

Parents speak out of English School's changing agenda

By Stefanos Evripidou

Cyprus.-

A GROUP of parents with pupils at the English School have organised themselves to protest against what they see as the increasingly left-leaning political agenda of the school.

An anonymous website, www.englishschoolnews.com, has been created by parents of pupils who are concerned about what they describe as the political pressure being put on their children by a team of teachers who impose their own views and those of a political party.

The English School started off as a mixed school with Greek and Turkish Cypriot pupils, and returned to being one again after the crossings opened in 2003. Given the content of the website and the gripes voiced, the offending party in question is likely to be the ruling communist party AKEL.

Speaking of the left-leaning group of teachers, the concerned parents accuse it of "an evident effort to impose its personal and party views on pupils regarding matters like the Turkish invasion, EOKA, ethnic origin in Cyprus, religion..."

They refer to the recent banning of symbols like the Greek flag and the cross, the teaching of national poet Vasilis Michaelides, the removal of religious icons from the classroom and the national anthem, all in the name of "multiculturalism", say the aggrieved parents.

It is argued that this politicisation in the classroom is having an adverse affect on the children, hence the creation of the Initiative of Parents and Graduates of English School to express displeasure at path the school is taking.

The website allows for parents to make their own comments, and post their own gripes. So far, four comments have been left, one discussing the teaching of Current Affairs by one senior teacher.

"For a whole three-month period, he tried to 'explain' that Turkish Cypriots are compatriots and have the same rights as Greek Cypriots and that they killed Greek Cypriots and that Greek Cypriots killed Turkish Cypriots. He also showed them an interview with a Turkish Cypriot whose family was killed by Greek Cypriots," said one commentator.

He added that personal views should not be brought into the classroom, whether they were right or wrong, and accused the teacher of abusing his position, suggesting the lesson be scrapped.

Another complained that in one school bulletin reference was made to the north and south of Cyprus, language which even the government did not adopt, said the writer.

A complaint was also registered that an AKEL member, Rolandos Katsiaounis was invited to speak at the end of October to celebrate Cyprus' independence, a month late and without the national anthem. He was

accused of bringing leftist ideology to the national problem.

The concerned parents call on the English School to leave policy and propaganda out of the school and call on all interested to meet on January 28, 7pm, at the Hilton Hotel to discuss their concerns.

Kyriacos Vasiliou, a chairman of the board of governors at the school, said he had seen the letters written.

"Before Christmas I sent an email to all parents, saying that I understand there are problems and differences of opinion and that those things will not be solved by sending anonymous letters to teachers which they had done.

"My door is always open to civilised discussion. I received no one since that time, no calls, emails, nothing."

Vasiliou said his offer still stands if anyone wanted to talk to him. He rejected claims that the board had been taken over by AKEL members. "There are 10 people on the board of which I am chairman and there may be two people who are AKEL."

Another member of the board who wished to remain anonymous said that there were three groups among parents and teachers at the English School:

"A left wing group with its own Trotskyite political agenda, on the end, a small group of parents who can't accept Turkish Cypriots studying at the school and in the middle, a silent majority."

Injured officer in surgery again

The 21-year-old police officer seriously injured in an attack by unidentified gunmen in Exarchia was under observation yesterday after undergoing a second operation to stop a stomach hemorrhage.

Diamantis Mantzounis was said to be in a critical but stable condition following the operation, which was carried out without complications, according to doctors. The operation was deemed necessary after Mantzounis started hemorrhaging from his stomach, punctured by one of the bullets. Medics said yesterday that the strain of the second operation would set back Mantzounis' recovery by a few days.

The 21-year-old has been in the intensive-care unit of the capital's Red Cross Hospital since Monday January 5 after being shot twice in an attack involving assault rifles and a hand grenade.

Of the eight people arrested on Tuesday during searches following the attack, one – in whose apartment police found a cache of weapons – was yesterday handed a suspended 15-month jail sentence.

Meanwhile, just one month after a police bullet killed a teenager in Exarchia, the European Court of Human Rights condemned Greece for a police blunder in which an 18-year-old died when an officer's gun went off by accident. A court ruling issued on Thursday decided that a fundamental principle of the European Convention on Human Rights, the right to life, was violated when Nikolaos Leonidis was shot at point-blank range during a bungled arrest in Thessaloniki in March 2000. The case – brought to the European court by Leonidis's father – had alleged that the police officer used "excessive firepower and that the Greek authorities failed to carry out an adequate, effective and prompt investigation into the incident."

The court ruled that the policeman – one of two plainclothes officers who chased Leonidis and two friends after suspecting them of robbery – should have put his weapon back in its holster before handcuffing the teenager.

The accused officer was acquitted of accidental manslaughter, while the victim's father received 80,000 euros in compensation from the Greek government.

'10% NSW childcare centres sub-standard'

Up to 10 per cent of NSW childcare centres are below standard in areas such as health, hygiene, nutrition, safety, staffing and protective care, figures from the government watchdog show.

More than 100 of the state's 3,298 centres are at risk of having their childcare benefit approval cancelled, The Daily Telegraph reports.

The newspaper said 188 long daycare, family daycare and out of school hours care centres had been given the "not accredited" status, while 105 had received the more serious "non-compliant" rating from the government watch-



dog, the National Childcare Accreditation Council, as of December 5, 2008.

A spokeswoman for federal Education Minister Julia Gillard refused to comment on previous

promises to "name and shame" centres that don't meet standards, saying the government was in the process of developing a range of reforms.

However, some parents attacked the watchdog's rating system, criticising the lack of specific information on

where centres are supposedly failing.

Maree Dennis, whose two children Isla, three, and six-month-old Aoife attend a centre in Sydney's north-west, said the government should tell parents exactly what centres fail on.

"There is a big difference between a small thing like whether they put a certain notice on the board or a major thing like hygiene, disease control or health and safety," she told the Telegraph.

"We want a system where parents can see how centres perform in each area, rather than just being accredited or not."

Childcare centre operators meanwhile told the newspaper that some of those listed in the serious category of "non-compliant" had met all quality requirements but simply forgot to pay annual registration fees.

Antenna TV boss has \$2.9 bil to buy media

LONDON -- Greek shipping scion and Antenna TV CEO Theodore Kyriakou has emerged as an unlikely potential investor in British media assets, telling the Financial Times that he has a war chest of 2 billion pounds (\$2.9 billion) to invest in U.K. and European media. He would not comment directly on a possible investment in ailing commercial broadcaster ITV, but said he is "not going to rule out anything." Shares in the broadcaster that airs "X Factor" and "Britain's Got Talent" have been steadily rising since mid-December despite falling markets. Kyriakou, told the Financial Times that he has 600 million pounds (\$874 million) in cash to invest -- with hopes of bulking that up via leverage to more than 2 billion pounds -- and will be looking for growth opportunities in the U.K. and Europe. "We are not about to rush in anywhere, but will wait to see what opportunities turn up in the next six to 18 months," he told the Financial Times. "We are looking for businesses with growth potential and we are looking at Internet, production, pay TV, free-to-air television and magazines."