February 15th, 2019

Subject: Student participation – The future of independent education in Europe

Dear students,

We are looking forward to your participation at the conference in Istanbul 10th-12th April 2019. This letter is to give you some input on themes you might touch in the students’ round tables that will take place Thursday, 11th, in the afternoon.

On the afternoon of Wednesday 10th, you will have a preparation meeting with the other students coming in from different countries (from 14:00 to 17:00). At this meeting, you and your teachers may also get answers for all the doubts you may have.

Here you will get a feeling of which kind of input you will get from the other countries. Please notice that the more diverse views you bring to the audience, the more different, interesting and maybe also diverse reflections among the audience can be expected.

As a starting point, we recommend you to reflect on:

1. Your own time at school – you might go back through the years: Where did you feel “the school” was listening to you and your ideas? Were you asked about your opinion? And today– do you feel included in school’s life? If yes- in which questions?
2. Which key-factors do you think create a school with a good school-culture, a good spirit or atmosphere? Is students` participation in school life one of those factors?
3. Student participation/influence in school life can take place in many fields. Do you have some considerations about such fields and about students/ pupils ages (5 – 18)?
4. How do you dream the future school? And what practices do you think could enhance student participation at school?

For your information, we attached the introduction text of the seminar.

At ECNAIS we are very keen on meeting and discussing these issues with you in Istanbul,

Rodrigo, Markku and Per
ECNAIS Executives

www.ecnais.org
Student participation – The future of independent education in Europe

Istanbul, Turkey | 10 - 12 April 2019

Introduction

As representatives of a vital part of civil society, independent schools are important players in the process of democratization of the whole of society. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that independent schools are an important source of innovation and quality in national education systems. Independent schools all over Europe, each with their own profile and curriculum, offer parents, students and – within the given variety of schools – also teachers, the opportunity to choose just that specific school, that best meets their own expectations, talents and skills. By so doing, independent schools are completing the different national school systems in Europe and contribute with school choice and innovative school practices to the modern social and economic development of their countries.

Within Europe, there is a growing focus on the need to educate children within some common values that may help create and sustain fair, prosperous and inclusive societies. One of these values is usually defined as citizenship in the sense of belonging and participating in a given society actively contributing to its wellbeing.

At the school level, educators give sense to this value in many different ways. One of them is by creating formal ways for student participation in the life of the school. Not only as by-standers or recipients of teaching and other services, but as active agents of school life. Be it in student affairs, school administrative issues or even at the pedagogical management level.

The aim of the ECNAIS conference is to share and debate ways in which student participation in independent schools is being addressed and how this contributes to the development of the schools’ educational projects. Being independent education based on the right of parents to choose the education they wish for their children and a manifestation of the role of civil society in the public sphere, student participation is an important field of action.

Accordingly, students will have a prominent role in this conference. For the first time, ECNAIS has invited its members to open participation to students form secondary education. They will have an active part in the conference: as presenters, listeners and discussants. By sharing experiences from the national systems and the perspectives of school leaders, teachers and students, we hope to attain a complete picture of the topic.

The points of departure for the conference are the following questions:

- What does student participation mean?
- How does student participation promote citizenship?
- How to balance freedom of parental school choice, freedom to offer distinctive school projects and student participation?
- What is the contribution of independent schools to the diversity in the national education systems?