

Better schools: an agenda for European cooperation

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Pál SCHMITT (EPP-ED, HU) in response to the Commission's Communication entitled "Better Schools: an agenda for European cooperation".

MEPs recall that considerable disparities between the respective performances of education systems in the EU could increase disparities in economic and social development between the Member States. They therefore fully support the Commission Communication of 4 July 2008 (see summary of the non-legislative initial document) and parallel Communication of 16 December 2008 ([COM\(2006\)0865](#)) on "An updated strategic framework for European cooperation on education and training".

On the whole, MEPs consider that school education should be a key priority for the next cycle of the Lisbon strategy. In this context, MEPs make the following main recommendations:

Improving competences of every student: MEPs call on the Member States to do their utmost to provide every young person with basic skills that are fundamental for further learning. They are concerned about the present trend of decreasing level of students' literacy and numeracy skills. Strategies should therefore be put in place to reduce the number of early school leavers and to reduce gender imbalances in basic skills. Moreover, MEPs stress the need to identify students at risk as soon as possible and to provide them with additional support, as well as to support them during the transition from one school level to the next and provide personalised learning approaches for those in need.

MEPs call on the Member States to:

- ensure that their educational policies achieve a balance between equality and quality, with the stress on social facilitation measures for pupils and students from disadvantaged backgrounds and on adapting the learning process to their individual needs;
- enhance the access of disadvantaged groups to vocational training and university studies by drawing up and advertising appropriate scholarship schemes.

MEPs also call for the **modernisation and improvement of school curricula** so that they reflect today's social, economic, cultural and technical realities and are closely linked to industry, business and the labour market. However, the reform of the educational system should be fundamentally geared to the full and multi-faceted development of the individual, cultivating respect for human rights and social justice, lifelong learning, the protection of the environment and personal and collective wellbeing. On the whole, MEPs believe that schools should strive not only to improve employability, but also to give all young people the opportunity to develop their full potential, in line with their personal aptitudes. They also consider that all children should, from the earliest age, be given the opportunity to acquire musical, artistic, manual, physical, social and civic competences and strongly believe that **musical, artistic and physical education should be compulsory** parts of the school curriculum.

Reiterating their view that children should learn foreign languages from an early age, MEPs welcome the proposal of a new benchmark, according to which **at least 80% of pupils in lower secondary education be taught at least two foreign languages**. Member States are also called upon to instruct pupils in the use and applications of new communications and digital technology.

High-quality schools and teachers: MEPs call for a **European charter on pupils' rights** as a first and important step to guaranteeing the right of every child to quality education. Member States and the competent regional governments are also called upon to invest in high-quality pre-primary education.

MEPs consider that **public education** should remain primarily a state-financed domain which contributes to social equity and inclusion. They recommend that financial support be given equally to all kinds of school in accordance with their size, regardless of their educational philosophy and recall **the important role of faith-based schools** that provide high quality education and teach strong moral values. Moreover, MEPs believe that public educational institutions in a more disadvantaged financial situation should be granted additional support.

According to MEPs, a good quality learning environment, providing modern infrastructure, materials and technology is a pre-requisite for achieving high quality education in schools. The quality of education further requires curricula of a demanding and rigorous nature and assessment of pupils on a regular basis.

MEPs also call on Member States to give schools the **necessary autonomy** to find solutions to the specific challenges they face in their local context (as well as the appropriate flexibility in curricula, teaching methods and assessment systems).

MEPs also believe that it is necessary to provide high-quality initial teacher education based on both theory and practice, while stressing the importance of respect for the teacher's authority in the classroom. According to MEPs, the quality of teaching depends on the skills of the teachers. Moreover, they stress the importance of mobility and school partnership projects (e.g. Comenius). They also recommend creating school/community partnerships in order to combat the problem of violence in schools.

At the same time, MEPs recommend **involving parents in school life**. They believe that all schools should foster the acquisition of democratic competences by supporting student councils and allowing students to take co-responsibility for the school in partnership with parents, teachers and school councils.

Lastly, MEPs call on the Member States and the Commission to cooperate closely to promote **implementation of the European schooling system** in the Member States' respective education systems and to envisage including the European Schools in the work of the Eurydice network. In the meantime, they call on the Commission to report regularly to Parliament on the progress made following the two aforementioned communications.