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Vice-president
Budget and Human Resources

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Dear Ms O'Reilly,

Thank you for your letter of 26 January expressing your concerns about the integration of children with disabilities in the European Schools.

Let me start by underlining, as you have pointed out in your letter, that the European Schools system is based on an intergovernmental convention and is not part of the EU public administration, nor is it a comprehensive educational system comparable to the national educational systems. Consequently, the European Schools cannot be required to provide an all-inclusive education for all the children, as it is the case in the national systems¹. Nonetheless, the European Schools system offers different forms and levels of support to ensure appropriate help for pupils experiencing difficulties and having special educational needs at any point in their school career.

Having said that, allow me to address the different issues raised in your letter.

As to the general compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), let me assure you that the integration of pupils with special education needs (SEN) is of great importance to the Commission. These issues are closely coordinated with the Office of the Secretary-General of the European Schools (OSG) and discussed within the framework of the standing Educational Support Policy working group, bringing together representatives of the OSG, the Commission, national inspectors in charge of educational support, directors, teaching staff and parents.

Moreover, since the Commission received the recommendations of the UNCRPD, the reflection on possible ways to implement the UN recommendations has been initiated with the concerned stakeholders and notably the OSG. The Commission will support all endeavours at the systemic level aiming at fulfilling these recommendations.

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¹ Complaints Board of the European Schools, decision 09/14 of 31.08.2009.

European Schools attach great importance to their pupils' individual needs and social integration. Assessment of pupils' needs starts with a multidisciplinary report including medical, psychological and psychoeducational components. Based on this, the Schools propose remediation methods focused on overcoming these pupils' learning difficulties/disabilities so that they can be offered the best conditions to learn, socially integrate and render their competences.

Consequently, the European Schools consider that their approach is in line with the UNCRPD requirements as regards the model of social-based and multidisciplinary assessment of pupils' special education needs. Nonetheless, the Schools will continue to evaluate and ameliorate their assessment model in order to fully comply with the UNCRPD in this respect.

Annual training is provided to the educational support coordinators (i.e. teachers responsible for coordinating the provision of the educational support at their school's level), as well as to the management of the European Schools. They also receive constant support on this issue both from the Office of the Secretary-General of the European Schools and from the national inspectors. In addition, targeted training in this area is organised for teachers in many Schools.

Regarding the Complaints Board of the European Schools, it is a body independent from other organs of the European Schools system and its members are responsible for defining their own training needs.

As far as the budget is concerned, the annual budget for the SEN programme has been constantly increasing over the last years, from 4.38 million EUR in 2010 to 5.9 million EUR in 2015 and the Commission has supported such evolution in this particular domain.

Concerning the reimbursement of costs related to particular therapies under the JSIS, in certain situations foreseen in the implementing provisions for the reimbursement of medical expenses, special measures can be applied such as double ceilings or 100% reimbursement in case of recognition of serious illness.

The European Schools' policy on the Provision of Educational Support² enacts general guidelines regarding the transition between cycles (change of levels). Within their framework the Schools must establish their own transition procedures, including those for transition of pupils with special education needs.

The class teachers of the pupils concerned cooperate with the education support coordinators of the respective cycles in order to pass on all the relevant information at the beginning of the school year and to identify the most appropriate form of support in the new cycle of education.

When it comes to the question of exclusion, each school has to be able to make appropriate provision for pupil's pedagogical and social integration. However, there may indeed be cases, when after discussions with parents, the school concludes it is not competent to respond to the specific needs of the child. Should such a situation arise, the school assists the parents as far as reasonably possible to find a better alternative solution.

² Document 2012-05-D-15-en-10 <http://www.eursec.eu/getfile/1887/2>

Moreover, a specialised social worker of the Commission can provide information on alternative schooling options and accompany the parents in their search for specialised therapies, leisure time activities and, if needed, special living arrangements. Parents in this situation are also entitled to an education allowance, currently amounting to 260 EUR per month (subject to indexation).

Additionally, after a thorough medical evaluation procedure, children considered as being "disabled", can obtain co-funding for private schools from the Commission's budget line related to "aid for disabled children" (around 100 children receive such financial assistance, with a total budget of about 1.35 million EUR; individual amounts depending on the total family income vary between 65% and 95% of the costs).

As regards the legal remedies, the general means of redress are applicable, namely parents may lodge an administrative appeal to the Secretary-General of the European Schools and, subsequently, should their appeal be rejected, to the Complaints Board of the European Schools.

For the issue related to planning, under the Convention of the European Schools, host countries are solely responsible for the provision and maintenance of the Schools infrastructure. When it comes to the fifth European School in Brussels, Belgium has indeed ratified the UNCPRD and the applicable policy of the *Régie des bâtiments* (the federal buildings agency responsible for the European Schools in Brussels) includes provisions concerning the requirements of persons with disabilities³.

Let me conclude by saying that the SEN policy of the European schools is regularly assessed and the recommendations are issued on a regular basis (such as updating the guidelines, early identification of disabilities by the Schools, better exchange of information and practices between the Schools, as well as better communication between the Schools and the national inspectors to harmonise the policy implementation).

I am thus personally convinced that the best possible solutions for pupils and their parents will continue to be sought, identified and implemented in order to meet their special educational needs to the largest possible extent.

Yours sincerely,

Kristalina Georgieva

c.c. Ms Marianne Thyssen
European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility

³ <http://www.buildingsagency.be/PDFS/ReglementAdministratif%E2%80%93932011.pdf> (e.g. Titre II Chapitre I.1.1 A or Titre II Chapitre I.1.1 G.d)