

Education in French-speaking Belgium

Information booklet

**for migrant
families**

ENGLISH / ANGLAIS



A Belgian Red Cross and European Refugee
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F.E.R.

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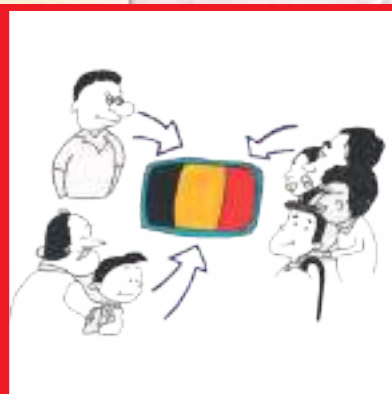


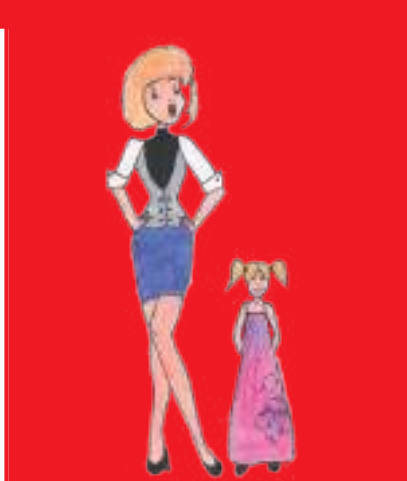
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Coordination:

Madeleine Kirsch
Department of Asylum Seekers Training, Advisor
Welcoming Asylum Seekers Department, Belgian Red Cross

Emilien Clonan
Coordinator of the project EARS, Education coordinator
Welcoming Asylum Seekers Department, Belgian Red Cross

Edition:

Emilien Clonan

Illustrations:

The director, pedagogical team and students of the city of Namur Technical School Felicien Rops for the illustration work (as well as Mister Paris' contribution at ITCF Henri Maus)

Graphics, layout, printing:

La Maison du Graphisme, Verviers

Special thanks to:

Billy Jüngling
Welcoming Asylum Seekers Department, Director
Belgian Red Cross

The Red Cross staff, teachers, school directors, and other actors of education.
Henryk Chojnacki (Fedasil centre of Rixensart) who defined the contents of this guidebook

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All the people who proofread this document

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Contact us if you wish to help us help people in need.

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Thank you.

Welcome!

For over twenty-five years, the Belgian Red Cross has been welcoming asylum seekers. Supporting families in their children's education is one of our missions.

For all these years, we have noticed that parents often know little about education in Belgium. Overcoming the language barrier and understanding the structure of our education system are among the difficulties parents face as they attempt to take an active part in their children's education.

This booklet is intended to help you overcome these difficulties. It was created with the support of the European Fund for Refugees and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

Teachers, health professionals, psychosocial services, experts in migrants support and education as well as **parents associations** participated in the content of this booklet.

In Belgium, children can start going to school when they reach 2 ½ years of age. Education is compulsory for all children aged 6-18 years old.

This booklet will inform you on what education can bring to your child and on your rights and responsibilities as well as those of schools. It will also offer you a description of the school structure and **transition classes (DASPA)**, as well as some practical information.

Each word written in **pink** is defined in the glossary located at the end of this booklet.

Enjoy!

Billy JÜNGLING

Director of the Welcoming of
Asylum seekers Department
Belgian Red Cross

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How can education make a difference in my children's life?

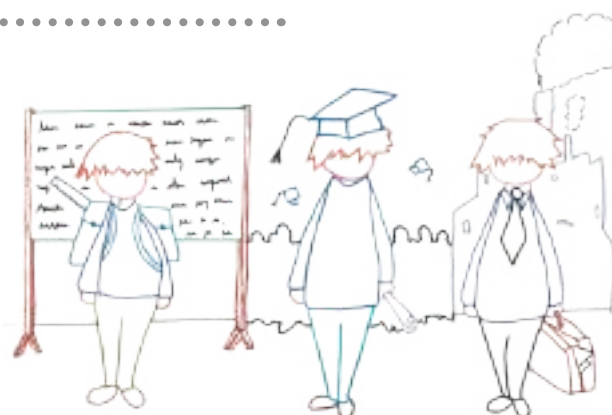
How can education make a difference in my children's life?

Attending school allows my children to learn to talk, read and write:

French-language skills, such as speaking, understanding, writing and reading, are part of everyday life in French-speaking Belgium.

A very good command of French is necessary to participate in class, make friends, travel by train, go shopping, fill in documents, write letters, etc.

Proficiency in French also makes it easier to find a job. Developing French language skills takes time.

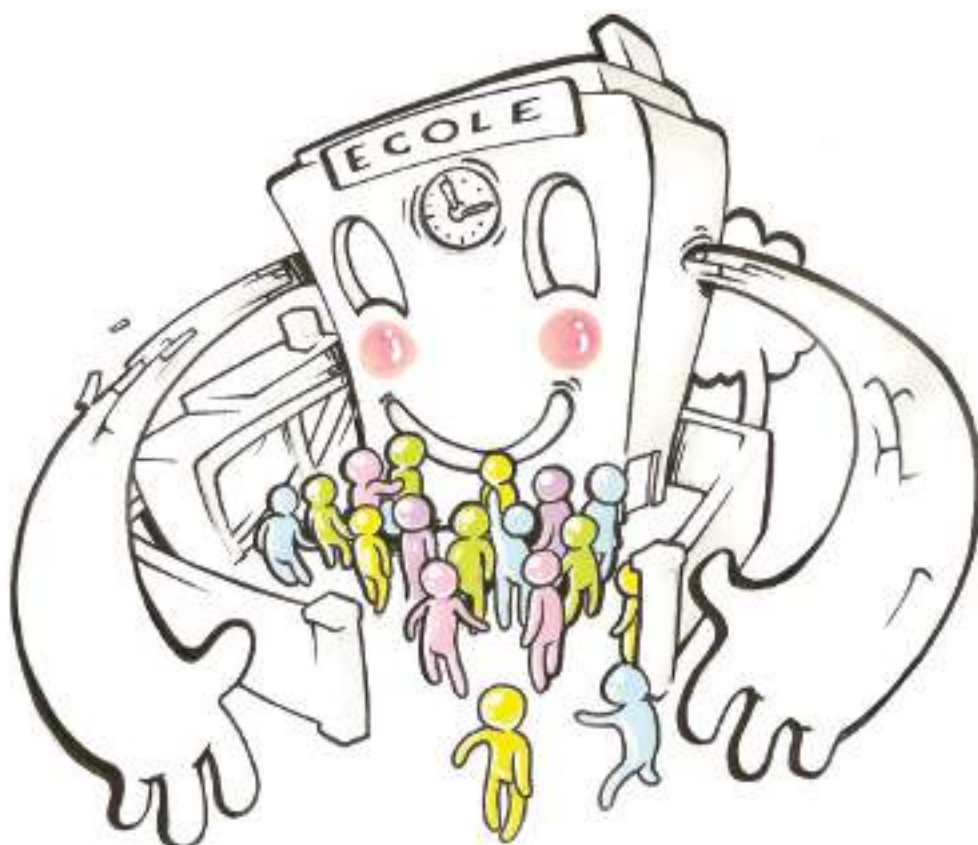


At school, my children get to know the country they live in.

Going to school gives my children a chance to get a diploma, develop skills and find a job more easily.

In Belgium, having a **diploma** is important to find a job. A **diploma** is a document which certifies that my children have successfully completed a course of study and have developed specific skills. **Diplomas** are awarded at school. Everything my children learn at school will be beneficial to them regardless of their academic career.

Education allows my children to get acquainted with the values and principles of Belgium. For instance, my children will learn at school that Belgium supports the idea that all human beings are born free and equal in duties and rights without distinction of any kind, such as national or social origin, gender or religion. When they go to school, children meet other people who live in Belgium and learn rules that govern Belgian society. This facilitates their integration.



What are our **rights** and **responsibilities** as parents? And what are those of the school?

.....

In Belgium, all children between 6 and 18 years old have an obligation to go to school whatever their nationality or status. Girls and boys attend schools and classes together.



Why is education compulsory?

Child labour is forbidden in Belgium. With compulsory school attendance, Belgium aims to provide all children with equal opportunities to learn and later find a job. Compulsory education from 6 to 18 years old has been enshrined in Belgian law since June 29, 1983. Sanctions can be applied if it is not respected.

1st article. - § 1st. Minors are subject to compulsory education for a twelve year period starting with the school year that starts the year they reach the age of 6 and ending at the end of the school year that ends the year they reach the age of 18.

Parents: Rights and Responsibilities

Parents' responsibilities

As a parent, I have to make sure my children go to school every day. If they cannot go to school, I have to contact the school staff the same day and **justify my children's absence** within the official period of time. For example, if my child is sick I have to provide the school with a medical certificate issued by a doctor.



I also have to make sure my children do the **homework** assigned by their teachers and study their lessons. If I do not understand French, it is important to ask my children what they are doing and whether they understand what they are doing or not. It will allow me and the teachers to assess my children's progress.



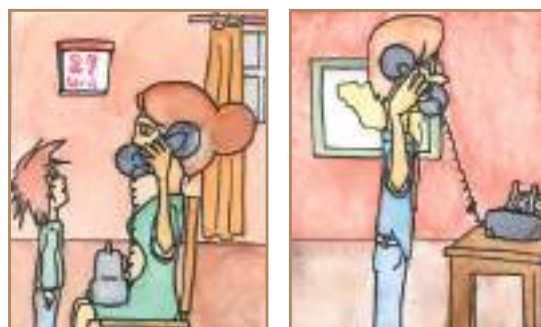
I also have to stay up-to-date with school communications. Some are very important. Information is conveyed by mail or through class diaries. (See page 16)

The presence of a participation council in every school is required by law. This council aims to gather all actors of education (teachers, directors, educators,...) as well as students and parents representative to discuss the quality of life at school.

During school hours, I cannot access classrooms. I can make an appointment if I want to meet with a teacher.

Parents' rights

I have the right to request an appointment with a teacher and/or the school director.



If I face difficulties with my children at any point of their education, I have the right to seek advice from the Medical and Psychosocial Services. (See pages 14 and 26)

I have the right to join a **parents association**. Such associations connect parents and schools staff. They discuss general topics regarding their school, exchange information, etc.



Students: Rights and Responsibilities

Students' responsibilities

Every school has **internal rules (ROI in French)**. They aim to define certain codes of conduct and ensure harmonious life at school.



All students and parents must know and respect these rules.

Such rules often state that:

- Students must respect the school staff and fellow students (boys and girls alike).
- Neither verbal nor physical abuse will be tolerated.
- Insults and racist comments are forbidden.
- The school infrastructure and equipment are expensive. Students must respect them. Parents will be charged for any damage caused by their children.
- Students have to do the work teachers ask them to.



Students' rights

Students can request a meeting with teachers.

They can request additional explanation from teachers.



They have the right to study in a peaceful, appropriate environment.

They can express their opinion in a manner respectful of other classmates and school staff.

Schools and teachers: Rights and Responsibilities

Everyone's
rights and
responsibi-
lities

Teachers **have to:**

Command respect and exert their authority while safeguarding students' moral and physical integrity.



Take the time to provide students with explanations.

Teachers have the **right to:**



Command respect from students.
Discipline students (as long as it is justified).
Ask students to do **homework** (also during school holidays).
Request a meeting with parents.



Schools **have to:**

Accommodate all students within the limits of their capacity.

Define their school policy and update it every three years.

Report student absenteeism. Absenteeism is counted in half-days. One day of absence equals to two half-days.

After **9 half-days** of unjustified absence in **primary school**, principals have to inform the Head Office of Compulsory Education (DGEO in French).

After **10 days** of unjustified absence in **secondary school**, principals have to inform the DGEO. Second and third cycle students (adults and minors alike) with over 20 days of unjustified absence in a school year lose their regular student status. They become "**free students**": the year of study will not be considered and students will not be accepted to the next one.



If my children are dropping out of school, I can seek help from different services such as the Medical and Psychosocial Services or the School Mediation Services in secondary school.

Schools have the **right to:**

Punish students who break rules. Sanctions are described in the **internal rules (ROI)**.



How is education organized in Belgium?

3 communities

Belgium has **three communities and three languages**.

- The French Community or Wallonia-Brussels Federation (French-speaking),
- The German-speaking Community (German-speaking),
- The Flemish Community (Dutch-speaking).

Education in the **Wallonia-Brussels Federation** is detailed hereafter.

Subsidized public schools and subsidized free schools

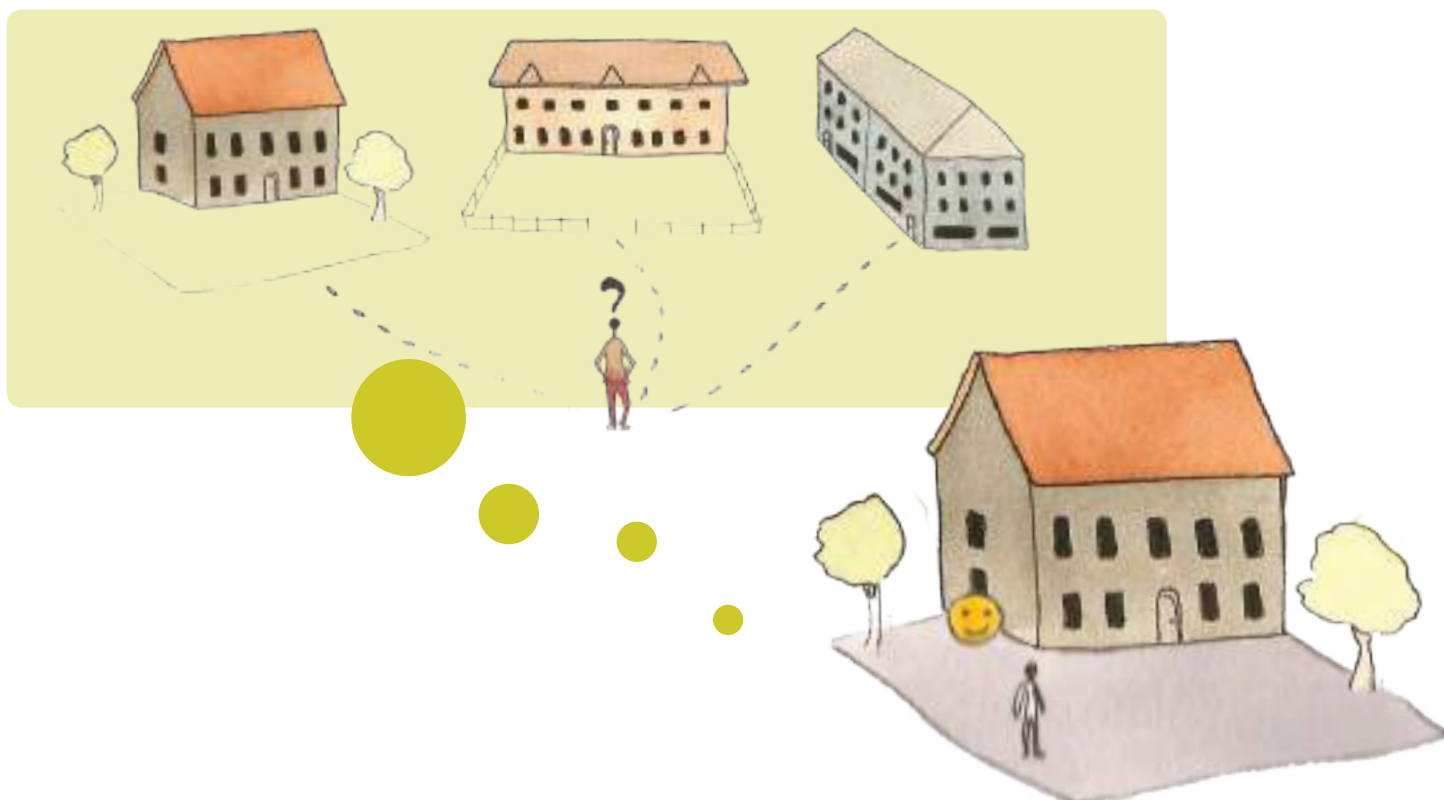
The choice of school is free in Belgium. However, schools cannot accept more students than their capacity allows them to.

There are two types of schools: Subsidized public schools and **subsidized free schools**.

Public schools depend on public authorities; i.e., the French Community, the province or the municipality. Although they are of no particular obedience, their curriculum includes religious classes (Catholic, Protestant, Israelite, Islamic or Orthodox) or **secular**

moral classes (students learn about the rights and duties of citizens, the bases of democracy, freedom, communication, criticism...). An alternative pedagogical program has been organised since September 2015 for students who do not wish to follow either of the philosophical courses. A citizenship course will be organized from 2017 onward.

Free schools are denominated schools organized by dioceses or religious congregations as well as non-denominated schools organized by associations with specific pedagogical views.



Education in Belgium: **three stages**

Kindergarten: for children aged 2 ½ to 5 years old.

Primary school: for children aged 6 to 11 years old.

Secondary school: for children aged 12 to 18 years old.

Each stage has specific learning objectives. Girls and boys go to the same schools and attend classes together.

In kindergarten, my children will get acquainted with school (from 2 ½ to 5 years old).

Children learn to socialize and develop basic reading, writing and counting skills through games. Kindergarten is not compulsory but prepares children for further education and allows them to learn French.

From primary school onward, school attendance is compulsory (from 6 to 11 years old).

In primary school, children learn to read, write and count whilst learning about other subjects (sciences, languages, history/geography...).

They will have **homework** to do and lessons to learn at home.

Children pass the Certificate of Basic Studies (CEB) in sixth grade, at the end of primary school. It is an important exam. Successful students receive a certificate and continue to secondary school. If they fail, children can either repeat the year or start secondary school in differentiated first grade. Going to secondary school usually involves changing schools.



How is education organized in Belgium?

Attendance is also compulsory in secondary school. There are different possibilities (from 12 to 18 years old).

Upon entry in secondary school and in accordance with entry rules, my children will be registered in a class matching their abilities (common 1st grade or differentiated 1st grade).

My children have different options when starting third grade. They can:

- Learn jobs-related skills in the **qualifying section**.
- Study to pursue higher education in **the transition section**.

All students who successfully pass the Certificate of Higher Secondary Education (CESS in French) have access to all university-level studies, regardless of the section they followed in secondary school (except for studies in engineering sciences, for which an entry test must be taken).

More practical education, taking place at school and in-company, is accessible for children of at least 15 years of age.

Any questions I have regarding my children's education can be addressed to the school and its Medical and Psychosocial Services (PMS).

PMS Centres are meant to help children, teenagers and parents. They take actions to help students progress and accompany them throughout their education and life.

I can request a meeting with my school's PMS Centre. It's free of charge.

- Belgium **provides specialised** education for children and teenagers with a handicap that requires a modified environment. PMS Centres direct students towards this type of education.

More information on specialised education on the following website:

<http://www.enseignement.be/gen/syst.spec.pdf>



What a transition class is: welcoming newly arrived students and ensuring access to education

Some schools receive a high number of students from foreign countries. These students often do not speak French and lag behind in an education system they are not familiar with. They need targeted support to develop their potential through education. Newly arrived students attend **transition classes** for a period ranging from a week to 12 months (maximum 18 months). Special attention helps them learn French and adapt to the Belgian socio-cultural and education system. When teachers think a student is ready to join a traditional class, the **integration council** gathers and decides which class best matches the student's abilities. When they join traditional classes, students receive a certificate of admissibility. Students then pursue their education in the traditional system.

The list of schools offering **transition classes** is available here: <http://www.enseignement.be> choose « l'école de A à Z », then « passerelles », then « classes passerelles ».

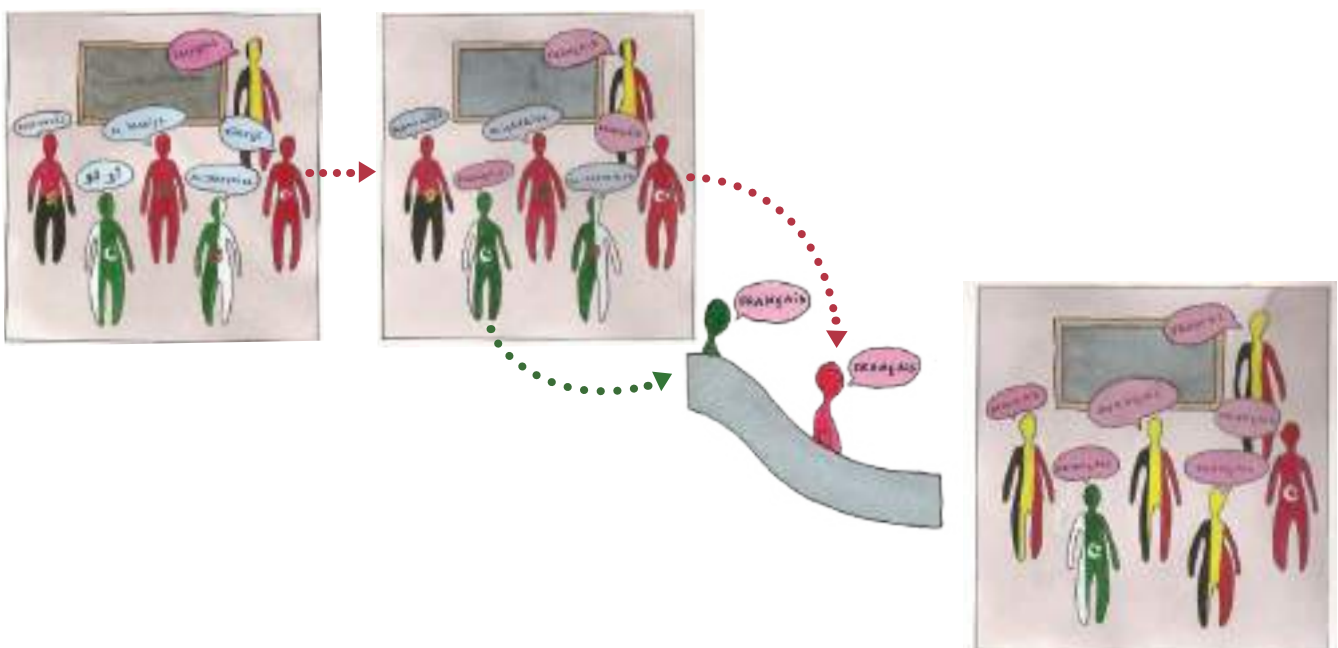
What does "newly arrived" mean?

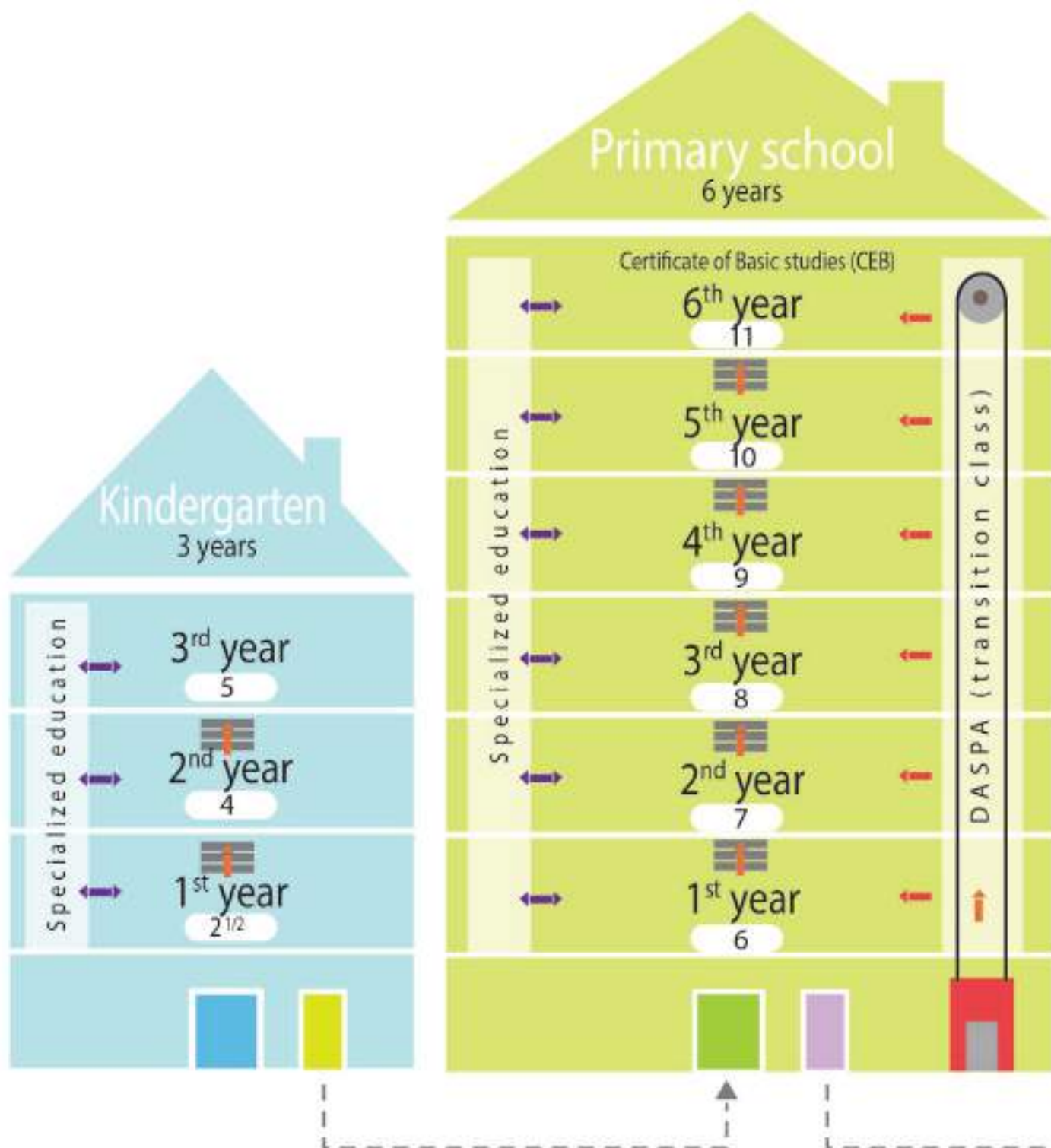
By "newly arrived" students, the law means all students between 2,5 and 18 years old that arrived on national territory less than a year ago provided that they:

- are asylum seekers or have been recognized as refugees, or are accompanying a person with a pending asylum request or recognized refugee;
- have requested the stateless status, have been recognized stateless, or are citizens of a developing or transition country.

The list of developing/transition countries is established by the Development Assistance Committee and can be found on the **OECD Website**.

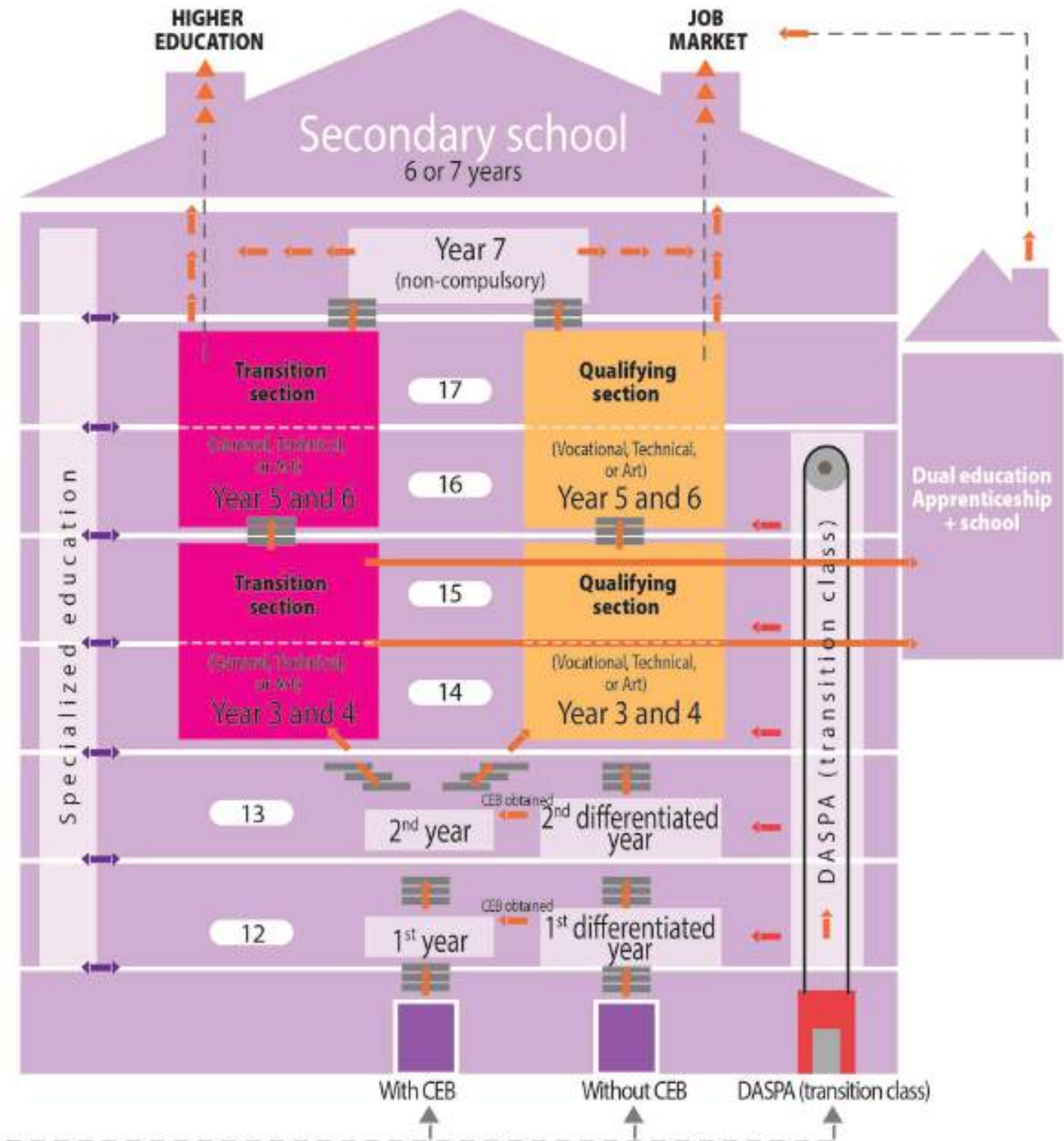
Students who graduated from school in their country of origin can contact the « equivalence services » of the French Community to get their degree recognized. Go to <http://www.enseignement.be> then « l'école de A à Z », then « équivalences ».





French-speaking Belgium

The education system in Belgium and transition classes (DASPA)



Who works in Belgian schools?

In kindergarten and primary school.

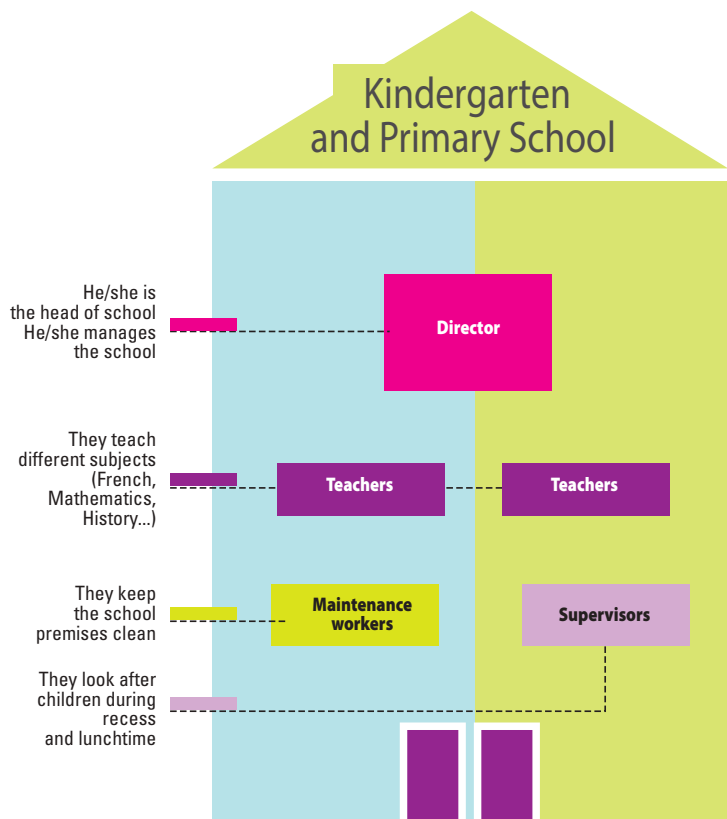
The head of school is the Principal (called "Directeur"). They manage the school and organize its daily life. They are responsible for the school.

Teachers are trained and qualified men and women with an official degree. They teach several subjects in kindergarten and primary school. They supervise recess, attend class councils and meet with parents.

They accompany children during their learning process and help them grow.

Maintenance workers keep the school premises clean.

Sometimes, external supervisors look after children in day care before and after school. They can also supervise lunchtime in the canteen.



In secondary school.

Schools are bigger and host more students and staff.

The head of school is the Principal. They are called "Préfet" in subsidized public schools and "Directeur" in **subsidized free schools**. They manage the school on a daily basis. They are responsible for the school.

Assistant Directors (called "Proviseur" in public schools and "Sous-Directeur" in free schools) are in charge of the practical organization of the school. They can replace Principals if they are absent.

General Secretaries manage school employee.

Treasurers manage the school finance and accounting. They are in charge of purchases, such as supplies for teachers, class books or food vouchers.

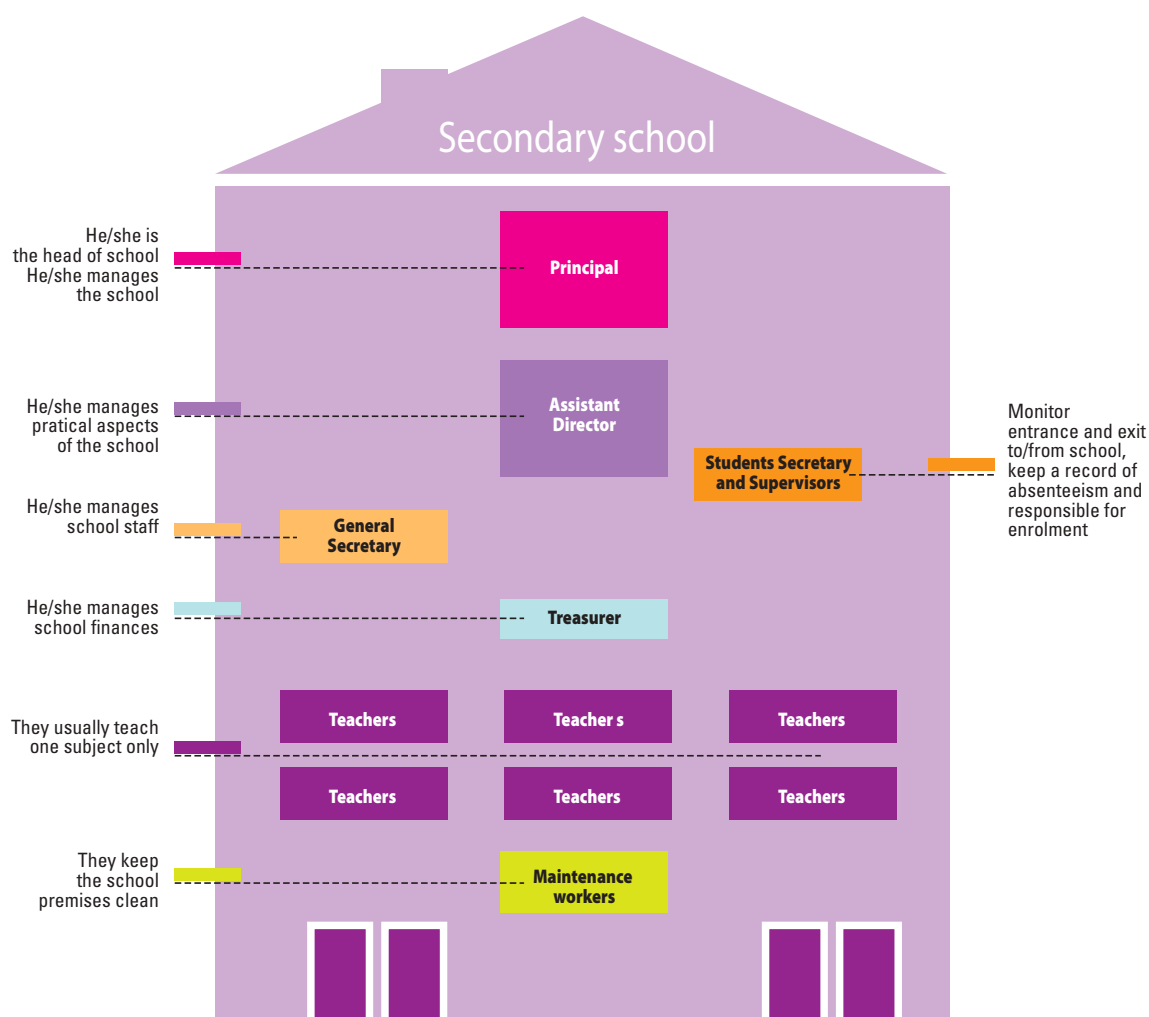
Students Secretaries and Supervisors keep a record of absenteeism and monitor entrance and exit to/from school. They supervise recess, hallways and canteens. They are sometimes responsible for enrolment.

Teachers are men and women who usually teach one subject only (French, Physical Education, Mathematics, etc.) They are trained and own a degree in the

subject they teach. Most of the time, students have as many teachers as subjects although some teachers might occasionally teach two or three subjects.

Transition classes can be run by one or several teachers depending on schools.

Maintenance workers clean and look after the school premises. However, keeping schools clean is everyone's responsibility.



How to enrol my children?

I can enrol my children any time of year.



I have to go to school with my children to enrol them. The school's administrative staff will need some documents. Therefore, I have to bring identification documents (annex 26, orange card, ID card...). I need a form issued by a primary school to enrol my children in secondary school. I have to fill it in and submit it to the secondary school of my choice. I will be informed once a decision has been made.



Upon enrolment, the school will give me documents about **internal rules**, educational projects, general academic regulations, the supplies I need to get and the Medical and Psychosocial Services working with the school. On enrolment day, I can visit the school and find out more about it.

I will not be able to enrol my children if the school is already full. In this case, the school will give me a certificate proving my enrolment request and I will have to find another school. The French Community Enrolment Services can help me find a school (free phone number: 0800/188.55)

Free access to compulsory education

The Constitution (art. 24) and the "Missions" decree (Art. 100 and following) guarantee free access to compulsory education.

All schools are subsidized by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (except for a few private schools). Schools therefore receive subsidies to guarantee the quality of education. However, those subsidies do not cover all education-related expenses. You may be asked to cover some of them. You will receive an estimate of the yearly expenses at the start of the year.

If you ever go through financial difficulties and are unable to pay, contact the head of school or the treasurer as soon as possible. They will help you find a solution that suits everybody.

What is the school year like?

The school year generally starts on September 1st.

School holidays are scheduled throughout the year:

- End of October - beginning of November: Autumn holidays, also called All Saints holidays (1 week).
- End of December: Winter holidays, also called Christmas holidays (2 weeks).
- February: Relaxation holidays, also called Carnival holidays (1 week).
- End of March - beginning of April: Spring holidays, also called Easter holidays (2 weeks).
- The school year ends at the end of June. Students then have two months of holidays.
- Certain days are national public holidays. Schools, but also shops and administration services are usually closed those days.

In primary school, the frequency and type of assessments is described in the **internal rules** (ROI). Pupils are generally assessed throughout the year. Successful pupils receive the certificate of basic studies (CEB) at the end of sixth grade. They will continue to secondary school. Students who do not get it can either repeat the year or start secondary school in differentiated 1st grade.

Secondary school **exams** usually take place in December/January and in June. My children's grades are written in the school reports I receive throughout the year. This allows me to assess my children's progress.

Teacher/parent meetings take place several times a year. Teachers will summarize my children's progress and behaviour in class with me. I will be able to ask any questions I want. **I should attend all of these meetings.**



The school calendar is available on the following website: <http://www.enseignement.be>

What is a typical school week like? And a typical school day?

School weeks start on Monday morning and usually end around 4.00pm on Friday. Children usually do not have classes on Wednesday afternoon (although students may have to stay at school for disciplinary reasons). Extracurricular activities are sometimes organized on Wednesday afternoon.

Each school decides when classes start and end. Starting and ending times are indicated in the **Internal Rules**.

Children have recess every morning and a lunch break between morning and afternoon classes.

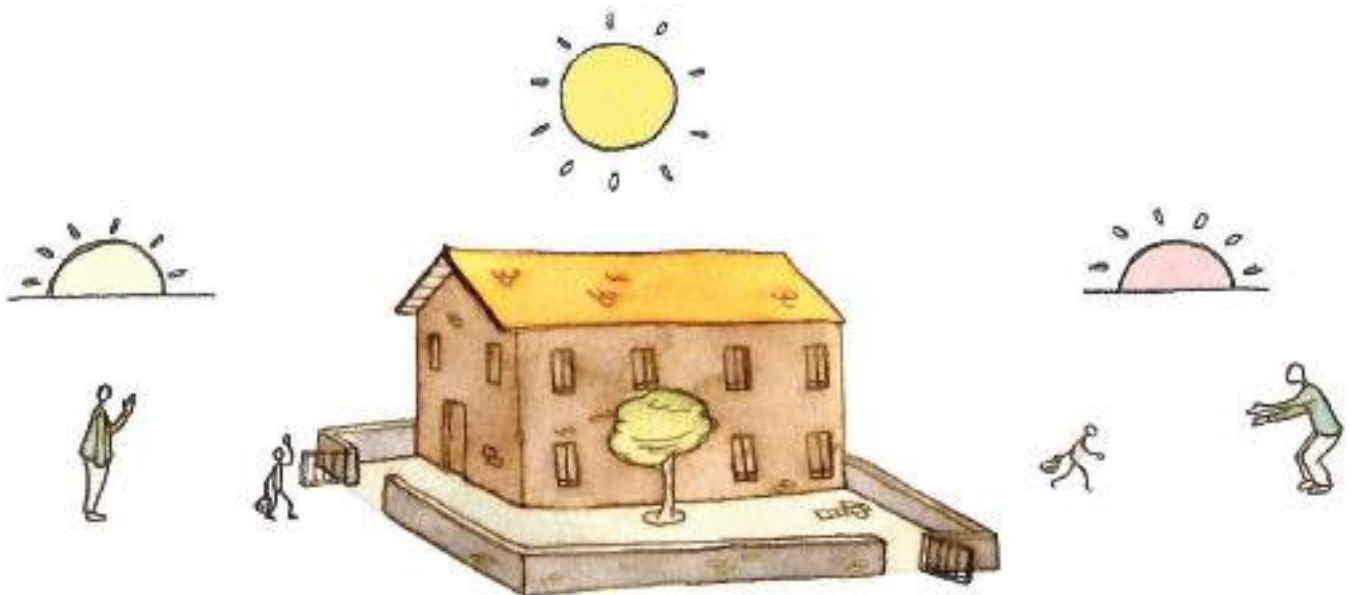
In primary school:

Classes usually start between 8.00 and 9.00 am and end between 3.30 and 4.00 pm.

In secondary school:

Each class has its own schedule. At the beginning of the year, students receive their timetable. Classes might not start or end at the same time every day.

Each subject is taught by a different teacher, often in a different classroom.



What are the classroom rules?

Students have to arrive on time. Latecomers can be punished if they have no justification.



Students have to listen to their teacher during classes. They also have to listen to each other and cannot interrupt each other. Students are required to raise their hands before speaking.

Students should bring all their school supplies (textbooks, copybooks, pens, pencils, rulers ...). Teachers can punish students who do not bring their school supplies.



What sanctions are applied if rules are broken?

Sanctions depend on children's wrongdoing. I will be notified if my children are punished.



In the school diary, I can see if my children received **warnings** and/or were assigned extra **homework** to do.



Detention means my children have to stay extra hours at school, usually after the school day.



Temporary exclusion from a given class means my children are not allowed to attend this class anymore. They can still attend other classes. The measure lasts a few hours or days.



General temporary exclusion means my children are not allowed to attend any classes for a few hours or days.

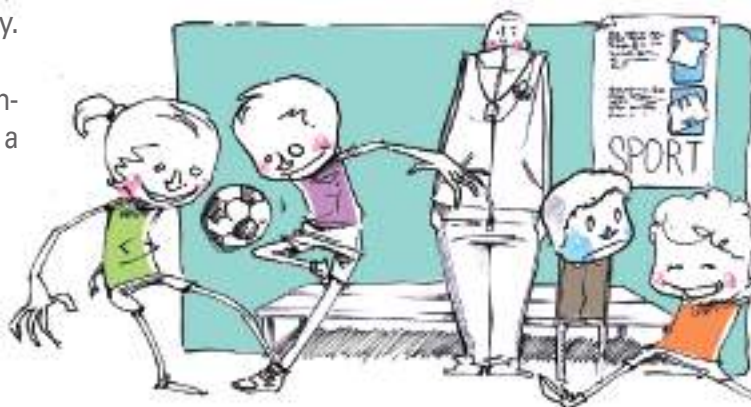


Definitive exclusion from a school means my children are not allowed to go to that school anymore. I will have to find a new one. The school must set up a specific procedure before excluding my children.

What are physical education classes like?

Attending physical education classes is compulsory.

My children have to bring their own equipment (trainers with white soles, shorts, a t-shirt, a swimsuit, a swimming hat and a towel for swimming classes).



What is the school diary?

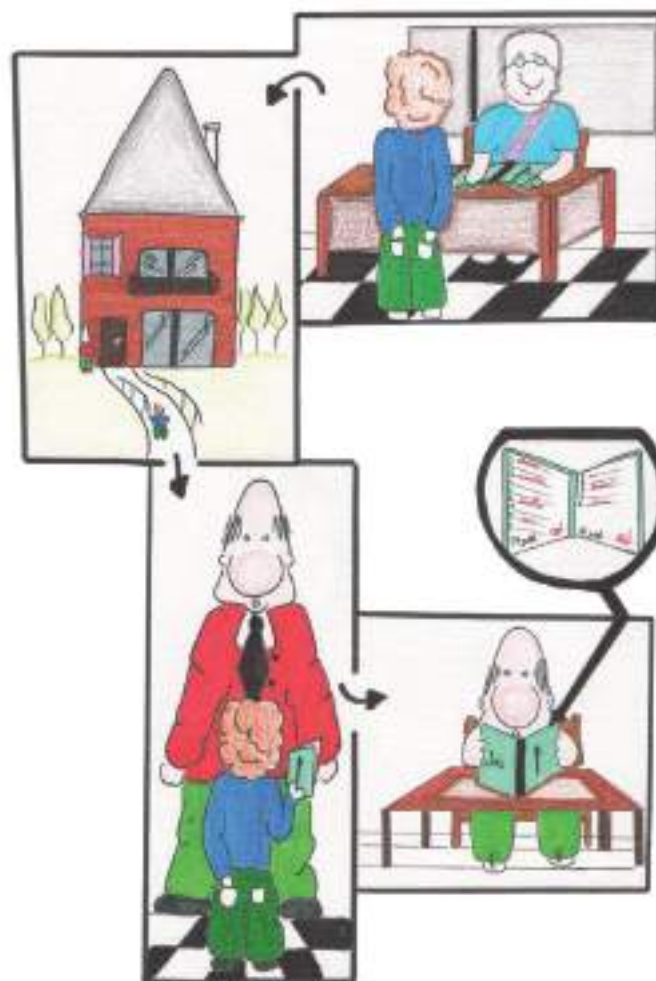
It is a day planner children use to write what each class was about and the **homework** they were assigned (exercises to do and material to study).

Teachers and school staff use it to communicate with parents.

My children have to bring their diary to school every day.

I have to check and sign the diary on a regular basis.

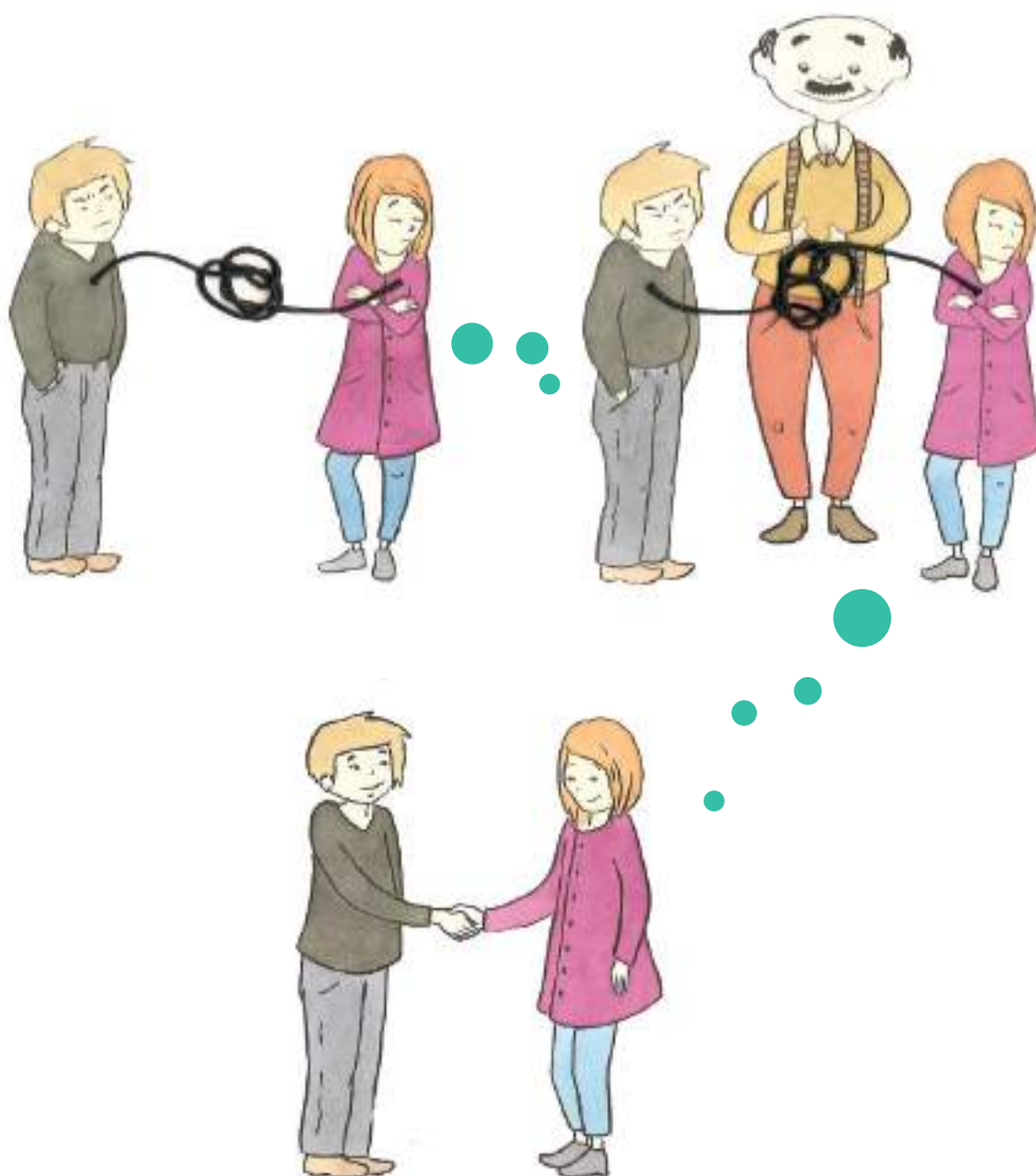
If my children misbehave, I may be notified in the school diary.



Who are school mediators? What do they do?

School mediators help prevent violence, absenteeism and school dropout. They are part of a structure set up in secondary school by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

Principals, teachers, parents and teachers alike can contact school mediators. Their mission is to facilitate and promote good relationships between all actors of education.



Who to contact if my children face learning difficulties?

If my children face learning difficulties, I can request a meeting with their teachers and discuss what could be done. Some schools can offer various solutions.

Homework schools (EDD) help children with learning difficulties. These schools are not like traditional schools. Some of their activities and methods may be helpful.

The list of "**homework** schools" and the type of service they provide is available on the following website: www.ffedd.be

Students who have been excluded from school or are dropping out of school can seek help from support services. For more information, check the official youth support website: www.aidealajeunesse.cfwb.be.

Medical and Psychosocial Services can also be helpful.

Each school is linked to a PMS Centre. Such centres involve a team of social assistants, psychologists and doctors or nurses.

Their mission is to support children, adolescents and parents alike. They set up programmes and help students progress and accompany them throughout their school life and career. They listen to students and their families and help them find solutions to certain problems (personal or interpersonal difficulties, orientation...).

PMS workers can advise students regarding their development and school career. They are bound by professional secret and confidentiality.

Upon enrolment at school, I will receive the name of the PMS centre working with that school.

I can request a meeting with the PMS centre linked to my children's school. It is free.



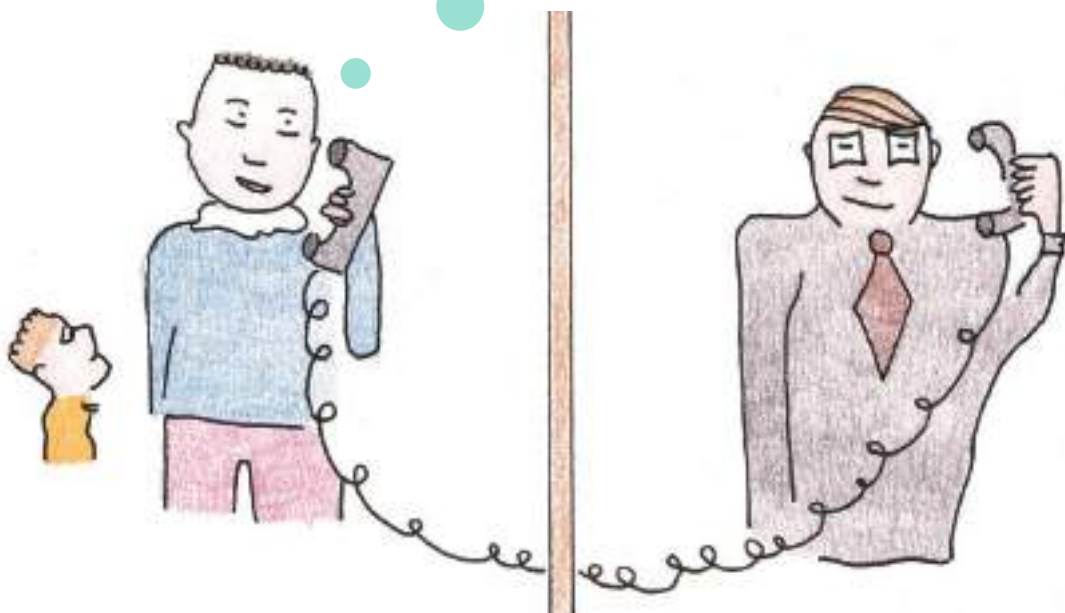
Who to contact if we face other difficulties at school?

For communication problems with the school staff, I can contact intercultural mediators (usually in big cities). They will help set up and sustain positive communication with the school and bring me and the staff closer.

I have to take actions if my children witness racism or are subject to acts of racism. First, I should warn the school staff. I can also warn the school's PMS centre. They will raise awareness in the classroom. Then, some organizations specialized in Human Rights and Discrimination may advise and accompany me. I can file a complaint with the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Fight against Racism.

<http://www.diversite.be>

The Head Office for Compulsory Education has set up a free phone number to inform parents of students who witness racism or are victims of it.



What should I do if I move to a new location?

I should inform the Principal of the date my children will be leaving school and give the Principal the address of the new school.

If my children are in primary school, I will receive a document from the former school. I have to fill it in and bring it to the new school.

If my children are in secondary school, the new principal will contact the former one to exchange information.



Where can I learn French?

French courses are offered in some Red Cross centres.

Local organizations present in towns and cities offer French classes. Use the Social Guide website to contact them.

<http://www.guidesocial.be>

Where can I find additional information?

Web sites:

www.enseignement.be (list of schools offering **transition classes**, list of PMS centres and the schools they are linked to, information regarding school programs and levels, enrolment...)
www.devenirKLK1.be (training and courses)
www.orientation.be (orientation)
www.siep.be (orientation and courses)
www.aidealajeunesse.cfwb.be (helping young people)
www.cire.be (interpretation and translation, French courses...)
www.ffedd.be (**homework** schools)
www.guidesocial.be (General website indicating addresses and phone numbers of organizations offering assistance in the field of education, orientation, training, refresher courses...)
www.unia.be (Centre for Equal Opportunities and Fight against Racism)

Useful phone numbers (free):

School and Parents: **0800/95.580**.

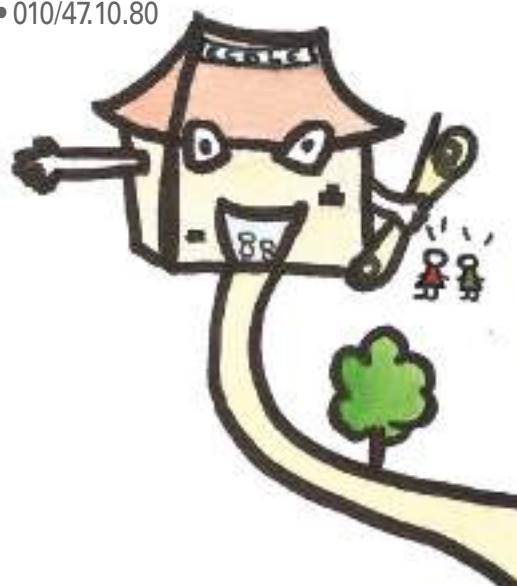
Available Monday to Friday, 9.00am-1.00pm. Only deals with questions regarding violence at school.

Enrolment Assistance: **0800/188.55**

Adresses:

SIEP: Service d'Information sur les Etudes et les Professions

Bruxelles:	109-111 rue de la Poste, 1030 Bruxelles	• 02/640.08.32
Charleroi:	51 boulevard P. Janson, 6000 Charleroi	• 071/33.12.06
Libramont:	39A grand rue, 6800 Libramont-Chevigny	• 061/21.32.21
Liège:	26 rue Saint Gilles, 4000 Liège	• 04/223.80.80
Mons:	101 chaussée de Binche, bloc C, 7000 Mons	• 065/33.48.22
Namur:	12 rue de Saintraint, 5000 Namur	• 081/25.14.00
Wavre:	13 rue de Flandre, 1300 Wavre	• 010/47.10.80



Lexicon

Parents association:	Group of parents collaborating with the school staff to improve students' wellbeing. It serves as a link between parents and school staff.
DASPA (Transition class):	Special class for students who arrived recently in Belgium. It involves French and refresher classes.
Council of Integration:	Council involving teachers of a given student's school cycle and presided by the principal. It aims to integrate DASPA students into regular classes in accordance with their abilities.
Secular moral class:	Course where students learn about citizens' rights and responsibilities, the bases of democracy, freedom, communication and criticism.
Homework:	Written assignments, exercises to do and/or lessons to learn after school. They are assigned by teachers.
Diploma:	A document which shows that a person has graduated from a school.
Subsidized free Schools:	Education is organised by religious congregations or associations.
Subsidized official Schools:	Education is organized by public authorities.
Free students:	Students that do not meet admission requirements to school and/or do not follow classes regularly. Their school year will not be taken into account and they will not be allowed to go to the next year.
Examinations:	Written or oral tests to assess students' skills.
Class diary:	Copybook, agenda or day planner where students write class schedules and homework (exercises and lessons) to do at home. Parents and teachers use it to communicate in written form.
Justifying one's absence:	Providing the school staff with a document that explains why a student was absent. This document should be issued within the period of time imposed by the school. For instance, a medical certificate issued by a doctor.
Internal Rules (ROI):	Parents receive the ROI document upon enrolment. It describes rules necessary to follow at school. It also describes sanctions in case of infringement.

Diplomas issued

Certificates (primary and secondary school)

Students receive various certificates (**diplomas**) throughout their education:

- C.E.B.** [Certificate of Basic Studies]: at the end of primary school.
- C.E.1.D.** [Certificate of Secondary School, 1st Degree]: At the end of the 2nd year of secondary school.
- C.E.2.D.** [Certificate of Secondary School, 2nd Degree]: at the end of the 4th year of secondary school.
- C.E.S.S.** [Certificate of Upper Secondary Education]: at the end of secondary school, transition or artistic section or at the end of 7th grade in vocation section (this certificate gives access to higher education)
- C.Q.6** [Certificate of Qualification 6]: at the end of 6th grade, qualifying section in secondary school.
- C.Q.7** [Certificate of Qualification 7]: at the end of 7th grade, qualifying section in secondary school.
- C.E.P6** [Basic Qualification 6th year of professional training]: at the end of the 6th year of secondary school, vocational section.

Certificate of Complimentary Secondary School – nursing section: at the end of the 4th degree of Secondary school, vocational section.

Certificate of Basic Management: awarded to students who met all the specific requirements.

End of year assessment and recommendations in secondary school

At the end of 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grade in secondary school, three outcomes are possible. Students can be awarded the following grades:

- AOA** [Orientation A]: full success (students are admitted to the next year without restriction).
- AOB** [Orientation B]: partial success (students are admitted to the next year but their choice of options and subjects is limited and requires approval by the school staff). This outcome is not possible at the end of 5th grade, transition section.
- AOC** [Orientation C]: failure (students are not admitted to the next year and have to repeat the current one).

Merci et bravo
à nos illustrateurs !



CROIX-ROUGE
de Belgique

