OECD Reviews of School Resources

Flemish Community of Belgium

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Paulo Santiago and Richard Teese

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Foreword

This report for the Flemish Community of Belgium forms part of the OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools (also referred to as the School Resources Review*, see Annex A for further details). The purpose of the Review is to explore how school resources can be governed, distributed, utilised and managed to improve the quality, equity and efficiency of school education. School resources are understood in a broad way, including financial resources (e.g. expenditures on education, school budget), physical resources (e.g. school infrastructure, computers), human resources (e.g. teachers, school leaders) and other resources (e.g. learning time).*

The Flemish Community of Belgium was one of the education systems which opted to participate in the country review strand and host a visit by an external review team. Members of the review team were Deborah Nusche (OECD), co-ordinator of the Review; Gary Miron (Western Michigan University); Richard Teese (University of Melbourne); and Paulo Santiago (OECD). The biographies of the members of the review team are provided in Annex B. This publication is the report from the review team. It provides, from an international perspective, an independent analysis of major issues facing the use of school resources in the Flemish Community of Belgium, current policy initiatives, and possible future approaches. The report serves three purposes: i) to provide insights and advice to the Flemish education authorities; ii) to help other countries understand the Flemish approach to the use of school resources; and iii) to provide input for the final comparative analysis of the OECD School Resources Review.

The scope for analysis in this report includes all levels of school education, from elementary through to upper secondary education. At the request of the Flemish authorities, the focus areas of the Review of School Resources in the Flemish Community of Belgium were: i) funding of school education; ii) provision of school places; and iii) distribution and utilisation of teacher staff. The analysis presented in the report refers to the situation faced by the education system in November 2014, when the review team visited the Flemish Community of Belgium.

The involvement of the Flemish Community of Belgium in the OECD Review was co-ordinated by Marie-Anne Persoons, Advisor International Policy in the Strategic Policy Support Division of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training. An important part of the involvement of the Flemish Community of Belgium was the preparation of a comprehensive and informative Country Background Report (CBR) on school resources authored by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training. The OECD review team is very grateful to the main authors of the CBR and to all those who assisted them in providing a high-quality informative document. The CBR is an important output from the OECD project in its own right as well as an important source for the Review Team. Unless indicated otherwise, the data for this report are taken from the Flemish Country Background Report. The CBR follows guidelines prepared by the OECD Secretariat and provides extensive information, analysis and discussion in regard to the national context, the organisation of the education system,

the use of school resources and the views of key stakeholders. In this sense, the CBR and this report complement each other and, for a more comprehensive view of the effectiveness of school resource use in the Flemish Community of Belgium, should be read in conjunction.

The OECD and the European Commission (EC) have established a partnership for the Project, whereby participation costs of countries which are part of the European Union's Erasmus+ programme are partly covered. The participation of the Flemish Community of Belgium was organised with the support of the EC in the context of this partnership. The EC was part of the planning process of the Review of the Flemish Community of Belgium (providing comments on the Flemish CBR, participating in the preparatory visit and providing feedback on the planning of the review visit) and offered comments on drafts of this report. This contribution was co-ordinated by Patricia de Smet, Country Desk Officer for Belgium as regards education and training, working within the 'Country Analysis' Unit of the Directorate for 'Lifelong Learning: horizontal policy issues and 2020 strategy', which is part of the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) of the European Commission. The review team is grateful to Patricia de Smet for her contribution to the planning of the Review and for the helpful comments she provided on drafts of this report.*

The review visit to the Flemish Community of Belgium took place on 2-10 November 2014. The itinerary is provided in Annex C. The visit was designed by the OECD (with input from the EC) in collaboration with the Flemish authorities. It also involved a preparatory visit by the OECD Secretariat on 4-5 September 2014 with the participation of Patricia De Smet, from the EC. The review team met with Ms Hilde Crevits, Vice Minister-President of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister of Education, and other officials of the Department of Education and Training; the Agency of Educational Services (AgODI); the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV); the Agency for Educational Infrastructure (AGIOn); the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels; the Inspectorate of Education; the Belgian Court of Audit; representatives of the main school umbrella networks (GO!, OKO, OVSG, VSKO); the Flemish Education Council (VLOR); teacher unions; school leader associations; parent associations; student associations; and researchers with an interest in the effectiveness of school resource use. Meetings were also held with representatives of the City of Antwerp Government and the Antwerp Autonomous City Enterprise for Education and the City Government of Vilvoorde. The team visited seven schools in the municipalities of Anderlecht, Antwerp, Brasschaat, Heuvelland, Ieper and Vilvoorde, interacting with school boards, school management, teachers and students. The intention was to provide the review team with a broad cross-section of information and opinions on school resource use and how its effectiveness can be improved.

The OECD review team wishes to record its gratitude to the many people who gave time from their busy schedules to inform the Review Team of their views, experiences and knowledge. The meetings were open and provided a wealth of insights. Special words of appreciation are due to the National Co-ordinator, Marie-Anne Persoons, and the co-ordination team for the Flemish Country Background Report which was organised within the Strategic Policy Division of the Department of Education and Training: Jeroen Backs, Head of Division, Katrijn Ballet, Isabelle Erauw and Marie-Anne Persoons. We are grateful to the co-ordination team for sharing their expertise and responding to the many questions of the review team. The courtesy and hospitality extended to us throughout our stay in the Flemish Community of Belgium made our task as a Review Team as pleasant and enjoyable as it was stimulating and challenging. The OECD Review Team is also grateful to colleagues at the OECD, especially to Francesc Masdeu for analytical support, to Eleonore Morena for key administrative, editorial and layout support and to Yuri Belfali for overall guidance.

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This report is organised in four chapters. Chapter 1 provides the national context, with information on the Flemish school system, main trends and concerns, and recent developments. Then Chapters 2 to 4 look into three dimensions of resource use that were defined as priorities by the Flemish Community of Belgium in collaboration with the OECD: the funding of school education, the provision of school places and the distribution and utilisation of teacher staff. Each chapter presents strengths, challenges and policy recommendations regarding the effectiveness of school resource use.

The policy recommendations attempt to build on and strengthen reforms that are already underway in the Flemish Community of Belgium, and the strong commitment to further improvement that was evident among those the OECD review team met. The suggestions should take into account the difficulties that face any visiting group, no matter how well briefed, in grasping the complexity of the Flemish education system and fully understanding all the issues. This report is the responsibility of the review team. While the team benefited greatly from the Flemish CBR and other documents, as well as the many discussions with a wide range of Flemish personnel, any errors or misinterpretations in this report are the team's responsibility.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AGIOn	*Agentschap voor Infrastructuur in het Onderwijs* – Agency for Educational Infrastructure
AgODI	*Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten* – Department of Education and Training; the Agency of Educational Services
AHELO	OECD Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes
AHOVOS	*Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs en Studietoelagen* – Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education and Study Grants
AKOV	*Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming* – Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training
ASO	*Algemeen secundair onderwijs* – General Secondary Education
BSO	*Beroepssecundair onderwijs* – Vocational Secondary Education
BUSO	*Buitengewoon secundair onderwijs* – Special Secondary Education
CBR	Country Background Report
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CLB	*Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding* – Student Guidance Centres
CVO	*Centrum voor Volwassenenonderwijs* – Centres for Adult Education
DBFM	Design-Build-Finance-Maintain Public-Private Partnership
DBSO	*Deeltijds beroepssecundair onderwijs* – Part Time Vocational Secondary Education
DG EAC	EC Directorate General for Education and Culture
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ESL	Early School Leaving
FOPEM	*Federatie van Onafhankelijke Pluralistische Emancipatorische Methodescholen* – Federation of Independent Pluralistic Emancipatory Method Schools
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GO!	*Onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap* – Flemish Community Education Network
GOK	*Gelijkeonderwijskansenbeleid/Gelijke Onderwijskansen* – 2002 Decree on Equal Educational Opportunities
GON	*Geïntegreerd Onderwijs* – Integrated Education
ISCY	International Study of City Youth
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IEP	Individualised Education Plans
ION	*Inclusief onderwijs* – Inclusive Education
IPCO	*Raad van Inrichtende Machten van het Protestants-Christelijk onderwijs* – Council of School Boards of Protestant-Christian Education
ISCED	UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education
IZA	*Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit* – Institute for the Study of Labor

KSO	*Kunstsecundair onderwijs* – Secondary Arts Education
LiSO	*Loopbanen in het Secundair Onderwijs* – Longitudinal Analysis Of Study Careers In Secondary Education
LOP	*Locale overlegplatformen* – Local Consultation Platforms
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
LVS	*Leerlingvolgsysteem vor Vlaanderen* – Flemish Student Monitoring System
NESSE	Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OGO	*Officieel gesubsidieerd onderwijs* – Grant-aided Public Education
OKO	*Overleg Kleine Onderwijsverstrekkers* – Consultation Body of Small Education Providers
OVSG	*Onderwijssecretariaat voor Steden en Gemeenten van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap* – Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities
PBD	*Pedagogische Begeleidingsdiensten* – Pedagogical Advisory Service
PIAAC	OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	OECD Programme for International Student Assessment
POV	*Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaanderen* – Flemish Provincial Education
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SERV	*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen* – Social and Economic Council of Flanders
SES	Socio-economic Status
SONAR	*Studie van de Overgang van Onderwijs naar Arbeidsmarkt* – Study of School-To-Work Transitions
SSL	*Steunpunt voor Studie- en Schoolloopbanen* – Centre for Education and School Careers'
TALIS	OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey
TIMSS	Trends in Mathematics and Science Study
TSO	*Technisch secundair onderwijs* – Technical Secondary Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VGO	*Vrij gesubsidieerd onderwijs* – Grant-aided Private Education
VLOR	*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad* – Flemish Education Council
VOOP	*Vlaams Onderwijs OverlegPlatform* – Flemish Education Consultation Platform
VSKO	*Vlaams Secretariaat Katholiek Onderwijs* – Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education

Executive summary

The Flemish Community shows strong overall achievements in international student assessments, with both a high share of top performers and a small proportion of low performers. But international assessment results also confirm the persistence of profound inequities within the Flemish school system, with socio-economic factors influencing students' educational trajectories and achievements. Paying attention to equity challenges will remain highly relevant in the context of current demographic growth and shifting enrolment patterns. The Flemish school age population is increasing, but not all parts of the Flemish Community are affected by demographic changes to the same degree. While urban areas are characterised by an above average and growing share of immigrants and young people, some rural areas are experiencing declining student enrolments, which results in the demand for places being unequal across the system.

The Flemish Community has one of the OECD's most devolved education systems with schools enjoying a high degree of autonomy and parents benefiting from free school choice. School autonomy is grounded in the principle of "freedom of education", which gives the right to any natural or legal person to set up a school, recruit staff and determine the educational and other principles of the school. Officially recognised schooling is organised within three educational networks and each school is governed by a school board. In principle, funding "follows the student", which lays the foundation for potentially strong competition among schools to attract students. At the same time, the Flemish authorities are encouraging school collaboration through collaborative partnerships between schools in the same geographical area.

This report analyses the use of resources in the Flemish school system, with a particular focus the funding of school education, the provision of school places, and the management of the teaching workforce. The following policy priorities were identified to improve the effectiveness of resource use in the Flemish Community.

Monitor and review the effectiveness of school funding strategies

The Flemish school funding system would benefit from the development of a Community-wide reporting framework bringing together financial indicators and student outcome indicators. To maintain high standards and to narrow the equity gap are goals that require Community consensus regarding fiscal effort and social inclusiveness. To build this consensus would gain from periodic in-depth public reporting both of resource distribution and student learning outcomes. Given the important share of public resources devoted to schooling, it is important to make transparent the funding machinery – design principles, structure and expenditure outputs.

Transparency could also be enhanced at the level of schools, by introducing a school-level reporting framework which enables schools to examine the fiscal impact of their resource and curriculum decisions. In particular, the costs of delivery of school programmes and the budget impact of resource and programme decisions should be made more transparent. This is in the context of the autonomy that Flemish schools enjoy and the limited accountability that balances this. To understand socio-economic gaps in the ability of schools to raise resources, it is essential that schools and education authorities have good data, both on social need and on locally-raised income.

Given the current imbalance of spending between elementary and secondary education, the Flemish authorities should also examine the potential advantages of shifting to more equal spending per student between elementary and secondary education. Policies of rebalancing spending in primary and secondary school are supported by research demonstrating that the rate of return on investment in human capital is greatest in the early years of school and lowest in the later years. If more progress is to be made in closing the equity gap, the Flemish authorities need to start a discussion about the potential benefits of stronger investment in tackling low achievement at the earlier stages of education. In this context, it would also be advisable to consider harmonising approaches to equity funding in elementary and secondary schooling along with consistent approaches to evaluate how schools use additional resources, and developing a repertoire of effective intervention strategies to guide schools in good practice.

Address inefficiencies in the provision of school places

This report identifies a number of priorities in addressing inefficiencies in the provision of school places and the organisation of the school offer. First, in a context of fiscal constraints, it appears difficult to maintain a school system which offers both small schools *and* multiple and complex course options. A central level analysis of the distribution of schools, especially small schools, across the Flemish Community would help policy makers obtain a more complete picture and reveal the scope and potential for school consolidation. Incentives for collaboration should be complemented with incentives for mergers between small schools, or at least the removal of financial disincentives for schools to operate at a larger scale and ensure an efficient provision of classes. In addition, the distribution and availability of programme options, especially in the vocational education and training sector, needs to be closely monitored in collaboration with social partners and local stakeholders. If patterns over time indicate limited interest in and relevance of specific study programmes, decisions could be made to phase these out.

Second, the distribution of school infrastructure is the result of historical developments, autonomous decisions by the educational networks and efforts to ensure parental choice, but it does not optimally accommodate the current distribution of students. More co-ordinated – and perhaps more centralised – infrastructure planning might be needed to ensure that decisions about investments in school facilities prioritise the needs of local communities. This should be combined with incentives for schools to share facilities across networks at a local level, including for special education. Regarding the structure of school networks and boards, the potential merger of the two public networks deserves review and serious consideration as it would help reduce overhead and administration costs across the two smaller networks. Within each network, it would also be beneficial to review the size of school boards to ensure each school is supported by a board with adequate professional capacity.

Third, an important source of inefficiency appears to be linked to a portion of students not progressing through the system as anticipated, moving to less demanding study programmes, repeating a year and exiting the system with insufficient competencies. There is a need to introduce a better Community-wide system to monitor the characteristics of students going into different tracks and avoid a disproportionate orientation of specific student groups in the vocational education programmes. This should be coupled with strengthened early diagnosis and response to language learning needs to prevent students being oriented to vocational tracks due to language difficulties. Reforms of the first stage of secondary education to create a more comprehensive stage of schooling, as planned with the Master Plan for Secondary Education, should be complemented with strategies to reduce under-achievement in elementary education and to attract and retain greater numbers of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in the general study programmes.

Fourth, although an increasing number of students have been enrolled in inclusive settings in recent years, concerns remain about the current provision of schooling for students with special educational needs. Special schools may be necessary for some students with moderate or severe disabilities, but the enrolment of high functioning students with mild disabilities in these schools appears both stigmatising and inefficient. New legal provisions for inclusion (the "M Decree") state the right intentions, but their implementation needs to be pursued carefully and gradually, as it requires infrastructure adjustments, specialised staff, changes to the funding system and adequate preparation and training of all teachers, as well as other players at the school level.

Ensure effective preparation, distribution and support of the teaching workforce

In light of the current demographic trends, it is important to ensure that well qualified candidates enter the teaching profession at an adequate rate. Even if there appears to be no overall shortage of teachers, it is important for the school system to ensure a given rate of teacher renewal so the school system is continuously provided with new ideas and perspectives. It is also important that effective beginning teachers are retained in the profession. Responding to future teacher needs does not necessarily involve hiring a greater number of teachers but instead finding ways to better match teacher resources to student needs, improving the retention of effective beginning teachers, and enhancing the mobility of teachers across the system so that instances of shortage are more easily addressed.

In order to make initial teacher education attractive to high achieving graduates from secondary education, it is important to develop targeted strategies, such as information, assessment and counselling for prospective students; incentive schemes to recruit candidates with suitable competencies and flexible programme structures that provide teacher students with school experience early in the course. In the longer term, it would also be beneficial to improve the status of teachers in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education by raising the qualification requirements for teaching at these levels. There is no reason, from the perspective of professional roles and responsibilities of teachers, for qualification requirements of upper secondary teachers to be higher.

Greater effort should also be directed to ensuring that all schools have a chance to build a diverse teaching body in terms of experience and background. In the current system, beginner teachers are much more likely than experienced teachers to be employed

in schools with many students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As beginner teachers have lower salaries, this also means that schools in disadvantaged circumstances will receive less "teacher resources" in terms of government money invested in salaries. To ensure a more equitable distribution of teaching staff, incentives could be provided to attract high achieving and experienced teachers to disadvantaged schools. It would also be important to create greater transparency regarding teacher salary costs and stimulate a debate around the need to move towards a fairer distribution of teacher resources across schools.

Finally, further on-the-job support will be required to allow all teachers to work effectively in increasingly diverse and inclusive classrooms. Moving teacher employment under a workload system, whereby teachers would work a specified number of hours per week could help recognise that the teaching profession involves a range of other tasks beyond teaching such as whole-school planning and collaboration in professional learning communities. To ensure that all teachers have opportunities for regular feedback and professional learning, it is important to further enhance pedagogical leadership in schools. This would involve both supporting the capacity development of school principals and promoting more distributed leadership and involvement of senior peers in managing the teaching workforce. In addition, establishing a teacher career structure linked to teacher certification or registration processes could serve to formally recognise the varieties of roles and responsibilities that teachers perform at school.

Assessment and recommendations

Education system context

Recent demographic change poses new challenges to educational planning and school funding

The Flemish Community of Belgium is densely populated and highly urbanised. Its school age population has grown over the last decade and a further increase is expected in the coming years. But not all parts of the Flemish Community are affected by demographic changes to the same degree. While urban areas are characterised by rapid population growth and an above average share of immigrants and young people, some rural areas are experiencing declining student enrolments. This pattern results in the demand for places being unequal across the school system, which presents a challenge for educational planning. As other parts of Europe, the Flemish Community is faced with population ageing, which increases the demands for funding in the areas of health and care for the elderly and is likely to create pressures on the public budget. At the same time, the increase of student numbers generates additional demands for spending on education. These additional demands may be partly offset by savings made due to the retirement of a significant proportion of highly experienced teachers, which is likely to lead to a reduction in overall staff costs for the education system.

Freedom of choice and autonomy are key foundational values of the Flemish school system

The Flemish Community has one of the OECD's most devolved education systems with schools enjoying a high degree of autonomy. School autonomy is grounded in the principle of "freedom of education", which gives the right to any natural or legal person to set up a school, recruit staff and determine the educational, religious or ideological principles of the school. To be able to award official qualifications or to receive funding, schools must meet certain conditions set by the Flemish authorities, including following a core curriculum and allowing the Flemish authorities to assure their quality. Officially recognised schooling in the Flemish Community is organised within three educational networks and every school is governed by a school board, which oversees the implementation of legislation and regulations in the school. Parents are free to choose and are guaranteed access to a school of their choice within reasonable distance from their home. In principle, funding "follows the student", which lays the foundation for potentially strong competition among schools to attract students. At the same time, the Flemish authorities are encouraging school collaboration through the promotion and funding of collaborative partnerships ("school associations") between schools in the same geographical area.

Flemish students perform at a high level internationally but there are concerns about inequities among student groups

The Flemish Community shows strong overall achievements in international student assessments, with both a high share of top performers and a small proportion of low performers. But international assessment results also confirm the persistence of profound inequities within the Flemish school system, with socio-economic factors strongly influencing student performance and immigrant students being particularly at risk of underperformance. The Flemish school system is highly stratified, with a first streaming of students occurring at the beginning of secondary education, and there are marked performance differences between schools. A range of recent policy measures aim to improve quality and equity the Flemish education system, including: plans for a broad reform of the secondary education sector and policy measures for the reduction of early school leaving, a comprehensive policy to promote equal educational opportunities for all students, and the implementation of a Decree to support the inclusion of students with special educational needs in regular schools.

Strengths and challenges

Overall public expenditure on schooling is high and supports parental freedom of choice

The Flemish Community of Belgium supports a complex school system which performs at a very high standard internationally. The strength of government commitment to schooling is reflected by a sustained high level of investment in schooling and favourable conditions for teaching across schools, as indicated by comparatively low class size and student-teacher ratios. Recent changes to the system for distributing operating grants and staffing went in line with substantial increases in the overall budget for schooling. Parental choice is supported by the school funding system, in particular the commitment of the Flemish Community to free education. Regardless of the choice of school, parents do not have to pay tuition fees for publicly recognised schooling and there is a uniform approach to recurrent funding of schools in all networks.

Inputs to schooling are based on school and student characteristics, but there is no empirical picture of resource outputs

School budgets are calculated based on a set of student coefficients associated with educational level, student background characteristics and programme and course choices. These determine the structure of inputs into schooling. Resource outputs, however, are only described at a very general level. The resource output is the real cost of educating a student, which is distinct from the entitlement on resources associated with student coefficients. The difference between entitlement and output lies in the policies of school leaders and school boards, who can decide to redistribute operating grants among their schools and staff courses in the way they think best. Some schools have higher resource profiles than other comparable schools, for example if they raise more funds from parents or employ more costly teachers, who are paid directly by the Ministry of Education and Training. The system of funding teaching staff assigns schools a total number of teaching hours, but does not place a limit on the cost of these hours. While schools are autonomous in using their overall assigned resources, the real cost of running programmes and services is not reported, which makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the Flemish school funding approach.

Schools receive additional resources to compensate for socio-economic disadvantage

The Flemish school financing system is designed to support equal access to educational opportunities for all students and compensate for differences in student background. To help schools meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, school operating grants are weighted for socio-economic status (SES). This is intended to check the influences of key differentiating variables – the mother's educational level, foreign language spoken at home, the family's financial capacity, and the student's neighbourhood characteristics. Student socio-economic characteristics are also used in the calculation and allocation of teaching hours to elementary schools, and secondary schools receive a top-up of teaching hours based on such characteristics. Differential weighting recognises the adverse impact on student learning of specific student background characteristics. The SES weights may enable remedial classes to be run, classes to be split, and teachers to be released for a range of pedagogical and support activities. In these ways the Flemish authorities seek to balance choice and autonomy with equity.

Schools are granted high levels of autonomy in using resources, but some schools lack financial flexibility

The Flemish approach to school funding is in line with a strong focus on school autonomy. Most resources going to schools are not earmarked, which gives schools flexibility to use resources to fit their specific needs. School boards have full autonomy in most areas of resource policy including setting up budgeting and accounting systems, recruiting and dismissing school staff, organising school leadership, making decisions about the use of teacher hours and maintaining the school infrastructure. While the Flemish Community places great emphasis on the autonomy of its schools, freedom to develop and operate policy is relative to the resources available for its exercise. Income from non-public sources is not reported, but there are indications of inequities in schools' access to private funding, with schools in challenging socio-economic contexts often facing financial pressure and struggling to answer needs. While these schools receive higher operating grants based on their students' background characteristics, they do not always have the margin to use this additional funding to enhance teaching and learning for their most disadvantaged students due to other pressing demands on their funding.

The impact and effectiveness of resources for equal opportunities are not sufficiently monitored

While a considerable amount of funding is allocated to schools based on socio-economic characteristics, the number of schools receiving extra teaching hours for equal opportunities is not reported in global statistics on Flemish education. Nor is the overall amount of hours and the associated salary cost. An empirical view of the resource margin and of resource utilisation would be necessary to understand the impact of such factors as school size and community setting and also to assess the issue of whether resources could be more heavily concentrated in fewer schools. There can be a risk of dispersing SES funding too thinly either by sharing it among too many schools or by offering all eligible schools the same level of support, regardless of relative need. Research that has been done at the level of the Flemish Community points to only modest gains from a rather small supplement to teaching resources. This may be due to a too-thin dispersal of hours across many schools, with the average marginal gain in resources being too small to affect the level of change required in a school.

There is an imbalance in the distribution of funding across levels of education

Overall spending per student in the Flemish Community is significantly higher in secondary school than in elementary school. The Flemish approach to funding teacher salaries is likely to be the main contributor to the large difference in expenditure across levels of education. A combination of factors contributes to high teacher salary costs in the second and third stages of secondary education: teachers at these levels have a master's level qualification and are paid more and classes are often smaller. The differences in spending across levels of education should be seen in the context of the relative impact of education spending by stage of schooling. A consistent body of research has shown that investment in the early years of schooling is relatively more effective and less costly than remedial programmes later on in the lifecycle, so there is a case to be made for seeking greater balance in funding across educational levels.

The differential resourcing of programmes and courses at the secondary level raises concerns

The design and funding of the staffing model at the secondary level, which applies different weightings depending on educational programme and study area, raises a range of issues. Differential funding by programme and study area might be justified on the grounds that there is more specialisation in some programmes and thus a thinner distribution of students. However, the current fragmentation of the course offer in secondary education raises the unit costs of education and disperses the budget thinly over many options. This is expensive, especially in the context of the comparatively small size of schools and competition between establishments. Similar programmes and options being offered for small numbers of students by several schools or networks in a locality comes at a very high cost. Differential funding could also be supported on the grounds that the vocational programmes concentrate a higher share of students with initially low achievement who need additional learning support. But although the funding system expresses a higher entitlement to resources on the part of students in vocational programmes, this does not mean that they in fact enjoy a greater share of total teaching resources, as schools frequently shift these teaching hours to fund small courses with narrow levels of interest in the general and technical education programmes. Moreover, the extra teaching hours that vocational students do enjoy by way of entitlement may in some cases simply compensate for the costs of small class size rather than reversing educational disadvantage or deepening learning.

The Flemish authorities have developed new approaches to infrastructure funding but the offer of school facilities remains inadequate to meet current needs

Over the past decade, the Flemish authorities have developed new infrastructure approaches in addition to traditional public sector financing and joint public-private ventures. Of particular interest is the Design-Build-Finance-Maintain (DBFM) public-private partnership. The importance of this initiative lies partly in the scale of the undertaking (around 200 schools), partly in the creation of low-energy facilities of lasting economic benefit, and partly in access to private equity to augment the resources of the public authority. Nonetheless, during the OECD review visit, infrastructure was identified by stakeholders as one of the most pressing needs experienced by Flemish schools. Pressure on infrastructure arises from a combination of factors: growth in the size of the elementary school-age population, the serviceability of facilities built many decades ago,

the need to adapt buildings to modern methods of teaching and equipment, the general state of repair of buildings, and the challenge of expanding provision in urban areas where development options are very limited. Together these pressures have intensified demand for new or improved buildings, enhanced competition between schools over a limited budget for infrastructure, and led to long queues and delays.

While the school system is built upon historically relevant and committed school providers, there are a number of inefficiencies in the provision of school places

The level of commitment from both public and private school providers for serving the public good is a fundamental strength of the Flemish education system. At the same time, the complexity of the Flemish education system, with its different layers of organisation and many autonomous components that result from the principle of "freedom of education", may inhibit the ability of central steering or implementation of policy objectives that represent the best interests of the system. This report identifies a number of inefficiencies related to the provision of school places and the organisation of the school offer.

- The small size of some schools and classes involves high costs to the system and is favoured by institutional features of the Flemish education system such as: the obligation for the Flemish Community to provide a public school in all localities where there is demand; the degressive funding model, which allocates more teacher hours for course options enrolling fewer students; and the differential funding of programmes and courses in secondary education which allows schools to sustain many small courses.
- The distribution of school places across the Flemish Community is the result of historical developments, autonomous decisions by the educational networks and efforts to ensure parental choice, but it is not designed to optimally accommodate the current distribution of school age students. The approach to capital funding aims at renovation and expansion of existing systems of provision, with little prospect of steering construction to address most pressing needs, enhance collaboration and end diseconomies within or across networks.
- The duplication of administration and services in the school sector is another area contributing to inefficiencies. This can be seen in the public sector due to the existence of two different networks providing public education and at a more local level, with the overlap of services provided by different layers of the school governance system.
- Finally, an important source of inefficiency is linked to the high cost of educational failure, resulting from a significant portion of students not progressing through the complex school system as anticipated, moving to less demanding study programmes, repeating a year and/or exiting the system with insufficient competencies.

Important progress has been made in regulating school choice, but concerns remain regarding the distribution of students across schools

School choice is a predominant feature of Flemish education and there are a number of provisions to ensure equal access of families to the school of their choice. Although dependent on the extensive Catholic school sector and other private school providers, the Flemish government does make it clear that schools cannot legally select students at the entry point and are obliged to accept all students regardless of religious background. In recent years, school choice has been increasingly regulated in order to mitigate its adverse impact on socio-economic diversity across schools in urban areas. The current approach to managing school choice is the result of a strong consultative process and has benefited

from experimentation, stakeholder involvement and subsequent adaptations of the relevant legislation in order to best respond to the current needs of the Flemish society. Despite the welcome introduction of controlled choice schemes, concerns remain about the polarisation of schools and study programmes along socio-economic and demographic lines. This is partly linked to the early tracking of students, which has resulted in a greater share of students from disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds being oriented towards vocational study programmes. In addition, a range of factors are likely to inhibit choice by some families, such as access to information, school transportation arrangements and admission practices.

New legal provisions for inclusion state the right intentions but their implementation is likely to raise challenges

Working towards a better inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) is high on the Flemish education policy agenda. In recent years, an increasing number of students have been enrolled in integrated education and inclusive settings. A Decree concerning measures for students with special educational needs (referred to as the "M Decree") was passed in 2014 with the aims to avoid disproportionate referral of students to special schools and to ensure greater access to mainstream education for students with SEN. While the M Decree has the right intentions, a range of implementation challenges were raised during the OECD review visit. These concerned a lack of clarity regarding the organisation of the transition of SEN students to mainstream education, potential incentives for special schools to retain students and advise against such transitions, and concerns among regular schools about a lack of funding and human resources to adequately serve these students. There are also indications that teachers in mainstream schools need further preparation and support to provide suitable support to all students in inclusive classrooms.

While there is an overall good provision of qualified teachers, experienced teachers are distributed unequally across schools

Internationally comparable information indicates that, on the whole, the Flemish Community is not facing a teacher shortage situation and that "out-of-field teaching" is not a major issue in the Flemish school system. However there are some concerns about the distribution of teachers across schools, with urban schools and those facing more difficult socio-economic circumstances encountering more difficulties in recruiting qualified and experienced teachers. There is evidence that in the Flemish Community more experienced teachers are more likely to be in schools with a less diverse student body while beginner teachers are typically more concentrated in challenging schools. In part this reflects the inability of the system to steer more qualified and experienced teachers to the neediest schools as no special incentives are available. The main response of the system to disadvantage seems to be the provision of additional teacher hours, rather than a focus on the distribution of teachers and the quality of teaching. The system for funding teacher salaries also tends to reinforce inequities across schools: since schools enrolling students from more advantaged backgrounds are in a better position to attract more experienced teachers, they receive more "teacher resources" in terms of government money invested in salaries.

Flemish teachers value their profession but there are challenges in attracting and retaining new teachers

While the job satisfaction among Flemish teachers appears high by international comparison, there are indications that the teaching profession is facing challenges in attracting the most suitable candidates and in retaining young professionals. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that beginning teachers are more likely to obtain a teaching post in a disadvantaged school where working conditions can be particularly challenging given high levels of diversity and more difficult socio-economic circumstances. In addition, beginning teachers face little job security for several years until they are able to obtain a permanent post, often having to move from one school to another in consecutive school years. While teacher salaries overall are quite competitive in the labour market, compared to the situation in other countries, this is less so at the beginning of the career, especially when the teacher remains in a temporary post. Moreover, the short duration of initial teacher education for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education, which stands in contrast with the requirements of a master's level qualification for teachers at the upper secondary level, is likely to have detrimental effects on the status of teachers at these levels.

School-based teacher recruitment brings efficiency to the labour market, but a number of rigidities remain in matching demand and supply

Schools are autonomous in teacher recruitment, which allows the use of a more complete set of locally relevant criteria in recruitment processes, as school leaders are in a better position than more remote administrative levels to assess the specific needs of the school. The process of open recruitment also offers advantages to applicants since they can more directly choose the school and identify with the school's educational project. As a result, the process is more likely to build a sense of commitment of teachers to the schools where they are recruited. It should be noted, however, that the teacher labour market features a number of rigidities and imperfections. First, there are a number of boundaries between school networks and, sometimes, even between school groups and school associations, concerning the transfer of teachers' acquired statutory rights. Second, while schools have good levels of autonomy in teacher recruitment, they are restricted in their choices by a number of regulations regarding seniority, experience and network affiliation as to which candidates should be given priority over others. Third, the recruitment and selection of teachers is not always transparent as information on open positions may not be widely available and selection processes are frequently marked by a degree of informality.

Schools have considerable autonomy in managing the teaching workforce, but further steps are necessary to enhance teacher professionalism

In addition to recruitment, school leaders have considerable room to manage the teacher hours allocated to the school in the way they see fit. This flexibility allows schools to choose an optimal distribution of teacher resources adapted to the school's specific needs and also gives teachers opportunities to diversify their roles in schools. However, the conception of teacher employment on the basis of teaching hours, as opposed to overall working hours, is a source of concern. This approach implicitly assumes that teachers work further hours in other activities such as preparation of lessons and assessment of students' work but does not explicitly recognise these activities. It limits the opportunities for teachers to formally engage in activities other than teaching at the school. In this context, there appears to be relatively little time dedicated to feedback and collaboration among

teachers. Teacher appraisal typically focuses on the least experienced teachers while it often becomes an administrative formality for other teachers. There also appears to be little tradition of peer observation and feedback. Where teacher appraisal exists, quite limited use is made of the appraisal results to inform teachers' professional and career development. This is likely to be linked to both the absence of a teacher career structure with different steps recognising roles and responsibilities, and also to variations in school leadership capacity across schools.

Policy recommendations

Develop a community-wide reporting framework for school funding

The Flemish school funding system would benefit from the development by the Flemish authorities of a Community-wide reporting framework bringing together financial indicators and student outcome indicators. The school funding system in the Flemish Community is complex and not fully transparent or readily understood. The high level of public investment in Flemish schools supports a high level of performance, but is also accompanied by large social differences in achievement. To maintain high standards and to narrow the equity gap are goals that require Community consensus regarding fiscal effort and social inclusiveness. To build this consensus would gain from periodic in-depth public reporting both of resource distribution and student learning outcomes. Given the important share of public resources devoted to schooling, it is important to make transparent the funding machinery – design principles, structure and expenditure outputs. In addition there needs to be greater transparency with respect to how many schools qualify for additional resources based on socio-economic criteria and how their access is structured. While inspection has a valuable role to play in reviewing whether schools are working towards attainment targets, the cost and effectiveness of funding and teaching hours for equal educational opportunities also need to be kept under review.

Enhance school-level reporting on resources and gather data on locally-raised funds and the services that these provide

Transparency could also be enhanced at the level of schools, by introducing a school-level reporting framework which enables schools to examine the fiscal impact of their resource and curriculum decisions. In particular, the costs of delivery of school programmes and the budget impact of resource and programme decisions should be made more transparent. This is in the context of the autonomy that Flemish schools enjoy and the limited accountability that balances this. To understand socio-economic gaps in the ability of schools to raise resources, it is essential that both schools and education authorities have good data, first on social need and second on locally-raised income. Social need refers to the range of ancillary services and goods supplied by schools, either directly or indirectly through the use of their resources. Locally-raised income refers to the cash contributed by parents through charges, donations and fund-raising activities. The Flemish authorities should consider the regular collection of the relevant school income data, as is done in some other school systems.

Rebalance the resource effort between educational levels

Given the current imbalance of spending between elementary and secondary education, the Flemish authorities should examine the potential advantages of shifting to more equal spending per student between elementary and secondary education. Policies of

rebalancing spending in primary and secondary school are supported by research demonstrating that the rate of return on investment in human capital is greatest in the early years of school and lowest in the later years. On the other hand, education at the secondary level, and in particular in the technical and vocational education and training sectors, often requires more specialised teaching and equipment, which may contribute to higher funding needs at this level. These and other considerations need to be carefully considered when making decisions about the allocation of funding across levels and sectors of education. However, if more progress is to be made in closing the equity gap, the Flemish authorities need to start a discussion about the potential benefits of stronger investment in tackling low achievement at the earlier stages of education. In this context, it would also be advisable to consider harmonising approaches to equity funding in elementary and secondary schooling along with consistent approaches to evaluate how schools use the additional resources, and developing a repertoire of effective intervention strategies to guide schools in good practice.

Develop more integrated system-wide planning for school infrastructure

Improving the quantity and quality of school facilities is a pressing need in the Flemish Community. Responding effectively will require careful analysis of the demand for places as well as a thorough understanding of the current status of facilities available. In further planning for school infrastructure development, it will be important to further strengthen the monitoring arrangements already in place and to build on positive examples of strategic planning observed in some parts of the school system. Given the co-existence of schools from different networks in most local communities, it would be beneficial for the Flemish Community to develop strategic infrastructure planning for the school system as a whole. More co-ordinated – and perhaps more centralised – planning might be needed to ensure that decisions about investments in school facilities prioritise the needs of local communities rather than the interests of umbrella networks or individual schools. This should be combined with incentives for schools to share facilities across networks at a local level, including for special education. Thinking about longer-term development, it would be prudent for the Flemish Community to consider the value and potential flexibility that could be afforded by broader public ownership of school facilities.

Address inefficiencies in the provision of school places

This report identifies a number of priorities in addressing inefficiencies in the provision of school places and the organisation of the school offer. In a context of fiscal constraints, it appears difficult to maintain a school system which offers both small schools *and* multiple and complex course options. A central level analysis of the distribution of schools, especially small schools, across the Flemish Community would help policy makers obtain a more complete picture and reveal the scope and potential for school consolidation. Incentives for collaboration should be complemented with incentives for mergers between small schools, or at least the removal of financial disincentives for schools to operate at a larger scale and ensure an efficient provision of classes. In addition, the distribution and availability of programme options, especially in the vocational education and training sector, needs to be closely monitored in collaboration with social partners and local stakeholders. If patterns over time indicate limited interest in and relevance of specific course options, decisions should be made to

phase these out. Regarding the structure of school networks and boards, the potential merger of the two public networks deserves review and serious consideration as it would help reduce overhead and administration costs across the two smaller networks. Within each network, it would also be beneficial to review the size of school boards to determine the potential for mergers.

Ensure equal access to school choice and study tracks for all students

The OECD review team commends the efforts undertaken with the equal opportunities policy (GOK) to regulate school choice and reduce socio-economic polarisation of schools while safeguarding the principle of parental choice. Ensuring equal access to school choice requires continuous attention to maintaining effective application and enrolment systems, providing parents with relevant and comparable information on all schools regardless of network identity, and offering well planned transportation that can help underrepresented populations to consider schools further away. It is equally important to encourage schools to develop diverse and distinct pedagogical profiles so that choices by parents match their children's learning style instead of preferences based on religious, ethnic or socio-economic composition of the student body.

Moreover, as socio-economic polarisation in the Flemish Community occurs mostly between the different study programmes in secondary education, it will be key to attract and retain greater numbers of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in the general study programmes. In addition to the welcome reforms foreseen by the Master Plan for Secondary Education, it will be important to focus on reducing under-achievement in primary education and thereby preparing students from more diverse social backgrounds for academically demanding study programmes. There is also a need to introduce a better Community-wide system to monitor the characteristics of students going into different tracks and prevent an excessive orientation of specific student groups in the vocational education programmes. This should be coupled with strengthened early diagnosis and response to language learning needs to avoid students being referred to vocational tracks due to language difficulties.

Pursue careful and gradual implementation of the M Decree

The implementation of the M Decree will require time, and – at least during initial years – greater resources, although cost-savings are likely to be achieved in the longer run. Besides the need for more specialised staff in mainstream schools to support SEN students, infrastructure adjustments between mainstream and special schools will be needed. Effective inclusion of SEN students will need to be based school-based planning and decision making (in collaboration with special education experts and parents), which is likely to require a shift of resources and teacher hours from SEN schools to mainstream schools over time. Ideally, resources for students with special educational needs should follow the students independently of whether they are involved in a separate special school or a mainstream school. To ensure quality education in inclusive settings, it will be important that all teachers receive relevant preparation on how to serve SEN populations in mainstream classrooms. Such training should be provided during both initial education and continuing professional development. Information and preparation of all students, as well as their parents, during the initial few years should also aid in the transition period.

Make the teaching profession more attractive and enhance the preparation and professional development of all teachers

In light of the current demographic trends, it is important to ensure that well qualified candidates enter the teaching profession at an adequate rate. In order to make initial teacher education attractive to high achieving graduates from secondary education, it is important to develop targeted strategies, such as information, assessment and counselling for prospective students; incentive schemes to recruit candidates with suitable competencies; and flexible programme structures that provide teacher students with school experience early in the course. Addressing some of the hurdles teachers face early in the career, for example by improving the working conditions of beginner teachers and granting them greater job security, would also help making the profession attractive. In the longer term, it would also be beneficial to improve the status of teachers in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education by raising the qualification requirements for teaching at these levels. There is no reason, from the perspective of professional roles and responsibilities of teachers, for qualification requirements of upper secondary teachers to be higher.

Efforts also need to be undertaken to ensure that all teachers are adequately prepared to deal with diversity and special educational needs. Providing adequate support for students from a different language background, a disadvantaged family or with special educational needs should not be seen as an isolated task for specialist teachers, as this has become part of the regular work of most teachers. Hence, it is of great importance to mainstream elements of teaching diverse classrooms in general initial teacher education and professional development offers for all teachers. Finally, the teaching profession itself needs to play a more active role in designing teacher education programmes and determining who meets the criteria to enter the profession. The views and experience of effective teachers and school leaders need to be central to the teacher education reforms.

Improve the transparency and effectiveness of the teacher labour market

Greater effectiveness in the functioning of the teacher labour market calls for better portability of statutory rights across school networks, more flexibility of recruitment regulations and a more systematic dissemination of vacancies for teaching positions. In addition, there is a need to develop a strategy to ensure a more equitable distribution of teachers across schools. Such a strategy could be twofold. First, incentives could be provided to attract high achieving teachers to disadvantaged schools. This would involve special allowances and support for teachers working in schools facing more challenging circumstances. Second, it would be helpful to work towards a more equitable distribution of expenditure for teacher salaries across schools. Ensuring greater transparency in this area would help stimulate a debate around the inequities created by the current approach of funding teacher salaries in terms of actual resources invested per student, and the need to move towards a fairer distribution of resources across schools. In addition, steps could be taken to make schools take responsibility for the cost impact of their hiring decisions and work within a defined budget for teacher salaries.

Enhance structures and capacity to support teacher professionalism

There are a number of ways which could help support teacher professionalism. Moving teacher employment under a workload system, whereby teachers would work a specified number of hours per week could help recognise that the teaching profession

involves a range of other tasks beyond teaching such as the preparation of lessons, teacher collaboration, whole-school planning and work in professional learning communities. This would also favour the promotion of peer feedback and joint work among teachers. To ensure that all teachers have opportunities for regular feedback and professional learning, it is important to further enhance pedagogical leadership in schools. This would involve both supporting the capacity development of school principals and promoting more distributed leadership and involvement of senior peers in managing the teaching workforce. In addition, establishing a teacher career structure linked to teacher certification or registration processes could serve to formally recognise the variety of roles and responsibilities that teachers perform at school.

OECD Reviews of School Resources:
Flemish Community of Belgium 2015

Chapter 1

School education in the Flemish Community of Belgium

This chapter sets the context for the report and describes the main contextual features of the Flemish school system such as demographic developments influencing educational planning and broader economic trends impacting on the funding of the education sector. It also presents the main characteristics of the Flemish school system itself, including its structure and governance and the organisation of schools within school boards and educational networks. In addition, the chapter describes the system's main educational goals and mechanisms for official recognition and quality assurance of Flemish schools. It also examines evidence on the quality and equity of schooling and considers major trends and policy developments that influence the use of resources in the school sector.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Context

Governance

There are three tiers of government in Belgium: the Federal State, the Regions and the Communities. The Federal Government has responsibility for areas including social security, justice and defence. The jurisdiction of the three Regions (the Flemish, Walloon and the Brussels Capital Regions) revolves mainly around matters related to the territory and the economy, whereas the three Communities (the Flemish, French-speaking and German-speaking Communities) are responsible for matters related to the individual including cultural, language and educational matters. The Flemish Region and the Flemish Community governments have merged into one.

The Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities each have their autonomous education systems. Only a small number of competences for education remain with the level of the Federal Government. These include determining the duration and age range of compulsory education, the conditions for the delivery of recognised qualifications, and the retirement regulations for teachers and educational staff. The Flemish Community is responsible for education in the Flemish Region and for education provided with Dutch as the main instructional language in the Brussels Capital Region. In 2011/12, the Flemish education system comprised 56.3% of the Belgian student population in primary and secondary schools (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015a).

Population

In 2012, the Flemish Region had a population of 6.4 million inhabitants. The Region is densely populated and highly urbanised, with an average of 470 inhabitants per square kilometre. In contrast to most other regions in Europe, population growth in the region has accelerated over the past decades. While the natural growth rate has been gradually increasing (from 0.7 per thousand in 2000 to 1.8 per thousand in 2011), migration is the main driver of population growth and educational expansion. The net migration rate to the Flemish Region was 5.3 per thousand in 2011, up from 1.4 per thousand in 2000 (Government of Flanders, 2013). In 2012, 17.5% of the Flemish Region's population had at least one parent born with a foreign nationality and 7.1% of the population did not have Belgian nationality (Government of Flanders, 2014a). Just under one fifth (19.5%) of the Flemish Region's population was under 18 years old in 2012 (Government of Flanders, 2013).

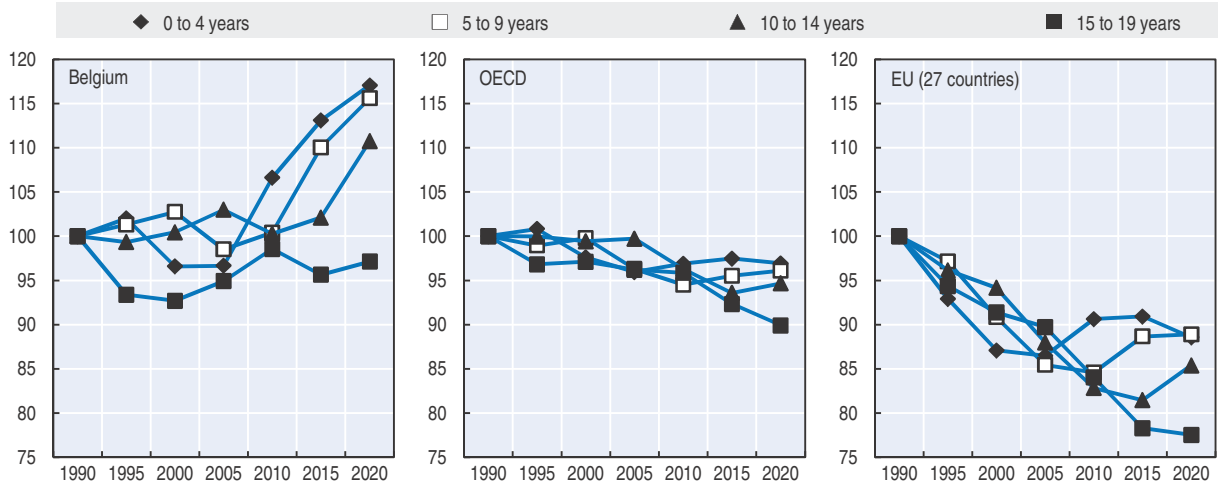
Not all parts of the Flemish Region are affected by demographic changes to the same degree. As elsewhere, the population increase is concentrated in the larger cities and certain municipalities. Larger cities in the Flemish Region are characterised by more rapid population growth and an above average share of immigrants and young people. In particular, the municipalities of Antwerp, Mechelen and Genk have a substantially larger than average share of immigrants and young people (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015a). High levels of population growth and immigration are also prevalent in

several municipalities in the bilingual Brussels Capital Region where the Flemish Community is responsible for education provided with Dutch as the main instructional language.

Internationally comparable data for Belgium as a whole illustrate these demographic trends. Figure 1.1 shows that the development of the school age population in Belgium since 1990 and projections until 2020 differ significantly from developments in other OECD and European Union (EU) countries. While an overall decline in the school age population can be observed across the OECD and EU areas, Belgium is faced with the opposite phenomenon. There has been a sharp increase in the Belgian population aged 0-4 since 2005, followed by a subsequent increase in the population aged 5-9 (since 2009/10) and the population aged 10-14 (since 2014/15). The population aged 15-19 is expected to increase in the coming years (OECD Database). According to OECD (2013a) data, 15% of Belgian residents were non-native in 2011, with the largest immigrant groups coming from Morocco, France, the Netherlands and Italy (OECD, 2013a).

Figure 1.1. **Variation in school age population in Belgium, the OECD and the EU**

1990 = 100



Source: Data extracted from OECD database, *Historical population data and projections (1950-2050)*, *https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=POP_PROJ*.

Demographic developments have an important influence on educational planning. The Flemish Community has experienced rapid growth in the school age population of its urban areas over the last decade and a further increase is expected at all levels of education in the coming years. Population projections for schooling in the Flemish Community of Belgium indicate continuous growth of the primary school population over the next years, although a small decrease is projected for 2020/21. In the secondary sector, student numbers have decreased somewhat in the past few years, but are expected to rise again from the 2016/17 school year onwards (Table 1.1). A second trend of significance is the shifting enrolment concentrations, with some rural schools experiencing declining enrolments while many urban schools have rapidly growing populations and struggle to meet the demand for places. This pattern results in the demand for places being unequal across the Flemish Community which presents a challenge for the system.

Economy and government budget

The Flemish Region is comparatively wealthy by European standards, with a GDP per capita (at PPP) at 133% of the EU27 average in 2012. The Flemish economy has been resilient throughout the crisis and has maintained an employment rate of 71.5%, considerably above both the Belgian (67.2%) and EU28 average (68.5%). Labour productivity, as measured by GDP per person employed, is also above the EU15 average (117%) (European Commission, no date). However, the recovery has been hesitant and, as in the Belgian economy as a whole, there was a small contraction in the Flemish economy in 2012 (OECD, 2013b; Government of Flanders, 2014b). Further predictions for economic growth are moderate, with an expected growth of 1.5% for the period of 2011-20 (Government of Flanders, 2014a).

Table 1.1. **Prognosis on student numbers in pre-primary, primary and secondary schooling in the Flemish Community of Belgium, 2014-21**

School year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Pre-primary students	271 611	271 822	272 352	272 211	273 275	274 758	276 277
% change to previous year	**-0.35**	**-0.39**	**-0.72**	**-0.24**	**0.26**	**0.40**	**0.47**
Primary students	437 977	446 965	454 544	459 529	461 416	461 805	460 558
% change to previous year	**2.32**	**2.05**	**1.70**	**1.10**	**0.41**	**0.08**	**-0.27**
Secondary students	443 679	441 798	442 469	445 167	449 701	455 949	464 348
% change to previous year	**-0.71**	**-0.42**	**0.15**	**0.61**	**1.02**	**1.39**	**1.84**
Students all levels (total)	1 151 623	1 157 672	1 163 985	1 171 027	1 178 129	1 185 821	1 194 239
% change to previous year	**0.50**	**0.53**	**0.55**	**0.60**	**0.61**	**0.65**	**0.71**

Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015a), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, *www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*.

The funding of the education sector is confined by the overall budgetary situation of the Flemish Government. As other parts of Europe, the Flemish Community is faced with population ageing, which increases the demands for funding in the areas of health and care for the elderly and is likely to create pressures on the public budget. At the same time, since funding for schools is allocated on a per-student basis, the increase of student numbers generates additional demands for spending on education. These additional demands may be partly offset by savings made due to the retirement of a significant proportion of highly experienced teachers, which is likely to lead to a reduction in overall staff costs for the education system.

Structure of the school system

Schooling in the Flemish Community is compulsory from age six to eighteen. The school system is highly stratified, with a first streaming of students occurring at the beginning of secondary education. The school system is organised in four main stages, preceded by a non-compulsory offer of pre-primary education, which is free of charge.

- **Pre-primary education** (typical ages: 2.5-6) is not mandatory, but over 90% of children are enrolled in pre-primary education at age three. Pre-primary and primary education is usually provided under the same roof in elementary schools.
- **Primary education** (typical ages: 6-12) lasts for six years. There is also an offer of seven years of special primary education for children with special educational needs. In the 2012/13 school year, 7% of the primary school cohort was enrolled in special primary education. At the end of primary education, students who achieve the objectives of the curriculum receive a certificate.

- **The first stage of secondary education** (typical ages: 12-14) lasts for two years and is organised in two streams: the "A stream" and the "B stream". The vast majority of students enrol in the A stream (85% in 2012/13). This first stage of secondary education is intended to provide students with a shared curriculum of basic general education. Students who did not receive a certificate for primary education and those who wish to pursue a vocational education enrol in the B stream. Upon completion of the first year of the B stream, students are allowed to transfer to the first year of the A stream if they wish so. The majority of those completing the first year of the B stream, however, continue in the second year of the B stream.
- **The second and third stage of secondary education** (typical ages: 14-18) usually last for two years each. For students in vocational secondary education, there is an option to take an additional year in the final stage of secondary education if they wish to enter tertiary education. At the second and third stages, secondary education is organised into four main educational pathways, as listed below. Within each of these secondary education programmes, students can choose a particular study area. As they move from the second to the third stage, the education and training provided become progressively more targeted, depending on students' planned further education or career pathway. All programmes include a mix of compulsory and optional subjects.
  - **General secondary education** (*Algemeen secundair onderwijs*, ASO) offers a broad general education programme preparing students for progression into tertiary education. 41% of students in the second and third stage of secondary schooling were enrolled in ASO in 2012/13.
  - **Technical secondary education** (*Technisch secundair onderwijs*, TSO) offers a mix of general, technical/theoretical and practical subjects, preparing students for a technical profession or tertiary education. 31% of students were enrolled in TSO in 2012/13.
  - **Secondary arts education** (*Kunstsecundair onderwijs*, KSO) combines a broad general education with active arts practice, preparing students for an artistic profession or tertiary education. 2% of students were enrolled in KSO in 2012/13.
  - **Vocational secondary education** (*Beroepssecundair onderwijs,* BSO) provides practice-oriented education in addition to general education, preparing students for entry to the labour market. BSO students who wish to enter professional or academic tertiary education are required to take an extra (third) year in the final stage of vocational secondary education. 26% of students were enrolled in BSO in 2012/13.

Students who have completed the A-stream certificate of the first stage of secondary education can choose to enter any of these four pathways. Those who were enrolled in the B stream of the first stage are automatically referred to vocational education (BSO) in the second stage of secondary education. There is also an offer of special secondary education (*Buitengewoon secundair onderwijs*, BUSO) for students with special educational needs. 5% of all secondary school students were enrolled in special secondary education in 2012/13.

All students in the Flemish Community have a full-time learning obligation until age 18. From the age of 16, or even 15 for students who have completed the first stage of secondary education, they may follow part-time education in combination with work-based learning. Such education is offered in three forms: i) part-time vocational secondary education (*Deeltijds beroepssecundair onderwijs*, DBSO), ii) apprenticeship (*leertijd*) offered by *Syntra Vlaanderen* training centres and iii) part-time training programmes.

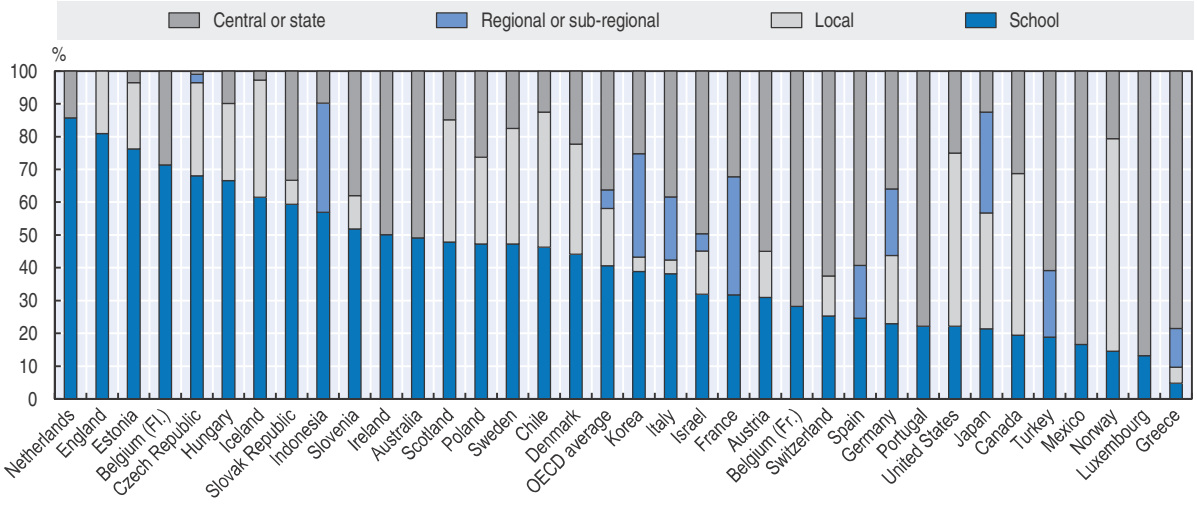
Students in the BSO programme who successfully complete six years of secondary education receive a certificate of vocational secondary education, oriented towards entry to the labour market. For certain study areas in TSO and KSO, students can opt to enrol in an additional specialisation year, which is referred to as "secondary education after secondary education" (Se-n-se). Students obtain the diploma of secondary education, which grants access to tertiary education, after successfully completing six years of secondary education in the ASO, TSO or KSO programmes, or seven years in the BSO programme. The principle of freedom of choice regarding educational institutions and programmes is also guaranteed at the level of tertiary education.

Governance of the school system

School autonomy and freedom of education

The Flemish Community has one of the OECD's most devolved education systems with schools enjoying a high degree of autonomy and the local level (Provincial and Municipal Governments) playing only a minor role. According to data collected for the OECD's Education at a Glance 2012 publication, lower secondary schools make 71% of key decisions (compared to an OECD average of 41%) and the central government makes 29% of the decisions (compared to an OECD average of 36%) (Figure 1.2).[1]

Figure 1.2. **Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2011**



Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of the percentage of decisions taken at the school level.
Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2012-en*, Table D6.1, see Annex 3 for notes.

A closer look at the different domains of decision-making[2] reveals that Flemish schools make 89% of the decisions regarding the organisation of instruction, 75% of the decisions regarding personnel management and 71% of the decisions regarding planning and structures. However, they only make 50% of the decisions on resource management. The latter domain includes the allocation and use of resources for teaching staff, non-teaching staff, capital and operating expenditure and professional development of principals and teachers.

School autonomy is grounded in the principle of "freedom of education", which is guaranteed by Article 24 of the Belgian Constitution. Freedom of education gives the right to any natural or legal person to set up a school, recruit staff and determine the (educational, religious or ideological) principles of the school. Schools also enjoy considerable autonomy in developing curricula and organising teaching within the boundaries set by the regulatory framework (see below). Parents are free to choose and are guaranteed access to a school of their choice within reasonable distance from their home. In principle, funding "follows the student", which lays the foundation for potentially strong competition among schools to attract students (see Chapter 3 for more detail).

The role of school boards and educational networks

Every school is governed by a legally recognised competent authority, typically referred to as school board or school governing body, which oversees the implementation of legislation and regulations in the school. There are about 1 500 school boards in the Flemish Community.[3] School boards can be responsible for one or several schools and they typically administrate all resources for their school(s). Most school boards belong to an "umbrella organisation", which represents them in policy discussions with the government and provides school support, for example by developing curricula and timetables based on the centrally-set attainment targets and developmental objectives (more on this below). Officially recognised schooling in the Flemish Community is organised within three educational networks:

- **The Flemish Community education network** (*Onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap*, GO!) acts under the authority of the Flemish Community government and has its own school board: the Community Education Council. The operational functions of this board are situated at the meso-level: schools are organised in 28 school groups. In 2012/13, the Flemish Community network included 14.9% of primary school students and 17.6% of mainstream secondary school students (Government of Flanders, 2013). Community schools have to comply with a range of principles regarding the neutrality of education and they have to offer a range of choices for students to attend classes in an officially recognised religion or in non-confessional ethics (see Chapter 2).
- **The publicly funded and publicly managed education network** (*Officieel gesubsidieerd onderwijs*, OGO), also referred to as grant-aided public education, includes schools organised by the provincial and city/municipal authorities. These local and provincial authorities act as school boards. At the political level, the city and municipal authorities are represented by the Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (*Onderwijssecretariaat voor Steden en Gemeenten van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap*, OVSG). The provincial authorities are represented by the Flemish Provincial Education (*Provinciaal Onderwijs Vlaanderen*, POV). The OGO network included 22.7% of primary school students and 7.6% of mainstream secondary school students in 2012/13 (Government of Flanders, 2013).
- **The publicly funded and privately managed education network** (*Vrij gesubsidieerd onderwijs*, VGO), also referred to as grant-aided private education, includes denominational and non-denominational schools. The vast majority of denominational schools are of Catholic tradition. The school boards of Catholic schools are typically private foundations related to dioceses, parishes or congregations. These are represented by the Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education (*Vlaams Secretariaat Katholiek Onderwijs,* VSKO). Six other denominational schools are clustered in the Council of School Boards of Protestant-

Christian Education (IPCO). The few other denominational schools have not established an umbrella organisation. The non-denominational schools typically pursue a particular educational method or philosophy. There are 25 schools represented by the Federation of Steiner Schools, eighteen schools represented by the Federation of Independent Pluralistic Emancipatory Method Schools (FOPEM) and 12 schools clustered in the Flemish Education Consultation Platform (*Vlaams Onderwijs OverlegPlatform,* VOOP). The four smaller umbrella organisations within the VGO network have established the Consultation Body of Small Education Providers (*Overleg Kleine Onderwijsverstrekkers,* OKO) as a discussion partner for the Flemish Community. The VGO network enrols the majority of the student population, 62.4% of primary school students and 74.8% of mainstream secondary school students in 2012/13 (Government of Flanders, 2013).

Table 1.2 illustrates the organisation of the Flemish school sector within the educational networks and umbrella organisations and Figure 1.3 depicts the distribution of students across the three educational networks. There are considerable differences in the number of schools grouped together under one school board within and across the different educational networks. In the Flemish Community education network (GO!), all 28 school boards (also referred to as "school groups") are responsible for more than one school. Since these groupings can bring together elementary schools, secondary schools, centres for adult education, boarding schools and Centres for Student Guidance, they can be quite large and have up to 25 members. In grant-aided public and private education (OGO and VGO), on the other hand, more than 50% of the primary schools have a school board responsible for only one school. At the secondary level, this is the case for 33% of VGO schools and 56% of OGO schools (Groenez et al., 2015).

Table 1.2. **Educational networks, umbrella organisations and school boards**

Network	Community education (GO!)	Grant-aided public education (OGO)		Grant-aided private education (VGO)		
Umbrella organisation	Flemish Community Education (GO!)	Educational Secretariat of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (OVSG)	Flemish Provincial Education (POV)	Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education (VSKO)	Council of School Boards of Protestant-Christian Education (IPCO)	FOPEM Steiner, VOOP
					➔ Consultation Body of Small Education Providers (OKO)	
School board	Flemish Community Education Council ➔ School groups	Cities and municipalities	Provinces	Private foundations		
Schools						

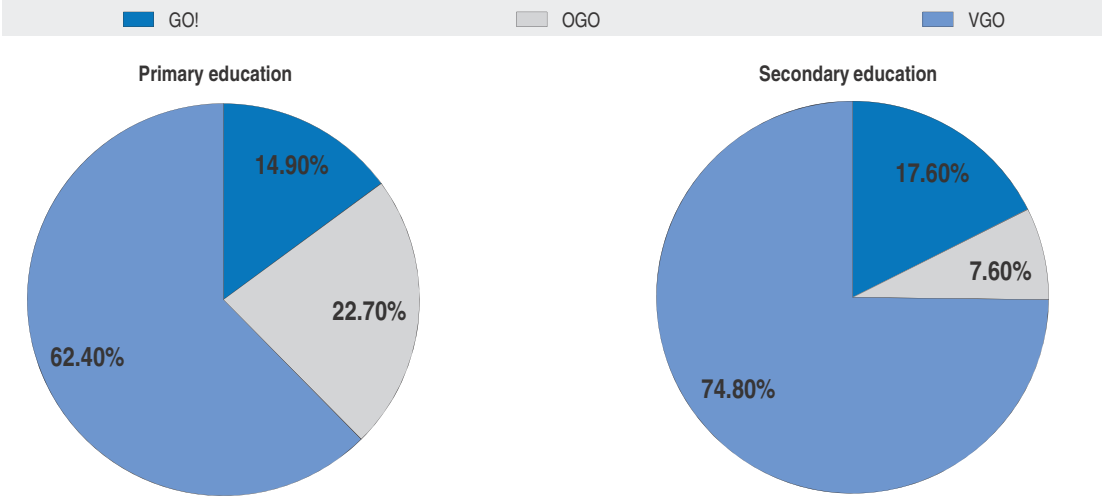
Source: Authors based on Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015a), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, *www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*.

Educational goals, recognition and quality assurance

Educational goals and official recognition of schools

The Flemish Authority sets a "core curriculum" consisting of attainment targets and developmental objectives to be implemented by all schools. Final attainment targets are minimum objectives, which the government considers necessary and attainable for

Figure 1.3. **Distribution of students over the three main educational networks**



Notes: GO! = Flemish Community education; OGO = Grant-aided public education; VGO = Grant-aided private education
Source: Government of Flanders (2013), *Flanders in Figures, www.flanders.be/en/discover-flanders*.

students at the end of specific year levels and study programmes. They were first implemented in 1998 to increase transparency, quality assurance and comparability in the education offered across schools and networks. Developmental objectives are goals that schools should strive for their students to attain, but there is no obligation for all students to actually reach them. Schools only need to account for their efforts to work towards these goals. The attainment targets are an instrument for the government to guarantee the minimum desired quality of education.

For schools to receive public funding and have the right to award official certificates, they need to be "recognised" by the Flemish authorities. There is a system of compulsory inspection for all schools seeking recognition by the Flemish Government. School boards that are seeking recognition for their schools have to comply with a number of regulations. Most importantly, they must incorporate final attainment targets and developmental objectives set by the Flemish authorities in their curricula and allow the Flemish authorities to assure the quality of their schools via the regular inspections. Schools must also be adequately equipped and be housed in buildings that comply with a range of quality standards. Both publicly managed and privately managed schools receive public funding provided that they meet the requirements for schools in their sector (see Chapter 2 for more detail on school funding).

School-based curricula and quality assurance

According to the 2009 Decree on Quality of Education, each school is responsible for providing good quality education. Within the framework of attainment targets and developmental objectives, schools are free to develop their own curricula, which will reflect different priorities and cover broader areas. In practice, most schools work within the curricula developed by the umbrella organisations of their educational network. Schools are legally required to implement a system of quality assurance, but they are free to determine the type and design of their own quality system. There are no nationwide standardised tests or examinations to measure the learning outcomes of all Flemish

students at key stages of schooling. However, a range of externally designed tests exist to help schools measure their outcomes. These include the following (Shewbridge et al., 2011):

- The National Assessment Programme (*Peilingen*) was originally developed as a periodical sample survey to monitor the implementation of attainment targets at the system level. The tests are administered every year to a representative sample of students in primary school (Year 6) and secondary school (Year 8, 10 or 12). However, it is now possible for schools to administer parallel versions of these tests as part of their own evaluation activities. Also, all schools participating in the National Assessment Programme receive reports with feedback on their own performance.
- The umbrella organisations of several educational networks offer student tests for the final year of primary education, aligned to the networks' respective curricula. The two main tests are provided by VSKO and OVSG. The VSKO's tests (*Inter-Diocesane Proeven*, IDP) in Dutch language and mathematics have been available since the 1970s, while tests in "world orientation" (with the two strands "nature and technology" and "humanity and society") have been added more recently. These tests are taken by almost 90% of all Flemish Catholic school students. Results are reported compared to the national average for participating schools and to participating schools with similar student population or contextual characteristics. The OVSG's tests (*OVSG-toets*) are used by schools managed by the municipalities and cities but also by most schools of the GO! network and some publicly funded private schools. These tests cover the breadth of the OVSG curriculum and attainment targets in Dutch language, mathematics, environmental studies, arts education and French. Practical tests are also available in a range of subjects including spoken language (Dutch and French), physical education, technology and music. Results are processed on line and can be compared to average results of participating schools, schools with a similar profile and previous years' results.
- A range of student tests for schools (*Toetsen voor scholen*) are available on a special website run by the Ministry of Education and Training.
- The Flemish student monitoring system (*Leerlingvolgsysteem voor Vlaanderen*, LVS) offers a suite of formative assessments for the primary sector. Primary schools can use these to monitor student progress in Dutch and mathematics at different stages of primary schooling.

School inspection

External evaluation of schools is implemented by the Flemish Inspectorate of Education. External inspection by the Inspectorate ensures that schools implement the centrally-set attainment targets and developmental objectives, comply with the regulations for recognition and financing and systematically monitor their own quality. Since 2009, the Inspectorate pursues a differentiated approach where every school has to be inspected at least once every ten years, but some schools will receive more frequent and intensive inspection, depending on the Inspectorate's evaluation of their educational quality. On average, the Inspectorate visits schools after an interval of five years (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015a). The Inspectorate uses an inspection framework with quality indicators to evaluate school context, input, processes and output. Part of the inspection involves examining the tests schools use to assess their students. Following the inspection process, the Inspectorate prepares a report for publication, which contains a

recommendation to the Flemish government about the schools' quality and future steps to be taken. There are three possible recommendations: positive, restricted positive and negative (Shewbridge et al., 2011).

Pedagogical Advisory Services

Each umbrella organisation runs a pedagogical advisory service (*Pedagogische Begeleidingsdiensten,* PBD) to provide professional support to teachers and school leaders. Schools can call upon the PBD to receive educational and methodological support, for example in the area of school self-evaluation, quality assurance and innovative school projects. There has been a shift of focus from support for individual teachers towards support for the whole school, and in particular for strengthening schools' "policy-making capacity". In the case that a school receives a negative recommendation from the Inspectorate and is judged to have insufficient policy-making capacity to implement a successful improvement plan, the school will be obliged to accept support from the PBD (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015a; Shewbridge et al., 2011).

Student guidance and youth assistance

Across the Flemish Community, there are 73 Student Guidance Centres (*Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding,* CLB) financed by the government. These centres bring together a mix of different professionals including educationalists, psychologists, social workers, medical doctors and nurses to provide multidisciplinary support to students. Guidance provided by the CLBs is based on four main pillars: i) learning and studying, ii) the school career, iii) preventive health care, and iv) social and emotional development. The CLBs also organise mandatory medical examinations of students.

The CLBs are independent and work across the three educational networks, although each CLB is connected to one of the three networks. Students, parents, teachers or school leaders can call upon the CLBs to intervene, but supervision of a student by a CLB is only compulsory in the case of truancy. In all other cases the CLB will provide guidance and supervision only after obtaining the student's or parents' (for students under 12 years of age) consent. The CLBs also guarantee confidentiality of all student data.

The main focus of the CLBs' work is on ensuring equal educational opportunities for all students, particularly by working with students at risk of drop out and early school leaving. The CLBs also provide guidance to students regarding their choice of educational programme based on prior achievement and they can refer students to special education if necessary. Further, the CLBs can help establish connections with appropriate assistance and for this purpose they are a major partner of Integrated Youth Assistance,[4] a system of co-operation between different sectors of youth care to ensure well aligned and efficient assistance to all students in need.

Responsibilities for policy development and implementation

The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training comprises the Department of Education and Training and four executive agencies. The Flemish Department of Education and Training has responsibility for policy preparation, evaluation, co-ordination and communication, while the four autonomous agencies are in charge of policy implementation and oversee all services related to quality improvement in education.

- The Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (*Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming,* AKOV) is responsible for defining the minimum

standards for quality education that all Flemish schools must meet. In this context, AKOV sets the attainment targets and developmental objectives for schools. It is also in charge of the recognition of qualifications and the recognition of prior learning.

- The Agency for Educational Services (*Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten,* AgODI) is responsible for the implementation of policies on school education, part-time arts education, centres for student guidance, the inspectorate and the pedagogical support to teachers and schools. AgODI pays the salaries of all school staff, manages the personal files of teachers and monitors student enrolment, truancy and early school leaving.
- The Agency for Educational Infrastructure (*Agentschap voor Infrastructuur in het Onderwijs,* AGIOn) provides financial support for the acquisition, construction and renovation of buildings for schools and universities.
- The Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education and Study Grants (*Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs en Studietoelagen,* AHOVOS) is responsible for the implementation of policies on higher education, adult education and study grants. At the time of the preparation of this report, a merger between AKOV and AHOVOS was taking place.

Stakeholder consultation and participation is built into the public policy process. All legislation on education requires a mandatory consultation of the Flemish Education Council (*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad*, VLOR), the strategic advisory body for education and training which brings together representatives from all major stakeholder groups. Both trade unions and employer organisations are consulted in economic and social decisions, and meet regularly with the government as part of the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (*Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen,* SERV).

Main features of the school system

Quality and equity of schooling

The Flemish Community shows strong overall performance in international student assessments. At the primary level, Flemish students in Year 4 (typically aged 9 and 10) participate in the IEA's (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). In TIMSS 2011, they reached excellent results in mathematics and scored just above the TIMSS scale centerpoint in science. Indeed, the Flemish Community was among the top ten of high achieving education systems in mathematics and was significantly outperformed by only six participating countries.[5] Half of the Flemish students assessed in TIMSS reached the high benchmark of achievement in mathematics and 10% reached the advanced benchmark (compared to an international median of 28% and 4% respectively). In science, however, while the Flemish Community scored slightly above the TIMSS average, it was positioned among the lower achieving education systems, outperformed by 23 participating countries (Martin et al., 2012). As shown in Table 1.3, this relatively low position is mainly due to a smaller proportion of Flemish students achieving at the high end of the achievement distribution. While the proportion of students reaching the low and intermediate benchmarks in science achievement were slightly above the international median, only 24% reached the high benchmark and 2% reached the advanced benchmark (compared to an international median of 32% and 5%, respectively).

At age fifteen, Flemish students show strong performance in all the areas tested (mathematics, reading and science) in the OECD Programme for International Student

Table 1.3. **Performance of Flemish students in mathematics and science at the international benchmarks of achievement in primary education**

Percentages of students reaching international benchmarks in TIMSS

International benchmark	Area tested	Flemish Community of Belgium	International median
Low	Mathematics (TIMSS)	99	90
	Science (TIMSS)	96	92
Intermediate	Mathematics (TIMSS)	89	69
	Science (TIMSS)	73	72
High	Mathematics (TIMSS)	50	28
	Science (TIMSS)	24	32
Advanced	Mathematics (TIMSS)	10	4
	Science (TIMSS)	2	5

Sources: Martin, M. O. et al. (2012), *TIMSS 2011 International Results in Science*, International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), Amsterdam and TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center, Boston; Mullis, I.V.S. et al. (2012), *TIMSS 2011 International Results in Mathematics*, International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), Amsterdam and TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center, Boston.

Assessment (PISA). Since PISA was first administered in 2000, Flemish 15 year-olds have consistently achieved performance results above the OECD average. The Flemish Community of Belgium has reached particularly good results in mathematics, where it is typically positioned among the highest performing OECD education systems.

The PISA 2012 results further show that the Flemish Community of Belgium has been able to nurture a high share of top performers while limiting the proportion of low performers. Compared to the OECD average, significantly fewer Flemish 15 year-olds scored below the PISA performance level 2, believed to be the mark of basic competency necessary for a successful transition to the labour market or tertiary education in subsequent years (Table 1.4). At the top end of the performance distribution, a quarter of the Flemish student population reached the PISA performance level 5 and above, compared to an OECD average of 13% (OECD, 2013c). The Flemish Community is also among the education systems with the highest proportions of "resilient students", i.e. students who manage to overcome difficult socio-economic circumstances and exceed expectations, when compared with students in other countries[6] (10%, compared with an OECD average of 6.4%).

However, the PISA results also confirmed the persistence of profound inequities within the Flemish school system. As in previous rounds of the PISA assessment, socio-economic factors strongly influenced student performance in 2012: 20% of the mathematics performance variance in the Flemish Community could be explained by socio-economic background, compared to 15% at the OECD average. The most socio-economically advantaged quarter of Flemish students outperformed the least advantaged quarter by 116 score points, indicating a significant educational gap between students coming from different socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, 2013c).

Immigrant students are particularly at risk of underperformance. In 2012, 11% of the Flemish students assessed in PISA 2012 had an immigrant background and these students were more likely to be socio-economically disadvantaged in comparison to non-immigrant students. Immigrant students scored an average of 97 points lower in the PISA mathematics assessment than non-immigrant students, and an average of 65 points after accounting for socio-economic differences. This performance difference is significantly larger than in the OECD overall, where on average immigrant students performed 34 points lower than non-immigrants, and 21 points after accounting for socio-economic

Table 1.4. **Selected indicators of quality and equity in Flemish education, based on PISA 2012**

		Flemish Community	OECD average
Percentage of top performers	Mathematics	25	13
	Reading	13	9
	Science	12	8
Percentage of low performers	Mathematics	15	23
	Reading	14	18
	Science	15	18
Percentage of students who repeated a grade		27	12
Percentage of immigrant students who are low performers in mathematics		41	36
Percentage of variance in mathematics performance explained by socio-economic status		20	15

Notes: Top performers = students performing at PISA level 5 and above; low performers = students performing below PISA level 2.
Sources: OECD (2014a), PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do (Volume I, Revised edition, February 2014): Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading and Science, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264208780-en*; OECD (2013c), PISA 2012 Results: Excellence through Equity (Volume II): Giving Every Student the Chance to Succeed, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201132-en*; OECD (2013d), PISA 2012 Results: What Makes a School Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en*.

differences. In the Flemish Community, 41% of students with an immigrant background were low performers (i.e. scoring below the PISA level 2) in mathematics, compared to 12% of the non-immigrant population (OECD, 2013c).

The Flemish Community of Belgium also has high proportions of grade repetition, with 27% of 15 year-olds reporting that they have repeated a grade at least once, compared to 12% at the OECD average (OECD, 2013d). A closer look at this data reveals that grade repetition is more prevalent in primary education, with 18% of 15 year-olds reporting that they repeated a grade in primary education, compared to 9% in lower secondary education. National data indicate that grade repetition is also common practice at the upper secondary level. In the 2013/14 school year, 6% of the students enrolled at the second and third stage of secondary education were enrolled in the same grade as the previous year (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015b). At this stage, grade repetition needs to be seen in the context of a relatively long duration of compulsory education – from age 6 to age 18 – and challenges in keeping all students motivated to stay in education up to age 18.

There are marked performance differences between schools in the Flemish Community. The performance variance lying between Flemish schools for mathematics was among the highest of the participating education systems at 67% of the total variance, in contrast to 37% in the OECD. Most of the between-school variation is explained by the study programme in which a student is enrolled (OECD, 2013c). There are also indications that the socio-economic status of students influences their enrolment in different school types, with students from lower socio-economic backgrounds being overrepresented in the technical and vocational tracks and underrepresented in the general tracks in upper secondary education (Hindriks and Lamy, 2013).

As described above, the Flemish Community of Belgium has a highly stratified school system. In PISA 2012, 30% of students were in schools whose principal reported that a student in the national modal grade for 15 year-olds would be "very likely" transferred to another school because of "low academic achievement", "behavioural problems" or "special learning needs", compared to 13% on average across the OECD (OECD, 2013c). The fact that the Flemish school system provides the option to struggling students to transfer

to another programme may reduce incentives for teachers to work with these students to help them catch up. In the Flemish Community, the phenomenon of students who are falling behind transferring to less academically oriented schools or programmes is referred to as the "waterfall system".

In addition, a large proportion of students in the Flemish Community are diagnosed as having special educational needs and the majority of them are educated separately in special schools and classes. A comparative study prepared for the European Commission (NESSE, 2012) found that in 2010, 5.2% of the total student population in the Flemish Community of Belgium were being educated separately from the mainstream in special schools and classes. This was the highest proportion among 32 European education systems, based on information from the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

Attainment and transition to the labour market

Belgium as a whole has a highly qualified population and its general level of education has gradually increased over the past generation. Education is compulsory up to age eighteen. In 2013, almost three out of four (73%) Belgians aged 25-64 had at least an upper secondary education (compared with the OECD average of 77%) and 36% held a tertiary education degree (compared to an OECD average of 33%). The younger generation is doing even better: among 25-34 year-olds, 82% held at least an upper secondary qualification (compared to an OECD average of 83%), and 43% held a tertiary qualification (compared to an OECD average of 40%). Among 15-29 year olds, 15% were neither in education nor in employment, the same as on average across the OECD (OECD, 2015). The early school-leaving (ESL) rate in the Flemish Region is relatively low at 7.5%, compared to 14.7% in the Walloon Region and 17.7% in the Brussels Capital Region (European Commission, 2015).

The Flemish Community's own ESL indicator, which is based on administrative data for Flemish schools, shows a decrease in the share of youngsters leaving education with at most lower secondary education, from 12.9% in 2010 to 11.7% in 2013 (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015c). This leaves the ESL rate at 6.5 percentage points from the Flemish target of 5.2%. The indicator shows that early school leaving is more widespread among Flemish students in the urban areas, with the highest ESL rates found in the cities of Antwerp (24.6%), Ghent (20.6%), the Brussels Capital Region (19.6%) and Genk (19.4%) (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015c).

Results from the OECD's 2012 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) indicate that adults aged 16-65 in the Flemish Community of Belgium are highly skilled, achieving above-average proficiency in literacy and numeracy and average proficiency in problem solving in technology-rich environments compared with adults in the other countries participating in the survey.[7] The Flemish Community also has a lower proportion of low-skilled adults than on average across participating countries: some 14% of adults in the Flemish Community attain only the lowest performance level in literacy proficiency (compared with an average of 16%) and 13% attain only the lowest performance level in numeracy (compared with an average of 19%).

Educational attainment appears to have a significant impact on employment prospects in Belgium. Among Belgian adults aged 25-64, people with tertiary qualifications have the highest employment rates and those with only below upper secondary education are most at risk of being unemployed. In 2012, the percentage-point difference in

employment rates between people with tertiary qualifications and those with below upper secondary education in Belgium was among the highest in the OECD, at 37% (compared to an average difference of 28% across the OECD) (OECD, 2014b). Educational attainment is also related to the level of foundation skills in the adult population. As in other countries, Flemish adults with higher levels of education also tend to have higher scores in literacy and numeracy as measured in PIAAC (OECD, 2014b).

Among those with upper secondary education as their highest level of education, graduates from vocational education and training (VET) programmes appear to fare better in the labour market than graduates from general education programmes. In 2012, 76% of individuals aged 25-64 with a vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary qualification were employed – a rate that was 7 percentage points higher than among individuals with a general upper secondary education as their highest qualification. The difference may be explained, at least in part, by the fact that people who study in non-vocational tracks generally pursue education at the next education level, while those who study in vocational tracks at the upper secondary level generally enter the labour market once they have obtained this qualification (OECD, 2014b). A potential drawback, according to results from PIAAC, is that people with VET qualifications generally have lower levels of literacy proficiency than people with general upper secondary education, which is likely to make it more difficult for them to adapt to changing work environments.

The European Commission (2015) points to concerns about labour shortages for critical occupations and skills mismatch in Belgium as a whole. Most mismatches are vertical, i.e. they are linked to the fact that workers' levels of skills are lower than required by the job. According to the European Commission (2015), more than 80% of the active population with tertiary education are employed, against 65% for medium-skilled persons and less than 40% for the low-skilled. While these percentages are below the EU average for all three groups, the gap for the low-skilled is especially large (European Commission, 2015).

Policy priorities and recent developments

School collaboration through school associations

In 1999, the Flemish authorities launched a policy to encourage school collaboration through the establishment of "school associations" (*scholengemeenschappen*) in the secondary sector. From 2003, school associations were also introduced in the primary sector. School associations are collaborative partnerships between schools in the same geographical area. On average, school associations comprise between six and twelve schools (Pont et al., 2008). Schools forming a school association can belong to different school boards and even to different educational networks (although school associations within the same educational network are far more common). In 2010, the vast majority of schools (96.7%) belonged to a school association (Ministry of Education and the University of Antwerp Edubron Research Group, 2010).[8]

It is a key purpose of this policy to strengthen schools' organisational and leadership capacities through increased co-operation. In secondary education, the policy also aims at improving the co-operation of schools in the supply of study options, career guidance and efficient use of resources (Ministry of Education and the University of Antwerp Edubron Research Group, 2010). Joining a school association is voluntary, but the Ministry of Education and Training provides incentives for schools to join an association by attributing resources to the association, and granting more organisational flexibility in the case of secondary schools. School associations receive a package of points for the management

and support staff in their schools, which are then redistributed among the individual schools in the association based on a repartition system agreed between the schools forming the association. In elementary education, some of these points may be used to appoint a co-ordinating director of the school association, and in secondary education, the school association can retain up to 10% of the points to ensure its own operation.

Master plan for secondary education and policy measures for the reduction of early school leaving

In 2013, the Flemish Government adopted a "master plan" for the reform of the secondary education system (*Masterplan Secundair Onderwijs*), which is due to be further translated into legislation during the 2014-19 administration period. The stated intentions of the master plan are to improve quality and equity in secondary education by reducing early school leaving; addressing the strong impact of students' socio-economic background on their school and programme choices; improving students' learning trajectories and facilitating the transition from primary to secondary education.

In the medium term, the modernisation of the secondary sector is intended to introduce i) a broader first stage of secondary education, which will delay early tracking and allow students to make choices based on their talents and interests, and ii) a simplified structure for the second and third stage of secondary education, which will result in fewer study programmes. In the long term, the modernisation process should lead to the abolition of the hierarchy between the four existing programme types in secondary education (Eurydice, 2014).

The Master Plan for Secondary Education also includes provisions for changes in the primary sector, including increased attention to languages, sciences and technology; more differentiated teaching and learning providing the adequate level of challenge and support for each student; and adaptations allowing a more gradual transition into secondary education (Eurydice, 2014).

Equal opportunities policy ("GOK policy")

Ensuring equity in education has been a policy priority for Education Ministers in the Flemish Community over the past decades. The 2002 Decree on Equal Educational Opportunities *(Gelijke Onderwijskansen*, GOK) has played an important role in promoting policies to maximise learning opportunities for all children. The 2002 Decree includes three main provisions, referred to as the "GOK policy": i) the creation of local consultation platforms to ensure fair school admission and enrolment processes; ii) measures to safeguard school choice and the right to enrolment for each child in a context of demographic growth; and iii) the allocation of extra staff resources for schools implementing additional educational support in the context of this policy. A fourth measure to promote equal opportunities through extra resources was implemented in 2008 with the introduction of a weighted funding system for school operating grants based on student characteristics. These measures are described in detail throughout Chapters 2 and 3.

Inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools ("M Decree")

Working towards a better inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) has also been high on the Flemish education policy agenda in recent years. According to national data (see Chapter 3), 4.5% of the Flemish student population were enrolled in

separate schools providing education exclusively for students with SEN in 2013, while an increasing number of students have been enrolled in integrated education (*Geïntegreerd Onderwijs,* GON, integrated education under the guidance of a special school) and in inclusive settings (*Inclusief onderwijs,* ION, inclusive education in mainstream schools). In March 2014, the Parliament passed a Decree concerning measures for students with special educational needs, which is referred to as the "M Decree". The Decree will be gradually implemented from September 2015. It aims to avoid the disproportionate referral of students to separate schools and to ensure greater access to mainstream education for students with special educational needs. The Decree states that schools can only refer students to special education if they can justify having tried all "reasonable adaptations" to allow them to follow the teaching programme in mainstream education (for more detail, see Chapter 3).

Notes

1. This indicator presents results from data collected in 2011 on decision making at the lower secondary level of education and updates the previous survey on this topic, which took place in 2007. This indicator shows where key decisions are made in public institutions at the lower secondary level of education. The indicator does not capture the totality of decisions made within a school system. Instead, a representative set of 46 key decisions, organised across four domains, are considered. Responses were compiled in each country by a panel of experts representing different levels of the decision-making process at the lower secondary level. Information on the composition of these panels and the methods and process used to complete the survey can be found in the "Notes on methodology" in Annex 3, available at *www.oecd.org/edu/eag2012*.
2. The four domains of decision-making defined by the OECD (2012) comprise the following areas:
   - **Organisation of instruction:** student admissions; student careers; instruction time; choice of textbooks; choice of software/learningware; grouping of students; additional support for students; teaching methods; day-to-day student assessment.
   - **Personnel management:** hiring and dismissal of principals, teaching and non-teaching staff; duties and conditions of service of staff; salary scales of staff; influence over the careers of staff.
   - **Planning and structures:** opening or closure of schools; creation or abolition of a grade level; design of programmes of study; selection of programmes of study taught in a particular school; choice of subjects taught in a particular school; definition of course content; setting of qualifying examinations for a certificate or diploma; accreditation (examination content, marking and administration).
   - **Resource management:** allocation and use of resources for teaching staff, non-teaching staff, capital and operating expenditure, professional development of principals and teachers.
3. This figure is an estimate. The exact number of school boards is not available due to yearly fluctuations and a discrepancy between administrative school numbers and school locations (campuses).
4. The other partners of Integrated Youth Care are: General Welfare organisations, the sector of Specialised Youth Care, the Centres for Mental Health Care, the Preventive Child Health Care organisations, the Centres for Integral Family Care and the Flemish Agency for Persons with a Handicap.
5. In 2011, 52 education systems and 7 benchmarking participants took part in the fourth grade assessment of TIMSS.
6. Resilient students are defined by the OECD (2013c) as disadvantaged students (those in the bottom quarter of the socio-economic scale within a country or economy) who perform among the top 25% of students across all participating countries, after taking their socio-economic status into account.
7. Around 166 000 adults aged 16-65 were surveyed in 24 countries and sub-national regions.
8. Most of the schools that have not joined a school association provide special education.

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Chapter 2

Funding of school education in the Flemish Community of Belgium

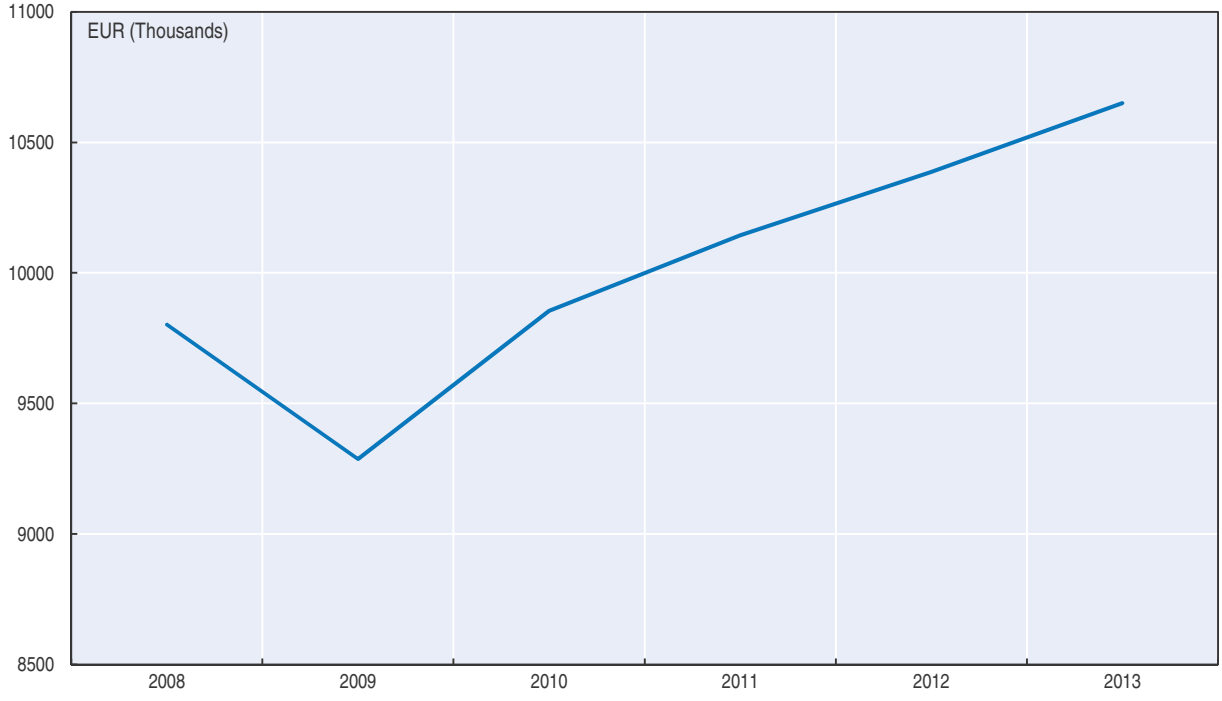
This chapter is about the funding of school education in the Flemish Community of Belgium. It presents the level of resources available for the school sector and the main principles of school funding. It also analyses the structure of the school education budget and provides a detailed description of its three main components: school operating grants, staffing and infrastructure. It examines how the Flemish approach to school funding supports freedom of choice and school autonomy while aiming to provide equal opportunities to schools in responding to the needs of different student groups. The chapter also reviews the availability of information necessary to evaluate the impact of school funding and examines the distribution of funding across levels and types of education, giving particular attention to the differential resourcing of educational programmes in the secondary school sector.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Context

The Flemish Community of Belgium supports a complex school system which performs at a very high standard internationally. The strength of government commitment to Flemish education is reflected by the school budget trend since the global financial crisis of 2008. While the crisis triggered a contraction in spending on elementary and secondary education in 2009 – a fall of 8% in nominal terms – growth had returned by 2010 and has trended upwards since then (Figure 2.1). It is important to note that the drop in the budget of 2009 was partly due to a pre-payment to the operational budget for elementary and secondary education in the previous year and, to a lesser extent, to savings made in 2009.

Figure 2.1. **The Flemish education budget (in thousand EUR), 2008-13**



Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2013), *Flemish Education in Figures, 2012-13, www.ond.vlaanderen.be/onderwijsstatistieken.*

At the same time, the Flemish school system faces both pressure on budget and pressure on educational performance. Pressure on budget is related to recent demographic trends. Nominal growth in the school education budget has been underpinned by strong demographic growth (Chapter 1). The current strong growth in the elementary school population will eventually flow through to secondary education and reverse the downward trend that has been experienced in recent years (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2013). As funding enrolment growth in secondary school is much more expensive

than funding growth in elementary school (1.7 times the per student cost), this will create further demands on the budget for school funding (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

Pressure on the education system to further improve student performance and equity is created by a combination of factors. Sustaining a high level of commitment to investment in schooling will likely depend on the ability of Flemish schools to produce a continuing high standard of performance and to extend and deepen the benefits of schooling. While the Flemish Community has a highly educated population, educational attainment levels need to rise in line with economic change and achievement gaps between students from different socio-economic backgrounds need to be narrowed. Labour market projections indicate that people with low levels of educational attainment are likely to face increasing difficulties on the labour market, which requires further strategies to reduce early school leaving and enhance qualifications (CEDEFOP, in Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

Faced with fiscal pressures and performance pressures, Flemish schools rely on the capacity of the funding model to allocate resources to where they are most needed and where they can have the greatest impact. If the machinery of funding is less than optimal, schools' access to human and financial resources will be constrained and performance impaired. It will be difficult for schools to maintain and extend their efforts to achieve more, especially for children at an educational disadvantage.

The twin pressures of fiscal restraint and performance enhancement are being felt in a context in which the Flemish school population is not only growing, but changing in ways which add further opportunities and challenges. Not only are more children beginning school, but a more diverse range of children in terms of language and family education background are being accommodated. More places in school must be found, but a greater effort must be made to ensure that children succeed. While Flemish secondary schools have an outstanding record of achievement, there are also wide gaps and considerable inequality. The Flemish budget has to tackle these issues as well as managing quantitative growth in enrolment.

The ways in which schools are funded by government should be viewed in the context of participation and performance as well as the need for efficient allocation of resources. If a performance level that is consistently high for *all* populations is the policy objective, this puts pressure on the funding machinery, not only the level of funding. For more value or impact has to be extracted from educational investments. Inefficiencies and inconsistencies work against objectives and waste money. The point is to ensure that funds are allocated in ways which maximise impact.

Features

Expenditure on school education

Overall expenditure on schooling is high in Belgium compared to other OECD and European Union countries. Figure 2.2 shows the cumulative expenditure per student from age 6 to 15 by educational institutions across OECD countries based on information from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Belgium as a whole is among the ten countries spending the highest cumulative amount per student in this age bracket.

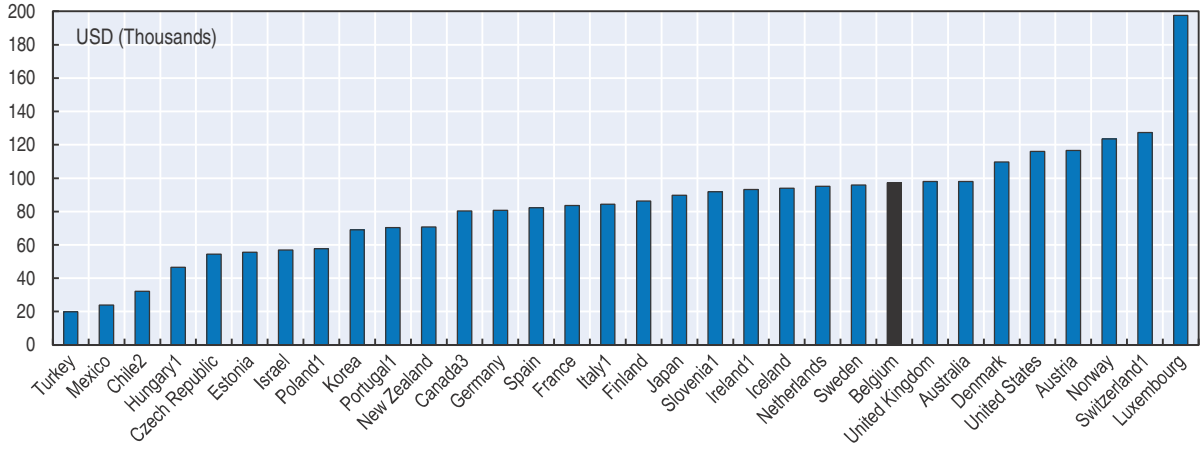
Governance of school funding

Funding of Flemish schools follows the same basic stepwise model for all schools. The general budget is divided among the different federal entities of Belgium, including the Federal Government, based on a ratio. The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training pays the salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff directly. However, funds for operating expenses and minor capital works are channelled through an intermediate body. In the case of Flemish Community (GO!) schools, this is the local cluster of establishments or "school group". In the case of municipal schools, it is local government. In the case of grant-aided private schools, operational funding goes directly to the school board.

Capital funds flow from the Ministry through the Board of Flemish Community schools for Community education and through the Flemish Agency for Educational Infrastructure (AGIOn) for grant-aided public or private schools. Grant-aided schools make a contribution from their own resources to meet capital requirements. These flows are depicted in Annex 2.A1 which analyses each of the separate funding routes by sector of schooling.

Figure 2.2. **Cumulative expenditure by educational institutions per student aged 6 to 15 years, 2010**

Cumulative expenditure in equivalent USD using PPPs for GDP



1. Public institutions only;
2. Data are for 2011;
3. Data are for 2009.

Source: OECD (2013a), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes a School Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices*, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en*, Table IV.3.1.

In the machinery of funds allocation, the Agency for Educational Services (AgODI) plays a key role, including in collecting and verifying data, calculating budgets, managing relationships with school boards, and providing clear statements to schools regarding the amount of operating resources and teaching hours they generate.

Main principles of school funding

Funding is provided to schools based on certain general principles. All schools, whether public or private, have a legal entitlement to funding. This is intended to fully cover operating costs and salaries. The different legal status of schools – whether public or private, municipal or provincial, elementary or secondary – has no bearing on funding

entitlement. Equality of treatment between Flemish Community education (GO!) and public and private grant-aided education has been enshrined in the Parliamentary Act of 2008, which builds on a longer history of convergence of funding entitlement.

Capital funding is also provided to all schools, regardless of their legal status. However, there are differences in the level of access to public funds for infrastructure. Schools run by the Flemish Community network receive 100% of their capital funding through the Community, while grant-aided public and private schools receive between 60-70% (depending on educational level). The assets created in these sectors are either privately-owned or are the property of the relevant public authority.

Public funding ensures equal treatment for all educational providers (except regarding capital) and aims to ensure equal opportunities for all families by reducing the educational costs of parents to a strict minimum. There are no tuition fees in pre-primary, primary and secondary education. While both elementary and secondary schools levy charges, these are strictly regulated. In elementary schools, the annual levy rises with the age of students – for the 2013/14 school year, it was set at EUR 25 per child aged 2-3 years, EUR 35 for 4 year-olds, EUR 40 for 5 year-olds and also for children of compulsory school age in pre-primary education, and EUR 70 per student in primary education[1](Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). For extra-mural activities, there was a maximum charge of EUR 410 per student throughout the child's primary school career. In secondary schools, no maximum charge applies. However, schools are required by law to apply cost-control measures, maintain costs at a reasonable level and take into account parental circumstances.

The structure of the school education budget

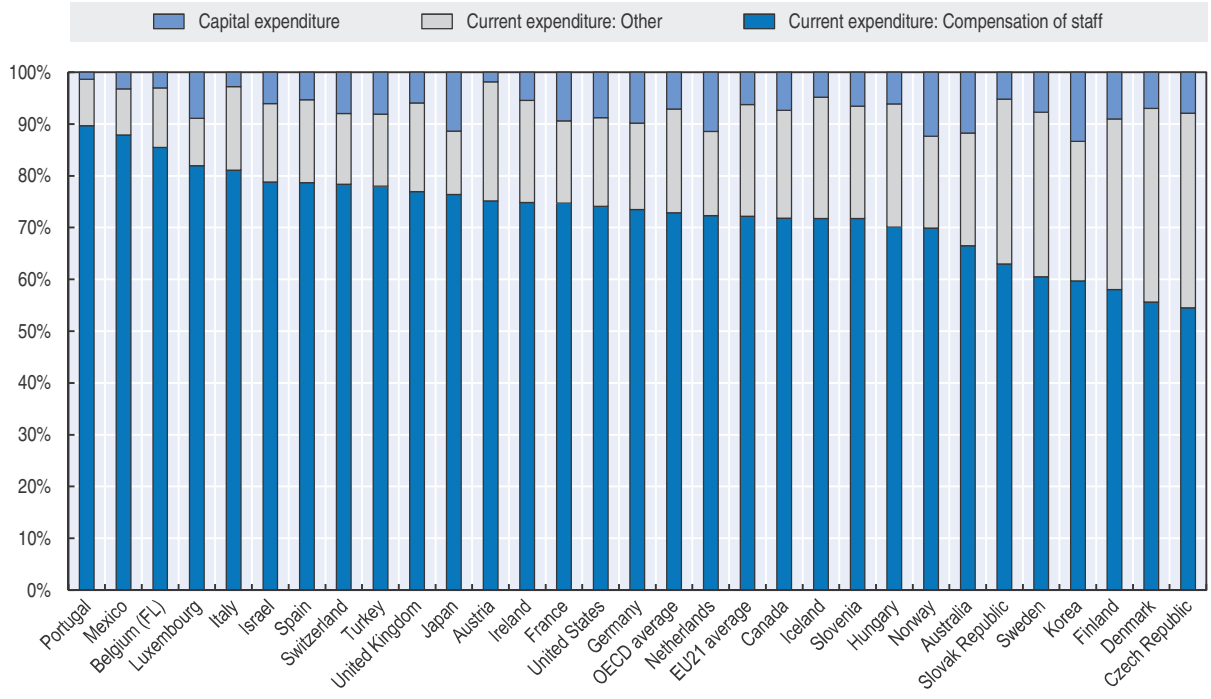
As in other OECD countries, by far the biggest share of expenditure on school education in the Flemish Community of Belgium is allocated to compensation for staff. According to data reported by the Flemish Community to the OECD (2014), staff compensation represented 83.8% in primary education and 85.5% in secondary education. Other current expenditure accounted for around 12 % of total budgets while capital investment contributed 3-5% (depending on the educational level). The proportions for secondary education in the Flemish Community compared to other OECD countries are represented in Figure 2.3. As can be seen from the figure, only Portugal and Mexico invested a higher proportion of their overall budgets in staff compensation at the secondary level.

In the Flemish Community, funds are allocated to elementary and secondary schools under three broad headings: the operating grant (to meet running costs), salaries, and capital. Figure 2.4 analyses the major components of the school budget in the Flemish Community and reports the trends in spending between 2011 and 2013. As can be seen from Figure 2.4, over the last three years, outlays on salaries have grown in absolute terms, but are largely unchanged as a proportion of total outlays as investment (infrastructure spending) has lifted. The increases in salaries during this period do not compare with the 16% increase in capital spending (which nevertheless remains a very small component of total expenditure).

To illustrate the way in which school operating grants and staffing hours are calculated for an individual school, Annex 2.A2 provides an extract and translation of an official letter sent by AgODI to a sample elementary school and Annex 2.A3 provides an abstract and translation of an official letter sent by AgODI to a sample secondary school. The following sections draw from this information and other example letters seen by the OECD review team in order to describe the Flemish approach to school funding.

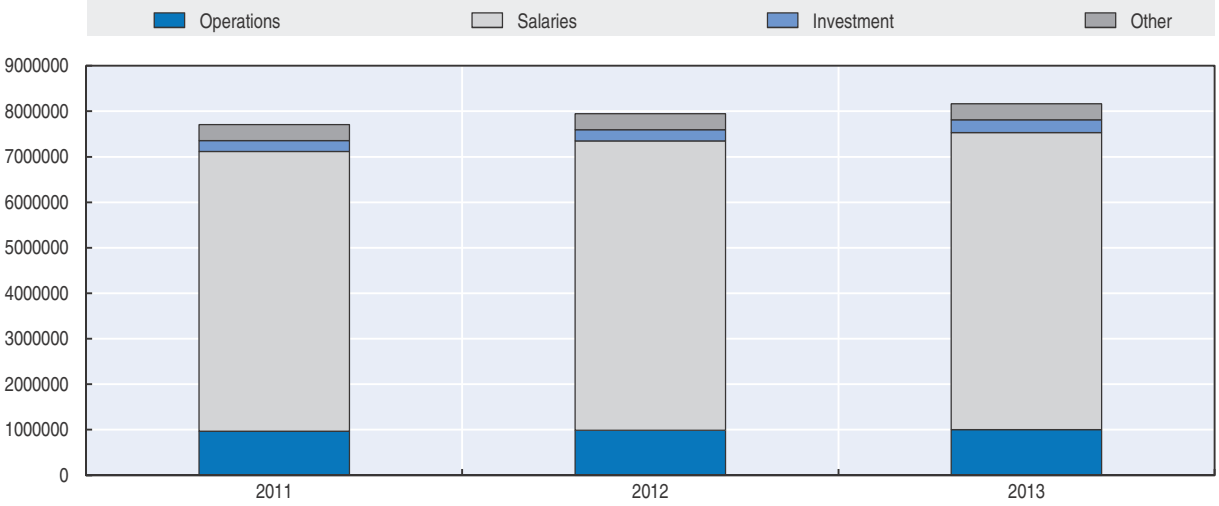
Figure 2.3. **Distribution of expenditure by secondary educational institutions, by resource category, 2011**

In percentage of total expenditure



Source: OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en*, Table B6.1.

Figure 2.4. **Elementary and secondary education: main budget components and trends (in EUR), 2011-13**



Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, *www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*, Annex Table 2.3.

The operating grant

The operating grant is intended to cover the running expenses of a school. These include administrative and utility costs, but also a number of fixed costs in programme delivery. While there are differences in the administrative status of schools belonging to the three different umbrella networks (Chapter 1), the allocation of operating funds has been on the same basis since 2008, when the Flemish Parliament ended the older system of differential treatment. As regards operational costs, all schools receive a base grant, adjusted for "objective differences" between the educational networks and weighted by student and school characteristics.

The 2008 approach to operational funding, while treating all schools alike, does recognise two distinctive cost features (referred to as "objective differences") between the educational networks. First, according to the principle of neutrality (Art. 24 of the Belgian Constitution), schools operated by the Flemish Community network are constitutionally obliged to offer freedom of choice. This means that every population centre, whether urban or rural, must be served by a Community school, notwithstanding the small size of schools which results from this obligation in certain localities. Second, every public school (i.e. Community schools and grant-aided public schools) must offer philosophy-of-life courses (official religions or non-confessional ethics) on demand, notwithstanding potentially low numbers in options demanded by parents.

The legal requirements for freedom of choice and openness to different philosophies of life impose higher operating costs on public schools. These costs are taken into account in the operating grant through two "pre-set" budget provisions: i) 3% of the overall budget for school operating grants is set aside and allocated to the Community school network as financial compensation for the obligation of neutrality through which parental freedom of choice is guaranteed; and ii) 4.5% of the budget for school operating grants is allocated to Community education and grant-aided public education as compensation for the obligation to offer instruction in different philosophy-of-life courses. These 4.5% are calculated based on the budget for students qualifying for this difference.

Since 2008, the operating grant also adjusts for social differences between students. This adjustment in the operating grant applies to mainstream elementary and secondary education, but not to special education[2] (see Chapter 3). The weighting of the operating grant is designed to deliver additional support to schools serving disadvantaged students and their communities. In the case of elementary education, this support represents about 14% of the total operating grant and will rise to 15.5% by 2021. In the case of secondary school, the corresponding figures are 10% rising to 11% in 2020 (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

The pre-set budget to compensate for social differences between students is distributed among schools by adjusting school operating grants based on four indicators:

- **the educational attainment of the student's mother,** which is taken to reflect the cultural background of the student;
- **the students' eligibility for a study grant,** which is intended to capture the financial capacity of the student's family;
- **the language spoken at home,** which is taken as an indicator for the linguistic and cultural capital of the student; and
- **the student's place of residence,** which is seen to reflect the social capital of the student.

In elementary education, the overall pre-set budget to compensate for social differences is divided equally among the four indicators (i.e. 25% of the budget per indicator). In secondary education, however, the neighbourhood indicator (student's place of residence) is allocated only 10% of the overall earmarked budget, with the other indicators weighing 30% each. The money value per student meeting a given indicator is calculated by dividing the overall budget for the indicator by the number of students meeting the indicator, resulting in four different money values. Table 2.1 provides further details.

Table 2.1. **Indicators of students' socio-economic status applied in the calculation of school operating grants**

Student characteristic	Indicator	Source of information	Money value per student (2013/14) in EUR	
			Elementary education	Secondary education
Cultural background	Educational attainment of the mother	Provided by parents	122.753547	125.540353
Financial capacity	Entitlement for a study grant	Flemish study grant administration	120.833022	114.666674
Linguistic and cultural capital	Language spoken at home other than Dutch	Provided by parents	146.689638	276.471822
Social capital	Student's place of residence	Flemish household administration	99.780364	40.793134

Sources: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, *www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*; Examples of budget letters sent to Flemish schools.

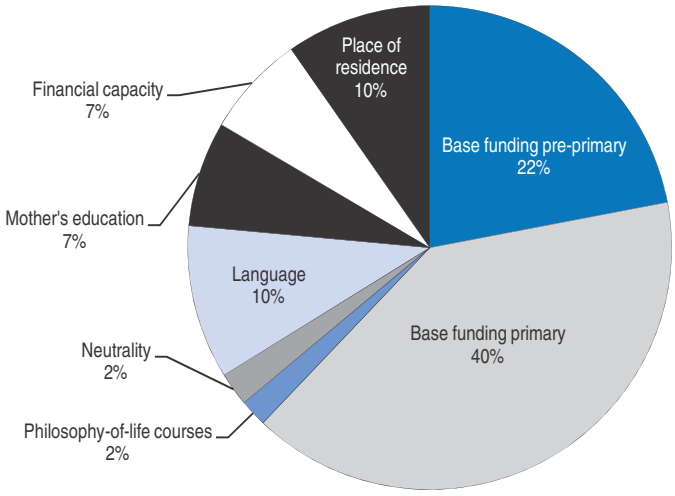
In calculating the size of the socio-economic component of the operating grant for each school, the number of students meeting each disadvantage indicator (e.g. those whose mothers have limited education) is multiplied by the number of Euros allocated per student for that characteristic, and the products are then added up. Annex 2.A2 provides an extract and translation of an official letter sent by AgODI to an elementary school in Brussels, which can help illustrate the approach used to calculating school operating grants and staffing hours for an individual primary school.

While the operating grant makes provision for "objective differences between schools" (such as meeting the neutrality requirement) and student characteristics (as reflected in the weights for disadvantage), the largest part (about 80%) of the operating budget is allocated on the basis of school characteristics, such as educational level, type of establishment and curriculum.

Within a given elementary school, the basic coefficient of *per student funding* is the same for both pre-school and primary school students.[3] However, the children in pre-school classes have a different *point value* to the children in primary classes. The point value of a child in pre-school is 5.3088, while the point value of a child in primary school is 8. In the sample Community school in Brussels, where the money value per point is set at EUR 82.566575, a pre-primary student generates EUR 438.329433 (EUR 5.3088 x 82.566575) whereas a primary student generates EUR 60.5326 (8 x EUR 82.566575). This reflects the expectation that the minimum fixed costs of operating pre-primary classes as compared to primary classes are about one-third lower (i.e. 5.3088/8) (Annex 2.A2). The difference in funding for operating expenses in primary and pre-primary education is based on the historical assumption that not all children will attend pre-primary education on a full-time basis.

Figure 2.5 illustrates the different components of the operating grant for 2013/14 in the sample elementary school presented in Annex 2.A2. It shows the different components that make up the grant, including the base allocation for pre-school and primary education, the adjustments for intake, and the contributions which reflect the legal requirements of philosophy-of-life courses and neutrality of provision. The sample school has 179 students (81 in pre-primary and 98 in primary education). It has a very high proportion of students meeting the indicators of disadvantage: of the 179 students, 166 speak a language other than Dutch at home; 117 have mothers with low educational attainment; 120 are entitled to a study grant and 175 students live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Figure 2.5. **Operational budget components, sample Community school (elementary level), Brussels**



Source: Example of a budget letter sent to a sample Community school (elementary level) in Brussels by AgODI. For details, see Annex 2.A2.

In secondary education, the basic coefficient of per student operational funding further depends on the educational programme (ASO, TSO, KSO or BSO). In addition, within each programme students have a different point value depending on the courses in which they are enrolled. In ASO, the point value assigned to each student lies between 16 and 18 depending on the courses chosen by the student (a point value of 16 being most frequent). In TSO and BSO, the point value per child varies between 16 and 22 (a point value of 22 being most frequent). In 2013/14, the money value per point was set at EUR 49.774932 in ASO and at EUR 50.686142 in TSO and BSO.

Staffing

As noted above, staffing accounts for the vast majority of the financial resources going to schools. How staffing is allocated differs between elementary and secondary education. This section will address each level of education in turn. Staffing also differs in the case of special education, where calculations are based on type of programme (for more information, see Chapter 3).

Box 2.1. **Flemish evaluations of the 2008 approach to calculating school operating grants**

In summer 2015, just before finalisation of this report, two studies were published regarding the school operating grants for Flemish primary and secondary schools: i) the Belgian Court of Audit conducted an audit of the 2008 reform on the operating budget of school education, and ii) a consortium of researchers commissioned by the Flemish Minister of Education prepared an analysis and evaluation of the distribution and use of school operating grants. This box summarises the main findings of these studies.

Belgian Court of Audit (2015): Operating Grants for Primary and Secondary Schools

The Court's 2014 audit of operating budgets for primary and secondary schools relied on a direct analysis of school accounts and addressed three main points: i) allocation, ii) supervision and iii) use of budgets and objectives.

Regarding the allocation of operating budgets, the Court of Audit found that the calculation method for operating grants was applied correctly and that the risk of errors was fairly low due to a high degree of computerisation. However, the Court highlighted that the operating grants were set by means of a complicated calculation method that lacked transparency as not all parameters were made public. Although financing is relatively stable, student and school characteristics could cause average operating budgets per student to differ widely between schools.

Regarding the supervision of schools' use of operating budgets, the Court of Audit found that school reports on their financial activities varied and that schools' accounts often lacked cost details. It criticised that supervision of schools did not comprise a risk assessment procedure and that there were few agreements between central education inspection and the Agency for Educational Services (AgODI) for the purpose of school system related inspections.

Regarding the use of budgets and objectives, the Court's audit found large differences in the financial situation of schools depending on their ability to raise parental contributions, especially in secondary education. It criticised that the Flemish authorities did not have the means to acquire a global view on the use of operating grants and recommended that the supervision in this area should be enhanced. Regarding the SES-based part of operating grants, the Court of Audit found that there was little difference between the expenditure patterns of schools with high and low numbers of disadvantaged students. The main difference was the use of extra funding for measures against poverty. Schools used operating budgets to a limited extent to recruit additional teachers. The Court also found that the introduction of SES weights in the funding formula for operating budgets did not have any effect on favouring a better social mix of students in schools; quite the contrary, polarisation of students along socio-economic lines had increased since 2008. The audit recommended reconsidering the weight of student characteristics in the operating budgets, considering a more selective allocation of funding for equal opportunities and/or enlarging staffing requirements.*

Groenez et al. (2015): Analysis of Financing Mechanisms for Operating Grants

This study commissioned by the Flemish government relied on a mix of qualitative interviews in 20 schools, a survey of school principals and a survey of municipalities. It addressed i) the distribution of operating grants to schools by their school boards, and ii) the use and management of operating grants by schools.

Box 2.1. **Flemish evaluations of the 2008 approach to calculating school operating grants** *(cont.)*

Overall, the study found large variations in the financial situations of schools, largely because of the differences in additional resources that schools and school boards were able to generate. The study also highlighted that schools with certain characteristics were typically in more difficult financial situations; this included schools belonging to a school board responsible for only one school, schools with declining student numbers, rural schools and schools with a high level of unpaid parental fees. The study found that school boards can play an important buffering role for schools in such situations by helping schools avoid the accumulation of large or permanent deficits.

Regarding the distribution of school operating grants from school boards to schools, the study pointed out that school boards pursued a range of different distribution policies and did not always redistribute operating grants to their schools according to the same weightings as determined by the Flemish government. This was partly related to the size of school boards, with the larger school boards (comprising a higher number of schools) more typically establishing their own redistribution policies. In such cases, school boards established their own weightings and did not redistribute funding according to the per student weightings set by the government. Schools with a high proportion of low-SES students more often indicated that this was the case in their school board.

Regarding the use and management of operating budgets by schools, the study highlighted that schools and school boards enjoyed a high degree of autonomy with respect to the use of additional funding based on SES weights, as the Flemish government had not provided explicit directives for the use of such funding. It concluded that it was logical for schools with a more difficult financial starting situation to draw on these funds to address their most basic needs such as urgent repair and heating costs and/or to fill gaps left by unpaid parent fees. The survey of school principals indicated that schools with more disadvantaged student populations also needed to cover more specific expenditures to address the needs of disadvantaged students, such as specific teaching materials, in-service training or community school activities. Hence, the additional funding was found as providing the necessary material conditions for teachers to do a good job. Finally, the study reports that the additional SES-based funding was seen very positively by school principals in the sample, with over 90% indicating that they considered it a good policy.

* The Flemish Minister of Education gave a provisional reply to the recommendations of the Court of Audit (available at: http://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/docs/stukken/2014-2015/g37f-1.pdf) and announced that she would revisit the funding system on the basis of the two studies summarised in Box 2.1 and the findings of the OECD School Resources Review.

Sources: Belgian Court of Audit (2015), *Werkingsbudgetten voor het Gewoon Basisen Secundair Onderwijs Toekenning en Aanwending (Operating Grants for Mainstream Elementary and Secondary Education, Allocation and Utilisation)*, Verslag van het Rekenhof aan het Vlaams Parlement, Brussels; Groenez S. et al. (2015), *Analyse van het nieuwe financieringsmechanisme voor de werkingsmiddelen van scholen, Evaluatie van het Financieringsdecreet van 2008: Eindrapport (Analysis of the New Financing Mechanism for School Operating Grants, Evaluation of the 2008 Decree on School Funding: Final Report)*, *www.ond.vlaanderen.be/obpwo/rapporten/Analyse_nieuwe_financieringsmechanisme_werkingsmiddelen_scholen_DEFINITIEF_RAPPORT_HIVA.pdf*.

For both elementary and secondary education, there is a principle of free utilisation of staffing hours. This means that the schools, in consultation with school boards, are free to decide on organisational aspects such as class size, the distribution between teaching hours and other working hours for teachers and the distribution of hours between schools belonging to the same board. There are only a few restrictions to the principle of free utilisation, for example no more than 3% of the teacher hours can be used for special

pedagogical tasks (i.e. pedagogical activities other than regular teaching supporting individual students or teachers in the school) unless this is negotiated through a local negotiation committee and a protocol is signed.

Calculation of staffing hours for elementary education

Staffing is delivered to Flemish elementary schools through direct allocation of teaching hours from government to school board and also indirectly through allocations of staffing points to school associations (school associations are voluntary partnerships of schools in the same geographical area; for more information see Chapter 1).

The staffing allocation system currently in place for elementary education was introduced in 2012. The aims of the 2012 reforms to the allocation system were to equalise pre-primary and primary schooling and to reflect student characteristics in resource allocation. As part of this new system, staffing levels were raised by 8.8% in pre-primary education and by 1.7% in primary education. There were other changes made at the same time which relate to teaching load and duties. Separate lines of staff allocation were integrated into a global package. The allocation of staffing hours as a global package is consistent with the emphasis on the freedom of schools to vary their use of staff according to the priorities and philosophy set by their boards.

The formula to calculate teaching hours takes into account a set of school characteristics. First, the size of an elementary school makes a difference. The allocation scale of teaching hours is slightly degressive, i.e. it declines gradually with school size (Chapter 4). Second, geographical location is also factored in. A student attending a school in Brussels is weighted at 1.11 instead of 1 for the purposes of the staffing formula, while in thinly-populated rural areas, a child is weighted at 1.05. Third, there is also a weighting to address distance between campuses of the same school. If this exceeds 1.5 km, the school receives more teaching hours, as the two campuses will be counted as separate entities and scales for calculating teacher hours are degressive for each entity. The basic package of teacher hours is calculated based on the weighted number of students.

Student characteristics also play a role in the allocation of staff resources in elementary education. In scaling teaching hours, three of the indicators of socio-economic status (SES) considered for the operating grant are also used: cultural background (mother's education), financial capacity (entitlement for a study grant) and linguistic and cultural capital (language spoken at home). However, unlike for the operating grant, the dimension of location (place of residence) is not included. In addition, a weighting of 1.5 is applied to students who, for a variety of reasons, do not live with their own families and/or lack the support that family integration normally provides. These children include those living in a Centre for Child and Family Support, children in foster homes, those judicially separated from their parents, children whose parents have no fixed residence, and homeless children.

The SES weights can produce a large human resource impact on an elementary school. For example, in our sample Community school in Brussels (Annex 2.A2), the weights increase the basic teaching hour allocation by 36% for both pre-primary and primary levels. This impact comes on top of the area adjustment for Brussels which lifts enrolments by 11% and raises the basic teaching hour allocation. As can be seen in the letter to the sample school (Annex 2.A2), the school receives only 97.16% of the overall teaching hours it generated based on the scales (more on this below).

In addition to the basic package of teaching hours, elementary schools are entitled to complementary teaching hours for a range of specifically defined purposes. While schools are guaranteed free utilisation of their basic package of teaching hours, complementary teaching hours should be used in line with the purpose they were assigned for. These purposes include the provision of philosophy-of-life or cultural awareness courses, the integration of non-native speakers and inclusive education for students with disabilities. In addition, schools can receive extra hours to support their work in specific situations such as the voluntary merging of schools or the provision of education at home for students who are ill.

It is the responsibility of school boards to recruit teachers to deliver teaching within the designated amount of teaching hours. School boards typically delegate this task to the principals of individual schools. While teachers are recruited at the school level, they receive their salaries directly from the central level through the Agency for Educational Services (AgODI) (see Chapter 4).

For each school, the function of school principal is financed in addition to the teaching hours, which are based on student coefficients. In small schools, the school principal will be responsible for both school leadership functions and a (reduced) teaching load, depending on school size. At the pre-primary level, additional working hours are allocated to schools for child care (in mainstream education) and for a broader range of support staff (in special education).

As explained in Chapter 1, envelopes of points for extra management and support staff are allocated to elementary school associations. These points are then distributed by the association to individual schools. The points can be used flexibly for the following functions: co-ordination of information and communication technologies (ICT), support for students with special educational needs (SEN), administrative support, and co-ordination tasks at the level of the association. The number of staffing points needed for a part-time or full-time assignment will depend on the qualification and positioning on the salary scale of the respective employee.

The resource outcome for the sample Brussels school is presented in Figure 2.6. This reports the allocation of teaching hours with the level of statistical precision found in the official advice to a school. The figure separately analyses hours by educational level. Also shown are the teaching hours allocated for philosophy-of-life classes (Islamic religion courses in this case) at the primary level and for child care at the pre-primary level. Not depicted are the points which schools generate for ICT co-ordination (9 points) and general administrative support (33 points) – these are allocated to the responsible school association in a global envelope of points.

Calculation of staffing hours for secondary education

The funding model for staffing for secondary schools is different from the model for elementary schools in a number of key aspects. Annex 2.A3 provides an extract and translation of an official letter sent by AgODI to a secondary school in Herentals, which can help illustrate the approach used to calculating staffing hours for an individual secondary school.

The formula that is used to allocate teaching hours to secondary schools adjusts for the programme of study and the size of each programme. In addition, the claim that a student makes on teaching resources depends not only on the main programme (ASO, TSO,

Figure 2.6. **Composition of staffing allocation in a sample Brussels elementary school (teaching hours)**

	Staffing hours pre-primary level	Staffing hours primary level
Financial capacity	7.0638971	8.8080692
Language	22.12816	27.95136
Mother's education	14.1563	17.6286
Child care	8	0
Philosophy-of-life course	0	12
Basic schedule	121	147

Source: Information provided by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training. For details, see Annex 2.A2.

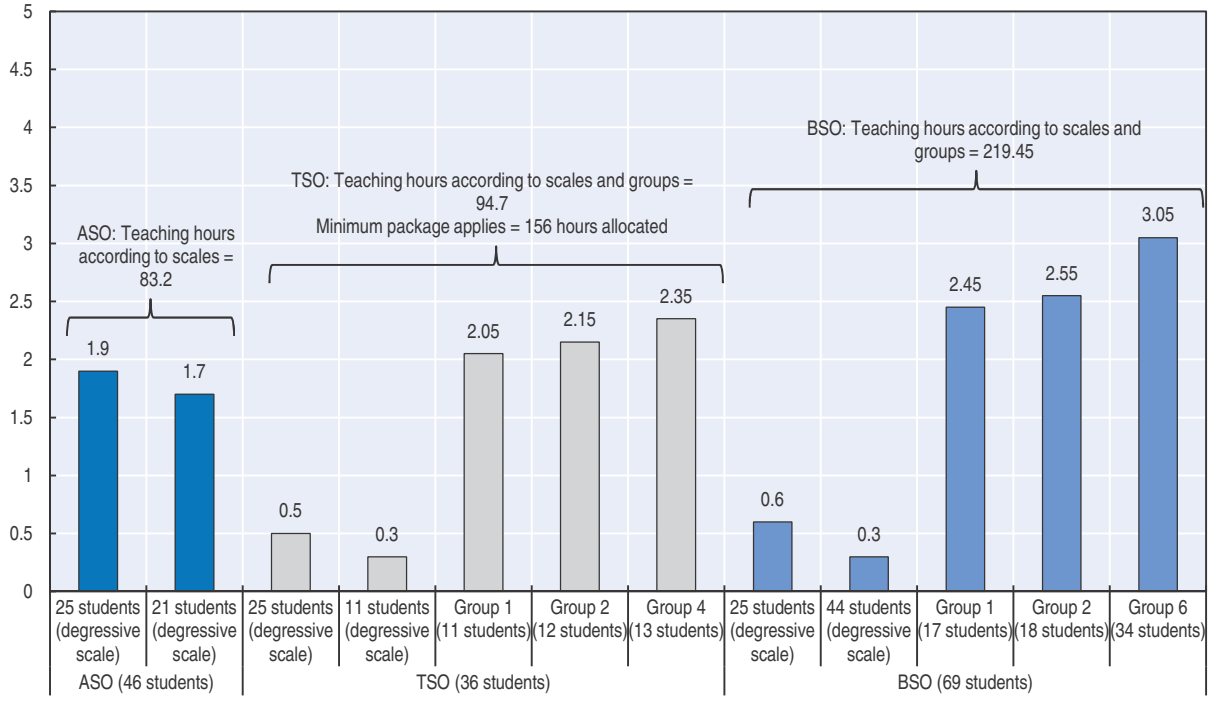
BSO, KSO) chosen by each student but also on the sub-programme (or course). A complex system of weights or student coefficients is used to make this adjustment. The students who exercise the highest claim on resources are those taking vocational courses.

The extent of this claim is measured by the size of the student coefficient. Figure 2.7 illustrates the differential weighting of students according to location in the curriculum for the sample upper secondary school presented in Annex 2.A3. In all programmes, the scales used to calculate teacher hours are degressive, i.e. programmes with a higher number of students receive a gradually smaller amount of teacher hours per student. For example, the academic (ASO) programme weighs students at 1.9 for the first 25 students and at 1.7 for the next group of students. The technical (TSO) and vocational (BSO) programmes weigh the first 25 students at 0.5 and 0.6 respectively, and the next group of students at 0.3. Within each programme, the same scales apply both in the second and the third stage of secondary education.

In the technical and vocational programmes, there is an additional weighting of students by "group". These groups refer to clusters of study areas. In the technical programme, for example, there are eight different groups.[4] In the sample school depicted in Figure 2.7, the technical programme weights students at between 2.05 and 2.35, depending on the group within this programme. The vocational programme weights students more highly again – between 2.45 and 3.05, depending on the group. Figure 2.7 shows a clear progression across programmes and groups, with students in Group 6 of BSO having a much higher weight than students in the general academic programme (i.e. 3.05 compared to between 1.7 and 1.9) (Annex 2.A3).

Finally, schools with small programmes can benefit from a so-called "minimum package" of teaching hours. The minimum package of teacher hours varies according to

Figure 2.7. **Programme and group weights in a sample secondary school (stage 2)**



Source: Example of a budget letter sent to a sample Community school (secondary level) in Herentals by AgODI. For details, see Annex 2.A3.

educational programme and stage of education. The sample school depicted in Figure 2.7 has a small number of students in the technical programme and therefore benefits from the minimum package for this programme. Based on student numbers and groups, the TSO programme would have generated 94.7 teacher hours. However, to ensure the minimum teacher resources necessary for the operation of this programme, the school in fact receives a minimum package of 156 teacher hours.

Similar to elementary schools, secondary schools do not receive the full amount of hours that they generate. A so-called "utilisation percentage" is applied, based on which schools receive 98% of the hours for philosophy-of-life courses, 96.57% of the hours based on student coefficients and 98.57% of the minimum package. As explained by representatives of the Flemish Ministry for Education and Training, this utilisation percentage was introduced in the 1990s together with the introduction of programme and group weights, as the education budget at the time was insufficient to finance the total amount of generated teaching hours.

In secondary education, there is no adjustment in the formula allocation of teaching hours for the socio-economic characteristics of students. Instead, secondary schools are eligible to receive additional teacher hours for socio-economic disadvantage through an older policy for equal educational opportunities (*gelijkeonderwijskansenbeleid*, GOK), on top of the formula allocation of teaching hours. For more information about the GOK policy, see Chapter 1.

To determine eligibility for supplementary teaching hours in secondary education, five indicators are used: i) the parent is an itinerant worker, ii) the mother has not completed secondary school, iii) the child does not live with his or her parents, iv) the family lives on

community support income, and v) at home, the child speaks a language other than Dutch (Lambrechts and Geurts, 2008). A school is eligible for additional GOK hours if a set percentage of its students meet at least one of the relevant indicators. The threshold is set at 10% of students meeting at least one of the indicators in the case of the first stage of secondary education, and at 25% in the second or third stages.

The reason for this difference in thresholds is historical. When the policy of GOK funding was originally implemented in 2002, the main emphasis was on compensating socio-economic disadvantage in primary and lower secondary education, in order to moderate the impact of socio-economic differences in access to secondary education programmes in the second stage (ASO, TSO, KSO). Therefore, a lower threshold was set for schools to qualify, thus reaching more widely across the school system.

Initially, the provision of GOK hours in the second and third stages of secondary education had a different emphasis. The focus was on preventing early school leaving and addressing the needs of students who were relatively disadvantaged in educational terms. Up until 2008, a different set of indicators were used to determine eligibility for GOK hours at these stages of education, namely: i) the child has repeated two or more years of schooling. ii) the child is enrolled in the second or third stages of TSO or BSO and in the previous year achieved a B or C certificate[5] in another school. and iii) the child attended reception classes for newly-arrived children not speaking Dutch. A higher threshold was set, the effect of which was to reach fewer schools, but focussing resources on student location within programme, and characteristics which were predictors of drop-out, such as grade repetition. Since 2008, the five indicators listed above are used at all stages of secondary education. However, the different thresholds of 10% and 25% are still in place.

To calculate the number of GOK hours allocated to schools that have a sufficiently high concentration of disadvantaged students, there is a complicated system to compute an amount of points per student, depending on the indicators met by the student. The weighted points are then summed up and multiplied by a coefficient. In secondary education, GOK hours are allocated for three years and schools follow a defined cycle of policy and planning (year 1), evaluation (year 2), and inspection (year 3). Within this framework, a school has considerable flexibility as to how GOK hours are used.

As in elementary education (see above), the approach to the funding of management and administrative support staff in secondary education differs from the funding of teaching staff. While teaching hours are funded through student coefficients, the functions of principal or co-ordinator are treated as a fixed cost (for each standalone entity) and are automatically funded. For other management roles and for administrative support staff, an envelope of points is used. The calculation of points takes into account the number of management functions, the number of support functions, and function and task differentiation. Behind this, the number of students is taken into account, the number of practical courses, and other factors. It is clear that the aim is to reflect all costs in detail and to make these accessible to costing at a central level before allocating a points package to schools for decisions on how support is actually used. The intention behind this 2009 innovation was to create more flexibility in how schools used funding support for management and administration functions. Instead of earmarking lines of funding for specific roles, the global package allows schools to vary their use of the allocation.

It is notable that, as in elementary education, the points envelope is assigned to the school association where this exists. Only very few schools do not form part of a school

association and these schools receive their point package directly. The school association can withhold up to 10% of the points contained in the envelope, or more if there is agreement from the negotiation committee of the association. This withheld component helps meet the costs of the association and its activities. These include using the points to assign temporary positions, e.g. releasing teaching staff or engaging additional staff through external recruitment. This represents a pooling of resources to deliver management and administrative support to the schools that form part of the association.

Funding for infrastructure

Investment in buildings and equipment comprises the third main area of education funding in the Flemish Community. As noted earlier, funding for infrastructure allocated to primary and secondary schools represented less than 5% of overall school budgets in primary and secondary education. Access to capital funding is organised through two public agencies:

- The GO! Education of the Flemish Community finances the creation or improvement of buildings in the Flemish Community schools network as public assets.
- The Agency for Educational Infrastructure (AGIOn) finances building works in grant-aided public schools (municipal and provincial) as well as in grant-aided private schools. Grant-aided private schools make up the largest sector of schooling in the Flemish Community. AGIOn meets 70% of their capital requirements in elementary education and 60% in secondary education. The unsubsidised balance can be met by a state-guaranteed loan. The asset remains privately owned for the grant-aided private schools. For the grant-aided public schools, the asset remains owned by the local authorities (municipalities and provinces).

More information on funding for school infrastructure and a discussion of related strengths and challenges is included in Chapter 3 as part of the analysis of the provision of school places.

Strengths

A critical perspective on the machinery of resource allocation in the Flemish school system aims to identify any features which have a potentially negative impact on the services that schools provide or on the capacity of different school populations to respond to the demands of schooling. But questionable features should be seen within the context of the strengths in educational vision and system design which describe Flemish schooling. It is important to highlight these strengths, at least in broad terms, before turning to the challenges that need to be addressed to make the machinery of funding work as well as possible.

There is a sustained high level of investment in schooling

The Flemish Community of Belgium supports a large and complex school system which performs at a very high standard internationally. Spending has been maintained against the downward trend in other European countries following the global financial crisis.[6] Over the past few years, changes to the system for distributing operating grants and staffing have led to substantial increases in the overall budget for schooling. The 2008 Parliamentary Act on the Financing of Education, which introduced equal funding for schools from all networks, relied on a structural increase of the total operational budget for

elementary education (by EUR 85.2 million) and secondary education (by EUR 40 million). The 2012 staffing allocation model, which ensured equal staffing for primary and pre-primary education and introduced an SES-based part in the school staff allocations, resulted in an additional investment of EUR 52.7 million in elementary education, corresponding to an 8.8% increase in staffing levels in pre-primary and a 1.7% increase in primary education (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

The Flemish Community's high investment in schooling is also reflected in the favourable conditions for teaching across schools. Financial and human resource inputs – reflected in indicators such as teacher-student ratios and expenditure per student – are more favourable than on average in the OECD and the European Union (more on this in Chapter 3).

The Flemish approach to school funding supports freedom of choice and school autonomy

The Flemish Community has made freedom of choice central to its philosophy of schooling and to the institutional arrangements which express this philosophy. That parents are largely free to choose schools removes a potentially major constraint on the engagement of parents in their children's education, represented in other systems by school zones and rules. As emphasised by respondents during the OECD visit in November 2014, parents' freedom of choice is conceived by most Flemish education stakeholders as an educational principle ensuring that the values and educational practices of home and school are consonant, rather than a principle of market or quasi-market economics (more on this in Chapter 3).

Parental choice is supported by the school funding system and in particular the commitment of the Flemish Community to free education. Regardless of the choice of school, parents do not have to pay tuition fees. There is, at least in principle, no financial impediment to parents' choice of school, as almost all schools in the Flemish Community (over 99%) are free. In addition, since 2008, there has existed a uniform approach to recurrent funding of schools in all networks. This is a very different situation to that found in other jurisdictions, such as Australia, where subsidised Catholic schools charge tuition fees, or France, where fees can be levied to meet building costs (Australian Government, 2011; Ministère de l'Education Nationale, 2012).

The second animating principle of Flemish schooling is autonomy. The Flemish approach to school funding is in line with a strong focus on school autonomy. Most resources going to schools are not earmarked, which gives schools flexibility to use resources to fit their specific needs. Schools receive itemised letters from the Ministry of Education and Training, making transparent the operational funding and staffing hours each school has generated. School boards have full autonomy in most areas of resource policy including setting up budgeting and accounting systems, communicating with relevant stakeholders about resource use, recruiting and dismissing school staff,[7] organising school leadership, making decisions about the use of teacher hours, maintaining the school infrastructure and establishing relationships with contractors and vendors (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). Autonomy in funding decisions provides the conditions for schools to use resources in line with local needs and priorities.

In principle, the Flemish school system thus invites parents to engage themselves fully in the education of their children – by enabling them to extend their values and efforts into the school of their choice – and encourages schools to energetically pursue a

philosophy or project, confident of parental support and relatively free of bureaucratic direction. Choice and autonomy invigorate Flemish schools. But in a society in which not all parents have equal means – material and cultural – it is important to establish safeguards to ensure that choice and autonomy do not aggravate rather than alleviate inequalities.

Choice and autonomy are balanced with a focus on equity in the funding model

As described above, the Flemish school financing system is designed to support equal access to educational opportunities for all students and compensate for the differences in family background.

To help schools meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, the operating grant is weighted for socio-economic status. This is intended to check the influences of key differentiating variables – mother's educational level, foreign language spoken at home, the family's financial capacity, and the students' neighbourhood characteristics. The relevance of these factors to differences in schools' operating budgets lies in the reduced access to opportunity which they create. Even though the contributions of parents to schooling are capped (in elementary school) and represent a modest amount, they are not always within the capacity of disadvantaged families to meet. During the OECD visit, it was reported by respondents that adjustment of operating funds in favour of schools enrolling students from disadvantaged backgrounds helped in part to restore access to extra-mural activities (such as excursions) and also enabled schools to purchase books, material and equipment that disadvantaged families were not able to buy or rent themselves.

Schools serving disadvantaged communities, it was observed, also faced difficulties in improving the physical condition of buildings and thus enhancing the learning environment. An investigation by the Court of Audit found, indeed, that many schools drew on their operating grants to improve the physical amenity of school buildings and that about half the schools in the Court's sample had also cut extra-mural programmes (Belgian Court of Audit, 2011). It may be that schools set different priorities, depending on the challenges that they face and the degree of flexibility they have within their budgets. Where a school recruits largely from disadvantaged families, it will typically have very little flexibility available from parental contributions. This can be expected to put pressure on how the operating grant is used.

The weighted funding based on socio-economic indicators thus helps schools under financial pressure to have an additional budget to meet urgent needs of its student population, without providing explicit directives on the intended use of this budget (Groenez et al., 2015). The design of the indicators to generate additional operating grant resources further recognises that both the socio-economic characteristics of a school's intake and the locational characteristics of students' residence influence educational opportunity. Although these two dimensions are related, they are not the same, as the pattern of free choice of school in the Flemish Community facilitates mobility and educational choice, leading to selectivity of intakes, including in locations that are disadvantaged. The weightings in the operating formula acknowledge these two distinct barriers on the ability of children and young people to take advantage of the opportunity for learning and for socio-economic integration.

Student socio-economic characteristics are also used in the allocation of teaching hours to elementary schools, and secondary schools receive a top-up of teaching hours based on

such characteristics. Differential weighting recognises the adverse impact on student learning of a limited level of financial capacity, low parental education, and speaking a foreign language at home. The SES weights enable remedial classes to be run, classes to be split, and teachers to be released for a range of pedagogical and support activities. In these ways the Flemish authorities seek to balance choice and autonomy with equity.

The funding system provides some incentives for school collaboration and pooling of resources

As explained above, operational resources are allocated to school boards (i.e. the school groups in Community education, the local level authorities in subsidised public education and private foundations in subsidised private education). The financial autonomy of individual schools varies across school boards but, according to stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team, school leaders typically plan their budgets in collaboration with the school boards. Some boards of the schools visited by the review team took an approach where they provided support to schools in the more technical aspects of budgeting and accounting, allowing school leaders to focus attention to more strategic tasks. Where school boards are responsible for several schools, they can acquire operational goods and services for a number of schools in order to achieve economies of scale. The school boards that are in charge of multiple schools may also redistribute resources among their schools according to needs and organise key services for their schools. However, it should be noted that some school boards are responsible for only one school or very few schools, which reduces their opportunities for sharing resources and achieving scale economies.

Over the last decade, the policy supporting school associations (Chapter 1) has aimed to further increase collaboration between schools, including beyond the borders of individual school boards. As described above, resources for administrative and management staff are typically allocated to school associations. This approach can be seen as playing a broader role than simply meeting basic staffing needs. It enables schools to pool resources and access services that they cannot provide from their own resources alone. Further it allows associations to perform valuable roles, such as the dissemination of good practice in inclusion of students with special needs. Another valuable role is to enable schools to co-ordinate programmes and avoid competition within associated schools. Given the large number of course options with fewer than five students (as reported by the Belgian Court of Audit, 2010), this represents a significant step towards creating more viable class and group sizes in secondary schools. This is especially important in the context of the Flemish school system which is highly devolved and is made up of comparatively small schools in a largely urbanised community (Chapter 3).

Challenges

Funding can be viewed in terms of the architecture of the school system – elementary and secondary schools, the different networks, the school boards and associations, and the logic behind these features – but also in terms of the outcomes of schooling. The high performance of Flemish students on PISA is one indicator. But so, too, is the large gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds (Chapter 1).[8] Socio-economic differences in educational outcomes point to an interaction between family and school influences. The complex machinery of the school budget in the Flemish Community – which translates a big portfolio commitment into resources – is meant to sever the

connection between who a child is and how well he or she achieves. This is the principle of equity. However, what is known of student outcomes in the Flemish Community suggests that this connection remains strong (see Chapter 1), despite the complexity of the resource allocation machinery and despite the high level of budget commitment on the part of government. This section discusses a range of challenges related to the current funding model.

A lack of information on student learning outcomes makes it difficult to evaluate the impact of school funding

The OECD review team formed the impression that a critical scrutiny of the suitability, effectiveness and efficiency of the budget model is hampered by a systemic lack of knowledge of how well Flemish schools work and for whom. At a broad level (the Flemish Community as a whole), valuable information is gathered through the National Assessment Programme (see Chapter 1) as well through international surveys such as PISA and TIMMS. Both national and international assessments have identified performance differences within the school system at the level of the Flemish Community. But the information available to schools is limited. Schools can use "parallel" versions of the National Assessment Programme instruments to test their students. However, it is viewed as contradicting freedom of education to impose standardised testing across the Flemish Community. On the other hand the majority of schools do use standardised tests developed by their networks.

The basic question is whether there is enough knowledge available to guide policy at a school and Community level regarding opportunities and outcomes for different groups of Flemish children. There are no national examinations. These are viewed as offering no real advantage to students and their families and as potentially impairing the performance of schools by focussing efforts too narrowly on examination results. It is thanks to international assessments and to academic studies that researchers have been able to test the equity credentials of Flemish schooling. The picture that emerges is that equity is a project in action, not yet an accomplished result. There are both advantages and risks to introducing national assessments and examinations, which need to be carefully considered (for a detailed discussion, see OECD, 2013b). But there is a clear challenge facing the Flemish school system–the need for a strategy to assess the progress of different groups over the course of their schooling and into the workforce, technical training or tertiary education.

The longitudinal analysis of study careers in secondary education (*Loopbanen in het Secundair Onderwijs,* LiSO) and study of school-to-work transitions (*Studie van de Overgang van Onderwijs naar Arbeidsmarkt,* SONAR) conducted by the Centre for Education and School Careers (*Steunpunt voor Studie- en Schoolloopbanen,* SSL) may go a long way towards meeting this need. For without comprehensive and accurate data on what happens to students during both elementary and secondary education, it is difficult to assess how well the machinery of the budget works, how consistent its various components are, how well targeted supplementary funding is, and whether, in the end, the budget model delivers value for money (for more information on these projects, see OECD, 2010). The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training has also set up its own Early School Leaving Monitor which is aimed at tracking pupils who leave school at age 18 or later without obtaining the upper secondary school qualification. The value of longitudinal studies for investigating the impact of differences in resource levels and utilisation will depend on whether the

studies contain relevant design specifications and whether the structure of samples enables resource-related issues to be investigated. An innovative approach to measuring outcomes over the longer term is the participation of Ghent in the International Study of City Youth (ISCY). This tracking programme involves international comparisons, controlling for the background and achievement level of young people as they complete upper secondary education (Demanet et al., 2014; see also *http://iscy.org/cities/ghent/*).

There is no empirical picture of resource outputs

If the first challenge is to measure student outcomes, the second is to measure expenditure outputs. The budget is designed in terms of a set of entitlements as represented by student coefficients, whether SES, course-related, or disability-related. These determine the structure of inputs into schooling. However at present, resource outputs are only described at a very general level and we do not know how much individual schools consume in terms of per student resources (as distinct from their entitlement). It is possible that some schools have higher resource profiles than other comparable schools, for example if they raise more funds from parents or employ more costly teachers.

The student or course coefficients determine the formal entitlement of students to teaching resources, with students in BSO programmes generating the highest amount of teacher hours. However, from this it does not necessarily follow that students undertaking vocational courses are the most highly resourced in practice, that is, from the angle of real allocation as reflected in per student expenditure. Some quite small classes operate in the general academic programme – as well as in technical and vocational programmes – and the master's level qualification required of teachers in upper secondary education drives up the per student cost as do the small numbers following some courses. Thus in upper secondary education a student in the general education programme has a comparatively low coefficient, but may be taking subjects with only a small group of fellow students and is certain to be taught by a comparatively well-paid teacher (having a master's level qualification).

The resource output is the real cost of educating a student. This is distinct from the entitlement or claim on resources associated with grade, programme and group. The difference between entitlement and output lies in the policies of school boards and school leaders. They are free to decide what courses are taught at what levels and by whom. The student coefficients send a signal regarding the broad pattern of resource outputs that government is seeking (through deliberation with stakeholders). But boards can ignore these signals and staff courses in the way they think best. In other words, there is no guarantee that a given student will in fact benefit from the additional resources he or she generates based on socio-economic background and course choice.

This points to a larger challenge regarding a lack of transparency in the Flemish model of school finance. Not unlike funding regimes elsewhere, it represents the accumulated wisdom of experience over many years, with multiple adjustments as circumstances change or as the policy emphasis shifts. New rules are introduced to replace old ones, but the old ones linger on. New systems make their appearance, but run in parallel with older systems, as for example the different approaches to SES funding of teaching hours in elementary and secondary education. The operating grant is for running expenses, but in practice is also applied to infrastructure. Adjustments to the staffing model through differential weighting of students do not appear to be evaluated for impact or fitness of purpose, even though by their very nature they stimulate change and adaptation and need to be monitored. For about 15 years, schools have received only about 97% of allocated

staffing hours; this reduction was initially introduced as a linear saving measure and cannot easily be adjusted due to budgetary constraints. Schools need continuity and predictability so there is a reluctance to prune back the thicket of policy with its many branches and offshoots. Yet, the downside of this approach is an ever-increasing opacity of the funding approach.

At a school level, too, there is a lack of fiscal transparency. Schools, as autonomous entities, receive a budget but the real cost of running programmes and services is not reported. Schools do not construct their own budgets, even though they are autonomous. Income from non-public sources is not reflected in the Ministry budget, even if it might be exhumed from audit reports for the Ministry of Finance where the emphasis is on accounting compliance rather than educational use and value. It could be argued that complexity is a not unreasonable price to pay for a high-performing system. But Flemish schools are not uniformly high performing, and the point of having a funding model is to reach a consistently high standard for the whole of the Community. If it is difficult to evaluate the model, it cannot be easier to operate it.

The impact and effectiveness of resources for equal opportunities are not sufficiently monitored

Elementary schools receive higher allocations of teaching hours based on SES profile, and secondary schools receive additional GOK hours. The additional hours should provide schools with more staffing flexibility so that more varied approaches and more individual attention are possible. But an empirical view of the resource margin and of resource utilisation is necessary to understand the impact of such factors as school size and community setting and also to assess the issue of whether resources could be more heavily concentrated in fewer schools.

There is indeed a risk of dispersing SES funding too thinly either by sharing it amongst too many schools or by offering all eligible schools the same level of support, regardless of *relative need*. An important question relates to the density thresholds themselves – 10% for the first stage of secondary education and 25% for the second and third stages. The rationale for differential treatment of stages in secondary education was originally based on the argument that i) SES disadvantage is best tackled during primary and lower secondary education and ii) in second and third grade secondary education, it is better to tackle *educational* disadvantage (such as a history of grade repeating and relegation to the vocational programme).

Even after the indicators for the second and third stage were changed (thereby extending the focus on SES disadvantage to all stages of secondary education), the different thresholds were maintained. However, it is not clear why a secondary school must have at least one in four "at risk" students in the second and third stage before it can access GOK hours. This may be desirable from the point of view of concentrating resources in schools of high measured disadvantage and thus seeking to have maximum impact. But there needs to be greater transparency with respect to how many schools qualify, how their access is structured (as they do not receive the same levels of per student support), and how many additional hours they do receive.

While inspection has a valuable role to play in reviewing whether schools are working towards attainment targets, the cost and effectiveness of GOK loadings or programmes also need to be kept under review. The number of schools receiving GOK hours is not

reported in global statistics on Flemish education. Nor is the overall amount of hours and the associated salary cost.

Research that has been done at the level of the Flemish Community points to only modest gains from a rather slender supplement to teaching resources (Ooghe, 2013; Hindriks and Lamy, 2013). This may be due to a too-thin dispersal of hours across a great many schools, with the average marginal gain in resources being too small to affect the level of change required in a school. Analysing the 2002-05 cycle, Ooghe (2013:4) found that the increment to resources typically fell within the range of 0.5 to 1.0 additional teacher (full-time equivalent) per eligible school. Although this study focuses on the period prior to the 2008 introduction of SES-weighted operating grants the fundamental questions it raises are still relevant: is the generated amount of additional resources sufficient to enable schools to make a difference to the achievement levels of their students, their engagement in schoolwork, and their progression both within school and beyond? This depends on how schools deploy the additional resources, but the margin of staffing flexibility created by the GOK hours appears to be limited and heightens concerns regarding thresholds and dispersal of resources.

There are other school systems in which these concerns have been raised, specifically with respect to funding for equity. In the state of Victoria in Australia, for example, a systematic review of funding conducted in 2004 found that the equity budget was thinly dispersed across almost half of all public schools (University of Melbourne, 2004). Similarly, an investigation of resource allocation in Western Australian public schools found that half of all such schools received equity funding. This wide dispersal produced only a small increment to resource levels, including in the most severely disadvantaged schools (Teese et al., 2009).

Some schools have little financial flexibility

During the OECD review visit to the Flemish Community of Belgium, schools drew attention to differences in access to activities and services and to educational facilities and materials, including ICT devices. Language and cultural differences contribute to poorer access on the part of many immigrant children. As we have previously observed, while costs in elementary school are capped, there remain issues of parent co-operation, especially in a context of socio-economic disadvantage. Schools step in to make up for shortfalls in parental contributions for the purchase of materials and books, and to help meet the costs of excursions and other extra-mural activities considered essential to the educational project.

There is no legal cap on charges in secondary school, where costs tends to be higher, as with calculators, longer excursions and other expenditures. While government has sought to address these costs through a combination of supplementary funding to schools and transfer payments for parents (e.g. entitlement to a study grant), teaching staff in some of the schools visited by the OECD review team pointed to continuing stress in schools serving the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and families, and a continuing struggle to answer need. The operating grant is basically the only source of financial flexibility available to schools once parental and community contributions are exhausted. As not all elementary schools receive full-time administrative support, there may be very little flexibility at all in the case of small schools in disadvantaged areas. Further pressure is experienced by schools in relation to maintaining or improving buildings in disrepair (see above).

The key issue here is the flexibility of schools. The Flemish Community places great emphasis on the autonomy of its schools. But freedom to develop and operate policy is relative to the resources available for its exercise. As pressure on schools in challenging socio-economic contexts accumulates, the categories of school finance also come under pressure. The boundaries that government seeks to maintain between different budget lines become blurred. On the one hand, government seeks to maintain integrity of purpose, for example the operating grant is destined officially only for running expenses. On the other hand, schools seek to address the needs of all their students, using the totality of the resources available to them and using their autonomy as far as it reaches. But if there is no flexibility in funding arrangements at a school level, there is also limited autonomy. Schools can employ whomever they wish amongst qualified teachers and will never receive a bill. They cannot trade teaching hours for student services or for building repairs. They are free to spend large amounts in per student terms on small specialist classes, knowing that if they made savings by running larger classes or collaborating with neighbouring schools, they would not be able to use the savings to fund ancillary services or fix a leaking roof or re-wire a building or appoint a community-liaison worker.

The question of SES weighting of the operating grant is symptomatic of a bigger issue – the limitations in the access of schools to the totality of their resources. Weighting the operating grant by socio-economic characteristics recognises that some schools lack the flexibility needed to respond to the challenges they face. What is problematic is that the flexibility schools show in using the grant (e.g. to fund building repairs) is viewed as an infraction of purpose, while the real problem might be that schools in disadvantaged contexts have no other sources of funding, neither from parents nor from the funding authorities, and may not have a budget in the proper sense of the term.

Concerns about the distribution of funding across levels of education

Published summary statistics show that overall spending per student in the Flemish Community is significantly higher in secondary school than in elementary school. In 2013, per student expenditure in mainstream secondary education amounted to EUR 8 589 compared to EUR 5 030 in mainstream elementary education (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. **Annual cost per student by level and type of education (EUR), 2011-13**

Level and type of education		Year		
		2011	2012	2013
Mainstream education	Elementary	4 707	4 858	5 030
	Secondary	8 244	8 474	8 589
Special education	Elementary	14 943	15 405	15 891
	Secondary	18 856	19 065	19 460

Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, *www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*, Annex Table 2.4.

The Flemish approach to funding teacher salaries is likely to be the main contributor to the large difference in expenditure across levels of education. The system of funding assigns schools a total number of teaching hours, but does not place a limit on the cost of these hours. School boards appoint staff and decide how hours are allocated, but they do not have to operate within a financial constraint or cap on costs. They operate within their

entitlement. In effect, school boards send the bill to the Ministry, which the Ministry pays because the bill is based on a pre-determined entitlement. A combination of factors is likely to contribute to high teacher salary costs in the second and third stages of secondary education: teachers in upper secondary education have a master's qualification and are paid more and classes are often smaller. However, there is a lack of transparency about the real level of funding for teachers at different levels of schooling and there needs to be a clear and persuasive rationale for the different levels of support that are provided.

These differences in spending across levels of education should be seen in the context of the relative impact of education spending by stage of schooling. Studies, such as by James Heckman (2008), have concluded that early intervention is more productive than late intervention. To compress socio-cultural differences in achievement requires structured programmes in early childhood care and education, extending upwards into primary school. An example of where this should be applied in the Flemish Community relates to the provision of language-support programmes. Respondents in the OECD review visit argued that these programmes were of too-short a duration and should be extended for up to six years to have a real impact on the language development of immigrant school children (see also Nusche, 2009).

The Flemish Community, like many school systems allocates resources in a traditional pattern in which students who progress through to the end of secondary education are treated from a funding angle as requiring higher outlays, while students who are struggling with lower secondary or elementary school work receive fewer resources. The risk of failure is higher in primary than in secondary school to judge from the percentage of students who report repeating a grade in primary school as compared to repeating in secondary school (Chapter 1). So there is a case to be made for seeking greater balance in funding across educational levels. A major reduction in under-achievement in primary school would help increase the flow of students into the A stream and later into general education and would likely reduce levels of dropout as well as unemployment on leaving school.

Differential resourcing of educational programmes in the secondary sector raise a range of concerns

The design of the secondary staffing model, which applies different weightings depending on educational programme and study area, raises a range of issues. These concern both the strength of the rationale for this policy and the efficiency, effectiveness and equity outcomes of differential funding for programme and group.

Turning to the rationale, differential funding of technical and vocational courses might be justified on the grounds that there is more specialisation in these programmes (due to their industry or occupational focus) and thus a thinner distribution of students. A higher allocation of teaching hours compensates for this. However, this assumes that delivering these more expensive courses also delivers relevant transition outcomes in the form of work-based training (apprenticeship), higher technical studies or jobs based on the industry or occupational focus of TSO or BSO courses. However, there are indications that a range of programmes that are currently proposed do not prepare students well for the labour market (Belgian Court of Audit, 2014). If the evidence of student transition does not support the conclusion that specialist course options secure good transition outcomes, differential funding needs to be re-examined.

There might also be a case for spending more on classes whose students are at risk of low achievement and drop-out. As Hirtt (Varin, 2006) has demonstrated, Flemish students in the highest band of socio-economic status have ten times the chance of being placed in the general (academic) programme of secondary education and have virtually no chance of being placed in the vocational programme. More teaching hours might be allocated to classes enrolling students at risk of drop-out, a higher concentration of which can be found in the BSO sector. But that would depend on the educational objectives of the streamed specialist classes that receive higher per student weightings. It is not clear that greater spending on these courses is intended to lift the general level of achievement, as distinct from offering specific forms of training (e.g. workshops with smaller student groups) to better access the labour market. The rationale for higher investment in these programmes and courses has not been made explicit.

Efficiency and effectiveness of high investment in a fragmented course offer

Specialisation in the form of multiple courses raises the unit costs of education and disperses the budget thinly over many different options. This is expensive, especially in the context of the comparatively small size of Flemish schools, declining student numbers in some areas, and competition between establishments. Were schools larger and fewer in number, or at any rate were they to collaborate on running specialist classes together (as does happen occasionally), this would make specialisation more economically viable and less expensive in per student terms. This would not necessarily improve the effectiveness of technical and vocational courses (impact on students). But larger, more mixed classes and more broadly designed courses could offer the possibility of improving cognitive as well as economic outcomes, and thus gaining in equity as well as efficiency.

Limitations of differential resourcing of programmes and courses as an equity strategy

The differential weighting of student numbers according to programme and group should be seen in the context of the absence of adjustments in the formula allocation of teaching hours for the SES of students. Unlike in elementary education, no loadings are applied for SES in the allocation of teaching hours in secondary school. The older system of GOK funding does deliver additional hours for schools meeting SES criteria, but this approach to equal opportunities is not integrated in mainstream funding.

Seeking to incorporate SES weights into the staffing formula would no doubt add still further to the complexity of the approach. But it might well be argued that the system of weights owes its current complexity to the lack of adjustment for the family characteristics of students: the weights for study programme can be interpreted as a compensation package for the relatively more disadvantaged students who predominate in the technical and especially the vocational programmes.

The challenge of student diversity in cognitive growth is handled in the Flemish Community by differentiating programmes of study so that students are only exposed to performance demands that they can manage. If all were placed in the same programme, the challenge of diversity would be intensified and would require a range of different interventions that targeted the socio-economic factors undermining achievement. This is what the SES weights in elementary school aim to do. By contrast, secondary education appears to address the challenges of diversity by orienting higher proportions of weaker students to technical and vocational programmes and thereby progressively lowering academic demand on these students. In this way, pressure is taken off the teachers and the

classes of general secondary education and transferred to the technical and vocational programmes where it is managed by different expectations and also by heavier resourcing.

It is thus possible to view the hierarchy of the Flemish secondary school curriculum as a way to deal with student diversity, based on lowering demands on performance for some students and supported by a greater formal entitlement to teaching resources. Seen in this light, the weightings for the SES of students applied to the undifferentiated curriculum of elementary school surrender their place to weightings for programmes and courses in the differentiated curriculum of secondary school. It is a measure of the success of this tradition that Flemish students are amongst the highest performers in Europe (including students from disadvantaged backgrounds), and it is a measure of the failure of this tradition that the performance difference between students from different socio-economic backgrounds is amongst the greatest in Europe. It should be noted, that past policies have aimed to raise cognitive demands in all programmes, by imposing more stringent educational objectives. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Master Plan for Secondary Education aims to abolish the hierarchy between the different programmes.

Higher investment in TSO and BSO programmes may not benefit the targeted groups

While course loadings express a higher entitlement to resources on the part of students with weaker academic profiles on leaving primary school, this does not mean that they in fact enjoy a greater share of total teaching resources than students who entered the general programme, or that spending on them in per student terms is higher. Comparative statistics show that the Flemish Community is at the high end of spending per student in secondary education (Government of Flanders, 2013) but these estimates are aggregates for whole jurisdictions and do not provide insight into the variability of expenditure per student at a sub-regional or sub-group level, i.e. we do not know whether BSO students benefit from higher investment overall than TSO and ASO students.

In fact, any advantage in terms of entitlement (student coefficients) may be neutralised by curriculum policies and higher salaries (due to the requirement of higher qualifications) in general upper secondary education. As will be further discussed in Chapter 3, there is evidence that schools frequently shift teaching hours generated by students enrolled in specialised BSO classes towards the ASO and TSO programmes in order to sustain small courses with narrow levels of interest. This practice in turn results in larger class size in the BSO sector, as opposed to what the generated teaching hours would indicate (Belgian Court of Audit, 2010).

Moreover, the extra teaching hours that technical and vocational students do enjoy by way of entitlement may in some cases simply compensate for the costs of small class numbers rather than reversing educational disadvantage. In other words, the higher entitlement may translate into sitting in smaller classes, but not necessarily being extended cognitively. By age 15, a large achievement gap has opened up between students from different socio-economic backgrounds in the Flemish Community, and the machinery of early selection, transfers and grade repeating contribute to the creation of this gap. A commitment to reducing the gap would need to examine whether differential resourcing of courses succeeds or fails as an equity strategy.

Policy recommendations

If Flemish education is to be distinguished both by excellence *and* equity, the funding model should deliver a high level of support to weaker students and they, for their part, should be exposed to a high level of cognitive demand through the curriculum.

The philosophy of parental choice and school autonomy has been rewarded by internationally high standards of achievement, but the machinery of funding might be retarding the progress of many students. More investment per student is made in secondary education than in elementary school. As this fails to compress socio-economic differences in achievement, a system of early selection and streamed provision appears to reduce pressure on both students and teachers in secondary school. This is expensive to operate and complex in design. The objective appears to be to manage the consequences of low achievement rather than ending failure through early, sustained and carefully targeted interventions.

The Flemish approach supports the progress of strong students (educated together in the general programme), but it accommodates rather than challenges weaker students. The additional teaching hours which make up the course-based entitlement of low achievers should have been allocated earlier before selection and streaming. Fragmentation of the curriculum in secondary school adds to the costs of operating small, competing schools, and drives up the costs of accommodating diversity when the point is to reduce achievement gaps and spend money where it can have the greatest impact. The recommendations which follow are made with a view to both simplifying and refocussing the machinery of the school budget so that what Flemish schools do best, they do for all.

Recommendations are framed with a view to: i) making more effective use of school funding, ii) containing costs without adverse impact on quality of service or educational opportunity, and iii) achieving greater transparency in funding support and student outcomes. The recommendations aim to finance improvements in educational outcomes, not to withdraw resources from schools.

Develop a community-wide reporting framework for school funding

The Flemish school funding system would benefit from the development by the Flemish authorities of a Community-wide reporting framework bringing together financial indicators and student outcome indicators. The school funding system in the Flemish Community is complex and not fully transparent or readily understood. The high level of public investment in Flemish schools supports a high level of performance, but is also accompanied by large socio-economic differences in achievement. To maintain high standards and to narrow the equity gap are goals that require Community consensus regarding fiscal effort and social inclusiveness. To build this consensus would gain from periodic in-depth public reporting both of resource inputs and student outcomes.

For preparing this report, the OECD review team had the benefit of a Country Background Report, but this was specially prepared rather than having been produced regularly for consultation within the Flemish Community and for discussion with relevant partners. The review team could not locate any overarching legal document detailing the system of student coefficients and weights used to calculate operating grants and staffing hours for schools, as the regulations provide a scattered picture with several Parliamentary Acts and a large number of Circular Letters on the matter. For the purpose of this report, the OECD review team deduced the main funding principles of the Flemish school system

from example letters sent to individual schools. Given the important share of public resources devoted to schooling, it is important to make transparent the funding machinery – design principles, structure and expenditure outputs. It is equally important to understand the goals of the funding effort – the impacts that the publicly-funded education system is called on to make for the Flemish Community.

The form that a Flemish Community report on education might take is best considered by the Flemish authorities themselves. But contrasting examples of comprehensive reporting include in Germany *Bildung in Deutschland* (Lohmar and Eckhardt, 2012) and the more thematic and investigative *Das Bildungswesen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 2011-12* (Kultusminister Konferenz, 2013), and in France *Repères et Références Statistiques sur les enseignements, la formation et la recherche* (Ministère de l'Education Nationale, 2013). These are not proposed as models, but represent different approaches to systematic reporting on education inputs and outputs. While not proposing to specify either the form or the content of a Community-wide report, it may be useful to indicate some broad topics which together cover the fields of funding and outcomes. These are set out in Table 2.3.

Introduce a school-level reporting framework on resources

As described above, transparency at a Community-wide level can be advanced by developing a comprehensive framework of reporting of resources and outcomes. But transparency could also be enhanced at the level of schools, by introducing a school-level reporting framework which enables schools to examine the fiscal impact of their resource and curriculum decisions. For these are important decision-makers in a devolved system of schooling. The framework should be developed in consultation with schools, but the preparation of reports should be undertaken by the Ministry, using existing data and not imposing more paperwork on schools.

Table 2.3. **Example themes for a system-wide reporting framework on school funding and outcomes**

Financial indicators	Funding effort	Expenditure by educational level, per student, etc.
		International comparisons
	Funding machinery	Operating grant, salaries, infrastructure
		Principles and processes
	Funding for equity	Elementary and secondary education; operations and staffing; different approaches
		Secondary schools qualifying for GOK funding; impact on school resource level
		How schools use equity funding
		The impacts of equity funding
	Distribution	A socio-economic analysis of funding outcomes (spending per student by school) (including by programme in secondary education)
Student outcomes	Participation	Pre-school education and care
	Achievement	National Assessment Programme results by student group
		PISA results and trends
		TIMSS results and trends
	Progression	Grade repetition
		Access to different programmes
		Drop out
	Attainment	School completion
		Post-school transition
		Attainment goals

In particular, the costs of delivery of school programmes and the budget impact of resource and programme decisions should be made more transparent. This is in the context of the autonomy that Flemish schools enjoy and the limited accountability that balances this. To take some examples, secondary schools are free to decide on which courses they teach and how classes will be staffed. These autonomous decisions – which may, of course, be influenced by school associations – determine the teacher salary cost to the Ministry. Thus, a decision to run a class in Latin for five students represents an expensive commitment as does a class of five in a vocational course. The school is not required to take into consideration the fiscal impact of its decisions, as it is covered by the hours of teaching supplied by the funding formula (which is blind to *who* teaches and to *how many* students).

Rebalance the resource effort between educational levels

Given the current imbalance of spending between elementary and secondary education, the Flemish authorities should examine the advantages and disadvantages of shifting to more equal spending per student between elementary and secondary education.

Research from different countries has found a common international pattern of greater spending on secondary than on elementary school (Odden, 1999). Historically, this was based on higher teacher salaries and also smaller, specialist classes in higher grades of schooling. However, as participation in upper secondary education became general, the historical pattern persisted. This was despite larger classes and the convergence of teacher salaries in many jurisdictions (as the qualifications level of primary school teachers rose). As concern over the early emergence of achievement gaps in primary school has risen, an increasing number of jurisdictions have rebalanced their spending patterns, in some cases giving the same weight to primary and secondary schools, in some cases giving greater weight. The United States experience is summarised in Lamb and Teese (2012).

Odden (1999) describes the rationale for the shift in emphasis as based on the argument that early and sustained intervention raises a strong cognitive platform which will support the more demanding work of secondary school. OECD countries display a large range of experience in relative resource levels for primary and secondary education. Some countries, like Finland, Hungary and Poland, employ more teachers in primary school relative to student numbers than in upper secondary education, while others, like France, do the opposite (Lamb and Teese, 2012). The policy of rebalancing spending in primary and secondary school is supported by research, most notably by Heckman and LaFontaine (2007) who demonstrate that the rate of return on investment in human capital is greatest in the early years of school and lowest in the later years.

The issue for the Flemish Community is first to understand why it is 1.7 times more expensive to educate a child in secondary school than in elementary school (i.e. EUR 8 589 compared to EUR 5 030) (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). Part of the answer lies in higher salaries for teachers with a master's degree (upper secondary education). Part also lies in smaller classes and in the systemic lack of scale economies due to a fragmented curriculum and multiple, small schools serving similar geographical catchment areas. Stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team also pointed to the lack of administrative and support staff in elementary schools compared to secondary schools. Any shift in resources to primary schools, however soundly based on educational principles, will run up against the weight of Flemish educational practice cemented in

these structures. However, if more progress is to be made in closing the equity gap, the Flemish authorities need to start a discussion about the potential benefits of stronger investment in tackling low achievement at the earlier stages of education.

Gather data on locally-raised funds and the goods and services that these provide

Flemish schools apply the operating grant to a range of different needs, including utility charges, administrative overheads, contributions to association activities, and supplementing parental charges for materials and excursions. During the OECD visit, respondents indicated that the operating grant gave schools a degree of flexibility, particularly those serving disadvantaged communities. These schools are under pressure to make up for what families are unable to provide, even when charges are modest. Where schools are faced with a high level of social need, the concept of "operating costs" changes meaning. Schools may find themselves supplying meals, organising for medical support, resolving family issues, managing complex behavioural problems, combating low attendance and unauthorised absences, ensuring that children of parents with limited financial means are not excluded from excursions and have the same materials and equipment as other children, and communicating intensively with parents, social workers, community leaders, and police. These activities consume resources and impose financial costs. They represent a burden that is heavier in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods than in others and a responsibility which may not always be perceived as "core business", but without which the core business of a school would be impaired.

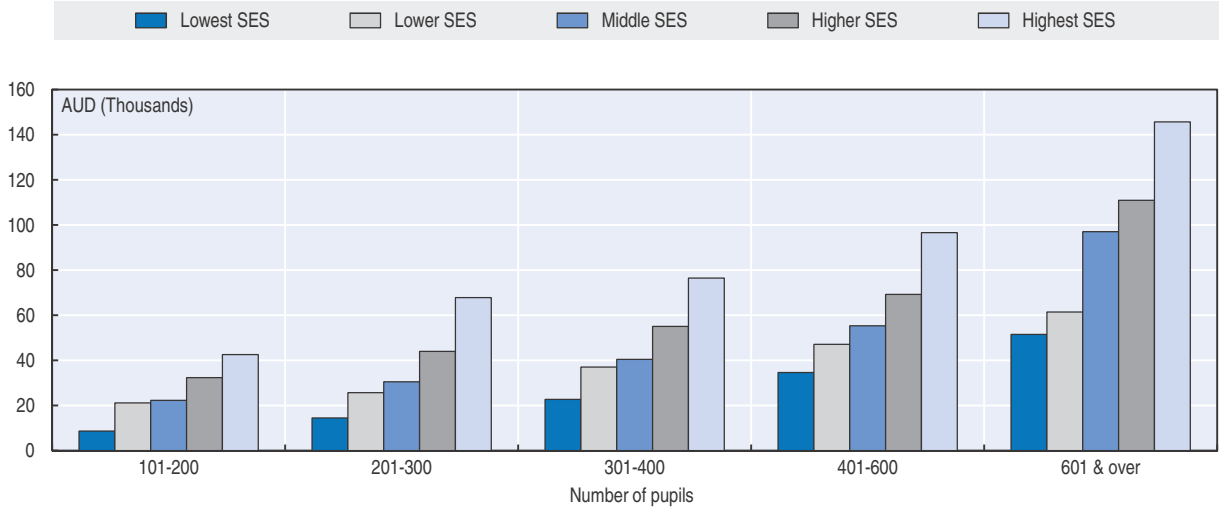
To highlight socio-economic gaps in the ability of schools to raise funds, it is helpful to look at patterns in school systems which routinely collect the relevant income data, as is done in some school systems. Figure 2.8 compares the median level of funds raised in public primary schools in Western Australia by size of school and (within this) the average SES of students (Teese, 2011). The chart shows that, within each size-band, contributions rise in line with socio-economic status, while multiplying 16 times from the smallest and lowest SES schools to the biggest and highest SES schools. It is often small schools and those located in socio-economically disadvantaged areas that experience the greatest pressure of need, due to the concentration of multiple disadvantages in them. But these have the least flexibility in budget terms.

It is essential that education authorities have good data, first on social need and second on locally-raised income. Social need refers to the range of ancillary services (and goods) supplied by schools, either directly or indirectly through the use of their resources. Locally-raised income refers to the cash contributed by parents through charges, donations and fund-raising activities.

Examine the role of equity funding and consider harmonising approaches in elementary and secondary schooling on the basis of common objectives

Equity funding is built into the way teaching hours are allocated in elementary school through student coefficients which reflect socio-economic challenges. In secondary school, equity funding comes through the equal opportunities (GOK) policy in which schools receive a top-up of teaching hours. It is difficult to assess whether a secondary school student with given family characteristics receives the same level of support as an elementary school student with the same characteristics. The entitlement to additional teaching hours is calculated on a different basis and distributed according to different criteria. Just as elementary schools and secondary schools are viewed as two separate

Figure 2.8. **Median locally-raised funds in Western Australian primary schools by size and SES, 2008**



Source: Teese, R. (2011), The Review of School Funding in Western Australia: Background, Key Research Findings and Implications, WA Corporate Executive Briefing, Perth.

worlds from the point of view of overall spending per student, so students who experience disadvantages of family background are regarded also as occupying separate worlds depending on the level at which they are enrolled. Yet are the needs of an 8-year-old child whose mother never completed school so very different from the needs of a 16-year-old brother or sister? To have a common approach to equity funding is to recognise a commonality of need, though need has to be addressed in different school settings.

More generally, it needs to be considered whether the approach of tackling disadvantage through supplementary hours in secondary education is preferable to building support into the formula allocation of teaching hours, as is the case in primary education. The potential advantages of supplementary hours include the capacity to evaluate identifiable initiatives, to terminate ineffective ones, to stimulate innovation through financial incentives, to circulate knowledge of good practice and possibly also to circulate staff. The potential disadvantages include lack of focus and continuity, dispersal of resources across widely varying contexts and challenges, the lack of impact on mainstream school culture and practice, and an outcome of "compensation for failure" rather than real growth in student learning and progression. Integrating equity supplements in the formula allocation of teaching through loadings would not necessarily overcome weaknesses in a supplementary grants programme. But an integrated approach offers greater certainty for schools and greater flexibility in the use of staff, and these are important desiderata as is the need for a transparent and formative system of evaluation.

As we have argued above, the use of programme- and course-related student coefficients in secondary education appears as a substitute for differential loadings for socio-economic factors. Hence, the issue is whether the overall approach in secondary education – a combination of top-up GOK hours and course coefficients – is the best way to reduce unequal student learning outcomes. It might be more transparent and effective to use SES coefficients (as in elementary school), but monitor and evaluate how schools use the additional teaching hours and develop a repertoire of effective intervention strategies to guide schools in good practice.

Notes

1. The amounts are adapted to the evolution of consumption prices. For the 2015/16 school year, the maximum charge was set EUR 45 for pre-primary and EUR 84 for primary education.
2. In special education, the size of the grant is determined by the type of special education facility attended by a student.
3. However, this coefficient varies slightly between schools from different networks. While the coefficient in a sample Community schools was EUR 82.566575, it was EUR 83.962123 in a grant-aided private school of similar size. The reason for this marginal difference (expressed with a high level of precision) is largely historical and relates to a category of personnel under an older system of funding. There is a group of employees in the public school system who are funded through an older financing system. To compensate for this difference, grant-aided private schools receive a slightly higher budget. This system will be phased out by 2020 as employees hired under the old financing system will be retired.
4. The groups represent the following clusters of study areas: i) administration and distribution, sports; ii) chemistry, industrial techniques, agriculture, food, etc.; iii) hotel, clothing; iv) electricity; v) graphical techniques; vi) dentistry, social security, nursery, etc.; vii) building, textiles, metal; viii) glass-making techniques.
5. There are 3 types of certificates connected to decisions on study progression at the end of each school year. Students receiving an A certificate can proceed to the following year level without restrictions in the programme. Those receiving a B certificate are allowed to progress to the following year in certain programmes but not in others. Students with a B certificate who wish to continue in a programme for which direct progression is not allowed will have to repeat the year and obtain an A certificate. Finally, the C certificate is a year repetition decision; students obtaining a C certificate are not allowed to progress to the following grade in any programme.
6. Referring to school education only and taking into account growth in student numbers (2011-2013).
7. However, school boards do not make decisions about salaries. This will be discussed in Chapter 4.
8. The performance gap between students from different socio-economic background cannot be regarded purely as a reflection of different levels of cultural (including linguistic) capital, as if the organisation of the school system and educational practice did not contribute to social inequalities. Academic selection - which arguably occurs at the end of primary school rather than at age 14 – is one practice which can be shown to promote socio-economic selection. This is reflected in the disproportionate allocation of socio-economically disadvantaged students to TSO and BSO streams (Pearson Foundation, 2013; Varin, 2006). In these streams, students enrol in less academically demanding courses. Less is demanded of them, and these lower expectations contribute to poorer learning outcomes for socio-economically disadvantaged students. Grade repetition, which is widespread in the Flemish Community (Chapter 1), is another practice which contributes to social selection. The costs of grade repetition are not insignificant and the impact on students often negative. Not all grade-repeaters come from poorer homes or immigrant backgrounds, but many do (Varin, 2006).

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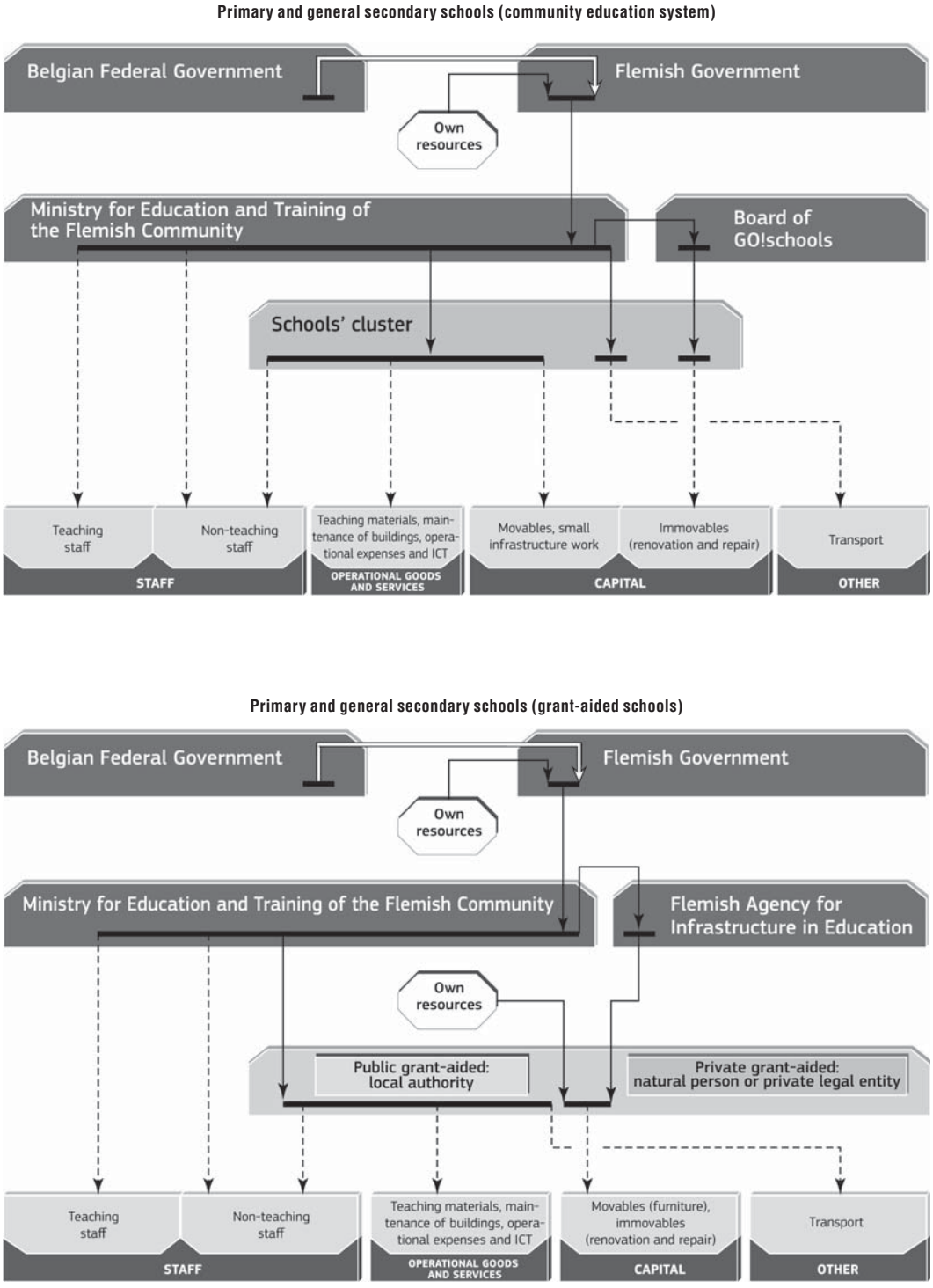
ANNEX 2.A1

Funding flows in the Flemish Community of Belgium

Figure 2.A1.1. **Funding flows in the Flemish Community of Belgium**



Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2014), *Financing Schools in Europe: Mechanisms, Methods and Criteria in Public Funding*, Eurydice Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

ANNEX 2.A2

Calculation of the operating grant for a sample Elementary School

Calculation of the operating grant for a sample elementary school (Community education network, Brussels), extract from an official letter sent to the school by AgODI, 2014/15 school year

Objective differences

Objective differences	Number of students	Money value per student (EUR)	Amount for objective differences (EUR)
Philosophy-of-life courses	98	30.153983	2955.09
Neutral education	179	20.102655	3598.38
Total for objective differences			6553.47

Student characteristics

Student characteristics	Number of students	"Corrected" number of students	Money value per characteristic per student (EUR)	Amount per characteristic (EUR)
Language spoken at home	166	113.120901	146.689638	16593.66
Mother's level of education	117	100.941164	122.753547	12390.89
Eligibility for a study grant	120	91.011413	120.833022	10997.18
Place of residence	175	156.803032	99.780364	15645.86
Total for student characteristics				55627.59

School characteristics

School characteristics	Number of students	Number of points	Money value per point (EUR)	Amount per level of education (EUR)
Pre-primary education	81	430.0128	82.566575	35504.68
Primary education	98	784	82.566575	64732.19
Total for school characteristics				100236.87

Operating grants

Amount for objective differences	EUR 6553.47
Amount for student characteristics	EUR 55627.59
Amount for school characteristics	EUR 100236.87
Calculated operational budget	EUR 162417.93
Advance	EUR 81319.65
Balance	EUR 81098.29

Calculation of staffing hours for a sample elementary school (Community education network, Brussels), 2014/15 school year

Pre-primary education

Student numbers according to weighting coefficient

Weighting coefficient	Number of students	Weighted number of students
1.11	81	89.91
Total	81	89.91

Teaching hours according to scales

	Weighted number of students	Number of teaching hours
School	89.91	125
Total number of teaching hours		125
Total number of teaching hours for pre-primary education according to scales after applying SES-percentage of 97.16%		**121**

SES-teaching hours

Student characteristics	% on the basis of previous school year	Number of students	Teaching hours per student	Teaching hours per characteristic
Mother's level of education		53	0.26710	14.1563
Language spoken at home not Dutch		76	0.29116	22.12816
Eligibility for a study grant	73.18	59.2758	0.11917	7.0638971
SES-teaching hours for pre-primary education				43

Additional teaching hours in order to achieve a maximum student-teacher ratio of 18.5

Student-teacher ratio	11.853659
Additional teaching hours pre-primary education	0

Primary education

Weighting coefficient	Number of students	Weighted number of students
1.11	101	112.11
Total	101	112.11

Teaching hours according to scales

	Weighted number of students	Number of teaching hours
School	112.11	151
Total number of teaching hours		151
Total number of teaching hours for primary education according to scales after applying SES-percentage of 97.16%		**147**

SES-teaching hours

Student characteristics	% on the basis of previous school year	Number of students	Teaching hours per student	Teaching hours per characteristic
Mother's level of education		66	0.26710	17.6286
Language spoken at home not Dutch		96	0.29116	27.95136
Eligibility for a study grant	73.18	73.9118	0.11917	8.8080692
SES-teaching hours for primary education				54

Additional teaching hours in order to achieve a maximum student-teacher ratio of 18.5

Student-teacher ratio	12.059701
Additional teaching hours pre-primary education	0

ANNEX 2.A3

Calculation of staffing hours and ICT points for a sample secondary school

Calculation of staffing hours and ICT points for a sample secondary school (Community education network, Herentals), extract from an official letter sent to the school by AgODI, 2014/15 school year

Calculated teaching hours

2nd stage ASO: 46 students	Disciplines concerned by the minimum package: 1 or 2 (not 2 + 2)

Teaching hours according to scales

25 × 1.90 = 47.50

21 × 1.70 = 35.70

Hours: 83.20	**83.20**

3rd stage ASO: 43 students	Disciplines concerned by the minimum package: 1 or 2 (not 2 + 2)

Teaching hours according to scales

25 × 1.90 = 47.50

18 × 1.70 = 30.60

Hours: 78.10	**78.10**

2nd stage TSO: 36 students	Disciplines concerned by the minimum package: 3

Teaching hours according to scales

25 × 0.50 = 12.50

11 × 0.30 = 3.30

Teaching hours according to groups

Group 1: 11 × 2.05 = 22.55

Group 2: 12 × 2.15 = 25.80

Group 4: 13 × 2.35 = 30.55

Hours: 94.70	Minimum package: 156.00	**156.00**

3rd stage TSO: 36 students	Disciplines concerned by the minimum package: 3

Teaching hours according to scales

25 × 0.50 = 12.50

11 × 0.30 = 3.30

Teaching hours according to groups

Group 1: 14 × 2.05 = 28.70

Group 2: 7 × 2.15 = 15.05

Group 4: 15 × 2.35 = 35.25

Hours: 94.80	Minimum package: 156.00	**156.00**

2nd stage BSO: 69 students	Disciplines concerned by the minimum package: 4

Teaching hours according to scales

25 × 0.60 = 15.00

44 × 0.30 = 13.20

Teaching hours according to groups

Group 1: 17 × 2.45 = 41.65

Group 2: 18 × 2.55 = 45.90

Group 6: 34 × 3.05 = 103.70

Hours: 219.45	**219.45**

3rd stage BSO: 66 students	Disciplines concerned by the minimum package: 4

Teaching hours according to scales

25 × 0.60 = 15.00

41 × 0.30 = 12.30

Teaching hours according to groups

Group 1: 27 × 2.45 = 66.15

Group 2: 21 × 2.55 = 53.55

Group 6: 18 × 3.05 = 54.90

Hours: 201.90	**201.90**

No. of students taken into account	296.00
Teaching hours including minimum package (Y)	894.65
Teaching hours excluding minimum package	772.15

Evaluation of the minimum package

Hours according to minimum package (MP)	312.00
Hours according to coefficients (CF)	189.50
Relationship MP/Y	34.87%
Relationship CF/MP	60.74%
You retain the right to the minimum package	

Calculation of hours for philosophy-of-life courses

Study year	Norm	RC	Prot	J	Isl	Ort	Ang	Ncz	Ecr	CB	**Total**
Year 1, Stage 2, ASO	27	2	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	**8**
Year 2, Stage 2, ASO	27	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	**6**
Year 1, Stage 2, BSO	27	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	**6**
Year 2, Stage 2, BSO	27	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	**4**
Year 1, Stage 2, TSO	27	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	**6**
Year 2, Stage 2, TSO	27	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	**6**
Year 1, Stage 3, ASO	27	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	**6**
Year 2, Stage 3, ASO	27	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	**6**
Year 1, Stage 3, BSO	27	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	**4**
Year 2, Stage 3, BSO	27	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	**6**
Year 3, Stage 3, BSO	27	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	**4**
Year 1, Stage 3, TSO	27	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	**4**
Year 2, Stage 3, TSO	27	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	**4**
	Total	**26**	**2**	**0**	**16**	**0**	**0**	**26**	**0**	**0**	**70**

RC: Roman Catholic; Pro: Protestant; J: Jewish; Isl: Islamic; Ort: Orthodox; Ang: Anglican; Ncz: Non-confessional ethics; Ecr: Éthique et culture réligieuse (non-recognised option); CB: Cultural awareness (non-recognised option).

Utilisation percentage

Type of hours	Number of hours	Utilisation percentage	Total
Generated teaching hours	582.65	96.57	563
Minimum package	312.00	98.57	308
Teaching hours for philosophy-of-life courses	70.00	98.00	69

Calculation of ICT points

Stream	Number of students	Weighting	Total
A stream	161	1.00	161.00
B stream	135	1.25	168.75
HS-312 (part-time vocational secondary education)	234	1.25	292.50
Total weighted number of students			622.25
Envelope of points (Coefficient 0.03969)			25

Summary overview

Generated teaching hours	871
Teaching hours for philosophy-of-life courses	69
Total number of teaching hours	940
Points for ICT co-ordination	25

OECD Reviews of School Resources:
Flemish Community of Belgium 2015

Chapter 3

Provision of school places in the Flemish Community of Belgium

This chapter presents the organisation of the school offer and the provision of school places in the Flemish Community of Belgium, including the provision of special needs education. It describes the existing setup of schools and school buildings as well as the distribution of students across these institutions. It examines how demographic developments are influencing the demand for school places in different parts of the Flemish Community, with particular attention to the challenges faced by urban areas in meeting growing demand. The chapter also analyses how parental choice impacts on student enrolment patterns and the degree to which policies to regulate school choice influence the composition of student populations within schools. It places particular emphasis on potential efficiency gains in the provision of school places, giving attention to aspects such as school size, the offer of programme and course choices in the secondary sector, the organisation of schools within educational networks and school boards and the extent of student tracking and grade repetition.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Context and features

The Flemish education system provides extensive choices for families. As described in Chapter 1, the provision of school education involves three general providers (referred to as "networks") of compulsory education: The Flemish Community education network (*Onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap*, GO!), the grant-aided public education network (*Officieel gesubsidieerd onderwijs*, OGO), and the grant-aided private education network (*Vrij gesubsidieerd onderwijs*, VGO).

The education system is built upon traditional reliance on private – largely Catholic – schools that provide compulsory schooling. More than two-thirds (67%) of the student population are enrolled in publicly funded private schools, which are largely organised by private foundations of Catholic denomination. 17% of the students are enrolled in municipal or provincial public schools, and the remaining 16% are enrolled in schools organised by the Flemish Community. This chapter explores the organisation of the school offer in the Flemish Community, reviewing its unique context and features, describing key strengths and challenges and concluding with a range of options for further policy development.

Priorities for the education system

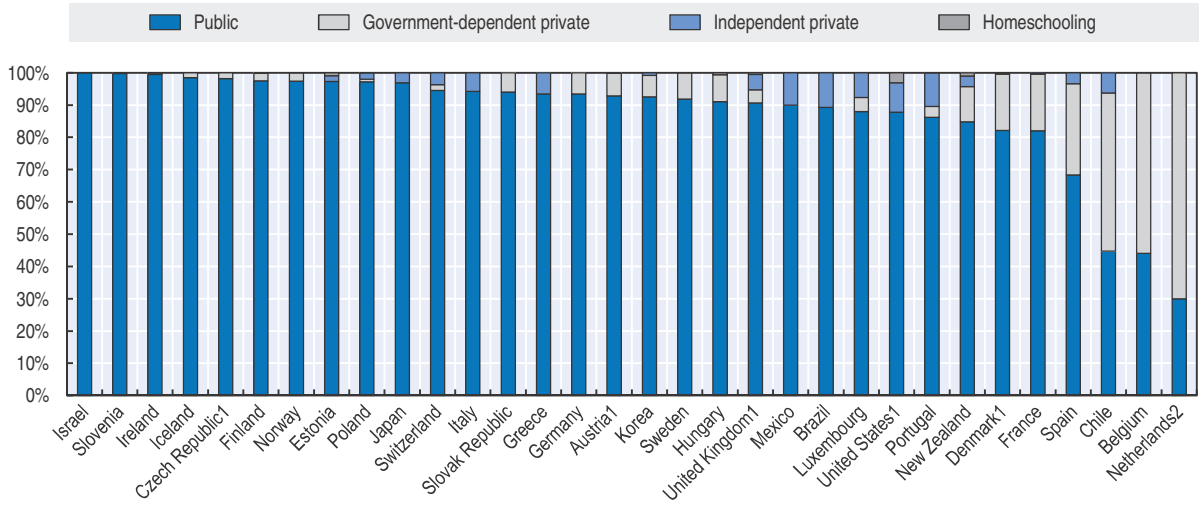
Broadly speaking, the goals of the Flemish education system that were most often spoken of during the OECD review visit are to provide quality education for all children and to deliver this education efficiently and in a way that ensures equity. Efficiency is an important priority given the challenges the system faces with economic constraints and increasing enrolments (Chapter 1). Further, it is important to note that increased efficiency can free up resources to address other priorities such as quality and equity. While these are common goals that most countries consider, there is another more defining goal of the Flemish education that separates it from many other OECD countries; namely the goal of providing meaningful school choices from which all families can freely select.

The promotion and offer of school choice in the Flemish Community of Belgium is based on the long-standing involvement of private providers. While school choice can be seen as an end in itself, it can also be used as a tool for accomplishing agreed upon goals of the education system (Miron et al., 2012). In the case of the Flemish Community, school choice is primarily seen as an outcome or end in itself. As will be explored in this chapter, the goal of ensuring school choice may compete with the goals of quality, equity and efficiency. In the section discussing policy recommendations, this chapter will highlight design features of school choice that could be established to help pursue quality, equity and efficiency rather than compromise these other goals.

Distribution of students across the school system

In the 2012/13 school year, there were 1 127 802 students enrolled in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools in the Flemish Community (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). Figure 3.1 indicates the relative distribution of students across diverse

Figure 3.1. **Distribution of students across diverse forms of educational institutions, ISCED 1-2, 2008**



Note: Several countries reported small numbers of students in home-schooling which comprised less than 0.01% of total enrolments.
1. Estimated for home-schooling;
2. Estimated for reference year 2006.
Countries are ranked in descending order according to the proportion of students reported in public schools.
Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators*, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2010-en*, Table D5.2, See Annex 3 for notes.

school types in Belgium as a whole, relative to other OECD countries (OECD, 2010). The data in this figure does not set the Flemish Community apart from the rest of the country, although the distribution of students across the school types does not differ much across the three linguistic Communities. Belgium is relatively unique in that it reports providing very comprehensive support for government-dependent private schools (i.e. grant-aided private schools, *Vrij gesubsidieerd onderwijs*, VGO, in the Flemish Community context). Among the OECD countries, only the Netherlands reported having a higher proportion of its students provided for in government-dependent private schools, which by definition receive most of their funding from public sources, although they operate as private entities. Belgium reported that it did not have data on the percentage of students enrolled in independent private schools for reference year 2008. There are however very few independent private schools (Chapter 1) and it is estimated that less than 0.6% of students are "home-schooled", which means they are educated by an adult in the household or attend a non-recognised private school (OECD, 2010).

Compulsory education starts at age 6 and extends to age 18. It is worth noting that the Flemish Community has a very high proportion of 3- to 5-year-old children enrolled in early childhood education and care. Belgium as a whole reported that 98% of all 3 year-olds and 99% of all 4 year-olds were attending early childhood education and care (ECEC) in 2012; this ranked Belgium highest among OECD countries (OECD, 2014). This broad provision of ECEC is exceptional given budgetary constraints and reflects the importance of ECEC in supporting children's cognitive and emotional development and laying the foundation for future learning.

However, while Belgium is well above the OECD average in serving 3 and 4 year-olds in ECEC, there is concern that enrolment of younger children in ECEC is lower and unequal across different groups, with the children of immigrants being underrepresented (OECD, 2015). This is also linked to structural differences in the offer for young children of

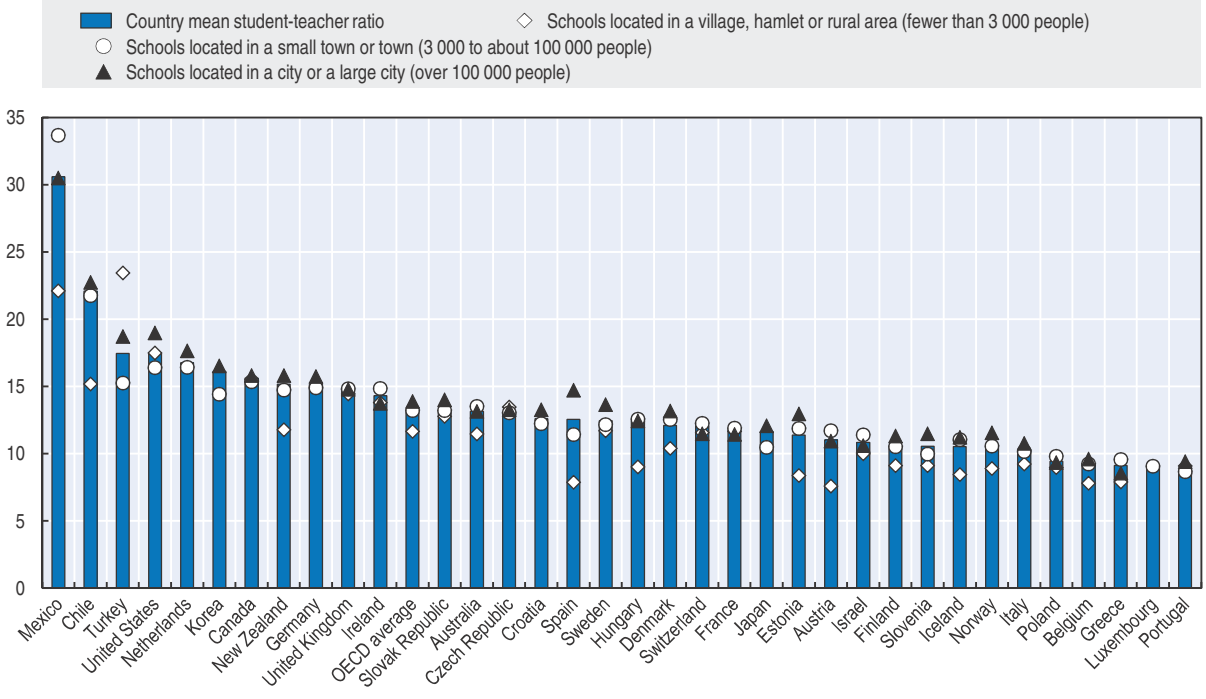
different ages. Early childhood education for children aged 2.5 to 6 is offered free of charge in a school setting and has therefore almost universal participation independently of the parents' employment status. On the other hand, early education and care for children below age 2.5 is a paid service and participation is confined mostly to children whose mothers are active in the labour market.

Other key indicators suggest that Belgium is below the OECD average in investment per child enrolled in ECEC, as indicated by children to teaching staff ratios and average expenditure per child (OECD, 2014). With an average of 16.2 children per teaching staff in ECEC programmes, Belgium was ranked above the average in the OECD where the average children-to-teaching staff ratio is 14.5 (OECD, 2014). In terms of total expenditure on ECEC, Belgium spent an equivalent of USD 6 333 per child in 2011, compared to the average of USD 7 446 across the OECD (OECD, 2014). The European Commission (2014), among others, has drawn attention to the importance of focussing not just on the quantity of places but also on the quality and adequacy of ECEC provision in responding to the needs of an increasingly diversified population.

By contrast, at the level of primary and secondary education, the three linguistic Communities in Belgium are noteworthy in their ability to provide programmes and places with very favourable conditions across the system regardless of school location. As shown in Figures 3.2 and 3.3, Belgium is among the countries offering the lowest student-to-teacher ratio and class size at the lower secondary education across countries participating in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This was consistently the case for schools located both in rural and urban areas.

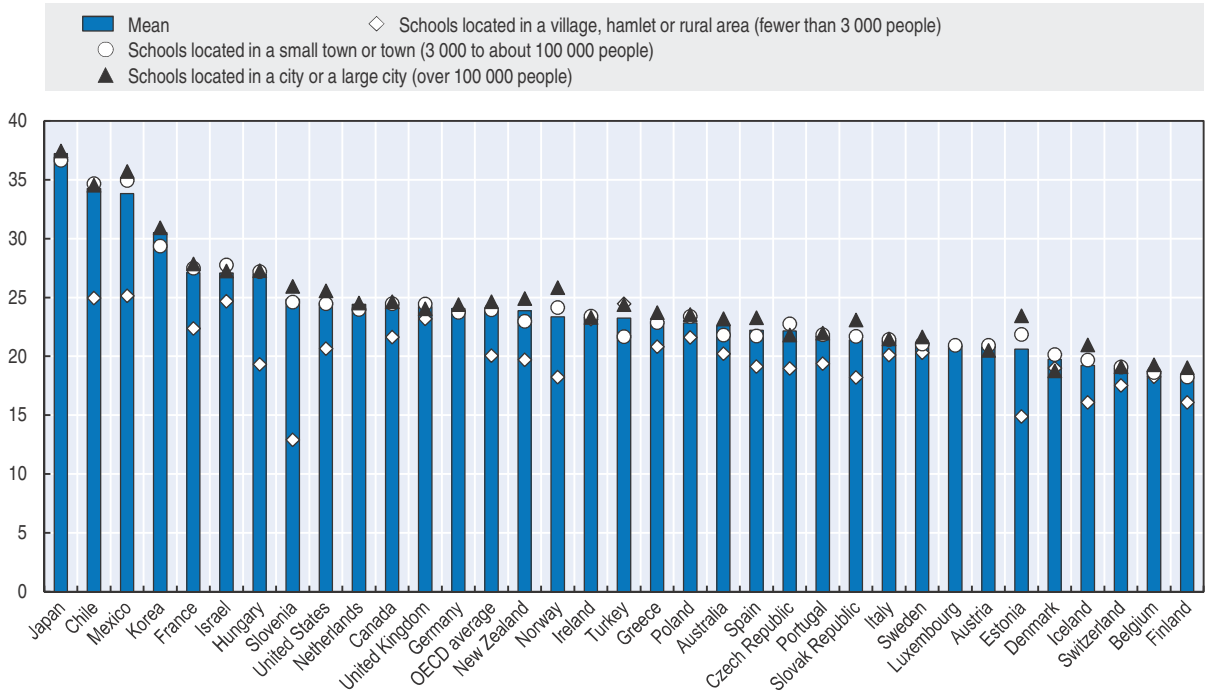
Figure 3.2. **Student-teacher ratio in Belgium: overall and by school location, 2012**

As reported by school principals in PISA 2012



Note: Countries are presented in descending order of overall student-teacher ratio.
Source: OECD (2013), PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en*, Tables IV.3.8 and IV.3.9.

Figure 3.3. **Class size of language-of-instruction lessons, as reported by 15-year-old students, 2012**



Note: Countries are presented in descending order of overall class size.
Source: OECD (2013), PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en*, Table IV.3.24.

Study programmes are not tracked in elementary schooling, although some grouping of students can occur depending on the school. As explained in Chapter 1, the secondary schools are organised into three stages, each with two-year duration of study (plus an optional additional year for students in the vocational programme who wish to enter tertiary education). In the first stage, which corresponds to lower secondary education (students are approximately 12 years old), students are placed in either an A stream or a B stream. The A stream is the general education track while the B stream prepares for vocational education. At the start of secondary school, 84.6% of the students are in the A stream. In the second and third stages of secondary school (approximately ages 14-18), students choose or are tracked into one of four study lines: General Secondary Education (ASO), Technical Secondary Education (TSO), Artistic Secondary Education (KSO) and Vocational Secondary Education (BSO).

Distribution of schools and facilities

In 2012/13 there were 3 628 schools providing compulsory education in the Flemish Community. The grant-aided private schools constitute the network with by far the most schools (64.4%). Each of the networks has about 8 to 10% of their schools established as special needs schools (Table 3.1).

School size

Table 3.2 compares the average school size for diverse types of elementary and secondary schools. At the elementary school level, the separate schools for students with

Table 3.1. **Distribution of schools by network, level and type, 2012/13**

Education network	Number of elementary schools		Number of secondary schools		Total number of schools and % by provider
	Mainstream	Special	Mainstream	Special	
Community education	368	34	217	21	640 (17.6%)
Municipal and provincial schools	532	33	71	17	653 (18.0%)
Private-run schools	1 468	126	666	75	2 335 (64.4%)
Total	**2 368**	**193**	**954**	**113**	**3 628 (100%)**

Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, *www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*.

Table 3.2. **Average school size by level and type of education, 2012/13**

School type	Average school size
Mainstream elementary schools	289.3
Special elementary schools	154.8
Mainstream secondary offering only first stage (ISCED 2)	218.9
Mainstream secondary offering only second and third stages (ISCED 3)	426.9
Mainstream secondary offering all 3 stages (ISCED 2 and 3)	568.0
Total for all mainstream secondary schools	438.5
Special secondary schools	178.2

Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, *www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*.

special education needs are typically about half the size of their mainstream counterparts. At the secondary level, the mainstream schools are on average 2.5 times larger than the special schools, although the size of the mainstream schools also varies depending on whether they offer all or only some stages of secondary education.

School facilities

In 2013, the range of educational institutions existing in the Flemish Community were distributed over more than 6 000 school sites in the Flemish Community and encompassed close to 17 000 separate buildings – this includes all schools from pre-primary to secondary, special schools, Student Guidance Centres (CLBs), and boarding schools (Leemans and von Ahlefeld, 2013).

The Flemish Community network (GO!) is considered the owner of the facilities in its network, while in the other networks the school boards are legal owners of the facilities. As explained in Chapter 2, there are two main bodies responsible for financing the construction and renovation of school facilities and the implementation of government policy on this topic: The Flemish Community network (GO!) is responsible for the schools in its own network, and the Agency for Educational Infrastructure (AGIOn) is responsible for subsidising school facilities for grant-aided public and private schools. In the Brussels Capital Region, where the Flemish Community government is responsible for the 250 schools providing education with Dutch as the language of instruction, additional support is provided by the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels.

In the case of the grant-aided private schools, the buildings are privately owned and any equity accrued belongs to the school. AGIOn does not subsidise the entire school building project for grant-aided public and private schools; the subsidy amounts to 70% for

primary education and to 60% for secondary education. The school board can finance the part which is not subsidised by means of a loan guaranteed by the Flemish government. As reported by the representative groups and stakeholders interviewed by the OECD review team, it is common for private and municipal schools to use a portion of their operating grants to pay off the loan that covers the portion not funded by public sources.

Over the past decade, the Flemish authorities have developed new infrastructure approaches in addition to traditional public sector financing and joint public-private ventures. Of particular interest is the Design-Build-Finance-Maintain (DBFM) public-private partnership. The project involves the erection of 200 new low-energy schools for a total outlay of 1.5 billion euros. Over the leasing period of 30 years, the venture partner maintains each school to required standards, while the school boards pay a fee, partly subsidised by AGIOn. At the end of the period, ownership is transferred to the boards without any further costs. The importance of this initiative lies partly in the scale of the undertaking (around 200 schools, which represents over 5% of existing capacity as measured by the number of schools), partly in the creation of low-energy facilities (of lasting economic benefit), and partly in access to private equity to augment the resources of the public authority.[1]

Provision of special needs education

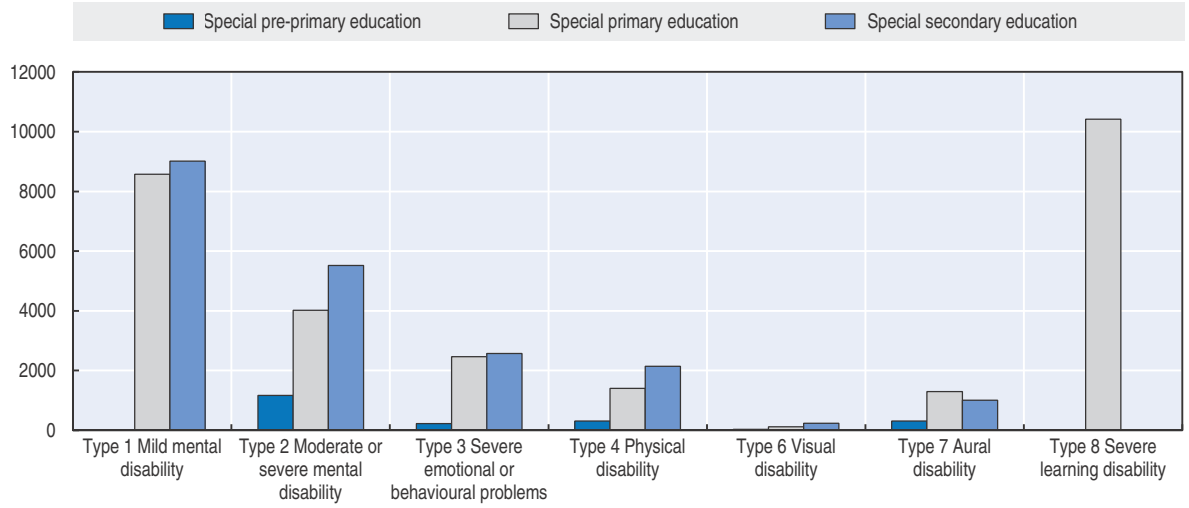
A relatively large proportion of the students with special educational needs (SEN) in the Flemish Community are served in separate special schools. According to national data, in 2012/13, 9.2% of all schools were providing education exclusively for students with special educational needs, serving a total of 50 681 students, which accounts for 4.5% of the Flemish student population (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). In addition to these students who are served in special schools, there are also students with SEN who are educated within mainstream schools.

There are eight recognised types of special learning needs that are similar but not identical to practice in other countries. Figure 3.4 illustrates the number of students in seven of the eight types by school level. To avoid double counting of students, those with long-term illness (type 5) are not included since most of these students also enrolled in a mainstream school or fit into one of the other types. It should be noted that not all types of special education are organised at each level of education.

Not all students with special needs are placed in special schools. Students who are mainstreamed may be enrolled in integrated education under the guidance of a special school; this programme is referred to as GON. The number of students served in this programme expanded from 1 500 students in 2000 to 12 278 students in 2013. A small group of 111 students with severe or moderate mental impairments participate in the inclusive education project (ION) which allows these students to be served in mainstream schools, with a modified and individualised curriculum (Figure 3.5).

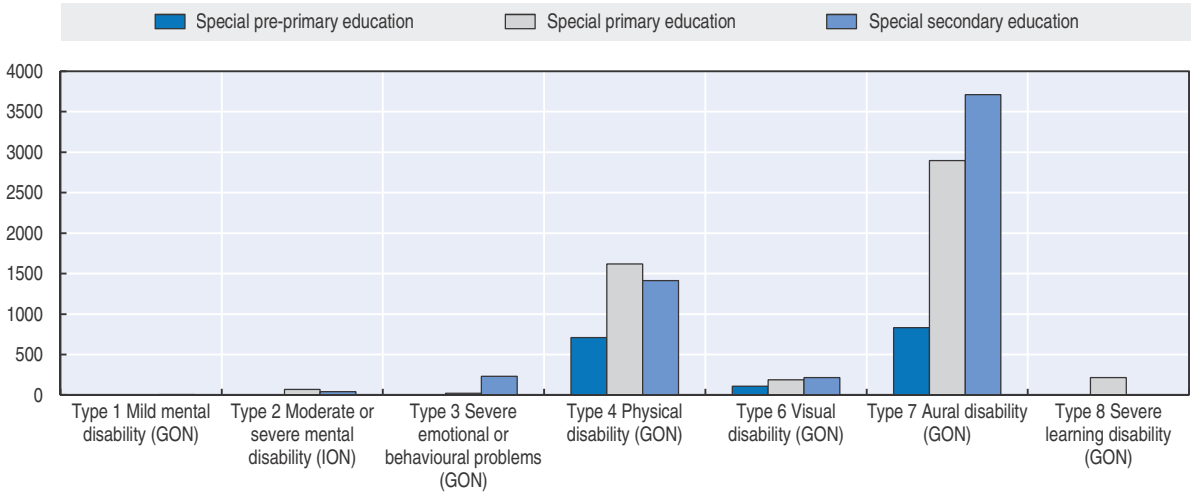
Integrated or inclusive primary education is organised in co-operation between mainstream education and special needs education. It implies that children with a disability take classes or activities in a mainstream school. In this process they receive support from special needs schools. At the end of primary education, children who have obtained all goals from the curriculum take a certificate of primary education. Also in special needs education children may in certain cases obtain a certificate which has the same value as the one from mainstream education.

Figure 3.4. **Students enrolled in special needs education, by category and school level, 2013/14**



Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, *www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*.

Figure 3.5. **Students enrolled in integrated special needs education, by category and school level, 2013/14**



Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, *www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*.

The current configuration of special schools has been defined by Decree in 1970 with relatively few changes up until now. The "M Decree" (see Chapter 1), which is scheduled to be implemented in September 2015 is intended to move many of the students from special schools to mainstream schools, where they should receive special support adapted to their needs. There are a range of challenges related to the implementation of M Decree which are discussed later in this chapter.

School choice in the Flemish Community

School choice is a predominant feature of the Flemish education system. Historically, private providers – mostly schools organised by the Catholic Church – have played a critical role in providing most of the school places for children. Government involvement in

developing schools started in the early 1800s with initial steps taken by municipal authorities. *De facto* school choice has always existed since families have not been assigned to schools based on geographic location. Regulation of school choice in the Flemish Community over time has generally sought to provide equitable access to all children and to ensure transparency.

The OECD's *Education at a Glance 2010* provides internationally comparable information on school choice across OECD education systems and data is available for the Flemish Community separately (OECD, 2010). While most other countries that allow school choice have some restrictions on choice, the Flemish Community reported that there were no restrictions and students and their families had the right to choose from any public or grant-aided private school they wish (OECD, 2010). All students in the Flemish Community are required to choose a school as they are not assigned to a school based on geographical area. The typical arrangement in most other OECD countries is for students to be initially assigned a school based on geographic location (OECD, 2010). However, the majority of OECD countries reported that families were given a general right to enrol in any traditional public school they wish, even if they were initially assigned to a local school based on geographic location (OECD, 2010). In such a situation, families that wish to choose a school other than the one they are assigned to need to apply to receive a place. Some limitations may apply and parents are required to go through an application process. In practice, families often accept the local school and do not apply for alternatives.

Allowing choice does not always mean that options will be available and parents can freely choose among a diverse array of schools in proximity to their homes. However, in the Flemish Community, which is highly urbanised and densely populated, the vast majority of parents can indeed choose among several schools in the same geographical area. Based on the 2012 school principal survey of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 85.1% of students in the Flemish Community were in schools at which principals reported that there were two or more other schools competing for students in the area (OECD, 2013). Just over 10% of the students were in schools with one other school in the area that was competing for students. Only 4.5% of Flemish students were in schools where principals reported that there were no other schools in the area for students to choose.

In terms of incentives to facilitate school choice, the Flemish Community promotes school choice by fully funding all public schools and grant-aided private schools. Schools may not charge for tuition, although parents can be asked to pay some fees for specific materials or supplemental activities (Chapter 2). The Flemish Community did not report providing vouchers or scholarships for students at the primary school level, although scholarships are available for some students at the secondary level to assist with expenses associated with their study programmes. In addition, means-tested study grants are allocated to Flemish primary school students whose parents have lower general income (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2015), and even for children in pre-primary education where entitlement to such grants is linked to regular attendance.

The types of regulations for schools with regards to central performance targets and requirements on personnel and certification standards are rather typical of most OECD countries (OECD, 2010). However, school choice in other OECD countries usually means that in exchange for increased autonomy, schools face increased accountability, so that parents can make their choices based on information about school quality and

performance. The Flemish Community does not have as much overt accountability nor does it have as many diverse forms of accountability (OECD, 2011). During the OECD review visit, stakeholders at different levels of the school system pointed to the importance of developing trust rather than accountability mechanisms. Based on experiences in other countries, one might expect demands for greater transparency and more direct access to data on schools, but such features are not characteristic of the Flemish approach.

Regulation of school choice to support equal educational opportunities

School choice in the Flemish Community is increasingly being regulated, particularly in response to concerns about equal access to schools. The 2002 Decree on Equal Educational Opportunities (Chapter 1) includes two important provisions with respect to school choice. First, it provided for the establishment of local consultation platforms (*locale overlegplatformen*, LOPs) to ensure co-operation between schools and stakeholders in implementing local policies to regulate student enrolments and ensure equal access to educational opportunities. In 2013, there were 72 LOPs covering most of the territory of the Flemish Community. In particular, LOPs had been created in all urban areas, where enrolment issues have been most pressing. LOPs operate within a defined local authority or region and bring together representatives of the main educational stakeholder groups in that area. This typically includes school directors, representatives of the local authority, teacher unions as well as parent and community organisations. There are separate LOPs for elementary schools and for secondary schools.

Second, the 2002 Decree reinforced the constitutional principle that each student has the right to enrol in the school of their parents' or carers' choice. A school can only refuse a student seeking enrolment on one the following grounds: i) the school has reached its capacity and additional enrolments would jeopardise safety, ii) the student has been excluded permanently for disciplinary reasons, iii) the student has been excluded from other schools and is seeking enrolment in the course of a school year within the local consultation platform's action zone, and iv) the school is not able to provide specialised facilities needed for the student's learning (except for children with learning disabilities). The refusal of a student needs to be justified in writing. Initially, the policy also included the possibility for schools to refer students to another school in case their enrolment jeopardised the balance between students with Dutch as a first language and students from a different language background. This rule was abolished in 2005 (Lambrechts and Geurts, 2008).

The 2002 Decree defined two groups that are given priority in enrolment when schools are oversubscribed: students whose siblings are already enrolled at the school and Dutch-speaking students in Brussels schools where Dutch is the language of instruction. The Decree also allowed pre-primary, primary and lower secondary schools to introduce a priority system based on socio-economic criteria. In order to encourage socio-economic diversity in the student body, schools could give priority to students who met one or several indicators of disadvantage established by the GOK policy (see Chapter 2). Conversely, schools whose proportion of students meeting the GOK indicators was at least 10% higher than in the local reference area could give priority to students who did not meet any of the indicators. Introducing such priority measures was possible for a period of six weeks maximum, preceding the regular enrolment period (Lambrechts and Geurts, 2008; Cantillon, 2011).

As there was little evidence that controlled choice mechanisms were effective in creating greater socio-economic diversity in schools (OECD, 2015), a 2008 revision of the GOK Decree allowed for a two-year experimentation period during which local consultation platforms were given greater freedom to design local enrolment policies, as long as they respected the equal treatment of students and did not create additional priority groups. During this period, online application systems were introduced in the major cities, allowing parents to apply to several schools (Cantillon, 2011).

Finally, a 2011 Decree on the right to enrolment took stock of the lessons learned during this experimentation period and introduced a number of changes to strike a better balance between free school choice and mechanisms to increase socio-economic diversity in schools. First, LOPs were given the responsibility to define quotas for both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in oversubscribed schools, based on the socio-economic composition of the neighbourhood. Second, a number of criteria were defined for schools to choose among students within each group when demand for places exceeded supply. Pre-primary and primary schools were allowed to use the following criteria: the distance between the parents' home or workplace and the school, the position of the school in the student's rank order list, or the results of a lottery. Secondary schools were required to operate on a first-come first-serve basis in combination with a call centre or to make decisions based on the position of the school in the student's rank order list (Cantillon, 2011).

Strengths

The education system is built upon historically relevant and committed school providers

A fundamental strength of the Flemish education system is the level of commitment from both public and private school providers. Because the overall education system has historically been based on private school providers, these schools have taken on board responsibilities for serving the broader community of students. There have been regulations of the private schools over time, but it seems clear that the private school providers have a deep commitment to serving the "public good" rather than just working to serve their own private interests or the interests of select families that are affiliated by religion.

A number of other OECD countries have expanded opportunities in recent decades for private schools to enrol students with funding and support from taxpayers. In many of these cases, the private schools enter the overall education system in a competitive position and many seek to make profit. In such cases, governments have to be committed to provide greater oversight and more extensive regulations to ensure that private providers serve the overall interests of the government and society. In the case of the Flemish Community, it appears that private or commercial interests by the private school providers are minimal.

Based on the interviews conducted during the OECD review visit, the review team formed the impression that the private schools in the Flemish Community have pride and a strong sense of responsibility when it comes to serving the broader interests of the community. Anecdotal evidence to this effect came from examples cited by officials from the Ministry of Education and Training as well as from representatives of the private school network and leaders of private schools who stressed that they recognised the needs of the local communities and spoke of their desire to serve all students. The commitment of private providers in the Flemish Community to offer quality education to students from different backgrounds was not questioned by any of stakeholder groups interviewed by the OECD review team.

Data is not readily available to establish if the composition of students differs by network, but most studies of school segregation in the Flemish Community located by the review team focused on school segregation within the networks – not between them. According to Hindriks and Lamy (2013), students with low socio-economic status are slightly overrepresented in the public networks, but the differences in enrolment between networks are much less important than enrolment differences across educational tracks (more on this below). Hindriks and Lamy (2013) found that in PISA 2009, only 3% of the socio-economic segregation between schools in the Flemish Community could be explained by differences in the socio-economic composition of the student populations across the educational networks.

During the OECD review visit, a number of informants indicated that freedom for diverse providers creates opportunities for innovation. The broader international research literature does not support the assertion that diversity of providers necessarily leads to innovation in terms of the development of wholly new curriculum and teaching practices (Lubienski, 2003, 2012). In the Flemish Community, although schools have curricular autonomy, most of them use the curricula and assessments developed by their umbrella networks. Nevertheless, it is expected that diverse providers with strong connections to local communities can introduce "unique" practices, tailor the school profile to local needs and offer a curriculum that differs from what is already available in the area, even if this may not be "innovative" or wholly original.

The system offers considerable choice for parents

One of the most prominent features of the Flemish education system is school choice. The tradition of school choice dates back to the early 1800s when an effort was made to develop public municipal schools to supplement the existing system of Catholic schools. The parochial and private school providers in the Flemish Community have long been receiving public resources, a recognition of their important role as providers for compulsory level education. Over the 20th Century, there has been convergence of funding entitlement for all schools. Equal treatment between Flemish Community education and public and private grant-aided education has been enshrined in law since the Parliamentary Act of 2008 (Chapter 2).

The Flemish government provides wide-reaching assurance to families that a diversity of choices are available in all local communities. Although dependent on the extensive Catholic school sector and other private school providers, the Flemish government does make it clear that private school providers are obliged to treat all applicants for available places fairly. If families do not wish to enrol their children in one of the local private schools, the Flemish Community Education Council is obliged to establish a government school to serve these families. There are some limitations, for example, with expectations related to a minimum number of students required and proximity to other school options.

Starting in the 1990s, a number of OECD member states, most prominently New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, pursued school choice reforms with the underlying belief that market forces could improve school systems, promote diversity of provision, enhance stakeholder commitment and stimulate innovation. Box 3.1 provides an overview of the theoretical arguments supporting school choice. The foundational value in the Flemish Community is more on parental choice as an end in itself, rather than choice as a means to introduce market forces to steer the system and deliver market signals that could be used for holding schools accountable.

Box 3.1. **Key concepts and theoretical arguments supporting school choice**

This box draws on analysis developed in OECD (2010) to explore key concepts and theoretical arguments supporting school choice. Most arguments for school choice and the use of private providers in education make some combination of the following arguments. First, according to its advocates, markets for schools involve several distinct mechanisms including competition between schools (Hoxby, 2000). In theory, competition and the threat that consumers can purchase goods and services from other providers create a strong incentive for those providers to supply high quality products and lower prices, lest consumers "vote with their feet" and take their business elsewhere (Hirschman, 1970).

A second argument for offering school choice to parents suggests that with a wide variety of schools from which to choose and where each provides a different mix of services, customers will choose the mix of services that best meets their educational preferences. The result will be schools that cater to a relatively narrow range of educational preferences. Advocates of privatisation and school choice argue that such sorting by preferences will reduce the amount of time schools spend resolving conflicts among stakeholders, leaving them more time and energy to devote to developing and implementing education programmes (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Hill et al., 1997). Advocates of marketisation in education also argue that the very act of choice will leave students, parents, and teachers disposed to work harder to support the schools they have chosen.

A third theoretical argument for privatisation is that autonomous schools will develop innovations in curriculum, instruction, and governance that will lead to improvements in outcomes. Traditional public schools could also improve by adopting the innovative practices that private or independent schools are expected to develop. Proponents also argue that privatisation is likely to bring a welcome dose of entrepreneurial spirit and a competitive ethos to public education. According to Hirschman (1970), consumers confronting insufficient or deteriorating quality of goods or services have three options: exit, voice, and loyalty. These options are also commonly used to explain or justify school choice. In that context, "exit" reflects the possibility that parents may choose another school than the one assigned for their children. "Voice" refers to the opportunities that parents have to influence or change the schools educating their children, and "loyalty" simply reflects the situation when parents do not exercise exit or voice options.

Debates about privatisation and school choice are often framed in terms of accountability. Accountability, however, is a contested concept, and proponents of privatisation often have in mind a particular kind of accountability: one that emphasises accountability for outcomes (performance accountability) and competitive pressures on schools (market accountability) over accountability for inputs and processes (regulatory accountability). Up until the 1990s, most accountability for public spending on schools involved monitoring inputs and processes. This involved compliance reporting and the use of school inspections. After the 1990s, more and more OECD countries started to reform their school systems and promote more school choice. School choice was facilitated by the inclusion of private schools and the creation of new and more autonomous types of public schools. Many choice plans also involved freeing up the traditional public schools and allow them to compete with one another for students. Coinciding with reforms increasing school choice were changes in accountability systems towards more performance accountability. Most countries were allowing greater autonomy for schools and were less involved in monitoring inputs and processes but instead were shifting toward the use of outcome measures, such as national assessments and examinations to ensure the accountability of public resources (OECD, 2011).

Sources: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators*, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2010-en*; OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2011-en*; Hoxby, C. M. (2000), "Does competition among public schools benefit students and taxpayers? Evidence from natural variation in school districting", *American Economic Review*, 90(5), pp. 1209-1239; Hirschman, A. O. (1970), *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA; Chubb, J. E. and T. Moe (1990), *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC; Hill, P. et al., (1997), *Reinventing Public Education: How Contracting Can Transform America's Schools,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

There is growing attention to managing the adverse impact of school choice

There are a number of provisions in the Flemish Community to ensure equal access of families to the school of their choice. For example, schools cannot legally select students (by ability or background) at the entry point, and private schools are obliged to accept all students regardless of religious background. In addition, as described above, school choice in the Flemish Community is increasingly being regulated in order to mitigate its adverse impact in urban areas, particularly in response to concerns about segregation and equal access to schools. The current approach to managing school choice is the result of a strong consultative process and has benefited from experimentation, stakeholder involvement and subsequent adaptations of the relevant legislation in order to best respond to the current needs of the Flemish society.

The local consultation platforms (LOPs) created through the GOK Decree play an important role in managing enrolments and avoiding socio-economic segregation across schools. The responsibilities of LOPs include ensuring students' right to enrolment, analysing the socio-economic characteristics of the student population in the local area, acting as an intermediary in case of conflicts and implementing a local policy to co-ordinate schools' enrolment procedures within the framework of the GOK Decree (Lambrechts and Geurts, 2008; Cantillon, 2011). In practice, LOPs have taken on a diversity of roles depending on the area in which they operate. Demographic developments are most pressing in cities and urban areas, and it is in these areas that the LOPs play a prominent role in guaranteeing students' right to enrolment and facilitating the distribution of students across the schools and networks in the local area. Outside the main urban areas, schools may be faced with the opposite phenomenon of declining student populations. In this case, LOPs typically play a role in facilitating communication and co-operation across schools and networks, with a view to co-ordinating and rationalising the study offer in the area.

To respond to the shortage of school places in major urban areas, the cities of Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent have been piloting computerised models to handle the application process as well as the distribution of places. While the intention of these models to ensure an adequate socio-economic mix in the student population is commendable, concerns have been raised during the OECD review team's interviews with education officials and stakeholders that some families of higher socio-economic status may be motivated to move away from specific urban areas as schools are becoming more diverse and parents cannot be assured of their first preferences.

Stakeholder participation shapes the organisation of the school offer in the Flemish Community

More broadly, a remarkable feature of the Flemish education system is how it benefits from a broad consultative process that engages all stakeholder groups. The 2004 Participation Decree requires that all schools promote participation of key stakeholders. Each school is expected to have its own school council comprised of representatives of stakeholder groups in the school and the local community. The school council plays an advisory or consultative role in regard to policies at the school. At the secondary level, student councils are also common and their existence is required if at least 10% of the students request this. Similarly, if 10% of teachers request it, an education council is to be formed to represent them, and if at least 10% of parents request it, a parent council is to be formed.

There are also several initiatives to support schools in collaboration with the local community. The 2007 Parliamentary Act on Education Policies for Local Support provides a framework for multi-level governance and a mechanism to fund specific projects bringing together schools and local authorities in addressing educational challenges at the local community level. The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training also supports a study centre on "diversity and learning" which focuses on broader school outreach (*brede school*), among other things. At the system level, the consultative process with broader stakeholder groups is facilitated by the Flemish Education Council (VLOR), which brings together representatives of all partners in education and provides strategic advice on education policy for the Flemish Community. More broadly, the system involves and benefits from broad consultative processes that engage all levels from citizens to central level elected officials.

There is willingness to increase co-operation across schools and school networks

While almost all schools belong to an umbrella organisation, there is traditionally little collaboration between schools beyond their networks. However, there clearly is political will to further enhance co-operation among schools, both within and across networks. Examples of policy initiatives to foster collaboration among schools include the promotion of school associations by the Ministry of Education and Training and the creation of local consultation platforms in the context of the GOK policy, as described above. Notwithstanding the benefits of these initiatives, ministry officials, educational researchers and other groups interviewed by the OECD review team expressed the need for the Flemish Community to go further in stimulating the co-operation and co-ordination between schools so as to achieve a more equitable and efficient provision of schooling.

Challenges

Demographic developments require adjustments to the provision of school places

There are three important trends relative to students and their background characteristics in the Flemish Community that have implications for the review of the effectiveness of the provision of school places. First, even while the general population in the Flemish Community is ageing, we can see that the school age population has been growing in the past decade and projections indicate the number of students will continue to grow over the next decade (Chapter 1). This trend has a significant impact on the supply side and presents a changing context for school choice.

A second trend of significance is the shifting enrolment concentrations, with some rural schools experiencing declining enrolments and empty places, while urban schools – especially schools in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent – have rapidly growing populations and struggle to meet the demand for places. This pattern results in the demand for places being very unequal, which presents a challenge for the system (Chapter 1). The third trend is that the proportion of students from immigrant backgrounds is expected to continue to grow, albeit at a slower rate in future years (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2015). Many of these students are likely to require support in Dutch as an additional language and/or come from socio-economically less advantaged households. In terms of the demand on places this trend presents challenges and opportunities for the school system since the growing diversity of the student population requires not only the provision of additional places but also calls for more innovative approaches to school organisation and teaching in order to offer equal educational opportunities for all.

In summary, there are concerns about the increasing number of students in the school system and the increasing diversity of the student population. These factors have placed economic strains on the school system. However, while analysing these economic strains on the education system, it is important to recognise that the Flemish education system is currently relatively well resourced; in particular student-teacher ratios and class size are very low by international comparison (see above).

Inadequate and insufficient school facilities to meet current needs

During the OECD review visit, infrastructure was identified by educators as one of the most pressing needs experienced by Flemish schools. Pressure on infrastructure arises from a combination of factors: growth in the size of the elementary school-age population, the serviceability of facilities built many decades ago, the need to adapt buildings to modern methods of teaching and equipment, the general state of repair of buildings, and the challenge of expanding provision in urban areas where development options are very limited. Together these pressures have intensified demand for new or improved buildings, involve competition between schools over a limited budget for infrastructure, and have led to long queues and delays.

As a result of history, or chance, some schools have considerable property and numerous facilities, while other schools are limited in both property and infrastructure. Funds are set aside each year from which schools can apply for support to renovate or build new structures. These funds, however, are limited and there is a large backlog, with representatives from some schools reporting to the OECD review team that they expected to wait over ten years before their request for support for facilities would be addressed. According to representatives from AGIOn, the average delay before construction or renovation requests were addressed was around fourteen years for the grant-aided private schools. The grant-aided public schools were reported to show shorter delays of around seven years on average. Starting in 2008, reforms sought to ensure equal funding across schools from all educational networks, but this did not include equal funding for facilities, as AGIOn only subsidises 60-70% of the costs for infrastructure in grant-aided public and private schools.

Many of the groups interviewed by the OECD review system described challenges related to the system for funding infrastructure renewal or renovation. Stakeholders reported that it was common for grant-aided private schools to use a large part of their operational funding to pay off infrastructure loans. Constructing new school buildings may create financial difficulties for the school management over many years to come, as a significant portion of the operating grants will need to be shifted to infrastructure payments. Such challenges have also become more acute for grant-aided public education: while traditionally municipalities have supplemented infrastructure investments for school buildings and renovations, this has become more difficult in recent years due to the increased need for school places and competing demands for municipal funding, for example to cover pension costs for municipal civil servants. Representatives of the umbrella organisation of smaller grant-aided private providers (OKO) also drew attention to specific challenges related to the requirement for a school to have existed for four years before being eligible for infrastructure funding.

A first survey of school building quality was conducted by AGIOn in 2008. Based on a response rate of approximately 65%, the survey found that 58% of the building stock was constructed before 1970 and 29% was built before 1950. Only 15% of the schools were built

after 1990. One-fifth of the buildings were classified as unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory by school leaders that completed the survey (AGIOn, 2009). Respondents to the 2008 survey also indicated that many of the buildings were not ready for 21st Century challenges and that 32% of the sites had insufficient space; the shortage of space was most pronounced in the Brussels Capital Region. The limitations in the facilities were reportedly similar across all networks (Leemans, 2009). However, infrastructure issues are also a question of equity, with schools serving a higher proportion of students with lower socio-economic status (SES) in inner-city areas often having school buildings of poorer quality than schools in more affluent areas. A second large-scale survey was conducted five years later, in 2013. While the overall score of the Flemish school building landscape remained largely unaltered between 2008 and 2013, progress was observed in some areas, in particular regarding the governance and maintenance of the existing school patrimony. Progress was most significant in the use of buildings by several schools or for other functions than school education (AGIOn, 2014).

In their comprehensive review of school facility policy in the Flemish Community, Leemans and von Ahlefeld (2013) reported that key challenges for school construction policy in the Flemish Community included the need for: more energy-efficient school buildings; facilities that can also be used by local communities; better integration of ICT in building policy; further investment in infrastructure for technical and vocational education; accessibility for all students; increased capacity to meet growing enrolments, especially in key urban areas; and infrastructure changes to accommodate innovative pedagogical approaches.

The rapid growth in the school age population in recent years has further strained the adequacy of supply of school places. The new population is unevenly distributed in the country, which makes the situation more acute in urban areas where most of the population growth is found. This was illustrated by the experience of schools visited by the OECD review team. For example, a Catholic school in Anderlecht was constrained by want of space to offer its lower secondary technical programme on only one of its four campuses (thus risking segregation). Growth as a single campus was not possible. In a primary school in Vilvoorde, classrooms were reported to be too small to accommodate larger classes. Demographic pressures are likely to increase further as population growth extends into the secondary years.

Infrastructure planning appears to be built around the needs of schools and networks, but not necessarily those of local communities. There are limited examples of area-wide planning, although a few positive experiences were cited by stakeholders during the OECD review visit. The OECD review team was not made aware of a broader government policy to plan for both the construction of new buildings and the regular renovation and renewal of the existing building stock. At a central level, officials at the level of the government and the Ministry of Education and Training are of course aware of the challenges related to the quality and quantity of school facilities. Like some other challenges, however, the ability of the central government to plan and address such problems is partly undermined by the largely decentralised system that is dependent upon both public and private entities.

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

The OECD review team identified a range of challenges related to inefficiencies in the offer of school places. This sub-section discusses the main sources of such inefficiencies as identified by the review team in discussion with key stakeholder groups of the Flemish

education system. These relate to i) the size of schools, ii) the organisation of study offerings and course options, iii) the organisation of schools within the umbrella networks and school boards, and iv) the extent of student tracking and sorting.

The small size of some schools

School systems generally face challenges of infrastructure provision, but the Flemish Community presents some distinctive features. A highly urbanised community (comprising around 300 municipalities), the Flemish Community is served by 3 628 schools located on 6 277 physical sites. Many of the schools are small establishments, especially in the elementary school sector, which falls under regulations requiring that students should not have to travel more than 4 km to reach a school. In the elementary sector, the average school enrols fewer than 300 students and three-quarters of all elementary schools have fewer than 350 students; in Brussels, this is the case for 92% of the schools.

In secondary schools offering all three stages, average school size is about twice as large as in the elementary sector (568 students) because students travel larger distances. However, while there are typically more students in secondary schools, many secondary schools run an uneconomical course offer, providing classes attended by very few students.[2] As reported by stakeholders to the OECD review team, this is linked to competition across schools, with some schools offering course options with very small classes in order to be able to attract students in a context of competition with schools from the other networks, or even within their own network.

As discussed in Chapter 2, institutional features of the Flemish education system favour small school size in several ways. First, the principle of neutrality leads to the existence of a range of very small Flemish Community (GO!) schools across the system. Second, small schools receive additional resources to ensure that they can meet minimum fixed costs to operate the school. Third, the "degressive" funding model allocates more teacher hours per student for course options enrolling fewer students (Chapter 2). The Belgian Court of Audit (2010) found that the introduction of this funding system provided incentives for schools to break up single school entities into several administrative units so as to increase the relative funding for the separate units.

The degressive funding of teaching hours at least implicitly recognises the importance of scale economies by tapering the student coefficients so that these deliver smaller resource outcomes for larger schools. But on the other hand a safety net is created for the small schools which gain from the tapered scale, as well as from the lump sum package of teacher hours for schools that enrol too few students to generate sufficient resources for operating the school. Thus small schools, which are more costly to operate and cannot benefit from scale economies, are protected regardless of the programme demands on them.

The Flemish approach to capital funding aims at renewal – and indeed expansion in some contexts – of the existing system of provision, with very little prospect of ending diseconomies either within or across networks. It is very difficult to close a school in the Flemish Community, and there are few incentives for schools in different networks (or even within networks) to merge or at least collaborate. Within associations, there is collaboration and there is the potential to create larger schools, which would give access to scale economies. If the same building stock could be more efficiently used without sacrificing educational benefits or philosophy, the savings could be applied to renewing the current building stock or even expanding it.

Freedom of choice, which is highly prized in the Flemish Community, may lead to a continuous division of the school estate or patrimony, which becomes more and more costly to renovate without surrendering anything of the past. If schools become too small, they are protected by the safety net. If schools are closely located in urban space, they are protected from sharing human resources or capital by network identity. Savings that might be made in the staffing budget through more consolidated programmes and cross-school delivery are not available to assist the regeneration of the estate.

The organisation of the study offerings and course options

As described above, Flemish secondary education also has many course options. This is based on the argument of diversity. As students exit primary and lower secondary school with uneven levels of academic achievement, curriculum options have to be diversified. This eventually leads to a multiplication of courses which aim at alignment with students' cognitive levels and labour market needs. However, as discussed above, this adjustment does not always work well as employment outcomes for some groups are weak.

Several of the groups interviewed by the OECD review team voiced concern about the multiplication study options, especially in vocational education and training (VET). The study offer was perceived as being influenced more by the interests of schools and their staff supply than by labour market demand. This is in line with a previous OECD report on vocational education and training (VET), which identified the following challenges: some VET programmes were insufficiently informed by labour market demand; the involvement of employers in the content and organisation of programmes remained too limited; and there was insufficient data on labour market outcomes (Musset, 2013).

As described in Chapter 2, students enrolled in TSO and BSO generate higher levels of funding for their schools than students enrolled in other programmes. However, the Belgian Court of Audit (2010) found that schools lump together teaching hours allocated for specific programmes (e.g. for vocational education and training) and shift these to other programmes with narrow levels of interest in order to sustain a diverse range of study offerings. In particular, the third cycle of general secondary education and technical secondary education were characterised by a fragmented study offer with many small classes. During the OECD review visit, examples of very low class size were commonly reported. According to the Belgian Court of Audit (2010), one of seven administrative groups (courses) had less than five students.

Research indicates that investing in small class size is comparatively less efficient than other interventions to support student learning (Hattie, 2009). Given the associated student-teacher ratios and the disproportionate amount of administrative effort that is required to organise these classes, small class size is likely to result in a higher cost school system with no evident increase in student learning outcomes (Rivkin et al., 2005; Hanushek, 2011). While some studies indicate that smaller classes can improve non-cognitive skills (Dee and West, 2011), research on class size in OECD countries has generally found a weak relationship between small classes and better performance (OECD, 2013). However, class size seems to be more important in the earlier years of education and for students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Finn, 1998; Chetty et al., 2011; Dynarski et al., 2011).

The system of student coefficients rewards the smaller classes that result from course specialisation by assigning higher weights to the students enrolling in them. But favouring

smaller classes arises not only from the fragmentation of the curriculum itself (within a framework of comparatively small schools), but also because, with the degressive scales, the coefficients are calibrated to rise in value as enrolments in courses fall. This is intended to keep access open to options which would otherwise not be offered. Such a provision in effect penalises schools which achieve economies of scale through consolidation of curriculum offerings, and for the same reason it works against collaboration between schools by creating a reverse incentive.

The introduction of school associations since 1998 was designed to increase school collaboration and incentivise increased co-ordination of the study offer in secondary education. The Belgian Court of Audit (2010) found that following the introduction of school associations in secondary education, the number of courses provided in duplication within school associations had indeed decreased to a large extent. However, it also concluded that the overall course offer in secondary education remained excessively fragmented and that the streamlining effect of the school associations policy had been limited. Almost ten years after the implementation of school associations, the study offer within associations had decreased by only 7% and, after an initial decrease in the course offer, the number of study offerings had remained constant since the 2005/06 school year (Belgian Court of Audit, 2010).

Although specific to the Flemish Community schools and grant-aided public schools, there are additional inefficiencies resulting from very small class size in philosophy-of-life courses, since schools are required to provide courses in different religions if there is demand, as well as non-confessional ethics courses for students that do not wish to follow a religion course. This obligation is important given the commitment to provide diverse school options, but – since co-operation between schools in offering these courses is limited – it often results in very small class sizes for these courses. Besides the cost associated with the uneconomical provision of these courses (currently 4.5% of the budget for school operating grants are allocated to public schools for this purpose, based on the budget for students qualifying for this difference), concerns were also raised regarding the organisational burden this represents for school leaders in scheduling provision. The professional associations representing school leaders reported practical difficulties in arranging the provision of these courses in every public school. Teachers providing specific philosophy-of-life courses are typically shared between several schools and may have to split their time across five to seven schools in order to have a full teaching load.

The organisation of schools within educational networks and school boards

The organisation of the Flemish school offer in three educational networks raises a range of concerns regarding the efficiency of provision. The three networks of schools work rather independently from one another. In many respects these are parallel systems and there is considerable overlap.

The networks are largely autonomous in deciding where to construct new school infrastructure. AGIOn provides funding for construction and renovation mainly on a first come, first serve basis following the order in which applications were received from schools. It does not steer the construction of new buildings in a way as to respond first to most pressing needs, nor does it condition funding on collaboration across networks where this would help accommodate the demand for places. Hence, the distribution of schools

across the Flemish Community is often the result of historical developments or efforts to ensure parental choice, but is not designed to optimally accommodate the current distribution of school-age students.

There has been little or no overall strategic planning to organise the school offer and distribution of school places in the Flemish Community as a whole. Some planning occurs within each of the networks but this appears insufficient to avoid duplication, especially in more rural areas where student numbers are decreasing. In general for public services, the Flemish government is able to centrally track and monitor population developments and plan for infrastructure to correspond with changes in the population. Such planning is more difficult, however, for education services since the system is broken up into separate networks and diverse independent providers.

Another area contributing to inefficiencies is the duplication of administration and services. This can be seen in the public sector due to the existence of two networks providing public education (Community education and the municipal and provincial schools). The situation gets more complicated in Brussels since the capital region is further divided into nineteen municipalities, most of which serve both students funded by the French Community government and students funded by the Flemish Community government. Each of the three main educational networks has a central organisation employing administrative staff and each network operates its own pedagogical advisory services (PBDs) and student guidance centres (CLBs) funded by the Flemish government. Questions have also been raised about the size of school boards and whether there could be room for merging school boards within each of the networks.

At the local level, challenges were reported to the OECD review team related to overlap and duplication of services between school associations and school boards. For example, in one of the schools visited by the OECD review team, the school association brought together secondary schools from different boards, which led to tensions between the association and the boards. Theoretically, it was reported, the school boards should focus on issues such as infrastructure and administration, and the association should focus on the organisation of the study offer. However, as issues of infrastructure and study provision are closely related and the school board was also involved in the organisation of programmes, there were challenges related to the overlap and duplication of responsibilities.

More generally, while the formation of school associations has helped increase co-operation among schools beyond the school board, the approach to financing school associations also points to a certain tension in policy. On the one hand, the Flemish education system places great emphasis on choice and autonomy, and this tends to multiply the number of schools and the number of course options within schools to the point of uneconomical operations. On the other hand, it is recognised that diseconomies can be at least partly corrected by financing school associations to aid collaboration between schools or to help smaller schools through the provision of management and administrative support. However, this is to add costs of correction to costs of provision rather than tackling diseconomies of provision directly.

The extent of student tracking and grade repetition

One of the greatest sources of waste or inefficiency appears to be linked to a portion of students not progressing through the system as anticipated and then exiting the system with insufficient knowledge, skills and competencies to gain employment and function in

society. The Flemish system, relative to many other OECD countries, still tracks students into different study programmes at a relatively early age. Belgium reports that the first year of horizontal stratification occurs at age 12 while the OECD average is age 14 (OECD, 2013).

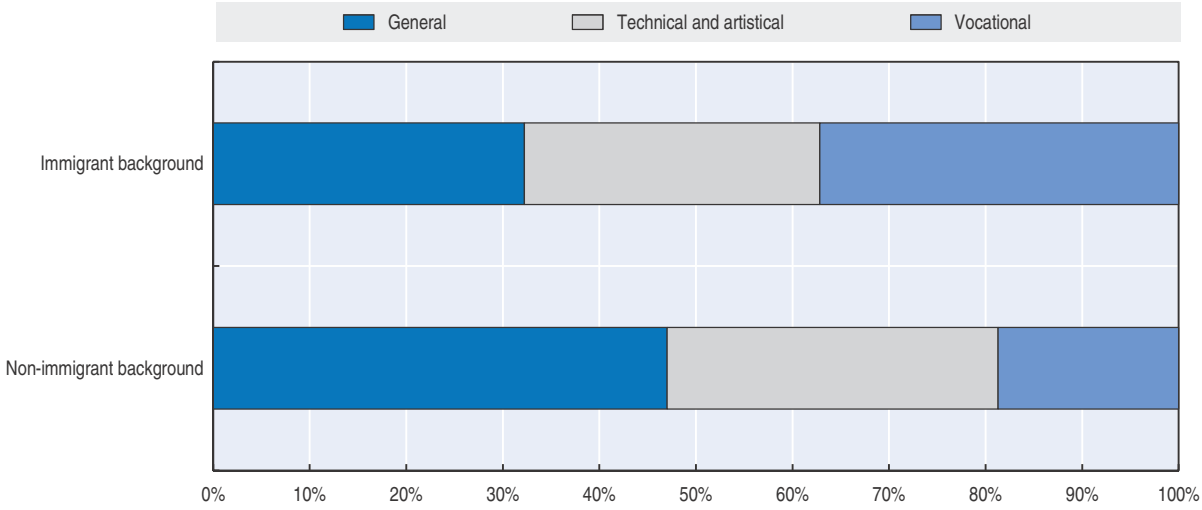
In the first stage of secondary education, students are steered into the A or B stream of secondary education, with the vast majority of students (84.6%) enrolling in the A stream, which keeps study options open for the subsequent stages of education. In the second and third stages of secondary school, students choose or are tracked into one of four study lines: General Secondary Education (ASO) (41%); Technical Secondary Education (TSO) (31%); Artistic Secondary Education (KSO) (2%); or Vocational Secondary Education (BSO) (26%).

General secondary education (ASO) is the most academically oriented programme and is geared at preparing students for tertiary education, although students completing other study programmes at the upper secondary level are allowed to enter university education as well (see Chapter 1). The percentages indicated above illustrate the relative portion of all students in the second and third stages that are enrolled in each study line. In practice, the percentage of all students in ASO at the start of Stage 2 is likely to be considerably higher than 41% and by the end of secondary education it is likely to be considerably lower, as each year a portion of the students move "downstream" into one of the other study lines. Based on statements from diverse key informants, seldom does it happen that students move "upstream" and back in the ASO study line. Informants repeatedly referred to this as a "waterfall system" indicating that students move down to less academic and more practical study programmes with each year in secondary schools.

Findings from the OECD's 2012 PISA survey on student transfer practices illustrate this process. In 2012, 65.1% of Flemish students were enrolled in schools where the principals reported that a student in the national modal grade for 15-year-olds would likely or very likely be transferred to another school due to low academic achievement, compared to 26.4% on average across the OECD. By contrast, only 5.0% of Flemish students were in schools where the principal reported that students would likely or very likely be transferred to another school due to high academic achievement compared to an OECD average of 9.8%. Further, 54.7% of Flemish students were enrolled in schools where the principals reported that a student in the national modal grade for 15-year-olds would likely or very likely be transferred to another school due to behavioural problems, compared with 42.2% on average across the OECD (OECD, 2013).

Several cross-country studies find that, after controlling for a range of other factors, early tracking is associated with greater inequality of outcomes but does not have any discernible effect on mean performance (Schütz et al., 2005, Hanushek and Wössmann, 2006, Meier and Schütz, 2007). Thus it seems that early tracking poses risks to equity without improving the overall efficiency of education systems. OECD (2008) concludes that the gains in efficiency from having more homogeneous schools are offset by the adverse effects on lower ability students of being educated in separate institutions. The potential negative impacts of early tracking are especially salient for students with an immigrant background. Early tracking practices may lock them into cognitively less demanding instructional environments before they have had a chance to develop the linguistic and other relevant skills to prove their full educational potential (Entorf and Lauk, 2006; Nusche, 2009). Figure 3.6 indicates that in PISA 2012 the percentage of students with an immigrant background enrolled in the vocational track was almost twice as high as the percentage of students without an immigrant background enrolled in this track (37.2% versus 18.7%).

Figure 3.6. **Distribution of 15-year-old students in the Flemish Community by immigrant background and educational tracks, 2012**



Source: OECD (2015), *OECD Economic Surveys: Belgium 2015*, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eco_surveys-bel-2015-en*, based on PISA 2012 Database.

Another sign of inefficiencies related to student grouping practices is the high level of grade repetition in the Flemish Community. In the 2012 PISA student survey, 27% of the students sampled in the Flemish Community reported that they had repeated at least one grade during primary and secondary schooling, compared to an OECD average of 12% (OECD, 2013). For Belgium as a whole, the total annual cost of grade repetition relative to total expenditure on primary and secondary education was estimated at 11.5% – the highest proportion among all OECD countries (OECD, 2013). The cost for grade repetition is based a combination of direct and opportunity costs.

The European Commission (2014, 2015) highlights that educational inequality already starts at the level of early childhood education and care (ECEC), with disadvantaged and immigrant children being less likely to be enrolled, especially below age three. It further finds that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more at risk of being directed towards special needs education or vocational pathways with limited opportunities for upward progression, and are more at risk of dropping out of education than others (European Commission, 2015).

Concerns about the distribution of students across schools

Research on segregation by socio-economic and language backgrounds

During the OECD review visit, several informants expressed concern about "concentration schools", a term that was used to denote schools with high proportions of students from lower socio-economic and/or immigrant backgrounds. In many countries, school segregation reflects segregation in residential patterns. In the Flemish Community, there are indications that school segregation exceeds residential segregation (OECD, 2015).

Research from different countries suggests that concentration of students from low socio-economic and immigrant backgrounds in schools is likely to be detrimental to their learning outcomes. For example, regression analyses using cross-country data from studies such as TIMMS, PIRLS and PISA indicate that across OECD countries a higher degree of segregation was associated with a higher unexplained test score gap between students

from immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds (e.g. Schnepf, 2004; Schneeweis, 2006). Research conducted both within the Flemish Community and internationally indicates that socio-economic segregation across schools is typically caused by a combination of factors including early tracking of students into different types of schools and programmes (see above), as well as school admission policies, parental choice and self-selection.

In response to the lack of empirical knowledge in the Flemish Community on the extent of segregation by socio-economic and immigrant background and its impact on academic performance, four research centres from three Flemish universities started the Segregation in Primary Education in Flanders project (SIPEF) to investigate the extent, the antecedents and the consequences of school segregation.

Although most research on school segregation is based on smaller scale studies or case studies, Wouters and Groenez (2013) have conducted an in-depth study of segregation in the Flemish Community. Their study examines school segregation based on socio-economic status and home language of students. Factors such as ethnicity, religious background and ability were not considered. While the study looked at segregation by school, it provided a breakdown of findings by area or community. One other important feature of the study is that it looked at segregation over time, from 2001/02 to 2011/12 school years.

The authors found that school segregation by socio-economic status increased over the time period they examined. There were a few exceptions to this pattern. One is that segregation in primary schools in Brussels actually declined over time. Also, even while the number of children that were not native speakers increased, segregation by home language did not show big differences over the time period studied. This suggests that although there is still noticeable segregation, non-native speakers are being more evenly distributed. The study did find that patterns of segregation varied considerably by location and by level of education. The secondary schools were much more segregated and the researchers' estimate is that tracking between study programmes (ASO, TSO BSO, and KSO) accounts for about 50% of the segregation that occurs.

In one of their analyses, Wouters, and Groenez (2013) focused on the 10% of the schools deemed most advantaged (i.e. schools with the highest concentration of socio-economically advantaged students) and the 10% of the schools deemed most disadvantaged (i.e. schools with highest concentration of socio-economically disadvantaged students students). The researchers concluded that segregation was most often characterised and represented by concentrations of disadvantaged students, rather than concentrations of advantaged students. This key finding was consistent with what informants reported during the site visit by the OECD review team.

Agirdag et al. (2013) reviewed the evidence on segregation and conducted a large scale survey in Flemish schools which revealed, among other things, that teachers' expectations for students were lower in schools with higher concentrations of students from immigrant and socio-economically disadvantaged students, and these lower expectations had an indirect effect on student achievement and persistence in schools. Hirtt et al. (2007) examined segregation in the Flemish Community and describe how schooling contributes to reproducing inequality based on socio-economic status and ethnic origin. According to these authors, parents do self-select, but the observed concentration patterns result from more or less conscious societal choices.

The role of school admission practices

Since the 1990s, many OECD countries have pursued school choice reforms with the underlying belief that market forces could improve school systems and that suppliers (i.e schools) would increase places in response to the demand from consumers (i.e. students and their families). Research has shown however, that education systems do not function like a free market and in many cases, the suppliers do not increase the number of places but instead engage in activities that allow them to choose the consumers (Miron, 1993; Walford, 1996; Fiske and Ladd, 2000). The Flemish school system does provide a favourable context for school choice in that it offers a number of schools from which parents can choose, but this does not mean that all parents have equal access to these schools in practice. Despite the welcome introduction of controlled choice schemes which aim to increase socio-economic diversity in schools (see above), concerns remain about the polarisation of schools along socio-economic lines.

At the policy level, clear steps have been taken in the Flemish Community to ensure that all families have equal access to public and government-funded private schools. By regulation, schools are not permitted to use selection criteria for admission that some other countries allow, especially in government-funded private schools (OECD, 2010). For example, Flemish schools cannot require students to take admission tests and they are not allowed to select students based on performance results, religious background or gender (OECD, 2010). However, practice can sometimes look quite different from general regulations and does not always follow the intentions of central authorities. Results from the 2012 PISA survey indicate that 32% of Flemish 15-year-old students were in schools whose principals reported that the student's record of academic performance was always a factor that is considered in admission to a school, and 31% were in schools whose principal reported that it is sometimes a factor. Recommendations from feeder schools were also reported a factor considered for admission in Flemish schools, with 9% of students enrolled in schools whose principals stated that this was always a factor in admission decisions and 43% of students enrolled in schools whose principal stated that this was sometimes a factor (OECD, 2013). The responses of principals are likely to refer partly to the counselling system organised by the Student Guidance Centres (CLBs), which provide advice for students' programme choice based on their past performance (see Chapter 1).

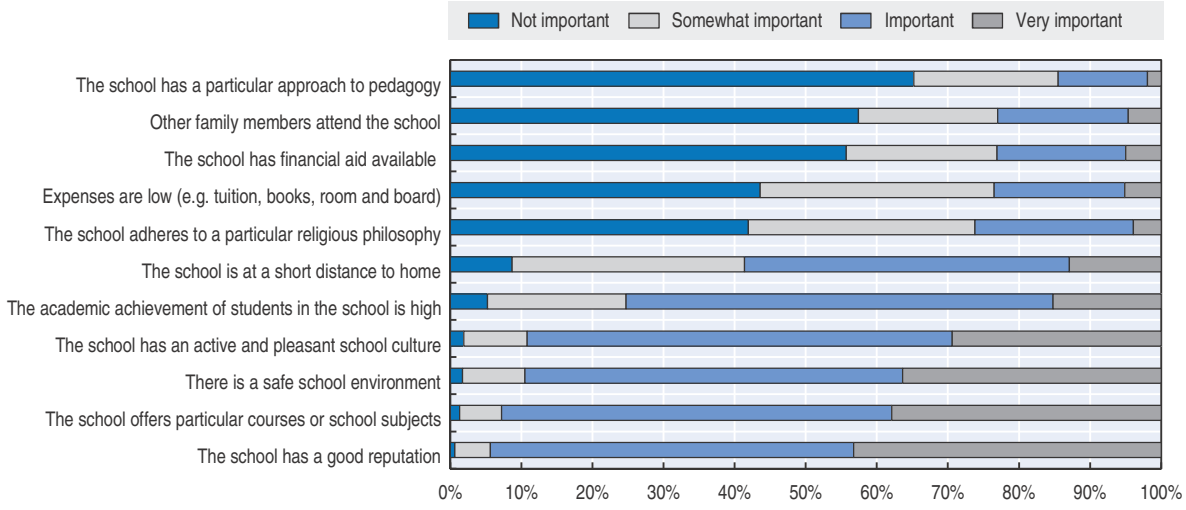
While public schools in the Flemish Community cannot promote one religion over another, the government-funded private schools are largely organised by private foundations of Catholic denomination. The religious tradition of these schools may inhibit some families from choosing them, although admission of students is not based on parents' or students' practicing religion. Data on religious background of families does not appear to be readily available because this type of segregation is mentioned but none of the studies reviewed by the OECD review team actually provided empirical evidence on enrolment by religious background of students. There are likely to be differences in students' religious background by network, even though according to regulations the government-funded private schools are open to all and are not supposed to give preference for places based on religion. In PISA 2012, 25% of Flemish 15-year-old students were in schools whose principals reported parents' endorsement of the instructional or religious philosophy of the school was always a factor considered for admission, and 16% reported that it was sometimes a factor. While a school may require parents to sign the school's regulation which may include respect for a philosophical or religious orientation, legal admission to all schools is guaranteed by the Constitution and Flemish legislation.

Factors influencing parental choice

The Flemish Community is relatively unique in that all families are required to choose and apply for enrolment in a school. Even with this requirement, however, international research suggests that families with greater resources and higher levels of education are more likely to secure information on schools and more active in the school selection process for their children (Hamilton and Guin, 2005; Lacireno-Paquet, 2012; Bosetti, 2004; Schneider, et al., 1998). They are also likely to be able to provide transport for their children, which further expands the range of schools from which they can choose. In some of the schools visited in the Flemish Community, the OECD review team received examples of descriptive information brochures available to the public. These brochures were more often available for secondary schooling and presented information on the diverse school options available, but they only covered single networks and did not bring together information on all schools within a local area.

Figure 3.7 illustrates results from a survey of Flemish parents conducted as a component of the OECD's 2012 PISA survey. Only a handful of countries participated in the parent survey so it is not possible to compare with an OECD average. As can be seen in Figure 3.7, the criterion rated as most important by parents in choosing a school for their child was the reputation of the school while the criterion rated as least important was the schools' particular approach to pedagogy. One explanation for the school's pedagogical approach being rated as relatively less important might be that differences in pedagogy are not that large between schools across the Flemish Community. The importance of the school's "reputation" or "image" in parental school choice was also emphasised by several of the stakeholder groups interviewed by the OECD review team.

Figure 3.7. **Reports by Flemish parents of 15-year-old students on the importance of different criteria for choosing schools for their children, 2012**



Note: Criteria are displayed in descending order based on the percentage of parents reporting that the criterion was "not important" for their choice of school.

Source: OECD (2013), PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en*, Table IV.4.10.

In theory, school choice will result in better overall outcomes because parents will choose schools that match the learning style of their children. This process then results in groupings of students, parents and educators that come together within a school because of common interests and preferences with regard to teaching and learning. Without substantive differences in curriculum and instruction, however, parents make choices based on other "visible" characteristics that distinguish schools; these may include religious affiliation, or the socio-economic composition of students. In the Flemish Community, the feature that seems to most distinguish schools from one another is the network affiliation, not unique pedagogical options. While religion was considered a relatively less important criterion by Flemish parents surveyed as part of PISA 2012, still over one quarter (26.2%) of parents considered the school's adherence to a particular religious philosophy to be an important or very important criterion for school choice, and over a third of parents (31.9%) considered it somewhat important.

Since schools do not charge tuition and have limited required fees, it is not surprising that most parents indicated that "expenses" or "availability of financial aid" were less important criteria for selecting a school (Figure 3.7). However, responses on these items differ considerably by socio-economic background. Figure 3.8 provides a breakdown of parents' responses regarding the importance of selected criteria for choosing a school by socio-economic status of students. The results are broken out across four quartiles of socio-economic status. As can be seen from this Figure, parents of students with higher socio-economic status are more likely to rate a good reputation of the school and academic achievement of students as "very important" compared to parents of students with lower socio-economic status. Conversely, parents of socio-economically disadvantaged students were more likely to rate as "very important" the expenses for schools and the availability of financial aid compared to parents of socio-economically advantaged students. Just over 10% of the parents in the lowest socio-economic status quartile rated these as very important.

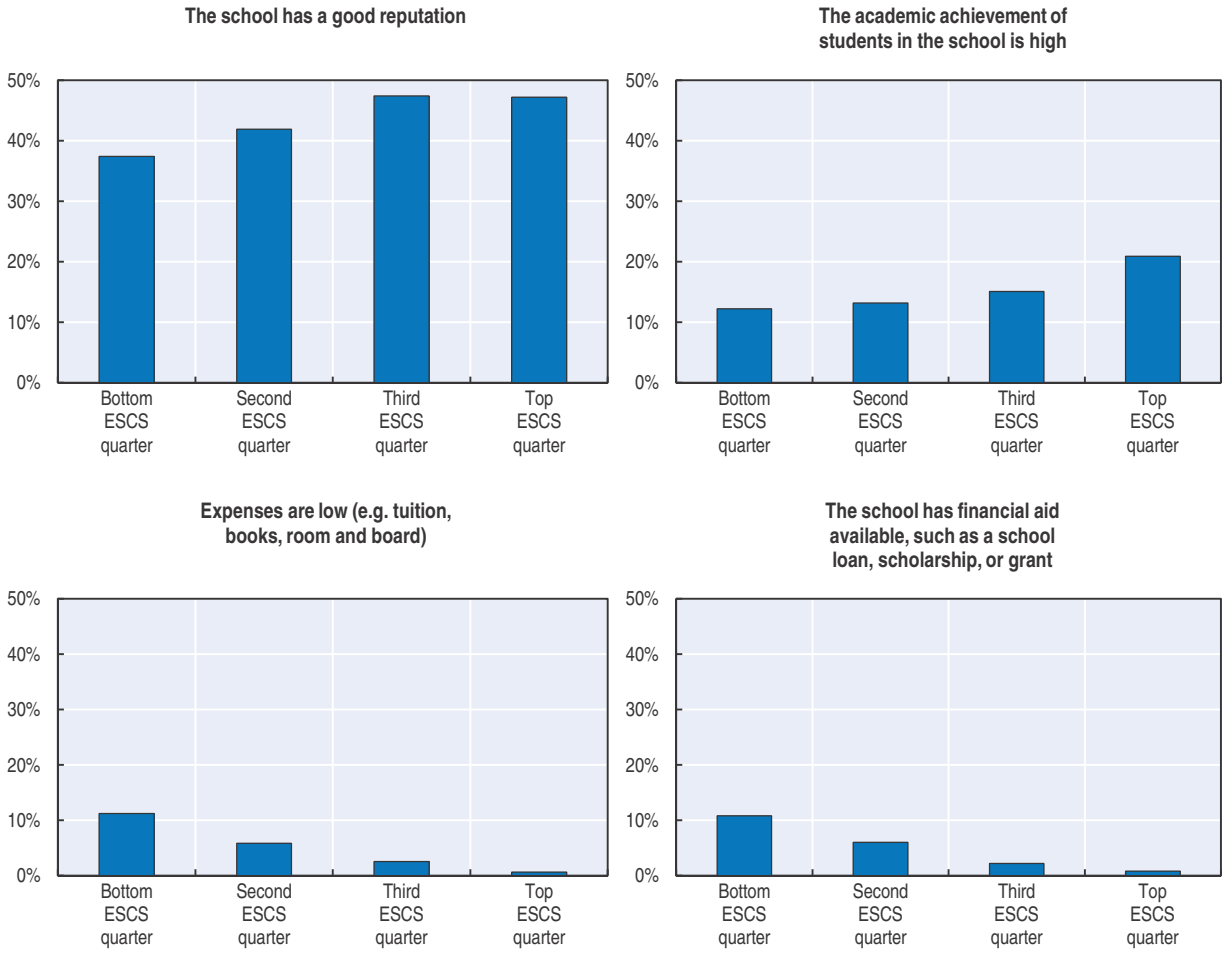
In a 2011 report, the Belgian Court of Audit found that the Flemish policy on free education and cost containment had been generally successful, with schools usually respecting the set limits on school cost. However, the report also found that while schools' collection of contributions from parents were typically not likely to influence school choice, over one-third of the schools reviewed asked parents to contribute to meet school's operational costs and two out of the 40 schools visited requested an amount so substantial that it was likely to influence school choice.

Concerns related to the provision of schooling for students with special educational needs (SEN)

As described above, services for students with special educational needs (SEN) are largely delivered in separate special education schools, although an increasing number of students have been enrolled in integrated education (*Geïntegreerd Onderwijs,* GON) and in inclusive settings (*Inclusief Onderwijs,* ION) in recent years. Since the 1980s, many OECD countries have increasingly sought to educate students with disabilities in least restrictive environments. The changes in the 1980s were influenced by normalisation theory and the thinking of Nirje (1985), among others. A growing body of research developed since then (Box 3.2) also indicated that students with special needs could be served more effectively in mainstream schools and that there were important values and benefits for students with and without disability being exposed to one another and learning in the same environment, albeit with supports for students that require this.

Figure 3.8. **Reports by Flemish parents on their criteria for choosing schools for their children, by socio-economic status of students, 2012**

Percentage of Flemish parents that rated each of the following criteria for choosing a school as "very important"



Note: ECSC stands for the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status. The ESCS index was derived from the following three indices: highest occupational status of parents, highest educational level of parents in years of education according to ISCED, and home possessions. For more information, see OECD (2013).

Source: OECD (2013), PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en*, Table IV.4.10

Indeed, many recent educational reforms intended to individualise instruction and create more engaging learning environments in all schools arose from special education practices being introduced in the mainstream classroom.

The Flemish Community has a well-staffed sector of separate special education schools. The special schools may be necessary for some students with moderate or severe disabilities, but the enrolment of high functioning students with mild disabilities in these schools appears both stigmatising and inefficient. The Flemish services for children with disabilities and special needs are expensive since they are predominantly delivered in separate special schools where these students are placed. Expenditure per student in special schools is three times the amount spent on students in mainstream schools. For example, in 2013, spending per student on mainstream elementary education was EUR 5 030 euros, compared to EUR 15 890 in special elementary education (Flemish Department of Education and Training, 2015).

Box 3.2. **Key concepts in the delivery of appropriate services to students with SEN**

During the 1970s and 1980s, Sweden was an international exemplar in regard to inclusion, known for its progressive approach and for the wide range of supports that were provided to students who required assistance. While the development of the Swedish model of special education services was driven by ideals of equity and social justice, the United States also developed more mainstream services for children with disabilities in the 1970s, but this was more driven by top-down decree and court decisions. This box outlines general principles that have guided the delivery of special needs education in countries that have introduced reforms to reduce isolation of students with SEN over the past three to four decades:

- **Normalisation** was a foundational concept or idea that helped to change thinking about special needs education in the Nordic countries in the 1960s and 1970s. Normalisation refers to the policy of offering persons with disabilities conditions and experiences of everyday life as close as possible to those of non-disabled persons, by not segregating them physically, socially and administratively from the rest of society.
- **Least restrictive environment.** Over the past four decades, as special needs education has developed and evolved in industrialised countries, an array of policies and education decrees have sought to change special needs education based upon the principle of least restrictive environment (LRE). The mainstream education environment is considered the least restrictive setting because it is the placement with the greatest opportunity for proximity and communication with the "ordinary flow" of students in schools. As it name implies, LRE is part of a continuum of alternative placements and does not mean that all children with special education needs are served in the mainstream school setting. Arrangements for students can vary by i) the number of classes or time spent in the mainstream classroom, as opposed to pull-out options or placement in a segregated special education school; and ii) the types of supports provided, including human resources, material support and equipment/devices.
- **Inclusion.** Policies adopted to pursue placement of children in the least restrictive environment have traditionally been referred to as "mainstreaming," and "integration." More recently, the more comprehensive label "inclusive education" has become commonly used to refer to policies and reforms in special education that aim to ensure that children with special educational needs are placed in the least restrictive environment.
- **Appropriateness.** According to the principle of LRE, a student with disabilities has the right to be educated in a setting that is not overly restrictive considering what is appropriate for that student. Appropriateness entails an education that will provide meaningful benefit for a student, as opposed to mere placement in a mainstream setting. When the educational programme is appropriate, a student with disabilities should be placed in the general education environment, or as close to it as is feasible.
- **Consultative decision making and individualised education plans.** Key practices in determining and implementing LRE include consultative decision making and individualised education plans (IEPs). Consultative decision making means that decisions about appropriate education services are determined by a group of interested persons, usually including school administration, special education teachers or specialists, parents, and when possible the student involved. Each student with special education needs is unique and decisions about the array or combination of learning environments as well as the type and amount of supports that are provided are documented in an individualised education plan.

Sources: Winzer, M. A. (2009), *From Integration to Inclusion: A History of Special Education in the 20th Century*, Gallaudet University Press, Washington, DC; Emanuelsson, I. and B. Persson (1997), "Who is considered to be in need of special education: why, how and by whom?", *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, Vol. 12 (2), Routledge, pp. 127-136; Tuunainen, K. (1994), "Finland, Norway, and Sweden", in Mazurek, K. and M.A. Winzer (Eds.) (1994), *Comparative Studies in Special Education*, Gallaudet University Press, Washington, DC; Hiroshi, K. and G. Miron (1990), "Educational integration for persons with handicaps: A conceptual discussion", *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 5 (2), Routledge, pp. 126-135.

Implementation of the M Decree starting in 2015 is intended to place more students in least or less restrictive environments. It is the intention of the M Decree that only students with a disability who cannot be provided for in a mainstream school should be placed in a separate SEN school. This is intended to ensure greater equality of opportunity for students, and it should also lead to cost savings in the longer term since the delivery of support services in mainstream schools is expected to be less expensive than delivery of services in separate schools for students with disabilities and special needs.

As was clear from interviews conducted by the OECD review team, the M Decree has the right intentions but the timeline for implementation is a challenge. Some concerns reported by informants regarding the M Decree include the following: i) the Decree does not consider the whole range of students; ii) it is not clear who will decide which students can be placed in mainstream and how this transition will be co-ordinated; iii) there are incentives for special schools to retain students so they may advise families and mainstream schools against moving children to the mainstream; and iv) mainstream schools may advise against inclusion because they may not have funding support and human resources to adequately serve these students.

Implementation of the M Decree will also be difficult due to restrictions of the funding system and the manner in which human resources are distributed. Students with special educational needs enrolled in mainstream education do not generate additional operational funding for their schools, but they generate teacher hours which are provided by an itinerant specialised teacher. However, this type of support appears insufficient, especially since special education teachers need to commute to the mainstream schools and transportation alone can consume a significant portion of the allocated additional time to work with each student. Funding for teachers and the system for allocation of hours is rigidly fixed and teacher hours are steered by the separate special education school, not the school where the children are included in the mainstream. There appears to be currently insufficient autonomy at level of the mainstream education schools to adjust and redistribute teaching so as to successfully implement the M Decree.

Finally, there are indications that teachers in mainstream schools are not adequately prepared to instruct students with special educational needs. In the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS),[3] Flemish lower secondary school principals identify the shortage of teachers with competencies in teaching students with special needs as the second main resource issue hindering the school's capacity to provide quality instruction, a problem affecting about 40% of Flemish teachers. Preparation for teaching students with special education needs is provided as a specialisation following initial teacher education and is given less attention in general teacher education programmes. It is also questionable why a specialisation in special needs education is not a formal requirement to teach special needs students, including in special schools (more on this in Chapter 4).

Policy recommendations

Develop more integrated, system-wide planning for school infrastructure

Improving the quantity and quality of school facilities is a pressing need in the Flemish Community. The shortage of places undermines school choices and deteriorating facilities undermine the quality of learning environments. Concerns about the quality of school buildings also present equity challenges since a disproportionate share of the poorer quality facilities are used by inner-city schools that serve more students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Leemans and von Ahlefeld, 2013).

Responding effectively will require a careful analysis of the demand for places as well as a thorough understanding of the current status of facilities available. As mentioned above, AGIOn evaluates the building stock through a monitoring survey on a five-year cycle. However, approximately 35% of schools did not respond in the first round in 2008 and 47% did not respond in the second round in 2013. The sample obtained was sufficient to provide a broad overview of system-level needs but this data appears too incomplete to inform decisions on specific investments and implement system-wide planning. Further steps seem necessary to improve the response rate to the survey, such as making survey completion mandatory for schools or, at least requiring schools to complete the survey if they (or another school in the school association) wish to apply for infrastructure funding. Of course, prior to funding construction or renovation of school buildings, the status of facilities should be confirmed by a visit. An improved response rate should yield a data set that could help inform decisions about specific investments and which schools to prioritise.

In further planning for school infrastructure development, it should be possible to build on positive examples observed in some parts of the school system. For example, representatives from the Flemish Community network reported that they were developing strategic planning to map out the school provision and infrastructure for all the Flemish Community schools. This is based on strategic plans for each school group in the Flemish Community network, as well as monitoring and projecting of relevant indicators related to demographic trends and local infrastructure. The intention is to encourage school leaders and the General Directors of school groups to make strategic choices, plan ahead for future needs and set priorities looking at the whole local area. Their effort involves investment in an information system including data on all facilities and associated infrastructure.

Delays in creating new or renovated space are also related to the fact that there are multiple queues – schools in the same urban communities, but in different networks, each requiring more and better space. Given the co-existence of schools from different networks in most local communities, it would be beneficial for the Flemish Community to develop strategic infrastructure planning for the school system as a whole. Similar to other challenges, however, addressing the challenges related to the quantity and quality of school facilities might be confounded by the decentralised system with three independent network providers, which may act as an obstacle to efficiently distributing resources and pursuing centrally set objectives and goals. More co-ordinated – and perhaps more centralised – planning might be needed to ensure that decisions about investments in school facilities prioritises the needs of local communities rather than the interests of umbrella networks or individual schools. This should be combined with incentives for schools to share facilities across networks at a local level, including for special education (more on this below).

Given the diverse demographic patterns in different parts of the Flemish Community, it will be critical to monitor school capacity to respond to demand by location and take into account how changes in student numbers or student background characteristics will impact municipalities differently. Given the school choice model in place it is critical that decisions also be taken to prioritise popular choices or "successful" schools that need to be allowed to expand. The definition of successful, of course, can be defined by Flemish authorities, and one such example of success could be schools that are oversubscribed but also are intentionally inclusive (Mampaey and Zanoni, 2014).

Thinking about longer-term development, it would be prudent for the Flemish Community to consider the value and potential flexibility that could be afforded by broader public ownership of school facilities. School facilities in the government-funded private sector, which enrols the majority of Flemish students, are largely paid for with public resources, first through a grant that covers 60-70% of the costs, then a guaranteed loan to cover the remainder and then a portion of publicly allocated operational funds being used by many schools to subsequently pay off the loan.

As it stands, private organisations are – in many cases – building equity and assets. While private schools cannot make profit from their educational activities, they could make profit on other activities carried on in the school facilities. And, after using the facility for thirty years, they can theoretically sell the building and not return the equity to the government nor be forced to reinvest the equity even while they may apply to receive more public resources for facilities. Such a situation is unlikely in the current context of high demand on facilities and when funding for renovating or building a new facility is limited. However, current policies, including handing over facilities paid for largely with public funds to private entities, imply that the facilities are legally out of the control of public authorities and they will have little leverage in the long term to ensure the facilities serve societal needs and the public good. If public authorities could retain ownership of facilities, this might increase future options to facilitate sharing of facilities with local groups and also with other schools.

Address inefficiencies in the provision of school places

Review the current structure of school networks and school boards

The complexity of the Flemish education system with its different layers of organisation and many autonomous components may inhibit the ability of central steering or implementation of policy objectives that represent the best interests of the system as opposed to the separate interests of networks and school boards. During the OECD review visit, the review team learned of a number of promising potential avenues to increase collaboration and improve efficiency. For example, there has been discussion about creating a single network that would cover all public schools, both the Flemish Community schools (GO!) and the schools managed the municipalities and provinces. The potential merger of the two public networks deserves review and serious consideration as it would help reduce overhead and administration costs across the two smaller networks.

In the context of reforms to optimise the structure of school administration, the OECD review team also recommends reviewing the size of school boards within the different networks, with a special focus on determining the potential for merging school boards. As discussed earlier in this chapter, some school boards are very small and responsible for only one or a few schools, which does not offer the same extent of scale economies, management capacity and support that can be offered by larger boards. While school leaders are accountable to their boards, not all boards have the professional capacity to appraise and provide effective feedback and support to their leaders (Shewbridge et al., 2011). In addition to providing appraisal and feedback to school leaders, larger boards can also provide professional support with budgeting, accounting and other tasks, allowing the leaders of individual schools to dedicate more time so strategic and pedagogical leadership.

There is also potential to incentivise further collaboration and sharing of resources across schools and networks. For example, the OECD review team heard of few examples of facilities-sharing across networks. Yet to the outside observer, this presents itself as one potentially valuable way to reduce pressure on school accommodation by building common spaces and thereby shortening queues. Given the reliance of schools on public resources for teachers' salaries, operating costs, and a large part of school infrastructure costs, there is room for the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training to further incentivise collaboration. Reception of a portion of public funds could be made contingent upon collaboration. The Ministry of Education and Training already promotes school collaboration by offering incentives for schools to join a "school association", a welcome initiative to help schools respond to challenges collectively within larger collaborative structures. Yet, while the vast majority of schools belong to an association, there are only very few school associations bringing together schools from different networks.

An important parallel is the use of school facilities outside of school hours by local communities. In Australia, for example, different states have developed protocols to facilitate the use of public school facilities by community groups and sporting organisations as a means of enhancing community engagement with schools.[4] A broader concept of local community includes other schools serving the same area or community. An example of this collaborative approach is Caroline Springs College in the western suburbs of Melbourne. This public school worked with two publicly-funded private schools – one Catholic, the other non-Catholic – to construct facilities and shared spaces under a joint-use agreement.[5] Other examples come from South Australia (Trimper and Salagaras, 2008). These initiatives have not implied a loss of school autonomy or a weakening of the educational mission of different schools. Sharing of facilities, including specialist classrooms (such as for vocational training), is a way of making capital development go further and produce bigger returns by maximising usage. But it also eases pressure on capital funds and the planning queue, enabling greater prioritisation.

Given the network-segmented nature of schooling in the Flemish Community, it may prove more realistic to develop facilities and accommodation for joint use within associations. But progress on this front may serve as a guide and incentive for cross-network initiatives as well, potentially bringing together several associations.

Provide incentives for schools to operate on an effective scale

As highlighted across this report, there are a large portion of small schools in the Flemish Community. This outcome of choice may not always fulfil the promise of choice, especially in secondary education. For small school size reduces course options within schools, may lead to isolation of teachers through too few opportunities for classroom release and professional development, and makes it harder for schools to develop distributed pedagogical leadership and policy-making capacity (Ares Abalde, 2014). As the costs of supporting small schools are high, any loss in functionality or in quality represents an expensive inefficiency which drains resources away from students to keep schools open.

While each of the networks has done some monitoring of its school offer, a central level analysis of the distribution of schools, especially small schools, across the Flemish Community would help policy makers obtain a more complete picture and reveal the scope and potential for school consolidation. Some of the disadvantages that come with small size can be partially offset with increased co-operation with other schools. Creative ideas for co-operation and new efforts to collaborate could be encouraged with the use of

incentives for schools or their associations. This should be coupled with incentives for mergers between small schools, or at least the removal of financial disincentives for schools to operate at a larger scale and ensure an efficient provision of classes.

Rationalise the study offer in secondary education

Issues of provision are aggravated by fragmentation of the curriculum and the operation of many small classes in secondary education. This fragmentary provision creates difficulties for renewal of the building stock which is denied the savings that would be available from more economical provision of both schools and courses. In a context of fiscal constraints, it appears difficult to maintain a school system which offers both small schools *and* multiple and complex course options.

Fragmentation of the study offer is costly as well as being ineffective for some students who are facing difficult employment prospects. The student coefficients for TSO and BSO are high, and funds are channelled into supporting a multitude of very small specialised classes. It is worth considering whether resources could be put to more effective use through less specialisation and more focus on the achievement of strong generic competencies, basic skills and personal development, which are essential for students to succeed in workplace training and transition to an uncertain and ever changing labour market.

The distribution and availability of programme options, especially in the vocational education and training sector, needs to be closely monitored and reviewed. Particular attention should be given to involvement of social partners and local stakeholders to ensure that provision is well aligned with both local and national labour market needs. If patterns over time indicate limited interest in and relevance of specific study programmes, decisions could be made to phase these out. Such reforms are already being discussed, with the Master Plan for Secondary Education. Given that most duplication of study programmes occurs at this level, a careful but comprehensive review should lead to decisions about steps that could improve the efficiency of course provision in secondary education. Previous OECD work further recommended that reforms of the secondary VET sector should involve further expansion of high-quality workplace training well attuned to the labour market (Musset, 2013; OECD, 2015).

Review the policy regarding the provision of philosophy-of-life courses

Involvement of religious institutions in the delivery of compulsory education is a firmly-rooted tradition in the Flemish Community. This tradition was established when there was a rather homogeneous population of citizens who were largely affiliated with the Catholic Church. There is broad recognition across the system that the Flemish Community, like much of the world today, is becoming more diverse in terms of culture and religion. This is reflected in the requirement for public schools to provide a range of philosophy-of-life courses catering to an increasingly diverse student population.

However, the requirement for each school to provide diverse religious or non-confessional ethics courses results in a large number of small-sized classes in which these courses are taught. The associated expenses for schools to run these small courses represent an opportunity for extensive further collaboration between schools, and a potential for considerable cost-savings. A first step to ensuring a more efficient provision of philosophy-of-life courses would be for the Flemish authorities to further encourage co-operation between schools in offering these courses, which could be provided jointly for several schools.

In addition, the Flemish Community could consider conducting a targeted review of the scope of the commitment to offering philosophy-of-life courses in all schools. Such a review could not only explore the potential for collaboration across schools but also consider whether religious classes could be offered outside of the regular school day, with optional enrolment, and/or funding coming from private sources such as fees or support from private foundations. To meet public needs for reducing social or religious tensions in the community, schools might still be required to teach a course on democratic values, tolerance and civil responsibilities. Such a review could result in suggestions for changes that might gradually shift away from state-sponsored religious instruction, or simply present options for a more economical provision.

Reduce early sorting and tracking of students within and across schools

A common issue that a wide array of informants took up during the OECD review was the need to address what was commonly referred to as the "waterfall system", linked to a "tracking and sorting mentality" that was pervasive across the system, with a considerable risk for students from immigrant and low socio-economic backgrounds to be sorted into less academic programmes. The 2013 Master Plan for Secondary Education (Chapter 1) envisages delaying the age of tracking and moving towards a more comprehensive school system. The OECD review team commends this initiative and encourages the Flemish authorities to proceed with the implementation of this plan.

Based on the analysis in the previous sections, steps to reduce early tracking should involve several elements. First, there is a need to introduce a better Community-wide system to monitor the characteristics of students going into different tracks. If data is not readily available at the system level to monitor student characteristics it will be difficult to plan and implement changes intended to avoid an excessive orientation of specific student groups in the vocational education programmes. Second, it will be important to reform the first stage of secondary education so as to create a more comprehensive stage of schooling, which keeps options open for all students up to age 14 rather than age 12. A collaborative process is already in motion to rethink the organisation of the first stage and early tracking into the A and B streams. Third, early diagnosis and response to language gaps are essential to avoid students being referred to vocational tracks due to language difficulties (see Chapter 4).

These measures should also fall in line with further efforts to reduce grade repetition, as repetition in more academic programmes is often associated with subsequent transfer of students to less academic programmes (OECD, 2015). The reforms mentioned should be combined with further steps to reduce the referral of students to SEN schools and to ensure better differentiation of instruction (more on this below). Building teachers' capacities to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body within mainstream schools will be essential for the success of these policies (Chapter 4).

Ensure equal access to school choice for all families

School choice is a right guaranteed by law in the Flemish Community, which means that in theory all families have the right to freely choose a school for their children. In practice, there are factors that can inhibit choice by some families, such as the availability of information, school transportation arrangements and admission practices. Any coherent school choice policy should regularly review the relevance of these factors in shaping equal access to school choice for families.

Ensure effective enrolment, information and transportation systems

The OECD review team commends the efforts undertaken with the equal opportunities policy (GOK) to regulate school choice and reduce socio-economic polarisation of schools while safeguarding the principle of parental choice. Going further, it will be important to systematically monitor enrolment outcomes of these controlled choice policies at the school level (OECD, 2015). Based on the experience acquired through the different stages of the GOK policy, it is important to review the use of common application and enrolment systems, take stock of lessons learned and continuously develop processes to work towards an adequate student composition, while avoiding an outflow of more socio-economically advantaged families in certain neighbourhoods.

It would also be wise to integrate online enrolment system with information for parents on all the available schools. Research indicates that while choice policies increase the level of information of all parents, the quantity and quality of information seems to be highly correlated with parents' level of education (Lacireno-Paquet, 2012; Hamilton and Guin, 2005; Bosetti, 2004; Schneider and Buckley, 2002; Schneider, et al., 1998). Finding relevant, fair and comparable information on available school choices by local community needs to be made easy for all parents. A government or independent organisation should be charged with the responsibility for sharing information on options. The information should provide parents with relevant and comparable information on schools in a given local area and more generally across the system, regardless of network identity. This could be Internet based but requests for paper-based information from parents should also be allowed. It would be useful if school inspection reports could also be linked to information about individual schools and be made more readily available.

Experience from other countries indicates that personal contact, at least in the initial stages, is key to ensuring that parents from different socio-economic backgrounds engage, understand the information and have the opportunity to seek clarification (Nusche, 2009). Well planned transportation can be another means to encourage underrepresented populations to consider schools further away and perhaps outside of their immediate community. Given limitations in school facilities, transportation can also be used to move students from areas with a shortage of places to other areas where places may still be available. Because transportation can be a barrier for lower income families that wish to exercise their right to choose a school, it is important to monitor how transportation assistance responds to the needs of these families.

Support intentionally inclusive practices

It should be noted that providing equal access to school choice alone, as outlined in this section, is unlikely to solve the issue of polarised enrolment in schools along socio-demographic lines. There is evidence from different countries that parents self-select and they often do this based on criteria such as the socio-economic background of the student body. Research in the United States also indicates that schools may employ a range of strategies to structure or influence who applies, who accepts a place and who is likely to leave after receiving a place, even in systems where policies are in place to promote equal access to school choice (Welner, 2013).[6]

Research from different countries indicates that schools with a high share of immigrant students are sometimes perceived by parents as offering lower quality education, and that non-immigrant parents are more likely to use school choice to opt out

of such schools, thus reinforcing segregation (Hastings et al., 2005; Rangvid, 2007; Zanoni and Mampaey, 2013). In this context, it is important to encourage schools to have more diverse and distinct pedagogical profiles so that choices by parents match their children's learning style instead of preferences of parents that may be based on religious or ethnic or socio-economic composition of students.

Zanoni and Mampaey (2011) illustrate practices that diverse schools could use to continue to make themselves attractive in the market place, despite their high contraction of students from socio-economically disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds. There are a number of schools that are intentionally inclusive (Mampaey and Zanoni, 2014), which means they have a high proportion of students from immigrant or lower socio-economic background who are well represented in the more academic tracks. Understanding how these schools accomplish this should shed light on tactics and incentives that could be used to get other schools to become intentionally inclusive.

As socio-economic polarisation in the Flemish Community occurs mostly between the different study programmes in secondary education, it will be key to attract and retain greater numbers of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in the general study programmes. Greater equity and a broadening of the social base from which high achievers are recruited require the building of strong cognitive platforms early in a child's school career. Interventions that come towards the end of schooling have less impact. In this context, in addition to the welcome reforms foreseen by the Master Plan for Secondary Education, it will be equally important to focus on reducing under-achievement in primary education and thereby preparing students from more diverse socio-economic backgrounds for general education and academically demanding study programmes.

Pursue careful and gradual implementation of the M Decree

The implementation of the M Decree is scheduled for September 2015. This reform aims to avoid the disproportionate referral of students to separate special education schools and to ensure greater access to mainstream education for students with special educational needs (SEN).

Clearly, the implementation of such a wide-reaching reform will require time, and – at least during initial years – greater resources, although cost-savings are likely to be achieved in the longer run. As emphasised by Husén (1990) in his strategy rules of education reform, even reforms designed to increase efficiency and save resources in the longer run will likely still require additional resources during implementation. Besides the need for more specialised staff in mainstream schools to support SEN students, infrastructure adjustments between mainstream and special schools will be needed, for example more classrooms for pull-out options in mainstream schools and the conversion of some special schools into resource centres supporting the integrated work of mainstream schools. It is also likely to involve refitting some special schools to serve mainstream and integrated populations of SEN students.

The successful implementation of the M Decree will also require reviewing some of the current resource allocation mechanisms, especially the allocation of teacher hours. Effective inclusion of SEN students in the mainstream requires planning and decision making by school leaders in collaboration with special education experts and parents. However, allowing such school-based decision making is likely to require a shift of

resources and teacher hours from SEN schools to mainstream schools over time. Ideally, resources for students with special educational needs should follow the students independently of whether they are involved in a separate special school or a mainstream school.

With the approval of the M Decree, the Flemish Community joins a growing number of OECD countries, which have reformed special needs education to ensure that students were less isolated, and the Flemish Community can benefit from the experiences of others (for key concepts derived from inclusion experience in Sweden and other countries, see Box 3.2). For the Flemish Community to move in this direction, it will be important that all teachers receive relevant preparation on how to serve SEN populations in mainstream classrooms (more on this in Chapter 4). Such training should be provided during both initial education and continuing professional development. Information and preparation of all students, as well as their parents, during the initial few years should also aid in the transition period.

Notes

1. In the context of stricter interpretation of European legislation on government financial reporting, the new Flemish government has announced its intention to abstain from all DBFM projects relying on state guarantees and involving too high a participation in capital funding.
2. However, a distinction needs to be made between the theoretical class group (i.e. the group of students following the same teaching programme) and the de facto class group (i.e. the group of students sitting physically in the same classroom). The Belgian Court of Audit (2010) observed that vocational programmes typically have small theoretical class groups but that these are often put together in one classroom for a large part of the curriculum, resulting in a much higher student-to-teacher ratio than the statistics would indicate. By contrast, in general education programmes there is more convergence between theoretical and de facto class groups and in some cases students in these programmes receive teaching in smaller de facto class groups than would be expected on the basis of their theoretical entitlement to teaching hours.
3. TALIS is the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey, which was implemented in 2008 and in 2013, covering lower secondary education and with the participation of 24 and 34 countries, respectively. TALIS 2013 enabled countries to also conduct the survey in their primary and upper secondary schools. The Flemish Community of Belgium participated in both editions of TALIS with a sample of lower secondary teachers and in the 2013 edition also with a sample of primary teachers. The results derived from TALIS are based on self-reports from teachers and principals and therefore represent their opinions, perceptions, beliefs and their accounts of their activities. Further information is available at *www.oecd.org/edu/school/talis.htm*.
4. For New South Wales and Victoria, see: *www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/administrative/facilities/comm_use/proced.pdf*, *www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/administrative/facilities/comm_use/proced.pdf*; *www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/infrastructure/sacfpolfworkg.pdf*.
5. For more information, see: *www.schoolchoice.com.au/caroline-springs-college/*.
6. In the United States, a key strategy to address this phenomenon has been to encourage well-off families to choose schools with high shares of students from disadvantaged backgrounds by offering special curricula or programmes. So-called "magnet schools" offering special mathematics, science or art curricula in relatively disadvantaged neighbourhoods have existed since the 1970s. Magnet schools aim at providing high quality education in a specialised and integrated learning environment and in some cases consider student ethnicity in the admission process in order to balance a school's socio-demographic diversity (Mickelson et al, 2008). Several reviews of research confirm the effectiveness of magnet schools at reducing isolation (Gamoran, 1996; Bifulco et al, 2009; Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 2012).

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Chapter 4

The teaching workforce in the Flemish Community of Belgium

This chapter gives an overview of the main characteristics of the teaching workforce in the Flemish Community of Belgium, including: initial teacher education, recruitment into teaching, employment status and career structure, compensation, workload and use of teachers' time, teacher evaluation and teacher professional development. It also considers the role of school leaders and other types of staff in managing and supporting the teaching workforce at the school level. The chapter reviews existing policies aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the teacher labour market and providing adequate employment conditions for teachers to perform well. It also examines challenges faced by the school system in attracting, preparing, distributing and retaining effective teachers, as well as a number of fairness concerns in the organisation of the teaching profession.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Context and features

Profile of the teaching workforce

Size of the teaching workforce and its main characteristics

In 2012, 119 285 teachers worked in Flemish publicly-funded schools, with the following distribution across education levels: 15.8% in pre-primary education, 31.0% in primary education and 53.2% in secondary education (see Table 4.1). About 89% of these teachers worked in mainstream education while about 11% of teachers worked in special education (see Table 4.1). In 2014, the total number of school staff (management, teaching and support staff) was 131 523, reflecting a 2.4% increase from staff levels in 2008 (Table 4.2). Growth in staff levels between 2008 and 2014 was more significant in special secondary education (21.0%) and mainstream elementary school (8.4%) while mainstream secondary education observed the most significant decrease (4.1%).

As in other OECD countries, the teaching profession in the Flemish Community of Belgium is highly feminised: the proportion of women in 2012 reached 97.5% in pre-primary education (close to the OECD average of 97%), 81.8% in primary education (OECD average of 82%) and 62.3% in secondary education (OECD averages of 67% in lower secondary education, 59% in general upper secondary education and 53% in vocational upper secondary education) (Table 4.1 and OECD, 2014a).

Table 4.1. **Number, gender and age of teachers, by level and type of education, 2012**

	Number of teachers	Proportion of females (%)	Proportion of teachers aged less than 30 (%)	Proportion of teachers aged 50 and over (%)
Mainstream pre-primary education	18 279	97.5	23.7	14.2
Special pre-primary education	578	97.6	23.2	14.9
Total pre-primary education	**18 857**	**97.5**	**23.7**	**14.2**
Mainstream primary education	31 062	81.7	20.5	23.8
Special primary education	5 966	82.5	24.0	19.0
Total primary education	**37 028**	**81.8**	**21.1**	**23.0**
Mainstream secondary education	56 944	62.0	16.4	30.1
Special secondary education	6 456	65.3	21.0	26.2
Total secondary education	**63 400**	**62.3**	**16.9**	**29.7**
Total	**119 285**	**73.9**	**19.3**	**25.2**

Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium*, Brussels, *www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*.

The teaching profession in the Flemish Community is considerably young when compared to the OECD average. In 2012, the proportion of teachers aged less than 30 was 23.7% in pre-primary education, 21.1% in primary education and 16.9% in secondary education (Table 4.1), against OECD averages of 13% in primary education and 10% in secondary education (OECD, 2014a). The proportion of teachers aged 50 and over was 14.2%

in pre-primary, 23.0% in primary and 29.7% in secondary education (Table 4.1), against OECD averages of 30% and 36% for primary and secondary education respectively (OECD, 2014a).

In 2014, most school staff worked in publicly-subsidised private education (VGO) (64.7%), while 19.3% worked in Community Education (GO!) and 16.0% in municipal and provincial schools (OGO). These proportions were practically unchanged relative to their 2008 levels: 65.3%, 19.3% and 15.4% respectively (Annex 4.A1).

Initial preparation and qualifications of teachers

Teaching in Flemish schools requires the following minimum qualifications (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). Teachers at the pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education level, as well as teachers of certain programmes in upper secondary education, are required to have a bachelor's degree in teacher education for the relevant level. Teachers in general upper secondary education need to complete a master's degree (in a given discipline) and a specific teacher education certificate. For teachers of practical subjects in technical and vocational education, a combination of a general qualification (secondary degree, bachelor's degree) with a specific teacher education certificate is also possible.

Initial teacher education is offered in two main forms: professional 3-year Bachelor of Education degree programmes, which integrate subject-specific and pedagogical components (referred to as integrated teacher education programmes) and programmes attended in addition to or after a subject-specific initial programme at bachelor's or master's level (referred to as specific teacher education). For more information on the organisation of initial teacher education in the Flemish Community, see Annex 4.A2. Preparation for special education teachers is undertaken as a specialisation, in the form of an Advanced Bachelor's programme (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

The teacher education programmes offered by different institutions are equivalent and based on the same basic teacher career profile. The latter sets out the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of an experienced teacher. From these a set of minimum competencies have been developed to frame initial teacher education programmes (McKenzie et al., 2004). Access to teacher education programmes follows general rules to access higher education (universities and university colleges), i.e. it is based on successful graduation from secondary education. Institutions of teacher education do not organise specific entrance examinations. However, in the Governmental agreement for 2014-19, the introduction of non-binding examinations to enter initial teacher education is envisaged (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

By international comparison, Flemish teachers have lower than average educational attainment, which is mostly the result of the minimum qualifications required to teach (see below). According to data from the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), in 2013, 12.0% of Flemish lower secondary teachers and 6.0% of primary teachers had a university (master's) degree (ISCED 5A) or higher, by far the lowest figures among the TALIS participating countries (against TALIS averages of 90.9% and 79.6%, respectively). Also, 98.3% of Flemish lower secondary teachers had completed a teacher education bachelor's programme, the 3th highest figure among the 34 TALIS participation countries (against a TALIS average of 89.8%) (OECD, 2014b).

Recruitment into teaching

The main requirement to apply for a job as a teacher is to hold a teaching degree for the relevant level of education and field of study. Teachers are hired into schools through an open recruitment procedure organised at the school board level and with considerable involvement of the school principal. Schools boards have autonomy in teacher recruitment, selection and appointment, and therefore act as the employers. However, schools need to observe regulations at the Flemish Community level regarding teacher required standard qualifications and the statutory rights of teaching staff. In particular, they need to give priority to those teachers who have a permanent nomination and take into account their seniority. Teachers apply directly to schools and/or school boards and the hiring procedure typically involves interviews by the school board (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

In specific circumstances, it is possible to teach in a Flemish school without the required qualifications. This can occur with "acceptable" qualifications, if the individual has a teaching degree for the relevant level of education but in a different field of study, or with "other" qualifications, when the individual has a degree other than a teaching degree and/or some relevant professional experience. While schools should always give priority to individuals with "required" or "acceptable" qualifications, they may exceptionally (e.g. in a situation of teacher shortage) appoint an individual with "other" qualifications (Eurydice, 2015).

Employment status and career structure

Teachers with a permanent contract have a quasi-public servant status. While teachers are employed by the school boards, they are paid by the Flemish Government and their employment conditions, including pensions, are defined within the public service framework (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). There are three stages in the contractual status of teachers: i) temporary appointment of definite duration, ii) temporary appointment of continuous duration (i.e. automatically renewed if the respective school is funded the associated teaching hours), and iii) permanent employment. For more information regarding teachers' employment status, see Annex 4.A2.

The characteristics of the Flemish teaching workforce in relation to their contractual status are quite similar to the TALIS average. According to 2013 TALIS data, in the Flemish Community, 83.2% of lower secondary teachers were permanently employed (the TALIS average was 82.5%) while 4.2% of teachers had a fixed-term contract for more than one school year and 12.6% had a fixed-term contract for one school year or less, respectively (the TALIS averages were 5.8% and 11.9% respectively).

A permanent position provides the teacher with substantial job security. A teacher with permanency status continues to be employed even if his or her job becomes redundant due to falling student numbers. In theory, a teacher with permanent status can be dismissed, for example as a result of a disciplinary measure or if they have received two consecutive "insufficient" evaluations. In practice, however, dismissing a permanent teacher can prove difficult and rarely occurs.

In the Flemish Community, teachers have few opportunities for promotion. The teaching career does not provide for distinct stages associated with competency levels or given roles and responsibilities in schools. Promotion essentially involves access to

(Eurydice, 2015): i) "Selection offices" such as deputy-principal, technical advisor and co-ordinator, in secondary education; or ii) Management functions as school principal. Management positions in school groups, school associations and school boards may also be considered a promotion.

However, job differentiation is typically offered at the school level. Roles and responsibilities outside teaching, such as co-ordinating departments or organising cultural activities are distributed by school management as part of the autonomy of schools. Teachers can be exempted from teaching in order to fulfil other tasks in support of the needs of schools, which are typically part of "special pedagogical tasks". A specific example of such specialised tasks is the role of mentor of beginning teachers. This role involves training and a time allowance (i.e. fewer hours of teaching).

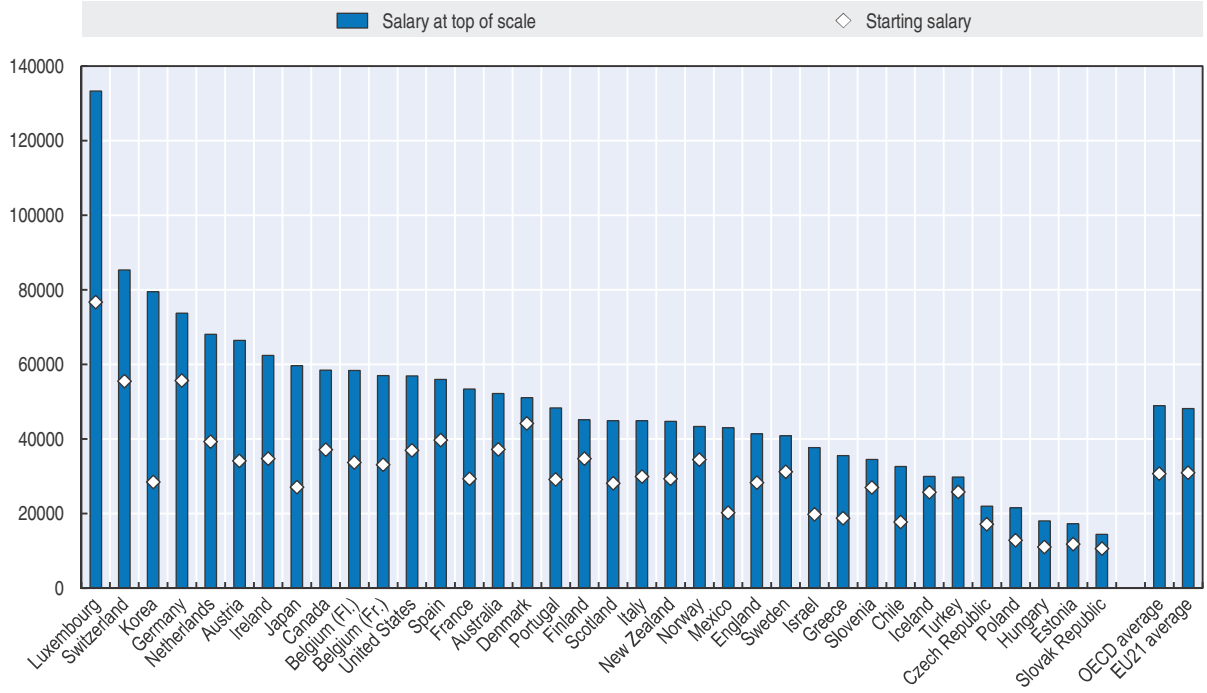
Compensation

Teachers have common salary scales irrespective of the network of schools they belong to as these are determined by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training following a process of collective bargaining with teacher unions. However, salary scales differ according to the level and type of education. Pre-primary, primary and lower secondary teachers have a common salary scale but a different salary scale exists for upper secondary education (the rationale for this differentiation relates to the level of initial qualifications required, i.e. bachelor's or master's degree). In addition, a great number of salary scales coexist for upper technical and vocational secondary education. Teachers in management functions have separate salary scales.

Typically, qualified teachers reach the maximum of the salary scale after 27 years of experience in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education (OECD, 2014a). This is longer than the average length of teacher salary scales in OECD countries (24 for lower secondary education, see OECD, 2014a). The maximum salary of a pre-primary, primary or lower secondary teacher is approximately 73% greater than the beginning salary, whereas for upper secondary teachers the maximum salary is about 76% greater. The salary scales for Flemish teachers look slightly "steeper" than the OECD average (OECD, 2014a). Compared to most OECD countries, the Flemish Community puts a heavy emphasis on length of teaching experience in determining individual teachers' salaries. Teachers with the same levels of qualifications and teaching experience receive essentially the same salary. Teachers are paid according to the number of their teaching hours, which they are not in a position to choose (Eurydice, 2015).

Teacher statutory salaries in the Flemish Community are above the OECD average for all levels of education at the different stages of a career (OECD, 2014a). Figure 4.1 displays lower secondary teacher annual salaries at the start of career and at top of the scale, showing the Flemish Community above the OECD average. When teachers' salaries are compared to earnings for tertiary-educated workers aged 25-64, while showing that salaries in the Flemish school system are lower than in other sectors (except for upper secondary education), the situation of Flemish teachers is more favourable than the OECD average for pre-primary education (ratio of 0.88 against an OECD average of 0.80), primary education (ratio of 0.89 against an OECD average of 0.85) and upper secondary education (ratio of 1.13 against an OECD average of 0.92) while in lower secondary education the situation is similar to the OECD average (ratio of 0.87 against an OECD average of 0.88) (OECD, 2014a and Figure 4.2). Salaries of teachers in the Flemish Community have been relatively stable over the last few years. Salaries increased, in real terms, by 1%, 1% and 2%

Figure 4.1. **Teacher annual salaries at start of career and at top of the scale, lower secondary education, public institutions, 2012**



Notes: Salaries are in equivalent USD converted using purchasing power parities (PPPs) for private consumption. Data refer to statutory salaries for teachers with minimum qualifications. For Hungary, Sweden and the United States, data refer to actual salaries. For Sweden, reference year is 2011.
Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en*.

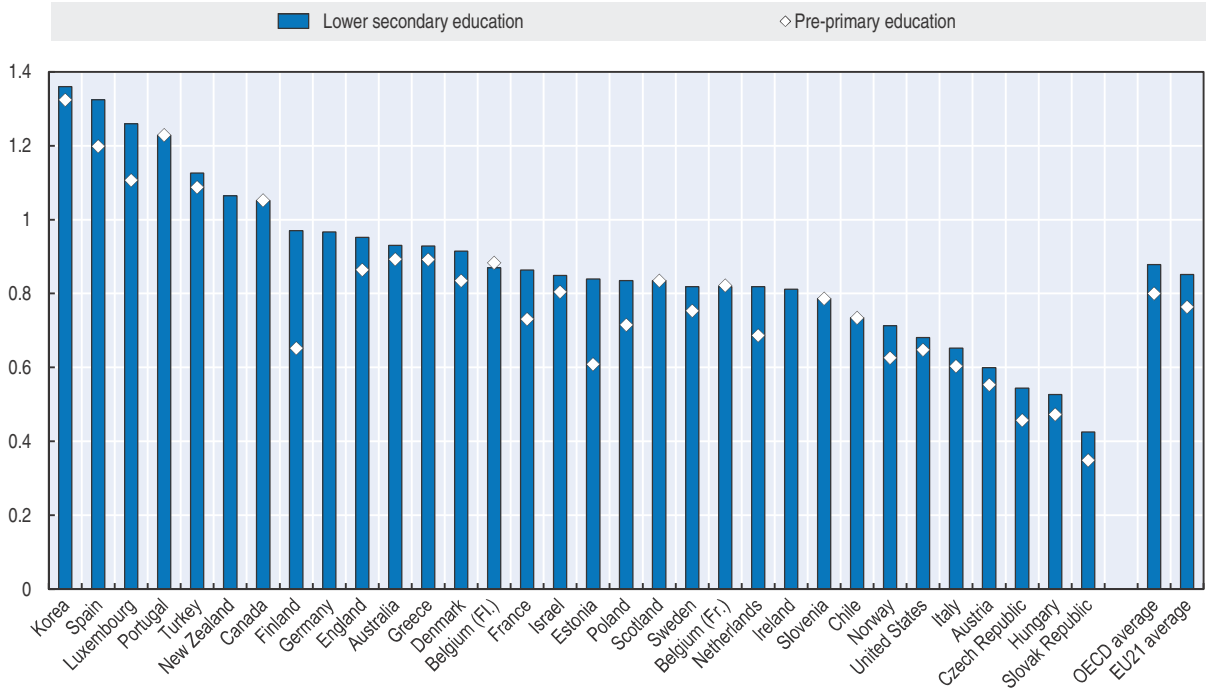
in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary respectively, between 2005 and 2012, for teachers with 15 years of experience and minimum training (Figure 4.3). These increases stood around the OECD averages (3%, 2% and 1% in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary respectively) (OECD, 2014a).

There are no extra allowances for difficult working conditions, specific subjects or responsibilities, teaching in areas of shortage, or for good performance. Only the completion of additional professional development leading to specific qualifications can have a positive impact on salaries. Some salary allowances are provided such as a child allowance and for pre- and after-school child care and lunchtime supervision. Experience outside education is generally not taken into account with the exception of vocational and technical teachers who can have some work experience recognised on the salary scale (Eurydice, 2015).

Workload and use of teachers' time

In the Flemish Community, teachers are employed mostly under a weekly teaching load system whereby their basic compensation is mostly associated with their teaching load. Regulations stipulate the minimum and maximum teaching loads for teachers (see Table 4.2). The total number of working hours and the range of tasks are expected to perform beyond teaching itself are not defined by legislation. The latter are defined on an individual basis in function of the specific needs of the school.

Figure 4.2. **Teachers' salaries relative to earnings for tertiary-educated workers aged 25-64, public institutions, pre-primary and lower secondary education, 2012**

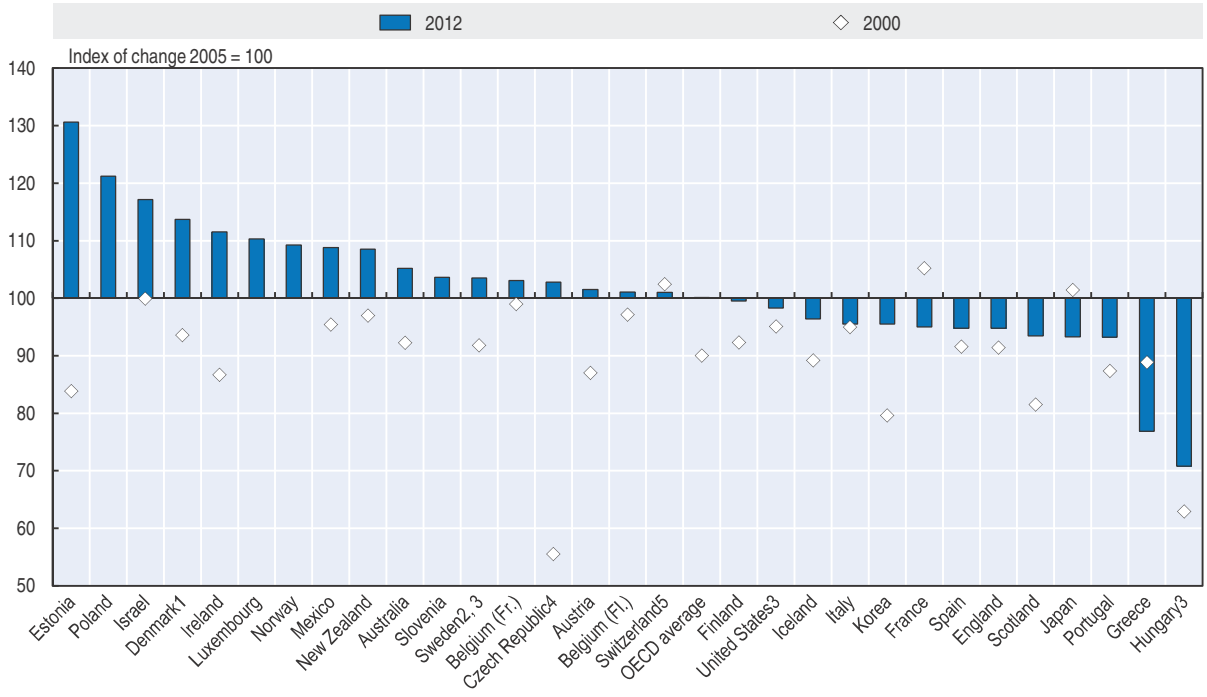


Notes: Data refer to actual salaries except for the following countries, for which statutory salaries were used: Austria, Canada, Ireland, Korea, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey. The "Actual" method refers to the ratio of average actual salary, including bonuses and allowances, for teachers aged 25-64 to earnings for full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education aged 25-64. The "Statutory" method refers to the ratio of teachers' statutory salary after 15 years of experience and minimum training (regardless of age) to earnings for full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education aged 25-64. For Belgium (French Community), Belgium (Flemish Community), England and Scotland, data on earnings for full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education refer to Belgium and the United Kingdom, respectively. Scotland includes all teachers, irrespective of their age. For Sweden, average actual teachers' salaries do not include bonuses and allowances.
Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en.*

The typical total annual net teaching time is 732, 748, 652 and 609 hours in pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and general upper secondary education respectively, below the OECD averages of 1 001 (pre-primary education), 782 (primary education), 694 (lower secondary education) and 655 (general upper secondary education) (OECD, 2014a). Figure 4.4 reflects self-reports of lower secondary teachers regarding actual hours worked during a week, positioning Flemish teachers slightly below the TALIS average.

Regarding the tasks other than teaching, for pre-primary and primary education teachers, the tasks associated with the required hours of presence at the school are defined at the school level and may include teamwork and dialogue with colleagues, supervising students during breaks, providing counselling and guidance to students, participating in school management, communicating and co-operating with parents or guardians and engaging in professional development activities. But some of these can also be performed outside the school, within teachers' working time, at the discretion of schools. In secondary education, these tasks are not required to be undertaken by teachers at the school but schools have the discretion to include them within teachers' working time. For all educational levels, individual planning and preparation of lessons is required and expected to be undertaken outside the school (OECD, 2014a). Figure 4.5 shows the average

Figure 4.3. **Change in lower secondary teachers' salaries (2000, 2005, 2012), for teachers with 15 years of experience and minimum training**



Notes: Countries are ranked in descending order of the index of change between 2005 and 2012 in the salaries of lower secondary teachers with 15 years of experience.

1. Break in time series following methodological changes in 2009.
2. Year of reference 2011 instead of 2012.
3. Actual base salaries.
4. Break in time series following methodological changes in 2012.
5. Salaries after 11 years of experience.

Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en.*

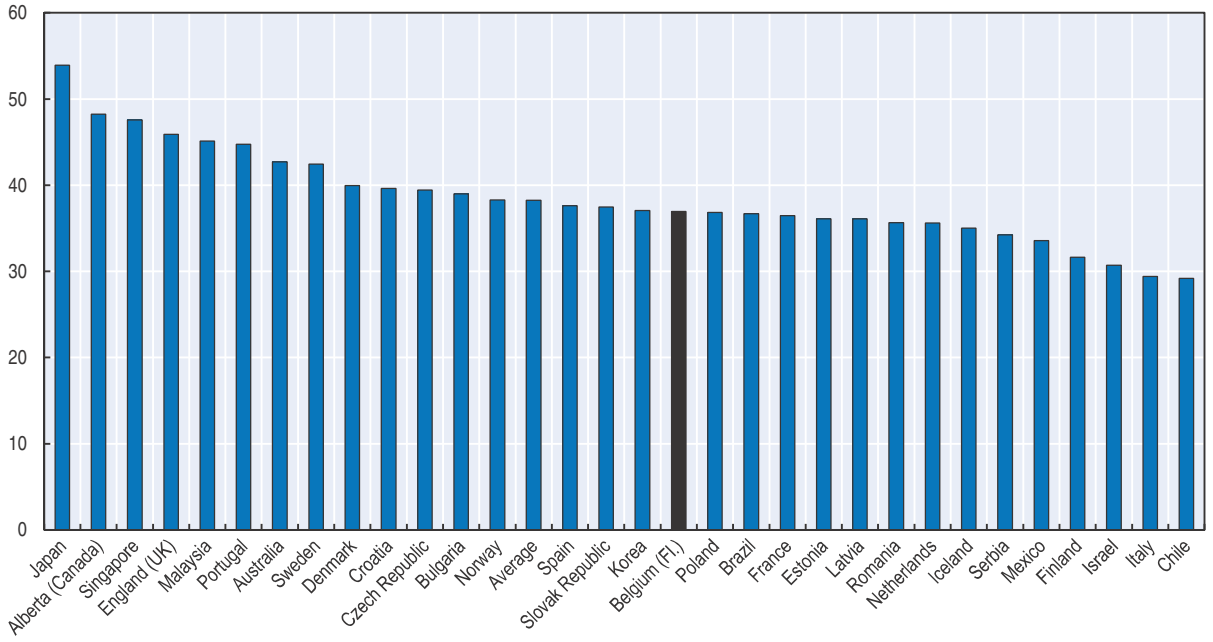
Table 4.2. **Regulations on teachers' time in the Flemish Community, 2014**

	Required number of 60 minute teaching periods per week	
	Minimum	Maximum
Mainstream pre-primary education	20	22
Mainstream primary education	20	23
Mainstream lower secondary education	18	19
Mainstream upper secondary education	17	18

Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools, Country Background Report of the Flemish Community of Belgium, http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm*; Eurydice (2013), *Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe*, EACEA, Brussels/Luxembourg.

number of hours lower secondary teachers report having spent on a variety of tasks for both the Flemish Community and the average among TALIS countries. It highlights the fact that Flemish teachers spent about the same time as teachers in other countries on teaching itself while they spend relatively less time on other tasks such as preparation of lessons, teamwork and dialogue with colleagues within the school, communication with parents or student counselling (OECD, 2014b).

Figure 4.4. **Average number of hours lower secondary education teachers eport having worked during the most recent complete calendar week, lower secondary education, 2013**



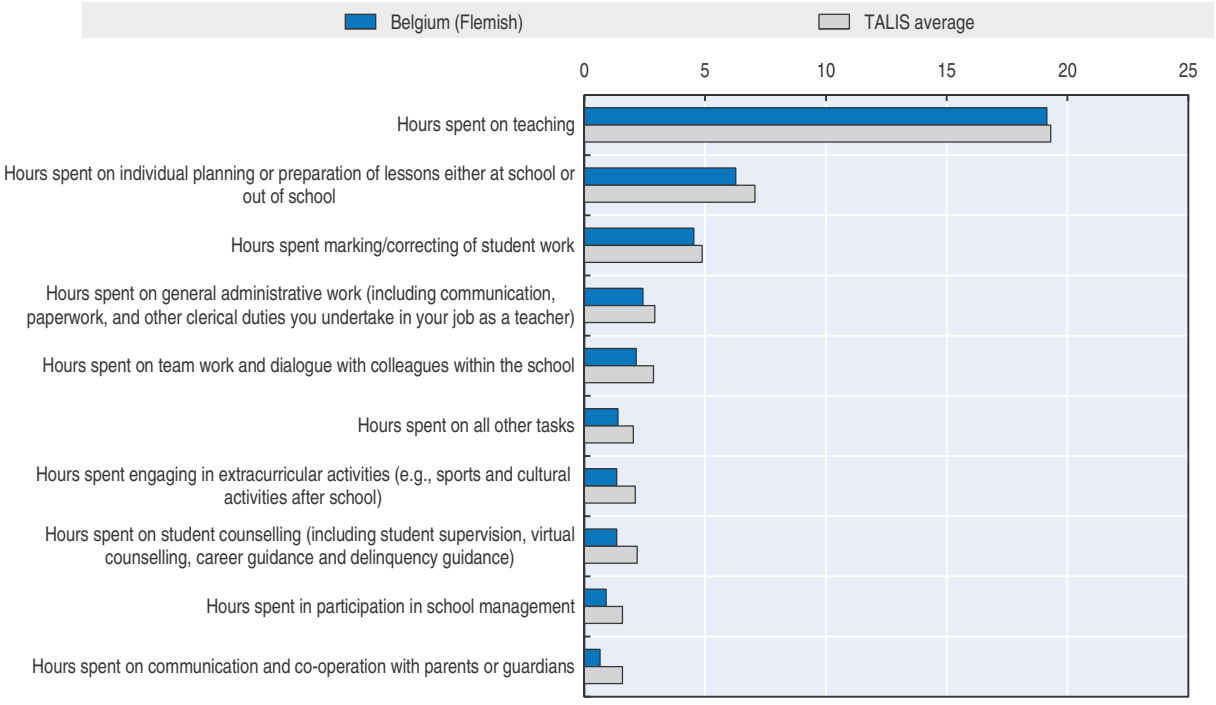
Notes: A "complete" calendar week is one that was not shortened by breaks, public holidays, sick leave, etc. Also includes hours worked during weekends, evenings or other off-classroom hours. The sum of hours spent on different tasks (shown in Figure 4.5) may not be equal to the number of total working hours because teachers were asked about these elements separately. It is also important to note that data presented represent the averages from all the teachers surveyed, including part-time teachers.
Source: OECD (2014b), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en.*

As explained in Chapter 2, schools are free to decide on how they use the "teaching hours" they are allocated. School boards decide on the size of class groups, the distribution between actual teaching hours and hours for other tasks (e.g. special pedagogical tasks, professional development, participation in school management), and the sharing of hours between schools under the same school board. Teaching staff cannot be assigned to extra hours which are not derived from the "teaching hours" package the school receives, unless the school management pays these extra hours with extra resources from the school (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

Teacher evaluation

In the Flemish Community, individual teachers are evaluated within schools using an individual job description as a reference. Individual teachers need to undergo a formal evaluation at least once every four years. The evaluators are appointed by the school principal (or by the school board) and need to be individuals holding a higher hierarchical rank than the teacher. The evaluator may be the school principal, especially in elementary schools where there are typically no other management staff. According to Eurydice (2015), the evaluation process involves the following steps: i) appointment of evaluators, ii) drafting of the job description, iii) evaluation of the teacher, including coaching and guidance, and (iv) evaluation results described in a report and possible consequences. For more information, see Annex 4.A2.

Figure 4.5. **Average number of hours lower secondary education teachers report having spent on the following activities during the most recent complete calendar week, Flemish Community of Belgium and TALIS average, 2013**



Notes: A "complete" calendar week is one that was not shortened by breaks, public holidays, sick leave, etc. Also includes tasks that took place during weekends, evenings or other off-classroom hours. The sum of hours spent on different tasks may not be equal to the number of total working hours (shown in Figure 4.4) because teachers were asked about these elements separately. It is also important to note that data presented represent the averages from all the teachers surveyed, including part-time teachers.
Source: OECD (2014b), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en.*

Teacher professional development

In the Flemish Community, there is no mandatory requirement for teachers to undertake professional development. However, legislation requires that individual schools create the conditions for their teachers to undertake professional development, which is an expected duty of teachers. Schools receive funding for the professional development of their teachers. Its provision can originate at school, network and government level, but the principle is that schools and teachers retain their autonomy in decision making. Teacher professional development benefits from dedicated budgets at schools. By international comparison, affordability does not constitute an important barrier to participation in professional development. According to TALIS 2013 data, only 16.8% of Flemish lower education teachers agreed or strongly agreed that professional development being too expensive/unaffordable represented a barrier to their participation, the lowest figure among TALIS countries, against a TALIS average of 43.8% (OECD, 2014b).

Schools are responsible for their own professional development policies. They prepare a professional development plan for their staff. The plan includes key priorities, a time schedule and a budget for professional development activities. Teachers typically apply for professional development they would like to undertake through the school leader. The school leader is in charge of prioritising teachers' training requests in line with the educational and pedagogical needs and conditions of the school. Schools are free to select

providers of professional development in a free market. In addition to funding professional development activities of their staff, schools often also fund travel expenses and course materials. Also, school-based professional development appears to be common practice, with teachers in the schools visited by the OECD review team reporting that their schools typically organised "study days" several times a year, bringing together all their teachers around a specific professional development activity.

By international comparison, the participation rates of Flemish teachers in professional development are about average. According to 2013 TALIS data, 88.9% and 88.2% of Flemish primary and lower secondary teachers respectively reported having participated in at least one professional development activity in the previous 12 months, quite similar to the TALIS averages of 89.7% and 88.4%, respectively (OECD, 2014b). Compared to teachers in other systems, Flemish lower secondary teachers in 2013 reported the highest levels of participation in activities such as courses or workshops, qualification programmes and courses in business premises, public organisations and non-governmental organisations. By contrast, relative to colleagues in other TALIS countries, Flemish lower secondary teachers were less involved in all other types of professional development, including education conferences, mentoring as part of a formal arrangement and a network of teachers.

Professional development is provided by a range of different institutions including universities, university colleges, pedagogical guidance services of school networks, private companies and the Ministry of Education and Training. Every year the Government sets a number of priority professional development themes and offers the corresponding training free of charge to all school networks (unless the maximum capacity of these courses is reached). Pedagogical advisory services of school networks, which are publicly funded, offer a range of services to the respective schools such as support in establishing school development plans, teacher evaluation and professional development. They are also providers of professional development activities. They can prepare tailor-made professional development programmes at the request of schools. The Ministry also makes available a database of professional development offerings to disseminate this information among teachers.

Other school staff

In addition to teachers and school leaders, other types of school staff are hired. These include support specialists (e.g. special needs co-ordinator, ICT co-ordinator, child care workers), administrative staff (e.g. secretaries, accountants), medical and paramedical staff in special schools (e.g. speech therapist, psychologist, physiotherapist) and maintenance staff (e.g. cooks, repairmen). The school boards recruit support staff on the basis of the financial capacities and needs of the schools. Most of these support staff are funded by the Flemish government.

Strengths

Teachers value their profession

Although there are challenges regarding the attractiveness of the teaching profession (more on this below), by international comparison, the job satisfaction among Flemish teachers appears high. According to TALIS 2013 data, 95.3% of Flemish lower secondary teachers reported that they are satisfied with their job, against a TALIS average of 91.2% (OECD, 2014b). Similarly, 84.6% of lower secondary teachers in the Flemish Community

reported that they agree or strongly agree that the advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages, against a TALIS average of 77.4%. A relatively low proportion of them (22.7%) wonder whether it would have been better to choose another profession, against a TALIS average of 31.6%. In addition, 45.9% of lower secondary Flemish teachers reported that they agree or strongly agree that the teaching profession is valued in society, the 9th highest figure among TALIS countries (the TALIS average being 30.9%). During the interviews with the OECD review team, Flemish teachers from all levels of education spoke of the many elements of the profession that they enjoyed, including the close work and interaction with young people, the passion for their subjects, the opportunities and challenges of working with students from different backgrounds, and the possibility of having a positive impact on students' learning and life choices.

Profiles of teacher competencies provide a good basis to plan initial education and professional development

Statements of basic teacher competencies, describing the knowledge, skills and attitudes graduates from initial teacher education need to acquire, were established for pre-primary, primary and secondary education in 1998, and updated in 2007. They provide the main reference for the development of initial teacher education programmes and may form the basis for entry into the profession. These basic competencies enable teachers to grow into "professional profiles", which are targeted at practising teachers for the different educational levels. These professional profiles, also established in 1998 and updated in 2007, describe the knowledge, skills and attitudes of in-service teachers and guide the professional development of teachers. Both the basic competencies and the professional profiles cover teacher functions such as educator, content expert, organiser, innovator and researcher, partner of parents, member of a school team and member of the educational community (Eurydice, 2015).

The existence of teaching standards that provide a clear and concise profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do is a positive element for the management of the teaching profession. Teaching standards are essential mechanisms for clarifying expectations of what systems of teacher education and professional development should aim to achieve, offering the credible reference for making judgements about teacher competence, guiding teacher professional development, and providing the basis for career advancement. Clear, well-structured and widely supported teaching standards are a powerful mechanism to define what constitutes good teaching and align the various elements involved in developing teachers' knowledge and skills (OECD, 2005). However, while the Flemish profiles of teacher competencies have potential to play such a role for the teaching profession in the Flemish Community, the review team formed the impression that they were not widely known in schools and that they did not seem to be systematically used to plan the professional development of teachers (more on this below).

Overall good provision of qualified teachers across the system

Internationally comparable information indicates that, on the whole, the Flemish Community is not facing a teacher shortage situation. PISA 2012 data reveal that the Flemish Community has an index of teacher shortage around the OECD average (Tables IV.3.37 and B2.IV.6, OECD, 2013a). As discussed in the previous chapters, the Flemish Community also stands out internationally as offering low student-to-teacher ratios and small class size across schools both in rural and urban locations. According to TALIS 2013 data based on

reports of primary and lower secondary teachers, the average class size stood at 18.0 and 17.3 in primary and lower secondary education respectively (against TALIS averages of 20.3 and 24.1). The average student-teacher ratio stood at 13.4 and 7.9 in primary and lower secondary education respectively (against TALIS averages of 13.5 and 12.4 respectively).

In addition, there are some indications that out-of-field teaching is not a major issue in the Flemish Community. This type of "hidden shortage" is said to exist when teaching is carried out by someone who is not fully qualified to teach the field/subject and is usually measured as the proportion of teachers teaching a subject in which they are not qualified. TALIS 2013 provides data on the proportion of lower secondary teachers in given subjects who have not had formal education or training at ISCED level 4 or higher or at the professional development stage for those subjects. In the Flemish Community, such proportions for teachers currently teaching reading, writing and literature; mathematics; science; and modern foreign languages were 3.7%, 4.6%, 7.4% and 6.3% respectively (against TALIS averages of 5.7%, 6.6%, 7.6% and 10.5% respectively) (OECD, 2014b).

However, this does not mean that the Flemish school system is not faced with specific instances of teacher shortage. According to 2013 TALIS data, 33.4% of lower secondary teachers were working in schools whose school principals reported that a shortage of qualified and/or well-performing teachers hindered the school's capacity to provide quality instruction (the TALIS average was even higher at 38.4%) (OECD, 2014b). Schools facing more difficult socio-economic circumstances, especially in the larger cities, tend to encounter more difficulties to recruit experienced teachers (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015). The projected increase of student numbers in the near future is likely to put more pressure on the recruitment of qualified teachers. However, an advantage of the Flemish Community is the flexibility of its initial teacher education system, especially its "specific teacher education", which offers flexible pedagogical preparation to individuals with another graduate degree or with relevant professional experience, granting potential swift responses to the needs of the teacher labour market.

Teachers are recruited at the school level, which brings efficiency to the labour market

In the Flemish Community, there is considerable autonomy for the management of the teaching workforce at the school level. According to TALIS 2013 data, 100% of lower secondary teachers are in schools where the school principals report that considerable responsibility for appointing or hiring teachers is held at the school level (either by the school principal, other members of the school management team, teachers or the school governing board), against a TALIS average of 74.7%. The equivalent figure for dismissing or suspending teachers from employment is also 100%, against a TALIS average of 68.4% (OECD, 2014b). This is a significant strength in a system where schools are individually judged on their ability to improve student learning. A direct interaction with the applicants takes place, typically through interviews, and allows the use of a more complete set of criteria to match individual applicants' characteristics to schools' specific needs. School leaders are in a better position than more remote administrative levels to assess the specific needs of the school. The freedom of choice for parents, together with school leadership of teacher recruitment, provides incentives for schools to seek out specific teacher characteristics which align with their educational project. The process of open recruitment also offers advantages to applicants since they can more directly choose the school and identify with the school's educational project. As a result, the process is more likely to build a sense of commitment of teachers to the schools where they are recruited.

Research based on cross-country analysis indicates that school autonomy in teacher recruitment is associated with higher student achievement levels. For example Wößmann (2003) used data from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) to examine the relationship between different aspects of centralised and school-level decision-making and student performance. He concluded that students in schools with autonomy in deciding on the hiring of teachers performed statistically significantly better in mathematics and science than students in schools that did not have such autonomy. Better performance in mathematics and science was also observed among students in schools that could determine teacher salaries themselves.

However, it is important to note that school autonomy in teacher recruitment involves some complexity as there is the potential for an inequitable distribution of teachers (as schools with more resources and located in advantaged areas have greater potential to attract high quality teachers, see below) and opportunities for favouritism in teacher selection by schools. Avoiding the latter requires transparency in recruitment processes through making information about existing teaching openings publicly available. This is not yet fully the case in the Flemish Community (see below).

Schools are free to organise teacher hours as they see fit

In addition to recruitment, school leaders have considerable room to manage teacher resources. They are free to manage the teacher hours allocated to the school in the way they see fit. This grants them the ability to select the optimal distribution of teacher resources across classes and students and across roles and tasks within the school. This flexibility allows schools to adapt the use of teacher hours to the school's specific needs and the student characteristics of each school. The principle is to give autonomy to schools to allocate resources where they are most needed.

As described in previous chapters, disadvantaged schools receive extra resources which can be used in activities such as remedial classes for students with learning difficulties, extra language support, and student care and guidance (help with behavioural aspects and any aspects of student life that might negatively impact on performance). All the schools the review team visited had teacher hours allocated to these functions. This flexibility at the school level also gives teachers opportunities to diversify their roles in schools.

Schools also make an extensive use of part-time employment, which provides flexibility in responding to fluctuations in demand for teachers. According to TALIS 2013 data, 74.7% of Flemish lower secondary teachers were employed full-time (i.e. more than 90% of full-time hours), against a TALIS average of 82.4% (OECD, 2014b). Opportunities to work part-time can also be attractive to many people, and thus increase the potential supply of teachers.

Challenges

There are difficulties in attracting and retaining new teachers

There are indications that the teaching profession in the Flemish Community is not attracting the most suitable candidates and is facing challenges in retaining young professionals. In several meetings with the review team, it was referred that entrants into initial teacher education come in little proportion from the pool of best secondary graduates. There is also a challenge in attracting males and individuals with an immigrant background into initial teacher education so the teaching workforce better matches the characteristics of the student population.

Teacher retention in the initial years of the career is a concern. According to information on teacher attrition rates presented by the Flemish Minister of Education to the Flemish Parliament in March 2015, the total attrition rate of teachers aged younger than 30 in the Flemish Community for the period of 2009-14 was 17.1% on average across mainstream and special elementary and secondary education. Attrition rates were at 10.9% for mainstream pre-primary schools (12.8% for special pre-primary schools), 11.6% for mainstream primary schools (16.0% for special primary schools) and 23.1% for mainstream secondary schools (26.6% for special secondary schools).* Teacher attrition reflects a degree of inefficiency in the management of the teaching workforce and is likely to be related difficult working conditions within schools for beginning teachers.

Part of the explanation lies in the fact that beginning teachers are more likely to obtain a teaching post in a disadvantaged school where working conditions can be particularly challenging given high levels of cultural and language diversity and more difficult socio-economic circumstances. In addition, beginning teachers face little job security for several years until they are able to obtain a permanent post, often having to move from one school to another in consecutive school years. While teacher salaries overall are quite competitive in the labour market, compared to the situation in other countries (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2), this is less so at the beginning of the career, especially when the teacher remains in a temporary post. These challenges will be discussed in more detail below.

A further aspect that that teachers often mentioned in their interaction with the OECD review team as reducing the attractiveness of the profession was a high amount of administrative paperwork, including systematic minutes of meetings, documented year planning, and the need to justify their decisions in writing (e.g. failing a student, remedial strategies).

Concerns about the organisation of initial teacher education

During the OECD review visit, different groups raised concerns about the required minimum qualifications for pre-primary education, primary education and lower secondary education teachers, which are currently set at ISCED 5B level. Considering the OECD area, in primary education and lower secondary education, only the French Community of Belgium and Denmark also set qualification requirements at ISCED 5B level. In pre-primary education, only five other OECD systems set qualification requirements at ISCED 5B or below (OECD, 2014a). The duration of initial teacher education for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education is shorter than in most other OECD countries. In only one other school system (the French Community of Belgium), the duration of the initial teacher education for all lower secondary education teachers was three years as in the Flemish Community. For the primary education level this was the case for four other education systems, and for the pre-primary level it was the case for ten other systems. These qualification requirements are in stark contrast to the requirements of a master's level qualification for teachers at the upper secondary level. There is no reason why the level of education should be lower for teachers at pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education given similar professional demands. This approach is likely to have detrimental effects on the status of teachers at the pre-primary, primary and lower

* These figures were provided by in response to Parliamentary question no. 310 by Caroline Gennez to Minister Hilde Crevits on 3 March 2015.

secondary levels, although it should be noted that teachers with a master's degree also frequently teach in special education (at all levels) and sometimes in mainstream lower secondary education.

Inadequate preparation of teachers for dealing with diversity in the classroom

Several of the groups and individuals interviewed by the OECD review team spoke of their perception that initial teacher education and continuing professional development did not adequately prepare teachers in several aspects of teacher practice, including subject didactics; teaching in a multicultural environment; differentiation of instruction; supporting language learning in all subjects; and teaching students with special educational needs. In the context of changing demographics of the Flemish student population and the current policy towards greater inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools, it is of key importance that all teachers are adequately prepared to work in diverse classrooms and differentiate instruction effectively.

Speaking of Belgium as a whole, the OECD (2015) has noted that the language barrier to educational achievement is as strong amongst native-born students with foreign-born parents as amongst foreign-born students themselves. Also observed was Belgium's internationally low profile in the proportion of immigrant children in remedial language classes. Concern was expressed by respondents in the OECD review visit that immigrant children's access to specialist language support classes was too limited. Programmes were of short duration (typically one school year), and great reliance was placed on the teachers in mainstream classes and on social interactions in this setting. However, results from TALIS indicate that the Flemish Community had the fourth lowest percentage of teachers (8%) with recent training for teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting and this dimension is usually reported as a low-importance item in teacher appraisal and feedback.

Rigidities and imperfections in the teacher labour market

While the teacher labour market operates within a school system characterised by freedom of education and choice, it features a number of rigidities and imperfections. First, there are strict boundaries between school networks and, sometimes, even between school groups and school associations, concerning the acquired statutory rights of teachers. While teachers moving to a school in another network generally keep their pension rights and salary level, they will lose their permanent teacher status. Sometimes this is the case if they only move to another school board in the same network. This is a major obstacle to mobility of teachers across networks and school boards.

Second, while schools have good levels of autonomy in teacher recruitment, they are restricted in their choices by a number of strict regulations. Within a given school network (or school group/association), priority has to be given to the candidate with the highest level of seniority from among the candidates and teachers with permanent status have priority over temporary teachers. Other rules require that priority be given to those who have worked for a certain number of years and, where two candidates are equal in this regard, priority is given to those who have worked in the same network of schools, or been employed by the same organising authority. This might limit the extent to which schools select the candidate who best fits their needs and explains, in part, why often recruitment processes have a certain degree of informality (see below).

Third, the recruitment and selection of teachers is not always transparent. Schools and school boards do not seem to be required to advertise their teacher vacancies even if some of them do so on the school network's website or at the Flemish public employment service. School networks, groups or associations typically keep a list of potential candidates and often directly contact a potential candidate for a position in the school, while not organising a formal recruitment process. It seems that some schools prefer not to openly advertise vacancies because that would compel them to follow regulations in regard to recruitment, rules that may not suit school needs. In general, there also seems to be a lack of information to connect those looking for a teaching position with the schools seeking teachers. In order to address this concern, the Flemish public employment service and the Ministry of Education and Training have jointly established a web-based database of teacher vacancies in elementary and secondary education (*www.vdab.be/leerkrachtendatabank*).

Inequities in the distribution of teachers across schools

As explained above, recruitment at the school level combined with differences in resources across schools has the risk of leading to an inequitable distribution of teachers across schools. In the Flemish Community, there are indications that there is some inequitable distribution of teachers across schools, with the most experienced teachers typically employed in the least challenging schools. According to TALIS 2013 data, while 16% of lower secondary teachers worked in schools with more than 30% of students coming from disadvantaged home backgrounds, this was the case for 26.6% of beginning teachers (i.e. teachers with 5 years teaching experience or less).

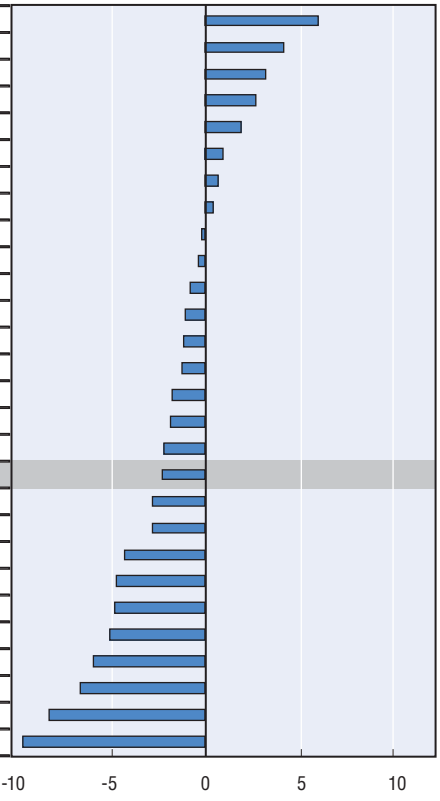
This phenomenon is illustrated in Figure 4.6. In countries and economies found at the top of this Figure (with positive differences), experienced teachers are more likely to be working in schools with high proportions of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Figure 4.6 shows that for a majority of countries, however, the opposite is true. Negative difference scores on these graphs indicate that a larger proportion of more experienced teachers teach in less challenging schools. The Flemish Community appears at the bottom of the list, indicating that more experienced teachers are more likely to be in schools with a less diverse student population, whereas beginner teachers are more likely to be concentrated in schools with many students from disadvantaged home backgrounds. The European Commission (2015) highlights that there is an additional challenge of a particularly high turnover rate of relatively inexperienced teachers in Brussels schools.

In part this reflects the inability of the system to steer more qualified and experienced teachers to the neediest schools as no special incentives are available. Schools with disadvantaged student populations can receive more teaching hours but not necessarily more experienced teachers. The main response of the system to socio-economic disadvantage seems to be additional teacher hours, rather than a focus on the distribution of teachers and the quality of teaching. The funding system also tends to reinforce inequities across schools as schools enrolling students from socio-economically more advantaged backgrounds are in a better position to attract more experienced teachers and, as a result, receive more "teacher resources" in terms of government money invested in salaries.

Figure 4.6. **Distribution of experienced teachers in more and less challenging schools, 2013**

Proportion of lower secondary education teachers working in schools with more than 30% of students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes (referred to as "challenging schools"), and difference in the proportion of more experienced teachers working in more and in less challenging schools

	Percentage of teachers working in more challenging schools
Brazil	40
Korea	8
Croatia	7
Netherlands	12
Chile	55
Latvia	18
Mexico	44
Portugal	48
Italy	10
Serbia	7
France	45
Bulgaria	24
Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates)	11
Slovak Republic	10
Poland	18
Malaysia	58
Spain	14
Average	**20**
Australia	26
Singapore	6
Estonia	11
Japan	6
England (United Kingdom)	24
Israel	46
Romania	28
Alberta (Canada)	20
Sweden	10
Flanders (Belgium)	16



Notes: Categorisation of more challenging schools is based on principals' estimates of the broad percentage in the schools of students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes.
Country data for categories representing fewer than 5% of the cases are not presented in this figure.
Source: OECD (2014b), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, Table 2.11, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en*.

There are a range of fairness concerns in the organisation of the teaching profession

Hurdles throughout the career are uneven

As noted by a previous OECD report on teacher policy in the Flemish Community (McKenzie et al., 2004), another aspect that stands out is the unevenness of hurdles throughout the teaching career. Obstacles are quite high at the beginning of teachers' careers when they still have temporary status. During this period of the career, the teacher goes through a probationary period, may be appointed for short periods of time, can be replaced by teachers with a permanent appointment, may need to move from one school to another, and can be dismissed in a relatively straightforward manner. Once permanent status is acquired, the picture changes markedly, and the teacher acquires a significant level of job security together with virtually automatic salary rises over time (McKenzie et al., 2004). However, the introduction of the "temporary appointment of continuous duration" has brought some improvement to the employment conditions of beginning teachers.

Differences in status and working conditions across educational levels raise concerns

In the Flemish Community, there is a difference between the status of upper secondary teachers *vis-à-vis* that of teachers of other school levels. This is because required qualifications for teachers in upper secondary education are at the master's degree level while teachers in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education are at bachelor's degree level. This is the basis for considerable salary differences between teachers at the upper secondary level and other teachers. Figure 4.7 compares the statutory salaries of teachers with different levels of teaching experience across education levels in the OECD area. The Flemish Community of Belgium is the system where the ratio of salaries of upper secondary teachers to salaries of lower secondary teachers is the highest in the OECD area while it is the third highest when comparing salaries of upper secondary teachers to salaries of primary teachers. When the number of teaching hours is taken into account, as shown in Figure 4.8, the ratio of salary per teaching hour between upper secondary teachers and primary teachers is about 1.6, the second largest in the OECD area.

This situation is detrimental to the status of elementary and lower secondary school teachers and creates a bias of resources going into upper secondary education. There is no reason why qualification requirements should be distinct between upper secondary teachers and teachers of other school levels. Teaching requires similar competencies and levels of preparation regardless of the level at which teachers work. This situation also leads to unfair treatment of some teachers. For instance, secondary teachers who perform similar tasks in one given school but who have distinct qualification levels are in different salary scales. Also, primary education teachers with qualifications at the master's degree level may be paid according to the salary scale associated with bachelor's degree qualifications by some schools.

Distinct working conditions are not duly acknowledged

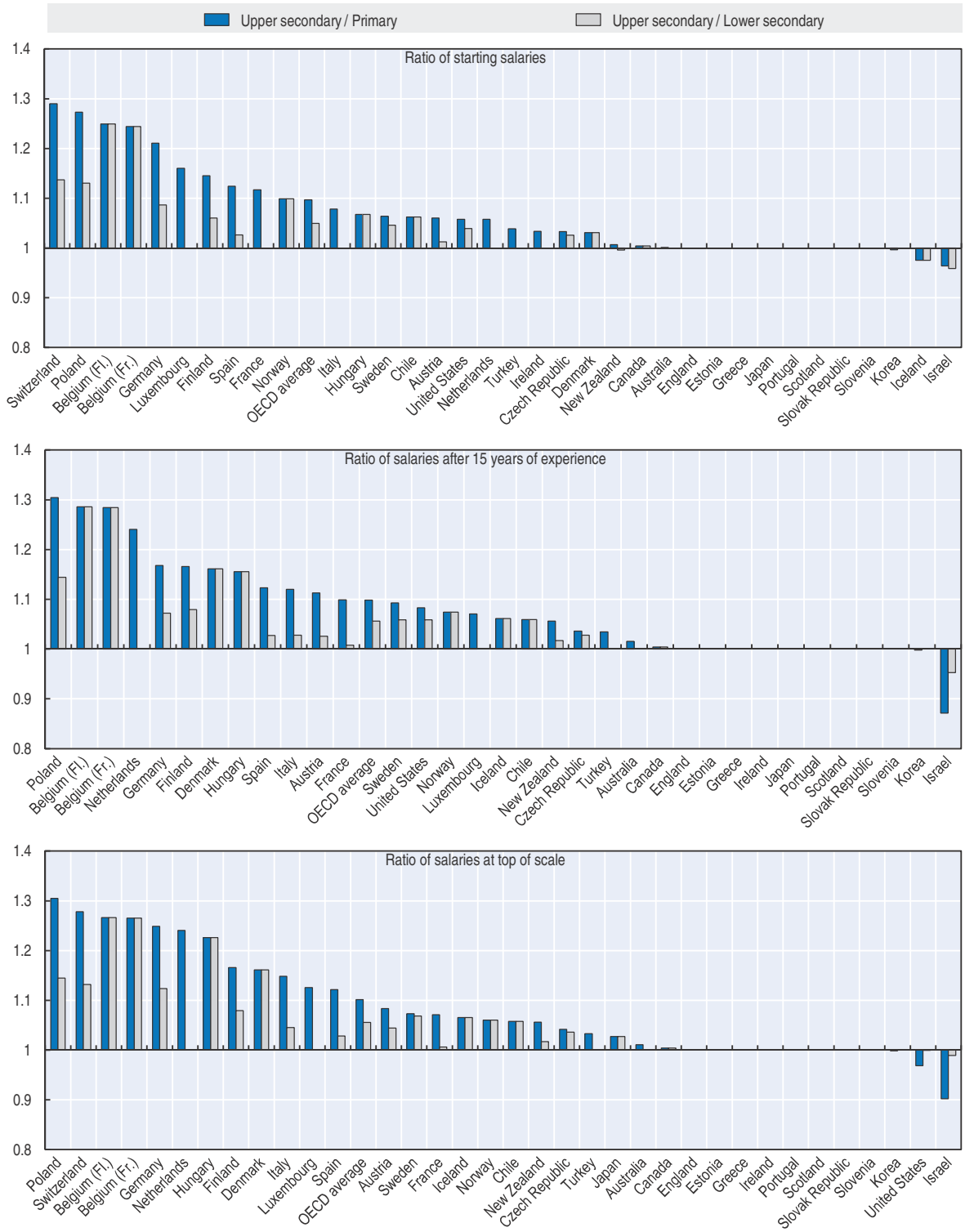
Little flexibility exists regarding teacher incentives. Teachers with a given set of qualifications and seniority are generally paid the same irrespective of their working conditions, level of shortages in the subject area, or school location. This restricts the ability of schools and the system as a whole to address staffing problems or to promote teacher mobility between schools and geographical areas. As explained earlier, working conditions of disadvantaged schools, given difficult socio-economic conditions and high levels of cultural and language diversity, can be particularly challenging for teachers. While these schools receive extra teacher hours, extra benefits to individual teachers are limited to potential smaller classes and fewer teaching hours so they can engage in remedial and other support for students with learning difficulties. However, these latter tasks are not formally recognised in the teaching career and are not always undertaken as part of the "special pedagogical tasks" assigned by the school management team. In fact, some of the non-teaching roles and time are often done on a voluntary basis and are not well defined, especially in those schools facing more difficult circumstances. This may lead to some unevenness of teachers' workload and does not provide any formal recognition to teachers' extra efforts, potentially having a detrimental effect on teacher motivation.

Conceiving teacher employment on the basis of teaching hours raises concerns

The conception of teacher employment in the Flemish Community, whereby basic compensation is associated mostly to the teacher's teaching load, is a source of concern. It implicitly assumes that teachers work further hours in other activities such as preparation

Figure 4.7. **Comparison of teachers' statutory salaries across education levels, public institutions, 2012**

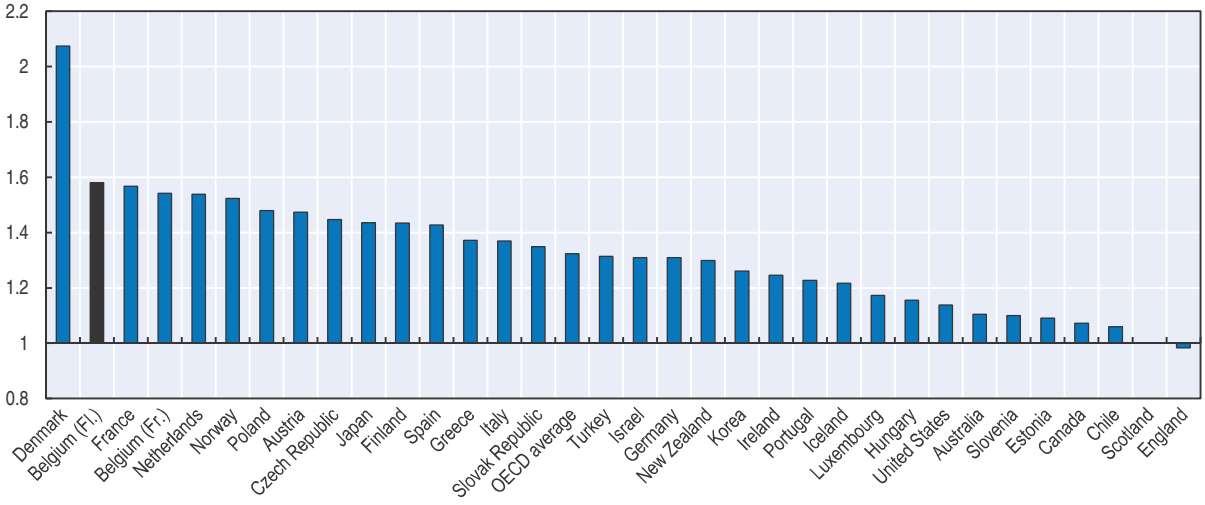
Ratio of salaries at different points of teaching experience, with minimum qualifications



Notes: For Hungary, Sweden and the United States, data refer to actual salaries. For Sweden, the reference year is 2011. For France, data include average bonuses for overtime hours for lower and upper secondary teachers. For the French Community of Belgium data refer to salaries of teachers with typical qualification instead of minimum.

Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en.*

Figure 4.8. **Ratio of salary per teaching hour of upper secondary teachers to primary teachers after 15 years of experience, public institutions, 2012**



Notes: For Hungary, Sweden and the United States, data refer to actual salaries. For Sweden, the reference year is 2011.
Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en.*

of lessons and assessment of students' work but does not explicitly recognise these activities. This approach limits the opportunities for teachers to formally engage in activities other than teaching at the school. Only in pre-primary and primary education is there a time requirement for presence at the school but the associated number of hours is only slightly above the expected number of teaching hours, which does not give much room for other activities within the school. TALIS 2013 data indicate that on average teachers in the Flemish Community invest less time than other countries in tasks other than teaching (see Figure 4.5). This limits teacher engagement in whole-school responsibilities, such as collaboration among teachers, school self-evaluation and improvement planning, which are important for raising the overall quality of teaching and learning at the school.

Teachers' opportunities for feedback and collaboration are limited

While there is a requirement for school principals to appraise their teachers once every four years, both school leaders and teachers interviewed by the OECD review team indicated that given the heavy workload of school principals such formal appraisal was not always systematically implemented for all teachers. Appraisal efforts are often concentrated on the least experienced teachers while appraisal may become an administrative formality for experienced teachers. According to TALIS 2013 data, while almost all Flemish teachers (97.9%) were in schools whose principals reported that teacher appraisal was implemented, 51.3% of Flemish teachers "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that teacher appraisal and feedback were largely done to fulfil administrative requirements, slightly above the TALIS average of 50.6% (OECD, 2014b).

According to TALIS 2013 data, the proportion of lower secondary teachers who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that feedback is provided to teachers based on a thorough assessment of their teaching was 46.9%, similar to the TALIS average of 47.0%. Only 21.4% of lower secondary school principals reported that they often or very often observe instruction in the classroom, compared to an international average of 49%. Classroom

observation was more commonly reported as a tool frequently used by school principals at the primary level (29.1% against TALIS average of 33.1%) (OECD, 2014b). Schools have full autonomy in designing teacher appraisal processes and little is known at the system level regarding the actual aspects appraised and criteria used across schools for teacher appraisal. As a result, teacher appraisal is likely to vary across schools in terms of the methods used, the criteria applied and the use of the results.

Further, there seems to be little tradition of peer feedback among teachers in the Flemish Community. According to TALIS 2013 data, the proportion of teachers who reported never observing other teachers' classes and provide feedback was 74.9% and 75.2% in primary and lower secondary education respectively (against TALIS averages of 49.3% and 44.7% respectively). Similarly, the proportion of teachers who reported never taking part in collaborative professional learning was 31.0% and 45.1% in primary and lower secondary respectively (against TALIS averaged of 17.4% and 15.7% respectively) (OECD, 2014b). Clearly, few teachers seem to work as "critical friends" or peer mentors for one another in developing their practice. However, it should be noted that pedagogical advisory services from school networks were mentioned by several teachers interviewed by the OECD review team as a good source of feedback.

Where teacher appraisal exists, it appears that quite limited use is made of the appraisal results in order to inform teachers' professional and career development. According to 2013 TALIS data, in the Flemish Community only 28.9% of lower secondary teachers agree or strongly agree that teacher appraisal and feedback systems in their school are used to establish a development or training plan to improve their work as a teacher, against a TALIS average of 59.1% (OECD, 2014b). Similarly, only 34.0% of lower secondary Flemish teachers report a moderate or large positive change in the amount of professional development after they received feedback on their work at school, against a TALIS average of 45.8% (OECD, 2014b). There is clearly further room in the Flemish Community for better linking teacher appraisal to individual professional development, which is desirable given that teacher development is one of the main functions of teacher appraisal (OECD, 2013b).

In addition, there seems to be no systematic link between the results of teacher appraisal and teacher career development. The Flemish Community does not have a teacher certification system, where teacher appraisal could be used to certify teachers as fit for the profession. Teacher appraisal does not seem to be used to identify and reward good teaching performance through an association with career progression whereby higher levels of a career structure could be reached by teachers who reveal higher level skills (more on this below). The result is that there are fewer incentives for teachers to perform at their best and to improve knowledge and skills continuously. As there is no guarantee that all teachers are regularly appraised and have their practice observed, the system also lacks a mechanism to ensure that underperformance is identified and addressed.

Lack of a career structure with different steps recognising roles and responsibilities

In the Flemish Community, teachers do not benefit from a clearly established career structure with several steps, associated to a teacher certification process. Salaries are mostly defined in terms of qualifications and seniority and there are no opportunities for formal promotion within teaching (only out of teaching into selection offices or management functions). As a result, there is little formal recognition of the varieties of

roles and responsibilities that teachers actually perform at the school, as part of school's autonomy to organise their teacher hours. While teachers benefit from time allowances to perform other tasks at the school (e.g. remedial courses, student guidance), these are not formally recognised in their career.

In other countries, the existence of a multi-stage career structure for the most part accomplishes two important functions: the recognition of experience and advanced teaching skills with a formal position and additional compensation; and the potential to better match teachers' skills to the roles and responsibilities needed in schools, as more experienced and accomplished teachers may be given special tasks within schools (e.g. department co-ordinator, mentor teacher). These convey the important message that the guiding principle for career advancement is merit and have the benefit of rewarding teachers who choose to remain in the classroom. The lack of opportunities for promotion may contribute to reducing the attractiveness of the profession (OECD, 2005; 2013b).

Variations in school leadership capacity

Among the schools visited by the OECD review team, there were examples of schools where pedagogical leadership was highly developed with school leaders developing clear strategies for the recruitment, professional development and peer learning of their teaching staff. But the OECD review team formed the impression that there is variation across the Flemish Community in school leaders' capacity to organise these tasks successfully. This was also noted by a previous OECD review on school evaluation in the Flemish Community (Shewbridge et al., 2011).

School leadership has been a priority theme in the Flemish Community in the past. A range of important initiatives have been introduced in recent years by the Pedagogical Advisory Services and the umbrella networks have received public funding to run in-service training related to their own educational aims. However, although all school networks organise their own procedures and training courses for school leaders, these courses are not compulsory, except in the Community education network, where candidates for promotion to management functions are required to complete additional training. In the other networks, anyone who is allowed to teach can also become a school leader with no obligation to follow an additional training programme (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

School boards organise the recruitment of school leaders autonomously. National standards or common required competencies for school leaders do not exist, although the Community education network has a developed a set of competencies that are required for its school leaders. In the context of freedom of education, it is the school boards' responsibility to determine school leaders' responsibilities, select and appoint school leaders and take responsibility for their further career development. The extent to which these tasks are done in a systematic or strategic manner is very much at the discretion of school boards.

Policy recommendations

Make the teaching profession more attractive

In light of the current demographic trends, it is important to ensure that well qualified candidates enter the teaching profession at an adequate rate. Even if there appears to be no overall shortage of teachers, it is important for the school system to ensure a given rate

of teacher renewal so the school system is continuously provided with new ideas and perspectives. It is also important that effective beginning teachers are retained in the profession. Responding to future teacher needs does not necessarily involve hiring a greater number of teachers but instead finding ways to better match teacher resources to student needs (e.g. possibly reducing the number of small classes in secondary education), improving the retention of effective beginning teachers, enhancing the mobility of teachers across the system (and the school networks) so instances of shortage are more easily addressed, and attracting talented individuals into the teaching profession.

A number of policies could strengthen the ability of the Flemish school system to ensure adequate teacher resources to meet the coming challenges. Priorities include improving the status of initial teacher education, including through raising the qualification requirements for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary teachers; improving the working conditions of beginning teachers by granting them greater job security; and enhancing their chances of working in less difficult schools (or be better compensated for working in more disadvantaged schools). These suggestions will be discussed in greater detail below. Efforts also need to be undertaken to reduce the administrative burden of teachers. Finally, the teaching profession itself needs to play a more active role in designing teacher education programmes, and determining who meets the criteria to enter the profession (i.e. introducing more self-regulation in the teaching profession). The views and experience of effective teachers and school leaders need to be central to the teacher education reforms.

Improve the provision and status of initial teacher education

Attract talented graduates from secondary education into teacher education

In order to make initial teacher education more attractive to high achieving graduates from secondary education, a number of strategies can be considered. These include: providing more information and counselling to prospective teacher students so that they can make well-informed enrolment decisions; procedures that try to assess whether the individuals wanting to become teachers have the necessary motivation, skills, knowledge and personal qualities (specific assessments); financial incentive schemes to recruit candidates with high-level competencies (such as higher education grants or loans with favourable conditions); and flexible programme structures that provide students with school experience early in the course and opportunities to move into other courses if their motivation towards teaching changes. There is also a need to develop specific strategies to attract males and individuals with an immigrant background into initial teacher education so the teaching workforce better matches the characteristics of the student population.

Enhance the status of teachers in elementary and lower secondary education

The above analysis points to the need to improve the status of teachers in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education by raising the qualification requirements for teaching at these levels. There is no reason, from the perspective of the professional roles and responsibilities of teachers, for qualification requirements of upper secondary teachers to be higher. The OECD review team would suggest developing a long-term strategy to raise qualifications requirements for all new teachers to the master's level. Of course, such a strategy would have significant budgetary implications as it would also require placing all teachers on a common salary structure regardless of the level at which they teach. New qualification requirements and steps towards convergence of salaries for

teachers at different educational levels would need to be phased in over time. The integration of the newly higher qualified teachers at the pre-primary, primary and lower secondary levels could potentially match the rate at which more experienced (and more "expensive") teachers retire from the system, making it more feasible to transition to a new system. During the transition period, distinct salary scales would co-exist to reflect different qualification levels of teachers. The upgrade of qualification requirements could help contribute to the improvement of the status and attractiveness of the teaching profession as a whole. It is in line with the suggestion made in Chapter 2 to rebalance the resource effort between levels of education.

Strengthen the preparation for all teachers to deal with diversity and special educational needs

There is a clear need to strengthen the preparation of all teachers to deal with the diverse needs of their students. Teaching students with a different language background, from a disadvantaged family or with special educational needs should not be seen as an isolated task for specialist teachers (those offering counselling or remedial support) as this has become of the regular work of most teachers every day. Hence, it is of great importance to mainstream elements of teaching diverse classrooms in general initial teacher education and not just in separate or specialised courses. It is also imperative to ensure a relevant offer of professional development programmes for teachers to improve their ability to successfully address diversity in their classrooms.

Two dimensions of diversity are particularly relevant in the Flemish context. First, greater efforts are needed to strengthen the preparation of all teachers to instruct students with special educational needs. This is key to the current efforts to include students with special needs in mainstream schools. It calls for initial teacher education institutions to ensure that special needs becomes a regular area for the initial education of any teacher, regardless of the type of school at which he or she will teach. This would require going beyond the current concept of "specialisation" as a preparation for teaching special needs students. However, teachers concentrating on the teaching of special needs students should be required to obtain the associated more in-depth specialisation. In addition, it is also important to develop professional development programmes targeted at developing skills to support special needs students in mainstream schools.

Second, it is of high relevance to ensure that teachers give due attention to the language development needs of their students. An adequate preparation for diversity in the classroom and skills to provide student individualised attention will help teachers become more aware of individual language development needs and reduce the risk that they categorise immigrant students as having special education needs or learning difficulties because of language difficulties. Also, while early language support is essential, the school system has an important role in supporting the continued development of academic language of immigrant students over several years, and across all subjects. This requires intense co-ordination between language support teachers and subject teachers.

Programme provision in other countries with a high proportion of immigrant students recognises that acquiring the level of language proficiency to fully benefit from schooling is a prolonged process. While functionality in the everyday use of the host tongue may be achieved within 1-2 years, it takes much longer (5-7 years) for second language learners to "catch up to their age peers in academic language" (Ontario, 2007). In the state of New South Wales in Australia, the guidelines for the provision of English as a Second Language programmes are

based on a classification of learners into three phases. Phase 1 learners generally require nine months to move beyond a very basic level of proficiency, three years to move beyond Phase 2, and seven years to move beyond Phase 3 (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004). Added to individual variation in language growth (reflecting factors such as parental education) is the impact of differences in the school environments in which formal and informal learning is occurring. There are concerns about segregation in Flemish schools as there is in Belgium more widely (for Flemish schools, see Wouters and Groenez, 2013; for Belgium, see OECD, 2015: 71). This implies different learning conditions and challenges.

It is only since September 2014 that Dutch language proficiency of all commencing students in Flemish schools has been systematically assessed (OECD, 2015: 75). The question is whether adequate additional support is being provided and whether teachers are sufficiently prepared to provide such support effectively. This should be tested by suitably designed assessments of progress, including in different school settings.

Improve the transparency and effectiveness of the teacher labour market

Greater effectiveness in the functioning of the teacher labour market calls for better portability of statutory rights across school networks, more flexibility of recruitment regulations and a more systematic dissemination of teacher vacancies. First, improving the portability of statutory rights essentially involves ensuring the recognition of the permanent status of teachers across school networks, groups and associations (in addition to keeping the current portability of pension rights and salary levels). While legal obstacles to such recognition have been cleared, teacher recruitment traditions by network remain strong. Portability could be facilitated by a planning of permanent posts across schools undertaken at the system level in alignment with the establishment of a career structure i.e. defining posts at the system level as permanent and then assigning teachers to them through open competitions. This would facilitate teacher mobility across the Flemish school system.

Second, recruitment regulations whereby schools have to give priority to the candidate with a permanent appointment and preference to candidates from the same school network should be reviewed. Given the proposed career structure, whereby different stages correspond to distinct skills and experience, schools should feel free to target the competencies they most need – for given tasks and roles – regardless of the employment status of teachers. This would allow schools to better achieve the mix of experience and skills that is optimal for the challenges they face.

Third, a priority is to improve the information flow in the teacher labour market. The development of transparent and prompt systems to close the information gaps between teachers and schools is essential for an effective functioning of the teacher labour market, especially in a system where schools are more directly involved in teacher recruitment and selection. This should involve the requirement that schools advertise their teaching vacancies and the development of websites at the system, network and group level where information about teacher vacancies is systematically made available (also building on the existing website initiative by the Ministry of Education and Training and the Flemish public employment service). Existing initiatives in this area should be further expanded. This is likely to considerably improve the transparency of teacher recruitment at the school level.

Work towards a more equitable distribution of teachers across schools

In complement to the current approach of addressing socio-economic disadvantage through the provision of additional teacher hours, the response to the current inequities in

the distribution of teachers across schools could involve a twofold strategy. First, incentives should also target individual teachers so disadvantaged schools are in a better position to attract more experienced and higher quality teachers. This would involve paying special allowances and support for teachers who work in schools facing more challenging circumstances. This should be in addition to non-salary strategies such as lower class contact times or smaller classes, for schools working with socio-economically less advantaged students or schools which have particular needs. The objective would be to compensate individual teachers for the more challenging working conditions. Given the concentration of beginning teachers in disadvantaged schools, this could also help lower the high levels of teacher attrition in the first few years of the career. The principle of targeted allowances could also apply to areas or subjects in which teachers are in short supply.

Second, based on the above analysis, the OECD review team suggests working towards a more equitable distribution of expenditure for teacher salaries across schools. As explained earlier, schools enrolling more socio-economically advantaged students are in a better position to attract more experienced teachers, and the Flemish Community *de facto* provides more resources to these schools in terms of actual salaries paid to the hired teachers. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a lack of transparency about the real level of funding for teacher salaries across different schools. Ensuring greater transparency in this area would help stimulate a debate around the inequities created by this system in terms of actual resources invested per student, and the need to move towards a fairer distribution of resources across schools.

In addition, steps could be taken to make schools take responsibility for the cost impact of their hiring decisions and work within a defined budget for teacher salaries. Moving towards a system that provides resources for teacher pay on the basis of a normative for teacher salary (e.g. salary of an "average-experience" teacher) rather than on the basis of actual teacher salaries could provide greater opportunities to disadvantaged schools to either: i) pay a salary allowance to attract more experienced teachers to their school (in case the suggested teacher allowance for difficult working conditions is paid through the school); or ii) hire a greater number of teachers with less experience given that they would benefit from an overall greater budget for teacher salaries. Such an approach would also be consistent with a concept whereby schools seek a diverse teaching body in terms of experience and background and not necessarily the greatest possible number of experienced teachers.

Reconceptualise teacher employment on the basis of a workload system

Making the work of teachers more effective in the Flemish Community could also benefit from a new concept of teacher employment. One option would be to move to employment under a workload system, whereby teachers work a specified number of hours per week (e.g. 40 hours), a proportion of which are devoted to teaching. This would involve stipulating the required number of working hours (and possibly hours required to stay at the school) but not necessarily the number of teaching hours. This concept of teacher employment recognises that teachers need time for engaging in a range of other tasks, including the adequate preparation of lessons. This is likely to improve the opportunities for teachers to formally engage in activities other than teaching at the school level. In particular, school management would be in a better position to foster teacher collaboration, promote whole-school planning and develop professional learning communities. This would also favour the promotion of peer feedback and joint work among teachers.

Ensure that all teachers have opportunities for regular professional feedback and relevant professional learning

While there is a requirement for school leaders to appraise their teachers every four years, the above analysis indicates that teachers do not have sufficient opportunities for regular professional feedback. To strengthen school-based teacher appraisal it is important to enhance pedagogical leadership in schools. This would imply improving school leader's skills for effective observation, feedback and coaching. A more systematic use of the existing teaching standards could help provide a common basis for school-based teacher appraisal and make it more consistent across schools. At present, school leaders' involvement in teacher appraisal and coaching is still rather limited. School leaders, especially in elementary education, report that this is also related to a lack of time and administrative support.

In this context, it is also important to promote more distributed leadership and involvement of senior peers in regular teacher evaluation, classroom observation, and planning of professional development. In addition, it is important to develop a culture where teachers to engage informally in observations of each other's practices with the objective of fostering mutual learning among teachers. These practices would benefit from a new concept of teacher employment based on working hours (rather than teaching hours, see above) whereby the formal recognition of activities other than teaching at the school would promote collaborative work among teachers. At the same time, increased peer mentoring and work among groups of teachers would decrease the dependency on an external service for pedagogical advice. Pedagogical advisors could work more with groups of teachers and school leaders to build professional learning communities and ensure that they have up to date knowledge on effective practice.

For teacher appraisal to have an impact on learning outcomes in the school, it needs to be closely connected to professional development. This link is not yet systematic in Flemish schools. At the school level, teachers' individual choices of professional development should be more strongly influenced by i) their own appraisal results and identification of areas for improvement, and ii) priorities of the school development plan. Effective teacher appraisal should give teachers a choice from a range of professional learning activities that meet their individual needs in relation to the priorities of the school's overall development plan. The appraisal results of individual teachers should also be aggregated to inform school development plans. In Korea, for example, results of the teacher peer review processes not only feed into teachers' individual professional development plans, but are also used to inform a synthetic report on professional development for the whole school bringing together the results of all appraised teachers (without identifying individual teachers) (Kim et al., 2010).

In order to guarantee the systematic and coherent application of school-based teacher appraisal across Flemish schools, it would be important to ensure external validation of the respective school processes. While the use of teaching standards as the main reference for teacher appraisal will support the consistency of school-based teacher appraisal across schools, there is still a need to ensure these processes are appropriately conducted in all schools. This should be part of the school boards' processes to appraise school leadership.

Strengthen the capacity of school leadership

Flemish school leaders enjoy a high level of autonomy and responsibility, including for ensuring that all their staff receive formal and informal opportunities for feedback and

professional learning. Leithwood et al. (2004) argued that given their potential impact on policy implementation, efforts to improve school leader recruitment and career advancement, including appraisal and ongoing professional development, can constitute highly cost-effective measures for improving teaching and learning in schools. In fact, several countries recognised the potential high rates of return on investments in improving school leadership during the 2012 International Summit on the Teaching Profession (Asia Society, 2012; Schleicher, 2012). In this context, the OECD review team recommends further building the capacity of school leaders as a key priority of the Flemish school system.

In an OECD review of school evaluation in the Flemish Community, Shewbridge et al. (2011) recommended that the following elements should be part of a national strategy for strengthening school leadership: establishing a Flemish framework for leadership competencies; developing new leadership roles; refining leadership training; and providing appropriate and accessible resources. Further developing the performance appraisal of school leaders was also recommended as an important area for policy development so that leaders themselves can receive external feedback and targeted support to improve practice. For this purpose, the Flemish authorities could consider to provide further support and materials for school boards on how to organise school leadership appraisal effectively. It would also be helpful to ensure that the evaluation of school leadership is part of school self-evaluation activities and that the Inspectorate has access to and reviews documentation from school leader appraisals as a basis for its inspection visits (for more detail, see Shewbridge et al., 2011).

Consider establishing a common teacher career structure linked to teacher certification processes

The OECD review team noted that the absence of a career structure for teachers undermines the formal recognition of the varieties of roles and responsibilities that teachers actually perform at the school, in the context of schools' autonomy in managing the teaching workforce. There is no mechanism to more formally link acquired skills and experiences with specific roles to be performed at the school. As a result, schools and teachers could benefit from a career structure for teachers that comprised a range of career steps or pathways, associated with distinct roles and responsibilities in schools in relation to given levels of teaching expertise. Access to different steps or pathways should be voluntary and be associated with formal processes of evaluation.

An important objective should be to align expectations of skills and competencies at different stages of the career (as reflected in teaching standards or professional profiles) and the responsibilities of teachers in schools (as reflected in career structures). Such alignment would reflect the principle of rewarding teachers for accomplishing higher levels of expertise through career advancement and would strengthen the linkages between responsibilities in schools and the levels of expertise needed to perform them (OECD, 2013b). Such a career structure should formalise opportunities for greater career diversification, which are likely to have a positive motivational effect and increase the attractiveness of the profession.

It would be beneficial to introduce a teacher certification or registration system to regulate access to different stages of a multi-stage career structure proposed above. Such certification or registration processes officially confirm teachers as competent for teaching practice. Teachers could be provisionally registered upon completing initial teacher education and advancement to fully certified teaching status could occur upon successful

completion of a probationary teaching period and/or following an appraisal against certification criteria. A teacher certification or registration system would offer the opportunity to re-balance job security between temporary and permanent teachers. The objective would be to move to a system whereby following an initial probationary period (and the associated mentoring programme), teachers would have the opportunity to go for certification to obtain a permanent post. This permanent post would then need to be confirmed periodically through the re-certification process. In this approach, teachers achieve employment security by continuing to do a good job, rather than by regulation that effectively guarantees their employment.

In countries where teacher certification or registration exists, the process typically involves external evaluators or a national teaching council or agency responsible for teacher certification to ensure fairness and consistency. After teachers have become fully registered, they typically have to renew their certification status every few years. This can be organised in different ways and could involve a simple attestation by a school-based committee (preferably with an external member) that the teacher is continuing to meet the agreed standards of practice. Teacher certification would have as its main purposes providing public assurance with regard to teachers' standards of practice, determining advancement in the career, and informing the professional development plan of the teacher. This approach would convey the message that reaching high standards of performance is the main road to career advancement in the profession.

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ANNEX 4.A1

Number of school staff, by level, type of education and School Network, 2008, 2011, 2014

Table 4.A1.1. **Number of school staff, by level, type of education and school network, 2008, 2011, 2014**

	2008		2011		2014	Change of total staff between 2008 and 2014 (%)
	Management and teaching staff	Total staff	Management and teaching staff	Total staff	Total staff	
Mainstream Elementary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	6 989	7963	7096	7990	8601	8.0
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	10 904	11 759	11 156	12 178	13 135	11.7
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	28 335	30 606	28 559	31 185	32 810	7.2
Total	**46 228**	**50 328**	**46 811**	**51 353**	**54 546**	8.4
Special Elementary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	1 351	2 681	1 496	2 181	2 279	-15.0
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	882	1 144	913	1 217	1 253	9.5
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	3 556	4 632	3 699	4 869	4 988	7.7
Total	**5 789**	**8 457**	**6 108**	**8 267**	**8 520**	0.7
Total Elementary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	8 340	10 644	8 592	10 171	10 880	2.2
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	11 786	12 903	12 069	13 395	14 388	11.5
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	31 891	35 238	32 258	36 054	37 798	7.3
Total	**52 017**	**58 785**	**52 919**	**59 620**	**63 066**	7.3
Mainstream Secondary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	10 859	12630	11111	12734	12469	-1.3
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	5 380	5988	5283	5890	5642	-5.8
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	40 016	44459	39388	43875	42402	-4.6
Total	**56 255**	**63077**	**55782**	**62499**	**60513**	-4.1
Special Secondary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	1 229	1536	1381	1702	2016	31.3
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	751	870	813	938	1014	16.6
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	3 585	4159	3953	4588	4914	18.2
Total	**5 565**	**6565**	**6147**	**7228**	**7944**	21.0
Total Secondary Education						
Community Education (GO!)	12 088	14166	12492	14436	14485	2.3
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	6 131	6858	6096	6828	6656	-2.9
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	43 601	48618	43341	48463	47316	-2.7
Total	**61 820**	**69642**	**61929**	**69727**	**68457**	-1.7
All levels of education						
Community Education (GO!)	20 428	24810	21084	24607	25365	2.2
Municipal and provincial schools (OGO)	17 917	19761	18165	20223	21044	6.5
Publicly-subsidised private education (VGO)	75 492	83856	75599	84517	85 114	1.5
Total	**113 837**	**128 427**	**114 848**	**1293 47**	**131 523**	2.4

Notes: Based on full-time equivalents. "Total staff" include school principals, deputy-principals, teaching staff, administrative staff, manual staff in Community Education, educational support staff, paramedic staff, staff of student guidance centres, inspectorate staff, educational advisors, staff in boarding schools and child care workers in nursery education. Data only on "Management and teaching staff" were not available for 2014.
Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (2014; 2011; 2008), *Flemish Education in Figures*, *http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/onderwijsstatistieken*, 2013-14, 2010-11 and 2007--2008 editions.

ANNEX 4.A2

Main features of the teaching profession: initial education, employment status and teacher evaluation

Initial education

Following a reform of teacher education undertaken in 2007, two types of teacher education programmes are offered (Eurydice, 2015):

- **Integrated teacher education programmes:** These are professional 3-year Bachelor of Education degree programmes (pre-primary, primary, or secondary education) which integrate subject-specific and pedagogical components. They are offered by university colleges. These programmes involve a practical component (practice in a school) corresponding to 45 credits (against a total of 180 credits for the programme). The secondary education programme involves two teaching subjects. Quality assurance follows the usual procedures in higher education: self-evaluation, external reviews and accreditation.
- **Specific teacher education:** These are programmes attended in addition to or after a subject-specific initial programme (at bachelor's or master's level) or a particular form of professional experience. They are offered by university colleges (mostly for graduates of professional bachelor's degrees), universities (for graduates of master's programmes) and centres for adult education (CVO) (open to everyone, including holders of a diploma of secondary education). These programmes are targeted at individuals who have a higher education or adult education degree or who have relevant professional experience and only need additional pedagogical training to enter teaching. The programmes comprise a workload of 60 credits of which 30 credits are specifically dedicated to the practical component, reflecting the integration of theory and practice. The practical component can be undertaken during the programme (pre-service training) or while on the job (in-service training, in a Trainee Teacher position). Specific teacher education programmes can come in three forms: i) as a "built-in" programme, in other words as a specialisation in a subject-specific programme (e.g. university colleges and universities can offer a 30-credit teacher education programme as part of a 120-credit master's programme); ii) as a programme contiguous to a subject-specific programme; and iii) as a separate training programme for individuals who wish to switch to a teacher career following another professional experience.

During initial teacher education and throughout their first year teaching in a school, teacher students receive guidance from the mentor in the school and from the training counsellor, a member of the staff at the initial teacher education institution. A similar

approach is followed for trainee teacher positions, in the context of specific teacher education. Quality assurance of initial teacher education is done by means of self-evaluation and external reviews (there is not accreditation of programmes).

Employment status

There are three stages in the contractual status of teachers (Eurydice, 2015):

- **Temporary appointment of definite duration:** All starting teachers are given a temporary appointment of definite duration, which does not exceed one year, can be renewed, and is associated with either a vacant or non-vacant position.
- **Temporary appointment of continuous duration:** Following a minimum of 720 days teaching, spread over a minimum of three school years, the teacher can be given a temporary appointment of continuous duration (i.e. is automatically renewed if the respective school is funded the associated teaching hours), which is associated with either a vacant or non-vacant position. The provision of this contractual status is based on a priority system and requires that the latest teacher evaluation did not rate the teacher's performance as "insufficient".
- **Permanent appointment:** A permanent contract can be granted if: i) a permanent position is available and the teacher successfully applies for the post; ii) the teacher accumulated a minimum of 720 days of service of which at least 360 days were in the positon to which the teacher is to be permanently appointed; and iii) the teacher held a temporary position of continuous duration on the 31 December preceding the permanent appointment.

Teacher evaluation

Teachers in the Flemish Community undergo a formal evaluation by the school leadership at least once every four years. The evaluation process involves the following steps (Eurydice, 2015):

- **Appointment of evaluators:** Each teacher has two evaluators who work at the same school or in another school belonging to the same school board. The first evaluator is in charge of guidance and coaching while the second evaluator assesses the teacher's performance. Training for evaluators, for which the Flemish Government provides funding, is recommended.
- **Drafting of the job description:** The job description is drafted by the first evaluator in consultation with the teacher. It consists of three parts: i) the tasks and school-related assignments and the manner in which the teacher must carry them out; ii) the school-specific objectives; and iii) the rights and obligations regarding professional development.
- **Evaluation of teacher, including coaching and guidance:** The evaluation typically involves classroom observation and an evaluation interview in which the performance of the teacher is discussed against his or her job description.
- **Evaluation results, including possible consequences:** The evaluation results are described in a report, which includes a rate. Temporary members of staff, appointed for a definite period of time, are dismissed if they receive the "insufficient" rate. In the case of permanent teachers or temporary teachers appointed for a continuous duration, dismissal occurs when the teacher receives two consecutive "insufficient" rates or when the teacher receives three "insufficient" rates throughout the career. In case an

"insufficient" rate does not lead to dismissal, the teachers will need to undergo a new evaluation within the next 12 months of service. In case of disagreement with the evaluation conclusions, the teacher has the possibility to appeal to the evaluation board. Personal and development objectives can also be added to the job description following an evaluation.

ANNEX A

The OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in School

The ***OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools*** (also referred to as the *School Resources Review*) is designed to respond to the strong interest in the effective use of school resources evident at national and international levels. It provides analysis and policy advice on how to distribute, utilise and manage resources so that they contribute to achieving effectiveness and efficiency objectives in education. School resources are understood in a broad way, including financial resources (e.g. expenditures on education, school budget), physical resources (e.g. school buildings, computers), human resources (e.g. teachers, school leaders) and other resources (e.g. learning time).

Fifteen education systems are actively engaged in the Review. These cover a wide range of economic and social contexts, and among them they illustrate quite different approaches to the use of resources in school systems. This will allow a comparative perspective on key policy issues. Participating countries prepare a detailed background report, following a standard set of guidelines. Some of the participating countries have also opted for a detailed Review, undertaken by a team consisting of members of the OECD Secretariat and external experts. Insofar, the participating countries are (in bold those that have opted for an individual Review): **Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community)**, Belgium (French Community), **Chile**, **Czech Republic**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, Iceland, **Kazakhstan**, **Lithuania**, Luxembourg, **Slovak Republic**, Spain, Sweden and **Uruguay**. The final comparative report from the OECD Review, bringing together lessons from all countries, will be completed in 2016.

The project is overseen by the Group of National Experts on School Resources, which was established as a subsidiary body of the OECD Education Policy Committee in order to guide the methods, timing and principles of the Review. More details are available from the website dedicated to the Review: *www.oecd.org/education/schoolresourcesreview*.

ANNEX B

Composition of the Review Team

Gary Miron is Professor of Evaluation, Measurement, and Research at Western Michigan University. He has extensive experience evaluating school reforms and education policies in the United States and Europe. Dr. Miron has prepared and directed more than 60 evaluations and research studies that have been funded with grants and contracts from national or international agencies as well as private foundations and non-governmental organisations. His body of scholarship covers such topics as research training and capacity building, international development, school finance, special education, and school choice. In recent years, his research has increasingly focused on private education management organisations as well as efforts to create systemic change in school districts. Prior to coming to Western Michigan University in 1997, Dr. Miron worked for 10 years at Stockholm University where his research focused on voucher reforms and school restructuring in 4 European countries. At Western Michigan University, Dr. Miron teaches graduate courses on evaluation and research methods.

Deborah Nusche, a German national, is a Policy Analyst in the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, where she has been since 2007. Prior to joining the School Resources Review, she conducted policy analysis for three major cross-country studies at the OECD: a review of school leadership policy and practice leading to the two-volume publication "Improving School Leadership" (2008); a review of migrant education leading to the OECD publication "Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students" (2010); and a review of evaluation and assessment in education, leading to the OECD publication "Synergies for Better Learning" (2013). She also conducted thematic education policy reviews in 15 OECD countries. She has previous work experience with the OECD's Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Paulo Santiago, a Portuguese national, is a Senior Analyst in the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, where he has been since 2000. He is currently the co-ordinator of the OECD School Resources Review. He has previously assumed responsibility for three major cross-country reviews, each with the participation of over twenty countries: a review of teacher policy (2002-05), leading to the OECD publication "Teachers Matter"; a thematic review of tertiary education (2005-08), leading to the OECD publication "Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society"; and a review of evaluation and assessment policy at the school level (2009-13), leading to the OECD publication "Synergies for Better Learning". He has also

led reviews of teacher policy, tertiary education policy and educational evaluation policy in over 25 countries. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from Northwestern University, United States, where he also lectured.

Richard Teese is Professor and Director of the Centre for Research on Education Systems in the University of Melbourne. His research is concerned with how well education systems work, for whom and why. Richard works closely with state governments in Australia on system improvement and equity, resource allocation and budget models, student achievement differences, destinations monitoring, and curriculum provision and participation in schools. A major area of Richard's work relates to how schools are funded. In 2003-04 and again in 2007-08 he assisted in designing a student-centred model of resource allocation for public schools in Victoria. In 2008-09 he investigated funding patterns and equity in Catholic schools and in 2012 examined the funding model of Western Australian public schools. For the Australian review of funding, he examined the comparative performance of public and private schools, long-term changes in social intakes, and local-area differences in enrolment patterns. Richard Teese participated in the OECD studies of equity in Spain (2005), Scotland (2007), and Ontario (2010).

ANNEX C

Visit programme

Monday, 3 November 2014, Brussels	
12:30-14:00	Light lunch followed by meeting of visiting experts and CBR co-ordination team
14:00-15:30	Joint meeting with officials from the Department of Education and Training from most relevant divisions on general policies on funding of school education 14.00-14.45: operational budget 14.45-15.30: staffing • Division of elementary education • Division of secondary education • Division of education staff • Division of statistical and budget services
15:30-16:30	Meeting with Agency of Educational Services (AgODI)
16:30-18:00	Meeting on infrastructure with Flemish Agency for Educational Infrastructure (AGIOn) and Flemish Community Commission in Brussels
Tuesday, 4 November 2014, Brussels, Heuvelland	
08:00-12:00	Meetings with part of main school education provider associations (umbrella organisations) and Court of Audit – Boudewijn Building • 08:00-09:30: GO! Education of the Flemish Community (Community education) • 10:00-11:00: OVSG – Education of Cities and Municipalities (subsidised public education) • 11:00-12:00: OKO – smaller education providers (subsidised private education)
15:00-17:15	School Visit – **Vrije Basisschool Wijtschate (Heuvelland)** • Headmaster • Head of school board • Teachers • Students • Representative of school board and school association
Wednesday, 5 November 2014, Brussels	
08:30-10:30	School Visit – **Sint-Guido Instituut Anderlecht** • Headmaster • Head of school board • Teachers • Students • Representative of school board and school association
11:00-13:00	School Visit – **Koninklijk Atheneum Anderlecht** • Headmaster • Teachers • Students • Representative of school board • Direction of school group Brussels
15:00-16:00	Meeting with Flemish Education Council (stakeholders' advisory council) • Secretary general
16:00-17:00	Meeting with group of academics with research focus on staffing • KU Leuven

Thursday, 6 November 2014, Antwerp	
09:00-12:00	School Visit – **Koninklijk Atheneum Brasschaat** • Headmaster • General director of Agora school group • Staff • Students
12:30-14:00	Lunch with City of Antwerp Government and Autonomous City Enterprise for Education • Vice Mayor for Education and Legal Affairs • General Director, Autonomous City Enterprise • Managing Director, Autonomous City Enterprise • Director of division of special education, Autonomous City Enterprise • Director of Centre for Student Guidance, Autonomous City Enterprise
15:00-18:00	School Visit and meeting with City of Antwerp – **Stedelijke Basisschool voor Buitengewoon Onderwijs – De Leerexpert (Leyweg)** • Headmaster • Staff
Friday, 7 November 2014, Ieper	
09:00-11:30	School Visit in Ieper – **Immaculata Instituut** • Headmaster • Representative of School Association • Teachers • Students
14:30-16:00	Meeting with City Government Vilvoorde – **Stedelijke Basisschool De Groene Planeet** • Alderman for Financial Affairs, Education and Prevention • Staff
16:00-17:00	School Visit – **Stedelijke Basisschool De Groene Planeet** • Headmaster • Staff • Students
Monday, 10 November 2014, Brussels	
09:00-10:00	Meeting with VSKO (Flemish Secretariat of Catholic Education)
10:00-11:00	Meeting with teacher unions • ACOD • COV • VSOA
11:00-11:30	Meeting with parents associations
11:30-12:00	Meeting with student association • Students
12:00-12:45	Meeting with Inspectorate
12:45-13:30	Lunch with Belgian Court of Audit
13:30-14:30	Meeting with associations of school directors • DIVO • DBSG • VIRBO • ODVB • VIGOM
14:30-16:00	Meeting with academics with research focus on economics and sociology of education • KU Leuven • VU Brussel • U Antwerpen
16:00-17:00	Wrap-up • Secretary General • CBR co-ordination team
17:00-17:40	Meeting with Flemish Minister of Education • Minister Hilde Crevits • Vice Director of Cabinet • CBR co-ordination team

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