The European Schools: where do we stand, what's on the horizon, and what are our aims.

The European Schools have successfully fulfilled their aims for a long time, thanks to the professionalism of the teaching staff and the trust of parents. They have enabled thousands of children to be educated and to flourish in their adult lives in a truly European spirit, particularly appropriate at a time of the return of nationalist excesses and self-interest.

Victims of their success, the European Schools called "**type 1**" are now however struggling to accommodate the growing student population, with the allocation of places close to parents' homes becoming increasingly difficult, forcing many students to travel long distances by bus...

Parents are too often being forced into falling back on national educational establishments of varying levels, of various denominations, sometimes with random waiting lists, whose environments do not necessarily correspond either to parental expectations or to the students' own educational and career plans.

To try to contain this drift away, and to meet the aspirations of parents for education within the European Schools, the decision was taken in agreement with the Belgian authorities to authorise the opening of a fifth school located in Neder-Over-Heembeek...

For the record, the number of children currently enrolled in the European Schools is 14,607, and it will rise to 16,200 in 5 to 6 years' time, whereas the current capacity of the European Schools is only 13,530.

The Neder-Over-Heembeek location, in addition to not being at all near where many families live, already raises a certain number of questions, such as:

- whether it is planned to transfer certain language sections there?

- even more children suffering from tedious and lengthy bus journeys?

Moreover, it is a safe bet that this new School will not have the capacity to accommodate the increasing population for long...

So why not, from now on, allow schooling in so-called "**type 2**" schools closer to parents' homes. These schools' benefit from a much greater capacity and have places available for siblings. They are known for their high-quality education and can offer better services to the many families whose homes are located nearby. For example, the European School of Argenteuil is close to families living to the south of Brussels and the School of Mol is convenient for families living to the north-east of Brussels whose parents work at Geel (the latter has also set up very favourable transport facilities).

This facility would make it possible to avoid overcrowding in so-called "type I" European Schools, which currently benefit from almost total support from the Institution. In return, the education allowance provided to parents sending their children to "type 2" schools could be substantially increased or supplemented to cover a substantial part of the fees of the latter schools.

Another subject of concern related to the previous one, seems to us to be worth mentioning: many parents are complaining about a noticeable drop in the quality of teaching. The syllabus is not always covered in its entirety, the quality of teaching is not always up to

standard, and these shortcomings are far from being restricted to only a few sections in a few schools. School overcrowding aggravates these problems, leading to unmonitored campuses with increasing cases of vandalism and even harassment.

This situation and these grievances reinforce our idea that a fairer and more harmonious distribution of children within the European Schools, whether type 1 or type 2, would constitute an excellent, if not the only, short- or medium-term solution. It would make it possible to shorten travel times, reduce the number of children per class, and ensure a safer extracurricular environment for children, their parents, and teaching and administrative staff.

Currently, the Commission generally contributes 2/3 of the budget of the European Schools, without having much say over the level and content of the courses given and the well-being of the children.

It is important that our Administration begins a rapid and consistent discussion with the Board of European Schools in order to propose solutions to the difficulties described above, which naturally involve a significant increase in allocations for attendance at type 2 Schools.

For the well-being of all, and whatever the angle adopted, it is important to reduce the divide between type 1 and type 2 establishments.

The FFPE, **in the interest of pragmatism, does not propose major structural changes or increased bureaucracy,** but a simple, more substantial financial support for parents wishing to send their children to type 2 schools, closer to home, would allow a re-balancing that would be reassuring for children and parents alike and rewarding for the teachers who give the best of themselves in often difficult conditions.

Our children's future is not just theirs. It is also ours, and in part, that of the European project, of which they are the witnesses, and perhaps even the actors of tomorrow. We need them, let's help them....

As in so many other areas, **the FFPE is ready to contribute to finding the solutions**.

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