

EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

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THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

*Guidelines for  
nursery and primary  
education*

Nursery and primary school reform  
1990

*Translated into English from the German and French versions*

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## 1 . P R E F A C E

During the meeting of the Inspectors' Committee on the 18th and 19th March 1986, in Brussels, the primary inspectors considered the document : "A Preliminary Study for a Reform of the Curriculum of the Nursery and Primary Classes" first presented in 1971 by Inspector General Mr. F. Christiaens. They noted that this report

- ◊ had become outdated since its publication,
- ◊ was largely limited to a description of the situation pertaining in the member states at the time,
- ◊ put forward no guidelines for reforming nursery and primary education in the European Schools.

They further noted that the curriculum reform papers, presented since then, fell into no overall plan and did not possess essential coherence.

Upon his retirement in 1985, the United Kingdom Inspector, Mr. W.E. Husband, produced a discussion paper entitled : "The Philosophy and Aims of Primary Education", in which he raised the following points :

- ◊ the need for a precise definition of aims and objectives,
- ◊ a way of looking at organisation and teaching methods,
- ◊ the need to create stimulating learning environments in the classroom,
- ◊ improved support for children with special needs and for gifted children,
- ◊ the need for much closer contact between the teachers of each level, nursery/primary/secondary, in and between the different language sections,
- ◊ the implications in terms of equipment and resources,
- ◊ a revision of testing and assessment procedures,
- ◊ the need for appropriate inspection to further the evolution of the schools.

The report of Mr. Papapietro for the European Parliament (1983) and of Professor D. Swan for the European Commission (1984) also considered the aims of Primary education in the European Schools.

As a result, the Inspectors' Committee considered that all future curriculum development in the nursery and primary schools should be based on a well established philosophy and that it served no purpose to pursue reform without, first of all, clearly defining the new thinking underlying it.

## 2 . I N T R O D U C T I O N

### 2.1. Point for the Reader's attention :

It is important for the reader to understand the spirit and appreciate the limits of this document. It describes the fundamental ideas on which the educational principles and the aims of the European Schools are founded.

In no way does it set out to give a detailed picture of the different subjects in the curriculum, as this is the task of particular workgroups. It does not claim to provide an answer to all questions.

It aims to

- ◊ create a link with previous initiatives and to fit them and any future developments into a common framework,
- ◊ promote fruitful discussions in the schools,
- ◊ pinpoint the practical and financial difficulties which have impeded the educational development of the schools,
- ◊ propose reasonable solutions based on the realities of the situation,
- ◊ establish a greater unity in the way work is seen and carried out in our schools.

It is particularly hoped that teachers

- ◊ will analyse the ideas put forward, with a critical eye on their own teaching experience,
- ◊ will be encouraged by the document to try out new ideas and approaches,
- ◊ will make use of all possibilities of working together,
- ◊ will renew and reinforce the drive which should be the mark of our schools which are unique in so many ways.

### 2.2. Form and contents of this document.

The document's main purpose is to present

- ◊ the ideal of the European Schools and their educational aims,
- ◊ the practical implications, not only for teaching but also for the infra-structure, organisation and resourcing of the schools.

In addition, it was felt necessary, in a preliminary chapter (III), to touch upon the many factors bearing upon the school which are determined by society at large.

3.1.4. The principal, but not the sole purpose of the European Schools, is to provide a general answer to the problem of the education of children who are temporarily expatriate.

For the majority of parents who are called abroad to contribute to Europe's political, economic and social progress, the European Schools are the only option that they can turn to for the education of their children.

3.1.5. The European Schools are and wish to remain all-age schools, welcoming children from nursery through to the end of the secondary cycle.

This guarantees continuity in their education for the children and offers expatriate families a psychological and logistical support. The schools are, indeed, a stable and happy environment for their children and offer a reassuring solution to the problem of providing them with education in their mother tongue.

3.1.6. The European Schools are anchored in a democratic Europe, showing a profound respect for each child, without distinction of race, sex, nationality, language, belief or social class.

3.1.7. Despite the apparent homogeneity of their families, both socially and intellectually, the children of the European Schools represent a very wide range of intellectual capacity, of school skills, of levels of physical, social and emotional development. The European Schools accept them on a non-selective basis. The schools try to respond to the needs of each child, whatever his age, by adapting themselves to him and by adopting appropriate approaches.

3.1.8. The European Schools recognize the inestimable value of a clear cultural identity, expressed through a dominant language. They consider teaching in mother tongue to be the keystone of the curriculum, organised in separate language sections.

3.1.9. The European Schools provide for the teaching of a second language already from the 1st year primary. This policy is founded on the conviction that this teaching provides a key to a better understanding between peoples. At the same time, it opens up for all pupils the possibility of a bi-cultural education. In Secondary school, all pupils learn at least one additional foreign language.

3.1.10. Article 4.3 of the Protocol of the European Schools states clearly : "In order to promote the unity of the school and to encourage contact and cultural exchanges between pupils of the different language sections, certain lessons for classes of the same level will be given together."

In the Primary School, this applies in particular to the foreign language lesson and to the European Hours and, in the Secondary School to a whole range of subjects.

3.1.11. From the child's enrolment in the nursery class, the European Schools attach great importance to the development of the physical, psychological, social, emotional and creative aspects which are essential to all children's educational success and well-being.

### 3.3. The Family

3.3.1. Most families of European School pupils are expatriate. Whether they have already lived for some time in an international milieu and travel frequently or whether they have come abroad for the first time, all experience the problems of adapting to the host country and of guaranteeing continuity in their children's education.

3.3.2. While it is potentially an enriching experience, expatriation is stressful for many families. Language difficulties, the absence of familiar points of reference, the dispersal of families in a foreign environment, the distances which have to be travelled and which separate a child from his school friends, the absence of the father or mother away on mission, are all factors which have an effect upon the children.

3.3.3. Certain families have a very complex cultural make-up. Sometimes there is neither dominant language nor clearcut cultural identity. For some children, the language of the family and the dominant school language are not the same.

3.3.4. Other families have lived through the separation or the divorce of the parents. Many pupils live with a single parent or share their school year and their holidays between two separated parents.

3.3.5. The school is an important reference point for many families, especially in the early years of their expatriation. It is, therefore, called upon to be a place of welcome, of advice and of support for both parents and children, a focal point for the expatriate European Community.

### 3.4. The Parents

3.4.1. Parents have a unique role, especially in the early stages of the child's education. At a given moment of his development, they begin to share this responsibility with the school. The first and principal responsibility for the upbringing of child remains theirs, however.

3.4.2. The wish of parents, both fathers and mothers, to develop their own lives professionally and socially, is sometimes in conflict with the child's broad educational needs.

3.4.3. More and more parents keep themselves informed about education in general and wish to be kept fully in the picture about their child's education in particular. They seek close contact with the school.

3.5.9. Within the framework of their timetable, teachers can use their particular linguistic, creative or sporting talents in the organising and running of European Hours and of extra-curricular activities, in coordination or in carrying out various teaching or non-teaching duties.

3.5.10. To harmonise teaching approaches and to keep abreast of developments in the field of education, the European Schools provide their staff with in-service training, both locally and at inter-school level.

3.6.10. Apart from its normal duties, the administrative staff has an important role to play in welcoming new teachers and in giving them whatever professional and practical help they may need.

3.6.11. Together, the Management and the administrative staff constitute a service alive to parents' hopes and wishes, prepared to cooperate constructively with all.

### 3.7. Society.

3.7.1. Society grants children a privileged and recognised place. They are not seen as adults in miniature but as individuals, respected for themselves.

3.7.2. In society today, more different models of the family unit are to be found than formerly. Certain children have to be able to adapt to new family situations.

3.7.3. At home and school alike, it is not always possible for children to have sufficient contact with both male and female adults, nor to define themselves in those terms and to find their own identity.

3.7.4. The way we live has been influenced by increased pressures, by new pursuits and by publicity. A certain balance, in eating habits for example, is not always guaranteed. This, added to a lack of physical exercise, can create problems for a child as he grows.

3.7.5. The consumer society has marked children out as a particular target. They are already subjected to concentrated pressure by commercial advertising, which manipulates them by encouraging competitiveness, acquisitiveness and conformity.

3.7.6. Life in our society is not without dangers for children : traffic, noise, environmental pollution, excessive demands on their attention. A certain threat from drugs is also sometimes present.

3.7.7. Access to the media and to various means of communication has widened the world with which children and adults now come into contact, and of which they receive a renewed image daily. Most feel more involved with what is happening in the world at large.

## 4 . THE PURPOSE OF OUR SCHOOLS

### 4.1. A Curriculum centred around the Child

In the light of the general considerations described in the previous chapter, and in the perspective of a more closely united and enlarged Europe, the European Schools adopt as their aim the all-round education of their pupils in a European and international context.

4.1.1. Their educational policy is designed to allow each child :

- ◊ to become aware of himself and of his identity and to take stock of his possibilities and limitations,
- ◊ to know his body, to learn to respect and to develop it and to seek a balance between body and mind,
- ◊ to become aware of others, to show interest, respect and tolerance; to develop a feeling for what is right and a constructive critical approach to life,
- ◊ to learn to form part of a group, to show commitment, solidarity and team spirit and to discover the rules governing partnership,
- ◊ to develop a desire to communicate with an ever-widening circle, in his own language at first and, later, in the language of others,
- ◊ to enjoy nature to the full and to understand why and how it has to be respected,
- ◊ to acquire the literary and mathematical languages which will permit him to come to terms with and to describe events, facts, techniques, the environment, people and the world at large,
- ◊ to waken and to develop his creative potential in all spheres, by the acquisition of the greatest possible number of codes and skills, so that he can develop and express his feeling for beauty,
- ◊ to develop his ability to organise his time and work,
- ◊ to acquire an ever surer grasp of the notions of time, space, environment and society and of his own place in them,
- ◊ to cultivate a liking for personal research and for effort.



- ◊ teachers keen to form part of an international teaching team, desirous of making their own contribution and of widening their horizons,
- ◊ committed Europeans, speaking at least one of the working languages of the school,
- ◊ teachers with particular skills : able to teach foreign languages or physical education, for instance, or possessing artistic or musical talent ...

4.2.2. The successful integration of a new member of staff therefore call for :

- ◊ the careful choosing of staff by the national authorities in close collaboration with the school concerned,
- ◊ adequate information and preparation for new staff with a preliminary visit to their school,
- ◊ upon arrival, personal and professional help from the management, from the administrative staff and from colleagues,
- ◊ the close support of the teaching team to ensure the success of the new teacher's probationary two years period.

4.2.3. To achieve a coherent plan of action, the school needs :

- ◊ a proportionate balance of male and female teachers
- ◊ a complete range of expertise, notably in the areas of physical education, of music, of art education and of science teaching,
- ◊ good coordination structures in each year group, in each section and between sections,
- ◊ opportunities for teachers to meet and plan their work and activities together,
- ◊ coherent criteria of assessment of children's progress, at all levels and in all sections, corresponding to agreed and clearly defined aims and objectives and which are meaningful for children and for their parents.

- ◊ by the opportunities offered to the children to develop socially and to become independant,
- ◊ by encouraging parental involvement in the school's activities.

4.2.7. In order to help the teachers identify with their school and commit themselves fully, it is necessary :

- ◊ to accentuate the importance of the existing provision for staff representation,
- ◊ to adapt it to real needs,
- ◊ to replace it by new structures where necessary.

#### 4.3. The School, A Place of Learning and Encounter.

4.3.1. For the expatriate child, the European School must be, over and above its educational role, a warm and secure place of welcome, a home from home. For some time, the child's class teacher will be the only person he knows outside his family.

4.3.2. For children living abroad, the class teacher must be :

- ◊ the person who guarantees continuity in the development of the child's mother tongue and who compensates for his linguistic isolation by various teaching approaches,
- ◊ the person who, for the child of a mixed marriage or whose home language does not correspond to the language of the existing sections, will ensure that he acquires a school language,
- ◊ the person who will maintain the traditions and culture of the home country,
- ◊ the person who, at the same time, will help parents and children to avoid too national a view of education and of society.
- ◊ the person whose position gives him an ideal opportunity to develop contact between people in his own language community.

4.3.5. The European Schools set out to be more than an mere school establishment or a public service. They endeavour :

- ◊ to answer the needs of the expatriate community by organising cultural and social activities for expatriate young people and for adults,
- ◊ to open their doors to the local community to promote mutual understanding by joint activities and the sharing of facilities,
- ◊ to share in the sporting and cultural life of the locality.

- ◊ The Curriculum must present concrete examples as an inspiration for the teachers, within the limits of what is possible,
- ◊ The Curriculum and related documents must be available in all languages.

The introduction of new syllabuses must always be accompanied by in-service training for the staff. This must be planned in the light of educational developments in the member states, with which the schools should maintain close contact.

The application of the syllabus depends largely on the individual teacher. To obtain a general consensus on the basic principles (concepts, skills and knowledge), staff within each school should prepare the application of a new syllabus by detailed discussions. This is true for all subjects but is particularly important in Environmental Studies, European Hours and Second Language teaching where local conditions have a considerable influence upon the outcome.

## 5.2. The Weekly and Daily Timetable.

At the outset, the timetable of the European Schools was basically a national timetable to which had been added the teaching of a foreign language and the European Hours. The resulting number of periods is a heavy workload for children and for teachers.

Moreover, teaching periods which are themselves too long are prejudicial to learning, they reduce efficiency and drain the will to work.

There is a close relation between the number of periods and the quality of teaching. A class teacher's teaching load, the meeting of children's individual needs, consultations with colleagues and with parents, the carrying out of non-teaching duties, all must be kept within reasonable limits.

It follows that the time has come for a revision of the existing timetables. The best solution would be reached by :

- ◊ a closer correlation of the weekly timetable and the children's ages,
- ◊ a revision of the number of periods attributed to each subject,

- ◊ by seeking an harmonious balance between learning, creating, movement (games and sport) and quiet activities,
- ◊ by exploiting fully the resources which lie outside the classroom and the school.

The teacher's art consists in following each child's progress closely, encouraging him when he is confronted by failure and supporting him in his efforts. The programming of his work takes full account of the children's curiosity and spontaneity.

Learning has progressed beyond the traditional pattern of listening and looking. Touching, using all the senses and the whole body are also important.

The importance of skills training must not be overlooked. Imagination and a careful choice of material will eliminate monotony from the children's learning. Healthy competition also has its place for children enjoy and are stimulated by comparing results. The teacher must make sure that all children benefit from this.

For the teacher, observing his pupils' progress is both a way of assessing how far general aims are being achieved and an on-going exercise in self-evaluation.

#### 5.4. Second Language Teaching.

The early acquisition of a foreign language normally taught by a native-speaker, initially by means of play activities and later by more elaborate methods, gives all our pupils a remarkable skill. To this authentic vehicle of communication must be added the contact made with the culture of other countries and enjoyed through songs, folk stories, literature, festivals and national customs.

Although our schools have already built up a wealth of experience and a valuable variety of approaches in this field, it is necessary to give some thought to certain aspects of this teaching if it is to evolve :

The European Hours offer a unique opportunity

- ◊ for verbal and non-verbal communication between pupils of different language sections,
- ◊ for providing musical and creative activities such as drawing and painting, craft work of all sorts, singing and music-making, dancing, sport, drama and the organisation of various festivals,
- ◊ for exploring the cultural and general interest facilities offered in the neighbourhood and in the host country.

In addition to underlining these well-established aims and work approaches, we feel that we have to make the following remarks :

- ◊ It is important to remove the European Hours from their relative isolation by associating them with other disciplines or with project work. This integration can be brought about within the framework of activities organised in Environmental Studies or as part of various celebrations or exhibitions.
- ◊ The teachers must be prepared to plan the European Hours together, to undertake certain parts of the work together and to share some activities. The outcome of such work should be presented to a wider public by means of shows, exhibitions or a school newspaper.
- ◊ The liaison with second language (as a support in real situations) has already been mentioned above.
- ◊ Whenever possible, the children should be able to exercise some degree of choice among the activities available, following their own interests and wherever the teachers can offer corresponding skills or talents.  
To further this, local teachers with particular skills could be brought in.

The European Hours should arouse the enthusiasm of the teachers and the pupils to the extent that they are considered a high point of the school week.  
To this end, they require careful preparation, both in content and approach.

## 6 . B U I L D I N G S A N D E Q U I P M E N T

### 6.1. Lay Out of the School Site and of the Buildings

Contemporary teaching approaches call for new thinking in the planning and equipping of buildings, of class rooms, of sporting facilities and of surrounding play areas. It is important that the school be seen, not only as a place of study, but as an environment and a community, creating real life experiences for the children. This idea must be reflected in the appearance of the school.

As the provision of buildings, the local environment and national directives all have to be considered, we can only give here a general view of what is required.

Each school must, therefore, achieve acceptable standard in the provision of classrooms and of specialist rooms. These include :

- ◊ spacious areas for physical education and sport (gym hall for the nursery school, gym halls and sports fields for the primary school) with equipment suitable for each age group.
- ◊ multi-purpose halls for drama, music and movement, exhibitions, various projects and activities. Entrance halls and corridors can sometimes be adapted for this purpose.
- ◊ specialist rooms adaptable to a variety of activities (scientific experiments, art and craft) in Environmental Studies or European Hours.
- ◊ study and meeting rooms, with both formal and informal lay out, for staff use (meetings, interviews with parents, staff library ...)

Besides the provision of essential teaching rooms, the following components of the school's infrastructure should be given adequate attention :

- ◊ Because our schools usually function in the afternoons, a well organised canteen service should be provided for the children. Especially for the younger pupils, it is important that they eat in a calm and educational atmosphere.

- ◊ In classes, specialist rooms, halls and corridor, there should be ample facilities for exhibiting and for storing children's work, including pin boards, glass show cases and shelving.

### 6.3. Resources for Nursery and Primary Classes.

The equipping of our school with audio-visual aids and teaching materials must answer the needs of the curriculum and of the teaching approaches adopted.

The following should be provided :

- ◊ rooms where teaching aids be kept which are not in daily use and which are too costly to provide for each class :

- large maps and wall charts.
- slides, educational films, transparencies, video cassettes,
- models and measuring instruments for environmental studies and for mathematics,
- equipment for experiments (preferably in transportable boxes),
- musical instruments (if there is no music room), records and cassettes,
- slide and film projectors, overhead projectors, tape recorders and cassette players,
- tools for craftwork (if there is no specialist room),
- additional material for special needs teaching,
- computer software ...

- ◊ a central library (including a work room) with :

- reference books and special interest books,
- children's fiction for each language section,
- books for special needs teaching.

If space permits, the teacher's library, the pupils' library and the central stock of teaching aids should be housed together in a Resources Centre, allowing for a maximum use of all resources.



#### 6.4. The Inventory and the Management of Resources.

To ensure maximum use of equipment available, it is essential that each member of staff and particularly newly arrived teachers be informed of what is available.

For this purpose :

- ◊ up-to-date lists must be distributed to staff,
- ◊ equipment must be readily available and organised with simplicity,
- ◊ responsibility for resources management should be entrusted to a teacher or an assistant. In this area, parents' help can be considered if necessary.

## 7.2. Cooperation between Management, Staff and Parents.

Management, the delegation of responsibilities, the flow of information and decision-making must operate so that aims and objectives can be achieved. Our schools will make continued progress if

- ◊ all members of the school community are informed and consulted about new initiatives and about decisions to be taken.
- ◊ members are able to participate actively in decision making, drawing on their professional experience.
- ◊ decisions are made by as large a team of people as possible.
- ◊ there is a clearly defined delegation of responsibilities : section coordination, inter-section coordination, promotion from the nursery to the primary and from primary to secondary ...
- ◊ teachers are encouraged to go beyond the limits of their own class and section to work together and to exchange ideas and experience.
- ◊ the sharing out and spending of budgetary resources take place after full consultation with the staff.
- ◊ the parents are full partners in the enterprise.

In the light of this, the positioning of classes in the school complex is not without its importance. The flow of information between members of staff and opportunities for cooperation are improved by proximity. The grouping of classes by age or by language section can be considered.

In each school the following consultative groups exist :

- ◊ the staff group of each language section,
- ◊ work groups for Euromaths, Environmental studies, Second Language, European Hours, Promotion from Nursery to Primary and from Primary to Secondary ...,
- ◊ the general staff meeting which considers problems of organisation and educational questions,

## 8 . C O N C L U S I O N

### 8.1. Turning proposals into reality.

When the present situation is looked at closely, a gap is seen to exist between the proposals put forward and the reality in certain schools.

The Board of Governors, the senior decision-making body in our Institution, must therefore be made aware that

- ◊ it is at nursery and primary level that foundations are laid and the direction set for the future development of a child,
- ◊ for this reason, a number of measures concerning staffing, infra-structure and resources need to be adopted as part of an overall strategy,
- ◊ the teacher must be able to carry out his key-role to the full. This calls for appropriate working conditions on the one hand : timetable, remuneration, sharing of responsibilities, freedom from non-essential tasks and adequate in-service training on the other.

To meet these requirements, a political will must be found to provide necessary budgetary resources, following a long-term plan.

In this respect, the primary inspectors play an important role as mediators and advisors. They are the link between the practical realities in the schools and the national delegations in the Administrative and Financial Committee and in the Board of Governors.

### 8.2. The role of the co-ordination group in the Reform Committee.

Because of the considerable number of objectives to be achieved, the need for a co-ordination group in the Reform Committee continues to make itself felt.

The working brief of such a small group, consisting of parents, teachers, headteachers and inspectors, would be :

- ◊ this option should not be more fully exploited,
- ◊ conversely, teachers from the secondary school might be permitted to teach in primary classes,
- ◊ ways of integrating the transition classes should be explored.

In this context, it is important to underline that special needs support such as Remedial Teaching and the integration of disabled children must not come to an end at the end of the primary cycle.

The educational efforts made in the primary school must be guaranteed continuity and further development in the secondary. This is equally true of the care provided for the children by the school doctor, the educational psychologist and by visiting speech therapists (logopèdes) and other specialists.

#### 8.4. The European Schools Institution seen as a whole :

It is clear that the ideas developed in this document concern the European Schools in their entirety : internal organisation, staff management, consultation processes, the channelling of information, co-operation, curriculum aims and development, teaching methods, and, above all, the identity of the Institution and its vision.

Music	Dec. 83.	1312 - D - 83
Physical Education	Dec. 83.	1412 - D - 83
Ethics	May 78.	78 - D - 66
Reinforcement of Internal Structures	April 87.	87 - D - 114

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Remarks : this list includes the documents published since 1974.

To keep the list up to date, please refer to the  
Digest of Decisions of the Board of Governors.