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The European School Curriculum: Structure and Organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools

Approved by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 16, 17 and 18 April 2013.¹

Amended by:

Decision of the Board of Governors in its meeting on 3, 4 and 5 December 2013 and approved by Written procedure No 2014/13 on 14 May 2014.²

Decision of the Board of Governors at its meeting on 17, 18 and 19 April 2018 in Tallinn.³

Decision of the Board of Governors at its meeting on 9, 10, 11 and 12 April 2019 in Athens⁴

Decision of the Board of Governors at its meeting on 15, 16 and 17 April 2020 in Brussels - Online⁵

Decision of the Board of Governors at its meeting on 6, 7 and 8 December 2022 in Brussels - Hybrid⁶

Decision of the Board of Governors at its meeting on 5, 6 and 7 December 2023 in Brussels – Hybrid⁷

Decision of the Joint Board of Inspectors at its meeting on 11 and 12 February 2025, in Brussels - Hybrid⁸

Decision of the Board of Governors at its meeting on 9, 10 and 11 April 2025 in Nicosia (Cyprus) - Hybrid⁹ -

Immediate entry into force

¹ Decisions of the BoG: 2013-04-D-15

² Decisions of the BoG: 2013-12-D-5

³ Decisions of the BoG: 2018-04-D-11

⁴ Decisions of the BoG: 2019-04-D-12 -This document cancelled and replaced the original document 2011-01-D-33-en-9 approved by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 12, 13 and 14 April 2011 in Brussels. (Decisions of the BoG: 2011-04-D-7)

⁵ Decisions of the BoG: 2020-04-D-26

⁶ Decisions of the BoG: 2022-12-D-7

⁷ Decisions of the BoG: 2023-12-D-9

⁸ Decisions of the JBI: 2025-02-D-13

⁹ Decisions of the BoG: 2025-04-D-2 The decision concerned will enter into force in September 2026.

This document repeals and replaces all the existing rules and decisions of the Board of Governors concerning:

- a) the organisation of teaching and class/group creation, division or regrouping.
- b) the Primary Cycle's harmonised timetable.
- c) the Secondary Cycle's harmonised timetable

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1. The European Schools' Curriculum

When we refer to the European Schools' curriculum, we mean the overall set of subjects and learning experiences that compose the educational programme of our institution over fourteen years of schooling.

These are some of the main features of our curriculum:

- **Comprehensive:** It requires pupils to study a combination of subjects from different areas until the end of their schooling. (Mathematics, at least 1 science, humanities and languages)
- **Multilingual:** Pupils learn content through their dominant language and other working languages (EN, FR, DE, **Host Country Language**). Moreover, they must learn a third language from s1 to s5, which can also become the language of instruction for other subjects.
- **Competence-based:** It aims at developing the 8 key competences for life-long learning. The level of pupils' attainment in the different subjects is measured through specific descriptors for each subject at each level.
- **Value-oriented:** We also aim at developing a European dimension of values in our pupils.
- **Flexible:** The principle of differentiation is central in our teaching and learning approach. Moreover, in the European Baccalaureate cycle, there are no fixed combinations of subjects or streams.

1.1. Structure of studies

The European Schools' studies are structured as follows:

- Two years of Early Education (Nursery School Cycle) starting at the age of 4.
- Five years of Primary Education (Primary School Cycle) starting at the age of 6.
- Seven years of Secondary Education (Secondary School Cycle).

The Secondary School Cycle is divided in three sub-cycles:

- **Observation Cycle:** It comprises the first three years of the Secondary School (s1-s3).
- **Pre-orientation Cycle:** It comprises the 4th and 5th year of the Secondary School (s4-s5).

At the end of this Cycle, pupils having successfully completed s5 will receive the **Junior Laureate Certificate**.

- **Orientation Cycle or European Baccalaureate Cycle,** which comprises the last two years of the Secondary School, 6th and 7th year (s6-s7).

The European Schools' leaving certificate is called the **European Baccalaureate Diploma**. It is recognised as a qualification for university entrance in all the EU Member States, as well as in several other European and third countries.

In Annex II of the General Rules of the European Schools a table of equivalences of studies with the EU Member States can be found.

1.2. Early Education (Nursery School Cycle)

Pupils are admitted to the Nursery School at the beginning of the school year in September of the calendar year in which the child reaches four years of age.

The children aged four and five are taught in mixed groups.

The Early Education curriculum for the Nursery School is designed to:

- Prepare children for a happy, healthy, responsible, and successful life.
- Develop children's personality and abilities.
- Support children's learning potential.
- Build up respect for others and the environment.
- Respect and appreciate children's own cultural and social identity, its values and those of others.
- Promote a European spirit.

Early Education is a fundamental part of lifelong education and learning and its central role is to support children's growth into ethical and responsible members of society. Teaching and learning in the early years support and monitor children's physical and psychological wellbeing, including social, cognitive, and emotional development and helps to prevent any difficulties that arise by creating the best possible learning opportunities.

Teaching and learning in the early years are holistic and the different areas of development are not separated. It is important to strengthen children's healthy sense of self-esteem with the aid of positive learning experiences and to provide opportunities for diverse interaction with other people. Children's world of experiences shall be enriched, and they should be assisted as they seek to find new areas of interest.

1.3. Primary School Cycle

Pupils shall be admitted to Primary year p1 at the beginning of the school year in September of the calendar year in which the child reaches six years of age. In the Primary School the focus is on the mother tongue or dominant language (L1), Mathematics and the first foreign language (L2), but Art, Music, Physical Education, Discovery of the World and Religion/Ethics are important, as are the “European Hours”, where children from the different sections with mixed nationalities meet for a variety of activities.

1.3.1. Primary School Harmonised Timetable

Subject	Years 1 and 2	Years 3, 4, 5
Mother tongue (SWALS L1)	8 hours (2 hours 30)	6 hours 45 (3 hours 45)
Mathematics	4 hours	5 hours 15
Language 2	2 hours 30	3 hours 45
Music Art Physical Education	5 hours	3 hours
Discovery of the World	1 hour 30	3 hours
European Hours		1 hour 30
Religion/Ethics	1 hour	1 hour 30
Recreation	3 hours 30	2 hours 30
Total	25 hours 30	27 hours 15
ONL – Other National Language*	1 hour 30	1 hour 30
*ONL is taught during the school day		

1.4. Secondary School Cycle

The Secondary School Cycle is divided in three sub-cycles:

- Observation Cycle: It comprises the first three years of the Secondary School (s1-s3).
- Pre-orientation Cycle: It comprises the 4th and 5th year of the Secondary School (s4-s5).
- Orientation Cycle or European Baccalaureate cycle, which comprises the last two years of the Secondary School, 6th and 7th year (s6-s7).

1.4.1. Secondary School – Observation Cycle Harmonised Timetable (s1-s3)

Overview of courses and periods: s1 to s3

	Number of periods per week (1 period = 45 minutes of teaching)		
	s1	s2	s3
Language 1	5	5	4
Mathematics	4	4	4
Language 2	5	4	4
Language 3	2	3	3
Physical Education	3	3	3
Religion / Ethics	2	2	2
Human Sciences	3	3	3
Integrated Science	4	4	4
Latin	-	2*	2*
Art	2	2	2
Music	2	2	2
ICT	1	1	2*
TOTAL	33	33 or 35	31 or 33
Ancient Greek for pupils with EL as L1	-	2**	2**
ONL - Other National Language	2**	2**	2**
TOTAL for pupils entitled to receive Ancient Greek or ONL**	35	35 or 37	33 or 35

*Optional courses

- S1: No optional courses
- S2: Optional LATIN
- S3: Optional ICT and LAT, pupils can choose only one of these two options.

**Options governed by specific rules (ONL and Ancient Greek) => see "Language Policy" 2019-01-D-35

1.4.2. Secondary School – Pre-Orientation Cycle Harmonised Timetable (s4-s5)

Overview of courses and periods: s4 to s5

Each pupil will have to take 31 to 35 periods per week. The scheme shown below is made up of 27 to 29 periods of core subjects, common to all pupils. Moreover, pupils must choose a minimum of 4 periods to a maximum of 8 periods from the seven option subjects below. The same timetable will apply in both the 4th and the 5th years. No changes of option subjects are allowed.

Mandatory Core Subjects:	Number of periods per week	
	s4	s5
Language 1	4	4
Mathematics	4 or 6	4 or 6
Language 2	3	3
Language 3	3	3
Physical Education	2	2
Religion / Ethics	1	1
History	2	2
Geography	2	2
Biology	2	2
Chemistry	2	2
Physics	2	2
SUBTOTAL	27 or 29	27 or 29
Options:	s4	s5
Latin	4	4
Ancient Greek	4	4
Language 4	4	4
Economy	4	4
Art	2	2
Music	2	2
ICT	2	2
TOTAL	31* to 35**	31* to 35**
Ancient Greek for pupils with EL as L1	2	2
ONL - Other National Language	4***	4***
TOTAL for pupils entitled to receive Ancient Greek or ONL	33 or 37	33 or 37

* The minimum number of courses taken by the pupil must amount to 31 or more periods per week. If a pupil takes Mathematics 6 periods, the minimum will be 33 periods.

** Exceeding the maximum 35 periods.

*** Pupils choosing the Other National Language cannot choose Language 4.

As an exception, pupils are allowed, with the agreement of the Class Council and the approval of the directorate, to have more than 35 periods per week if they wish to attend other existing courses which can be combined with their personal timetable.

1.4.3. Secondary School – Orientation / European Baccalaureate Cycle Harmonised Timetable (s6-s7)

The following table shows the curriculum structure and choice possibilities:

COMPULSORY SUBJECTS				OPTIONS				COMPLEMENTARY SUBJECTS ⁶		
Column 1		Column 2		Column 3		Column 4		Column 5		
Language 1	4 p.	Science, Technology and Society ¹	2 p.	Ancient Greek	4 p.	Advanced L1	3 p.	Biology Lab ⁷	2 p.	
Language 2	3 p.	Geography ²	2 p.	Latin	4 p.	Advanced L2	3 p.	Chemistry Lab ⁷	2 p.	
Maths 3 or	3 p.	History ²	2 p.	Biology ³	4 p.	Advanced Maths ⁵	3 p.	Physics Lab ⁷	2 p.	
Maths 5	5 p.	Philosophy ²	2 p.	Chemistry	4 p.			ICT	2 p.	
Religion or Ethics	1 p.			Physics	4 p.			Sociology	2 p.	
Physical Education	2 p.			Geography	4 p.			Lab Art	2 p.	
									Art 2 ⁸	2 p.
					History		4 p.		Music ⁸	2 p.
					Economics		4 p.		Language 5	2 p.
					Philosophy		4 p.		Sustainability and Active Citizenship	2 p.
					ONL ⁴		4 p.		Introduction to Economics ⁹	2 p.
					Language 3		4 p.		Sport	2 p.
					Language 4		4 p.		History of Art	2 p.
					Art		4 p.		Technical Drawing	2 p.
				Music	4 p.			Myth and Society in the Classical World	2 p.	
								Electronics	2 p.	
							Political Sciences	2 p.		
							Performing Arts and Media	2 p.		
		¹ Science, Technology and Society 2p. is compulsory unless Physics or Chemistry or Biology is chosen in column 3 . ² All courses in column 2 must be taken if not chosen in column 3.		³ Biology 4p can be chosen together with Science, Technology and Society. ⁴ If ONL is chosen, L4 cannot be chosen.		⁵ Advanced Maths can only be chosen together with Maths 5 periods in column 1.		⁶ The offer of complementary courses may vary from one school to another. ⁷ Laboratory subjects should only be taken if the corresponding 4-period subject has been chosen. ⁸ Art 2 p. and Music 2 p. not allowed if taken in column 3. ⁹ This course has been temporarily suspended from the offer for the school year 2025-2026 due to syllabus revision.		

1.4.4. Secondary School – Careers' Guidance

The Careers' Guidance programme is part of the Secondary School curriculum. It is part of the learning experiences of the Secondary School pupils in the European Schools.

The main aim of Careers' Guidance is to inform and advice pupils about the different subject choices and options offered in the Secondary School. In the European Bacculaureate cycle, Careers' Guidance focuses mostly on the transition to further education and the professional future. In many cases, Careers' Guidance teachers process pupils' applications for higher education institutions.

Every school has a Careers' Guidance team composed of teachers from the different sections that will spend several periods (lessons) with pupils and organize meetings with parents. Every European School can decide at local level how Careers' Guidance lessons are organised. Schools are given a certain degree of autonomy so that they can address efficiently their specific needs and circumstances.

This table gives a general idea on the overall organisation and activities.

Year	Maximum number of periods per class per school year	Some activities
s2	2 periods	To inform, explain and advise about the choices to be made for s3.
s3	6 periods	To inform, explain and advise about the choices to be made for s4.
s5	16 periods	To prepare the choice of subjects and options, considering the consequences for future studies and careers. To organize an information meeting for parents/guardians of pupils.
s6 and s7	16 for the two school years	To prepare for European Bacculaureate choice of examinations. To give advice about further education. To organize visit to education fairs or universities To assist pupils with university applications (paying a fee depending on the complexity and time spent)

Please, note that in this context, the term 'period' should be regarded as a 'single' period (a 45-minute lesson) and not as a weekly period throughout the year.

See more here: <https://www.eursc.eu/Syllabuses/2020-02-D-12.pdf>

2. Organisation of studies: class sizes – grouping – division of classes – regrouping divided classes

The Annual School Plan determines the amount of teaching time allocated to the school, as well as the number of classes and groups to be created.

The Annual School Plan is approved annually by the Administrative Board. The Administrative Board provides authority for cases where extra provision is proposed but will also legitimise any measures for a departure from the normal rules to enable schools to find local solutions and initiatives to reduce costs.

The exceptions and derogations to group/class/options creation/division or grouping rules must be approved by the Administrative Board of the School. The Budgetary Committee will be informed annually about the derogations from these rules.

The Annual School Plan is drawn up in the context of the overall pedagogical framework set by the Board of Governors and shall:

- show the total teaching time required to meet the needs of the school, i.e. a numerical estimate based on the forecast of the number of classes and teaching groups;
- show the cases where a departure from the normal rules was proposed;
- show the reduction in teaching periods;
- show groupings of classes/groups/options;
- show the courses which are organised in Language 2 or in the language of the host country;
- enable each school to put forward specific local projects and initiatives.

2.1. Regulations

The following points gather the rules to be applied as to the class/group sizes, the class/group creation, the minimum group/class/option sizes, the grouping of groups/classes, the regrouping of divided classes/groups and the reduction in teaching time for small groups/classes/options.

2.2. Class/group sizes

Classes/groups shall have a maximum of 30 pupils.

2.3. Class/group creation

a) Nursery

Nursery classes with more than 30 pupils shall be divided.

- If there are more than 15 children in a class, a half-time nursery assistant shall be appointed.
- If there are more than 25 children in a class, a full-time nursery assistant shall be appointed.

b) Primary

Primary classes/groups with more than 30 pupils shall be divided.

Exceptions:

- For “European Hours”, classes/groups with more than 25 pupils shall be divided.
- In Language 2, classes/groups with more than 25 pupils shall be divided.

c) Secondary

Classes/groups with more than 30 pupils shall be divided.

Language 2, 3 and 4 groups with more than 28 pupils shall be divided. Subjects taught in languages 2 with more than 28 pupils shall be divided.

Exceptions:

- Science classes/groups, including laboratory work, with more than 25 pupils may be divided.
- ICT classes/groups should be organised according to the places available in the ICT classrooms.

2.4. Minimum group/class/option sizes

The minimum group/class/option size is seven pupils. In years 6 and 7 the minimum option size is five pupils.

Exceptions:

It is possible to create groups/classes and options with fewer than seven pupils or fewer than five pupils in s6-s7 in some exceptional cases (a, b, c, d, e, f, g):

a) Compulsory courses for existing classes should be created, subject to 2.5.

b) Other National Language groups;

Other National Language groups shall be created with fewer than seven pupils.

c) Teaching of Ancient Greek for Greek-speaking pupils in the Secondary School

Pupils taking the Greek L1 course in Secondary years s2 to s5 are entitled to receive complementary tuition in Ancient Greek consisting of two periods per week.

d) Religion (Ref.: 2008-D-356)

In principle, Religion courses are offered in L1 up to Secondary year 2. As from Secondary year 3¹⁰, Religion courses are in principle taught in L2.

If the threshold (seven pupils) for creating a group cannot be met, even after combining different groups vertically and horizontally, and the consequence would be that courses in certain Religions cannot be offered, it is within the autonomy of the school to find alternative solutions to facilitate the organisation of these Religion courses.

Examples are (this list is not exhaustive):

- to organise Religion courses in L2 in s1 and s2 also,
- to organise Religion courses in the language of the host country,
- to reduce the number of Religion lessons in the Secondary Cycle,
- to create mixed Religion groups (such as Protestant/Catholic), by way of exception.

¹⁰ - A relatively small group of students coming from different countries but of one particular religious confession taught in Language 2 may be joined by students of this same religious confession, even when the Language 2 in question corresponds to the latter's Language 1.

- Where a group of students of the same religious confession is composed solely of students having their Language 1 in common, the course will be taught in that language.

e) Ethics

In principle, Ethics courses are offered in L1 up to Secondary year 2. As from Secondary year¹¹, Ethics courses are in principle taught in L2.

If the threshold (seven pupils) for creating a group cannot be met, even after combining different groups vertically and horizontally, and the consequence would be that courses cannot be offered, it is within the autonomy of the school to find alternative solutions to facilitate the organisation of these Ethics courses.

Examples are (this list is not exhaustive):

- to organise Ethics courses in L2 in s1 and s2 also,
- to organise Ethics courses in the language of the host country,
- to reduce the number of Ethics lessons in the Secondary Cycle subject to 2.5.

f) Educational Support courses

g) Groups/classes/options decided by the Administrative Board of the school for a number of duly justified reasons (e.g.: infrastructure constraints, special school projects, other relevant pedagogical reasons, etc.)

2.5. Grouping of groups/classes

a) Nursery

Year n1 and Year n2 shall be grouped up to 30 pupils.

b) Primary

Two consecutive classes, with a total of 25 pupils or fewer, shall be grouped. Three consecutive classes, with a total of 20 pupils or fewer, shall be grouped.

If the minimum number of seven pupils is not reached, pupils from consecutive classes/groups in a language section, or parallel groups/classes in different language sections, should be grouped, where timetable and pedagogical constraints so permit.

c) Secondary

If the minimum number of seven pupils is not reached (5 pupils for s6-s7), pupils from consecutive classes/groups in a language section, or parallel groups/classes in different language sections, should be grouped, where timetable and pedagogical constraints so permit. The school should use all five weekly working days efficiently.

Grouping is not mandatory for L1 courses in years s6 and s7 of the Secondary Cycle.

2.6. Regrouping divided classes/groups

A divided group/class shall be regrouped from the beginning of the next school year if the combined number of pupils is below the number which would justify dividing the group/class.

¹¹ - A relatively small group of students coming from different countries but of one particular religious confession taught in Language 2 may be joined by students of this same religious confession, even when the Language 2 in question corresponds to the latter's Language 1.

- Where a group of students of the same religious confession is composed solely of students having their Language 1 in common, the course will be taught in that language.

2.7. Reduction in teaching time for small groups/classes/options

If a compulsory course (e.g.: L1, L2, Mathematics, etc.) or an option (e.g.: Economics, Art, etc.) in the Secondary Cycle is created for fewer than seven pupils (five pupils in years 6 and 7) and no grouping is possible (see 2.5), the periods allocated to the course shall be reduced in accordance with the table below:

Number of periods/week	Number of periods to be organised
6	4
5	4
4	3
3	2
2	2*

* From Secondary years s1 to s3, Religion and non-confessional Ethics periods should be reduced from two to one.

The reduction is not applicable to L1 courses in years s6 and s7 of the Secondary Cycle.