

BACK TO SCHOOL

EDUCATION SPECIAL

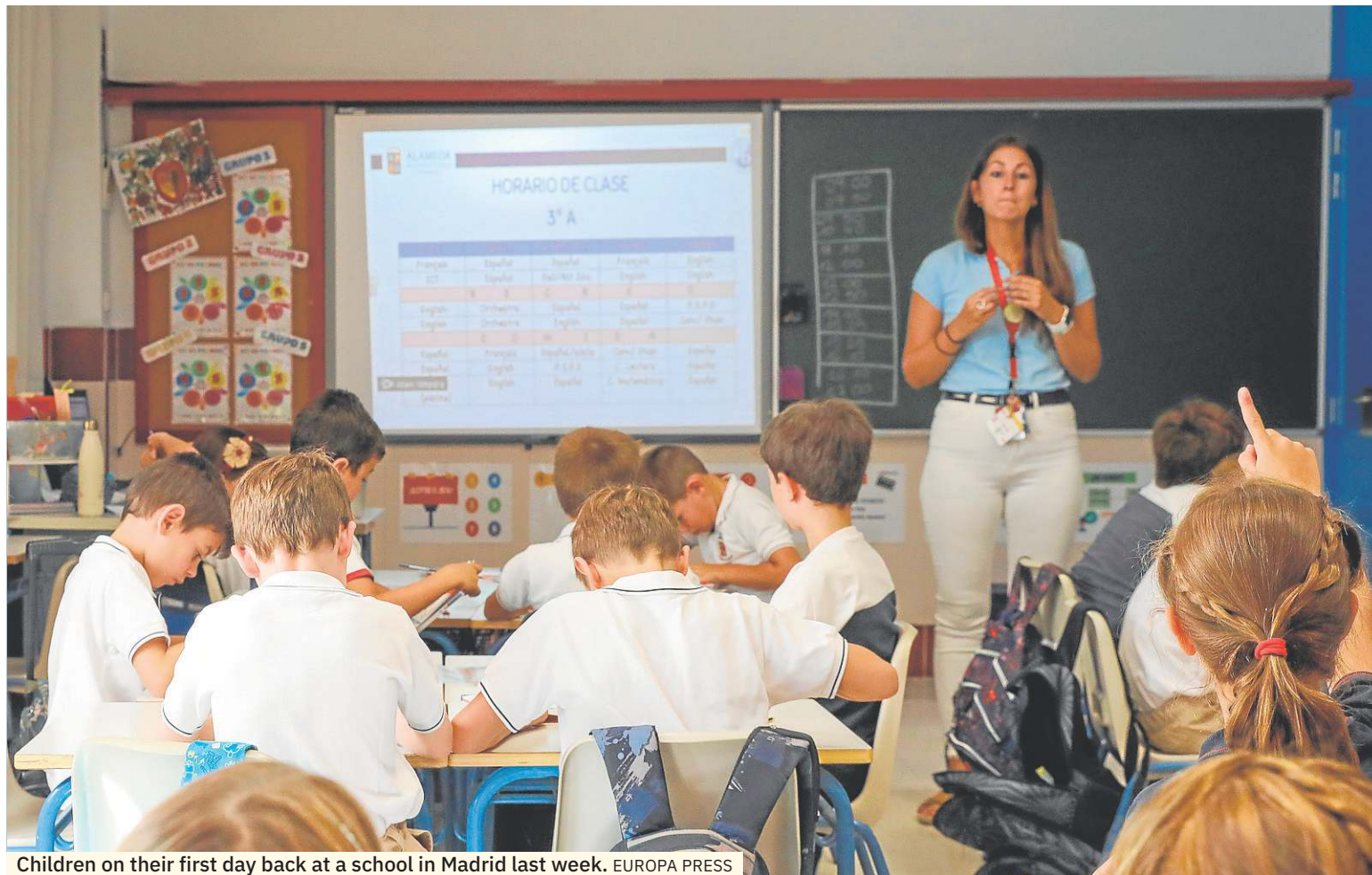
New term. Classrooms as they used to be: Spain drops all remaining Covid restrictions for schools and colleges **P2**

Report. Personalised education, less competition and a pace suited to individual abilities: utopia or future reality? **P10**

Nutrition. How healthy school dinners play an important role in the fight against childhood obesity **P14**



SCHOOL YEAR 2022/2023. The Ministry of Health has approved allowing all schoolchildren to interact normally in classrooms and eliminates social distancing in dining rooms



Children on their first day back at a school in Madrid last week. EUROPA PRESS

Parents urged to have their children vaccinated before the new term begins

The Andalusian health authorities have launched a campaign for more children aged five to 11 to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19 before the new school year begins. "The vaccine is the best method of prevention we have," the regional health minister, Catalina García, said at the weekend. This is the age group with the lowest incidence of vaccination in Andalucía. Only 50.9% of children aged five to 11 are completely vaccinated, and 60.7% have had at least one dose. This is much lower than the 12 to 19 age group, where the figures are 90.6% and 93.3% respectively.

"We're doing everything we can to ensure that as many children as possible receive the vaccine to protect them against Covid," said sources in the Malaga health care system, and nurses at health centres have been phoning parents to remind them how important it is that their children are protected from the virus. Schools have also been asked to reinforce the message.

Paediatricians have stressed that the vaccine is completely safe, and that although Covid-19 is normally mild in children that is not always the case and some become extremely ill.

"It's an important illness; if it can be prevented, so much the better. You have to remember that the immunity provided by the vaccine is very stable, which is why everyone is encouraged to be vaccinated," one of the doctors told SUR.

The dose given to children is one third of that administered to adults: 10 microgrammes compared with 30. The deputy minister of health in Andalucía, Miguel Ángel Guzmán, has also explained that facilities are being put in place to make it as easy as possible for parents to take their children for the vaccination, and he also pointed out that the Covid regulations in schools in the region have been relaxed now, as bubble groups are no longer necessary and masks will only have to be worn on public transport.

Spain drops all remaining Covid restrictions in schools and colleges

MALAGA

After more than two years of coronavirus restrictions, schools and colleges in Spain will leave the pandemic behind at the start of the new term, after the government approved last Friday, 2 September, a motion to end the restrictions that still remained in force in classrooms and school dining rooms.

The Public Health Commission, in which representatives of the Ministry of Health and the regions participate, has updated the document 'Prevention, hygiene and health promotion measures against Covid-19 for educational centres', and its new wording means a return to normality in the classroom.

Therefore, as the new academic year begins all age groups (including pre-school, primary, secondary schools and colleges) will now be able to interact in any situation and physical space. Nor will it be necessary to maintain a social distance in the dining rooms, where last term the preventive health measure was still being maintained.

Ventilation

The obligation to intensify cleaning in schools also ends, and now, sani-

tisation "will be carried out in the usual manner for the educational sector," according to the new protocol.

The text does maintain the recommendation of natural and cross ventilation in classes, but establishes that as long as the epidemiological situation allows it, "the need for ventilation to be permanent is eliminated. It is, however, recommended that there should be ventilation several times a day, between classes, depending on the timetable and the characteristics of the classroom," it said. In addition, the recommendation that schoolchildren be vaccinated continues.

The anti-Covid measures in schools have been progressively relaxed during the past year, and on 20 April the obligation to wear the mask inside the classrooms came to an end.

In Andalucía, the regional minister of health, Catalina García, had indicated a few days previously that the Junta was reviewing the exist-



ing protocol in schools to adapt it to the new conditions, and she also indicated that a substantial change was likely to be implemented this term.

Cautious reception

Experts generally agree that this is a good time to remove the restrictions, but some also sound a warning note. "This is going to be the first normal return to school since the pandemic and that is great news," said epidemiologist and paediatrician Quique Bassat, "but I do agree that caution is still needed on school transport."

Joan Carles March of the Andalusian School of Public Health also welcomed the measure in principle but he believes that not everyone has done their homework properly. "Many regions have still not dealt with issues such as installing CO2 meters or HEPA filters in classrooms," he pointed out, "and they should have maintained the ratios of pupils in classrooms at the same levels as the first year of the pandemic," he said.

Experts generally agree that this is a good time to remove the restrictions, but some have also sounded a warning note

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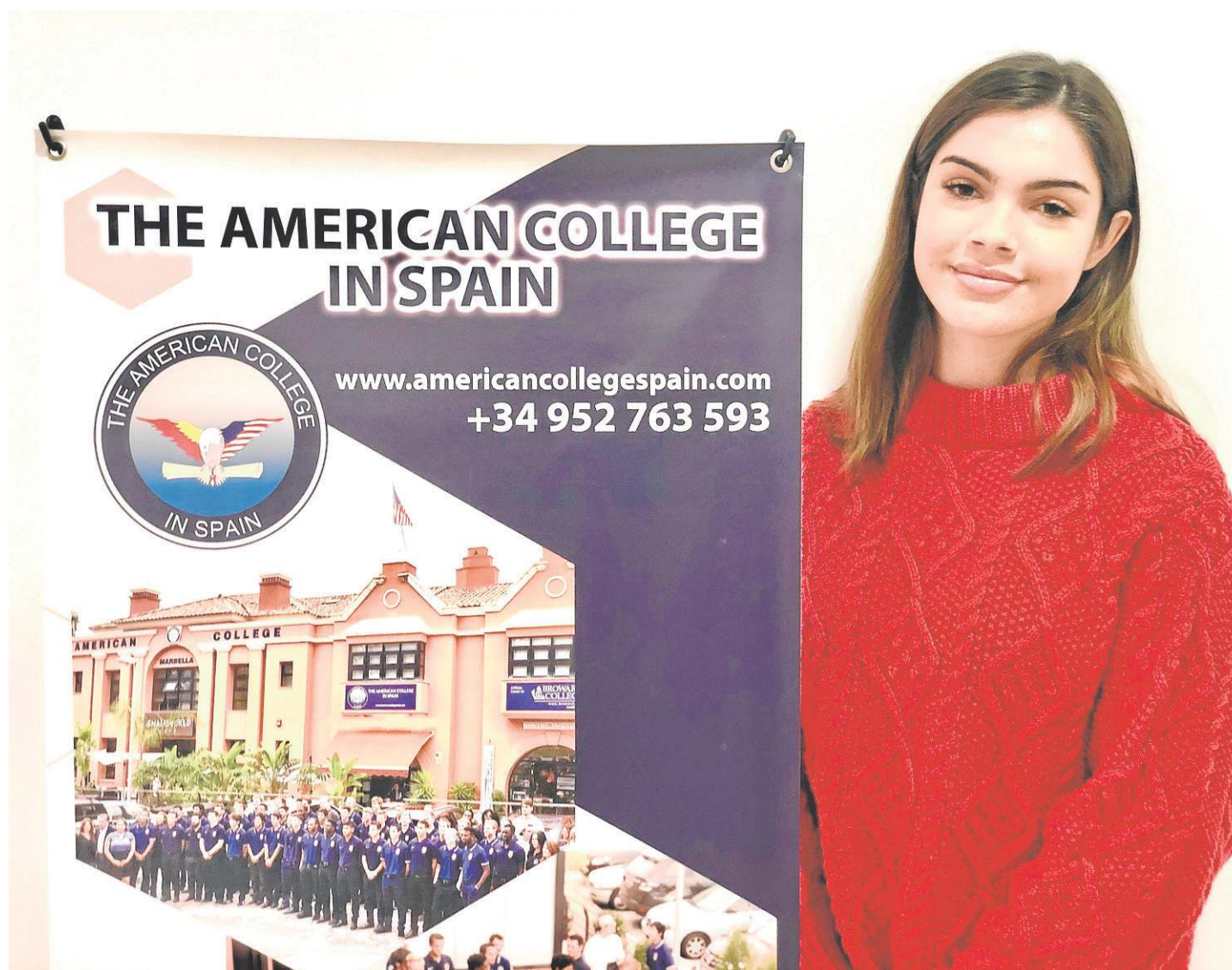
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Andreah: “The American College in Spain helped me tremendously to succeed as a high school student and to find what I really wanted to do in life”

Andreah, who is now 22 years of age has a full-time position in the human resources department of the very prestigious W Hotel of Miami

ACS, THE GATEWAY TO AN AMERICAN EDUCATION AND A BRIGHTER FUTURE

MARBELLA

SUR. Andreah was a typical teenager growing up in Marbella like many residents of the Costa del Sol, who now works for a prestigious hotel chain in Miami. At the age of 16 she enrolled the High School program at The American College in Spain. After two years she graduated and obtained a fully accredited high school diploma. At that point in time her parents decided she was not yet ready to move outside of Marbella to start her university studies.

The American College in Spain is an American institution which offers both a high school and a university program fully accredited in The United States. This program allowed Andreah to start her studies in Marbella enrolling in what they call the 2+2 University Program. Conducted in con-

junction and supervised by Broward College in Ft. Lauderdale, allows the students to complete the first two years of a university degree in Marbella and then trans-

fer to a university in the United States, from where they will obtain their degree.

Andreah spent only one year under the 2+2 university program

because ACS got her the opportunity to transfer earlier to Florida International University (FIU), one of the best universities in Florida and the entire US. According

to Andreah, “The American College in Spain helped me tremendously to succeed as a high school student and to find what I really wanted to do in life. A big advantage of the American system is that you don’t need to decide right away what you want to study. When I obtained my high school diploma, I was not sure in which direction I wanted to go but I was still able to start university”.

After completing one year of university studies in Marbella, Andreah realized that she wanted to study hospitality and tourism management. She was accepted as a transfer student at the Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, at Florida International University. She completed the last three years and in May 2022 Andreah graduated from this prestigious hospitality school, which is ranked as one of the top 5 in the country.

“Living in Miami and studying at FIU was like a dream come true. The facilities and the resources that this university offers are second to none but the most important for me was the training that I received by doing internships and working at some of the best hotels in Miami”. Andreah, who is now 22 years of age has a full-time position in the human resources department of the very prestigious W Hotel of Miami, which is part of Marriott Bonvoy, one of the largest hotel chains in the world.

According to Gayle Marco, Academic Director at ACS, “Andreah is the perfect example of how the program at The American College in Spain works. She obtained a high school diploma, enrolled in our 2+2 University program, transferred to the US, and ended up graduating from one of the most prestigious universities and hospitality schools in the world. Now she has a very good position working at a very prestigious hotel chain in Miami”.



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HEALTH. Back pain and even stunted growth can be the result of a badly chosen or overpacked school bag

Back to school: can children take the strain?

MÁLAGA

Almudena Nogués. The time has come for infants and juniors to go back to school and, of course, that means it is also time to get the backpacks ready. But, as they do at the start of every new academic year in the hope that parents will take note, health experts are warning that choosing the wrong type of school bag could lead to problems in the future.

The Spanish Society of Rehabilitation and Physical Medicine (Sermeef) says that in the long term, carrying a lot of weight on the back can mean a child or teenager “is shorter than they should be”, and there is a simple way of avoiding that happening: the weight of the backpack should not be more than 15 per cent of the weight of the child. They also recommend that backpacks have wide straps and, if possible, belt to go round the waist.

Helena Bascuñana, the vice-president of Sermeef, said it is important to remind people of these guidelines at the beginning of the new school year in the hope that they would follow the advice all the way through. Children often carry bags that are much too heavy, she said, and many of them end up with backache.

She explained that looking after your back is “easy” if the following advice is heeded when choosing or carrying a school bag: as mentioned above, when packed, it should not weigh more than 15 per cent of the child’s own weight; the back should be padded; the shoulder straps should be wide and there should be a belt to go round the waist, and a backpack



Carrying too much weight in a backpack can result in children being shorter than they should be. SUR

A school bag should weigh no more than 15 per cent of the child’s weight and have wide straps

should always be worn with both straps and not carried on one shoulder.

“It is also very important for children and adolescents to get into

the habit of planning what they are going to need the next day and try to put as little in their backpack as possible to minimise the weight,” Bascuñana said. However, she is not in favour of bags on wheels.

“When weight is involved it is always better for the back to carry it rather than pull it,” she said.

“It’s like the bags on wheels that people use for shopping. When children pull these types of bags they usually do so with one hand and the weight distribution is worse then, with the risk of causing pain in the back,” she explained.

One hour max in front of a screen

Dr Bascuñana also had some advice with regard to children and physical exercise, saying it is a shame that so many spend all day in front of some type of screen, because it is not healthy for them.

“A lot of boys and girls lead a sedentary life and they are overweight. That didn’t used to

be the case. An hour in front of a computer or other device is enough because it is harmful, including to the eyesight,” she said. And, with regard to physical exercise, she said this is extremely important.

“Ideally, all children should do some type of extracurricular sports activity every day. And that means seven days a week. But the very minimum should be three days a week, and what’s more, that should apply to the whole population, no matter what their age,” she said.

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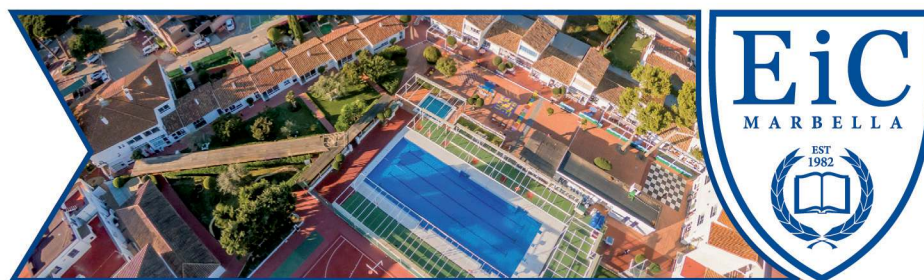
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REPORT. Experts at Unesco are recommending personalised education for every pupil based on their own pace and ability

Reimagining education: make it personal

MALAGA

Rocío Mendoza. The methods by which people are educated should not encourage them to compete, let alone promote a comparison among equals. A system of learning assessment which is based on numerical grades is not ideal for building a future of fulfilled individuals.

Contrary to what happens today in most classrooms around the world, schools should offer personalised instruction in accordance with the pace and abilities of each student.

Does that all sound utopian? Well, it shouldn't: it is the recommendation for the future of the education system made by experts at the United Nations Organisation for Education, Science and Culture (Unesco), who believe that an individual approach should be the guiding principle in schools and, among other things, that governments should invest in making this possible.

This is what has been shown in a report called 'Reimagining Education' which was published recently by the UN's Mahatma Gandhi Educational Institute for Peace and Sustainable Development, in which 30 experts from 45 countries have participated.

Work for this report began in 2019 and it has been carried out through global consultation with scientists and specialists in different disciplines including neuroscience, technology, education, philosophy, data and evidence and sustainability.

The rethinking of assessment systems is one of the most striking conclusions in the report, with the greatest impact on the present system, at least.

It says that those responsible for taking decisions in the field of education need to introduce policies "that focus on the potential of each individual and assess the individual learning process, instead of focusing on an assessment based on qualifications or merits and comparing pupils with one another".

The personalisation of education takes into account that every pupil learns in a different way and this is influenced by a combination of internal factors (biological, including neurobiological) and external depending on context (political, social, cultural, institutional, environmental, technological etc).

With this in mind, the report calls for "urgent efforts to be made to reorganise the financing of education and, at the same time, reorganise curricula, methods, research



Potential should be used in assessments, not how children compare with others, say experts. SUR

and assessment".

With regard to this aspect, Madame Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, a former Minister of Education in France, said the findings of the report will pave the way for formulating policies and taking decisions about future educational systems.

"Now more than ever," she said, "our world needs visions for a future that is more sustainable, resilient, fair and equal."

The support of digital learning

The two co-chairs of the ISEE Assessment Report, Anantha Duraiappah, who is the director of Unesco MGIEP and Nienke van Atteveldt, a lecturer at the Vrije University of Amsterdam, have also issued a statement about personalised education, saying that rather than a form or a system, it should be understood as a human right

The report suggests the rethinking of assessment systems and focus on the potential of each individual

of all pupils.

"More than 80 per cent of teachers, parents and students want exactly what personalised education - the holy grail of education - can offer. This is now possible with the support of digital learning and ethical artificial intelligence. We can ensure that every student receives the quality education which is their right, works at their own pace and

is their own benchmark for maximising their potential and leading a prosperous life," they said.

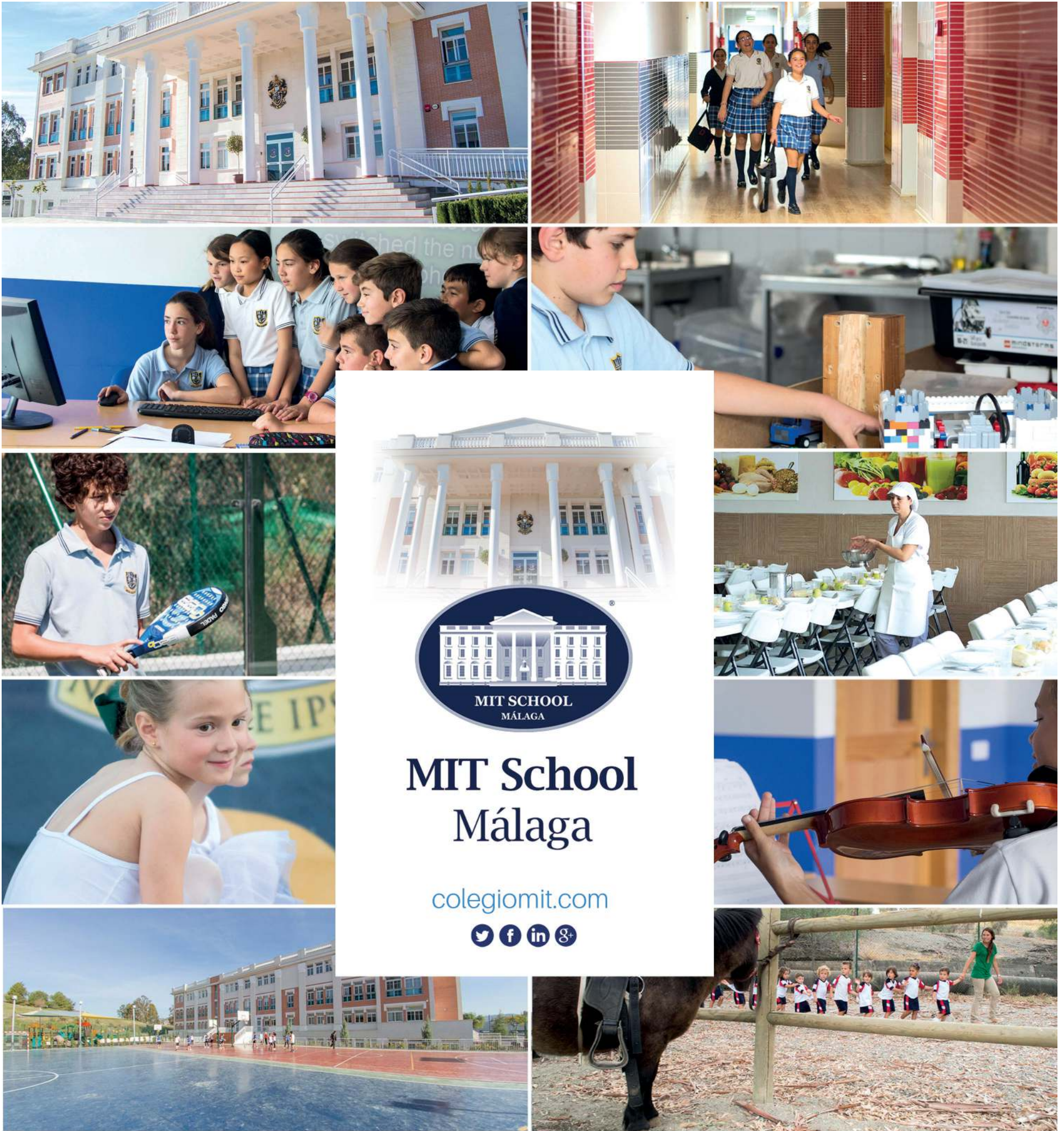
Sir Kevan Collins, president of the Youth Endowment Fund in the UK and a member of the advisory board for the report, said it is essential to establish a model which focuses on children's brains and how they function, not just to achieve a good education but also a prosperous society.

In this sense, he was referring to a model which focuses on cognitive-emotional learning, where knowledge and the socio-emotional state of the person need to be connected.

It is the children's potential which should be used, not meritocracy, to assess the success of students. "The potential should be measured by each individual's own pace of learning, based on a personalised course of tuition," the experts conclude.

A system to handle crises

The report comes at a time when the world is grappling with the effects of the Covid pandemic which have jeopardised the chances of achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Decades of progress are also threatened by conflict: 37% of refugee children of primary school age are not at school, only 24% have access to secondary education and 3% to higher education. The overview contributes to rethinking the education system to build others which are more resilient and sustainable and can weather crises such as these.



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An outstandingly caring, supportive ethos engenders a highly empowering learning environment, which enables the school to fulfil its challenging aims

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Fewer processed foods and more salads and fruit, among the recommendations. SUR

NUTRITION. School canteens can help to drive change in general eating habits in an attempt to fight obesity in childhood and later life

Healthy and sustainable school dinners - homework for the new term

MALAGA

MANUEL FRANCO. Nearly one million homes in Spain - that is, some 2.5 million people - have had to reduce the amount of food they eat due to a lack of money in the current cost of living crisis. Someone is said to be suffering from food poverty when they lack regular access to sufficient safe and nutritious food for normal health and development and to lead an active and healthy life, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Thanks to a study across Spain carried out by the University of Barcelona and the Daniel and Nina Carasso Foundation, we know that in July last year 13.3 per cent of households and families in this country suffered from food poverty, and more

than six million people, children and vulnerable families, do not have an adequate diet and do not eat even one meal a day.

In Spain, serious food poverty has doubled since the Covid-19 pandemic began. This study showed that in this country the right to adequate food is not guaranteed and we are far from achieving Sustainable Development Objective No. 2: zero hunger.

In addition to poor nutrition, child obesity is another serious public health problem. The health of the world's children and young people needs to be studied, understood and protected. Child obesity is a worldwide epidemic which can seriously affect physical, psychological and social health and development in

society now and in the future.

Data from the Gasol Foundation's PASOS study on child obesity in Spain showed that 14.2 per cent of the young population of this country suffers from this problem. In fact, the prevalence of child obesity has increased in the past two decades.

This is not just happening in Spain. The UK is another European country with a high prevalence of child obesity linked to very poor nutrition and high levels of social inequality.

A study of 3,000 children in the UK, published this summer, showed that 64 per cent of the calories in meals provided by school canteens came from ultra-processed foods, and eating such a large amount of ultra-processed foods only increases the risk of child obesity.

These days our understanding of nutrition within the concept of complex food systems comes from a perspective that takes into account not only health but also the social and environmental sustainability of this system, from production to distribution and consumption.

School canteens

The provision of school meals is a promising way of improving pupils' diet and health with a special focus on the sustainability of production, distribution and the way foods are prepared and handled.

The systems behind school meals can range from food subsidies and taxes, to the supply of healthy, sustainable meals and an improvement in the school nutrition system. Schools can become catalysts for systemic and multiple-stakeholder change.

Children and teenagers spend most of their days at school, making these places where they should not only learn but also be able to eat and socialise.

The European project called School Food For Change (SF4C) combines all these elements in order to have a positive long-term impact on the provision of school meals in Europe.

This four-year project, which is financed by the EU, aims to redefine what it means to eat healthily and sustainably at school, at the same time as addressing food education on different levels, as reported in an article published by the Science Media Center.

Serious food poverty in Spain has doubled since the pandemic began and we are far from achieving the objective of zero hunger



SchoolFood4Change includes multiple actors: cooks, catering suppliers and public buyers at local level, with the aim of creating a domino effect, impacting up to two million citizens in the 12 participating EU countries.

In line with the EU's Farm to Fork strategy and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the project develops innovative solutions and good practices for schools, suppliers of school meals, responsible authorities and legislators.

Diet for planetary health

To achieve the ambitious objective of changing the school meal system, the 43 partners involved in SF4C are taking a holistic approach at various levels: this involves developing innovative and sustainable food procurement criteria and methods, promoting diets and cookery with planetary health in mind and introducing a comprehensive focus on school meals.

What can we do to improve school meals?

European and Spanish central and regional administrations are mak-

At a continental level, the EU's Child Guarantee scheme encourages schools to offer at least one healthy meal a day

ing progress with the concept of guaranteeing health and adequate nutrition in childhood. For example, in the city of Barcelona, the Health Consortium and Public Health Agency are carrying out a project called Menjadors escolars Més Sans i Sostenibles -MEMSS- (Healthier and more sustainable school canteens), which promotes healthier and more sustainable child nutrition both at school and at home.

It recommends school menus with less red or processed meat and more protein of vegetable origin, and encourages the use of local and seasonal products. It also wants to incorporate more salad as an accompaniment and fresh fruit for desserts, and insists on the importance of using olive oil as a dressing and for cooking, as well as wholemeal products.

At a European level, in order to fight food poverty, protect the health



of the most vulnerable and prevent child obesity, the Child Guarantee scheme is being applied throughout Europe with measures which will enable schools to offer at least one healthy meal a day, with a special focus on those children who are in situations of poverty or at risk of social exclusion.

A fundamental right

Spain was one of seven EU countries in which an in-depth study was carried out, in which the University of Alcalá participated, on basic services of education, health, nutrition and housing in conditions of equality to combat child poverty and its consequences.

Consequently, data and scientific evidence have shown that school canteens are fundamental to improve the diet and health of the child and youth population and that they should always include a perspective of equality to protect child nutrition as a fundamental human right.

Offering at least one healthy and sustainable meal a day to our entire child and youth population should be an achievable aim for our society.

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- Ages 3-14
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