

SWALS Newsletter, October 2021

Dear SWALS Parents,

We hope your children had a good school start and that you and your families could smoothly adapt to an almost regular daily school routine.

To the new parents, welcome to the Students Without a Language Section (SWALS) parents' group and to our school community.

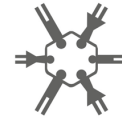
This year there won't be a SWALS assembly before the general assembly of the parents' association (PA). It is still not possible to hold a regular presential meeting and there is not the need to organise the election of the SWALS representatives in the board of the Parents association and in the Educational Council, because we have been elected last year for a 2-year mandate. However, we are facing challenges as a section, and we would like to inform you about the latest developments. Hence, we found that a newsletter would be an adequate way to address you.

The problems we are continue facing, are the reduction and grouping of SWALS L1 classes in secondary and the possibility of its extension into primary L1 classes. A couple of years back the measure was implemented without previous discussion with the parents, and SWALS parents have been strongly opposing it since then. Not only does this represent an effective reduction of the teaching time and consequently of the time our children are exposed to their L1 language, but it also sets a precedent for an unilateral change to the L1 teaching conditions we assumed when our children enrolled school as SWALS. Our major concern is that our children are unable to receive a good preparation for the BAC L1 exam, which has both a written and an oral component and is the subject with most weight in the final BAC grade. Effectively putting SWALS into disadvantage relatively to their peers in other language sections.

The argument invoked for the implementation of this measure, pointed to the necessary reductions to the school budget and the need for cost savings. Yet, discussions with the EPO and the ESM led us to the conclusion that the cuts in the SWALS expenses have no impact on the school budget. Furthermore, we could not confirm that the ESM has been a privileged European School all these years and its SWALS parents were the only parents not accepting the grouping recommendation. This was established in the [Decisions of the Board of Governors \(BoG\) concerning organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools](#). Hence, the key drivers for SWALS groupings continue to be unknown to us.

In 2020, we have initiated contacts with other European Schools via Interparents (IP), which resulted in a preliminary online meeting with SWALS representatives of ES-Varese and ES-Frankfurt. Both schools share the same concerns we have here in Munich. Varese was more advanced in the dialog process with Brussels to pursue a revision of the BoG decisions. But conversations with the office of the Secretary-General were at an impasse. A major problem pointed out by Varese and Frankfurt was the forced class year grouping in L1 SWALS in Primary.

We have proposed then, together with Varese, the creation of a SWALS Working Group inside IP and organised a meeting in May 2021 with SWALS representatives and IP representatives of all European Schools plus representatives in the Joint Teaching Committee. Together with the big issue of grouping consecutive years in L1, concerns about the L2 level of SWALS were also raised. Generally, SWALS pupils are enrolled in their L2 section in Primary, being taught the same syllabuses than L1 pupils of that section. So basically, they have an L1 level in this language when they reach Secondary, but



they are ranked L2. However, SWALS hardly have their L1 written skills developed to a mother tongue level. During secondary SWALS have most of the subjects in L2, but their advanced level it is not officially recognized. In some European schools there is or there was in the past a L2 advanced course for SWALS. That is not the case in Munich, as far as we know. On the other hand, a Language Policy for the European Schools was adopted by the BoG in 2019 and according to our common opinion the application of the "Decision on the organization of studies and courses" approved in 2019 to SWALS violates the principle of equity and the Language Policy Principles themselves. So, the approved strategy at this meeting was not to go directly into confrontation with the BoG, but to present a "Proposal to develop the Language Policy of the European Schools approved in 2019" at the Joint Teaching Committee Meeting under the new European Schools Presidency (Croatia) via IP and to start officially the debate with all the key players, especially with the new Secretary-General.

In view of the concerns that SWALS would be grouped in Primary starting this schoolyear, a meeting between us, representatives of the SWALS Parents, the parent association and the School Management was held in January 2021. Primary SWALS teachers were also able to put their opinion on this matter forward. It was then agreed that our concerns would be taken into consideration. We are delighted that this year SWALS were not regrouped in primary school. However, it is clear to us, that this subject has not been entirely concluded and we fully expect continued pressure on SWALS to be grouped in consecutive years.

While we, together with the Parents Associations of the other European Schools, hope to avoid litigation, it is clear we have to demand changes in the Language Policies of the European Schools. In this sense, we welcome the new Secretary-General and hope for an open dialog when tackling these issues.

Lastly, we as parents representatives would like to remind you that the EPO plays a crucial role in budgetary issues. For many of us the choice to send our children to the ESM is based upon the possibility of nurturing our native language at the level of the national curriculum. Cuts to the SWALS teaching framework puts this at risk. Should you feel that the 'SWALS package' at the European school is an essential part of your benefits package, we ask you to feed that back to your HR representative.

Sincerely yours,

Sofia Macieira (SWALS Representative in the Board of the Parents Association)
Inês Lampreia (SWALS Representative for Primary School in the Educational Council)
Marcela Frank (SWALS Representative for Secondary School in the Educational Council)