Dear Parents,

Last year, the Parents' Association sent an open letter to the OSG regarding the problems SWALS (students without language section) encountered in the Secondary school, mainly because of rigid regulations. Recently we had a follow up meeting with the School Management including Mr van Daal (Director), Mrs Soekov (Deputy Director for Secondary) and Mr Couché (in charge of the Secondary timetable).
The APEEEL2 SWALS Committee would like to share with you a very short summary of the discussion.

SWALS L1 lessons

Although there were some improvements in the organization of SWALS L1 lessons compare to last year (e.g. no more three L1 lessons on the same day) most of the major problems still exist.

- Merged SWALS L1 lessons are not just the outcome of the minimum group size rules, but often a result of financial and timetable constraints.
- There is no group size maximum limit for merged lessons. If the School is not able to organize separate L1 lessons, groups much larger than 7 students can have merged lessons.
- Hiring a second L1 teacher for SWALS languages has various obstacles: optimization of teachers' timetables, availability of teachers, support from the home country.
- These restrictions are not specific for SWALS L1 lessons. The School Management is expected to merge all groups when required by regulations. Some exceptions are requested for some SWALS L1 groups.
- The School Management highlighted that reducing the number of lessons (e.g. one lesson less per week to avoid merged lesson) is not the recommended procedure. For S6 and S7 classes, it is not allowed at all according to the ES regulations. So even if reducing the number of lessons to avoid class merge would be preferred by students, and supported by teachers, the School Management must still proceed with the merge of L1 lessons to achieve optimization goals.

Second Language (L2), differentiation

- We again raised the issue of the lack of group level differentiation in L2 teaching. Many parents told us that bilingual children and SWALS are often bored on L2 lessons, as there is too much difference in language skills within their group. The School Management explained that teachers are required to provide pupils with learning material appropriate to their skill level. If this is not working well, parents need to take it up with the teacher.

APEEEL2's request to parents: Please share with us concrete examples of pupils given exercises well below their level, so we can present them to the School Management

The School does organize some advanced lessons for pupils, but they are not available for all L2 languages and in every age group. This is not either meant to be a support for SWALS to achieve their higher-than-average learning goals. Regarding French advanced lessons, teachers select pupils instead of pupils being allowed to volunteer to the advanced lessons.

APEEEL2's request to parents: If you are aware of any group which was organized by pupils directly volunteering to advanced lessons, please let us know so we can clarify the process for applying to these lessons.

- In S1 A1.2 (FR) and A2(DE) level L2 books do not seem to be challenging for many students. There is no clear explanation why these books have been selected, if they are well below the minimum level required by the language policy. We must point out that this "concept" is the same in many European Schools, and not specific to Lux2. The Parent's Association will investigate further.

Communication to parents about the SWALS system

- The School Management agreed to involve the 2 SWALS coordinators in the update of the APEEEL2 SWALS FAQ, so parents are better informed. Hopefully everyone will have a clear overview of the rules and practices to avoid disappointment and unrealistic expectations.

Visit of the Luxembourgish Ombudsman

- During the previous school year, a group of parents from our two European Schools in Luxembourg contacted the Ombudsman to request an investigation on the SWALS situation. Parents suspected discriminatory outcomes on the teaching time, the access to learning resources and some other issues. As a result, the Ombudsman met with our School Director who explained the various regulations currently in place. We have not yet received any feedback from the investigation, and we will update you as soon as we get the conclusions from the Ombudsman's office.

We would like to thank the School Management for giving us the opportunity to discuss these issues and continue an open dialogue on the problems faced by SWALS pupils.

If you have any query or suggestions, please email us on office@apeeel2.lu with the subject "SWALS".

With best regards,

APEEEL2 SWALS Committee – 23/05/2023
https://www.apeeel2.lu/swals-committee/