



COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY

Local Staff Committee Brussels
The President

Brussels, **28 JUN 2010**
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NOTE FOR THE ATTENTION OF MR. M. SEFCOVIC,
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The LSC Brussels is following very closely the problem of repeat rates in the European schools. A dedicated working group was set up last year which provided a valuable contribution to the discussions of the Board. A document was transmitted to your predecessor Mr Kallas, as well as to the Secretary General of the European Schools and the members of the Board of Governors (see attached).

Thanks to its active involvement, the LSC succeeded in having the issue added to the agenda of the Board of Governors where the problem was analysed by a working group.

However, the LSC regrets that it did not have the opportunity, as promised, to present its proposals to the working group and that the Board of Governors gave no feedback to the LSC's contribution.

The LSC fears that the results of the work carried out by the Board do not tackle the problem as a whole as they only consider one specific aspect (focusing on science) and that, under these circumstances, no long-lasting solution will be provided.

Please find attached the comments of the LSC group on the final document "Analyse des taux de redoublement et des notes negatives en 2009".

We would like to have the opportunity to meet you to explain our concerns and to make sure that in the interests of our children our worries and suggestions are heard by the Board of Governors.

Yours sincerely,

Hans Torrekens

Enclosure: Preliminary Comments from LSC Working Group on the European Schools

C.c.: Mme I. Souka, M. D. Dotto, DG HR
LSC, OSP

**Preliminary comments from CLP Working Group on the European Schools
on the**

**" Rapport préliminaire du Groupe de travail du Conseil Supérieur présenté au
Conseil d'Inspection Secondaire - Analyse des taux de redoublement et des
notes négatives en 2009 – Mesures contre l'échec scolaire" (14 June 2010)**

The CLP working group on the European Schools:

- welcomes the fact that the Report recognises the problem has been known for many years (1988!) and therefore expects urgent solutions to be taken and no more blocking tactics, of whatever nature, in the process;
- welcomes the fact that the document presents already some proposals as an attempt to begin tackling the issue of repeat rates, particularly on science subjects. It especially welcomes the fact that for the first time a structured proposal identifying the problems and allocating tasks has been put forward. We highlight how important it is that some of these proposals, completed by further proposals from the Group of Inspectors, must be put in place as fast as possible, some of them already for the next school year;
- thanks the Inspectors for their involvement and concrete proposals and expects that the resources needed will be made available for the necessary measures to be put in place. To illustrate this, the proposal to give students the possibility to repeat exams in September is welcomed, should be put in place for next year and not be blocked by administrative or budgetary considerations;
- reiterates the fact that any attempt to implement the proposed measures will certainly need human and financial resources. Budgetary adjustments will have to be made to finance the measures identified as necessary to counter the deterioration of the education system in the European School system reflected, for instance, by the inability of the system to integrate all students, by the high repeat and drop-out rates, and by the huge differences between language sections. All these facts raise serious doubts over the recurrent statements of the BoG that the European School system is excellent.
- considers that the BoG WG approach to the issue is nevertheless insufficient as it does not address all the causes of the problem. As stated before, parents have identified at least four aspects with consequences on the deterioration of the education system and the high failure and drop - out rates: a) deficient governance b) lack of communication and transparency c) science subjects d) specific and systematic problem in the Francophone section.

This document has the merit of recognising the differences between the different sections (well illustrated in all data tables). The CLP WG insists that an in-depth analysis and recommendations be made to target this problem and particularly the specific problems of the Francophone section because otherwise: a) the repeat rates issue will only be partially and insufficiently addressed and b) there is a clear unacceptable discriminatory situation for the children in the Francophone section and children with French as L2 that cannot go on. In fact general statements such as the one on page 3 – "... nos bacheliers réussissent dans les meilleures universités ..." does not apply to all sections: Francophone section students are often refused by the best universities (i.e. in the UK). In fact the EP Report mentioned as a reference does not highlight the differences between sections.

- refuses the approach of "re-locating" the existing problem", by increasing selection in the Primary or considering repeating as a pedagogical method to be applied at certain "stages". Although the idea expressed in previous documents is not clearly expressed in this Report, the Group fears that the statement on page 8 on the cycles P5-S and S3-S4 will encourage a concentration of high repeat rates for the change of "cycles". Contrary to the idea expressed at the end of page 3, that repeating could be a "positive" event, the CLP WG expects that the Group of Inspectors will base their work on an examination of best practices in other Member States to reduce or eliminate repeating and achieve the integration goals for the current students' population. The same statement on page 5 "...la réalité montre que bon nombre de redoublements peuvent être considérés comme positifs".... has been recurrently put forward by the BoG – the CLP WG would welcome some clarification on the data and scientific basis (including psychological and medical) for this idea.
- requests total transparency: schools shall provide a complete table (per year, per class and per linguistic section) for all years, clearly including the repeat and the drop-out rates per school/class/year/language section. The Report of the Secretary General should provide, every year, a very clear and comprehensive analysis on this data, using coherent indicators, in such a way to highlight trends and find solutions in time. On drop-out rates, 27% of students having to repeat leaving the EEs; 35% for S4-S5 and 10% having repeated twice are terrible figures particularly because, contrary to the statement that EEs are "second choice schools", many of these children don't have anywhere to go but far away from their families back to their home countries – unless of course, the vast majority of the drop-outs will be in the Francophone section. This analysis has to be done and made available.
- as well as providing and analysing the statistics, evidence on the circumstances and reasons for failures and repeats should be gathered by

interviewing or requesting written comments from teachers, pupils, parents as this will help to identify the reasons behind the problems.

Comments on specific issues:

The CLP WG welcomes most of the concrete proposals presented particularly related to science subjects (syllabus, harmonisation, training and awareness raising on the specificities of the EE system, etc.)

Further aspects could nevertheless be raised:

- it would be useful to consider more flexibility in options BIO-CHI-PHY for S5-S6 – this would also allow students to follow a specific science subject without having to exclude LIII or LIV;
- absenteeism of students is certainly important but should be dealt with in parallel with efforts targeting the absenteeism of teachers, an issue that has been raised on several occasions by the Parents Associations.
- The situation Maths 4 vs. Maths 6 should be the object of an in-depth analysis as it a) could highlight possible causes/indicators for differences between sections; b) shows a clear problem of level of requirements that does not give students any alternative to pursue school whatever options they wish to take in S6.
- It would be important to split the marks in S5 (first year with exams counting for 50% in the final mark) to verify the possible reasons for failure: this would be an interesting indicator allowing to identify if there is a problem with the evaluation itself (exams too long/heavy for the time allocated, etc) and if there is a problem with marking between different sections.
- There should also be an investigation of the number of outside-school unofficial tutors that parents send their children to help them to learn and get them through the exams. This is a major industry occupying parents' and children's out of school hours and costing dear (even 50€/hour) – this would put in perspective the analysis on the school performance or make it re-think the level of requirements when compared with the resources or existing conditions.
- There should be a search for reasons why there are so many failures of newcomers in the first two years after arriving in the secondary school and how this is linked to L2 teaching and the use of L2 as vehicular language.