



10<sup>th</sup> December 2015

Dear Parents/Carers,

### Parent Governor Election

Clare Cousineau has been one of the two parent governors for the last twelve months. She has decided to step down from the role. I thank her for her dedicated service to the Governing Body, vital work which is carried out on an entirely voluntary basis.

Simon Purves, now Chair of Governors, remains the other Parent governor, but we must organise elections for the second person. You may have heard that the government is pressing for school governors to offer some expertise to their school. That is not a requirement to stand, but if you wish to reflect on it, please be aware that our school needs a very wide variety of expertise, from education to building, through finance, fund-raising and law. Most important though is your enthusiasm for the wonderful project of Europa School UK.

Please read the attached letter with details of the election process and consider whether you would stand or indeed recommend someone else to do so. Nominations to be submitted by 21<sup>st</sup> December.

### School Funding

Talk in UK schools over the last few months has been around two themes: “life after levels” and more recently “life after money”. To take the second first, it is clear that school budgets nationwide will be squeezed over the next four years. There are many schools already running annual deficits, relying on reserves. I am pleased to say that our position at present is relatively healthy, working each year within our allocated funding and building a good reserve against future projects.

We will always favour the core activities of the school, essentially teaching and learning, and we will promote the specific aims of the school, that which attracted you to send your children to us. Where we do anticipate extra need is in the area of redevelopment of the site. We have some exciting projects under consideration by the Educational Funding Agency and we will be fund-raising for these specific projects showing our commitment and thereby encouraging government funding. Please remember our appeal for you to sound out the prospect of charitable giving from your places of work.

### Assessment Criteria

“Life after Levels” is a reference to the Government's decision to withdraw the level measures of the National Curriculum: 1c, 1b, 1a, 2c, etc., as I outlined in a previous letter. In order to measure attainment of pupils against the European Schools' programme we will continue to use those introduced into reports last year:

- ++++ objective fully achieved
- +++ objective satisfactorily achieved
- ++ objective partially achieved
- + objective not yet achieved

We have extended these into our general recording of attainment resulting from the regular pupil progress meetings, between class teachers and a member of the school leadership team. For each subject area we are mapping the European Schools' programme against the new National Curriculum and so that these grades also reflect what is expected in the UK system. Continuing to report against the national criteria is important for us as a state school, not least so as to reassure you that your children are continuing to make the excellent progress already seen over the first three years.

## Security and Site Access

Recent events have led to a increased state of alert and revision of security procedures across the European Schools. While Brussels has been much in the headlines, all the schools, including the European School of Culham, are involved and, as we share a site, the Europa School is also affected.

Please be reassured that there is no specific threat to either school and this is simply a matter of prudence, but any tightening of security does have an effect on the day to day activities of the school.

I am sorry for the trouble caused to some parents through unexpected changes to arrangements for site access, particularly out of school hours. After revision, I believe these new measures are now better adapted and working more smoothly. At the start and end of day there has also been some confusion, but I can confirm that the arrangements now are exactly as given in the joint letter from Leene Soekhov (Head of the European School) and myself. This unfortunately includes very restricted use of the main European School gate which leaves pedestrians arriving from Culham with the long route round to the cycle gate. The European School feels it necessary to keep this restriction at present, but I hope it will soon be relaxed. If you need the code for the cycle gate you may request it from our Reception Office.

Security arrangements apart, there remain difficulties at pick up and drop off often due to the sheer volume of traffic in the car parks and Thame Lane. I attach a reminder of the steps to respect that help the general flow. This term has been more difficult because of the work to the front of the European School that has temporarily closed a number of staff parking places with the result that more staff must use the main car park, thus limiting space for parents. I am pleased to say that the scaffolding will be removed very soon with a consequent small improvement in circulation. In general vehicle access is far from ideal and our opportunities to improve the situation pre-2017 are limited. I can only ask for your patience and cooperation as we make the best of what we have.

## Your Views

At the end of last academic year we took a survey of parent opinion of the school. Thank you for your response which was highly supportive. I dream of having every family respond to such a survey, but even so I am gratified that your level of response is so far above that typical in UK schools. I would like to comment on a few aspects of the results, which I attach for your perusal.

It is in the nature of the Europa School that we bring together people with a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, and that applies to pupils, parents and staff. We benefit greatly from such a rich experience, but we have the additional task of managing some very varied expectations. This is most obvious over homework, where some are shocked that young children have any at all, while others believe that a good hour every night is the path to success. If we adopt a position which lies between these, it is not so much a matter of compromise, but of setting a level that works well for our school.

There are still some issues of communication. We have prepared a page within our management information system, SchoolBase, which will give parents information relevant to their own children, including a calendar of events and individual absence data. We will continue add features and I believe it will greatly enhance our feedback to you , helping to keep you informed in good time!

This year there will be a second individual parents' evening early in summer term, which combined with the first parents' evening and two reports will give you four evenly spaced updates on progress.

I am glad that most of you find access to management straightforward and am keen that we remain available to you. That we cannot always respond positively to your requests unfortunately goes with the job. All schools work within certain constraints, although as a Free School we do exercise certain freedoms, most importantly that of keeping the wonderful experience of European Schools' education alive on the site.

### Teacher Time

Teachers in UK primary schools have little time to rest their heads. In our school the added complexity of sharing classes takes even more of their time, with evenings and at weekends reserved for lesson preparation. To add to their task lengthy responses to e-mails is not possible. By all means use e-mail to send a brief item of information about your child (remember to copy in [reception@europaschooluk.org](mailto:reception@europaschooluk.org) when necessary) or to request an appointment, which can be by telephone for those who live far from the school, but please do not engage in lengthy correspondence by e-mail. Pascal and I will take on the more complex questions.

### Our Site

As well as future development plans there is the regular maintenance and improvement of the site throughout the year. Over the summer we added a new climbing frame, carefully chosen to meet not only the expenditure of energy, but also the development of strength needed for fine motor skills. We are delighted that parents give of their time, experience and even hardware to help maintain equipment in participating in DIY days. Thank you for adding so much to the good experience of the pupils.

I wish you an excellent holiday, that those celebrating Christmas and the various other feasts at this time will be able to do so with joy, and that you all return safely for a very happy new year at the school.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Ashbourne,  
Principal.