Compulsory education from three years old in France

Declaration of OMEP-France

Early childhood education is a personal and social right.

We, the WORLD ORGANIZATION FOR PRESCHOOL EDUCATION, OMEP-France Committee, have taken note of the decision of the President of the French Republic on 27 March 2018 "to make école maternelle (pre-primary school) compulsory, and thus to lower the age at which education is obligatory from six to three in France, as of the autumn 2019".

Among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015, SDG Target 4.2 calls for the establishment of at least one year of quality, free and compulsory pre-primary education by 2030, and recommends that all children have access to quality early childhood development, education and protection services.

France will implement this recommendation by September 2019, and will extend compulsory pre-primary education to three years. Pre-primary school will no longer be an option: compulsory education from the age of three will be established.

Even though 97.6% of three-year-olds attend pre-primary schools, this is different, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and overseas territories, where developing education will help fight against inequalities and academic difficulties resulting in later drop-outs. This decision will affect 20,000 children.

OMEP-France supports this decision, which only confirms the already established practice of widespread attendance of pre-primary schools at a very important time in the child’s development. We will ensure that the child is considered as a person in its own right and approached in a holistic manner, as recommended in current research, and will make sure that:

- the conditions of supervision and accompaniment (teachers, educational team, school assistants ...), class size and material conditions (premises, furniture, dormitories, school cafeterias...) are adapted, safe and sustainable;

- specific, initial and continuous quality training for teachers, educators and school assistants is provided;

- the inclusion of all children with disabilities or other difficulties is guaranteed with the appropriate and necessary means;

- the reception of children under three years old that has been previously set up is maintained, improved and extended;

- the biological rhythms of a young child’s life are respected;

- links with families and public and other existing structures are increased and bridges are favoured across them (mother & baby units, childminders, nurseries, kindergartens ...);

- the content of syllabi, with reference to the common base of knowledge, skills and culture in pre-primary schools, is well defined and applied;

- the commitment of local and regional authorities in terms of budgets is fair and honored.

We, OMEP-France Committee, pledge to support the governmental decision concerning the obligation of schooling as of age three for all children, in the best possible conditions in terms of reception and quality of education, and with a concern for equity and inclusion, in order to preserve equal opportunities, a fundamental factor of social cohesion.

PARIS, 15 May 2018, OMEP-France Committee

World site: www.worldomep.org ; OMEP-France site : www.omep-france.fr ; Contact : perruchon.daniele@gmail.com