



Brussels, 2 May 2021

Dear Ms Sciberras

The APEEE Board is extremely concerned about the intention of the four Brussels European Schools to reduce the teaching hours on the last six school days in June 2021. Given the significant implications this will have, we regret that the decision was not the subject of a thorough prior consultation with all APEEEs from its design and before its adoption. It is equally regrettable that there has been no attempt by the school to communicate this decision to us in such a way as to anticipate and allay legitimate parental concerns which we hereby raise with you.

Whilst we sympathise with EEB3 teachers in what has been a very challenging year and are extremely grateful for their efforts to ensure the education of our children, we fail to see how this decision reflects the best interests of the school community at large. Neither does it respect the provisions in the General Rules of the European Schools with regards to the scheduling and organisation of the Class Councils. Shortening school teaching hours to accommodate Class Council meetings is not in the educational interest of the pupils and further accumulates the teaching hours lost this year. It also contradicts the 180-day rule. Indeed it calls into question the reputation of all European Schools in Brussels, in particular in light of the trend across Europe for extending school days to compensate for lost teaching hours and gaps, accumulated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our primary concern rests with our children and their educational needs and welfare. The importance of completing the curriculum and filling in the learning gaps accumulated due to the pandemic, is a key concern, as already indicated in the APEEE motion adopted at our General Assembly in February 2021. This has not been addressed in the school's decision to shorten the said days. In addition, the most vulnerable pupils of the school, those receiving educational support, will be disproportionately affected as time allocated for support (including over lunch) and quality standards will be severely reduced.

It goes without saying that this decision will seriously affect the work schedule of many parents, in particular for those with children in the nursery and primary cycles, who will have to pick up their children earlier and try to reconcile their private and professional lives in the afternoons. Without compelling arguments, we cannot justify this to our members.

In short, this decision can only aggravate deleterious results during an exceptionally difficult year for all concerned. Any arguments in favour of this decision are outweighed by the educational consequences and the schools' reputational damage.

Furthermore, there appears to have been limited consideration for the impact on APEEE services. A comprehensive consultation would have enabled us to assess properly the significant organisational and financial implications, including direct costs, which remain to be addressed and for which the APEEE cannot be expected to assume sole responsibility.

We understand the School has had no control over many closures and interruptions to APEEE services this year, but where such interruptions are caused due to internal School decisions we believe there should be a case for APEEE agreement, as we are a key stakeholder. Unlike previous cases, earlier cancellation of services, for which parents are being refunded, were due to *force majeure*, as a result of the exceptional closure of the school or individual classes (due to preventative health measures in line with host country safety regulations). At the time, the APEEE did its best to minimise the resulting losses, but now we are not in a position to bear additional costs (notably for the possible cancellation of extracurricular activities and the disturbance of the canteen programme for Secondary students in June) in the absence of exceptional circumstances. Similarly, no timely consultation in relation to our services was held with regards to the organisation of Springfest this year. As a result of the School's decision to introduce a hybrid week of online school for Secondary, the APEEE has been forced to refund parents for lunches and extracurricular activities not taken. We cannot continue to work on the basis of such ad-hoc decisions. The implications for our services and our staff are too great.

We believe that this unfortunate situation underlines the necessity of an improved consultation culture, including the time for substantive exchanges with the APEEE before such far-reaching decisions are taken by the school management. We are keen to explore more effective communication methods with you, in order to better address our respective needs and responsibilities. Ideally, these should be reflected in the draft Framework Agreement that has been on the table since 2018. However, given the delays in its conclusion against our initial objective, we wish to propose a provisional EEBIII/APEEE Ixelles Memorandum of Understanding, in which reciprocal obligations and working methods are clarified, in our common interest of improving efficiency and mutual cooperation as well as a thriving community spirit.

We trust that our views will be considered prior to any communication on this matter from the school to parents. We believe that an urgent review of the decision of the Directors of the four European Schools is necessary, which takes full account of educational, organisational and financial perspectives.

Tassos Papadopoulos
APEEE Board Chair