

IV

(Notices)

NOTICES FROM EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS, BODIES, OFFICES AND AGENCIES

COUNCIL

Council Conclusions on school development and excellent teaching

(2017/C 421/03)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING the political background to this issue as set out in Annex to these conclusions;

RECOGNISING THAT:

1. Making high-quality, inclusive and equitable school education a reality for all learners is a top priority that influences the European Union's social progress and sustainable growth in the future. Education plays a decisive role in young people's prospects and life chances, and lays the foundation for learners' self-fulfilment in civic and social life, in the labour market and in their personal lives.
2. It is important for individuals to continue learning throughout their lives, in order to be able to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Schools, supported by the wider community, can play an essential role in helping individuals to develop a broad range of key competences ⁽¹⁾, to take responsibility for their lifelong learning and careers, and to become active and responsible citizens.

AWARE OF:

3. the need for contemporary approaches to teaching, learning and the governance of school education systems that are based on advancements in learning sciences and help schools to respond to the changing educational demands of learners, society and the labour market, as well as those brought about by digital and technological developments;
4. the challenges involved in reaching the 2020 benchmark of reducing the share of low achievers in reading, mathematics and science ⁽²⁾, which require serious policy efforts to improve schools' capacity to support all learners, including those with special educational needs and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds;
5. the fact that, despite the good progress made over the last decade, continued efforts are needed to achieve the Europe 2020 headline target of reducing the rate of early school leaving ⁽³⁾;
6. the need to promote equity, equality and inclusivity in and through school education, since socioeconomic background continues to be a strongly influential factor in students' educational achievement;
7. the need to invest in teachers and school leaders as powerful determinants of student achievement and to support them in taking responsibility and achieving a better balance between professional autonomy and accountability;

⁽¹⁾ In the 2006 Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, key competences are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

⁽²⁾ By 2020, the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15 %.

⁽³⁾ By 2020, the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10 %.

8. the importance of good governance of school education systems, and the balance between school autonomy and accountability as a crucial factor in improving quality, equity and efficiency in education;
9. the importance of early childhood education and care that lays the foundation for higher performance at all future education levels and participation in lifelong learning, as well as promoting learning of all children, their well-being and development.

STRESSES THAT:

10. Diversity is a hallmark of school education in Europe, where Member States are fully responsible for organising and developing their own education systems, which means that solutions addressing shared challenges and implementing targeted reforms may vary depending on national, regional and local contexts.
11. European cooperation in the field of school education, particularly through the Erasmus+ programme, has a high EU added value and an important role to play in ensuring quality education, building closer contacts between European young people, fostering a common European identity and supporting policy reforms in the educational field.

WELCOMES the Commission Communication on school development and excellent teaching for a great start in life ⁽¹⁾, which identifies three areas where action is needed and where European-level support can help.

Accordingly INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, with due regard for subsidiarity and in accordance with national circumstances, to focus on the following priority fields of action:

12. Ensuring high-quality and inclusive education ⁽²⁾, and contributing to the development of the talent and potential of all learners by:
 - a) supporting schools to apply a whole-school approach to developing teaching and learning, in order to promote a more inclusive, engaging and supportive school culture with a focus on the well-being of the entire school community and zero tolerance for bullying, violence and discrimination on whatever basis;
 - b) taking steps to ensure the acquisition of solid subject knowledge together with the development of a full range of key competences, in particular social and civic competences, as well as promoting common values ⁽³⁾;
 - c) supporting learners' motivation, their learning to learn competence and ownership of learning, and promoting learner voice, democratic dialogue and participation in school life;
 - d) enriching learning experiences while supporting effective use of digital technologies and encouraging activities that link learning with real-life experience, for instance through project- and problem-based learning, on-the-job experiences or involvement in local community activities;
 - e) investing in timely and targeted support for learners with special educational needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds and at particular risk, using a wide range of means, including providing better access to inclusive settings and focusing on transitions within the education system and from school to the labour market;
 - f) investing in high-quality early childhood education and care ⁽⁴⁾ that is accessible and available to all children.
13. Empowering teachers and school leaders by:
 - a) shifting towards a comprehensive teacher policy that spans all stages of their professional careers and takes advantage of digitalisation in education;
 - b) making their careers more attractive by offering quality working conditions and enhancing support, feedback and guidance, in particular for novice teachers and school leaders;
 - c) offering quality initial teacher education in which particular focus should be put on well-prepared classroom practice which spans the whole duration of their studies and, where appropriate, guided by trained mentors;

⁽¹⁾ 9842/17.

⁽²⁾ As referred to in the Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on inclusion in diversity to achieve a high quality education for all (February 2017).

⁽³⁾ As referred to in the Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.

⁽⁴⁾ As referred to in the Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow (19 and 20 May 2011).

- d) investing in their continuous professional development and growth during all phases of their careers and enhancing school leadership;
- e) supporting the preparation and professional development of teacher educators and mentors and bringing a broader range of experiences into teachers' education and training;
- f) strengthening targeted collaboration, learning networks, online communities and innovative pedagogical practices among teachers and school leaders, and involving other relevant stakeholders.

14. Shifting towards more effective, equitable and efficient governance by:

- a) finding a proper balance between autonomy and accountability with a view to supporting continuous improvement and innovation at school and system levels;
- b) further developing quality assurance systems, including self-evaluation, quantitative and qualitative assessment in accordance with national circumstances and policies, that are based on a comprehensive understanding of school development that is established and shared with stakeholders;
- c) supporting evidence-informed policies and making balanced and appropriate use of data, including from international comparative studies and from the Education and Training Monitor;
- d) striving for sufficient and efficient spending on school education and optimum use of resources at all levels, and, when appropriate, triggering structural school education reforms.

INVITES THE COMMISSION to complement actions taken by Member States and support their cooperation with a view to:

- 15. widening cooperation between schools by making school partnerships, eTwinning, and mobility of students, staff and teacher educators — including practical experience abroad for novice and future teachers and school leaders — more accessible through the Erasmus+ programme;
- 16. encouraging, through the exchange of best practice and peer learning, the development of a broad set of key competences for all young people, including basic skills, digital competences and competences to support personal and social development and active citizenship;
- 17. enhancing schools' readiness for digital age learning, for example by promoting teachers' self-assessment and development of digital skills through a Digital Competence Framework, exploring the potential of a voluntary self-assessment tool on digital capacity for schools, and further developing EU online communities and resources;
- 18. fostering science, technology, engineering, (arts) and mathematics (STE(A)M) education by promoting best practices, strengthening schools' cooperation with the higher education, research and business sectors at EU level, and effectively addressing gender gaps and stereotypes;
- 19. reinforcing peer learning and peer counselling activities and the exchange of experiences and best practices, in particular on early childhood education and care, quality assurance, the careers and professional development of teachers and school leaders, and inclusive education;
- 20. promoting and supporting inclusivity in education, including through policy experimentation on teaching learners with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and strengthening cooperation between Member States and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, as well as other relevant agencies and international organisations;
- 21. promoting and supporting research on education and disseminating the results of educational research, and further developing synergies with the OECD in coordination with the Member States to produce joint comparative data and reports on school education, including through more efficient joint data collection by Eurydice and the OECD;
- 22. helping Member States who voluntarily seek assistance to design and implement major school education reforms by setting up a demand-driven technical support arrangement with due regard for subsidiarity. The Commission services, including the Structural Reform Support Service, and EU funding instruments, such as the European Structural and Investment Funds and Erasmus+, could provide support.

ADDITIONALLY STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE OF:

23. the Commission taking full account of these conclusions when preparing its proposals for the future strategic cooperation framework in the field of education and training and the Union programme on education and training after 2020.
-

ANNEX

Political Background

1. Council Conclusions on preparing young people for the 21st century: an agenda for European cooperation on schools (21 November 2008).
 2. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament — Improving competences for the 21st century: an agenda for European cooperation on schools (3 July 2008).
 3. Council Conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET2020') (12 May 2009).
 4. Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow (19 and 20 May 2011).
 5. Council Conclusions on effective teacher education (20 May 2014).
 6. Council Conclusions on effective leadership in education (25 and 26 November 2013).
 7. Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (Paris, 17 March 2015).
 8. Council Conclusions on the role of early childhood education and primary education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence (18 and 19 May 2015).
 9. 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) — New priorities for European cooperation in education and training (23 and 24 November 2015).
 10. Council Conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school (23 and 24 November 2015).
 11. Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on promoting socioeconomic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education: the contribution of education and training to the European Semester 2016 (24 February 2016).
 12. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — A new skills agenda for Europe: working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness (10 June 2016).
 13. 2016 Education and Training Monitor (7 November 2016).
 14. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — Improving and modernising education (7 December 2016).
 15. Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on inclusion in diversity to achieve a high quality education for all (17 February 2017).
 16. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life (30 May 2017).
-