



# OECD Reviews of School Resources: Flemish Community of Belgium

(with the support of the European Commission)

## Main Conclusions

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**Hearing**

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# ***OECD School Resources Review***





# OECD School Resources Review:

## The overall project

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### Purpose:

Provide analysis and policy advice on how to distribute, utilise and manage school resources to help governments achieve efficiency and equity objectives in education.

### Resource areas analysed:

- Financial resources (e.g. expenditure on education, funding mechanisms, school budget)
- Physical resources (e.g. school network, school buildings, equipment)
- Human resources (e.g. teachers, school leaders); and other resources (e.g. learning time).

### The Review:

- Proposes an analytical framework to analyse resource use in schools; reviews the literature and collects information on country approaches to school resource use;
- Provides tailored advice to countries through individual country reviews;
- Offers comparative analysis in thematic reports (e.g. school funding).

**In collaboration with countries:** 16 countries, 10 country reviews; Belgium (through its Flemish representative) is the Vice-Chair of OECD's Group of National Experts on School Resources





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***OECD Reviews of School  
Resources: Flemish  
Community of Belgium***





## OECD Reviews of School Resources:

Flemish Community of Belgium (with support from the European Commission)

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### Structure of the Review:

- **Preliminary visit** on 4-5 September, 2014, by the OECD and the European Commission; **Main visit** on 2-10 November 2014, by Review Team.
- **Review team**: 2 OECD staff; 2 external experts (Gary Miron, Richard Teese) [with comments by the European Commission]
- **Focus areas**: funding of school education; provision of school places; the teaching workforce
- **National co-ordination** by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training – which prepared an informative Country Background Report
- **Meetings** with about 200 individuals representing wide range of groups; had 45 meetings; visited 7 schools in the municipalities of Anderlecht, Antwerp, Brasschaat, Heuvelland, Ieper and Vilvoorde.

**Country Review report available at:**

[www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm)





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# *Funding of school education*





# Funding of School Education – Analysis - Strengths

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- **There is a sustained high level of investment in schooling**
  - Recent changes to the system for distributing operating grants (2008) and staff (2012) have led to increases in the overall budget for schooling
  - Reflected in favourable conditions for teaching across schools (e.g. student-teacher ratios and expenditure per student favourable in international comparison)
- **The Flemish approach to school funding supports freedom of choice and school autonomy**
  - Parental choice (central to the Flemish philosophy of schooling) is supported by the school funding system
  - The approach to school funding is in line with a strong focus on school autonomy – schools use resources to fit their specific needs
  - Operational funding and staffing hours for each school are transparent



# Funding of School Education – Analysis - Strengths

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- **Choice and autonomy are balanced with a focus on equity in the funding model**
  - Funding system is designed to support equal access to educational opportunities for all students and compensate for educational disadvantage
  - Both the socio-economic characteristics of a school's student population and the locational characteristics of the school are taken into account
  - Used in a variety of ways: purchase of materials, extra-mural activities, remedial classes, support activities
- **The funding system provides some incentives for school collaboration and pooling of resources**
  - Operational resources are allocated to school boards, which provides opportunities for: purchased services to be shared by several schools; and for some re-distribution of resources across schools to account for special school needs
  - Incentives for school associations lead to greater efficiencies of provision: co-ordination of programmes; dissemination of good practice; sharing of resources



# Funding of School Education – Analysis - Challenges

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- **A lack of information on student learning outcomes makes it difficult to evaluate the impact of school funding**
  - Systematic lack of knowledge of how well individual Flemish schools work
  - Is there enough knowledge to guide policy at a school and Community level regarding opportunities and outcomes for different groups of Flemish children?
  - Need a strategy to assess the progress of different groups over their schooling
- **There is no empirical picture of resource outputs**
  - No measure of expenditure outputs at the school level exists – how much is spent per student at school level and in what? [depends on policies of school boards and school leaders]
  - No guarantee a given student will benefit from the additional resources he/she generates
  - Schools receive a budget but the real cost of running programmes and services is not reported [the school is not required to take into account the fiscal impact of its decisions]



# Funding of School Education – Analysis - Challenges

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- **The impact and effectiveness of resources for equal opportunities are not sufficiently monitored**
  - Need better empirical evidence on the impact of equity-related funding
  - Are resources for equity spread too thinly to make a difference among disadvantaged students?
- **Some schools have little financial flexibility**
  - Schools serving disadvantaged students face greater financial constraints – e.g. differences of parental contributions (no cap of parental charges in secondary schools)
  - The operating grant is basically the only source of financial flexibility available to schools – but may provide little flexibility (e.g. small schools)
  - Lack of flexibility in funding arrangements limits school autonomy – e.g. cannot trade teaching hours for student services or for building repairs [sometimes in contexts where they run small classes]



# Funding of School Education – Analysis - Challenges

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- **Concerns about the distribution of funding across levels of education**
  - Overall spending per student is significantly higher in secondary school than in elementary school
  - Two major factors: secondary teachers (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stages) are paid more and classes are often smaller in secondary education
  - Need to consider this issue in light of the impact of early interventions in education (e.g. provision of language support)
- **Differential resourcing of educational programmes in the secondary sector raises a range of concerns**
  - Efficiency and effectiveness of high investment in a fragmented course offer – expensive, especially in the context of the comparatively small size of Flemish schools and competition between schools.
  - Limitations of differential resourcing of programmes and courses as an equity strategy – weights for programmes a compensation for the more disadvantaged student population in TSO and BSO?
  - Higher investment in TSO and BSO programmes may not benefit the targeted groups – potential shift of resources from BSO to ASO and TSO, potential larger class sizes in BSO.



# Funding of School Education – Analysis - Recommendations

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- **Develop a Community-wide reporting framework for school funding**
  - Periodic in-depth public reporting of both resource inputs and student outcomes
  - Make more transparent the school funding arrangements – design, objectives, principles, structure and expenditure outputs.
- **Introduce a school-level reporting framework on resources and outcomes**
  - Enable schools to examine the fiscal impact of their resource and curriculum decisions
  - The costs of delivery of school programmes should be made more transparent
- **Rebalance the resource effort between educational levels**
  - Shifting some spending from secondary to elementary education
  - Need to compress socio-economic differences in achievement earlier: ending failure through early, sustained and targeted interventions rather than to manage the consequences of low achievement later (by fragmenting curriculum)



# Funding of School Education – Analysis - Recommendations

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- **Gather data on locally-raised funds and the goods and services that these provide**
  - Develop data on social needs at the school level
  - Locally-raised funds: parental contributions, donations, fund-raising activities
  - What services the extra resources provide
- **Examine the role of equity funding and consider harmonising approaches in elementary and secondary schooling on the basis of common objectives**
  - Improve the monitoring of equity funding
  - Equity funding in secondary education (GOK top-up of teaching hours) to be harmonised with equity funding in primary education (included in the funding of regular teaching hours) [Common approach to equity funding]



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# *Provision of school places*





# Provision of School Places – Analysis - Strengths

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- **The education system is built upon historically relevant and committed school providers**
  - Private school providers have a commitment to serving the “public good” and the broader interests of the community
  - Little socio-economic segregation across school networks
  - Ability of schools to tailor their services to local needs
- ***The system offers considerable choice for parents***
  - Assurance to families that a diversity of choices are available in all local communities
  - All applicants to be treated fairly
- **There is growing attention to managing the adverse impact of school choice**
  - A number of provisions to ensure equal access of families to the school of their choice [no selection by schools at entry point]
  - Role of local consultation platforms (LOPs) in avoiding socio-economic segregation across schools



# Provision of School Places – Analysis - Strengths

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- **Stakeholder participation shapes the organisation of the school offer in the Flemish Community**
  - Broad consultative process that engages all stakeholder groups at different levels: e.g. school council; links to local authorities; Flemish Education Council (VLOR).
- **There is willingness to increase co-operation across schools and school networks**
  - Traditionally little collaboration between schools beyond their networks
  - Political will to further enhance co-operation among schools, both within and across networks (e.g. school associations, local consultation platforms)



# Provision of School Places – Analysis - Challenges

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- **Demographic developments require adjustments to the provision of school places**

- School age population growing over the next decade
- Shifting enrolment concentrations: from rural to urban schools (demand for places becoming unequal)
- Proportion of students from immigrant backgrounds expected to grow

But Flemish education system is currently relatively well resourced (e.g. student-teacher ratios)

- **Inadequate and insufficient school facilities to meet current needs**

- Infrastructure is one of the most pressing needs experienced by Flemish schools – e.g. need to increase capacity to meet growing enrolments.
- Long queues and delays for renovating and building infrastructure
- Private sector schools often use operational funds to pay off infrastructure loans
- Limited examples of area-wide planning



# Provision of School Places – Analysis - Challenges

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- **Inefficiencies in the provision of school places in the Flemish Community of Belgium**

- **The small size of some schools**

Institutional features favour small school size: (i) principle of neutrality leads to a range of small schools in the GO! Network; (ii) Small schools receive additional resources; (iii) funding model allocates more teacher hours per student for small enrolment courses (lump sum package).

Difficult to close a school; few incentives for schools in different networks (or even within) to merge or collaborate.

Freedom of choice may lead to a continuous division of the school estate

- **The organisation of the study offerings and course options**

Supply of courses in secondary education is too fragmented – related to uneven levels of academic achievement as students leave primary education

- **The organisation of schools within educational networks and school boards**

Little collaboration and co-ordination across networks (and across school boards); duplication of services; two public networks

- **The extent of student tracking and grade repetition**



# Provision of School Places – Analysis - Challenges

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- **Concerns about the distribution of students across schools**
  - **Research on segregation by socio-economic and language backgrounds**  
Some evidence of segregation by socio-economic and language background; related to tracking; residential
  - **The role of school admission practices**  
A range of provisions to prevent school selection but practice might sometimes be different
  - **Factors influencing parental choice**  
More affluent families give more importance to reputation and academic results of the school; less affluent families give more importance to costs at schools
- **Concerns related to the provision of schooling for students with special educational needs (SEN)**
  - Enrolment of students with mild disabilities in special schools appears stigmatizing and inefficient (and expensive)
  - M Decree welcome but a number of challenges for its implementation (who decides, incentives, support for mainstream schools)
  - Current support for mainstreaming appears insufficient (additional teacher hours)



# Provision of School Places – Analysis - Recommendations

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- **Develop more integrated, system-wide planning for school infrastructure**
  - Careful analysis of the demand for places and an understanding of the current status of facilities – increase response rate to regular monitoring survey by AGIO
  - Strategic infrastructure planning for the school system as a whole – more co-ordinated and perhaps more centralised planning is needed
  - Incentives for schools to share facilities across networks at a local level
  - Consider the value and potential flexibility that could be afforded by broader public ownership of school facilities



# Provision of School Places – Analysis - Recommendations

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- **Address inefficiencies in the provision of school places**
  - **Review the current structure of school networks and school boards**

Explore options for improving collaboration and efficiency, e.g. single public network; reviewing the size of school boards; incentivising collaboration and sharing of resources across schools and networks;
  - **Provide incentives for schools to operate on an effective scale**

Central level analysis of the distribution of schools, especially small schools; sharing of resources; incentives for mergers; removal of financial disincentives for larger scale
  - **Rationalise the study offer in secondary education**

Less specialisation and more focus on the achievement of strong generic competencies, basic skills and personal development (Master Plan for Sec.ed.)
  - **Review the policy regarding the provision of philosophy-of-life courses**

Opportunity for joint provision by sets of schools; offer outside regular school day?
  - **Reduce early sorting and tracking of students within and across schools**

Delay the age of tracking (as planned in Master Plan); monitor tracking; early diagnosis and response to language gaps; reduce grade repetition; individual teaching



# Provision of School Places – Analysis - Recommendations

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- **Ensure equal access to school choice for all families**
  - **Ensure effective enrolment, information and transportation systems**

Systematically monitor enrolment outcomes; integrate online enrolment systems with information for parents on the available schools; assess need for transportation assistance
  - **Support intentionally inclusive practices**

Focus on reducing underperformance in primary education
- **Pursue careful and gradual implementation of the M Decree**
  - Need for more specialised staff in mainstream schools
  - Infrastructure adjustments
  - Conversion of some special schools into resource centres to support mainstream schools
  - Review some of the current resource allocation mechanisms (allocation of teacher hours)
  - Prepare all teachers to address special needs



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# *The teaching workforce*





# The teaching workforce – Analysis - Strengths

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- **Teachers value their profession**
  - Job satisfaction appears high
- **Profiles of teacher competencies provide a good basis to plan initial education and professional development**
  - Statements of basic teacher competencies and professional profiles
  - Essential mechanisms to clarify expectations
  - But do not seem to be widely known and used for professional development
- **Overall good provision of qualified teachers across the system**
  - On the whole, there is no teacher shortage
  - Good student-teacher ratios; class sizes
  - Specific instances of shortage (schools with more difficult socio-economic circumstances, especially in larger cities)



# The teaching workforce – Analysis - Strengths

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- **Teachers are recruited at the school level, which brings efficiency to the labour market**
  - Considerable autonomy for the management of the teaching workforce at the school level
  - Better match between individual teachers' characteristics and schools' needs
  - Specific teacher characteristics which align with the educational project
  - Sense of commitment of teachers to the schools where they are recruited
- **Schools are free to organise teacher hours as they see fit**
  - School leaders have considerable room to manage teacher resources
  - Ability to select the optimal distribution of teacher resources across classes and students and across roles and tasks within the school
  - The principle is to allocate resources where they are most needed
  - Particularly important in disadvantaged schools which receive extra resources
  - This gives teachers opportunities to diversify their roles in schools



# The teaching workforce – Analysis - Challenges

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- **There are difficulties in attracting and retaining new teachers**
  - The teaching profession is not attracting the most suitable candidates: top secondary graduates; males; individuals with an immigrant background
  - Teacher retention in the initial years of the career is a concern – more likely to work in a disadvantaged school; less job security
- **Concerns about the organisation of initial teacher education**
  - Concerns about the required minimum qualifications for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education, as well as about the short duration of teacher education
- **Inadequate preparation of teachers for dealing with diversity in the classroom**

Perception of a number of areas where there are preparation deficits:

  - subject didactics
  - teaching in multicultural environment
  - differentiation of instruction
  - supporting language learning in all subjects
  - teaching students with special educational needs.



# The teaching workforce – Analysis - Challenges

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- **Rigidities and imperfections in the teacher labour market**
  - Strict boundaries between school networks (and, sometimes, between school groups, boards, associations) – e.g. recognition of permanent status
  - Strict regulations in teacher recruitment which reduce the autonomy of schools – e.g. giving priority to more senior teachers
  - The recruitment and selection of teachers is not always transparent – lack of requirement to advertise available positions
- **Inequities in the distribution of teachers across schools**
  - Most experienced teachers typically employed in the least challenging schools
  - As a consequence more “teacher resources” per student in more advantaged schools



# The teaching workforce – Analysis - Challenges

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- **There are a range of fairness concerns in the organisation of the teaching profession**
  - Hurdles throughout the career are uneven
  - Differences in status and working conditions across educational levels raise concerns
    - creates a bias of resources going into upper secondary education; primary teachers with masters degree; secondary teachers with similar activities but with different qualifications
  - Distinct working conditions are not duly acknowledged – little flexibility of teacher incentives
- **Conceiving teacher employment on the basis of teaching hours raises concerns**
  - No recognition of the range of activities performed by teachers; limits teacher engagement in whole-school responsibilities
- **Teachers' opportunities for feedback and collaboration are limited**
  - Little guarantee of formal appraisal; little tradition of peer feedback; little collaborative professional learning; limited link to professional development



# The teaching workforce –

## Analysis - Challenges

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- **Lack of a career structure with different steps recognising roles and responsibilities**
  - Little formal recognition of the varieties of roles and responsibilities at the school
  - Lack of opportunities for promotion
- **Variations in school leadership capacity**
  - Variations of school leadership capacity
  - No systematic approach to school leadership training (except in GO! Network)
  - There are no national standards or common required competencies for school leaders (exist in GO! Network)



# The teaching workforce – Analysis - Recommendations

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- **Make the teaching profession more attractive**
  - Improve the status of initial teacher education, including raising the qualification requirements for levels below upper secondary education
  - Improve the working conditions of beginning teachers, granting them greater job security and enhancing their chances of working in less difficult schools
- **Improve the provision and status of initial teacher education**
  - Attract talented graduates from secondary education into teacher education – information and counselling; selection processes; financial incentives.
  - Enhance the status of teachers in elementary and lower secondary education – upgrading qualification requirements and levelling salary scales
- **Strengthen the preparation for all teachers to deal with diversity and special educational needs**
  - Mainstream elements of teaching diverse classrooms in general teacher education
  - Ensure relevant offer of professional development activities
  - Focus on special needs and language diversity



# The teaching workforce –

## Analysis - Recommendations

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- **Improve the transparency and effectiveness of the teacher labour market**
  - Improve the portability of statutory rights across school networks
  - Increase flexibility of recruitment regulations
  - Disseminate teacher vacancies more systematically
- **Work towards a more equitable distribution of teachers across schools**
  - Incentives to target individual teachers who work in disadvantaged schools
  - Work towards a more equitable distribution of expenditure for teacher salaries across schools – ensure transparency in this respect
  - Steps to make schools take responsibility for the cost impact of their hiring decisions and work within a defined budget for teacher salaries – e.g. through a normative for teacher salary (salary of an “average-experience” teacher) rather than on the basis of actual teacher salaries.



# The teaching workforce – Analysis - Recommendations

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- **Reconceptualise teacher employment on the basis of a workload system**
  - New concept of teacher employment on the basis of a workload, recognizing the variety of activities performed by teachers
- **Ensure that all teachers have opportunities for regular professional feedback and relevant professional learning**
  - Enhance pedagogical leadership in schools and the use of teaching standards
  - Encourage peer learning
  - Link school-based teacher appraisal to a professional development plan
  - Externally validate school-based teacher appraisal (by school boards)
- **Strengthen the capacity of school leadership**
  - Framework for leadership competencies; develop new leadership roles; refining leadership training; and providing appropriate resources
- **Consider establishing a common teacher career structure linked to teacher certification processes**
  - Range of career pathways, associated with roles and tasks in school in relation to given levels of teaching expertise
  - teacher certification process to regulate access to pathways and certify teachers as competent for the profession



## For further information

[www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm)



Thank  
You!