European Parliament questions European School leaders about actions to address critical recommendations in EP Report on the European Schools

On 12 September 2023 European Parliament voted overwhelmingly in support of the report by EP CULT Committee '*On the system of European Schools: state of play, challenges and perspectives'.* This report was the product of a 2+ year extensive investigation by the CULT Committee, and represents the most thorough review of the European Schools ever undertaken[i]

On 13 February 2024 the EP CULT Committee held the first of its planned annual meetings with the leadership and stakeholders of the European Schools. The meeting focused on the follow up to actions being proposed by the Office of the Secretary General for European Schools to address the many issues identified by the report and the priorities of the Board of Governors in bringing these reforms to life.

Andreas Beckmann, Secretary General for the European Schools, opened the discussion by presenting Secretary General's Office action plan. While this was generally welcomed, the EP Rapporteur Ilana Cicurel emphasized that the EP wanted all the recommendations from the report acted on, not just a selection. She stated that to achieve the vision of a reformed European School system as a role model for education in the EU, the process would need to include external experts from outside the schools and far greater involvement of the European Commission's own Education specialist – DG EAC, as one "cannot have a critical view on oneself". There will need to be direct discussions with all stakeholders and Member states to review how the governance can be changed and a new Charter for the schools established. This will require political will beyond the Secretary General.

InterParents president Helen Valentine, representing European school parents, fully supported the EP Rapporteur Ilana Cicurel and the EP for the thorough critical analysis of the European School System (ESS) and detailed recommendations aimed at fixing the many problems that parents, pupils and teachers encounter. She welcomed the vision to build a reformed European school system into a role model for education within the EU, but listed key areas where the Secretary General's action plan needs to be strengthened, including serious shortcomings of the ESS governance system and children's wellbeing, such as rules applicable to safety and security standards, establishing of effective dialogue with parents' and students' communities, absence of effective legal remedies remained overlooked and unaddressed. InterParents fully agreed with the EP Rapporteur and ESS Pupils' Committee's representative in highlighting the need to bring in external experts to review the system and measures to introduce genuine accountability and external scrutiny of the European schools.

The ESS Board of Governors President, Antonio Cenini, confirmed the priority to launch a reflection on the future of the European schools with the support of the Parliament, and to

adopt a new Charter for the schools. This will require “moving from ordinary to an extraordinary administrative approach”. He spoke strongly of the importance of building an inter-institutional high-level dialogue with the EP and The Commission as the way forward.

The Commission representative, Christian Roques, Deputy Director General DG-HR, expressed “all our appreciation and thanks for the work that has been done (by the EP). If I have one message there which I would like to be reminded, the Commission will be fully on Board to support this report, those recommendations in order for them to be a success”.

InterParents remain committed to improving ESS to achieve educational excellence, promoting multi-cultural education, while ensuring well-being of children at the level equal with that provided by national schools of EU Member States. InterParents believe that achieving this goal will be impossible without putting in place transparent, democratic and inclusive governance system that will establish effective dialogue between ESS and parents’ and students’ community throughout the decision-making process and an effective system of legal remedies.

Thanks to the work of the European Parliament, a once-in-a-generation pathway exists now to comprehensively reform the ESS and turn it into the kind of schools we all want – but this requires the Commission, the Member States and the Board of Governors plus all stakeholders to work with the European Parliament to make sure the requested reforms are delivered. This cannot be left just to the system managers as a level of political will is needed for this to happen as well as external expertise. We as parents can assist this process by communicating our support for these reforms to our contacts in Member states and in the EU institutions.

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The broadcast of the CULT meeting is available at:
https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/cult-committee-meeting_20240213-0900-COMMITTEE-CULT (starting at 10:45)

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/product/product-details/20240205CAN72645

The full text of the EP Resolution of 12 September 2023 is available at:
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0306_EN.html

Full information about the European Parliament’s procedure is available at:
https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2022/2149(INI)#

Annex: InterParents interventions at the Joint Teaching Committee (JTC) meeting on 09/02/2024 and at the EP CULT Committee meeting on 13/02/2024

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[1] An European Parliament (EP) own-initiative report, also called an INI report has its legal basis in Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Article 54 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament. It is prepared by a committee of the EP on a topic within its remit. It allows the EP to take initiative on policy issues and shape the EU agenda, even if there isn't a formal legislative proposal from the Commission. While the report and accompanying resolution are not legally binding documents, they raise awareness and spark public and political debate on the respective issues and may eventually lead to more formal action on the part of the Commission and the Council.

Annex

InterParents interventions on European Parliament Resolution and OSG Action plan

Joint Teaching Committee 8-9 February 2024

III.F.1. Action Plan: Reflection on the Future of the European Schools System – Follow-up to the Report of the European Parliament (2024-01-D-30-en-1)

InterParents is pleased that an Action Plan is being put in place to follow up on the Parliamentary Resolution on the European Schools. We believe that such timely and concrete action is extremely important. As this is the pedagogical committee, we will focus our intervention on the pedagogical points found under Section D of the Parliamentary Resolution (and Cluster 1 of the associated Action Plan). We will use the reference numbers of the EP Resolution, as we find the switch from the original structure and numbering confusing.

First, we observe that there have been some promising steps in the pedagogical area such as:

- the recruitment of additional posts into the pedagogical development unit,
- the development of CPD for teachers,
- the recent reexamination of the role and organisation of the inspectorate,
- the external review of the Whole School Inspection process, and
- the upcoming teacher forum in Parma.

However, there are also some notable gaps which are not addressed by the Action Plan. In particular, parents are concerned that the system is not undertaking the deep structural work that the European Parliament called for. In the pedagogical realm we believe it would be important to start with:

- **EP Resolution Point 23a:** a review of the overall quality assurance approach put in place as part of the 2009 school reform. *(This should have been undertaken by a dedicated task force including experts, and completed by mid-2024)*; and
- **EP Resolution Point 23b:** the introduction of an enhanced and accountable inspection regime. *(Here it is noted that the IAS assessment is due in 2025, but it is unclear why other work on the inspection regime cannot go on in the meantime.)*

In general, we believe that the Action Plan often fails to draw out key connections, dependencies, or synergies between the different points. This leads to too many small and potential inefficient actions, rather than a joined-up programme. As an example, **Point 23a** above, is strongly connected to **EP Resolution Point 18**, which calls for "greater autonomy accompanied by stronger assessment and accountability mechanisms". While **EP Resolution Point 29:** the question of support for mother tongue education is strongly connected to the

Point 2 "update of the mission, principles and objectives" of the system. And all points somehow depend on **EP Resolution Point 8** calling on the Commission to perform an in-depth review of the governance and management structure.

Furthermore, in several cases the Action Plan highlights that work is being done but sets no objectives or targets to measure the effectiveness, timeliness and general fitness-for-purpose of the results. This is certainly the case with the response to **EP Resolution Point 32** on environmental learning and digital education. In the same vein, we would question some of the deadlines proposed and would disagree with quite a few of the "colour codes" assigned to prioritise actions and characterise progress.

In sum, InterParents misses a structured programme-management approach to this work. We believe that a more structured approach should include: a clear programme governance structure and consultation of stakeholders; real ownership by the BoG; as well as analysis of the dependencies, priorities, objectives, targets and milestones.
The Rapporteur's explanatory statement calls for deep change at all levels. As parents, we recognise that change is difficult for any organisation. But we have a collective responsibility here to rise to the challenge and to address problems and weaknesses in the system. In doing so, we should not hesitate to call on external players to provide needed perspective as well as subject experts to ensure that changes are forward looking and meet the needs of our future school community.

We will be submitting a written statement for the attention of all the ESS governing bodies including JTC in due course and would very much appreciate your attention.

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European Parliament CULT COMMITTEE
Exchange of views on the European Schools system
13th February 2024 10:45 – 12:30

Andreas Beckmann, Secretary-General of the European Schools
Christian Rogues, Deputy Director-General of DG HR, European Commission
Antonio Cenini, President of the Board of Governors of the European Schools
Helen Valentine, President of InterParents, Parents representative
José Mas Marco, Co-President of the Inter-School Teacher Committee (ISTC), Teachers' representative
Byron K. Springer, President of the Conseil Supérieur des Élèves de Écoles Européenes (COSUP), Students' representative

InterParents intervention

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk to you today.

We applaud the European Parliament's thorough review of the European School System and its vision of the system as the cornerstone of a 'European Education Area', capable of driving the EU towards educational excellence in Europe. However, while the report has highlighted the strengths of the system, it has also brought to light significant shortcomings.

We echo the assessment by the rapporteur of the report that

'… the European Union has actually created an astonishing and living 'laboratory': one with high-quality multilingual education and highly performing students, one that produces truly European staff, teachers and inspectors that are the pedagogical force of the System…'

‘However, serious governance, management and financing difficulties persist, hampering the system’s potential with negative consequences for the entire school community. These difficulties touch upon legal issues, resources, infrastructure, staff recruitment and elements of educational and pedagogical quality, thereby underscoring a profound need for reform.’

Parents are pleased than an Action Plan is being put in place to follow up on your report. We believe that timely and concrete action is extremely important.

There are though some notable gaps which are not addressed by the Action Plan. We would summarise these gaps as follows:

1) Parents are concerned that the system is not undertaking the deep structural work that the European Parliament called for. We miss a structured programme management approach to this work that would include a clear governance structure and consultation of stakeholders, real ownership by the BoG as well as analysis of the dependencies, priorities, objectives, targets and milestones.

2) There are a number of key resolutions that have no action against them or explanation for why not. This is unfortunately a repeat of the 2011 exercise where a significant number of resolutions were ignored. In terms of objectives, in only 6 resolutions is the issue fully addressed by the proposed actions. A further 12 are partially addressed but in 8 resolutions the action specified fails to address the issue at all and finally in a further 13 cases no action is proposed. (This excludes the cases where the action is designated for a party other than the BoG)

3) Parents believe that the independence of the review process is key. The current draft action plan brings this process almost entirely under OSG which creates a conflict of interest as the office is unable to objectively advise the BoG on its own performance.

4) The requests to involve external experts should be respected. The current plan ignores these requests with the risk therefore that the reform process becomes inward looking, with no access to best practice developments and new thinking in the world of education and school management.

5) A key foundation activity is the requested in-depth review of the governance and management structures at both system and school level. This analysis will provide the insights and actions needed to achieve the desired reforms. It is therefore critical that this activity is agreed upon at the forthcoming BoG meeting in April and begins immediately after.

6) The EP report makes a clear and strong call for governance reform, in particular enhanced accountability and external scrutiny. The draft action plan does not address this in any significant way.

The Rapporteur’s explanatory statement calls for deep change at all levels. As parents, we recognise that change is difficult for any organisation. But we have a collective responsibility here to rise to the challenge and to address problems and weaknesses in the system. In doing so, we should not hesitate to call on external players to provide needed perspective as well as subject experts to ensure that changes are forward looking and meet the needs of our future school community.

In summary therefore, we call for the action plan to be an interim action plan and should be enhanced by 3 key actions:

1) To undertake an external review of the ESS in line with the new mission and vision as outlined in the report.

2) To create a strategic action plan following this external review that will address the full scope of the EP resolutions and in particular the serious governance, management, legal remedies and financing difficulties as identified in the report.

3) The setting up of a programme management function to deliver on the action plan. This function should report directly into the presidency.

As you can see - we share many of the concerns raised by Ilana Cicurel

Parents are proud to be stakeholders in our unique ESS and we are fully committed to the change process that lies ahead of us so that together we can facilitate the system achieve its potential.

We thank you for your time and attention.