

Let’s not forget some of the positive changes that are happening in our school. For example, P1/P2 pupils can now use the playground more effectively. If students are kept busy, they have less time to make mischief. The APEEE Community Fund can help in providing playground activities.

Moderator:

We are a diverse school with many different opinions. Just as an example, while some parents are concerned about how the religion teachers are selected (Mattus: by regional authorities) and evaluated (Mattus: by the school), others would like to have religion classes cancelled completely.

School management and APEEE Reps thanked all participants for being willing to start an open and honest dialogue to improve the functioning of the school for all pupils.