



## Cyprus by Achilles C. Emilianides and Christina Hajisoteriou

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### Overview

Cyprus, the third largest Mediterranean island, is located in the north-eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, and covers a total area of 9,251 square Km. The Republic of Cyprus became an independent republic in 1960, when its Constitution came into force. The Constitution provides of two communities, the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot, as well as three religious minority groups, i.e. the Armenians, Maronites and Latins. In 1974 Turkey invaded the island and occupied its northern part. As a consequence, the Greek Cypriots were displaced to the government-controlled southern part of the island, whereas the Turkish-Cypriots were forced to move to the North. The Turkish occupation of Cyprus continues to the present day and therefore the Republic of Cyprus is prevented from exercising its powers over the occupied territory, and several constitutional provisions, which refer to the Turkish Community, are temporarily not in force due to the abnormal situation prevailing in the island. This paper shall refer to the areas

controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus only.

The Constitution provides that educational matters shall be exercised by two separate communal chambers: a Greek communal chamber and a Turkish communal chamber. However, following an intercommunal constitutional crisis in 1963, the Greek-communal chamber was self-dissolved, and its legislative competencies were transferred, pursuant to Law 12/1965, to the House of Representatives, while its administrative competencies with respect to educational matters were transferred to the newly established Ministry of Education and Culture (see, in detail, Emilianides 2019a). The Turkish communal chamber no longer functions in the government controlled areas due to the abnormal situation prevailing in the island. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (MECSY), as is now called, which belongs to the central government, is the exclusive executive and administrative body for education. It has the sole responsibility for educational administration, enforcement of education laws, preparation of educational bills, development of national curricula, syllabi and textbooks, regulation and supervision of schools and other educational institutions, and the construction of school buildings, maintenance and equipment of schools; the latter being a shared responsibility with Local School Boards.

The public educational system in Cyprus is thus currently highly centralised, leaving little space for school autonomy. Despite the fact that the island has historically had a multilingual and multicultural profile, cultural diversity has substantially increased as a result of the economic growth since the late 90s. Following Cyprus' accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004, there was a considerable increase in migration flow towards the country (Gregoriou, Kontolemis & Matsi, 2010). A wide range of new socio-cultural, political and economic phenomena, such as migrant and refugee waves to the island, globalisation, Europeanisation, and modernization, have led to constraints to the traditional centrality of the nation-state in education (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016a).

## *The legal framework*

Article 20 of the Constitution safeguards for every person the constitutional right to receive, and for every person or institution the right to give instruction or education, subject to such formalities, conditions or restrictions as are in accordance with the relevant communal law and are necessary only in the interests of the security of the Republic or the constitutional order or the public safety or the public order or the public health or the public morals or the standard and quality of education or for the protection of the rights and liberties of others including the right of the parents to secure for their children such education as is in conformity with their religious convictions. The right is safeguarded for any person, irrespective whether Cypriot or foreigner, to the extent that they reside in the Republic. The registration of students in schools is not legally connected with the failure of their parents to produce an aliens card from the Immigration Department which indicates the expiry date of their permission to stay in the Republic, or the duration of the permission or the arrangement to stay in the Republic (MECSY, 2018). To this end, migrant students can enroll in public schools, even if their parents do not have the status of legal migrants.

It is further provided that free primary education shall be made available by the Greek and the Turkish Communal Chambers in the respective communal primary schools. Primary education shall be compulsory for all citizens of such school age as may be determined by a relevant law. Education, other than primary, shall be made available by the Greek and the Turkish Communal Chambers, in deserving and appropriate cases, on such terms and conditions as may be determined by a relevant communal law. All such powers have since 1965 been exercised by the MECSY. The various statutory provisions have further extended the right to free education to all levels of education, including the University level, as far as public schools or universities are concerned. The Compulsory Education Law 24(I)/1993 provides that parents are obliged to register their children at a school within their educational region, independently of whether they reside in the

island legally or not; education is compulsory and free in public schools for all citizens until the age of 15 (and starting from the age of 4 years and 8 months).

Article 2 of the First Protocol of the ECHR further provides that no person shall be denied the right to education and that in the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. The ECHR and its First Protocol have been ratified in the Cypriot legal order with Law 39/1962. Article 18 §4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) further provides that the States undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents, and when applicable, legal guardians, to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions. ICCPR has been ratified in the Cypriot legal order with Law 14.1969. Article 12 of the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) further provides that the Parties shall, where appropriate, take measures in the fields of education and research, to foster knowledge of the culture, history, language and religion of their national minorities and of the majority, and that they shall, *inter alia*, provide adequate opportunities for teacher training and access to textbooks, and facilitate contacts among students and teachers of different communities. The Parties further undertake to promote equal opportunities for access to education at all levels for persons belonging to national minorities, while Article 13 of the FCNM stipulates that within the framework of their education systems, the Parties shall recognize that persons belonging to a national minority have the right to set up and to manage their own private educational and training establishments. The FCNM was ratified in the Cypriot legal order with Law 28(III)/95, which entered into force on 1.2.1998.

Furthermore, the Republic of Cyprus has ratified the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child with Laws 243/90, as amended by Law 5(III)/2000. Both the ECHR and the UN Convention have superior force to any municipal legislation. Article 28 of the UN

Convention provides that primary education shall be compulsory and freely available to all, and that the development of different forms of secondary education shall be made available and accessible to every child. Higher education should also be made accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means. The Republic has undertaken to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates, and to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and rights. Education should be directed, pursuant to Article 29 of the UN Convention, to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own; and for the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.

### *The structure of government-operated schooling*

The Cypriot educational system consists of primary, secondary general, secondary technical/vocational, some forms of tertiary education and university education. Government-operated schooling falls under the authority of the respective Bureaus, namely the Bureau of Primary Education and the Bureau of Secondary Education, which operate under the jurisdiction of MECSY.

The first level of Cypriot education system includes pre-primary and primary education. Pre-school education is divided in nursery and pre-primary education. Public, community and private nursery and pre-primary schools cater for children over the age of three. One-year pre-primary education is compulsory for all children aged 4 years and 8 months to at least 5 years and 8 months. This level of education aims at the

development of children's personality in an empirical environment that helps them to realise their potential, while enhancing their self-image. Primary education covers six grades and extends from the age of 5 years and 8 months. Large primary schools, in terms of student numbers, are usually divided into two cycles. The three lower grades form Cycle A, while Cycle B includes the three upper grades. Class sizes are limited to a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 30. Class grouping is age and ability-related; schools place children of the same age in the same grade and purport to form mixed-ability classes.

The second level of Cypriot education system includes lower secondary education, higher secondary education, and technical/vocational education. In more detail, secondary education is offered in two three-year cycles, High School (Lower Secondary Education) and Lyceum (Higher Secondary Education) or Technical/Vocational Education to students between the ages of 12 and 18. The syllabus includes specific disciplinary courses, interdisciplinary fields, and various other activities besides the syllabus. With regards to Higher Secondary Education, students have the option to either attend the Lyceum, or proceed to Secondary Technical and Vocational Education. Technical/Vocational Education prepares students to directly join the workforce by providing them with knowledge and skills, or to pursue higher education studies in the fields they are interested in.

### *Freedom to establish and operate non-government schools*

As already noted, Article 20 of the Constitution provides the right of all persons to establish and operate non-government schools. This right may in principle be exercised by both Cypriot and foreigners, who may establish and operate private schools, either for profit, or not for profit. All private pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools operate in accordance with the provisions of the Private Schools Law 147 (I) / 2019]. No private school can operate without first obtaining official approval by the MECSY, following the

consent of the Private Education Advisory Committee. Each private school should have operating regulations, which are consistent in structure, content and general philosophy with the corresponding regulations of public schools. It is notable that in all private schools, irrespective of their type, students are taught the subject of Greek Language in a manner corresponding to the specified number of teaching periods provided per week in the study cycles of compulsory public education. Private schools are divided into three types in comparison to the corresponding type of public schools:

- (1) *Of the same type*: Private primary schools of the same type are those in which the main language of instruction is Greek and which follow, without any deviation, the applicable conditions of the existing type of public primary schools (study cycle, timetable and curriculum, teaching staff qualifications, teaching methodology, student assessment, student support material, etc.).
- (2) *Of a similar type*: Private primary schools of a similar type are divided into Greek-language and other-language schools. Greek-language private primary schools of a similar type are those in which the main language of instruction is Greek and which, in addition to other activities or courses, follow activities or teach courses covering at least two thirds of the curriculum and timetable of public primary schools. Other-language private primary schools of a similar type differ from the above, only in terms of the main language of instruction, which is a language other than Greek.
- (3) *Of a different type*: Private primary schools of a different type are considered to be private primary schools which do not fall into any of the above types of primary schools and which adjust their curriculum and timetable according to the educational system of another country.

The right of religious communities to set up and operate their own schools is safeguarded. Furthermore, such schools are financially assisted by the State to the extent that they are operated, or largely attended by members of the major religious minorities

of the island (Tornaritis 1974). Financial assistance is further provided to Turkish Cypriots, or members of the major religious minorities who opt to attend private schools. Religions and creeds, other than the major religions of the island, may also set up and operate their own schools if they so wish, but will not be financially assisted by the State (Emilianides 2019b).

### *Homeschooling*

Cypriot legislation does not provide, or allow, for home schooling. It is, however, possible to provide home or hospital schooling for a specified period of time to children who, for health reasons, cannot attend the mainstream school curriculum for a long time. In the latter case, attending classes outside the school premises is considered as part of the mainstream school curriculum.

### *Public funding of schools*

Public pre-schools, primary, secondary and technical/vocational schools are state and not local institutions. Local School Boards, which are funded by MECSY, do exist but their role is limited to the construction, maintenance and equipment of school buildings. Therefore public schools are generally funded directly by the state through Local School Boards. As the state subsidises the salaries of school personnel, basic education (primary education and lower and higher secondary education) is free (MECSY, 2018). All teachers of theology in public schools are appointed by the Government, and are members of the educational service of the Republic. Thus, the Republic of Cyprus provides for all their salaries and pensions. Children belonging to the Turkish Cypriot, Maronite, Armenian and Roman Catholic groups are assisted by the State to attend private schools of their choice. The state therefore covers all fees and expenses of Turkish Cypriot pupils whose families reside in the non-occupied areas, and who attend private schools of elementary and secondary education. It has been standard practice to fully subsidize Turkish Cypriot pupils who reside at the non-occupied areas to attend the

English School, a private secondary school with high fees. For Turkish Cypriot pupils who reside in the territory that is not under the control of the Government and who wish to attend this school, a lump sum is allotted towards their fees. The subsidy is given regardless of the financial status of the pupils' parents. Free breakfast is provided to all Turkish-speaking pupils who attend public pre-primary and primary schools. Moreover, free breakfast is also provided to all pupils who attend schools which fall into the Educational Priority Zones; furthermore, free lunch is provided to all Turkish-speaking pupils who attend 'All Day' public primary schools, as well as to other children who have low economic status. The State also covers the expenses of the Armenian, Maronite, or Roman Catholic students who attend their own religious, ethnic, or national private schools, and provides state aid to private schools which serve the interests of minorities; such state aid may include the salaries of the teachers, as well as all expenses for the management of the schools (see in detail Emilianides 2019b).

### *Support for families*

In the Cyprus context, parental involvement in school decision-making for their children still remains low. Parental involvement mainly has the form of teacher-parent briefings on school work, child progress, and guidelines for homework (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016b). With regards to migrant families, research cautions about the inadequate character of migrant parental involvement and the exclusion of migrant parents from school decision-making and other processes because of the delimited conceptualisations of parental involvement as on-site presence and adherence to school demands (Theodorou, 2014). Therefore, the low socio-economic status of migrant families makes the additional provision of academic and emotional support to migrant families by the school an imperative need. Students enrolled at secondary education have access to free of charge transportation by buses to their schools. This facility is not available to students of pre-school or primary education.

## *Distinctive character of schools*

All state schools include religious education courses as part of their curriculum. Religious lessons given in primary and secondary schools follow the doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church. In secondary education, the courses are given by graduates of university schools of divinity, while in primary education they are given by the class teacher. Attendance is compulsory for Orthodox pupils; atheists or members of other religions, however, may be excused. According to the Curriculum, pupils need to be assisted in understanding the presence of God throughout history and the apocalypse of God as an answer to the fundamental questions of human existence; they need to experience the figure and teachings of Jesus Christ, and experience the Christian way of love towards all people, regardless of colour, religion and race. It is further provided that pupils ought to be introduced to the basic aspects of other religions and develop a critical attitude towards them, so as to become able to understand and respect the religious beliefs of others.

Orthodox education should provide pupils, according to the Curriculum, with the skills to appreciate the meaning of Orthodox ethics, traditions and prayer, and the beneficial influence of the Church to the development and progress of civilization. In addition to the above, Orthodox education should develop understanding of the collective worship of the Church, encourage students to participate in such worship, and teach them to respect the value and importance of the various ecclesiastical monuments. It should also promote each individual's responsibilities towards the continuation of the Orthodox faith and way of life (see in detail Photiou 2020). Teachers of theology in public schools are required to teach the content of such textbooks in order to promote the aims of the Curriculum; certain teachers of theology are even members of the clergy. Textbooks include topics from the Bible, both the Old and the New Testament, the history of the Orthodox Church, the lives of the Saints, hymnography and hagiography, as well as moral teachings (Tapakis 2003).

There is no possibility of religious education for members of other religions in public schools, with the exception of Maronites and Turkish Cypriots; the religious instruction of Maronite children who attend public schools is taught by Maronite priests who receive a monthly salary from the state. Similarly, where there is an adequate number, Turkish Cypriot pupils may be religiously educated in their mother language and in their own religion, even in Greek-speaking schools.

Parents (or lawful guardians, as the case may be) have the right to request in writing that their children be exempted from religious education if they are not Orthodox Christians. In the case of *Arvanitakis v. The Republic* [1994] 3 CLR 859, the school had refused to exempt from religious education, pupils who were Jehovah's Witnesses. The applicants had stressed that in the textbooks used in the classes, Jehovah's Witnesses are referred to as an anti-Christian and anti-social sect and are generally presented in a negative manner; however, their arguments were rejected by the school, which declared that attendance to all classes is obligatory for all students, irrespective of their religion. The Supreme Court had no difficulty in holding that the school had exercised its competencies in an unlawful manner. Exempting, however, only pupils who do not belong to the Orthodox Church might be held to be inconsistent with the right of parents to not disclose their religious beliefs, or the wishes parents who belong to the Orthodox Christian religion or their children to not receive doctrinal religious education. In September 2016, the MECSY sent directions to the schools whereby the possibility of parents adhering to the Orthodox Christian religion to request for exemption was left open, depending on the grounds to be substantiated (Emilianides 2019b).

Private schools may have a distinctive character, or teach religious courses, in so far as there is no attempt of physical or moral compulsion for the purpose of making a person change, or preventing him/her from changing his religion, which is strictly prohibited in all private schools. As a result, the compulsory religious education of a religion or rite different from that to which the pupil belongs is not permitted (section 25 §2 of the

Private Schools Law 5/1971). The right of religious communities to set up and operate their own schools is also safeguarded, and such schools are financially assisted by the State if they pertain to the major religions of the island. Religions and creeds, other than the five major religions of the island, may set up and operate their own schools if they so wish, but will not be financially assisted by the State. It could well be argued that there is a continuous effort to maintain the special characteristics of the various religious communities with regard to education. The Orthodox Church and the other Christian creeds operate Sunday schools, without State intervention; the right to operate Sunday schools, or provide private religious education in houses or other establishments is allowed for all religions and creeds.

### *Decisions about admitting pupils*

With regards to pre-school and primary education, students' registration takes place in January on specific dates for each year that are determined by the Director of Primary Education. The confirmation of the registrations is carried out on specific dates for each year also determined by the Director of Primary Education. There is, however, the possibility, after a decision by the relevant First Education Officer, to enroll children who for proven reasons were unable to register during the specified time. Each student is enrolled in the neighbouring primary school of his/her educational district. In secondary education, students enroll in the schools of their respective educational districts and they have to register within the deadlines set by the competent authority. Graduates of public primary schools are enrolled in the first grade of high school, after presenting a primary school diploma and a birth certificate. Other students enrolled in the first grade of high school are those who did not successfully complete this grade and have to repeat it and those who passed the qualifying written exams for this grade. Students enrolled in the other grades of the high school and lyceum are the ones who successfully completed the exact previous grade, those who did not successfully complete that grade, and those who passed the qualifying written examinations for these grades, after presenting a study certificate that proves the above conditions. Graduates of public primary schools, who

according to the decision of the Provincial Committee of Special Education and Training, were studying with the status of a student who receives a certificate of attendance, enroll in the first grade of high school after submitting the relevant Certificate of Attendance and the decision of the Provincial Committee. Students who come from private primary schools of the same type and wish to enroll in the first grade of high school, they can do so without taking a written examination. However, students who come from private primary schools of the similar or different types, including student who come from schools in other countries, have to take written examinations in Modern Greek and History modules.

Public schools are not permitted to choose what pupils they wish to admit on criteria other than those described above. On the contrary, private schools may choose their students on the basis of ability. However, same-sex schools are no longer in operation in Cyprus. There are also no schools that preclude the admission of students on the basis of religion, although schools belonging to religious minorities might give precedence to students who belong to these minorities. However, as a principle all such schools also admit students from other religions and creeds as part of a multicultural educational program. Problems of private schools not admitting students due to their religion do not seem to have arisen in practice, nor has there been any discussion of it in the literature. An interesting case, however, arose when the parents of students of the English School applied before the Supreme Court requesting that an order be issued, whereby the Court would order the English School authorities to declare as a national holiday the Turkish days of Bayram. They relied on a report issued by the Ombudsman dated 14 Feb. 2014, where she suggested that the Islamic national holidays are introduced as national holidays for all students so as to promote the principles of a multi-faith and pluralistic society. The English School has declared the days of Bayram as a national holiday for the Turkish Cypriot students only and according to the petitioners, this discriminated between Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot students of the English School. The Supreme Court rejected the application on procedural grounds; it was noted that such an order a

could only be granted against a public authority and since the English School is a private school no such order could be granted (*Constantinou and another*, Civil App. 304/2014, Judgment of 25 June 2015).

## *Decisions about staff*

Teachers in public schools of all levels of the education system, are appointed, transferred and promoted by the Educational Service, a five-member independent body appointed by the President of the Republic for a period of six years. The school itself plays no role in teachers' hiring, transfer to other schools or promotion. In 2017, a new system for the appointment of new teachers in the public educational service was introduced. The 'New System for Teachers' Appointments in Education' aims to select new teachers to be appointed in schools, on the basis of success in written examinations. The Examinations Service, which is a government unit that belongs to the Higher Education Department of MECSY, is responsible for implementing and supervising the processes of written examinations. With regards to teachers' promotion, teachers are assessed according to their academic qualifications, years of teaching experience, and their teaching performance according to their evaluation. The Education Service draws upon these assessments in order to promote school personnel. Additionally, candidates for promotion to the positions of deputy head-teacher and head-teacher attend oral interviews conducted by the Committee.

Regarding private education, school boards have the right to select and make decisions about their own staff. Nonetheless, under the current law, the head-teacher and teaching staff of private schools of the same or similar type must possess the same academic qualifications that are required for the head-teachers and teaching staff of public schools. Appointed head-teachers must have at least five years of experience in public primary schools or approved private primary schools in Cyprus or in another state. On the other hand, the head-teacher and the teaching staff of the private primary schools of various types do not have possess the exact same qualifications required for head-teachers and

the teaching staff of the public schools. However, the provision of a certificate of parity for their degree by the Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications is necessary.

In Cyprus, pre-school and primary-school teachers have been traditionally trained by the Cypriot Pedagogical Academy in the form of three-year courses. Since 1991-92, the Department of Primary Education of the University of Cyprus has replaced the Academy by providing four-year programmes. Teachers who had already graduated from the Pedagogical Academy were asked to attend in-service training at the Cypriot Pedagogical Institute to improve their professional qualifications and their salary scale. Nowadays, pre-school and primary-school teachers are also graduates of the pedagogical departments of all other private universities in Cyprus. Secondary-education teachers are graduates of the pertinent departments to their field (i.e. Department of Mathematics) of both public and private universities. The University of Cyprus is responsible for secondary teachers' pedagogical preparation prior to their first appointment. The University of Cyprus has been assigned on the basis of the 'On Public Education Service (Amendment) (No. 2) Law of 2007' the organisation and implementation of the Pre-Service Training Programme for Candidate Educational Officers of Secondary Education. The goal of this programme is the preparation of university graduates for teaching. This programme seeks to enhance their expertise and skills that will enable them to practically implement pedagogical theories in order to successfully practice their roles in the school and classroom. Last but not least, the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus is responsible for teachers' in-service training by organising in-school and out-of-school seminars for all the levels of the education system that run on either on a compulsory or a non-compulsory basis.

In so far as teachers of religious education are concerned, a person may become a teacher of religious education, called a teacher of theology, in secondary education, only so long as s/he has graduated from a theological academy of a Greek University, or from an

equivalent Greek Orthodox theological school. In the case of *Stavrou v. The Republic* [1996] 3 CLR 2796 the applicant was a teacher of religious education in the private school of the American Academy of Larnaca; the applicant was a Greek Orthodox Christian, holding a Bachelor in Religious Studies from the University of Lancaster. The Consulting Committee for Education had concluded that the applicant did not possess the necessary legal requirements for being a teacher of theology. While the recourse of the applicant was pending before the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Education decided that graduates of non-Orthodox universities may also teach in private schools, so long as they are Orthodox Christians and the teaching is in Greek.

What counts as service for a teacher of theology was examined in the case of *Ioannou v. The Republic*, App. 1131/2002, Judgment of the Supreme Court of Cyprus of 12 May 2004. According to Regulation 3 §1 (f) (i) of the Regulations of 1997 regarding Educational Officers (Determining Recognised Service for the Purpose of Appointment, Promotion and Remuneration), educational service also includes service in the respective Offices of Religious Elucidation of the Archdiocese or the Metropolises, *so long as it contains the element of guidance and teaching*. The applicant had been a teacher of theology in secondary education since 2002; however, from 1989 to 2000 he had been working in the Office of Religious Elucidation under the Metropolis of Paphos. The applicant requested that the Educational Service Committee recognize his prior service to the aforementioned Office. The Education Service Committee decided that such a service was, in general, of an administrative character; however, it considered that his service as teacher at Sunday schools, which had been confirmed by the local ecclesiastical committees, could be recognized as prior educational service. The Supreme Court held that the decision of the Educational Service Committee was flawed; not only teaching at Sunday schools, but also guiding young couples with respect to their potential marriage, delivering religious speeches, providing guidance to the youth in order to join the church's activities and solve their various problems, were all activities containing the necessary element of guidance and teaching provided for in the Regulations of 1997.

Therefore, prior service for the purpose of the Regulations of 1997 is not restricted to teaching theology.

### *Accountability for school quality*

The Inspectorate forms a distinctive characteristic of the Cypriot educational system. The General Inspector of Primary Education and the General Inspector of Secondary Education are responsible for the supervision, coordination, and appointment of school-inspectors, while they also organise and participate in major school inspections. Moreover, they actively participate in the organisation of conferences, seminars and training courses for school-inspectors and teachers. The Inspectorate is also responsible for the enforcement of educational laws and regulations by evaluating schools and teachers. Under the two General Inspectors, there are the school-inspectors, who are responsible for the supervision and inspection of primary, secondary, and technical/vocational schools, while they cooperate with head-teachers for educational management issues. School inspectors have a two-tiered role of providing guidance to teachers and simultaneously evaluating their teaching abilities by marking the quality of their teaching. Usually teachers are assessed every two years. Marks are used as indicators for teachers' promotions to the positions of deputy head-teacher and head-teacher. Therefore, marks play a substantial role in teachers' career development. Kyriakides (1996) argues that the inspectors' role as evaluators pertains to a climate of mistrust, which impinges upon their primary responsibility of supervising teachers to encourage school improvement. In periods of educational reform, inspectors are responsible for monitoring the implementation of new educational programmes or curricula by the teachers. Additionally, they provide advice to teachers on such matters. Notably, the development of educational policies and directives derives from suggestions made by the Inspectorate. School-inspectors must cooperate with teachers' unions, school boards, the Pan-Cyprian Confederation of the Parents' Associations Federations and research institutions in mobilising processes of educational change. Policy proposals are submitted to the Planning Bureau, which operates under the supervision of the

Ministry of Finance. The Bureau forwards its commentary on policy to the Council of Ministers that has the highest authority for educational policy making. Curricular policy development complies with the same procedure. The Pan-Cyprian Conference of Inspectors, teachers' unions and the Cypriot Pedagogical Institute collaborate over the development of curricula. They submit their suggestions to the Ministry's Department of Curriculum Development, which develops national curricula, publishes most of the textbooks used in primary schools, and produces curricular material on a non-commercial basis.

### *Teaching of values*

According to the national curriculum in force, education is oriented to the creation of a 'democratic and humane school' (MECSY, 2010: 6). Accordingly, the democratic school, as it is defined in the 2010 curriculum, is a school where all children are educated together regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, learning difficulties or any other characteristics (Hajisoteriou, Neophytou & Angelides, 2012). As such, the school is held responsible not only for the success, but also for the failure of each and every child, equal educational opportunities are offered to all. A humane school is a school that respects human dignity, prevents segregational practices, marginalisation and stigmatisation and prepares children for a shared future. In this context, a democratic and humane school is an inclusive school that celebrates childhood, acknowledging that this should be the most creative and happy period of human life (MECSY, 2010: 6).

In addition, over the last fifteen years, MECSY has paid attention to the cultivation of intercultural values through education. We should examine this turn *vis-à-vis* the yet-to-be-resolved conflict situation that still characterises the Cyprus context, Cyprus' accession to the European Union, and the increasingly more and more culturally-diverse character of Cyprus society due to migration. Nowadays, MECSY appears to envisage an education that may contribute to conflict transformation, empathy and peaceful coexistence amongst the diverse communities and populations residing in Cyprus

(Psaltis, Anastasiou, Faustmann et al., 2017). Despite such a turn, we should point out the predominance of Christian-Orthodox values in the curricula of public education (Emilianides, 2011; Zembylas, Loukaides & Antoniou, 2018). This has also been discussed above.

### *Special populations*

The Law for the Education and Training of Children with Special Needs 13(1)/1999 provides for the provision of education opportunities to children characterised as having special needs. According to Law 13(I)/99 children recognised as having special needs are the children who appear to face severe or special learning, functional or adaptive difficulties, because of body (including sensory nerves), mental or psychological deficiencies, and who thus require the provision of special education and training. Special Education and Training is provided in three distinct ways:

- (a) mainstream classrooms in public schools; children follow the official curriculum, which is nonetheless adapted to their individualised needs. Public schools are provided with the appropriate infrastructure and are staffed with the necessary staff. The Provincial Committee has the duty to decide on the type of support provided, possible exceptions, exemptions, modifications or adjustments to the curriculum, necessary building and environmental changes in the school, and on the provision of technological equipment.
- (b) special units in public schools; these should be located and integrated in mainstream schools and operate in comfortable, organised and accessible areas. The responsibility for their operation belongs to the head-teacher of the mainstream school in which they are located in. Children of the Special Unit are enrolled in the school register and in the student register of the appropriate, as far as possible, with their age class and attend general class activities and courses, depending on their abilities and personalized needs.

(c) special schools; these are staffed with the necessary teaching and other scientific and support staff (psychologists, nurses, physiotherapists, music therapists, school assistants/escorts, etc.) and are technologically equipped accordingly to fulfill their mission. Children attending Special Education and Training Schools are grouped together, according to their age and particular needs and other characteristics, and the specific education and training provisions that are necessary for them according to multidisciplinary assessments.

As already analysed above, MESCYS supports minority schools and students belonging to the major religious minorities (MESCYS, 2018, Emilianides 2019b) by providing sponsorships and grants, as well as subsidization of fees. With regards to education opportunities provided to students of migrant background, the official policy draws upon the paradigm of intercultural education. After Cyprus' accession to the EU, the number of migrant-background students, who are also considered as emerging bilingual students, has steadily increased. In 2008, the Council of Ministers ratified the official policy for intercultural education as the best means to promote migrants' inclusion. Moreover, since the school year 2008-2009, MESCYS offers intensive programmes for teaching the Greek language to migrant-origin students. The programmes also aim to reinforce migrant-background students' inclusion in mainstream education. An important milestone in Cyprus education policy on promoting *inter alia* migrants' inclusion was the launch of the programme of Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP) during the school year 2003-2004. The ZEP programme represented a strategic choice made by MESCYS to address issues of functional illiteracy, school failure and school dropout in schools with large numbers of immigrant students (Partasi, 2017). However, in 2015, the ZEP programme was replaced by DRASE (Actions for School and Social Inclusion), a programme which was co-financed with the European Social Fund and aimed at the expansion and improvement of the ZEP programme by further encouraging the social inclusion of vulnerable school pupils during after-school hours (MESCYS, 2016a). In 2016, there was also another significant turn in MEC's policy towards the paradigm of anti-racist education. MESCYS developed the 'Behaviour Code against Racism' and the

‘Racist-Incident Management and Logging Guide’ (MECSY, 2016b; 2016c). In the aforementioned policy documents, a racist incident is defined as any incident that: is perceived as racist by the victim or other person; cultivates hostility against all those who share the same trait; and seriously harms wider communities. What is specifically stated in this documentation is that both the Code and Guide do not aim to classify people in the categories of ‘racists’ and ‘non-racists’ but seek to support teachers in the identification of racist incidents, taking action to prevent and respond to racist incidents, and help develop an anti-racist culture in their schools.

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