



Brussels, 14th of May, 2020

**EN Version**

Dear Pupils, Parents and Colleagues,

As we approach the end of another week and the start of our May holidays, as Directors of the European Schools in Brussels we wish to communicate to you our decision and plan for the coming weeks of school up to the end of the school year on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, 2020.

The past few months have been a new and challenging experience for all of us. We have gone from introducing health and safety measures in our schools due to the Covid-19 situation, to suspending in-situ lessons and switching immediately to an online system of education. Our school communities have shown flexibility, creativity and resilience. In a matter of a few days, we have transformed our modus operandi and gone online, not only to revise basic acquired concepts, but to actually continue with the delivery of our syllabi, which is our core role and responsibility. Feedback from stakeholders shows that we are all succeeding in making this system work well and, as time goes by, we are continuously improving. Difficulties and challenges will always remain but once the school receives feedback and information, measures are rapidly taken to tackle any difficulty that comes our way and continue progressing.

After the Easter holidays, the management teams of all 4 European Schools in Brussels started to evaluate the possibility of starting some form of re-entry. We believe that our schools have been very active all through the confinement period. However, prior to the end of the school year, we wanted to reflect, consult and analyse some form of re-entry as a closure of the school year.

We have worked alongside the other Directors of European Schools in other countries. We have worked together and tried to make decisions together as much as possible. We believe that this creates stability in the system. However, once countries started to implement different measures in dealing with a possible re-entry, it became clear that the four Brussels schools needed to focus on our own reality, namely, the measures announced by the Belgian authorities, which are not conceived for the specificity of our system and organization, the overcrowding in our schools, with a very large number of pupils, and the success of our distance learning programmes.

These were three key and differentiating factors that we needed to take into consideration when making our decision. One of the main challenges we face is the measures announced of having a set distance between one student and another to create social distancing. When we measured our classrooms and applied the formula provided by the Belgian authorities, it became clear that we would only be able to welcome between 6 to 8 students in a classroom. This would mean that a class of 28 would need to be divided into 4 groups and each group would need to come on one day, as we do not have enough teachers to cover all the 4 groups at the same time.

It is also clear that at this point it would be very difficult for teachers to teach in situ and also online at the same time. The conclusion is that if we bring back classes in situ, we would be offering teaching and learning to a small number of pupils, while the majority would be at home and would not be engaged in learning for certain periods. This would also create additional pressure on parents who would need to organise their children's time and activity.



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We have consulted extensively with all stakeholders. The majority of parents would opt not to send their children to school in the last few weeks. We also have a good number of teachers who fall in the vulnerable category group. We have also consulted with the Office of the Secretary-General who is in constant contact with the relevant authorities and European institutions.

We have explained this process in detail to share with you the background to our decision. The European Schools in Brussels will continue with the distance learning programme up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, 2020. However, as from the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2020 each of the four schools will organise a programme of educational activities to target certain year groups with specific aims and objectives. Each school knows its own priorities and will organise the programmes in accordance with their needs.

However, common objectives could be a closure programme for S7 students and a transition programme for P5 students. It is our intention to try and bring back to school, at least once, all pupils. In this way, they would be able to collect their things and also say good-bye to their teachers. **Any programme organised will be voluntary, that is, parents will decide on whether to send their child or not.** The activities will be organized in small groups and the schools will do all they can to adhere to the measures announced by the Belgian authorities. However, you need to bear in mind that those measures are thought for the Belgian system and therefore not adjusted to our more complex organization constraints. Further information about this will be sent once information about the educational activities are announced.

To conclude, as Directors we believe this is the best and safest way forward for our school communities. On one hand, we will be continuing with our educational programme and progressing with the content being taught, while on the other hand, we will be giving chance to a good number of pupils to come back to school on certain days in June 2020 to make contact with some of their friends, with their teachers, with their school environment, as we move towards closing the school year 2019-2020.

In the meantime, preparations for the next school year are underway, also considering the possibility of still being in a Covid-19 situation. We will continue to discuss with all stakeholders as we navigate through this unprecedented situation.

We wish you and your families the best of health and please keep safe.

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