

Information Note for Parents on the European Schools



Educated side by side, untroubled from infancy by divisive prejudices, acquainted with all that is great and good in the different cultures, it will be borne in upon them as they mature that they belong together. Without ceasing to look to their own lands with love and pride, they will become in mind Europeans, schooled and ready to complete and consolidate the work of their fathers before them, to bring into being a united and thriving Europe.

Jean Monnet

These words, which express the essential philosophy of the European Schools, have been sealed into the foundation stones of all the schools.

The European Schools differ from Irish schools in their organisation, their size, the curriculum on offer and the composition of the staff. It is this difference that offers exciting and unique learning opportunities and experiences for pupils/students.

Question 1

What is the mission of the European Schools?

Answer 1

The mission of the European Schools is to provide a multilingual and multicultural education for nursery, primary and secondary level pupils and students. The first European School was established in 1957 in Luxembourg. A particular objective of the European Schools is to ensure that pupils/students are capable of integration or re-integration into another European School or their national education system, if and when the need arises.

Further information on the European Schools is available at <http://www.eursec.eu> .

Question 2

How are the European Schools governed?

Answer 2

The European Schools operate under an intergovernmental protocol *The Convention Defining the Statute of the European Schools* which replaces earlier agreements dating back to 1957 and 1984 and entered into force in October 2002. The convention was initially ratified by 15 member states in October 2002 and has now been signed by all 28 members of the European Union. Other organs of the European Schools system include the Office of the Secretary General, the Board of Inspectors (each Member State is represented by a primary and post-primary inspector) and the Complaints Board. The European Schools is a *sui generis* system. A Complaints Board adjudicates on disputes concerning the application of the Convention. Each school is managed by an Administrative Board. The Secretary General of the European Schools normally acts as the Chair of the Administrative Board.

Question 3

Who attends the European Schools?

Answer 3

There are three categories of pupils/students who attend the European Schools. Category I pupils/students are those whose parents are officials of the European Institutions. The children of officials assigned to Ireland's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels come under the heading of Category 1. Category 2 pupils/students are those whose parents work for an institution with which the European Schools has an agreement. Category 3 pupils/students are those who attend in a private capacity.

Question 4

Where are European Schools located?

Answer 4

There are currently thirteen European Schools in seven countries - Spain, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom, and Luxembourg. The location of the schools is as follows: Alicante; Brussels I (Uccle); Brussels II (Woluwé); Brussels III (Ixelles); Brussels IV (Laeken); Mol; Bergen; Frankfurt am Main; Karlsruhe; Munich; Varese; Luxembourg I; and Luxembourg II. There are approximately 26,000 pupils enrolled across these fourteen schools. Places in the Brussels schools are allocated through a Central Enrolment Authority.

Question 5

How are classes organised in the European Schools?

Answer 5

The European School system consists of two years of early education (nursery cycle), five years of primary and seven years of secondary education.

Pupils are admitted to the nursery school at the beginning of the school year in September of the calendar year in which the child reaches four years of age. Pupils are admitted to primary year 1 at the beginning of the school year in September of the calendar year in which the child reaches six years of age. The nursery cycle is of two years' duration. The primary cycle- P1 to P5- is of five years' duration. Transfer to secondary happens at the end of P5. The secondary cycle - S1 to S7- is of seven years' duration. Typically, pupils transfer to S1 at the age of 11 plus. Students sit the European Baccalaureate at the end of S7 following two years of study.

Question 6

How do I enrol my child in a European school?

Answer 6

With the exception of the schools in Brussels, parents wishing to enrol their child in an individual school should contact the Director of the school.

In the case of the schools in Brussels, enrolment is overseen by a Central Enrolment Authority whose work is governed by an enrolment policy that has been prepared in consultation with relevant parties, including the European Commission and parents. The enrolment policy seeks to ensure a fair and organised approach to the

placement of pupils/students. The Central Enrolment Authority revises the enrolment policy from year to year to reflect changing needs and circumstances.

Every Category 1 pupil/student is guaranteed a place in one of the schools in Brussels. However, dating back to 2005, a place in the school of first choice in Brussels is not guaranteed.

Question 7

How soon will I know to which school my child is assigned? Do I source accommodation first?

Answer 7

The Central Enrolment Authority works according to a timetable each year. Critical dates apply. These can be accessed in the Enrolment Policy in the Brussels European Schools at <http://www.eursec.eu/en/European-Schools/enrolments/enrolment-policy-Brussels-ES>.

In the first instance, it is important to consult with officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Ireland and in Brussels to ensure that an application for a place is made in good time. It may be best to wait until the child has been allocated a place in a school before sourcing accommodation.

Question 8

Who is my first point of contact? Who do I contact in the school?

Answer 8

Every school has a director and a deputy director for each of the sections, primary/nursery and secondary. All schools have secretaries. Details of contact personnel may be accessed at <http://www.eursec.eu>.

Question 9

European schools are organised in language sections. In what section will my child be enrolled?

Answer 9

Almost all the schools have English, French and German language sections. Typically, Irish children are enrolled in the anglophone section. The language of instruction in this section is English but the classes may include children from other EU member states. Irish children enrolled in the anglophone section have access on an optional basis to Irish as an *Other National Language* (ONL).

Question 10

What if I elect to enrol my child in a section other than the anglophone section?

Answer 10

This is possible. In a small number of instances, Irish parents may opt for their child to be placed in the French or German sections. However, it is important that you give careful consideration to the language section in which you first enrol your child and to the implications of doing so. Transfer between language sections is only considered in exceptional circumstances. Pupils/students in a section other than the anglophone section do not have an entitlement to access Irish as an ONL.

Question 11

To what class will my child be assigned?

Answer 11

Pupils/students are generally assigned to their equivalent class/grade in Ireland. The classes comprise children of many nationalities.

Question 12

How many languages will my child learn?

Answer 12

Your child will learn the language of his/her section as his/her first language. He/she will learn either French or German from Primary 1 as his/her second language. He/she will then take a third language from Secondary 1. A fourth language is optional from Secondary 4.

Question 13

Will my child be taught through English?

Answer 13

Yes. Children enrolled in the anglophone section take English as their first language (L1). As students progress through the school, they will study some subjects through their second language (L2): from Secondary 3, Human Sciences and Religion/Moral; and from Secondary 4, Economics, History and Geography.

Learning through a second language creates opportunities for language learning at a high level but it is challenging initially for students, particularly for those who may join the system at a later point. Over time, pupils/students become more confident learning through a second language. The benefits from being immersed in the second language for their competence in that language become increasingly evident.

Question 14

Will my child require additional language support to access the curriculum in his/her new school?

Answer 14

Your child may require additional support to access the curriculum, particularly when he/she is accessing the curriculum through a language other than his/her first language. Language support is available, where necessary, in individual schools to newly enrolled pupils/students. Parents may also decide to make their own arrangements to support their child's language development in advance of, and as he/she transfers to, the European School system.

Question 15

Is there a cost/charge for school books?

Answer 15

Practices vary between schools. It is advisable to check the school's policies.

Question 16

Who will teach my child?

Answer 16

The European Schools are staffed primarily by teachers directly recruited (seconded) by the member states and also by teachers (non-seconded) who are locally recruited/hired directly by the schools. The Department of Education and Skills supports the operation of the schools by arranging for the secondment of qualified primary and secondary teachers to the schools.

Management in individual schools assigns teachers to classes. Therefore, Irish children may not necessarily be taught by an Irish teacher. Every effort is made to assign mother-tongue teachers in each of the language sections. Part of the educational experience of the European Schools is that children will have the opportunity to be taught by and to engage with teachers from different systems, thus enhancing their linguistic and cultural learning experiences.

Question 17

If I have an issue relating to my child's schooling, how do I process it?

Answer 17

It depends on the issue. If the issue relates to class placement, the concern should be brought to the attention of the relevant deputy director. If the issue relates to a particular matter in the class/ curriculum issues/other pupils/timetabling etc., then the concern should be brought to the attention of the relevant class teacher/subject coordinator/pedagogical advisor.

Procedures exist for parental complaints. If, following discussions with the teacher/deputy director/director, you are still dissatisfied, the issue should be brought (in writing) to the attention of the school's administration board. It is advisable that open communication be maintained with the relevant personnel at all times.

Question 18

What other involvement has the Department of Education and Skills in the European Schools?

Answer 18

The Department's Inspectorate represents the Minister for Education and Skills on the Board of Governors. Two inspectors – one nursery/primary and one secondary – are also assigned to the Board of Inspectors. Key elements of the inspectors' role include regular evaluation of seconded teachers and directors, whole-school inspections, curriculum development and implementation, teacher professional development, preparation of assessment tools for particular subjects in the European Baccalaureate (EB) and quality assurance of the examinations in those subjects.

Question 19

Will my child sit the Leaving Certificate?

Answer 19

No, not while attending the European Schools. The final examination in the European Schools is the European Baccalaureate (EB) examination which students take at the end of the seventh year in secondary school. Currently, candidates are required to sit five written and three oral examinations.

The EB examination process is overseen by an Examining Board which comprises examiners from each of the member states and is chaired by a university professor. The Board of Inspectors (Secondary) plays a key role in the quality assurance and preparation of examination materials. The European Baccalaureate is recognised for entry to third-level colleges in Ireland and abroad.

Question 20

How/where does my child access information with regard to entrance to Irish third-level colleges?

Answer 20

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) provides funding for access to appropriate guidance for the children of Irish parents who are enrolled in the European Schools. This service is coordinated by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) and is delivered by qualified guidance counsellors as recognised by the DES. The support is intended to supplement, but not replace, the guidance support already available to students in the European Schools. It is geared specifically to the needs of Irish students who may be considering applying to Irish third-level institutions and who have questions regarding general entry requirements, particular course requirements, and application procedures and deadlines.

The service is provided in the autumn term each year. In European Schools with larger numbers of Irish students (usually the schools in Brussels and Luxembourg), an Irish guidance counsellor visits the school. The guidance counsellor generally meets with each Year 7 student individually, and, as appropriate, with groups from Years 5 and 6. In some cases, the guidance counsellor also meets with parents of Year 7 on a designated evening during the visit.

In the case of schools with smaller numbers of Irish students, an Irish guidance counsellor provides a service by means of Skype or an equivalent system, by prior arrangement with the school. The service is provided to Year 7 students and, as appropriate, to students from Years 5 and 6.

Information on equivalences between the EB and national systems can be found in a document published annually on the ES website. Information is also available on the website of the Central Applications Office www.cao.ie.

Question 21

Are there opportunities for Irish pupils/students to continue learning Irish?

Answer 21

Yes. The study of Irish is facilitated in the European Schools. Irish is designated as an *Other National Language* (ONL) and is available on an optional basis to Irish nationals who are enrolled in the anglophone sections only at nursery, primary and secondary levels.

It is the policy of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to promote and support the provision of the Irish language in the European Schools from nursery to Baccalaureate level. The DES actively recruits teachers of Irish to the European School system even where the numbers taking Irish as an ONL are very small. This accords due recognition to the language in the multi-lingual context of the European Schools and recognises the valuable contribution of the Irish language to the cultural and language development of the pupils/students. It also ensures stability of access to Irish for pupils/students in the European School system.

Question 22

How does the provision for Irish in the European Schools compare with that in Irish schools?

Answer 22

The primary and secondary syllabuses for Irish in the European Schools are designed to build on the skills that pupils/students have already acquired and to further develop their knowledge and linguistic competences in Irish. They aim to promote natural and communicative use of the language. Organisational and teaching arrangements in the schools also accommodate students taking ONL as a beginner in the primary cycle and in the first year of secondary school.

The standard reflects a level that will fulfil third-level requirements in Ireland. Indications are that students sitting the European Baccalaureate (EB) in Irish achieve very good levels of competence in the key language skills in Irish. This may be attributed to the discrete provision made for Irish together with the enhanced capacity to learn language that is typical of pupils/students in the European Schools.

It is expected that students who successfully engage with the ONL Irish curriculum/syllabus will develop the language skills in Irish necessary to support their study of Irish at an appropriate level in school on return to Ireland. However, as with other subjects, the pathway for learning Irish in the European Schools is different from that provided in schools in Ireland in terms of content, engagement with texts, time allocation and assessment. Therefore, there will normally be a period of readjustment on returning to the national system. This is to be expected, given the overall differences between the two educational systems.

While the learning of Irish as an *Other National Language* (ONL) will also support the learning of Irish among those students who have attended Irish-medium schools prior to their enrolment in the European Schools, the provision of Irish does not provide the type of immersion education or Irish language experience that is possible in an Irish-medium setting in Ireland.

Question 23

Can a pupil/student who returns to Ireland be exempted from the study of Irish?

Answer 23

Currently, pupils/students in the following circumstances may be allowed an exemption from the study of Irish in primary or post-primary schools on their return to Ireland:

- Pupils/students whose primary education up to 11 years of age was received outside Ireland, provided that the parent or guardian who had custody of the pupil/student was permanently resident outside Ireland during the pupil's/student's period of education up to that age;
- Pupils/students who were previously enrolled as recognised pupils/students in a primary or post-primary school in Ireland who are being re-enrolled after a period spent abroad, provided that at least three years have elapsed since the previous enrolment in Ireland and the pupil/student is at least 11 years of age on re-enrolment.

Question 24

Are there supports available in the European Schools for pupils/students with special educational needs?

Answer 24

Yes. The European Schools do not claim to offer a fully inclusive education system. They offer a single type of general education in which learning conditions become increasingly demanding.

However, the European School system is committed to enrolling children with special educational needs (SEN) in the schools. A lot of progress has been made in recent years in this regard. Flexible support structures may be put in place in accordance with a pupil's/ student's educational and developmental needs to the extent that the school is able to do so. If a child has special educational needs, it is advisable that early contact be made with the director of the school to ascertain what support may be required and/or available. It is also important to provide the school with all relevant reports and documentation from the child's existing school.

In certain circumstances, provision is made for varying levels of support – general, moderate or intensive – and the development of Individual Learning Plans. These supports are designed to ensure appropriate help for pupils/students with special educational needs or for those experiencing difficulties at any point in their schooling.

The details of the different levels of educational support are outlined below:

General Support

- This involves short-term provision for pupils/students who may experience difficulties in an aspect of a particular subject or may need to catch up due, for example, to illness, late arrival or because he/she is not studying in his/her mother tongue.
- It is provided in/outside the classroom to small groups.
- Requests for such support may come from teachers or parents/legal representatives.

Moderate support

- This is seen as an extension of general support.
- It is provided to pupils/students with a mild learning difficulty or to those in need of more targeted support, i.e., those experiencing difficulties accessing the curriculum due for example to language issues, concentration difficulties etc.
- It is provided for a longer period than general support.
- Pupils/students have an individual learning plan (ILP).
- The support is provided in small groups or individually.
- Teachers request such support for their pupils/students but in some cases, parents/legal representatives may also do so.

Intensive support A

- This support is provided on the basis of a medical/psychological/psycho-educational and/or multi-disciplinary report.
- It can be provided in, or outside, the classroom in small groups or individually.
- Pupils/students have an ILP.
- The written request for such support comes from teachers or parents/legal representatives.
- An agreement covering the support is made; it is valid for one year only, after which needs are reviewed.

Intensive support B

- This support is provided for a short period only.
- A director may offer this support to a pupil/student, without a diagnosed special educational need, when it is considered that the pupil/student needs intensive language support in order to be able to access the curriculum.
- A request is made in writing to the support coordinator by a teacher or parents/legal representatives.

However, there may be occasions where, despite the school's best efforts to make appropriate provision for the pupil's pedagogical and social integration, education in the European School is not in the best interest of the child and the school may advise that it is unable to meet a pupil's/student's needs and recommend that the parents seek an alternative provision for their child's education. In such circumstances, the school assists the parents as far as it is reasonably possible.

There are three key reference documents that inform provision for pupils/students with special educational needs in the European Schools:

- 2012-05-D-14-en-9: *Policy on the Provision of Educational Support in the European Schools*
- 2012-05-D-15-en-11: *Provision of Educational Support in the European Schools – Procedural documents*
- 2014-03-D-14-en-5: *General Rules of the European Schools*

All three documents are available on the European School site: www.eursc.eu where they can be found under *legal basis of the European Schools - basic texts*.

**Department of Education and Skills
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

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