



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

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





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





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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





Funding of school education





Funding of School Education – Analysis - Strengths

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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 (2nd and 3rd 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

- **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

- **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]



Provision of school places





Provision of School Places – Analysis - Strengths

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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 n
 - 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

- **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

- **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



The teaching workforce





The teaching workforce – Analysis - Strengths

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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



Thank
You!