

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING DRAFT LEGISLATION FOR THE REFORM OF THE FRENCH SCHOOL SYSTEM

Since the middle of the 1990s, the French school system has been treading water and has not succeeded in making further progress, indeed it has even regressed. This is primarily reflected by the fact that 130,000 young people leave the education system each year without qualifications, while at the same time integration into the employment market increasingly requires a minimum level of training.

Difficulties start to appear for these young people in the first year of primary school and academic failure sets in and continues throughout the period of compulsory schooling.

Between 1997 and 2007 the number of pupils with reading difficulties has doubled, from 10% to 21%. The recent survey entitled Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011 confirms these poor results, with a disproportionately high representation of French students in the European quartile for the weakest students.

These failures are clearly correlated with social inequalities and most early exits from the education system come from disadvantaged socio-professional categories. In terms of gender, success is strongly biased in favour of girls who perform better, but who suffer from stereotypes which affect career options and direction.

Finally, the correlation is also strong with regional inequalities, with the most deprived areas particularly adversely affected.

The educational institution is therefore at the heart of the fight against inequality, but it suffers from the lack of initial teacher training and very poor levels of ongoing training.

The educational initiatives taken by certain teams are not recognised or evaluated and they lack support. In addition, these new tasks are not taken into account in the working hours of teachers.

The role of parents remains limited and some prefer to avoid schools; associations could play a role in this area, but the partnership aspects of their activities are still not well coordinated.

Finally, local authorities suffer from inequality of resources according to their town and region, which prevents the development of a real education strategy. The final element of school problems is the school year. In this area, France divides up the school year on the basis of fewer days (144 days compared to 186 days average for the OECD), but has the highest concentration of classroom hours over a few days of the week, which equates to 6 hours of classes per day in primary schools, and is therefore the busiest school day in Europe.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The ESEC considers that the major objectives of the draft bill reflect those recommended in its opinion «Inequalities in the Education System» issued in September 2011, viz: giving priority to primary education, restoring initial teacher training, linking the policy of priority education and the policy of the town, earnestly implementing the joint base of knowledge and skills in a coherent fashion. The ESEC agrees with the aims of the proposed bill to reform the school year, create

a civic and moral education and strengthen the work of schools and their partners.

Furthermore, the ESEC wishes to bring the following points to the attention of the Government.



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BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

- **The ESEC recommends redrafting article 3 of the proposed bill in order to:**
 - indicate that the education system must promote the success of all students;
 - promote all diversities – social, sexual, cultural and educational;
 - encourage teaching methods based on mutual assistance and cooperation among students.
- **Schooling must be fairer across all regions, and to that end the ESEC:**
 - recommends that financial resources are given to establishments on the basis of the social diversity of their pupils, with specific rules for priority education.
- **Pre-school and primary level should be the priority of the education system. The ESEC:**
 - recommends that particular attention be given to the application of effective teaching based on «more teachers than classes.»

EDUCATION AND THE PACE OF LEARNING

- **The willingness to train the person and the citizen at school; the ESEC:**
 - however recommends in particular the redrafting, in article 8, of the term «moral sense», which can be confusing in this sensitive area;
 - advocates making this teaching the cross-functional responsibility of all the stakeholders rather than of one specific discipline.
- **Digital Technology; the ESEC:**
 - recommends the implementation of a genuine plan for digital technology in terms of infrastructure and access to networks across the entire country;
 - emphasises the need for assistance and training to be provided for teachers.
- **Artistic and cultural education is a crucial aspect of training. The ESEC:**
 - wants to ensure that the education system definitely remains the axis of the path envisaged and that the content and modalities of implementation are clarified;
 - emphasises the importance of artistic activity: it is in itself a form of knowledge that awakens sensitivity.
- **Learning must be progressive. The ESEC:**
 - approves the establishment of a functional link between primary and lower secondary school (école and collège);
 - requests that attention also be given to links between pre-school and primary (maternelle-élémentaire) as well as lower secondary/secondary (collège-lycée).
- **The common core of knowledge, skills and culture. The ESEC:**
 - requests that its elements are quickly defined.
- **Allow all students to choose the direction of their studies. The ESEC:**
 - asks that value is added in this process to students full potentials, including their extracurricular knowledge and skills.
- **The ESEC believes that such an individualised route must**
 - put parents in the position of key partners;
 - give perspectives on integration into the employment market without being restricted solely to local markets.
- **The fight against dropping out of school. The ESEC:**
 - is part of this objective, bearing in mind that we must completely eliminate dropping out of school and ask that the eradication of academic failure is written into the objectives of reform of the school system.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

- **Partnerships between schools, parents, associations and communities. The ESEC:**
 - requests that support is put in place over several years with regard to the reform of school timetables and scheduling, both financially and to help with the restructuring;
 - recommends a comprehensive reform of school timetables by establishing a national framework with opportunities for local variations.

The ESEC proposes that the role of parents is more clearly stated in the draft bill.

The ESEC strongly insists upon the role of the State in ensuring diversity in the supply of initial vocational training in the regions.

THE INITIAL AND ONGOING TRAINING OF STAFF

The ESEC draws attention to the need for a rapid implementation of this reform, which should not jeopardize the quality of training, and strongly emphasises the importance of continued training.