

Ensuring that
all pupils achieve
their full potential

"Pour la réussite de tous les élèves"

overview
October 2004

The wide-ranging national debate on the future of the school system has revealed a number of paramount concerns, which Le Miroir du débat reports on: how to motivate pupils to work hard, understand their diversity and their learning difficulties, combat violence and disrespect, improve cooperation between teachers and parents, define the elements which are essential for pupils to acquire.

All these concerns lead up to a single ambition: **to ensure that every pupil is an achiever**. This is the aim to which the Commission wished to respond, by deeply rooting its recommendations within this big debate. It also felt it necessary to incorporate in its study certain vital imperatives for the country's future: to have the national school system fit in with the European milieu to encourage European citizenship and contribute to the emergence of the knowledge society; to adapt to the uncertainty of future needs of the economy and society; to achieve lifelong learning by enhancing the link with early education.

What meaning should one read into this great ambition? It is based on the following requirements: **to educate, teach, integrate and promote**. The school system must make pedagogical actions possible and teach people to live together in our democratic and republican society. It must ensure that all pupils acquire a common base of indispensable knowledge, skills and rules of behaviour and adapt to their diversity. It must be fair, it must aim for equal opportunities and excellence in many spheres.

A fair and efficient school system must be able to rely on responsible and mobilised school establishments staffed by competent, confident, dedicated and recognised people.

In support of these requirements, the Commission is proposing eight action programmes to devise the school system of the future.

1 > During compulsory schooling, to ensure that each pupil masters the common base of essential subjects and finds his own route to achievement

During compulsory schooling, the school's chief mission is to dispense to all pupils the common knowledge which corresponds to the culture the nation wishes to transmit to each generation and to enable each individual to succeed in his own way. To consolidate this ambition, it is necessary first to ensure a command **of indispensable knowledge, skills and rules of behaviour** for life. The diversification of the teaching should then lead each pupil to determine the path which best corresponds to his abilities. It is thanks to this command and diversification that later, through learning, at school, in higher education and throughout life **the level of education and qualifications aspired to by each individual will become possible and can be achieved**. The quality of the compulsory schooling is therefore a capital factor.

It is necessary to identify this base of indispensable subjects among those taught regularly. In the Commission's view, it is the responsibility of the **Parliament** to draw up the guidelines and of an **independent higher authority** to determine their specific content as well as that of the programmes. By way of illustration, however, and to clarify possible orientations, the common base of indispensable subjects could comprise the following fundamental functions: reading, writing, mastering language and speech, counting, knowing the main mathematical operations, expressing oneself (also in English for international communication), using a computer, living together in our Republic.

The tuition would be **personalised** so that all pupils succeed in mastering the common base of indispensable subjects. Pedagogical practices and learning times would be adapted to pupils' needs. This personalisation would be consolidated in particular by having pupils, after the small and medium sections of the nursery school cycle, undertake three cycles of compulsory schooling: a basic learning cycle (for example, the five-year-old children's section and the first two years of elementary school, CP and CE1); a further education cycle (for example, the final three years of elementary school as well as the first year of secondary education: 6^e); a diversification cycle (for example the final three years of secondary education: 5^e, 4^e and 3^e).

This new organisation would be accompanied by new requirements. A command of the indispensable subjects should be the prerequisite for passing from one cycle to the next; that of the other fundamental common subjects would be sanctioned on finishing school. The right to further tuition would be available specifically to the very small number of pupils who failed to master the base at the end of the compulsory schooling, as part of the right to lifelong learning. The compulsory schooling would be extended to five-year-olds, incorporating the final year of pre-school education and thereby mitigating the departure from elementary school.

2 > At high school, to motivate the pupils, define more standard courses and enhance some of them

High school is by definition a place of diversity. Pupils whose command of the basic subjects is certified and who have been able to determine their preferences and aptitudes in school, are qualified to join one of the sections of high school, whose purpose should be stated unambiguously: professional sector, which prepares the pupil for his insertion in professional life; sectors which prepare the pupil for short higher studies aimed at identified careers; sectors which prepare the pupil for lengthy higher studies. The sectors should be differentiated right from the first year of high school, which means abandoning the 'seconde de détermination' [self-determination] grade in general and technical high schools, whereas diplomas for professional studies (BEP) would be more wide-ranging than at present and preferably less numerous. From first grade onwards, each of the channels would be subdivided according to standard courses, stimulating pupils' interest and motivation and leading to a **more clearly profiled baccalaureate**.

In order to take into account the future needs of society as well as the aspirations of many young people, the Commission proposes building major channels and courses aimed at **health and social action**. It also asks, with a view to making the professional channels more attractive and to encourage the pursuit of studies up to baccalaureate level, that a **professional high-school student status** be created, conveying the message that unlike apprentices, professional high-school students participate in economic activity on an alternating basis during their studies.

3 > To help pupils to assemble an informed project and adhere to it as much as possible

The School should help pupils in defining their **training project** and undertake to respect it on their assignment at the end of school. Orientation by default was criticised during the wider debate as being detrimental to pupils' motivation and success. Their assignment to an educational channel, because of the rigidity of the structures and procedures, is often quite alien to their wishes and profile. **The School should be committed to respecting the pupil's informed project**, which is why the Commission recommends

- > **A guidance council** with a broader mission and composition which would decide on the orientation and the assignment of the pupil, particularly in function of his project;
- > The creation of a new **individualised school dossier** which presents both the pupil's training project and his results in connection with that project.

This new mechanism, in order to be truly operational, requires the setting up of two prerequisites:

- > the **redefinition** of high school channels and courses, in particular vocational courses;
- > a proper **education in the choices of training and jobs** on offer at the school, in order to give pupils the means of drawing up an informed educational project (schedules recorded in their school timetable, clear and complete information on sectors and jobs, competent interlocutors).

Respecting pupils' informed choice must also go hand in hand with a far **more flexible definition of the regional and local educational offer**. This is the responsibility of the region, in conjunction with the rector.

Overall, the orientation will lead to a better balance between the projects of young people and their families, their school results, the openings offered and existing training courses. The end of the third grade should not however remain the sole stepping stone; career changes should be made possible, not only at the end of the second grade or the BEP, but also during higher education and as part of lifelong learning.

4 > To encourage social desegregation

The School should encourage social desegregation and mobilise every resource to fight against segregation of any kind. With this in mind, the sectorisation of public establishments should be maintained, but on condition that each family is provided with good studying and living conditions for their children in the establishment of their sector. In aiming at establishments of equal quality, it is necessary to set up, based on a reinforced public evaluation, a **more ambitious policy than the present one of controlled differentiation, that is, for the proactive reduction of inequality**, by allocating far greater resources to those who are confronted with real problems concerning their environment. Establishments placed in difficult situations need specific responses. One must not hesitate to resort to **exceptional procedures** that enable conditions to be created which, even more than elsewhere, are indispensable for success: the setting up of motivated and stable educational teams, suitable teaching and follow-up practices, collaboration with the School's partners. In the most extreme situations, this could even entail the closure of the establishments.

5 > To strengthen the capacity of action and the responsibility of schools

In order for all pupils to achieve, the proper functioning of a school or a college is a prime condition. This responsibility takes several forms:

- > **the strengthening of the educational action**, which could be achieved by creating an educational community council in which all the partners of the educational community are involved, whether they are teachers, instructors, parents or pupils, and in the second phase, an educational directorate;
- > **the development of joint pedagogical practices**, which would be facilitated by the creation of a pedagogical council to which would be added, in the second phase, a research directorate;
- > the introduction of weekly time periods in which **all the pupils would be given tuition**, in addition to lessons, to help them to really master what they need to know;
- > **increasing the capacity of action of the schools and its directors**: this would be made possible by a distribution of resources where part would depend on the characteristics of the pupils and part on their projects; it would be formalised in a three-part contract, signed by the establishment, the academic authority and the administrative unit; it should be accompanied by an evaluation of the establishments themselves and their staff;
- > **the creation of establishments adapted to the primary schools**, taking account of the nature of primary tuition and of its environment;
- > the emergence of a **local pilot project** by the schools, liable to embody this controlled differentiation policy which the Commission is calling for, and which is able to consolidate the aspiration to a fairer school system.

6 > Within the educational team, to redefine the teacher's job

Teachers are at the heart of the evolution of the school system; they must be recognised and respected as educational professionals. In order to teach, instruct, educate, follow up and guide pupils, the role of the teacher in the 21st century should explicitly include, in addition to the fundamental mission of teaching, other missions such as pupil follow-up, relations with parents, team work, etc. This new organisation would entail **longer working hours** in the school establishment for school and high school teachers, **which should be remunerated accordingly**; this measure would apply to **all newly recruited teachers** and would be **optional** for the other teachers.

The renewal of half the teachers during the coming years is a quantitative but also a qualitative challenge. The transformation and success of the school system cannot be achieved without the support of better trained and more carefully selected teachers:

- > **more carefully selected**, by means of a competition conducted in two phases, the first to validate disciplinary skills in particular and the second, after a training course, to validate purported professional skills. It would also be advantageous to call on professionals from other sectors;
- > **better trained**: initial professional training in IUFM would be organised over a period of two years and based on alternation, giving priority to their presence in the classroom and at the establishments.

Lastly, it is important for the educational system to draw up and implement a **genuine human resources policy** for teachers: at the start of their career where only volunteers would be appointed to difficult jobs, compulsory further training, renewed assessment reflecting career progress — liable to lead to other missions and sectors.

7 > To build a coordinated educational programme with the parents for the pupil's benefit

Education coordinated between the School and the parents must be **remodelled** in order to meet the demand expressed in the wider debate.

The modalities of these deeper relationships would form part of the establishment's contract, which should in particular provide for an **active approach to parents who are distant from the School**. Each establishment would thus forge individual and regular links with all the families.

Relationships with volunteer parents should be developed by clearly distinguishing between actions during school time (in particular education on demand) and what should be done outside of school time, for example, the open school procedures.

Altogether, coordinated education, as the Commission wishfully calls it, should be **strengthened** and assume many forms, all aimed at pupils' achievement. It therefore would like parents' dedication and organisation to be encouraged in the educational system.

7 > To train with partners: elected representatives, associations, companies, the media, medical and social services, the police and the courts

Faced with the challenges of a complex environment, the School needs to develop **partnerships** for educating young people:

- > the communes, the school establishment and the associations involved in the organisation of educational activities and actions for the prevention of school difficulties should include their action within the contractual framework of a **local educational project**;
- > **the medical and social services** should take over when the School has pinpointed social or health problems; furthermore, an effort should be made in terms of public health: each young person should undergo a medical examination at each major point of compulsory schooling;
- > **companies and the School** should close ranks to encourage screening for jobs while still at school, build up career training based on alternation and improve professional insertion of young people.
- > the school should provide training in deciphering and in the use of the **media** which in fact should perform their educational role better..

These are the main outlines of the Commission's report. They do not claim to draw an exhaustive picture of the ideal or desirable School system for the next fifteen years; they constitute the bare bones of proposals intended to reform the current School system.

Three conditions appear of capital importance if the enterprise is to succeed: determination, responsibility and trust. **Determination:** carrying out reform requires great continuity of governmental and administrative action if it is not to become bogged down. **Responsibility:** the educational system must be conducted, governed, made responsible, which confers a vital role on its senior managerial staff and imperatively calls for a new management culture, combining firmness and coordination. **Trust:** young people's trust in their future; reciprocal trust between pupils and teachers; the latter's trust in the institution that employs them; the trust of the families, of the entire Nation, in the school system.

