

Newsflash – Commissioner Oettinger meets European School Parent Representatives

Brussels 14th December 2017

On Thursday 14 December, parents representing the European Schools met Commissioner Oettinger for an information-rich and frank exchange of views on the current situation in the European Schools.

Background

INTERPARENTS as well as 11 of the 13 schools in the system attended the meeting in person. Members of the Commissioner's Cabinet and DG HR were also present at the meeting.

The parent representatives had agreed the key items that they wished to discuss with Commissioner Oettinger, namely:

- 1) the evolution of the system over the past few years,
- 2) seconded teachers,
- 3) locally recruited teachers,
- 4) accredited schools and the importance of sustaining the pedagogical core of the system,
- 5) overcrowding and safety,
- 6) implications of Brexit for the schools and their communities,
- 7) support of the valuable work done by Parent Associations in supporting the schools.

Representatives from Interparents and all 13 Parent Associations contributed to crafting a coherent set of messages and requests for the Commissioner.

Introductory remarks

Commissioner Oettinger opened the meeting by clearly stating his support of the ES system, mentioning the key role it plays in attracting staff members from all Member States. Whilst specifically mentioning the value of the motivated directors, whom he met in October, as well as the teachers, he went on to refer to 3 significant challenges currently facing the schools:

- 1) the delays to the 5th school in Brussels,
- 2) the competition the schools have in recruiting teachers and
- 3) the challenges of the complicated financing structure.

Parents highlighted three key ways in which the European schools are of immense value to the Commission, then contrasting this with the difficult evolution of the system during the last four years. She highlighted the widespread perception that, despite the motivation evident from all key stakeholders, the system had now reached a tipping point and called for the Commissioner to spearhead action to overcome the intractable and conflicting problems, bringing together key decision makers and stakeholders.

The Commissioner responded to these initial points by expressing his belief that the parents' concerns were realistic because they were based in the daily reality of experiencing the education delivered at school level and paid tribute to the enormous amount of work done by parent volunteers, often for the generations of children yet to come.

As discussions progressed, the Commissioner proposed a high-level summit focusing on the European Schools at which all key stakeholders would be represented. He suggested targeting April 2018 for this summit. Parent representatives welcomed this proposal by the Commissioner and look forward to seeing a proposed agenda in the New Year.

Teaching

Parents highlighted the falling numbers of seconded teachers, the need to have the Commissioner's personal support in making Member States aware of their responsibilities as well as the need to progress with a new cost sharing agreement for when the current one expires, in a Brexit context, and the need to address the key issues surrounding the local recruitment teacher recruitment and the challenges of competitiveness of contracts, underlining that there was a need for urgency, to benefit the current recruitment cycle. Parents also highlighted the particular impact on children with needing educational support of the current situation.

The Commissioner endorsed the current target staffing model, whereby significant value is added by seconding teachers from all Member States, and highlighted the value these teachers also take back to their home countries at the end of their secondments. He confirmed the need for the European Schools to be an attractive employer and be able to compete locally, and he was receptive to the request to explore what could be done for September 2018.

Accredited schools

Parents mentioned the current situation with accredited schools (AES) AES bring challenges and opportunities for the system as a whole, including the need to ensure that the pedagogical core of the system is invested in for the benefit of all schools, as with regard to pedagogical reform, communication of the new marking scale, development of teacher training programmes and inspection resources.. Some schools, as in Luxembourg, faced particular challenges as they were founding themselves in unfair competition for locally recruited teachers. Parents finally mentioned that this would be an opportune time to reconsider the governance structure of the school system.

Commissioner Oettinger responded by expressing his support for the AES while confirming that type 1 schools should be able to compete on a fair basis. He alluded to the particularly difficult employment situation in Luxembourg and the need to find a workable solution.

Overcrowding

Finally, parents described the issues of overcrowding for some schools in the system and the reality of the situation becoming more acute in the face of more delays. He called on the Commissioner to ensure that the Belgian authorities provide answers and more certainty around the future, as well as for staffing needs in IT and safety & security to be supported by the Commission meanwhile. Commissioner Oettinger replied by stating the need for realism and an interim solution both in Brussels and Frankfurt as well giving his personal commitment to progress the current situation.

Conclusion

The Commissioner finished the meeting by thanking the parent representatives for coming and confirming their involvement in planning the upcoming summit.