The European Parents' Association of the European Schools

ALICANTE, BERGEN, BRUXELLES I, II, III, IV, FRANKFURT, KARLSRUHE, LUXEMBURG I, II, MOL, MÜNCHEN, VARESE

InterParents report of the Meeting of the Joint Teaching Committee of the European Schools, 10-11 February 2022, chaired by the Croatian Presidency

With the recent appointment of a new Deputy Secretary General (DSG) completing the new top duo at Central Office (OSGES), the February 2022 meeting of the Joint Teaching Committee (JTC) was characterised by the twin themes of taking stock after two years of the pandemic and of looking to the future. Parents, through their associations, were represented as usual throughout the 2-day meeting by four InterParents representatives, drawn from different schools (Frankfurt, Lux II, EEBI, EEBIV), following the usual weeks of preparation and consultation, culminating in a 2-day InterParents preparatory meeting. For parents, again the key issues were wellbeing and governance, with InterParents even bringing to this meeting of the JTC its own proposals to address these challenges.

THE HEADLINES

Moving forward: All proposals and reports were approved by the JTC, or were accorded a 'favourable opinion' by the committee, or funnelled into a working group for consideration/further development.

Holding the system to account: InterParents continued to challenge the system to confront the realities of the system and find real solutions (for instance on staffing) and took care to call attention to the key findings of the standard reports and presented at each February meeting of the JTC and to push for appropriate follow-up action (for instance: the Statistical Report on Educational Support and Inclusive Education.)

InterParents has your bac(k): As always, InterParents represented the interests of families with Bac candidates, with particular focus this year on ensuring that the GeoGebra suspension would have no adverse impact.

Hard work bearing fruit: The work of InterParents throughout the year (in the various working groups of the system and as lobbyists on behalf of the parent community) was evident in the issues covered by the documents presented at the meeting and in the detailed content, notably: pedagogical reform; procedural policy for educational support and inclusive education; pupil wellbeing; homework policy across the system; the roles, duties and work-frame of school psychologists; and use of inclusive language.

Constructive ideas for better planning and follow-up: As always, governance was a key issue for the parent community (whether it was ensuring that a robust multi-annual planning mechanism was created or that lessons would be learned from the results of the school survey.) Through its paper calling for tracking and clear follow-through on school action points from year to year, InterParents started a conversation at system level about creating a better flow of pedagogical data to inform planning. In conjunction with CoSup, InterParents also prompted a reflection on how different kinds of inspections could be used alongside school inspections to drive improvements e.g. transversal inspections to monitor the implementation of new system-level priorities such as wellbeing and digital competences.

Coming up in March: PISA tests for 15-year-old pupils and 'Writing Fest' – a transnational celebration of writing and editing skills in Nursery/Primary pupils to coincide with World Book Day.

One to follow this Spring: how the request for support for 'Climate Academy' fares in the Budgetary Committee (BC) and Board of Governors (BoG).

More detail on all of these points is available here:

Andreas Beckmann, elevated to Secretary General (SG) this school year, began the meeting by looking forward to the initial report of the European Parliament CULT Committee study of the European School (for which interviews and a survey have been completed) and to the results in October of the PISA tests which will be taken by 15-year-old pupils in March. These test results will help benchmark the attainment levels of the European School population against those in Member States.

Syllabuses

Following the decision in Autumn 2021 that use of **GeoGebra** be suspended (due to technical issues experienced in several European schools), the head of the Pedagogical Unit clarified that the graphing software would still be used for classroom teaching in order to support the development of the relevant competences of pupils. He affirmed that several measures were being put in place to avoid impacting pupils negatively and announced that S5 and S6 pupils can continue to use the scientific calculator. This is an issue on which InterParents has been very active, collating and representing the problems encountered across the system. Accordingly, a meeting with stakeholders, including InterParents, will be held in February, after which there will be further communication and guidelines issued. In-service training of teachers is scheduled for Spring.

A number of **new syllabuses** were approved: Biology 2P – S6-S7, Czech L1 – Nursery, Primary and S1-S7, Dutch L1 – Nursery and Primary, Dutch L1 Advanced – S6-S7, Early Education Curriculum, English L1 – Nursery and Primary, Geography 2 Periods – S6-S7, Italian L1 – S6-S7, Primary Mathematics, Non-denominational Ethics – S1-S7, Finnish and Swedish ONL – both: Nursery, Primary and Secondary, Maltese ONL - S1-S7. These will be made available in due course at https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/studies/syllabuses. Following feedback from Parent Association (PA) reviewers, InterParents forwarded specific written comments on several of these new syllabuses to the relevant inspectors but also took the opportunity of the meeting to raise two points: timetabling pressure on ONL in S6-7 and the question of digital tools in primary (adequacy of budget, whether schools are all equipped and expectations on parents to support homework.)

Other syllabus-related issues raised: The Pupil representatives (CoSup) reiterated their long-held position that Religion/Ethics should be an elective subject in Secondary, an idea which will be discussed by the Reform Working Group (WG). Teachers, supported by the Directors, underlined the importance of training for new syllabuses and it was confirmed that such training was planned.

Reports

InterParents reacted positively to the report of the **2020-2021 School Year Survey** and pushed for insights from it to be fed into the relevant ongoing areas of work (notably wellbeing and homework – two key issues that have been exacerbated, but *not* caused, by the pandemic.) Noting the relatively low participation of pupils and some sections of the parent community, InterParents also underlined the need for a follow-up plan, to be shared with the whole school community so that parents and pupils could see that it was worth participating in such feedback exercises.

InterParents relayed some positive remarks from its members (e.g. about the transition to online learning) while also making constructive suggestions for further improvements and for addressing two concerns parents had about the survey follow-up: that only 10% of parent open questions had been analysed (apparently due to GDPR concerns previously raised) and that, according to its members, the all-important discussion of school-level data had yet to happen. (In response, the SG requested schools to ensure this occurs.)

The "**Statistical Report on the Provision of Educational Support and Inclusive Education in the European Schools**" is produced annually. Reflecting on the report for 2020-2021, the inspectors drew attention to the fact that the Baccalaureate pass rate is the same whether or not pupils have special arrangements and highlighted areas for reflection within schools as: the few hours for support per teacher, issues with continuity/turnover/availability of qualified staff, and the differences seen between Primary and Secondary. Both the European Commission (EC) and the new Deputy SG, Manuel Bordoy, welcomed diversity in the classroom and the trend toward greater inclusivity while also mentioning efficiency and the current discrepancy in costs per pupil.

InterParents reported that parents were happy to see that the statistical report registers improvements but stressed that it remains important to monitor the decrease of ISAs in Secondary (now more evident between S1 and S2, while last year was more evident in the transition between P5 and S1) and that further clarity is needed on budget

(including for teacher training) and on the discrepancies seen between schools. InterParents also drew attention to the worrying drop in tripartite agreements in some schools and to the number of students every year leaving European school because of special educational needs (42 cases), requesting an investigation in order to understand better the existing barriers and to identify ways of making schools more inclusive.

A much-anticipated report was the **annual progress report of the Task Force of the Pedagogical Reform Working Group** which is working on the Multi-Annual Plan (MAP) of Pedagogical Priorities. This report reflected a new methodological approach based on 'clustering' of topics and revealed the large amount of work still needed on soft skills, cross curricular approaches, a greater emphasis on application of knowledge, opportunities for blended learning and sustainability.

InterParents has been successful in getting the views of parents consulted earlier and more often, such that the InterParents representatives at this meeting of the JTC were able to express appreciation for the direction the discussion is taking and approve of the different elements now included in the Educational Vision, specifically educating *responsible global citizens* and *personal skills***,** as well as the focus on *creativity, collaboration and critical thinking* and the explicit mention of *Well-being, Education for Sustainability, Key Competences* and the *European Dimension*. Nonetheless, it still remained unclear how Sustainable Education, the European Dimension and Well-being relate to the 8 Key Competences Civic and Personal Competences. So, to help the system set priorities and make hard (but consistent) choices when necessary, InterParents proposed it was time to generate a holistic expression of the school's *Educational Vision.* This would replace the currently disparate statements that can be found in the Convention and across the eursc website about who we are, what we do, and where we are going.

Meanwhile, for the MAP itself, InterParents also proposed an additional objective on Post COVID Recovery and called again for a reevaluation of the approach to Career Orientation which, many parents believe, has become outdated in the wake of Brexit. Following a favourable opinion of the report by the JTC, the Educational vision will be finalised by the WG and brought back to the JTC with a formal proposal in October.

Other reports brought to the JTC were an update on the work being undertaken to improve running of meetings and production of/access to documents under the aegis of the '**Simplification Working Group**' and the results of the **school inspections for Karlsruhe and Frankfurt**. As well as relaying the comments of the relevant Parent Associations, InterParents made a plea for inclusion of wellbeing in future evaluations (a point which was noted for the next rotation) as well as several general requests which would improve parent participation in, and transparency of, the process.

<u>European Baccalaureate</u>

The February meeting of the JTC is the forum at which the rules for the forthcoming Bac session are scrutinised and approved annually. This year, InterParents asked for reassurance to families of S7 pupils that, in the absence of a scientific graphing calculator, Bac candidates would not be disadvantaged in the Maths exam, especially considering that this will be the first year with the new maths syllabus (so InterParents pointed also to the lack of past papers available for practice.) InterParents also opened a conversation about using even more inclusive language, suggesting the use of plural to reflect a non-binary world, a point that was well received. It was reported that all the Pre-Bacs were conducted in situ, with some reserve sessions still to be done, some exceptions with 5-10 pupils absent, otherwise only individual absences. No alternative tasks had to be organised. The Head of the Bac Unit vocalised everybody's hope that the Bac session in June will be as near normal as possible, while outlining some contingency plans.

<u>Pedagogical Rules and Standards</u>

Three documents aimed at promoting wellbeing and enhancing support were presented to the JTC:

An **Update to the Procedural Document on Provision of Educational Support and Inclusive Education in the European Schools** was approved, InterParents hailing it as a strong basis for a harmonised approach, with clearer and more consistent procedures, strong progress towards providing reasonable solutions and containing lots of much-needed clarifications and modernisations. Based on input from the InterParents specialist team members drawn from across the system, InterParents also made some suggestions to help clarify and avoid unintended misinterpretations or a divergent understanding of what the procedural document seeks to achieve, as well as pointing to the need to align attachments/templates with the policy in detail.

After another tough year of pandemic, InterParents also welcomed the renewed focus on the **Roles, Duties and "Work-Frame" of School Psychologists**. To help keep the psychologists' task-load manageable, InterParents suggested that their role be limited in educational support to implementation and assisting with identification (with specialist tests, assessments, and recommendations remaining in the hands of independent external experts.) Parents' feedback about the importance of having multilingual psychologists, who can interact with students around sensitive topics in the students' dominant language whenever possible, was also reiterated – a point notably lacking in the (otherwise favourably received) document brought to the JTC. In addition, to facilitate pupils' direct access to the school's psychologist, InterParents proposed giving pupils, at the start of the school year, the necessary permission and details via SMS. The proposal will go forward to the next stage, having received widespread support from the JTC, with the sole reservation of the EC which did not agree with the proposed increases, contending they were over and above what is provided in the national schools of Member States and proposing some alternatives to support pupil wellbeing.

Following extensive lobbying and discussion with various actors in the system about wellbeing issues, InterParents was pleased to be able to welcome the **Proposal for a « Pupils' Well-Being Policy Framework » and Recommendations of the « Child Protection Policy » Working Group** though expressed some residual concern as to how the Policy Framework will work in practice at the 13 schools. Specifically, InterParents reported that there had been some disagreement among parents as to how "finished" this document was, with some appreciating the formal recognition at last that academic development cannot be seen as separate from personal development and recognising the potential of the new policy framework to trigger and guide reflection, policymaking and actions at each school. InterParents reported, however, that some parent representatives felt it did not focus sufficiently on urgent horizontal issues such as homework and the academic overload that students have argued is a root cause of poor student mental health across the system. To have a demonstrable impact on schools, an implementation timeline and action list for schools were therefore needed. Active promotion of student mental health should also be covered. Finally, InterParents pointed out that coordination would be needed at school level, which would require allocation of specific timetable reductions (décharges) and/or additional salary to those staff designated to write the well-being and child protection policies envisioned in the Framework.

Additionally, a new **Assessment Policy** was approved (a welcome first step in reflecting on the role of assessment in the European School, as far as InterParents was concerned), as were the proposals on the **Harmonisation of the Pedagogical Planning** which should foster sharing between teachers in different sections, levels, cycles and even schools. To this end, InterParents supported the proposal for harmonised planning templates, calling for monitoring of both the implementation and impact of the new practices, the use of digital tools to host planning templates and a 'special release period' for subject referents to support teacher training. The final item in this section of the meeting turned to homework – a topic for which The European Schools currently do not have a whole system approach. A group is working on this and an update was provided to the JTC on **the development of guidelines to assist schools in devising a homework policy** for comment prior to bringing a proposal to the JTC for approval in October. Several members of the JTC remarked on the link between homework and wellbeing and called for involvement of stakeholders closest to the issue (teachers, pupils, parents) as the proposal is developed. InterParents underlined the point by explaining, for instance, that the work envisioned did not encompass the administrative and organisational aspects necessary to regulate the daily load of homework.

<u>Other items</u>

As always, the last part of the meeting featured proposals dealing with resourcing, finance and governance on which the JTC was invited to form an opinion before the documents were scrutinised by the BC and finally, any initiatives proposed by stakeholders.

Firstly: the latest development in the long-running campaign to improve teacher recruitment and retention through a targeted range of new **Attractiveness Measures for the Teaching Staff**. InterParents and others welcomed the proposals to reduce the inequality in salaries between primary and secondary teachers (in line with trends in the Member States) and to target the compensatory allowance where it would be most needed but felt this might be insufficient, for DE teachers at the schools in Germany in particular, and proposed tracking the numbers of teachers terminating secondments. Looking at the benchmarking analysis presented, InterParents pointed out that many locally recruited teachers (LRTs) are offered fewer hours than they would like, limiting their income, and that in many professions, lack of job security (known to be a major driver for teachers leaving the schools) is normally compensated for by higher salaries. InterParents agreed that the schools would benefit from harmonised rules and

clear criteria governing protected posts but argued that linking the number of protected posts to cost sharing at the time when the system's reliance on LRTs is at its highest did not seem logical. School fees for teachers' children seemed a useful proposal but limited-hour-contracts needed to be considered and, InterParents reported, parent representatives from the Brussels schools felt it important that children should not be obliged to be taught at the same school where their parents were teachers. For the future, InterParents wondered whether the work on attractiveness measures could be extended to encompass those schools having to promote themselves to gain sufficient pupils, especially considering the evolving situation of those with nearby accredited schools. With a timely reminder from an inspector that achieving the schools' aspirations in terms of wellbeing and inclusivity were dependent on the wellbeing of its teachers, the JTC gave a favourable opinion on the proposals – with a reservation noted by the EC which requested more analysis for the Budgetary Committee.

Also given a favourable opinion by the JTC was the **Proposal for a Multi-Annual Business Plan (MABP) of the European Schools System - 2022-2024**, based on the broad lines already presented in the Autumn meetings. Anticipating its own upcoming paper on governance to some extent, InterParents suggested that future iterations of this plan could usefully establish a strategic and holistic vision for the European Schools, that both the MABP and the Pedagogical MAP should include objectives on topical issues that needed addressing (i.e. currently: pandemic recovery, sustainability, wellbeing and digital education) and that an additional objective should be included for Career Orientation (which InterParents representatives recognise could benefit from some centralised, subject-orientated coordination.) InterParents also proposed enhancement of the Internal Control objectives to include objectives relating to standardised reporting, including KPIs, Quality Assurance and the scope of audit. The EC also requested greater detail e.g. on where responsibilities lay. These points were taken on board although, as the SG pointed out, this plan reflected simply the implementation of decisions already taken and points raised by the auditors so InterParents still has work to do in convincing the system to adopt a more structured approach to planning stemming from an overall strategic vision.

With the appointment finally of a Head of IT after an 18-month interregnum, the proposal for the **Multi Annual ICT Plan – 2022 – 2026** was keenly anticipated. It reflected the auditors' remarks on the previous plan (which had been too detailed), detailing the what, but not how and with which resources. Importantly, it proposed including stakeholders in the service delivery, not only running surveys to check user satisfaction. The main concern of InterParents and others in the JTC was that the IT expert from the EC would receive enough resources to provide the Schools with the technical and organisational expertise that they will need to tackle the various IT issues they face. The plan progresses to the BC now, where the EC will give its first feedback, having not had the document in time to comment at the JTC.

Presentation of the **Posts of Seconded Teachers filled for the 2022-2023 School Year** is an annual feature of the February JTC. As ever, at the time of the meeting (when the list should be complete as it closed at the end of January), the projected fulfilment of posts by Member States still fell well short of the Cost-Sharing target of 65% secondees vs LRTs. Several speakers reminded the committee of the impact of missing deadlines and certain delegations spoke of their difficulties in recruiting (especially so-called 'non-native' teachers with adequate language skills.) InterParents objected to the replacement of experienced, native-speaking LRTs with new secondments when there was a cost, both financially for the European tax-payer and in terms of loss of quality, not to mention the measures to increase attractiveness of the European Schools to teachers being undermined. The SG concluded by reiterating his plea to MS to communicate as early as possible when a suitable secondment could not be found so as to enable retention of the LRT currently doing the job.

A brief oral update was given on the **Main Findings of the External Evaluation of the Action Plan on Educational Support and Inclusive Education**. Hailing the evaluation as an important cornerstone in understanding progress on the Action Plan, InterParents welcomed warmly the Agency's involvement and expertise, trusting that the comments of all stakeholders would help shape the final report. InterParents also reiterated the expectations of parents that the scope of the evaluation project would be used fully to formulate meaningful recommendations even going beyond the terms of reference.

In the spirit of constructive engagement expected of JTC members, InterParents also brought to the JTC two of its own proposals:

Firstly, InterParents sought to open a conversation among the JTC members about **pedagogical data and planning**, based on concerns raised by parent representatives in recent years about the paucity of data underpinning the

planning process: Data received in SACs and Administrative Boards were felt to be formulaic and generic, rather than meaningful and targeted to the issues either identified in Whole School Inspection reports or in (Multi-)Annual Planning system- and local-objectives (let alone to issues that parents or other stakeholders considered a priority). Beyond this, the objectives set in the planning process were not SMART and often lacked concrete or measurable (so-called RACER) indicators that would drive the creation of data. InterParents noticed also that even when such objectives and indicators did make it into Annual Plans, often they were not followed up in any systematic way, nor were they reflected on before the following year's plan was made.

Having re-examined the background documentation on the 2009 Reform that had established "controlled autonomy" for the schools, InterParents had concluded that such a process had once been envisaged and so suggested to the JTC that it was time to revisit the topics of: 1) school-level annual planning; 2) the creation and use of pedagogical data as part of this, and 3) how both would fit into the overall programme of pedagogical quality assurance and development in the schools under the schools' controlled autonomy model. The presentation met with positive responses, particularly from OSGES and the EC, albeit with acknowledgement that extracting data and interpreting it is a challenge. While the part of the proposal asking the JTC to recommend that the BoG mandate specific actions at its April meeting was considered to be premature, the other points were taken into the inspectorate's ongoing 'reflection process.'

In a joint initiative with the pupil representatives CoSup, InterParents presented to the JTC a proposal to reinstate **Subject-Based and Thematic Inspections**. These had been replaced by Whole School Inspections as part of the 2009 Reform but, as InterParents explained, it was time to reconsider; the school community was adapting to competence-based learning/assessment and emerging from the pandemic with an increased focus on such issues as wellbeing and sustainable development. Parent and student representatives considered that thematic or transversal inspections would offer a valuable tool to usher in such new educational topics or transversal competences e.g. digital. A thematic inspection could also be a powerful way to lay out the topography of a new area, to develop a systemwide vocabulary and to share-out knowledge and practice. The response from the JTC was encouraging in that the other members of the committee engaged with the substance of the proposal. While it was felt too soon for thematic inspection of certain transversal issues, the committee agreed that the best way to proceed was to refer the question initially to the working groups dealing with Quality Assurance and Child Protection to consider what they might be able to offer to accomplish the same goals.
http://interparents.eu/pdf/COSUP-IP-2022-02-10-Thematic-Inspections.pdf

Finally, the JTC considered two initiatives which, it was hoped, will inspire pupils and teachers across the system:

The **Climate Academy** (a programme that has been in development at EEBII since 2011, for pupils in S6-7) empowers its participants to address climate change at a local and global level, through advancing understanding, civic engagement and social entrepreneurship. The JTC was invited first, to endorse — as a European School Programme — this in-house project which could serve as a model for other similar, cross-curricular programmes and second, to recommend to the BC and BoG décharges for the teachers involved as a means for securing the programme's longterm viability. Reception was favourable, recognising the European School's commitment to Education for Sustainable Development, and so the proposal proceeds to the BC with only the Directors so far sounding a note of caution in the JTC regarding the potential precedent that the 7 hours of décharge requested would set for similar projects in other schools.

As an example of a pan-system initiative at Primary Level, the Irish inspector John Fitzgerald provided the JTC with a status update on **Writing fest** which will give all pupils across the system, including the accredited schools, from Nursery to P5, the opportunity to practise generating ideas, drafting and editing into a well-crafted piece of writing, in a transnational festival (364 teachers in 27 schools) culminating on 4th March: World Book Day. Eight pieces of each language sections are to be selected and uploaded and reviewed by the language inspectors who will look for clarity of thought when selecting from the short list 23 pieces for publication in a booklet at the beginning of April. InterParents reiterated parent support for this pilot project and welcomed particularly the proposed use (and "re-purposing") of digital platforms that teachers and students have hitherto used only for distance learning.

The meeting ended with the JTC saying **goodbye to Brian Goggins**, Director of EEBI, whose period of secondment has come to an end.

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