

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 (AGIO); 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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