

Thursday 2 April 2009

**Better schools: an agenda for European cooperation**

P6\_TA(2009)0217

**European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on Better Schools: an agenda for European cooperation (2008/2329(INI))**

(2010/C 137 E/09)

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Articles 149 and 150 of the EC Treaty on education, vocational training and youth,
- having regard to Article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union on the right to education,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 3 July 2008 entitled 'Improving competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools' (COM(2008)0425),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 16 December 2008 entitled 'An updated strategic framework for European cooperation on education and training' (COM(2008)0865),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 12 November 2007 entitled 'Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation: Draft 2008 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme' (COM(2007)0703),
- having regard to the ten-year Education and Training 2010 work programme <sup>(1)</sup> and to the subsequent joint interim reports on progress towards its implementation,
- having regard to Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning <sup>(2)</sup>,
- having regard to the Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning <sup>(3)</sup>,
- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council of 13-14 March 2008, notably the part on 'investing in people and modernising labour markets',
- having regard to the Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 on education and training as a key driver of the Lisbon Strategy <sup>(4)</sup>,
- having regard to the report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century,
- having regard to the Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008, on preparing young people for the 21st century: an agenda for European cooperation on schools <sup>(5)</sup>,

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 142, 14.6.2002, p. 1.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 45.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

<sup>(4)</sup> OJ C 300, 12.12.2007, p. 1.

<sup>(5)</sup> OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 20.

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- having regard to its resolution of 26 February 2004 on the role of schools and school education in maximizing public access to culture <sup>(1)</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 8 September 2005 on options for developing the European Schools System <sup>(2)</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 27 September 2007 on efficiency and equity in European education and training systems <sup>(3)</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 13 November 2007 on the role of sport in education <sup>(4)</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 23 September 2008 on improving the quality of teacher education <sup>(5)</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 18 December 2008 on delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation - implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme <sup>(6)</sup>,
  - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A6-0124/2009),
- A. whereas Member States are responsible for the organisation, content and reform of school education; whereas the exchange of information and good practice, and cooperation on common challenges, are excellent tools to support reforms; whereas the Commission has an important role to play in facilitating this cooperation,
- B. whereas the economic and social changes in the European Union, the factors conditioning the single market and the new opportunities and demands of a globalised economy are creating a set of common challenges for all national educational systems, making cooperation at European level in the field of education and training all the more necessary,
- C. whereas the considerable disparities between the respective performances of education systems in the EU could increase disparities in economic and social development between the Member States and jeopardise the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy objectives,
- D. whereas systematic measures are necessary to consolidate the role of education in the 'knowledge triangle' (research, innovation and education), in respect of which the Union provides support for the long-term strategy for future development, competitiveness and social cohesion and for the inclusion of education among the priorities of the forthcoming round of talks under the Lisbon Process,
- E. whereas benchmarks are important tools to drive forward further reforms, as they allow for the measurement of progress towards well-defined common goals,
- F. whereas the Council has adopted three benchmarks for 2010 relating to school education, on early school leavers, reading literacy and the completion of upper secondary education; whereas progress towards these benchmarks is still insufficient,
- G. whereas the acquisition of basic skills and key competences by all young people and the improvement of educational attainment levels are crucial for reaching the goals of the Lisbon agenda,

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 98 E, 23.4.2004, p. 179.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 193 E, 17.8.2006, p. 333.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ C 219 E, 28.8.2008, p. 300.

<sup>(4)</sup> OJ C 282 E, 6.11.2008, p. 131.

<sup>(5)</sup> Texts Adopted, P6\_TA(2008)0422.

<sup>(6)</sup> Texts Adopted, P6\_TA(2008)0625.

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- H. whereas young people's educational attainment has a direct effect on their later employment prospects, social participation, further education or training, and income,
- I. whereas the education of women is particularly influential on the educational performance of communities; whereas the incomplete or unsatisfactory education of girls may affect not only them, but may also transmit disadvantages to the next generation,
- J. whereas inequities and early school leaving produce high social and economic costs and have a detrimental effect on social cohesion, and whereas all forms of school segregation weaken the level of national education systems as a whole,
- K. whereas an alarming increase in violence at school, accompanied by manifestations of racism and xenophobia in the school environment, is currently being observed as a result of two basic trends within educational establishments - multiculturalism and the widening of the class divide - which are compounded by the lack of any suitable intervention or pupil support and contact mechanisms within the educational system,
- L. whereas inclusive educational models promote the integration of disadvantaged groups of pupils and of students with special educational needs, and increase solidarity between pupils from different backgrounds,
- M. whereas a well developed pre-primary education significantly contributes to the integration of disadvantaged groups (such as children from low-income and minority backgrounds), can help to raise overall skill levels, reduces educational differences, and is crucial for increasing equity and lowering drop-out rates,
- N. whereas schools have crucial importance in terms of children's social and learning life and personal development; as well as in terms of transmitting to them the knowledge, skills and values for participating in democratic society and for active citizenship,
- O. whereas, in the current global financial and economic crisis, education and training have a key role to play in developing innovative skills and know-how and ensuring the free movement of knowledge as the ideal instrument for economic recovery and employment market consolidation; noting, however, that the primary objective of policy making in the field of education and training is not to meet market needs and employability criteria but to ensure that pupils achieve an overall standard of knowledge meeting uniform educational criteria, resulting in fully rounded personalities,
- P. whereas curricula as well as teaching and assessment methods should allow every student to acquire key competences and to develop his or her full potential; whereas the physical and mental well-being of children, as well as an agreeable learning environment, are crucial for positive learning outcomes,
- Q. whereas a broad education including subject matters such as arts and music can contribute to fostering personal fulfilment, self-confidence and the development of creativity and innovative thinking,
- R. whereas education expenditure should be particularly directed at the areas that produce the greatest improvements in student performance and development,
- S. whereas the quality of teaching is recognised as being the most important factor within the school environment affecting student attainment,
- T. whereas mobility and exchanges can foster intercultural, language, social and subject-related competences, enhance motivation of both teachers and students, and help improve teachers' pedagogical skills,

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- U. whereas schools alone form only part of a group of actors sharing a collective responsibility for the education of young people,
  - V. whereas there is a need to create an evaluation culture in education and training systems to ensure effective, long-term monitoring of their development,
  - W. whereas Parliament stressed in its above-mentioned resolution of 8 September 2005 the need to reform the system by which the European Schools are governed in order to meet current challenges relating, in particular, to enlargement and its repercussions,
1. Welcomes the above-mentioned Commission Communication of 3 July 2008, and the areas on which it proposes to focus future cooperation;
  2. Welcomes the above-mentioned Commission Communication of 16 December 2008 and the measures it suggests;
  3. Endorses the view that school education should be a key priority for the next cycle of the Lisbon strategy;
  4. Welcomes Member States' agreement to cooperate on school education in key areas; urges Member States to take full advantage of this opportunity to learn from each other;

***Improving competences of every student***

5. Urges the Member States to do their utmost to provide every young person with basic skills that are fundamental for further learning, and to continue efforts to implement the Recommendation 2006/962/EC, as well as efforts to reach the benchmarks previously agreed upon;
6. Is concerned about the present trend of decreasing level of students' literacy and numeracy skills and urges the Member States to take all necessary measures to reverse it;
7. Recommends that Member States further consider strategies to reduce gender imbalances in basic skills;
8. Urges the Member States to continue efforts to reduce the number of early school leavers; emphasises the need to identify students at risk as soon as possible and to provide them with additional support and after-school learning activities, as well as to support them during the transition from one school level to the next and provide personalised learning approaches for those in need;
9. Notes that in the Union, young people show a concerning lack of ability to concentrate; therefore calls on the Commission to conduct a study to investigate the main reasons for this lack of concentration among pupils;
10. Takes the view that schools should provide high quality education for all children and have ambitious goals for all students, while offering a range of study options and additional support to take account of individual students' needs;
11. Therefore calls on the Member States to ensure that their educational policies achieve a balance between equality and quality, with the stress on social facilitation measures for pupils and students from disadvantaged backgrounds and on adapting the learning process to their individual needs, thus offering equal opportunities in terms of access to education;

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12. Furthermore, urges Member States to enhance the access of disadvantaged groups to vocational training and university studies according to the highest standards, inter alia by drawing up and advertising appropriate scholarship schemes;
13. Advocates inclusive education models where the school communities reflect society in terms of diversity, avoiding any kind of segregation;
14. Therefore urges Member States to pursue the aim of the complete desegregation of Roma classes/institutions in primary education, as well as to monitor and abolish the illegal practice of placing Roma children in classes for the mentally disabled;
15. Considers it important for young people to be prepared during their time at school, college and university for flexibility in the labour market in view of its mutability, (in that employers' requirements can change rapidly);
16. Calls for the modernisation and improvement of school curricula so that they reflect today's social, economic, cultural and technical realities and are closely linked to industry, business and the labour market;
17. However, takes the view that the reform of the educational system should be fundamentally geared to the full and multi-faceted development of the individual, cultivating respect for human rights and social justice, lifelong learning for the purposes of personal development and professional advancement, the protection of the environment and personal and collective wellbeing; takes the view that, in this context, matching knowledge thus acquired with market requirements is undoubtedly a priority for educational systems but is not their primordial and fundamental objective;
18. Believes that schools should strive not only to improve employability, but also to give all young people the opportunity to develop their full potential, in line with their personal aptitudes; underlines the importance of creating a learning environment where young people can acquire basic democratic competences enabling them actively to take part in civil society;
19. Considers that all children should, from the earliest age, be given the opportunity to acquire musical, artistic, manual, physical, social and civic competences; therefore, strongly believes that musical, artistic and physical education should be compulsory parts of the school curriculum;
20. Is convinced that, in accordance with the conclusions of the Barcelona European Council 2002, children should learn foreign languages from an early age; welcomes the proposal of a new benchmark, according to which at least 80 % of pupils in lower secondary education be taught at least two foreign languages; stresses the importance of continuing foreign language teaching in upper secondary education to assure that young people acquire high-level language competences; calls on Member States to reflect on the possibility of employing more native speakers to teach languages;
21. Underlines the importance of education in ICT and in media literacy; considers it important to instruct pupils in the use and applications of new communications and digital technology;
22. Appreciates the contribution of non-formal education in providing young people with valuable skills which are complementary to those acquired in schools and calls upon schools to cooperate more intensely with providers of non-formal education such as youth organisations;

#### ***High-quality schools and teachers***

23. Considers quality education to be a right of every child, and that a first and important step to guaranteeing it would be a European charter on pupils' rights;

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24. Calls upon the Member States and the competent regional governments to invest in pre-primary education, to guarantee high-quality pre-primary and childcare institutions with adequately trained teachers and carers, and to guarantee affordability; supports the proposal for a new benchmark on the rate of participation in pre-primary education;
25. Believes that public education should remain primarily a state-financed domain which contributes to social equity and inclusion; welcomes, however, initiatives aimed at developing a fruitful cooperation with the private sector and exploring potential new ways of complementary financing;
26. Considers that public educational institutions in a more disadvantaged financial situation, particularly those located in poorer regions of the EU, should be granted additional support;
27. Believes that a good quality learning environment, providing modern infrastructure, materials and technology is a pre-requisite for achieving high quality education in schools;
28. Believes that the quality of education and its level of results further require curricula of a demanding and rigorous nature and assessment of pupils on a regular basis, with assessment implying the responsibility of the pupils themselves for the progress they make;
29. Calls on Member States to give schools the necessary autonomy to find solutions to the specific challenges they face in their local context, as well as the appropriate flexibility in curricula, teaching methods and assessment systems, while recognising the need to ensure comparability of qualification systems across Europe;
30. Considers evaluation to be a useful instrument for improving the quality of educational systems; stresses, however, that each system of evaluation and assessment should be targeted not only at the quantitative results and achievements of the pupils, which would create a social hierarchy of educational establishments, accompanied by 'multispeed' educational systems, but also at the system itself and the methods it uses, taking clearly into account the specific socio-economic circumstances in which each school is operating;
31. Believes that the quality of education and its level of results also depend to a large extent on respect for the teacher's authority in the classroom;
32. Considers that the composition of teaching staff should reflect, as far as possible, the increasing diversity of European societies, in order to provide role models for all pupils; in this respect, encourages reflection on the necessity of attracting more men to the teaching profession, particularly at primary level;
33. Is convinced that it is necessary to provide both high-quality initial teacher education based on theory and practice and a coherent process of continuous professional development and support in order to keep teachers up-to-date with the skills required in the knowledge-based society throughout their careers; believes that teacher education and recruitment policies should be designed to attract the most able recruits and that teachers should be offered levels of social recognition, status and remuneration corresponding with the importance of their tasks;
34. Strongly advocates that as many students and teachers as possible be given the opportunity to participate in mobility and in school partnership projects; underlines the importance of the Comenius programme in this respect; stresses the need to further reduce the administrative burden for applicant schools; welcomes the setting up of Comenius Regio; supports the proposal to develop a new benchmark on mobility;
35. Recommends that teachers, including artistic teachers, be encouraged to make maximum use of European and national mobility programmes, and that mobility becomes an integral part of their training and careers;

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36. Recommends involving parents in school life, and raising awareness about the potential impact of living conditions and of extracurricular activities on the acquisition of skills and competences at school, acknowledging that redressing educational inequalities solely through educational policies has proved to be unsuccessful;

37. Strongly recommends creating school/community partnerships in order to combat the problem of violence in schools, which threatens to spread to all of society;

38. Believes that all schools should foster the acquisition of democratic competences by supporting student councils and allowing students to take co-responsibility for the school in partnership with parents, teachers and school councils;

39. Calls on the Member States and Commission to cooperate closely to promote implementation of the European schooling system in the Member States' respective education systems; calls on the Commission to envisage including the European Schools in the work of the Eurydice network;

40. Asks the Commission to report regularly on the progress made following the two above-mentioned communications, so that the performance of education and training systems in the EU can be evaluated, with particular attention being paid to pupils' acquisition of key skills;

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41. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

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