European Parliament

THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS SYSTEM: STATE OF PLAY, CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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This study focuses on **the European Schools System** (ESS), an inter-governmental system of educational establishments – both traditional and accredited European Schools – that offers **multicultural and multilingual education** to children across EU Member States. It assesses the ESS educational and operational progress since an in-depth review by the European Parliament in 2011.

Main observations

The ESS **educational** system generally functions well. Nevertheless, it faces particular **challenges in pedagogical quality assurance and language learning**. Firstly, after introducing **the competence-based change approach**, the ESS still needs to update its monitoring and evaluation indicators for pedagogical quality assurance and develop a continuous professional development (CPD) offer for both seconded and locally recruited teachers. Secondly, **language learning, seen by many stakeholders as the strongest side of the ESS**, especially the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) method, is challenged by teachers' shortage, exacerbated by both Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, some Schools are forced to mix age groups and language levels, potentially causing learning problems. Proposed remedies include digitalising language learning for some languages, at least in the secondary cycle, mitigating staffing shortages, enriching connections between both traditional and accredited Schools, and better reflecting the needs of multi-lingual pupils. This can also increase the flexibility of language learning in the ESS.

Many **operational** aspects of the ESS need to be reassessed considering the rapid expansion of the system and drastically changing reality, especially the ESS identity, governance and funding. **The ESS identity**, although it continues to be perceived as relevant, **needs to be broadened** to better consider multilingual pupils and social diversity, better integrate the system with Accredited Schools (AES) and local environments, better diversify educational offers, especially for pupils with special educational needs and non-academic ambitions. The ESS governance is perceived to be **overly complex, bureaucratic, and inefficient**. It can be improved by developing a new, comprehensive scheme of delegation, which **guards against conflicts of interest**, and establishing **clear channels of communication** together with **support that enables effective stakeholder**

The study

The study examines the progress that the European Schools System has made during the past decade and overviews its state of affairs as of 2022. The educational dimension of the study focuses on questions related to teaching and learning, while the operational one concentrates on the administrative and managerial sides of the system. The study pinpoints the key challenges that the system currently faces and provides tailored recommendations on how to overcome them.

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involvement and **higher transparency**. Finally, the current cost-sharing mechanism has led to two major issues the traditional ES face – **teacher shortages and a poor infrastructure**. Exploring alternatives to the current cost-sharing mechanism (e.g. contributions-per-student) and strengthening the employment package for teachers (e.g. via the introduction of equal employment conditions, appropriate teacher support structures, and better training opportunities) could be plausible avenues for development.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Expanding and promoting the system through the AES should be adapted as a policy priority. However, **stronger, and more consistent pedagogical quality assurance processes** also need to be put in place, centrally and within individual Schools, to ensure that the ESS can grow sustainably.

Key findings

1. After introducing the **competence-based approach**, the ESS still needs to update its monitoring and evaluation indicators for pedagogical quality assurance and develop a continuous professional development (CPD) offer for teachers.

2. **Language learning** is seen by many stakeholders as the strongest side of the ESS, especially the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) method. However, it is heavily impacted by staff shortages and COVID-19 after-effects.

3. While the current **ESS mission and objectives** are still seen as relevant today, they need to be broadened and include more explicit references to the values of diversity, inclusion, cooperation, and tolerance.

4. The current **ESS governance and funding** setup limits the system's ability to respond to challenges. This can be alleviated by higher delegation and transparency standards, feasible cost-sharing alternatives and strengthened employment package for teachers.

The eight key competences of the new competence-based approach to learning

Source: ES (2021f), New marking system in the Secondary cycle.