

The provision of out-of-school care in France

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1. Introduction

France differs from most other countries because of its *volume of teaching hours*, which is amongst the biggest in Europe, during very short periods. School schedules are concentrated “on a limited number of days, with shorter weeks and longer days at school, as well as longer summer and intermediate holidays”, (Conférence sur les rythmes scolaires, 2011, p.18)

Discussions on reorganising and transforming school rhythms (developing cultural and sports activities) have been going on already for a long time.

The main difficulty for tackling out-of-school provision in France derives from the fact that it does not come within a national framework, but is provided by local authorities. This means that there are no homogenous statistics, besides a survey that questions families on the forms of childcare they use, but it is neither recent nor complete. Moreover, great geographical inequalities appear regarding resources and time devoted to out-of-school care depending on the local authority.

But, on average, in France, many children spend almost 10 hours per day at school, with doors opening at 8.30.am (sometimes before, but rarely) and, above all, after lessons (until about 6.30.pm); and half of the children have school dinners.

Even with a fairly flexible system, we will show that childcare needs are not met and it is up to parents (and especially mothers) to reconcile their working time and their children’s school time. Certainly, unlike other European countries, this does not have a huge impact on mother’s employment, even if fewer of them work full-time when their children are young and there are many of them. However, they have to seek working schedules that are adapted to school times, especially on Wednesdays (when there are no lessons in France). Sometimes, atypical working hours in sectors where women predominate enable them to meet these responsibilities, but at the cost of their own working conditions and careers. For better-off families, where both parents often have long working days, paid childcare is often the only solution available in order to cover all out-of-school time. This also makes it possible to take into account children’s rhythms, thus leaving them time for non-collective rest at home.

Finally, the issue of school failure is also a challenge for out-of-school provision, as it now offers possibilities of personalised educational support free of charge for most disadvantaged children. But this solution does not seem to convince all actors, especially because it involves increasing children’s school time even more, and not necessarily promoting flourishing in other non-academic activities.

2. Organisation of pre-primary and primary education

Compulsory education in France is from 6 to 16 years. This is the case throughout the country. However, both of these limits are debateable and debated:

- First of all, at entry: pre-primary schools (*école maternelle*) start at 3 (until 6). Children *can* start earlier if they are 2 when the school year starts in September, provided they are physically and psychologically ready, and if there are enough places. In the provinces, this access is earlier than in big towns, especially in rural areas, where the lack of childcare for the under 3s is great. It should be remembered that pre-primary education is a “right” for children, but not compulsory. About 18% of 2 year olds are in pre-primary schools in France.
- Secondly, the upper limit of 16: young people between 14 and 16 can start an apprenticeship, if they fulfil one of the following conditions:
 - o have continued their education until the end of the 3rd class¹ (end of *collège* at about 14 years old),
 - o have done two years of sandwich courses or vocational education (e.g. on an apprenticeship preparatory course),
 - o have reached the age of 16 before 31 December of the year in which the apprenticeship contract is signed.

France differs from most other countries because of its ***volume of teaching hours***, which is amongst the biggest in Europe, during very short periods. School schedules are concentrated “on a limited number of days, with shorter weeks and longer days at school, as well as longer summer and intermediate holidays”, (*Conférence sur les rythmes scolaires*, 2011, p.18).

According to the OECD (2010), total teaching time is very big in France: the average for the OECD countries is 6,777 hours for the 7 to 14 age group, while the figure for France is 7,773 hours. Only Italy (8,316 hours) and the Netherlands (7,880) have more in Europe.

The average number of compulsory annual teaching hours for 15 year olds is 1,048 in France (compared with 595 hours in Poland, for example).

Usual teaching hours

From 3 to 10 years: pre-primary school and primary school

In France, 3 year olds go to pre-primary schools, which are part of the school system and have the same kind of organisation and teachers as primary schools. Thus, from 3 to 10 (end of primary school), teaching hours are the same:

- Since 2008, the school week is normally 24 hours (previously 26 hours) distributed over 4 or 5 days (with some half-days), and 2 extra hours are provided for pupils experiencing difficulties.
- There are no lessons on Wednesdays.
- “Normal” hours are from 8.30.am to 11.30.am and from 1.30.pm to 4.30.pm. But in pre-primary, in the first class (and especially for those under 3), children can go home in the

¹ i.e. 4th year of secondary education

afternoon to sleep (those who stay at school, also have a sleep). 6 out of every 10 children under 3 do go home.

- Wednesdays, and now also Saturdays, are free.
- The number of weeks at school per annum is 36, i.e. 180 days or 864 hours.
- School holidays total 16 weeks, distributed, depending on the region, around 8 weeks in the summer; the others are distributed throughout the year: 1 week and a half in November, (called “All Saints” holidays (vacances de la Toussaint); 2 weeks at Christmas; 2 weeks’ winter holidays (around the month of February); and 2 weeks near Easter.

According to research by DREES in 2007, primary school children generally start their day somewhere between 7 and 8am (only 2% are still in bed after 8am). 77% of them leave for school after 8am. Lessons finish at 4.30pm for 76% of primary school children.

Out-of-school time in primary schools thus corresponds with the beginning of the day (before school opens at 8.30.am); lunch break; and at the end of the day, from 4.30. to 6pm, or beyond; Wednesdays; and school holidays.

From 10 to 14 years: collège

Collège pupils study for between 25 and 28.5 hours per week (spread over 5 days). Timetables vary from collège to collège, and even from pupil to pupil. In general, lessons take place between 8am and 6pm.

According to a survey by Insee (2007), collège pupils get up earlier than primary school children (more than three-quarters are up at 7.15am and have left home before 8am. The end of the school day varies more than in primary schools: 29% finish before 4pm, 62% between 4 and 5pm, and the others after 6pm ??? (18%??? et de 17h à 18h???).

Out-of-school provision, where it exists, covers early morning, end of the day, lunch and school holidays (which are the same as for primary schools).

From 14 to 16-17 years: lycée

Lycée pupils have between 30 and 40 hours of courses per week (i.e. more than the legal working week!) spread over 5.5 days per week. However, they have the same holidays as the others.

3. Out-of-school services: facts and figures

3.1 Out-of-school services for children in pre-primary education

As we have explained in the previous point, there is no difference between pre-primary and primary timetables, in that pre-primary schools are part of the same institution as primary schools. Available data concern above all primary schools, but the principles of out-of-school care are the same in both schools (supervised playtime and homework time in the morning and evening, canteen and playtime at midday, leisure centres (centre de loisirs) on Wednesdays and during school holidays).

Depending on the local council, there is thus out-of-school provision before pre-primary schools open (sometimes from 7.30am, but not in Paris) and after school (frequently from

4.30 to 6.30pm, and sometimes even 7pm), involving a snack, games, as well as playtime in school premises. There is usually a canteen and playtime at midday. Leisure centres exist either in one school for several schools, or are separate from schools, and are open on Wednesdays and in school holidays. More details will be given in the following points

Statistical data *for evenings* show that most pre-primary children are collected at the end of lessons by a parent, even if both of them work. The most frequent solution, when this is not the case, is for children to stay in after-school care at school (26% of children if the mother is working full-time).

Distribution of children from 2 or 3 years to 6 years, according to type of care between 4.30 and 7pm

	Only parents	After-school care at school			Childminder	Grand-parents	Others	Total
		only	together with a different from of care	total				
Total	66	15	2	17	5	5	7	100
Both parents work	52	20	2	22	8	8	10	100
Mother works full-time	46	22	4	26	9	8	11	100

Source: enquête Drees 2002, quoted by Robert-Bobée, 2010.

Midday, half of all children in pre-primary school full-time have their lunch in the canteen; 4 out of 10 lunch with one of their parents; 3% with a childminder and 3% with a grandparent (Robert-Bobée, op.cit.).

As for *Wednesdays*, $\frac{3}{4}$ spend them with a parent; the others are in leisure centres or with a grandparent.

Great diversity can thus be observed regarding childcare outside school. Parents, and above all mothers - even if they work - play an essential role in out-of-school time. There is thus important process regarding reconciling regarding school time, parents' working time, and out-of-school time.

3.2 Out-of-school care for school going children

3.2.1. Availability

Out-of-school time corresponds with time in the morning, midday, at the end of the day; Wednesdays and school holidays. Some schools offer access to the canteen at midday, homework or playtime in the morning and evenings. Other people, who are either paid by families or not, can also be mobilised, namely traditional forms of childcare, such as childminders, baby-sitters and grandparents. These people may also take over after out-of-school provision at school.

It should be remembered that since 2008, 2 hours of personalised help is offered to children experiencing difficulties at school. Moreover, 2 hours of educational support is proposed in Educational Priority Areas (Zones d'éducation prioritaire) (see below).

The available survey on this subject (DREES, *op.cit.*) notes that “besides overall time at school, it appears that times and activities of each child vary according to age, availability of parents - especially mothers – or grandparents, and also according to geographical environment”.

The following data show that **2% of primary school children go the out-of-school care in the morning**; this does not exist in the collège (nor in Paris for primary school children). It is used essentially by children whose mothers work.

Just over half of primary school children (52%) and the majority of college pupils (62%) eat in the school canteen. The gap can be explained by the difference in provision (not all primary schools have a canteen, because it is the responsibility of the local council and not compulsory); but, above all, it is because of the distance between home and collège (especially in rural areas).

In the evening, almost three-quarters of primary school children go home with their parents and 7% go to family or friends– very rarely (2%) (see table) is someone paid to collect them – in the case of higher paid parents with long working hours.

13% of primary school children do not go straight home, but stay at school for homework or play, whereas only 4% of collège pupils stay.

Out-of-school time of primary school and collège pupils during schooldays

Proportion of children at school	primary	collège	
Morning:			
- go directly to school	95%	99%	
- go to supervised play at school (garderie), homework period (étude) at school or leisure centres before school	2%	0	
- other	3%	1%	
Midday:			
- have lunch at home	40%	30%	
- have lunch in the school canteen	52%	62%	
- other	8%	8%	
Evening:			
- go home straight away	73%	88%	
- do not go home straight away	27%	12%	
<i>Stay at school for homework or play</i>		13%	3%
<i>Go to a sports or cultural activity</i>		5%	4%
<i>Go to a person who is paid to look after them</i>		2%	0%
<i>Go to family, friends or others</i>		7%	5%

Source: Ined, used by Drees, 2007

In all, 21% of collège pupils and 14% primary school children have days that are longer than 10 hours outside their home.

Some children “accumulate” out-of-school activities: 1% have all three (morning, midday and evening); 10% go to the canteen and evening supervised play; 41% go only to the canteen; **44% of primary school children do not have any out-of-school activity.**

Wednesdays:

The problem of Wednesdays is even more difficult than the other days of the week, because for the great majority of primary school children it is free, whereas three-quarters of collège pupils have lessons in the morning. The use of out-of-school care depends above all on whether mothers work that day or not – the mothers of 32% of children work on Wednesdays (especially for collège pupils with 36% and less for primary school children - 27%). Half of primary school children are looked after by their mothers on Wednesdays, either because they are economically inactive, unemployed, working part-time, or full-time, but “manages it”: 20% of children whose mothers are in this situation are looked after by her. This is linked to the sector of activity in which these mothers work – a third of children concerned have a mother who works in personal services with schedules that are “compatible” with looking after their children on Wednesdays. Moreover, some parents make arrangements together or call on grandparents. 9% of primary school children look after themselves (or with brothers and sisters). **Finally, a fifth of children are in out-of-school care (in the broad meaning of the word), i.e., in leisure centres or homework centres (in school premises); cultural or sports activities, and so forth.** Unfortunately, this survey does not distinguish between them, whereas in the first case, it is full-day care, while the other activities are one-off and often require being accompanied by an adult. This grouping together no doubt explains that it is collège pupils whose mothers do not work on Wednesdays who go most – as, in their case, it must be cultural and sports activities, because there are very few leisure centres for collège pupils.

Who looks after children (from 6 to 14) on Wednesdays?

Mother’s activity	Mother works all day		Mother works maximum half a day (including the economically inactive)	
	Primary school pupils	Collège pupils	Primary school pupils	Collège pupils
Parents	32	28	65	53
- mother	20	12	51	42
- father	6	8	1	2
- both parents	5	4	8	5
- with the other parent (separated)	1	4	5	4
With brothers and sisters without parents	6	15	3	3
With friends without parents	0	7	1	5
Alone	3	13	1	2
In friends’ home without parents	0	3	1	3

With another member of the family (grandparents, etc.)	27	8	5	3
With a paid person	9	1	2	0
Leisure centre, club, homework centre, etc.	23	23	20	28
Others	0	2	1	3
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Drees, 2007.

On the basis of another statistical source, EU-SILC, it is possible to observe the number of children, who have a form of care that is not formal childcare (including out-of-school provision and also grandparents...) and the average length of such other forms of care. One notes that 19% of 3 to 6 year olds (most of them attending pre-primary school) have another form of care of less than 29 hours per week. This proportion has been going down since 2005. It is the case of 14% of children in primary school (up to 12 years). This kind of care is rarely used for more than 29 hours. It lasts on average 15.5 hours (for 3 to 6 year olds) and for 10.3 hours (for 6 to 12 year olds).

Proportion of children with a “different kind of informal care” (%)

Children’s age	Length of care	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
3 - 6 years	1 to 29 hours	25	24	24	22	19
	More than 30 hours	3	3	3	2	3
6–12 years	1 to 29 hours	16	17	15	15	14
	More than 30 hours	1	0	0	1	1

Source: EU-SILC

Average weekly hours of informal care (children with at least 1 hour of formal care)

Children’s age	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
3 - 6 years	15.3h	14.5h	14.6h	13.3h	15.5h
6–12 years	10.9h	10.9h	10.9h	11.3h	10.3h

Source: EU-SILC

3.2.2 Quality

The quality of out-of-school provision varies depending on the local council and the resources they devote to it. But, in general, staff responsible for out-of-school care are council employees and have a national, but not vocational, diploma: BAFA²

The type of activity depends on the age of the children and the local council’s resources. It is partly a time of recreation and supervised play; and partly studies (homework that is normally done at home is done during the period from 4.30 to 6pm in a classroom, with the presence of a person who is not a teacher). According to teachers, it is rare that school work is really done. But in some places (as in the example that we will present at Montrodât), out-of-school provision is not a time for study, but for games and recreation, and children do not return to

² Brevet d’aptitude aux fonctions d’animateur: Certificate of Aptitude for the Functions of Activities Organisers (see box on next page)

their classrooms. This is in line with the fact that homework is *normally* forbidden in primary schools in France. Personalised school help can be given to children with difficulties, but at lunchtime.

Finally, some councils have the resources do more, either by providing educational help to children (by teachers, often free of charge); or by offering more precise extra-curricula activities by people with specific skills (see box on Paris): sports activities (judo, kites, gymnastics, table tennis, which is sometimes with teachers); cultural activities (painting and so forth) or outdoor activities.

The adult/children ratio is laid down by the Ministry of Youth and Sport: **1 activities organiser for 10 children under 6 (pre-primary school); 1 for 14 children over 6.** Some councils monitor the quality of the training of the staff, and provide further training, but this is not always the case.

Activities organisers generally have the BAFA diploma or are training for it (thirty hours of training – see box) and are managed by a director, who has the BAFD³ diploma. Other diplomas can be accepted for becoming activities organisers (such as the small children Certificate of vocational aptitude for working with small children (Certificat d’aptitude professionnelle, CAP petite enfance), the Certificate of vocational qualification for out-of-school activities organiser (Certificat qualification professionnelle, CQP animateur périscolaire) and the BPJEPS (see box below).

Box 1: Training of activities organisers (animateurs)

- **The Certificate of Aptitude for the Functions of Activities Organiser (BAFA)** and the Certificate of Aptitude for the Functions of Director (BAFD) are diplomas that authorise supervising children and teenagers in collective provision, in a non-professional capacity and on a temporary basis. The training sessions that lead to BAFA and BAFD certificates are organised by training bodies that are registered with the Ministry in charge of young people. The training is composed of three main parts in the following order – a theoretical course, work experience and an in-depth or qualifying session. One has to be over 17 years old on the first day of the first training session.

The theoretical course, called “general training” must last at least 8 days (within a maximum period of 2 months). The aim is to tackle ‘theoretically’ all aspects of the function of activities organiser, namely responsibility in a group situation, regulations, knowledge of children and young people, and so forth. It is also an opportunity for learning about a whole series of games and manual techniques that can be used on the job. This also tests one’s taste for life in a group, which is an essential quality for supervising children and young people in this type of centre.

The practical course must last at least 14 days, in a holiday centre, a leisure centre, a youth centre or scout centre that is registered according to the rules. This work experience can be paid. It can be in the framework of a contract of educational commitment, an employment contract or as a volunteer.

The last session is a **choice between an “in-depth” (at least 6 days) and a “qualifying” session (at least 8 days)**. It is a matter of respectively increasing skills acquired during the previous 2 sessions or of specialising in a specific area (for the time being, the following exist: sailing, canoe-kayak, supervising swimming, motorcycle leisure activities). Since the reform of the training, which came into force on 1 September 2007, it is now possible to pass one’s “BAFA 3” abroad. In the end, the BAFA certificate is awarded by the jury of the Département office of youth and sport (Délégation départementale de la jeunesse et des sports, DDJS) where one lives.

- **Vocational Certificate of Youth, Popular Education and Sport (Brevet Professionnel de la Jeunesse, de l’Education Populaire et du Sport, BPJEPS).**

The BPJEPS (level IV) was created in 2001 and certifies the possession of vocational skills that are essential for exercising the occupation of activities organiser in the field of the speciality obtained. This diploma is awarded for a specific discipline, or for several disciplines, or is related to a specific field. The preparation of this diploma is provided by Training Centres that are registered with the Regional offices of youth, sport and

³ Brevet d’aptitude aux fonctions de directeur: Certificate of Aptitude for the Functions of Director

social cohesion. The diploma is awarded via course credits; or by validating skills acquired through experience; and/or an exam composed of periodic tests (which have not yet been implemented). The BPJEPS is composed of 10 credits. It is prepared either through initial training, apprenticeship, or continuing training. **In initial training, the minimum length of the course is 600 hours in a training centre.** Requests for validating skills acquired through experience can be made on the basis of all employee, non-employee or voluntary activities whether exercised on a continuous basis or not, during a total period of at least 3 years and related to the diploma. The BP prepares for the job of activities organiser (in the speciality), in an association, a sports club, a company or a local authority.

The specialities of the BPJEPS are as follows:

In the sports sector: swimming/water activities; horse-riding activities; gymnastics for health and strength; sailing activities; physical activities for all; and so forth.

In the entertainment and social sector: circus activities; cultural activities; social activities; leisure for all publics; information and communication techniques.

- Certificate of Vocational Qualification (Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle, CQP) for "Out-of-school activities organiser" is on the list of diplomas that are the equivalent of the BAFA since June 2010. A CQP is a diploma that is created and awarded by the professionals of a particular field. It is therefore not managed by the State, like the BAFA and BPJEPS. Regarding activities organiser, the organisation that manages these diplomas is the National Joint Commission on Employment, Training and Organisation of Activities (Commission Paritaire Nationale Emploi Formation de l'Animation, CPNEFA). CQPs are usually aimed at filling a gap – this is the case of the "Out-of-school activities organiser" CQP, which is between the BAFA and the BPJEPS.

Training for "Out-of-school activities organiser" CQP is a sandwich course of about 400 hours, including 3 modules:

Module 1: Caring for children in their out-of-school leisure time.

Module 2: Designing an activities project.

Module 3: Carrying out out-of-school activities for children and teenagers. These modules are based on two units of the BPJEPS course. Moreover, having a "Out-of-school activities organiser" CQP makes it possible to immediately validate credit number 5 "preparing a leisure activity for all publics" and credit number 9 "mastering necessary tools and techniques for implementing a leisure activity for all publics" of the BPJEPS speciality "leisure for all publics" (decree of 18 May 2010).

The "Out-of-school activities organiser" CQP is recent - the first courses were organised in 2009. It is recognised by the National collective agreement on activities organisation (rider N°132 dated 09/03/2010). It is for activities organisers for out-of-school activities that take place in schools and also on Wednesdays in leisure centres and holiday centres. **The creation of this qualification is a new step towards professionalising the occupation of activities organiser, because it offers a qualification to professional activities organisers, who often only have the BAFA.**

Finally, it should be noted that besides out-of-school activities that are organised at school, some associations provide out-of-school activities for children, sometimes arranging to go and collect them and take them from school to their association's facilities and even sometimes to the children's homes. However, these experiences remain limited, even if they reflect growing concern for many parents (especially mothers) about finding out-of-school activities that are not too expensive. The staff are often well trained (see the Gepetto experience), but this is not always guaranteed.

Box 2: Paris, a model of development of out-of-school provision

Paris has developed an especially big out-of-school service.

An educational charter of out-of-school activities covers children between 3 and 16 years, which is relatively rare (beyond the usual 14 years). In the editorial of this charter, one notes: "The activities proposed associate all children, without any distinction or form of discrimination. (...). A secular approach rules the organisation of the republic's schools and educational and leisure activities proposed by local authorities (...). Accompaniment by attentive, qualified and benevolent professionals is essential".

During out-of-school time, children are looked after in breaks, at midday and in the evening after school. They are supervised by activities organisers and specialised school staff (Agents spécialisés des écoles, ASEM), lunches are normally designed to promote children's taste. In the evening, supervised homework sessions, cultural, scientific and sports activities are proposed in primary schools and tea offered in pre-primary schools.

Paris city council has also created a system of educationally helping children who are experiencing difficulties in learning.

Boosting clubs (clubs coup de pouce) aim at helping children in their first year at primary school (cours préparatoire, CP) after pre-primary school, who are educationally fragile, to succeed in learning to read via extra and different contact with the written word.

Reading, expression and mathematics workshop (Ateliers Lecture Expression Mathématiques, ALEM) are for pupils in their last year in primary school (Cours moyen 2, CM2), before going to collège aimed at promoting expression, independence and consolidating French and maths. ALEMs enable children to reinvest school acquisitions, behaviour and values in a different context than the classroom. This action is continued in the 6th class (first year of collège) by the creation of French and mathematics workshops (Ateliers français mathématiques, AFM6), which benefit from work in small groups.

The programme "Action for collège pupils" constitutes personalised help to promote integration of collège pupils who are experiencing difficulties, via help during out-of-school time (week-ends and holidays). This programme offers help with homework, course choice, and socio-educational support at collège, and in the community. Likewise, projects are proposed by young people and funded by the département council, for cultural, sports and leisure activities in the evenings and on Wednesday afternoons.

Leisure centres function in all pre-primary schools and most primary schools. Children go for a half-day or full-day on Wednesdays and in the school holidays. In the summer, open spaces and short holidays are organised for children. Alongside leisure centres, resource centres enable children to start new activities, such as painting, photography, IT, music, gardening, developing their food experiences, and so forth. Free activities are also proposed in sixty or so primary schools on Saturday mornings (when there used to be lessons in Paris.)

Midday: about 6,000 permanent and temporary staff look after 100,000 children between 11.30am and 1.30pm (i.e. 1 adult per 15 children in pre-primary schools and 1 per 32 primary school pupils). The city devotes €10 millions for improving the quality of meals and supervision of the children. After lunch, there are activities, such as library time, book corner, and so forth.

Evening: in pre-primary schools, tea and recreation are provided between 4.30 and 6.30pm – a period of relaxation with play and educational activities. In primary school, 23,000 pupils are in supervised homework time between 4.30 and 6pm. After a period of relaxation and tea, the pupils go to classrooms to do their homework.

Blue workshops are proposed in primary school. They are an alternative to homework time. They function between 4.30 and 6pm in 30 sessions throughout the school year. The cultural blue workshops include acting, music, English, art, scientific culture and photography; the sports blue workshops are for 12 to 20 children for collective sports (football, basket ball, flag football, volley ball, handball, and so forth); racket sports (tennis, badminton, table tennis); combat sports (judo, karate, fencing, wrestling, and so forth); individual sports (roller skating, gymnastics, swimming, and so forth); circus, dancing and board games (chess, draughts, etc.). There are 830 cultural workshops and 1,460 sports workshops in 345 schools. Non-profit organisations (in line with the 1901 law) organise these activities with the agreement of Paris city services.

Wednesdays and short holidays: leisure centres are open in most schools (pre-primary, primary and some collèges for teenagers between 14-16 years). They provide artistic, cultural and outdoor sports activities. Sometimes, there are modelling, video, acting, biking, and so forth. Some activities can be outside school, such as picnics in forests, museum visits, cultural outings, and so forth.

Every other Saturday morning: some schools are open to children on Saturday mornings, because previously, there was a five-day week (no lessons on Wednesdays, but lessons on Saturday mornings). In order to meet the needs of parents who are unable to look after their children then, some centres are open.

Summer: 282 leisure centres and 23 nature areas look after children between 3 and 13, from the end of June to mid-August. There are play, cultural and sports projects (making a film, play, sports in nature areas, and so forth). Some centres even propose 2 to 5 day stays at the seaside or in the countryside. Arc-en-ciel (Rainbow) holidays enable 7,000 young people between 4 and 16 years to leave Paris for stays of between 5 and 12 days

3.2.3 Flexibility

In Paris, out-of-school hours concern time when there are no lessons during the period from 8.20am to 6.30pm for children in pre-primary school; and from 8.20am to 6pm for primary school children. Children can attend for half-days during short holidays and on Wednesdays.

But, surprisingly, more flexible schedules sometimes exist in rural, more isolated villages, for example, the village of Montrodât in Lozère, in the centre of France, out-of-school care is

provided between 7am and 7pm, i.e. during 12 hours per day. Normally, children do not stay for the whole period – needs are above all in the morning (but sometimes in the evening, depending on parents’ work schedules). However, nothing prevents a child from staying 12 hours in school, though it happens rarely. Such flexibility that is offered in this school is exceptional – the village council wanted to develop out-of-school provision, and the choice is perhaps linked to the fact that the Mayor is a teacher.

Out-of-school provision in the village of Montrodât, 1,186 inhabitants, according to Monique and Patricia

The school has 6 pre-primary and primary classes with 114 pupils from 78 families.

The Leisure Centre Without Accommodation (Centre de Loisirs Sans Hébergement, CLSH) in Montrodât is open for children between the ages of 3 and 12 years, who live in the village. With the agreement of the département council, the school also accepts **two year olds**. And even though schools no longer have catchment areas, it accepts children from other villages, only if the Mayors of Montrodât and of the village where the family lives agree – it is negotiated and argued about, with the Mayor of the other village often refusing to contribute financially, and with it being impossible to organise a school bus.

Opening hours of the CLSH:

Days with lessons – Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, as well as Wednesdays when there are catching-up sessions: **from 7 to 8.45am and from 4.30 to 7pm.**

The morning sessions are attended by between 15 and 24 children (i.e. between 13% and 21%) and the evening sessions involve between 10 and 15 children (between 9% and 13%), without prior registration required and for the length of time that suits parents. In general, variations are linked to parents’ work schedules – they either work early or late.

Wednesdays from 7am to 7 pm for 6 children on average (5%).

For short holidays (except Christmas): from 7.30am to 7pm, together with the CLSH of a neighbouring school and Montrodât families take their children to the other villages: 12 children on average (10%).

One activities organiser with the BAFA diploma looks after the children. The village council considers that if there is an emergency, there is always someone else in the school to help (cleaner, teacher or canteen staff). During school holidays, there are two activities organisers, one from each village.

There are no constraints or obligations for parents using the out-of-school services and canteen.

Morning and evening out-of-school care is available without prior registration. The activities organiser is present and waits for children.

Wednesdays are also without prior registration, but usually parents let the organiser know and she can leave if there are no children left.

Prior registration is required for the short holidays, and a programme is proposed.

Canteen meals are available and signed up for on a daily basis

Thus, school and out-of-school provision in France covers a big amplitude of time: from 3 to 16 years, children can be at school for almost 10 hours per day (and sometimes even 12 hours); everyday, sometimes including Saturday mornings (every other Saturday morning in Paris); and school holidays. This gives parents a big margin of flexibility, even if for children such flexibility is sometimes difficult (getting up very early 6 days a week, with little real rest, even if the centres provide leisure activities). This is why another very experimental solution has been proposed, called “relay care”, which makes it possible to have a qualified carer in children’s homes, thus children do not have to leave and return home at atypical times.

Box 3: GEPETTO⁴

GEPETTO is a system that has been baptised “Relay Care” by the CNAF⁵, and is in addition to existing forms of childcare, namely childminders, crèches, out-of-school provision and home helps. This form of care is available 7 days a week, 24

⁴ Garde d’enfants pour l’équilibre du temps professionnel, du temps familial et son organisation: Childcare promoting work and family balance and organisation

⁵ Caisse nationale d’allocations familiales: National Family Allowance Fund ???

hours a day at parents' homes for children between 0 and 13 years. Families pay according to their income. The staff are qualified in childcare⁶ and are in addition to existing local care provision. To date, "GEPETTO Relay Care" is part of the Contract regarding Children and Free Time (Contrat Enfance et Temps Libre) of town councils that benefit from this innovative kind of care.

GEPETTO Relay Care is destined especially for families where parents have atypical work schedules (very early in the morning, late in the evening, at night, on the weekend, and so forth), or work or training away from home, and so forth.

3.2.4 Affordability

The cost of out-of-school care in pre-primary schools and primary schools is set by local councils, often with a sliding scale, in line with a family income splitting system (quotient familial), which is a tax system that takes into account size of family and income). But costs vary from place to place: in Paris, a day with a meal varies between €0.45 and more than €12; whereas in Montrodat, there is a single rate of €14, but is reduced if a family has several children at school. Lunch in Paris varies between €0.13 and €5, whereas it is €2.90 in Montrodat, regardless of household income.

Some examples follow:

Rates for leisure centres in Paris: Rates are applied in line with a quotient familial that is calculated by the Schools Fund (Caisse des écoles) of the arrondissement of the school, on the basis of the household's income. If one does not provide documentary evidence (tax papers), the maximum rate is applied. For families on the lowest rate, the **contribution per child is limited to €6 per month**. Thus, the cost per day including lunch (e.g. on Wednesdays) ranges from €0.45 to €12.72.

Rates for Paris leisure centres for the school year 2010-2011

Quotient familial	Rates	Leisure centres		Adventure holiday
		Per day with lunch	Per day without lunch or per half day	Per day
Less than or equal to 234 €	Rate 1	0,45 €	0,32 €	2,08 €
Less than or equal to 384 €	Rate 2	1,89 €	1,05 €	4,20 €
Less than or equal to 548 €	Rate 3	3,69 €	2,10 €	8,40 €
Less than or equal to 959 €	Rate 4	5,45 €	3,21 €	10,76 €
Less than or equal to 1370 €	Rate 5	7,83 €	4,28 €	15,05 €
Less than or equal to 1900 €	Rate 6	9,94 €	5,42 €	18,49 €
Less than or equal to 2500 €	Rate 7	11,32 €	6,52 €	19,57 €
More than 2,500 €	Rate 8	12,72 €	7,72 €	20,90 €

Rates for canteens in Paris: Until September 2010, each arrondissement could set its own price for canteen lunches. The School Funds (one per arrondissement) set their own rates. Thus, two families, who had exactly the same income, but did not live in the same arrondissement, could be charged for school canteen lunches at different rates. This meant that families with identical income could pay rates varying between €1.59 and €2.60. Whereas, the 40 Paris collèges charge the same for all pupils, regardless of their social situation. On 10 and 11 May 2010, Paris council adopted a reform harmonising prices of school lunches in Paris, and established a single set of rates for all 20 arrondissements. **There are now eight different prices ranging from €0.13 (Rate 1) to €5 (Rate 8) per meal**, thus the price of a lunch varies depending on family income and composition.

⁶ Young children's workers (Educatrices de Jeunes Enfants), Auxiliaire de Puériculture (pediatric assistants), Young children's Certificate of Vocational Aptitude (Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle, CAP Petite Enfance)

This single set of rates is a real measure of social justice, based on the quotient familial, and has put an end to disparity of treatment of Parisian families arising from where they live and it has readjusted the financial effort required of families, especially the least-well off. Thanks to this reform, **65% of Parisian families have had a reduction in the cost of their children's school lunches.** This reform was validated on 17 December 2010 by the Administrative Tribunal. Obstruction by the Mayors of some arrondissement, who chair School Funds, in the 6th, 8th, 15th, 16th and 17th arrondissements, who had refused to implement the reform, was condemned. The Tribunal imposed implementation of the new rates within a period of two months. As a result, the families concerned have the right to request in writing that their School Fund refunds the difference between what they had paid since 1 September 2010 and the new rates.

The rates for school lunches in force since 1 September 2010:

Quotient familial	Rates	Price of a lunch
Less than or equal to 234 €	1	0,13 €
Less than or equal to 384 €	2	0,84 €
Less than or equal to 548 €	3	1,59 €
Less than or equal to 959 €	4	2,24 €
Less than or equal to 1370 €	5	3,55 €
Less than or equal to 1900 €	6	4,52 €
Less than or equal to 2500 €	7	4,80 €
More than 2,500 €	8	5 €

Rates of other out-of-school activities in Paris (Euros) according to Catherine Boulanger

Rates	Educational school trips	Supervised homework per term	Blue workshops per term	Tea	Arc en ciel holidays
	Per day	1 weekly session	1 weekly workshop	Per tea	Per day
1	1.15	2.10	2.10	0.15	2.05
2	3.47	4.20	8.40	0.30	5.20
3	8.11	9.45	16.85	0.65	10.40
4	9.48	13.97	25.80	0.95	13.87
5	13.06	18.31	34.43	1.25	18.21
6	14.55	20.65	43.47	1.35	23.79
7	15.82	22.81	50.60	1.50	33.58
8	17.26	24.18		1.55	46.28

Two typical examples follow:

- For a very poor family (quotient familial under €234 per month) with 2 children at school: out-of-school expenses are as follows (if both parents work fulltime or with atypical work schedules and no other possibilities than using out-of-school provision):

Expenditure for a normal month at school per child:

Lunches: $16 \times 0.13 = 2.08 \text{ €}$

Leisure centre on Wednesdays: $4 \times 0.45 = 1.80 \text{ €}$

Supervised homework in the evenings: $4 \times 2.10 = 8.80 \text{ €}$ but with an upper limit of **6€**

Teas: $20 \times 0.15 = 3 \text{ €}$

Total: 12.88€ per child, i.e. 25.76€ for two children

Expenditure for school holidays:

8 weeks during the year + 3 weeks in the summer:

Leisure centres: during the year, already with an upper limit of 6€; so only 3 additional summer weeks: 6€

Total per child per year: 10 months x 25.76 +6€ (summer) = 256.76€ per child, i.e. 513.52€ for two children

This covers annual care between 8.30am and 6pm from Monday to Friday, lunches, teas and holidays included (except for 5 weeks).

For a well-off family (quotient familial more than 2,500€) composed of two children and with the same working hours:

Expenditure for a normal month at school per child:

Lunches: 16x4.80= **76.80€**

Leisure centre on Wednesdays: 4x12.72=**50.88€**

Supervised homework in the evenings: 4x24.18=**96.72€**

Teas: 20x1.55= **31€**

Total: 326.68 per child, i.e. 653.36€ for two children per month

Expenditure for school holidays:

8 weeks during the year + 3 weeks in the summer, i.e. 11 weeks

Leisure centres: 55x12.72€= **699.6€**

Total per child per year: (10 months x 326.68) + 699.6 (summer) = 3,966.4€ € per child, i.e. 7,932.8€ for two children

This covers annual care between 8.30am and 6pm from Monday to Friday, lunches, teas and holidays included (except for 5 weeks).

Cost for families thus ranges from 513.52€ to 7,932.8€ for two children (i.e. a difference of 1 to 14).

But the share of income devoted to this expenditure is almost the same: a poor family with two children (with annual income less than about 6,924€⁷ plus family benefit for two children) **devotes about 7% of its income to out-of-school care; a well-off family (with annual income of over 88,500€) devotes about 9% of it to out-of-school care.**

How the quotient familial is calculated

When help is means-tested, the quotient familial (QF) is calculated in line with the family's annual resources and their number of tax units and determines whether help is provided or not. It is calculated in the following way:

$$\frac{1/12 \text{ of annual resources + benefits awarded by the Family Benefits Fund (CAF)}}{\text{number of tax units}}$$

Number of tax units:

Couple or lone person	2
1 st dependent child according to family benefit rules	0.5
2 nd dependent child according to family benefit rules	0.5
3 rd dependent child according to family benefit rules	1
Each additional child or per disabled child	+0.5

⁷ See below the method of calculating the quotient familial

Flat-rate prices at Montrodat (according to Monique and Patricia):

Out-of-school care: Every half-hour started is fully owed.

Mornings:

From 7 to 9am:	3 €
From 7.30 to 9am:	2.35€
From 8 to 9am:	1.70€
From 8.30 to 9am:	1.05€

Evenings:

From 4.30 to 5pm:	1.05€
From 4.30 to 5.30pm:	1.70€
From 4.30 to 6pm:	2.35€
From 4.30 to 6.30pm:	3€
From 4.30 to 7pm:	3.65€

For children who do not eat in the canteen, but come back before 1.20pm: 1.05€.

Wednesdays - hourly rate: 1.70€ + lunch

Short school holidays - daily rate including lunch:

1 child	14.00€
2 children	24.00€
3 children	33.00€

Rate for 5 consecutive days: 1 child 50.00€; 2 children 90.00€ ; 3 children 125.00€

Canteen: meal per child: 2.90€

3.2.5 Attitudes

In France, the principle of out-of-school care is well accepted, as there have been many full-time dual-earning couples for a long time already. Thus, local councils have contributed greatly to meeting families' needs. This is especially the case for time before and after lessons, but less so for Wednesdays, when families help each other out and parents (especially mothers) organise their working time accordingly. However, part of school holidays, especially the short holidays throughout the year, cause organisational concern for dual-earning parents. In fact, depending on income, care solutions obviously differ: those with low income use out-of-school provision more, whereas well-off households use mixed solutions, such as paid carers at home, activities to which paid third parties take the children, and so forth.

Reasons for using out-of-school provision: the most usual factor for explaining the use of out-of-school provision is linked to parents' work. When one of the parents is at home (economically inactive or unemployed), it is used significantly less - three times fewer school children stay for school lunch or out-of-school care than the others. This can also be explained by town council policies, which - given the demand for school lunches - ask for proof that both parents are in paid work.

- When both parents work, the mother's work schedules – much more than those of the father – explain the use of out-of-school provision. Two-thirds of school children, whose mothers work full-time, eat in the school canteen (only 34% when mothers work less than 20 hours per week).
- Distance between mothers' home and work also has an impact: if they have to travel more than 20 minutes, use of out-of-school provision increases.
- If one lives in a town, and especially in the Paris region, there is greater use of out-of-school provision, whereas in rural areas, neighbours, friends and grandparents help out more often.

3.2.6 New developments

In France, the development of activities proposed in out-of-school provision is sought. Before, only “supervised homework” functioned, and one spoke of “supervised play” rather than “educational workshops”. Thus it can be said that the improvement of these services is one of the most important points. In big towns, not all needs are met - for example the blue workshops do not meet all existing demand and a system of rotation has been introduced, in order to enable children to take it in turns to attend.

There is an increasing use of associations in this area: some associations play the role expected of the education ministry and provide relays between school and families, who have long working hours.

Finally, the issue of teenagers is increasingly important – they are too old to be concerned by supervised play or homework, but too young to be on their own after lessons. However, many young people are in the streets, in groups, and are subject to many criticisms, accusations and complaints, especially in difficult neighbourhoods. There have been many attempts, but which are not always successful, to meet young people’s needs. Many associations try to cater for them, such as the Association for Dialogue and School Organisation, “ADOS” (“Teens”: Association de dialogue et d’organisation scolaire) in Paris, attended by 350 young people in a difficult neighbourhood of the 18th arrondissement, called the “Goutte d’or”. With a big team of volunteers, this association offers help with schoolwork, sports and cultural activities for young people (half of them are teenagers).

3.3 Debate

Parents still experience difficulties regarding organisation, including in a city like Paris, especially in the morning. Whereas many other local councils have provision for children before 8.20am, this is not the case in Paris. However, travelling time often means parents have to leave before 8.20, so they sometimes resort to informal solutions with neighbours, or the children go to school alone.

Certainly, since the existence of the Local Educational Contract (Contrat éducatif local: see below), local authorities are greatly involved in looking for ways of meeting parents’ needs. But the solutions proposed vary a lot, regarding both opening hours (morning or not; until 6 or 7pm) and cost for households. Questions are raised as to whether before- and after-school provision (and lunch) correspond to average cost or be on a sliding scale depending on households’ income? Should it take into account the size of household (with the cost being less per child in families with several children)?

We have observed that there are no single answers to these questions. The only feature that is the same throughout France is the role that is still played by parents, and especially mothers: even when collective solutions are offered for children, not all the needs of families where both parents work fulltime can be met by the school system. Often, mothers adapt their work schedules and organisation to meet these needs. If the household is well-off, other forms of paid care are used in addition to school and out-of-school provision. However, there is reason to worry about poor dual-earning households, who are not able to find a solution – their children are sometimes left to their own devices, with help from siblings being necessary, even amongst young children.

4. Childcare services: research, policies and challenges

Little research and few studies have been made directly on what is at stake regarding out-of-school provision. However, there is much discussion about school rhythms in relation to school failure, which is a big problem France. The school system is accused of not being adapted to children's needs, but more of corresponding with parents' wishes (free week-ends); teachers demand (long summer holidays); and even with the needs of tourism (distribution of school holidays throughout the year).

This is why in 2008 a reform of school times was proposed again (passing from a 5-day school week to 4 days). As the Minister of Education stated: "At a time when developed countries are seeking to compare the performance of their educational systems, France cannot remain insensitive to official rapports and international evaluations, which pinpoint each year the mediocre results of its primary schools. In a country that invests so much confidence and resources in its school system, it is inconceivable that **15% of pupils leave school today with serious gaps** in their reading, writing and arithmetic skills. Dividing by three – within in five years - the number of pupils who leave primary school with serious difficulties and halving the number of pupils who are a year behind in their schooling are the results I expect from the reorganisation of school times *and* new curricular for primary schools".

Indirectly, different objectives regarding policy on provision exist even if they are not explicit. One is promoting fertility, which is verified in France - the existence of care provision partly explains the high fertility level in France, even though not all needs are met. Another is enabling women to continue their economic activity, by helping reconciling working and family life is part of family policies. Finally, combating poverty is also an objective.

4.1 Labour market achievements

Indirectly, the French system contributes to parents' occupational activity, especially regarding provision for children over 3. Pre-primary schools are acclaimed as a means of ensuring children's educational development, and also enabling both parents to work. Moreover, the possibility for children to spend the whole day at school between 8am and 6.30pm, and even longer, every day of the year, except weekends, makes parents' access to full-time employment possible. Long hours are thus a strong point of the French system, even if they do not exist everywhere and depend on the resources of each town or village council.

However, the number and age of children always has a negative influence on women's economic activity. Thus, according to OECD data (familydatabase), the overall employment rate of women between 25 and 49 years was 77.6%, but only 64.9% for mothers of a child under 15, in 2008.

The presence of a child under 3 greatly reduces women's employment rate and one has to wait until the youngest child is over 3 and enters pre-primary school for economic activity rates to increase (over 70%). Likewise, the larger the family, the less likely mothers are to be economically active, especially from the 3rd child onwards, when only 43% are in employment. This represents great inequality between parents, for the situation of fathers is the opposite – their economic activity tends to increase in line with the presence and number

of children. Moreover, amongst lone parents, only 69.9% of lone mothers are in employment, compared with 81% of lone fathers (of whom there are few).

Employment rate of mothers according to the age of their youngest child, 2008

Child under 3	Child between 3 and 5	Child between 6 and 14
58.6%	71.3%	66%

Source: OECD Family database

Employment rate of mothers according to the number of children, 2008

1 child	2 children	3 children and more
77.1%	67.9%	43%

Source: OECD Family database

If one observes the model of employment amongst couples with children, one notes that more than 40% are full-time dual-earners, and 65% of couples work (but some of them (women) are part-time). In other words, in France, the majority of couples with children work; the model of an “income and a half” is less widespread, and this is also the case of single breadwinner (26%).

Employment pattern among couple families with children of age 0-14

Both parents FT	1 parent FT+ 1 parent PT	1 parent FT	Neither parent in employment	other
41.4	24.2	26.1	4.1	4.3

Source: OECD Family database

Moreover, it can be observed that parents’ working time is long in France and not always compatible with school organisation. This is above all the case of fathers (more than 30% work more than 45 hours per week). But more than 20% of mothers work more than 41 hours per week, which is much more than 24 or 26 hours of lessons. It can be observed that there is little difference according to children’s age: pre-primary schools provide the same number of hours for children from the age of 3.

Distribution of parents’ working time

	Parents with children between 3 and 5 years				Parents with children between 6 and 14 years			
	1-29 h	30-39h	40-44h	45+	1-29h	30-39h	40-44h	45+
women	21.8	55.9	11.5	10.8	25.4	51.9	11	11.7
men	2.7	48.3	16.3	32.7	3.7	47.6	17	31.7

Source: OECD Family database

Finally, the cost of before- and after-school provision is also widely taken into account – the State declares that “We will ensure that no child is excluded from proposed activities for economic reasons, *the aim being to go towards free provision*”. Thus, many activities are free of charge (e.g. personalised help with school work) and the system of the quotient familial is applied, the aim being to help poorest children. The contribution of different ministries is envisaged in these plans (ministry of education, culture, youth and sports, etc.); and also of local authorities, and finally of volunteers in associations and teachers.

4.2 Child development

One of the priorities of the ministry of education is to combat school failure and promote equal opportunities and development. The following is what the ministry of education said about the creation of local educational contracts regarding before- and after-school rhythms (1998): The way in which children make use of their time outside lessons is important for their **success at school, the flourishing of their personality and their learning to live in society**. It is therefore necessary to envisage – especially for those who experience most difficulty in accessing different forms of culture –organising this time in order to promote their harmonious development. (...) Activities proposed to children and young people aim, especially, at **compensating for inequalities, which still persist in access to culture and knowledge** and which often increase during the time when they are looked after neither by school or their family. But this declared objective comes up against many obstacles and is not totally implemented.

Thus, since the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year, there is a new form of organisation of school time in primary schools, during the day, week and year. Lessons are now from Monday to Friday, with Saturday given over to family time, as most families want to have two full days with their children. Time in lessons has been reduced from 26 to 24 hours per week with a total of 864 hours of lessons per annum (which is still well above the average number of hours of lessons in countries with the best school performances in international ratings).

Free help is provided for pupils who have difficulties at school – in addition to the 24 hours of compulsory lessons. It involves 2 hours per week of personalised help for children with difficulties, as well as courses to catch up in school holidays and also educational help during after-school provision for those with most difficulties (see the following point).

4.3 Social inclusion

School failure is often related to economic and social difficulties, and also the impact of foreign origins (difficulties of integration, language, culture, and so forth). In order to combat this kind of inequality, major efforts are devoted to adjusting access to school and after-school services. Thus, as far as cost is concerned, disadvantaged families have possibilities of accessing these services at very low cost or even free of charge. Moreover, educational priority policies mean that such areas are provided with additional resources and greater independence for tackling school, social and economic difficulties (“give more to those who need more”), thus breaking with the traditional egalitarianism of the French educational system. Educational Priority Areas (Zones d’éducation prioritaires, ZEP) concern 8,836 schools and collèges, distributed unequally throughout the country: 32% of Paris schools are in ZEPs, compared with 5% in the Caen educational authority. On average, there are 21.3 pupils per class in ZEPs, compared with 23.8 elsewhere. There are 890 ZEPs.

In terms of before- and after-school provision, three new types were thus proposed in 2008:

- Personalised help of two hours per week, which has already been described above. These additional hours are proposed for pupils who have learning difficulties. Personalised help is provided in small groups by the class teacher, and organised by the school itself.
- Catching up courses are proposed during school holidays for pupils in CM1 and CM2 (last two years of primary school), who experience difficulties with French and

mathematics. Three sessions are organised during school holidays: one week in the spring holiday, the first week of July and the last week of the summer holidays. These courses can be offered to pupils who already benefit from personalised help. They take place in small groups in schools and are supervised by volunteer primary school teachers (who are paid overtime).

- **Educational accompanying:** ZEP schools organise educational accompanying, in the same way as in collèges. It offers pupils, who so wish, help with their school work and homework, as well also cultural, artistic and scientific activities, or sports, or languages.

In 2008-2009, 147,014 pupils in ZEP primary schools chose to participate in these activities, as did 725,434 collège pupils

In collège, all pupils are concerned, but pupils of the 6th class (first year secondary school) have priority, in order to help them adapt to collège. This accompaniment is organised throughout the year. **Indicative is two hours, preferably at the end of the day after lessons, four times a week.**

In 2009-2010, 5,183 public service collèges introduced educational accompaniment. This represents 809,098 public service collège pupils, i.e. almost **33 % of the pupils in the collèges** concerned, and 172,169 pupils in public service primary schools in educational priority areas, i.e. **32.7 %**.

In collèges, 62.1% of the time is devoted to help with homework, 20.7% to artistic and cultural activities; 10.4% to sports and 6.8% to a foreign language. For primary schools in educational priority areas, help with school work represents 60.7% of time, culture 27.3% and sport 12%.

The average adult/pupil ration is 1 adult for 8 children (in collège and primary schools).

Amongst the 98,000 adults involved in educational accompaniment in collèges, 63% are secondary school staff (teachers and school librarians); 19.8% of educational and teaching assistants; 4.4% of registered organisations; 3.8% of other external adults (pensioners, student artists, local authority staff, pupils' parents, and so forth). Amongst the 21,407 staff involved in ZEP primary school accompanying activities, 71% are teachers; 9 % educational assistants; 8,3% external people; 7,3% are from registered associations.

Thus it can be observed that this form of free-of-charge institutional out-of-school provision is successful. It provides personalised help for children experiencing difficulties. But criticisms persist: firstly, school success of the most disadvantaged children has not really improved. Furthermore, this help is primarily directed towards school failure and less towards children's general development – can children who spend 6 hours a day in lessons plus 2 hours in personalised accompaniment per day real flourish? Should one not – as some people suggest – shorten the school day and leave time for more play, as well as cultural and sports activities in the afternoon? But such a change would come up against other obstacles – who would supervise such activities? How would parents manage if these activities are not in the school building and both of them work?

4.4 Debate

France invests in its childcare and children's education. OECD data place France at the top with 3.7% of GDP being devoted to families (services, benefits and tax credit). Various objectives are presented and declared: promoting equal opportunities, combating school failure, promoting mothers' economic activity and reconciling times, as well as maintaining a high fertility rate. These trends are very old, since it should be recalled that pre-primary schools existed already in the 19th century; even if in those days the objective was, above all, child development.

Unlike our neighbours, and certain family-centred associations, entrusting one's young children to formal or informal (because of lack of formal) care is socially accepted. On the contrary, France is often criticised for children's long school days, including from an early age, because childcare starts at 3 months (unlike Nordic countries, where parental leave is taken during children's first year). Moreover, women's paid activity has also existed already for a long time, and started off full-time. But this very positive image is in fact more complex: inequalities exist regarding reconciling work and school time: even though formal out-of-school provision - provided by the National education system and local authorities - is widespread, it does not cover all families' needs. The balance depends on them: either families have limited income, in which case mothers, above all, will seek solutions that enable them to ensure their presence with their children and also to do their work. Part-time work and atypical schedules (evenings and week-ends) will enable them to make this equation. Sometimes, for those on small incomes, there are no real solutions and children are left to look after themselves (e.g. some children sometimes have to get up and go to school on their own).

Or families are better-off and using informal help enables them to provide the "link" between parents' working time and children's school and out-of-school time. Some will not have access to out-of-school provision at school, but a baby-sitter, in order to go to the park and relax; or stay at home and rest after compulsory school hours.

In all, children from disadvantaged families, both of whose parents work, spend most time away from home (between 10 and 12 hours per day) and are subject to more fatigue...

5. Summary and conclusions

Demand for childcare is not fully met in France: besides the subject of our report, it should be remembered that the big problem concerns children under 3 – only about every other child has a solution of formal or informal care, and there is an estimated need of 500,000 additional childcare places. However, contrary to announcements, the legal right to childcare (droit opposable d'accueil des enfants) has not yet been introduced. It has been announced that there will be at best 20,000 additional places, and, on the contrary, there are attacks on the French childcare system: opening of "nurseries" (jardins d'éveil) for 2 to 4 year olds with staff who are not trained teachers, in order to limit access to pre-primary schools; fewer children between 2 and 3 accepted in pre-primary schools; an increase in the number of children looked after by childminders, and so forth. Moreover, parental leave that is covered by the Supplement for Freedom of Choice concerning Economic Activity (Complément de libre choix d'activité, CLCA) - namely a monthly benefit of 500€ - has not been reformed. But on many occasions we have denounced the discrimination that this measure leads to for poorest women. Thus, even before the problem of out-of-school care is tackled, needs regarding care for the youngest children should be assessed in detail.

As for children over 3, France is in a paradoxical situation: rhythms and school hours are denounced as being too heavy-going for children, while parents often have difficulties in adjusting their working time in line with school hours. It is indeed very difficult to take into account the interests of all the people involved, namely parents (especially mothers), children, teachers and the State.

Moreover, many objectives are given to out-of-school care and they are partly contradictory – ensuring that children flourish, combating school failure, combating social inequality and exclusion, promoting fertility, making reconciliation of times easier, especially for mothers, and enabling women to work.

How can so many different objectives and needs be taken into account? There are few margins for manoeuvre. First of all, there is the aspect concerning quantitative resources - making more flexibility possible in schools for parents, who have real organisational difficulties (e.g. generalising care in mornings and evenings, i.e. before and after school). This care should be free of charge for lowest incomes, and thus make it possible to avoid children being left on their own during these periods. At the same time, this care should be improved, especially in disadvantaged areas, where accommodation is small and does not enable children to rest sufficiently. Spaces should be arranged with this in view (rooms for resting, playing and “quiet” times). It could even be suggested that purpose-built rooms reserved for out-of-school activities be created.

There is definitely a big battle against school failure, but it is not sure that adding extra lessons is the only solution. Developing time during the day reserved for personalised help for these children would be more effective and would also make it possible for educational accompaniment to be devoted more to culture and sport, and thereby enabling them to blossom outside school work (reversing the times: currently 60% educational activities and 40% cultural ones - changing over to 60% for cultural activities and 40% for educational ones). But this obviously comes up against increasingly big budgetary constraints – the State has decided not to replace all civil servants who retire and this has led to the cutting of 16,000 jobs in schools. Whereas to meet these needs, it is necessary for there to be new staff.

Moreover, even if the State imposes rules in this area via educational priority areas, big inequality appears between local authorities regarding the way this issue is taken on board – some are aware of the difficulties met by families and their children and therefore devote staff to out-of-school provisions, but others do not see this as a priority (compared with developing sports facilities, for example). It is thus also a political choice.

As a result, families have to “manage” somehow on their own to meet some of their needs. We have identified that this leads to a risk of additional inequalities – related to gender, in that mothers’ working time and availability are above all required; and to social inequalities, in that well-off households can use a different kind of paid care, outside school hours.

6. List of references

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