

**CLUSTER “ACCESS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN LIFELONG
LEARNING”**

Summary report of the Peer Learning in Paris, 12-15 November 2007

Fight against failure at school and inequality in education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the PLA was to assess how low achievement of pupils in schools in deprived urban areas is tackled in practice in France. The school establishments visited are at the outskirts of Paris, in the Seine Saint Denis department. The schools selected for visits are all located in districts with a very high concentration of unemployment and poverty, and high level of social tensions. In this socio-urban context the school is crucial for compensating for social and cultural disadvantages and for enhancing pupils' achievement.

Education policy and social inclusion

There is a high level of policy commitment for guaranteeing equal opportunities to master the core knowledge and skills during the compulsory education (until age 16). General and specific measures are directed at preventing underachievement of pupils at school and leaving statutory education without obtaining a certificate or a qualification.

The priority education strategies aim to eliminate inequalities in achievement of pupils attending schools in deprived districts and those going to schools in more prosperous neighbourhoods. A comprehensive programme 'Ambition to succeed' guarantees additional resources (financial and personnel) and an improved organizational structure through the establishment of networks of schools, partnerships between stakeholders, and supervision and monitoring of implementation.

The general measures targeted to underachieving pupils encompass the personalized programme for educational success (tailor-made for each pupil); access to knowledge about professional and vocational options; relay or transition classes as the medium-term intensive personalized support in special groups; and the general integration mission for adolescents aged 16+ who are no longer under statutory obligation to attend school and are at risk of remaining without a qualification.

Specific measures within the school environment include learning support at school (during and after school hours) and 'open school' (during school vacation, and days when there are no formal classes such as on Wednesday afternoon and Saturday).

Lessons learned

The strong points of the French context may be summarized as follows:

Policy and legislation

- Firm political commitment at the national level
- Inter-ministerial cooperation and partnerships in policy formulation
- Legislation underpinning the policy commitment
- Legal obligation to provide means (financial and personnel)
- Monitoring of implementation

Implementation

- Holistic approach which encapsulates preventative and remedial measures
- Top-down definition of values, norms and guidelines
- Bottom-up elaboration of specific projects by the school in partnership with local and municipal actors
- Partnerships between teachers and other pedagogical staff such as social workers, psychologists, and other stakeholders such as youth organizations, and local authorities
- Partnerships between secondary schools and industry and higher school establishments

The challenges for the successful enhancement of equity are associated with the need to further:

- Enhance innovative pedagogical practices
- Decrease variable quality across schools in deprived areas
- Avoid overlapping of measures in order to make better use of resources

The key sources of inspiration and reflection:

- While considering options for increasing the choice of schools, the main pursuit of solutions to fight underachievement should be to ensure that all schools meet high quality standards
- Increasing awareness among adolescents' of their potential and ambition may require preferential treatment of pupils from deprived neighbourhoods to access higher education
- Aesthetics and school architecture are important for improving social dynamics and motivation of pupils
- Bringing young drop-outs back to school via relay or transitional classes is an example of transferable good practice

1. INTRODUCTION

The PLA in France was very well planned and organized by the Ministry for the National Education (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale*). It demonstrated most impressively the range and breadth of France's efforts to achieve social cohesion through education, and reduce the drop-out rate, promote equal opportunities in performance of pupils in compulsory education, and foster access to higher education. The choice of visited schools was pertinent and provided a rich field for peer learning.

France has a long tradition of policies and measures to buffer and eliminate inequalities in education. However, the socio-economic developments in recent decades and changes in the composition of the school population, partly associated with increased immigration, have brought about significant challenges.

Youth riots in 2005 in urban areas with a high concentration of unemployed and poor families drew attention on the need to provide schools with the adequate means and to open the path to innovative approaches to inclusion through education. School performance in primary and secondary education was generally recognized as a relevant indicator of future trainability and employability which is the basis for social inclusion understood both as professional and civic participation in society.

The recent wave of adaptation and reform is embedded in the law passed in April 2005 which traces the vision, sets the goals, the line of responsibility and the procedures, and guarantees the provision of means (financial and personnel) and monitoring. Two years of implementation of the measures for social inclusion in education are a sufficient time span to assess the achievements and challenges, and to identify transferable lessons in the EU context.

The proportion of early school leavers in France is lower than the EU average (13% against an average of about 15.5%). Nevertheless, the policy concern is not only about the size of the population affected but relates also to the fact that early school leavers are highly concentrated among some sectors of the population, notably those living in the housing estates at the outskirts of the agglomerations, many of whom have an immigrant background. This is a serious challenge for the commitment to equal opportunities enshrined in the French constitution and laws.

Some 14% of pupils repeat a year at least once already during the first five years of elementary education. Underachievement at school, in France like elsewhere, is frequently associated with the broad array of social deprivations in the family environment. Typical are relational problems within family; housing problems such as overcrowding and poor quality of dwellings; low household income; unemployment of adult household members; low level of initial education of parent(s) which is exacerbated by poor knowledge of the French language, and/or the illegal status of parent(s).

Concentration of families with multiple problems in housing estates, located as a rule on the periphery of agglomerations in France, creates deprived neighbourhoods which are a poor general environment for learning activities. The school is considered crucial for compensating for social and cultural disadvantages and for enhancing pupils' achievement.

2. PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY

2.1. Description of provisions and visits

The main focus of the PLA was on the implementation of policies to fight early school leaving, and notably on priority education which aims to compensate inequalities between the achievements of pupils attending schools in deprived districts, and those going to schools in more prosperous neighbourhoods.

2.1.1. Priority education

Policies and measures which are targeted to the territories for priority education to enhance equity (*zones d'éducation prioritaires, ZEP*) date back to the early 1980s. The classification of territories built on criteria such as the socio-economic situation of families, presence of children of foreign origin or from non-French speaking families, children repeating years in compulsory education, and dropping out in lower-secondary education¹. Initially, the provisions for priority education consisted mainly of the allocation of additional funding for schools in deprived neighbourhoods. Over a 10 year period (between 1982 and 2003) the number of ZEPs grew from 362 to 900, and the number of pupils doubled, from 8.3% to 18%. By 2003 more than 1 million elementary school pupils and some 580 thousand lower secondary pupils were encompassed by the priority education. The cost per pupils was 10% to 15% higher than in non-priority territories². However, probably because of the excessive spread, the measures did not reach the proposed objective of diminishing the gap in achievements between disadvantaged and well off pupils.

In 2006 the reform to enhance equal opportunities based on the new law (*La loi d'orientation et de programme pour l'avenir de l'école*³) was underpinned by a significant increase in funding for schools in disadvantaged areas, new measures, and the creation of a better organizational structure for the implementation of reforms.

Networks called 'ambition to succeed' (*ambition réussite*) have been created in 2006. Clusters of nursery and elementary schools are grouped around a junior high school

¹ Circulaire No. 81-238 du 1er juillet 1981

² Education prioritaire : des objectifs et des méthodes à réaffirmer pour lutter contre la fracture scolaire, Discours - Xavier Darcos 17/01/2003

³ Journal Officiel, 24 avril 2005 La loi n° 2005-380 du 23 avril 2005 d'orientation et de programme pour l'avenir de l'École

(*collège*) in disadvantaged territories. These clusters (primary/lower-secondary) reinforce continuity of support during the transition of pupils from one level to the next. Currently there are 253 networks and they benefit from the input of 1000 additional teachers whose tasks are to contribute to the pedagogical improvements. Furthermore, the individual guidance of pupils in difficulty is provided by 3000 pedagogical assistants. A variety of methods and programmes are being developed, more pedagogical experimentation is encouraged, funds are allocated also for extra curricula activities, and a strong monitoring by inspectors and an evaluation system are set in place.

The accent is very much on building and supporting ambition among pupils – the basic consideration being that a disadvantaged pupil is frequently unaware of their own potential. Raising the level of expectations of the teaching staff towards achievements of their pupils is part of the concept of the overall ambition to succeed.

2.1.2. General measures targeted to underachieving pupils

Measures of support and guidance are in place for all pupils in difficulty, notwithstanding the level of disadvantage of the school. There is a personalized programme for educational success which is tailor-made for each pupil (*programme personnalisée de réussite éducative* known as ‘PPRE’); there are programmes of discovery of professional and vocational options; there are relay or transitional classes (*classe relais*) which ensure a medium-term intensive personalized support in special classes; and there is a general integration mission (*La mission générale d’insertion* known as ‘MGI’) to prevent pupils to exit compulsory education at age 16 without qualification and to bring back into a learning environment adolescents who are 16+ who have not obtained a certificate and are at risk of remaining without any qualification.

2.1.3. Social cohesion measures within the school environment

The so called ‘open school’ allows pupils in compulsory education to use the school facilities during the school vacation, and in days when there is no formal education such as Wednesday afternoons and Saturdays, so as to provide a safe learning environment for discovering a broad variety of competences and encouraging pupils to achieve better performance at school.

2.1.4. Visits

The PLA started with a presentation of policies and measures at the Ministry for the National Education in Paris. Then, the visits to schools allowed a comprehensive understanding of the issues to be tackled, and the magnitude and the nature of difficulties in the implementation of policies.

In the first school, a debate with the teaching staff about their implementation of the ‘ambition to succeed’ programme was followed by the observation of teaching in classes and a debate with pupils. In the second (Clichy sous bois) the focus was on the implementation of the PPRE, personalized programme for educational success, visits to

the relay or transitional classes, and discussions with pupils. In the third establishment, the visit focused on the ambition to succeed beyond compulsory education and the partnership with the reputable higher education establishments (*Grandes Ecoles*). In the fourth school, 'open school' activities were observed and there was a presentation of the reintegration classes for youth aged 16 to 25 without qualification.

The last day was dedicated to a meeting with the staff of the National agency for social cohesion and equal opportunities (*Agence nationale pour la cohésion sociale et l'égalité des chances ACSE*) which was setup in 2006. Its primary mission are to fight against discrimination, and to develop programmes of education, training, access to employment, health care, prevention of delinquency and development of social bonds. It works towards complementing the social cohesion role of the mainstream educational system, in particular for adolescents and young people between 16 and 25 years of age. ACSE's networking gathers public authorities, industry and civil society for the implementation of a broad array of field work ranging from literacy courses to health related issues⁴. We met with the representatives of an inter-ministerial group dealing with the adolescents in the 16-18 age groups. This is a special group at risk since those who do not pursue education beyond the statutory age which is 16 in France, and in particular those who had not acquired a qualification, find themselves in a social vacuum given that the legal adulthood is set at age 18. The group's mission is forward-looking and it is currently examining options such as raising the compulsory education age to 18, reinforcing apprenticeships, or introducing relay or transitional classes also for drop-outs above age 16. Here we had a useful exchange of information on how this particular age group is integrated in education in other countries.

2.2. General observations about visits

The school establishments visited are located at the outskirts of Paris, in the Seine Saint Denis department. This originally a working class department is faced with the biggest social problems in France associated with high unemployment, especially among youth, a high concentration of people living in poverty and a tendency towards ghettoization.

Visitors were struck by the fact that most, if not all pupils in the visited schools had a migrant background – mainly from sub-Saharan Africa or Maghreb, but also from Asia (India, Vietnam, China) or - to a minor extent – the Balkans. Given that the choice of school is linked to the residence criteria (*carte scolaire*), the composition of pupils largely reflects the ethnic composition of the urban area.

The appearance of buildings and neighbourhoods did not give the impression of significant deprivation. Some suburbs, next to Paris, look like many other Paris districts. In the other places we saw a combination of high-rise buildings and small houses, surrounded by quite large green public areas.

However, walking around these districts visitors often felt some tension. In one neighbourhood a headmaster advised us not to stand outside the school gate. The week of

⁴ www.lacse.fr

our visit, inspectors were in an emergency meeting following the stabbing of a headmaster in one of the schools. The climate of insecurity contributed to the ghetto feeling. The self-containment and isolation of the population was confirmed by the school staff who told us that even though the pupils live very close to Paris, many have never been to Paris.

The school premises we visited proved to be of considerably different quality. The first school we visited was in poor conditions. The building had cracked windows, broken furniture, was poorly illuminated, and had dirty walls. The entrance gate was weak and could not keep out the regular intruders (usually the unemployed former pupils). The second school complex we saw made a stark contrast to the first one. The building is new and beautiful – bright architecture, large and clean spaces. It was designed with the cooperation of the teachers to enhance its functionality. The school gave the impression of being a safe and protected environment.

Considerable differences in the overall quality of teaching were also apparent. In one, a great effort was put on controlling the pupils and keeping discipline in class. There was no evidence of pedagogical innovation or adequate adaptation of the after-school programme to the composition of pupils. The after-school program was implemented in the form of traditional classes and took place between 16.30-17.30 hours. Pupils could also stay longer at school to be helped with their homework. We had a very interesting exchange with the pupils about their wish for improvements to the school. They mentioned first of all “improving the building”, then “excursions” and “safety and protection on school premises”. We asked them about their origins and the language they speak at home – the vast majority were born in France but spoke another language at home. When asked what they felt to have in common, they answered “French culture” and “French history”.

In the second school, the headmaster and some teachers we met seemed highly engaged. The school organizes relay or transitional classes outside its own premises, it has a network of social assistants and psychologists, and they promote several innovative activities through the co-operation with external agents (students from Poly-technical schools, resident artists, etc.). There we could see how the networking of different levels of schools may work in practice – teachers of primary and lower secondary school hold classes together to assist kids with specific needs. As far as we could appreciate, pedagogy seemed more innovative, even though classes tend to be frontal and much effort in additional support is directed towards helping pupils with homework.

The two other secondary schools visited were an upper secondary ‘*lycée*’ and a lower secondary ‘*collège*’. In both we met highly committed teachers and headmaster. Once more, we saw how people make the difference. The Lycée is open to many cooperation projects with the outside world – they organize preparatory classes for higher education, and have an agreement which allows them to send some pupils to study Political Sciences (*Sciences Po*) through a non-standard, even though very selective, channel, and arrange tutorship by professionals from the world of business and industry. In the college, we saw pupils aged 16+ attending the reintegration classes (*Mission Générale d’Insertion*)

and visited open school activities (classes of hobby and leisure activities organized during out of school hours which aim at helping pupils to develop additional skills and to reinforce links to the school).

One of the general impressions is that there appears to be a tension in France, like in some other countries, between sincere aspirations towards equity or at least equal opportunities – considered as a main societal value - and the substantial elitism built in the education system.

Even if the ambition is to equip all pupils with a secondary school diploma, not all diplomas have the same value. We were told that students in Sciences Po were coming from 20 French higher secondary schools (*lycées*) only. The coordinator of the network for equal opportunities in enterprises explained that their action is not only addressed to disadvantaged high schools, but also to students of ‘non prestigious’ Universities, for whom finding a job will be very difficult. Besides, data show that the repartition of pupils between general or vocational education mainly depends on social class. When observing that most working class pupils are in vocational training and most white collars’ children in general education, is it possible to suspect a bias in guidance?

The PLA showed the extent to which some schools are faced with the consequences of the failures and shortcomings of urban planning, housing and employment policies and integration of immigrant practices, just to mention the most salient ones. The example of Clichy sous bois so vividly presented by the vice-mayor illustrates the weight of the problems that school alone cannot solve. The intensive construction of dwellings in the 1960s that were tailored for a relatively well-off prospective inhabitants who were expected to commute to Paris with their own cars via a highway that was to pass close by, is an example of a strategic failure. Like the highway, the middle classes did not come to stay in Clichy sous bois. The dwellings are all in private property and are being rented out by landlords to the low income families mainly of immigrant origin. Many are home to illegal immigrants. Foreigners account for one third of the population of some 29000 inhabitants, and there is no official statistics about numbers of families of immigrant origin or those with no legal residence. There is no urban structure, no commercial centre, no entertainment centre, no public housing, no industrial plants, no train, no subway connection to Paris, and the highway was never constructed in the vicinity of the district. People who find work elsewhere leave because they need to have access to transport to reach their jobs. The fact that there is no employment in the proximity and that public transportation is bad and excessively expensive, has turned this rather pretty environment into a ghetto. The officially registered unemployment rate is 25%, and a half of the population is under the age of 25. The municipality has 40% less fiscal income than an average town of its size. The new school Collège Doisneau, built following the riots of 2005, has created a safe learning environment for children during the compulsory education. However once out of the educational system, as pointed out by the vice-mayor, there is little if any chance for desegregation.

3. LESSONS LEARNED

3.1. Key success factors

3.1.1. Political commitment embedded in legislation

The strong points of the French approach are the firm political commitment at the national level and the inter-ministerial cooperation and partnerships in policy formulation. The legislation underpinning the policy commitment is a guarantee of longer-term sustainability of the implementation of the educational policy which is binding and statutory. The legislation encapsulates the obligation to provide schools with both the financial means and the personnel.

3.1.2. Top-down approach combined with local autonomy

A strong point of the policy is also in the choice of a top-down definition of values, norms⁵ and guidelines which are embedded in the tradition of the Republic. The guidelines leave much space for a bottom-up selection and elaboration of specific projects by the schools in partnership with local and municipal actors which are best placed to recognize and meet the local needs.

3.1.3. Partnerships

The importance of partnerships between schools and other institutions such as sports associations, cultural associations, and municipalities is acknowledged, and the involvement of multiple stakeholders is encouraged. Partnerships between schools and industry and higher educational establishments are also encouraged.

3.1.4. Networks between schools of different levels

Most participants found very promising the linking of schools of different levels (primary and secondary; secondary and higher education) as put in place within *Ambition réussite*. Such network approach guarantees continuity in the educational project and should thus prevent dropping out in the transitional points.

3.1.5. Combination of preventative and remedial measures

Participants valued the commitment to combining prevention of underachievement and dropping out of school with the remedial policies to reintegrate pupils into the educational system or to give them access to qualification.

⁵ The decree of 11 July 2006 defines 7 pillars of core knowledge and competences: mastering the French language; learning one foreign language; acquiring the basis of mathematics and scientific and technological culture; mastering of information and communication technology; humanistic culture; social and civic competences; autonomy and initiative.

3.2. Challenges

3.2.1. *Autonomy and quality*

The implementation of the ambition to succeed program (*ambition réussite*) puts the accent on the increased autonomy of the school and teachers to identify and develop projects that correspond to the specific needs of their pupils. They have acquired more freedom to experiment. What appeared from visits, however, was that some schools did not know how to use such freedom effectively. We saw some rigidly frontal classes and few imaginative extra-curricular activities. The success of the program therefore mainly depends on the individual abilities of teachers and headmasters. Much effort is needed to ensure that quality is inscribed in the system and transcends the good will and enthusiasm of individuals. It seems that autonomy may be a value only if accompanied by intense sensibilization and training of teachers to address the real needs of their pupils via improved pedagogical methods, tools, and skills.

Providing teachers with guidance on pedagogy is important for the quality assurance as is the evaluation of their performance (by inspectors, for instance). Evaluation is a sensitive task that may encounter strong suspicion by teachers, who do not accept interferences on their practices. This however needs to be addressed in the policy implementation process since the quest for pedagogical innovation is embedded in the policy guidelines, but the pedagogical practices that we saw in place, according to most participants, were very far from being optimal. Visitors also observed that learning outdoors, group tuition, or self-directed learning are still not standard activities.

As seen in many other countries, there is a strong link between equity and pedagogical quality – having variable quality across schools means not providing the same opportunities to all pupils. The quality issue is therefore something on which a strong focus needs to be placed.

3.2.2. *After school activities*

We saw a vast array of after school activities, under different titles. The rationale is that when children leave school, they will tend to stay in the street because their homes are poor and uncomfortable, and/or are lonely places. The aim of such activities is therefore on the one hand to keep children off the street, and on the other hand to provide them with the support (supervision of homework, recreational activities etc.) that more fortunate children receive from their families. While the rationale is sound, in reality we observed that most extra hours are focused on doing the homework in classrooms. Thus, these children and adolescents are sitting at a school desk in front of a notebook, in some cases in run-down classrooms, from early morning to 6 or 7 pm. Some of those after school activities may need to be diversified and brought outside classrooms into spaces such as sports and community centres.

3.2.3. *Multiplicity of measures*

The many combined efforts to tackle problems have generated an abundance of measures which sometimes seem to overlap. The introduction of new measures does not always imply a redefinition of those already in place. Thus, it is sometimes difficult to see how the different measures are articulated within the system. The need for the evaluation of the efficiency may be necessary to streamline the existing measures in view of the best use of resources and optimization of outcomes.

3.2.4. Intercultural education

In view of a specific choice in relation to integration/assimilation of the population of foreign origin in France, intercultural education does not seem part either of the curriculum or of teachers' training. Several visitors stressed that special measures may be necessary to increase the involvement of immigrant families. Many participants found that, given the composite origins of the pupils, intercultural education could be useful to reinforce the pupils' self esteem and participation. In schools we visited it appeared that "99% of the children were of immigrant background, while the teachers of the same background were not more than 2-3%". Greater presence of teachers with immigrant background could serve as positive role models in deprived neighbourhoods with a high concentration of immigrants.

3.3. Sources of inspiration and reflection

3.3.1. Free choice of school and quality standards

In previous Cluster meetings and PLAs, there has been quite an extensive discussion on the issue of free choice of schools. Countries where free choice is implemented (e.g. Belgium, and Hungary) find that the right to choose is not a guarantee for equity if it does not go hand in hand with the improvement of quality of all schools. The problem with free choice is that not everybody can choose – the ones with little information are normally left with the worst quality. Poor families may not be able to afford transportation and other costs associated with commuting daily to a better school. In Hungary, starting from this year, the choice of schools has been limited, based on residence. In France instead the debate is going in the opposite direction of opening more space for the free choice of schools irrespective of the location of residence. Through the visits in different countries we could observe that choice may be detrimental to equity, but that the lack of choice does not guarantee equity either. The schools we visited in France were segregated, simply because the urban area is segregated. When schools are of poor quality, obliging pupils who live in underprivileged areas to attend poor schools because they live there does not seem to serve well their interests either. One can wonder therefore if the debate on free choice or not is well focused. The main focus should probably be on quality – the main issue being how to ensure that all schools have high quality standards.

3.3.2. Ambition and preferential treatment

Teachers and headmasters confirmed that disadvantaged pupils have little awareness of their potential and have little ambition for themselves. They cannot imagine themselves in elite schools and leading professions. The teachers recognized that after a while such pervasive resignation affects them as well - and even for them it becomes difficult to imagine an ambitious future for their pupils. They become content if their most brilliant pupils make it to technical higher education. This may perhaps explain the somewhat biased guidance that leads working class pupils to VET and upper class ones to Universities. Teachers explained however that ambition is contagious. The example of one person who 'made it' may have large exhilarating effects on the overall state of mind of both pupils and teachers. Hence the importance of projects like the agreement between higher secondary schools in deprived districts and Political Science Faculty (*Sciences Po*) in Paris. This agreement enables pupils to pass special exams within the upper secondary school environment and be exempt from the standard entrance exam procedure. As one visitor inspired by the French PLA put it "people in the schools have to be ambitious for their students and build up new motivations, new pathways, and new chances for their students".

3.3.3. School as a safe heaven

We could concretely see the central role that school has for social cohesion as a safe place in rough neighbourhoods. The deputy mayor of Clichy sous bois spoke of the school as the main resource to keep people and to regenerate the town ravaged by unemployment, poverty and the experience of riots. The headmaster of the Collège we visited (situated in a housing estate *cit * with a history of violence) told us that kids who were apparently uninterested in school and were at risk of dropping out would hang about the school when the school was closed. This was an impetus to open the school during vacation. Keeping schools open needs to go hand in hand with the investment in school premises to make them more secure and more attractive.

3.3.4. Aesthetics, architecture and social inclusion

Many visitors were overwhelmed by the quality of the building of the second school we visited. Beautiful and comfortable school buildings influence the well being of pupils and teachers. The architecture created an atmosphere which clearly emphasized the special mission, the beauty and the meaning of a place of learning.

Spending one's days in a nice building or in an ugly and rundown one may make a profound difference to moods and aspirations. This is all the more true when pupils go back from school to dreary family dwellings. Teachers told us that the new building has had a huge impact on improving social dynamics within the school. Following a well known behavioural pattern, pupils would appreciate and respect the new building much more than they did the old one. As one visitor put it "School must be not only the place where pupils are obligated to be but also a place where they like to be". The social inclusion dimension of the physical quality of school premises was saliently formulated by another participant: "School architecture is an important factor and its influence appears to be all the greater the more one is dealing with disadvantaged students.

Adolescents who live in palaces can probably put up with the dilapidated buildings of an elite school, but the less space the home environment of disadvantaged families allows for development, the greater the influence of attractive premises.

3.3.5. *Transitional classes*

Relay or transition classes (*classe relais*) which give an opportunity to young pupils to gradually regain confidence, catch up on missed learning and be reintegrated in regular classes are identified by several visitors as examples of good practice that can be transferred to other countries. The high success rate of the relay classes we visited (where between 75% and 80% of pupils who accepted to be in this program get back to a regular school after attending relay classes) is encouraging. During our visit we could see that children were interested in their work, liked the environment and enjoyed being part of it. Here again, the critical factor is the high motivation and skills of teachers and other pedagogical staff engaged in the program.

The relay or transitional class which we visited was situated in a flat in which rooms only very remotely resembled classrooms. The importance of the measure and the choice of the location site is saliently summarised by one visitor. “The few students in this class receive intensive tuition from a substantial number of teachers over a period of three months to one year. The aim is not only to fill the gaps in the students’ knowledge, but also to help them master the regular curriculum for their respective years, thus enabling them to rejoin their year groups as smoothly as possible and without losing any time. The decision to make attractive rooms available in a flat (and not in a school) seems to help the students to cope with this double load”.

3.3.6. *Keeping youth in compulsory schooling longer years*

The inter-institutional group and the National agency for social cohesion and equal opportunities (*Agence nationale pour la cohésion sociale et l’égalité des chances* known as *ACSE*) is examining if extending compulsory education to the major of legal age threshold would be a solution to social inclusion problems for 16 to 18 year olds.

Compulsory schooling until pupils become major of age at 18 is the practice in several European countries and is underpinned by a variety of rationales. One of the guiding principles is the assumption that it is good to keep adolescents in a structured learning and protected environment of a school until they reach greater maturity to make responsible choices for themselves. The recent reform in Hungary in the direction of extending the duration of compulsory education was, according to one participant, based also on budgetary considerations. Namely, a study by an economist demonstrated that it is cheaper for the Hungarian state to raise the age of exit from compulsory education from 16 to 18 than to organize and run numerous projects and programmes to find solutions for youth in difficulty.

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