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

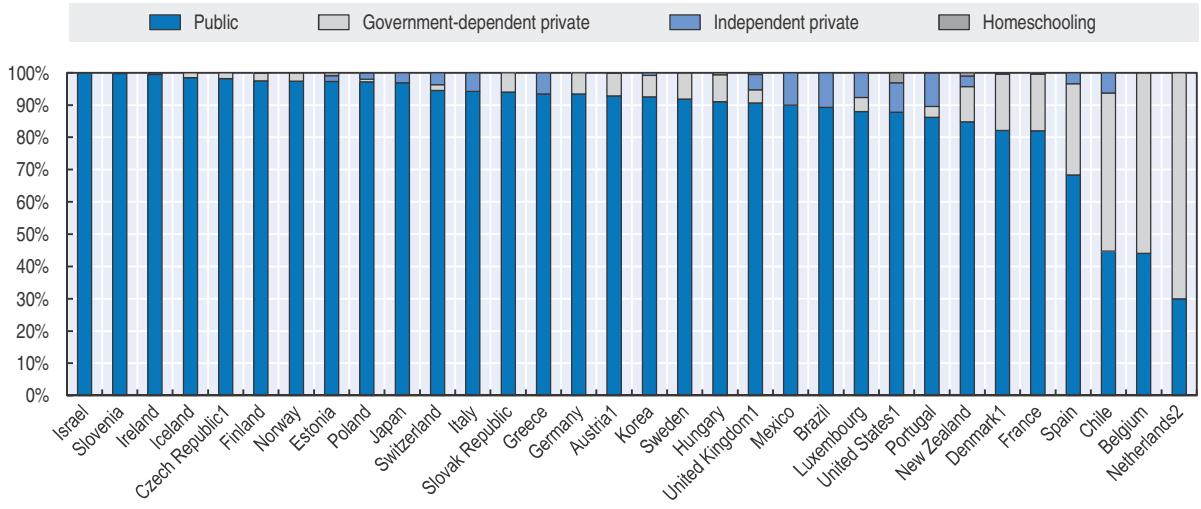
Broadly speaking, the goals of the Flemish education system that were most often spoken of during the OECD review visit are to provide quality education for all children and to deliver this education efficiently and in a way that ensures equity. Efficiency is an important priority given the challenges 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

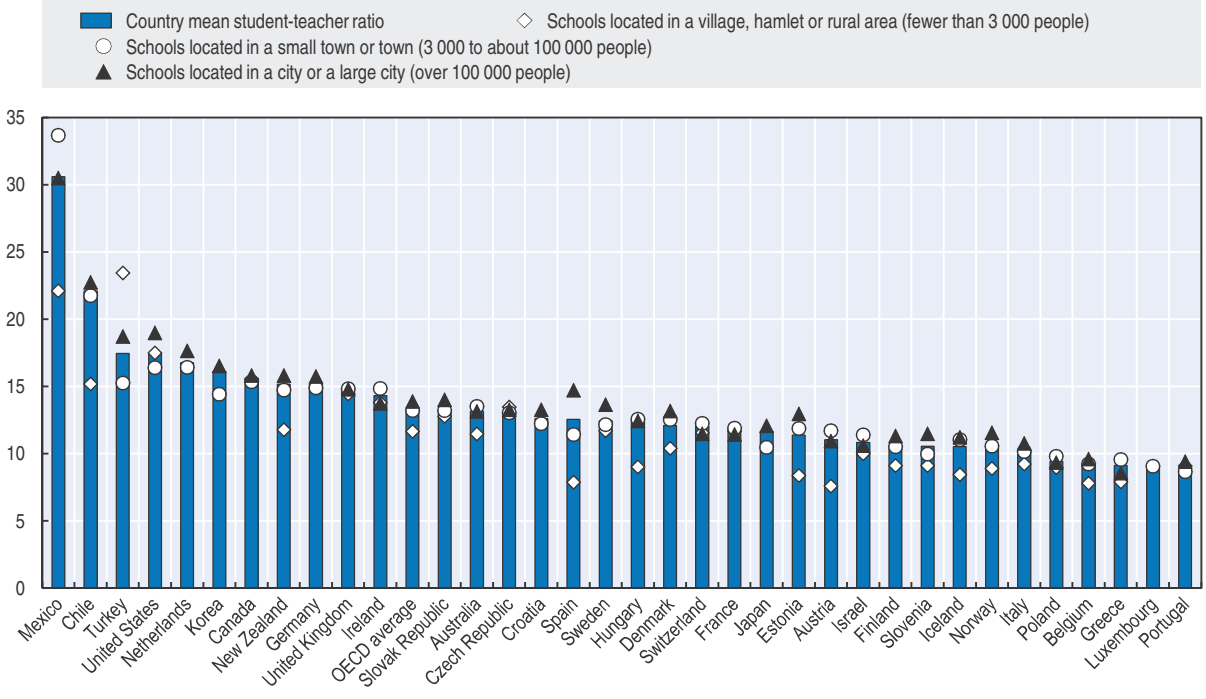
different ages. Early childhood education for children aged 2.5 to 6 is offered free of charge in a school setting and has therefore almost universal participation independently of the parents' employment status. On the other hand, early education and care for children below age 2.5 is a paid service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

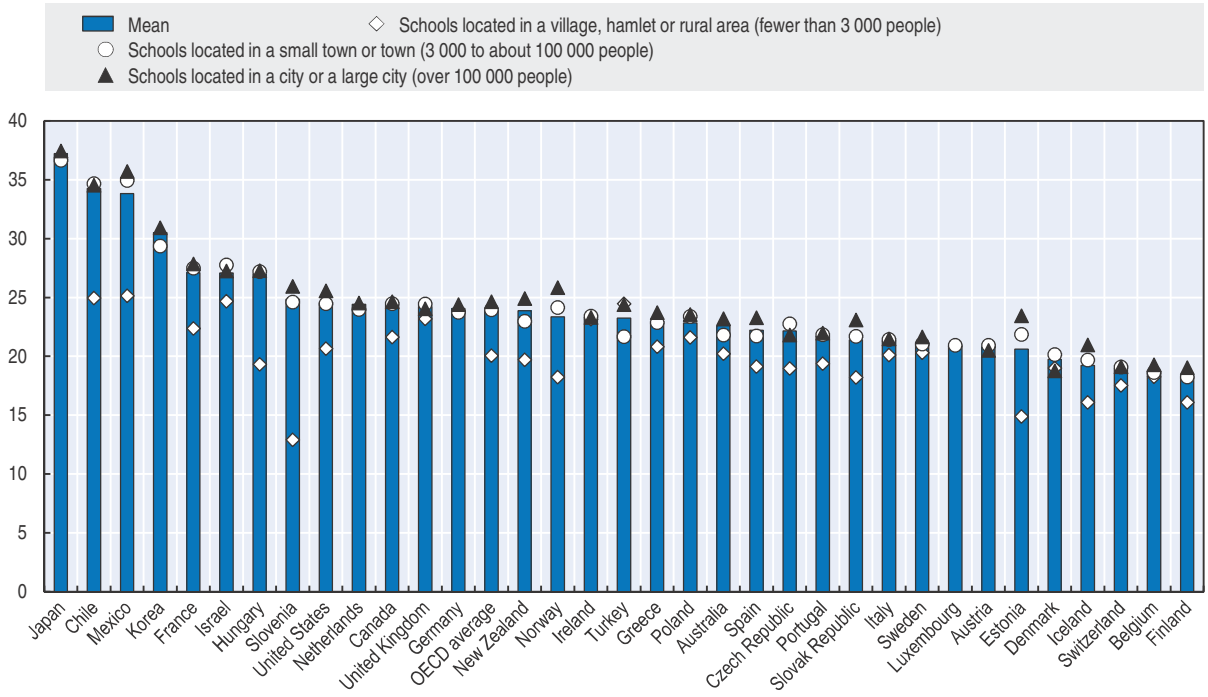
Figure 3.2. **Student-teacher ratio in Belgium: overall and by school location, 2012**

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

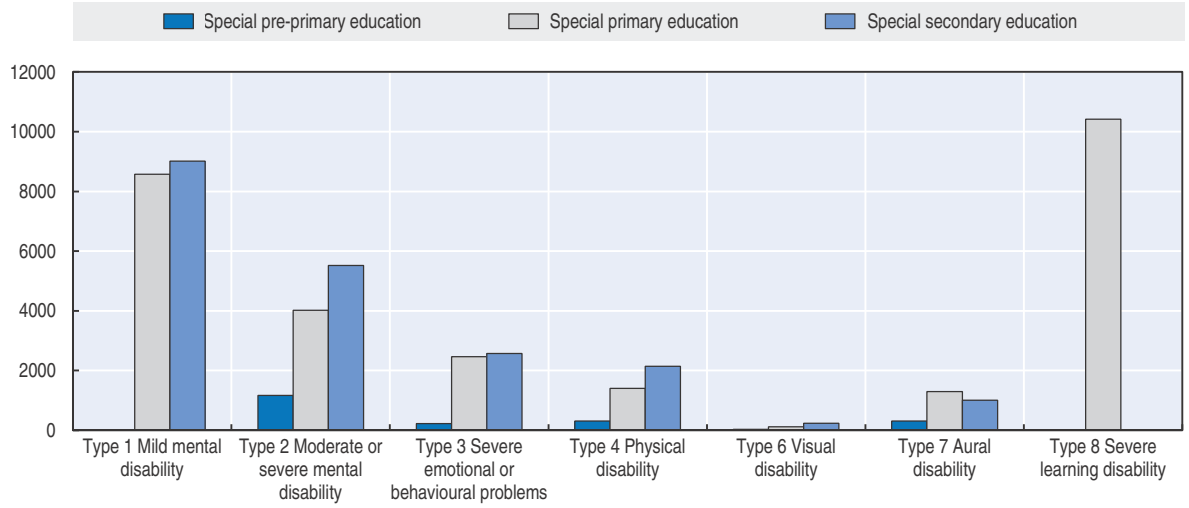
A relatively large proportion of the students with special educational needs (SEN) in the Flemish Community are served in separate special schools. According to national data, in 2012/13, 9.2% of all schools were providing education exclusively for students with special educational needs, serving a total 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).

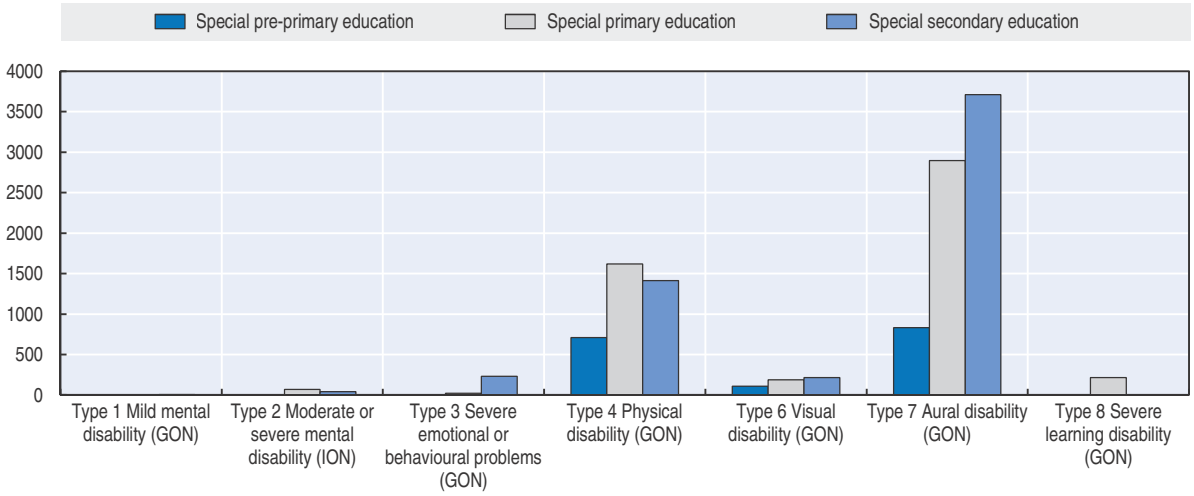
Integrated or inclusive primary education is organised in co-operation between mainstream education and special needs education. It implies that children with a disability take classes or activities in a mainstream school. In this process they receive support from special needs schools. At the end of 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).

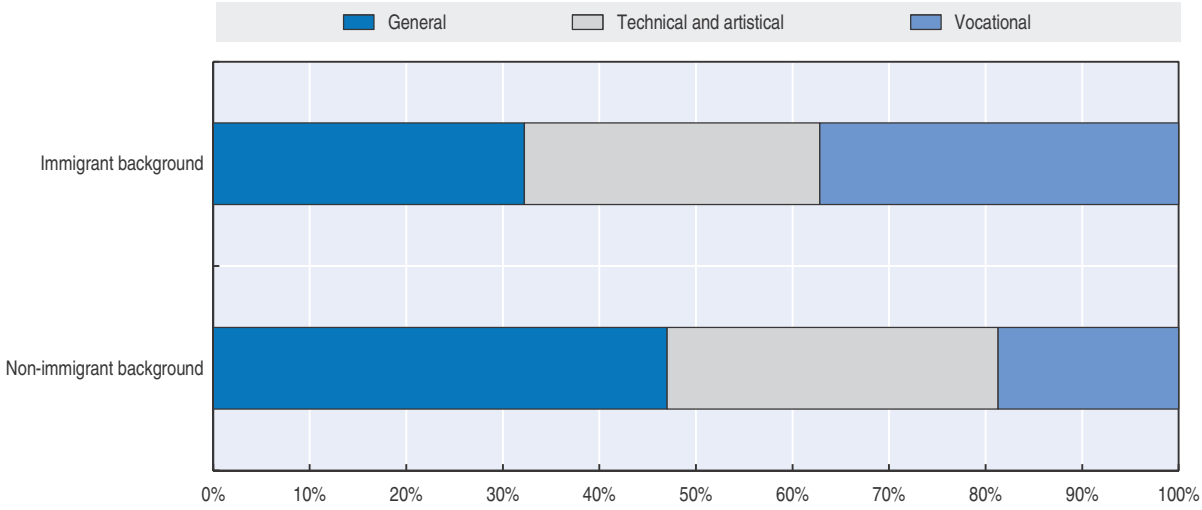
In the first stage of secondary education, students are steered into the A or B stream of secondary education, with the vast majority of students (84.6%) enrolling in the A stream, which keeps study options open for the subsequent stages of education. In the second and third stages of secondary school, 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).

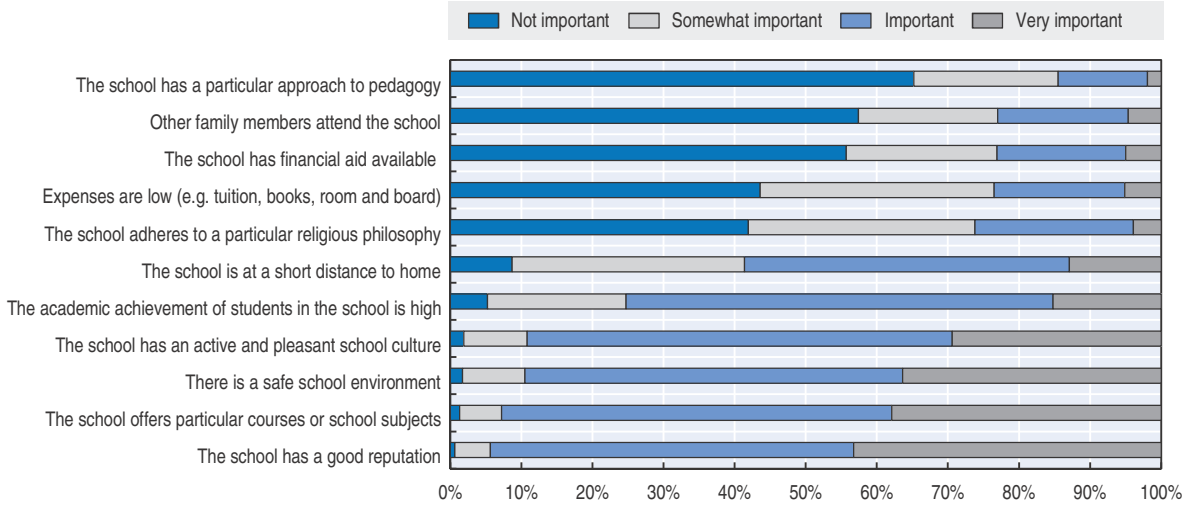
While public schools in the Flemish Community cannot promote one religion over another, the government-funded private schools are largely organised by private foundations of Catholic denomination. The religious tradition of these schools may inhibit some families from choosing them, although admission 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.

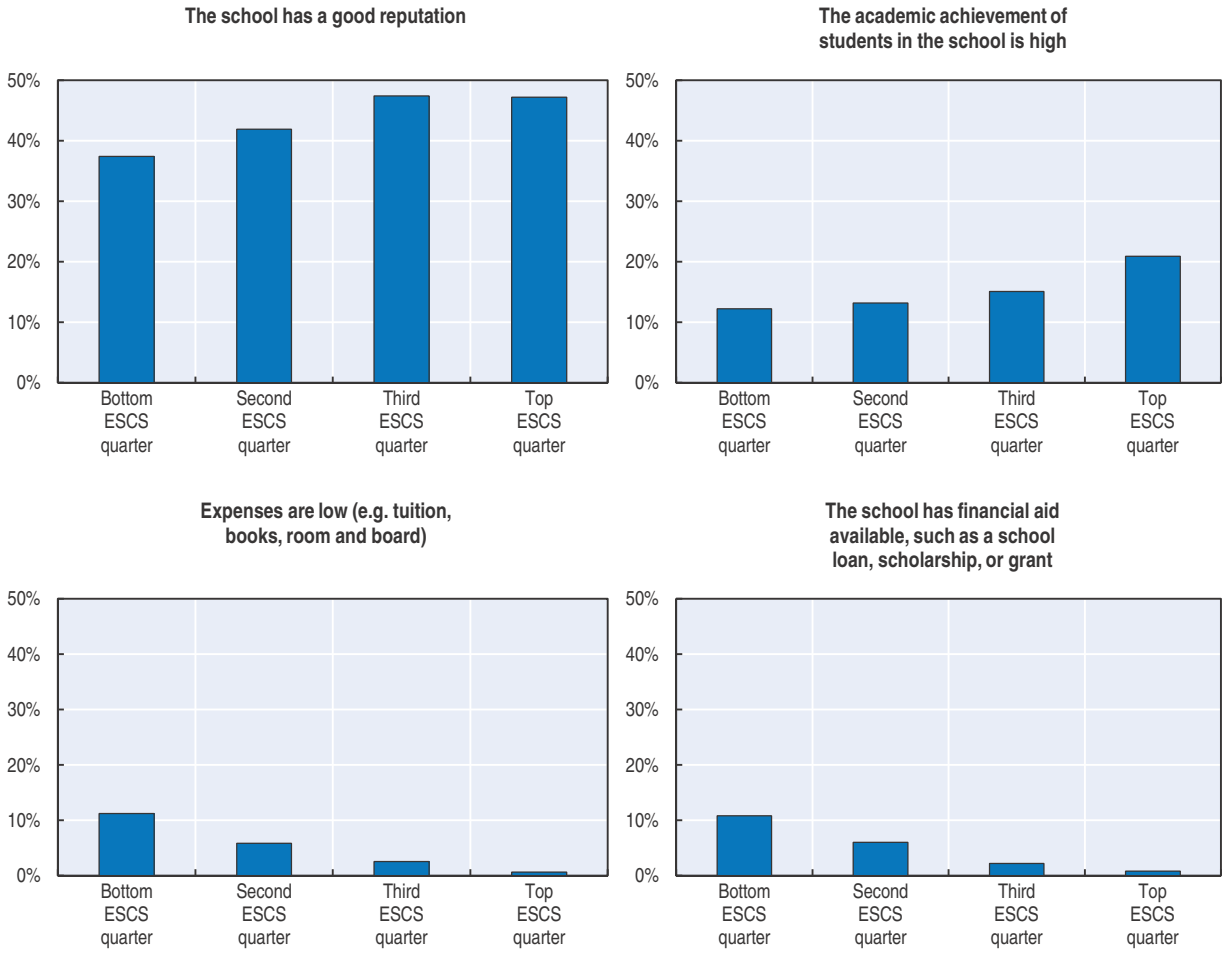
In a 2011 report, the Belgian Court of Audit found that the Flemish policy on free education and cost containment had been generally successful, with schools usually respecting the set limits on school cost. However, the report also found that while schools' collection of contributions from parents were 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).

References

AGIOn (2014), *De schoolgebouwenmonitor 2013: Indicatoren voor de kwaliteit van de schoolgebouwen in Vlaanderen (School Building Monitor 2013: Indicators for the Quality of School Buildings in Flanders)*, AGIOn, Brussels, *www.agion.be/Publicaties/deschoolgebouwenmonitor2013.aspx*.

AGIOn (2009), *De schoolgebouwenmonitor 2008, indocatoren voor de kwaliteit van de schoolgebouwen in Vlaanderen (School Building Monitor 2008: Indicators fort he Quality of School Buildings in Flanders)*, Garant, Berchem, *www.agion.be/portals/agion/downloads/7aeaafb7-9ccb-48f5-915c-106b4cc18a0f.pdf*.

Agirdag, O., M. Van Houtte and P. Van Avemaet (2013). "School segregation and self- fulfilling prophecies as determinants of academic achievement in Flanders", in De Groof, S. and M. Elchardus (Eds.), *Early School Leaving and Youth Unemployment*. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.

Ares Abalde, M. (2014), "School Size Policies: A Literature Review", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 106, OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jxt472ddkjl-en*.

Belgian Court of Audit (2010), *Staff Structure in the Full-time Ordinary Secondary Education System*, *www.rekenhof.be/EN/Publications/Fiche.html?id=308088a0-06cf-42fd-b2d1-b9906b64b570*.

Bifulco, R., C. D. Cobb, and C. Bell (2009), "Can interdistrict choice boost student achievement? The case of Connecticut's interdistrict magnet school program", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31(4), Sage Publications, pp. 323-345.

Bosetti, L. (2004), "Determinants of school choice: Understanding how parents choose elementary schools in Alberta", *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(4), Routledge, pp. 387-405.

Cantillon, E. (2011), *School Choice Regulation in Practice: Lessons from Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent* (draft manuscript), *www.rethinkingbelgium.eu/rebel-initiative-files/events/sixth-public-event-languages-school-curriculum-and-school-registration-admission-policies/Cantillon.pdf*.

Chetty, R., J. N. Friedman, N. Hilger, E. Saez, D.W. Schanzenbach and D. Yagan (2011), "How Does Your Kindergarten Classroom Affect Your Earnings? Evidence from Project STAR", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 126, No. 4, pp.1593-1660.

Chubb, J. E. and T. Moe (1990), *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC.

Dee, T. S. and M.R. West (2011), "The Non-Cognitive Returns to Class Size", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 23-46.

Dynarski, S., J.M. Hyman and D.W. Schanzenbach (2011), *Experimental evidence on the effect of childhood investments on postsecondary attainment and degree completion*, Working Paper No. 17533, National Bureau of Economic Research.

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.

Entorf, H. and M. Lauk (2006), *Peer Effects, Social Multipliers and Migration at School: An International Comparison*, HWWI Research Paper, Hamburg Institute of International Economics, Hamburg.

European Commission (2015), "Country report Belgium 2015 Including an in-depth review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances", *Commission Staff Working Document*, COM(2015) 85 final, Brussels.

European Commission (2014), *Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care in preventing early school leaving*, No. EAC/17/2012, Brussels.

Finn, J. (1998), "Class Size and Students at Risk: What is Known? What is Next?", US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students, Washington, DC.

Fiske, E. B. and H.F. Ladd (2000), *When Schools Compete: A Cautionary Tale*, Brookings Institution, Washington DC.

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*.

Gamoran, A. (1996), "Student Achievement in Public Magnet, Public Comprehensive, and Private City High Schools", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 18(1), Sage Publications, pp. 1-18.

Go! Ondervijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap (no date), *Informatiebrochure: Secondair Onderwijs (Information Brochure: Secondary Education)*, Scholengroep Brussel, Brussels.

Hamilton, L. S. and K. Guin (2005), "Understanding how families choose schools", in Betts, J. R. and T. Loveless (Eds.), *Getting Choice Right: Ensuring Equity and Efficiency in Education Policy*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC.

Hanushek, E.A. (2011), "The economic value of higher teacher quality", *Economics of Education Review*, Vol 30, Elsevier, pp 466-479.

Hanushek, E.A. and L. Wössmann (2006), "Does educational tracking affect performance and inequality? Differences-in-differences evidence across countries", *Working Paper No. 11124*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

Hastings, J., T. Kane and D. Staiger (2005), *Parental Preferences and School Competition: Evidence from a Public School Choice Program*, *Working Paper* No. 11805, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

Hattie, J. (2009), *Visible learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-analyses Relating to Achievement*, Routledge, London.

Hill, P., L. C. Pierce and J. W. Guthrie (1997), *Reinventing Public Education: How Contracting Can Transform America's Schools,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Hindriks, J. and G. Lamy (2013), *Retour à l'école, retour à la ségrégation?*, Itinera Institute Analyse, Brussels.

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.

Hirschman, A. O. (1970), *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Hirtt, N., I. Nicaise and D. De Zutter (2007), *De School van de Ongelijkheid [The School of Inequality],* EPO, Berchem-Antwerpen.

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.

Husén, T. (1990), "Strategy rules for educational reform: An international perspective on the Spanish situation", in Husén, T. (Ed.), *Education and the Global Concern*, Pergamon Press, Oxford.

Lacireno-Paquet, N. (2012), "Who chooses schools, and why? The characteristics and motivations of families who actively choose school", in Miron, G. et al. (Eds.), *Exploring the school choice universe: Evidence and recommendations*, Information Age Publishing Inc., Charlotte, NC.

Lambrechts, B. and E. Geurts (2008), *Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality, Country Report: Belgium/Flanders*, EPASI, Brussels.

Leemans, G. (2009). "Monitoring the Quality of School Buildings in Belgium's Flemish Community", *CELE Exchange, Centre for Effective Learning Environments,* No. 2009/08, OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/220808504374*.

Leemans, G. and H. von Ahlefeld (2013). "Understanding School Building Policy and Practice in Belgium's Flemish Community", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 92, OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k46h2rtw5mx-en*.

Lubienski, C. (2012). "Educational innovation and diversification in school choice plans", in Miron, G., K. G. Welner, P. Hinchey and W. Mathis (Eds.), *Exploring the School Choice Universe: Evidence and Recommendations*, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, NC.

Lubienski, C. (2003), "Innovation in education markets: Theory and evidence on the impact of competition and choice in charter schools", *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(2), Sage Publications, pp. 395-443.

Mampaey, J. and P. Zanoni (2014), "Managing legitimacy in the educational quasi-market: a study of ethnically diverse, inclusive schools in Flanders", *British Educational Research Journal*, 40, pp. 353-372, *10.1002/berj.3087*.

Meier, V. and G. Schütz (2007), "The economics of tracking and non-tracking", *Ifo Working Paper* No. 50, Munich.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (2012), *A Review of the Research on Magnet Schools*, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami.

Mickelson, R.A., M. Bottia and S. Southworth (2008), "School Choice and Segregation by Race, Class, and Achievement", *http://epsl.asu.edu/epru/documents/EPSL-0803-260-EPRU.pdf*.

Miron, G. (1993), *Choice and the Use of Market Forces in Schooling: Swedish Education Reforms for the 1990s*, Institute of International Education, Stockholm.

Miron, G. et al. (Eds.) (2012), *Exploring the School Choice Universe: Evidence and Recommendations*, Information Age Publishing Inc., Charlotte, NC.

Musset, P. (2013), *OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training: A Skills Beyond School Commentary on Flanders*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Nirje, B. (1985), "The basis and logic of the normalization principle", *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, 11 (2), pp. 65-68.

Nusche, D. (2009), "What Works in Migrant Education?: A Review of Evidence and Policy Options", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 22, OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/227131784531*.

OECD (2015), *OECD Economic Surveys: Belgium 2015*, OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eco_surveys-bel-2015-en*.

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

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

OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2011-en*.

OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2010-en*.

OECD (2008), *OECD Economic Surveys: Germany 2008*, OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eco_surveys-deu-2008-en*.

OECD (2007), *PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World: Volume 1: Analysis*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, *http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264040014-en*.

Rangvid, B.S. (2007), *School Choice, Universal Vouchers and Native Flight out of Local Public Schools*, Working Paper, May 2007:3, AKF, Danish Institute of Governmental Research, Copenhagen.

Rivkin, S.G., E.A. Hanushek and J.F. Kain (2005), "Teachers, schools and academic achievement", *Econometrica*, 73:2, Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, Inc., pp. 417-458.

Schneider, M., and Buckley, J. (2002). What do parents want from schools? Evidence from the Internet. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24(2), 133-144.

Schneeweis, N. (2006), "How should we organize schooling to further children with migration background?", *Working Paper No. 0620*, Department of Economics, Johannes Kepler University, Linz, Austria.

Schneider, M. et al. (1998), "Shopping for schools: In the land of the blind, the one-eyed parent may be enough", *American Journal of Political Science*, 42(3), pp. 769-793.

Schneph, S. V. (2004), "How different are immigrants? A cross-country and cross-survey analysis of educational achievement", *Discussion Paper No. 1398,* The Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), Bonn.

Schütz, G., H.W. Ursprung and L. Woessmann (2005), "Education policy and the equality of opportunity", *IZA Discussion Paper No. 1906*, Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA), Bonn.

Shewbridge, C. et al. (2011), *School Evaluation in the Flemish Community of Belgium 2011*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Trimper, K. and S. Salagaras (2008), *Educational Services: A Key Element in the Creation of Successful Communities*, Conference paper, Hawke Research Institute for Sustainable Societies, *www.unisa.edu.au/Documents/EASS/HRI/social-innovation-conference/trimper-salagaras.pdf*.

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.

Walford, G. (Ed.) (1996), "School choice and the quasi-market", *Oxford Studies in Comparative Education*, Vol 6, Symposium Books, Oxford.

Welner, K.G. (2013), "The dirty dozen: How charter schools influence student enrolment", *Teachers College Record*, *www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=17104*.

Winzer, M. A. (2009), *From Integration to Inclusion: A History of Special Education in the 20th Century*, Gallaudet University Press, Washington, DC.

Wouters, T. and S. Groenez (2013). *De Evolutie van Schoolse Segregatie in Vlaanderen. Een Analyse voor de Schooljaren 2001-02 tot 2011-12 (The Evolution of School Segregation in Flanders: An Analysis of 2001/02 to 2011/12 School Years)*, rapport nr. SSL/2013.08/2.2.1, Steunpunt SSL, Leuven.

Zanoni, P. and J. Mampaey (2011), "Achieving ethnic minority students' inclusion: A Flemish school's discursive practices countering the quasi-market pressure to exclude", *British Educational Research Journal*, 39 (1), Wiley, pp. 1-21.