

INTERPARENTS Meetings at the European School, Brussels II 17-18 February 2009¹

INTERPARENTS met at the Brussels II European School on Wednesday 17 February for an afternoon Roundtable mainly discussing the question of SWALS and briefly Second language teaching. The issue of languages is complex with obvious tensions as to the handling of mother tongue, dominant language, host country language, bilingualism, second language, section language, other languages, non-native students, language acquisition, parental choice, reduction of hours, differentiated teaching, language support. Interparents underlined mother tongue teaching as the cornerstone of the European school, rejected the idea of international sections, wanted more sections to maintain diversity, insisted on improved harmonisation and emphasised the need for learning support and teacher training.

The plenary meeting on Thursday 18 February 2009 prepared the Interparents position in the Teaching Committees of the European Schools offices in Brussels, 19-20 February 2009. Twelve of the thirteen member Parents Associations were represented in all or part of the meetings. Chair: Christopher Wilkinson, President of Interparents. Interparents was welcomed by Richard Galvin, Director, Brussels II who gave a comprehensive overview of the challenges facing Brussels II with regard to pupil intake, security, ICT developments and communication (within the school and externally), which was much appreciated. Later in the day, Anglo Salsi, President of the Brussels II Parents Association also said a few words particularly on the school's urgent needs exacerbated by over-crowding and projected increase of pupils.

The group briefly discussed the latest news from the Board of Governors, working groups on SEN (appeals) and Career Guidance (financing options) and again raised concerns about decision-making occurring where parents are not represented. Other news included: Interparents website developments; relations with the Parents' Association of the associated schools, where members felt that informal contacts and cooperation should be maintained and developed; [EuroSport Student Reporters](#) initiative and the launch of a [EuroSport website](#); European Parliament Public Hearing on "[Le systeme des ecoles europeennes: un modele pour la mobilite et le multilinguisme.](#)"

Then to the real work of the meeting which was to prepare the Teaching Committees (Joint, Primary, Secondary). For the Joint Teaching Committee and regarding **Religious Observance** [2009-D-371-fr] there was consensus that Article 33.c.ii, empowering the Director to decide, was sufficient so long as it was born in mind that any use of discretionary power had to be justified and transparent to avoid arbitrary decision making or discrimination and that the list of religious festivities which had been drawn up for guidance was limited. The **Analysis of Repeat Rates** [2009-d-381-fr] was actually statistics not an analysis as no conclusions as to whether this phenomenon was due to the teaching, the student, the marking scales or a combination of all three or more. Nor was there any link made with learning support. The group observed that high repeat rates in the French section were confirmed by their Baccalaureate results. With regard to **Integration of SEN pupils** [2009-D-391-fr], the group insisted that, whilst Learning Support was targeted and short term, SEN was a life long learning process and the current trend to limit it, was extremely worrying. Also, the lack of information to parents about what was available and their choices, is an additional source of concern.

¹ . This Webreport is issued for quick information of the member Associations under the responsibility of the Chair. It is not the Minutes of the meeting which will follow in due course after being approved by the participants.

Article 9(d) of the Convention gives the representative of the parents a right to vote on educational matters described in Article 11. However, Interparents has noticed a tendency for pedagogical decisions to be discussed and taken in meetings to which parents do not have access. Parents' Associations should play an important role in raising awareness about SEN and Learning Support.

For Primary, Interparents welcomed efforts to better communicate and coordinate between schools for Mathematics via the **Intermath Newsletter** [2009-d-401-en] the **Proposal for an Annual Meeting of the Intermath Commission with the Mathematics Coordinators of all European Schools** [2009-d-411-en] and **Analysis of the Follow-Up Report on Mathematics and Proposal for a Common Framework For Follow-Up On Inspections** [2008-D-386-Fr] and agreed that these good practices should be introduced for other subjects too. More information was requested on the possible development of a test for Year 5 to help in the transfer of information between primary and secondary phases.

For Secondary, Interparents took good note that the European Baccalaureate' Working Group was to be revived, and welcomed Interparents' representation. An Interparents Task Force would be set up and a position paper along the same lines as would be prepared, working closely with the Task Force on Reform. With regard to **Regulations for the L2 written and oral examinations in the European Baccalaureate** [2009-D-661-fr], doubts were expressed as to whether these were codifying the existing curriculum or were new proposals. Harmonisation should not disguise serious changes and, if this was indeed the case, they needed to be introduced well in advance. The group emphasised that the level of L2 (second language) was not intended to be at the same level as L1 although the PISA results showed very good L2 results.

Interparents reiterated its appreciation of the care and attention given to students made in their earlier discussion on the working group for career guidance. The scale of this job was well described in **Handling of Applications for Admission to Higher Education of year 7 students** [2008-D-6110-en] and the group felt that this could no longer continue on a voluntary basis varying from Section to Section. More recognition and resources were needed given that "Ce suivi demande un très grand nombre d'heures de travail, variable en fonction des difficultés rencontrées."

The group felt that the **Dossier of conformity of the Anglophone section – European Schooling at the International School Manosque (France)** [2009-D-671-fr] exemplified all the dangers of expanding the European school system into Type II associated schooling. It showed that anything and everything could come under the heading "European schooling" and that governments would put political expediency before pedagogical fundamentals.

Before wrapping up this part of the session, delegates attending the Teaching Committees were asked to put their oral interventions into writing after the meeting to ensure that they were properly integrated into the meeting reports and also to report back in writing so other representatives were briefed and to ensure continuity.

Rapporteur: Ana Gorey.

