

SWALS meeting - 7.10.2009 - Summary

The meeting was hosted by the SWALS representatives in the board and Teaching Committees (Luis Domingos, Dorte Agerbæk and Tamás Bokor) and attended by eighteen other parents. Following issues were discussed, in agreement with the provisional agenda:

1. Report of relevant issues from the Board of the Parents' Association

SWALS related issues:

- The P.A. has put at the disposal of each language representative, a budget of 1000€ for supporting projects of pedagogical interest to the students of that section. For SWALS, and thanks to the commitment of teachers, approximately 500€ were spent on books, videos and items for celebrating national days;
- In order to enable the office to maintain an updated database containing the contacts of parents per language, that permitting a quick spread of relevant information, the enrollment form of the P.A. ("Dienstleistungsbrochür") has been updated to contain a "mother tongue" field; Still, the database is being updated and errors may occur, especially for children new to the school or new to the swals condition. Spotted errors may be corrected by sending an Email to office@ev-esm.org;
- This year's overview of students and library books per language, and which is normally available under <http://www.ev-esm.org> >>> Für Mitglieder >>> Sprachsektionen >>> SWALS, hasn't been yet completed yet, but will be completed before Christmas.

Informations of general interest:

- The P.A. provides a number of services to its associates, further information being available under <http://www.ev-esm.org/> ;
- With respect to the provision of those services, in case parents' problems are not satisfactorily dealt with, the P.A. provides a new means for giving feedback, namely a complaints form under <http://www.ev-esm.org/> >>> Dienstleistungen ;
- Attention was called to the fact that this year's Christmas holidays start, effectively, after the 18th of December and not after the 22nd.

2. Report of relevant issues from the Teaching Committees

Primary:

- Traffic situation in Rennertstr.: Mr. Girardin sent a request for a zebra crossing to the city of Munich (Stadtbauamt)
- the disparity in the level of students in L2 is considered a problem by some parents who would like a division into more homogeneous groups of students; The answer from Ms. Presacco was that the school is not allowed to make an actual division but that a differentiation already takes place (through extra L2 teaching for some of the weaker students). Ms. Kraft will write a short note on how L2 is organised as of today;
- a previous member of the committee added that both subjects had also been discussed in the past, where no satisfactory alternative to the current status could be, at the time, envisaged. The answer from the city of Munich was at the time that the traffic situation in Rennertstraße can only be improved by the parents themselves showing more consideration (no double parking etc) and the L2 is said to be already taught in a differentiated form.
- a SWALS specific issue to be addressed this year in the teaching committee is the fact that 2. and 3. SWALS classes are often taught together due to logistical problems with the time table. This issue was brought up by Mr. Bokor and is described in more detail below.

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Secondary:

- the Teaching Committee dealt mostly with issues which were not specific to SWALS students, and it was not felt that the meeting of SWALS is a suitable forum for reporting on these daily issues in detail. Therefore, the representative (Tamás Bokor) only briefly mentioned that, among others, general disciplinary measures was a recurring issue in the Committee. The abolition of coke vending machines was debated on several occasions, which was finally accepted (the machines remained, now selling mineral water). The celebration of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall will be the main extracurricular theme of the secondary school in this school year.

The representative gave a more detailed report on the situation of SWALS students in the ESM and other European Schools.

This issue could be addressed directly on four specific occasions:

- in the beginning of the school year 2008-2009, the representative officially asked Mr. Studer in a written memorandum to the Teaching Committee to refrain from reducing the number of language lessons given to SWALS students, in spite of the formal possibility to do so, given a specific directive to this effect, passed by the Board of Governors.
- a joint delegation of the inspectors visited the school and held a meeting with the Teaching Committee. The same request was made and explained to the members of the delegation within a very useful and open discussion.
- the Interparents association is heavily involved in the current reform of the European Baccalaureate. This involves certain SWALS-related questions. But even apart from the BAC-Reform, Interparents stressed on various occasions the importance of supporting SWALS students, and issued proposals to improve SWALS language teaching in general. Concerning the BAC-Reform, Ms. Marie-Claude Donnelly regularly holds workgroup meetings with representatives of various sections with the intention of collecting feedback to the proposals being discussed at the Interparents. Swals' parents are being represented at this gremium by Mr. Bokor, who expressed a genuine appreciation for the work being carried out by Ms. Donnelly at the Interparents.
- the representative had an informal meeting with the Hungarian member of the Board of Governors of the European Schools, i.e. a person who is directly involved in the forming of the general educational policy in the European Schools.

General remarks:

- Munich is a European School having a relatively high percentage of SWALS as compared with other European Schools, still, one is left with the impression that no real special care is given to the SWALS teaching model. Rather than being actively supported by the school, the SWALS language teaching seem to be considered an unavoidable nuisance. This is partly understandable, as the high number of parallel language hours requires a very careful planning of the timetables and allocation of rooms.
- SWALS students have less time dedicated to their mother-tongue education than other students have (both in the primary and in the secondary schools);
- Non-seconded teachers (i.e. those being paid by the hour, and not being "Abgeordnete" teachers officially dispatched by their respective governments) are treated by the ESM as "second-class" teachers. Not only are their formal conditions of

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employment far inferior to seconded teachers, but they are also treated accordingly by the school management in their daily work. Since practically all SWALS language teachers are not seconded, they all suffer from this situation.

- This year, the change of the primary timetables caused a further degradation of the SWALS language teaching in the primary. The affected classes are 2nd and 3rd primary. As before, SWALS pupils have less L1 periods than non-swals. It is also standing practice to put together the 2nd and 3rd classes, which by itself can actually be positive for the pupils, nevertheless means that the teacher can spend only a part of the lesson for the curriculum of any given class. However, now this situation is made even worse because 2nd and 3rd grade SWALS pupils are taught together with only partly overlapping timetables (e.g., one student comes in 5 minutes after the lesson start, another leaves 10 minutes before the end). The teachers report that this is a serious disturbance in the class, as the course of the teaching is always interrupted by some pupils coming or going.

In spite of the above, there are some positive signs to be referred:

- During their visit to the ESM, the inspectors made clear that they value the existence of SWALS in the European Schools' education model; and there is no intention on a central level to discriminate against SWALS students or to reduce the support of SWALS.

- the representative of Hungary confirmed that at least on a political level, the Member States continue to be sensitive to the importance of protecting the conditions of the mother-tongue teaching, even under financial constraints, and it is still the declared policy of the European Schools that SWALS education should be maintained and possibly strengthened.

- in this school year (2009-2010), no reduction of SWALS lessons was reported in the secondary school. This is quite remarkable, because previously Mr. Studer has indicated on several occasions that the reduction of SWALS lessons is practically inevitable, given the "overpopulation" in the ESM and the logistical problems, such as the coordination of the timetable and the scarcity of rooms.

Concluding, the representative asked all SWALS parents to stand up for their own cause at every possible occasion, if they wished a better recognition of the SWALS language education. This is all the more necessary, as it should not be forgotten that even in Munich the SWALS students represent a clear minority. Even if the rights of this minority are guaranteed in theory, they must be actively demanded from the school.

3. Election of a representative for the Teaching Committee of the Primary School

Ms. Dorte Agerbaek was reelected.

4. Election of a representative for the Board of the Parents' Association

Ms. Cruz Ramos Flores was elected.

5. Any subject brought up by the parents

In response to a question, it was reported that Learning Support for SWALS is budgeted at 20 hours for the primary or 10 hours for the secondary and has been defined as a support in the vehicular language (L2) provided to recently arrived SWALS with insufficient knowledge in L2 to follow up all subjects. Unfortunately, there is no special budget to compensate for the reduced hours.