

APEEE Conference
"The role of the school psychologist"
11th January 2010, 19h00-21h30
JMO building, room M4

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

This was a well attended meeting, with some 80 parents and also some teachers present. The meeting was chaired by Ian Dennis. He introduced the three guest speakers: Mme. Zoe COTSIS, Mme. Virginie BATAILLE, Mme. Sabine FASS. He thanked the School Directors for their support and the SEN/LS Working Group of the APEEE¹ for organising and setting up the meeting.

The arrival of the school psychologists reflects a long battle in the School Administration Board for the appropriate budget allocation, and represents an important opportunity for the school community as a whole. This meeting aimed to describe their role, and illustrate what kinds of problems were appropriate for them to deal with, and clarify how such problems might be handled. Initial presentations were followed by a lengthy question and answer session which provided further useful information. Interpretation was arranged between English, French and German.

The school psychologists are NOT there to assess/diagnose/treat children with problems, or to mediate in family conflict. However there is no problem which would not be appropriate for them to be approached with. They would then use their role as advisors to all members of the school community, and would provide links to appropriate external organizations when necessary.

Contact details were communicated as below. The school will be urged to include this information on the website and in the memorandum which is issued to all parents at the start of the school year.

Virginie BATAILLE

	Matin	Apres-midi
Lundi	08h30-12h30	13h30-16h30
Mardi	08h30-12h30	n/a
Mercredi	08h30-12h30	13h30-16h30
Jeudi	08h30-12h30	n/a
Vendredi	n/a	n/a

V.Bataille@eursc.org

Primaire 4320.82441 B.905
 Secondaire 4320.82279 B.007

Zoe COTSIS

	Morning	Afternoon
Monday	n/a	n/a
Tuesday	08h30-12h30	n/a
Wednesday	08h30-12h30	13h30-16h30
Thursday	08h30-12h30	n/a
Friday	08h30-12h30	13h30-16h30

Z.Cotsis@eursc.org

Primary 4320.82441 B.905
 Secondary 4320.82279 B.007

Sabine FASS

	Morgen	Nachmittag
Montag	08h20-12h00	13h00-16h30
Dienstag	n/a	n/a
Mittwoch	n/a	12h00-16h30
Donnerstag	08h20-12h00	n/a
Freitag	08h20-12h00	n/a

Sabine.Fass@eursc.org

Primary 26.68.99.43 A.027

Importantly, the three school psychologists act together, although they are appointed to the separate school administrations (Lux.1: Mme.Bataille and Mme.Cotsis, Lux.2: Mme.Fass). Consequently they cover Anglophone, Francophone and Germanophone communities directly (and are each multilingual) and can cover other nationalities with interpretation, if necessary². As there is no Lux.2

¹ Mme. Rhonda Wilkinson, Mme. Birgitte Holst, Mme. Isabel Leite, Mme. Marika Papisideri.

² In serious cases, the school is required to find locally a psychologist speaking the required language, or to pay for someone from the home country. This is considered more likely in nursery cycle than in higher levels at the school, particularly given the nature of the school psychologists' role (ie. 'urgentiste', rather than long-term care).

secondary cycle, Mme.Fass expects to deal more with nursery and primary pupils, but all three experts can provide advice concerning pupils of all ages. One or other of the psychologists is available throughout the school week.

They are experienced professionals, and discussions are subject to standard ethical guidelines. In Luxembourg, confidential discussions with persons over the age of 18 would only be disclosed to others in three situations: (a) intent to self-harm, (b) intent to harm others, (c) intent to commit a criminal act. Of course, most consultations in school context will concern minors under the age of 18, where slightly different confidentiality rules apply. Where there is any disclosure (e.g. to school administration or to an external body), parents will always be informed in full in advance, but this does not amount to seeking their prior agreement.

- It is therefore conceivable that in certain circumstances, a referral to an external psychologist would be recommended against the wishes of the parents, but this would never happen without their knowledge.

- In response to a specific example, where a child voluntarily disclosed his/her harassment of another child, but expressed remorse and claimed to have ceased the action, the psychologists would probably not disclose, but each case would have to be taken on its merits.

If a pupil wishes to consult a psychologist, they can simply drop in to the appropriate room at the school (Lux.1: B007 or B905, Lux.2: A027). Pupils or parents can make appointments in advance. Teachers can refer pupils to a psychologist if they identify a need. In this case, they would interview the teacher and the child both separately and together, and may attend classes to observe pupil behaviour – after which they would speak to the parents and if necessary, make a referral to an external expert.

- The psychologists have no formal consultative role with regard to disciplinary procedures, but, like the APEEE management committee members, are available to advise families in such circumstances.

- The psychologists expect to be involved in the drafting of the child protection policy of the school, for which the deputy director of Lux.1 school, Mr.Lufi, is responsible. The APEEE is also involved in that process.

- The psychologists will also be invited to follow the work of the ‘ETHOS’ committee, where the APEEE is also represented.

The psychologists can help to increase awareness in the school community by talking to the teachers and administration about the reasons why a child may be having social or academic problems, This is another aspect of inclusion.

The psychologists will have a specific role regarding SEN pupils³. They would attend SEN Advisory Group meetings, meet class teachers and SEN teachers throughout the year, see children, arrange external referrals to local psychologists or visit national experts. They can also meet with parents to explain the various learning disorders and the diagnoses from external experts.

There was an extensive discussion of cyberbullying (eg. abusive images and information on facebook, twitter and similar social networking sites, or via emails, SMS and instant messaging

³ The annual reports for the Luxembourg schools (Lux.1 and Lux.2 combined) show 49 pupils altogether at 1.9.2008 for whom a SEN convention has been signed: 8+1=9 in the nursery cycle, 15+5=20 in the primary cycle, 0+20=20 in the secondary cycle.

systems). Pupils are typically more aware of modern technology than their parents, and parents need to be aware of the immediate and long-term dangers. Typically, cyberbullying is repeated *ad infinitum* as the victims seek to gain revenge on the initial perpetrators⁴ – and the whole thing remains in the public domain. Children feel powerful with the possibilities that cyberbullying offers, especially as it is more secret than direct communication. Children need to be educated about the power of expression through the written word and the appropriate use of technology. Concrete recommendations include: Beware of false identities in chat rooms; monitor internet use; advise children what to do in the event of an incident. Four profiles were suggested: isolated individuals adopting false identities; power seekers; ‘evil girls’; clicking by mistake on inappropriate material. Software is available to block/limit/monitor internet access, and parents are advised to buy and install it. Another useful software is ‘restrictive disclosure’ programmes which automatically prevent personal information such as names, addresses, telephone numbers being published. Signs which parents should look out for include: apparent memory loss, under-eating, changes in behaviour, illness/headaches. There should be zero tolerance for such incidents: freedom of speech does not include a license to harm others.

Information was also provided about telephone addiction. Teenagers typically send an average of 80 SMS per day, and typically have around 300 names on their contact list. This sort of use could indicate addiction. Of course, not all communication is negative, but although teenagers need this sort of connection to their peers, the nearly constant texting implies a loss of privacy. The consequences of heavy use include: sleeplessness, stress, distraction from work which can negatively influence academic performance, poor use of language, and increased exposure to cyberbullying (especially to ‘sexting’: the sending of sexually explicit images). Only concerted action is likely to have any impact on this phenomenon. Of course, active parents can turn off the tap (eg. restrict use to certain times of day such as refusing access between 10pm and 7am; limiting the budget) – but, as always, the key answer is probably to maintain a close communication with your child.

A question was asked about the linkup with the Guidance Group, a network of confidential counsellors at the Secondary School, made up of volunteer members of the teaching staff who have followed some training. The psychologists had provided some training to this group, and a note was circulated at the start of term indicating its existence. However, most parents present in the meeting were unaware of it. The services of the group are not clearly understood and it was recommended that greater publicity could be given to the network, and their role, including specific information about their availability and their approach to disclosure of information obtained. The Guidance Group teachers can be found on the School web-site, clicking first on Secondary, then on Documents. The list appears in a doc dated 27 Nov 2009.

The psychologists were recommended to take contact with colleagues in other European Schools, notably in Brussels (which are of similar size and could have similar problems).

The psychologists were asked to define hyperactivity, but given the complex and varied nature of this problem preferred to see the family concerned individually.

⁴ The technology easily allows arguments to continue after school hours that in the past would both begin and end on the playground.

The psychologists will be visiting classrooms to explain their role, and how they can be contacted, starting in January⁵.

A question was asked about peer pressure to buy GSM, and about the school policy on GSM usage at school. This is not really the domain of the school psychologists, but the choice of whether or not to buy a GSM, as with how to handle requests to buy the latest fashion clothing or the latest computer game or any other item, clearly rests with parents. Of course, the opportunity can be taken to explain the reasons behind decisions in a way which is appropriate for the age of the child.

- APEEE representatives understand the reasons why some parents wish their children to have a GSM already from an early age. They explained that, for obvious reasons, there is a policy on children not using GSM in classrooms: the way this is implemented by individual teachers has to be taken up with them. Systems are available to block GSM signals in certain areas (eg. meeting rooms of modern offices) but these do not exist at the school.

There was a short discussion about inclusivity. The European Schools cannot cater for all circumstances, but policies have been adopted in recent years to try and integrate children from many different backgrounds, and the APEEE considers this to be an advantage for the whole community. The situation for SEN children in Luxembourg is believed to have improved over time. Clearly, the concept of inclusivity goes much further than this, and improvements remain to be made in many areas: the APEEE is actively involved in that process both at local and at inter-school level.

A question was asked concerning bullying of pupils by teachers citing a concrete example of surprising behaviour. Clearly the school policy on bullying cannot just refer to pupil-pupil, teacher-pupil or pupil-teacher aggressions. In principle, the approach of the psychologists if asked to advise on a teacher-pupil incident, would be similar to their approach in other cases. Interviews would take place with the pupil(s) concerned and the teacher, both separately and together if necessary; parents and the administration would be contacted; appropriate recommendations would be made.

The psychologists confirmed that they would be prepared to provide advice about bulimia, anorexia and other eating disorders. They welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the school/APEEE work on a new canteen call-for-tender.

⁵ It will take time to complete this task: as at 1.9.2010 there are some 237 classes altogether in the Luxembourg schools (Lux.1+Lux.2 combined) : 26 in the nursery cycle (13+13), 89 in the primary cycle (52+37), 122 in the secondary cycle (122+0).