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AIDE MEMOIRE

Subject: “Cost Sharing”
– consequences for English language teaching in the European Schools

This note summarises the information that is available to Interparents regarding the consequences of the cost sharing issue on the teaching in mother tongue English in the European Schools. The formal secondment of mother tongue teachers by the UK and Ireland is falling well short of requirements. This is associated with increased local recruitment of teachers (Chargés de Cours), persistence of vacant English language posts and secondment of non mother tongue teachers by other Member States. The note presents the general situation, with a few illustrations. More specific information has been collected about this issue from the Parents Associations of nearly all the European Schools.

I Summary and Conclusions

The current situation in the English language sections is giving rise to considerable concern, particularly in the larger schools. The combination of enlargement and the multiplication of small language groups, insufficient numbers of mother-tongue English language teachers and the restrictive enrolment policy in the Brussels schools has created a critical situation. The problem has to be solved because it affects a large proportion of the whole school community learning English either as first, second or third language and consequently those following several other subjects in English as well. Non Anglophone pupils who join the EN (vehicular language) section struggle in classes where the proportion of mother-tongue Anglophone pupils falls too low to provide the necessary cultural context to learn English to the necessary level to undertake the whole of the European School career – including the baccalaureate – in the English language section.

Interparents considers that non mother tongue (or “near” mother tongue) teachers are not the answer. Secondment of English mother tongue teachers by other Member States is unlikely to provide a comprehensive solution, although a few successful appointments of this kind have been made. Several Member States have already indicated that they are unwilling to participate in this system.

Recognising that local recruitment of *Chargés de Cours* is an essential component of the European School system, it has to be said that it is now being pushed too far, under unsatisfactory conditions. Too many *Chargés de Cours* are being sought, too late in the year. Individual schools do not have the resources and expertise to conduct the recruitment process thoroughly. In several places the local “market” for teachers is too narrow to supply the requisite qualifications.

Insofar as non mother tongue teachers and *Chargés de Cours* are recruited, it is increasingly essential that the national Inspectors responsible for the language sections concerned are intimately associated with ex-ante quality control and the recruitment process itself. This would be the minimum counterpart for the current dilution of mother tongue teaching by seconded teachers.

Finally, the recently very restrictive enrolment policy in the Brussels schools has had the, no doubt unintended, consequence of seriously compounding the difficulties in a number of classes in the Anglophone language sections.

II Background

The issues underlying the present problem are not new. The slow-down in secondments by the UK and Ireland appears to have started some time ago. The Board of Governors initiated a closed working group on Cost Sharing in 2007. Already in January 2008 Interparents queried the so-called “structural solution” which imposes secondment of non mother tongue teachers by other Member States, having excluded all other options, including financial transfers.

Interparents' has also expressed deep concern as to the devolution and weakening of the critical role of the national Inspectors in maintaining quality control, in general in the context of the expansion of the European School system and specifically over the appointment and permanent evaluation of all teachers in the language sections for which the national Inspectors are responsible, including locally appointed and non mother tongue teachers.

Recently proposed mechanisms for attempting to ensure that “near mother tongue” teachers are appropriately evaluated before appointment, do not yet include an effective role and clear responsibility for the national Inspectors concerned for the language section(s) in question.

III The Consequences of Current Board of Governors' Policies

1. Nearly all the European Schools are already experiencing the negative effects of the inadequate numbers of English language (EN) teachers. This includes first Language (mother tongue, L1) teaching, teaching of subjects in L1 (e.g. Mathematics and Science), EN second language (L2) teaching in other language sections (e.g. English, History and Geography) and teaching EN as L3. In the extreme case, certain EN primary school and nursery classes are being permanently taught by a non mother tongue teacher.
2. Although there are differences between the schools, the problem already affects both small schools and large schools throughout the European Schools system. A few schools have not received a new UK seconded teacher for several years. EN posts approved by the Board of Governors have remained unfilled.
3. The problem is only partially resolved by the recruitment of locally appointed teachers.
4. The schools themselves are not necessarily equipped with the time, resources and expertise to reliably undertake local recruitment on the scale that prevails today. Furthermore, the schools often start local recruitment too late in the year, only after they have ascertained that their requests for seconded teachers have been refused.
5. The nature of the contract for locally recruited staff is not necessarily attractive: at only one-year, renewable, it is bound to be regarded as a temporary arrangement by both parties concerned.
6. The extent of these difficulties is indicated by the significant number of unfilled EN posts together with the increasing numbers of non mother-tongue teachers teaching in English, across all the schools. In the Brussels schools particularly, the combination of reducing EN mother-tongue teachers with the current enrolment policy, has had the bizarre effect of non mother tongue teachers teaching classes of which up to half the pupils are also non mother tongue speakers.
7. In principle the EN language sections have been set up primarily for English mother-tongue families. Although there has always been a degree of latitude to register, there, non English mother-tongue children in the multicultural context of the schools, one should recall that the multicultural dimension of the European Schools is achieved principally through second and third languages, and related activities, and not through multiple first languages in the Sections.

However, the situation is getting out of hand in certain classes to the point that the primary objective of establishing a solid basis in mother tongue language and culture is being compromised.

8. The influx of new Member State and other SWALS children into the English Language sections, is in large part due to the restrictive policy regarding the creation of new language sections. This problem is being belatedly addressed by recent proposals discussed by the Inspectors and the Teaching Committees but which have not yet been adopted by the Board of Governors.

In this context it is worth noting that there is not a conventional “market” for the teaching profession in the European Union nor in each of the Member States, particularly when it comes to expatriate teachers, teaching in languages other than local languages. In nearly all Member States, most teachers are employed directly by central government or by local and regional authorities. Thus, only limited numbers of qualified teachers are potentially available as independent contractors. Although there clearly are some people available to work on the basis of a short-term locally-recruited contract, also part-time, they will tend to be those who are already present for other reasons. In the smaller towns and cities locally recruited EN teachers are hard to find. Even in Frankfurt it is becoming increasingly difficult to find qualified EN candidates as Chargés de Cours.

IV Interparents' Concerns

Accordingly, Interparents expresses our concern and objections to a policy which has not been thought through and is at best already resulting in serious unintended consequences.

- (a) the local “markets” for English language teachers are not able to reliably supply the missing teachers as Chargés de Cours.
- (b) the ability and willingness of the other Member States to supply on secondment appropriately qualified alternative English mother tongue teachers is at best quite limited.
- (c) effective mechanisms for quality control in recruitment have not yet been put in place.
- (d) the primary obligation of the Schools and the Member States concerned for mother tongue teaching for the children of expatriated families is being disregarded.

(e) Meanwhile, the UK+IE policy, supported by the - contested - “structural solution” to cost sharing, is apparently designed to compensate for the fact that there are more students studying in English than there are UK and Irish nationals in the system. But in practice the policy already imposes a large proportion of the consequent disadvantages precisely upon their children in the English language sections.

(f) The resulting situation is one of unequal treatment for those children in the Anglophone sections. Firstly, unlike other sections, they do not enjoy the benefits of a large pool of mother tongue speakers; secondly, they are more likely than other sections to have non-mother-tongue speaking teachers.

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Although the above discussion of the issues is primarily germane today for the existing “Type I” schools, many of the above arguments are – *mutatis mutandis* – relevant for future “Type II” and “Type III” schools as well. Unless this is resolved, it indeed bodes ill for the proposed expansion of the European Schools system under the Reform.

Interparents would be glad to participate in a discussion of alternative solutions to these problems and will revert to these matters in the Board of Governors and its Committees and Working Groups, and to the EU Institutions. It is essential that these matters be satisfactorily resolved as soon as possible within the context of the proposed reforms of the European Schools system.
