

Chapter 2

Governance of schooling and the school network in Lithuania

This chapter focuses on the framework of governance applied to schooling in Lithuania and on how the school network is organised. It looks at the oversight and management of the schooling system at government, municipality and school level and considers how the network of schools is configured and, importantly, how that network is reviewed and reorganised to respond to demographic changes. It considers the strengths and challenges inherent in the current system and makes policy recommendations designed to improve the governance of how resources are used effectively.

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

This section considers the following aspects: the strategic importance of education; the governance of schooling; the impact of the economic crisis on funding for education; the demographic context; the changing shape of the school network.

Strategic importance of education

Legislation governing the provision of education in Lithuania was amended in 2011¹ and contains, in its opening article, an updated and unambiguous statement of the importance of education to Lithuanian societal development (see Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. Republic of Lithuania Law on Education: Article 1

Education is an activity intended to provide an individual with a basis for a worthy, independent life and to assist the individual in the continuous cultivation of abilities. Every person has an inherent right to learn. Education is a means of shaping the future of an individual, the society and the State, based on the acknowledgement of the indisputable value of the individual, his right of free choice and moral responsibility, as well as on democratic relationships and the country's cultural traditions. Education protects and creates national identity, guarantees continuity of the values that make a person's life meaningful, grant social life coherence and solidarity, and promote development and security of the State. Education serves its purpose best when its advancement leads the overall development of society. Education is a priority area of societal development that receives State support.

A National Strategy for Education

The new Law on Education and supporting national strategic documents set clear goals for Lithuania's schooling system and ensure the provision of pre-primary, primary and secondary education that is free of charge and universally available to all children. The Law also requires the development of a National Education Strategy by the Ministry of Education which covers a period of ten years. The strategy must be presented by the government to the Seimas (the Lithuanian Parliament) for confirmation and must be reviewed at least every four years.

The current National Strategy covers the period from 2013-22. As well as including a commitment to increase the level of investment from public funds in education, it focuses on education as a foundation for the future.

Governance of schooling

The structure of governance in Lithuania is discharged at three key levels: by the Ministry of Education and Science; through the 60 municipalities; and at the level of the individual school.

Ministry of Education and Science

The role of the Ministry of Education and Science can be described as shaping public policy in the schooling system and organising, co-ordinating and controlling its implementation. It approves national education documents including the general education plan and curricula and the school leaving (*Matura*) examination programmes. It is also responsible for the accreditation of the secondary education curriculum and for ensuring that schools comply with the requirements for this.

Under legislation, the Ministry carries responsibility and accountability at system level for the quality of education and for the supervision of the system to ensure accessibility, external evaluation, promotion of education improvement and provision of advice and sanctions. The Education Minister reports to the Prime Minister and is accountable to the *Seimas* on the effectiveness of the Lithuanian schooling system.

The Ministry of Education and Science also receives and is accountable for distributing the funding determined for schooling from the overall state budget and funding provided from EU Structural Funds for school-level education.

Municipalities

The sixty municipalities in Lithuania play a key role in overseeing the provision of education within their areas. As well as implementing national education policy, they must develop and approve complementary strategic education plans for their municipality and ensure the provision of a network of schools that meets the educational needs of their area. Municipalities also carry specific responsibility for the education of children with special education needs and for the provision of other education-related services including transport, catering, informal education and professional development and other support for teachers. Municipalities may set up education councils to promote participation in the development of the municipality education policy and to oversee the implementation of the policy.

Schools

While most schools are subordinate to municipal governments, they too carry their own governance responsibilities. The new Education Law makes clear that “the quality of education shall be the responsibility of the education provider” (i.e. the school). The new law also promotes very clearly the importance of self-governance at school level and the particular role of the school council as the highest self-governance body at school level. The school council is an elected body representing the interests of learners, teachers, parents and the local community and is required to account for its activity to the members of the school community who have elected the council.

National agencies

There are other national agencies that play an important role in education in Lithuania. These include two with particularly important contributions to the governance of schooling:

- The National Agency for School Evaluation (NASE) oversees a national programme of self-evaluation of school performance quality; organises and co-ordinates the process of school performance external evaluation; provides data for education monitoring;

conducts the selection, training and certification of external experts to conduct external evaluation of school performance quality; performs works of education policy analysis to support political decision-making.

- The National Examination Centre (NEC) organises final examinations on completion of basic and secondary education curricula, credit passes, examinations of knowledge of the official language and fundamentals of the Lithuanian Constitution, conducts national and international comparative research on student achievements and provides information on such research findings. After completion of the secondary education programme, students take the *Matura* examinations and must pass two: a compulsory examination in the Lithuanian Language and Literature and an elective examination, but students can choose to take up to five different subjects. Examinations are recognised as the primary entrance examinations for higher education.

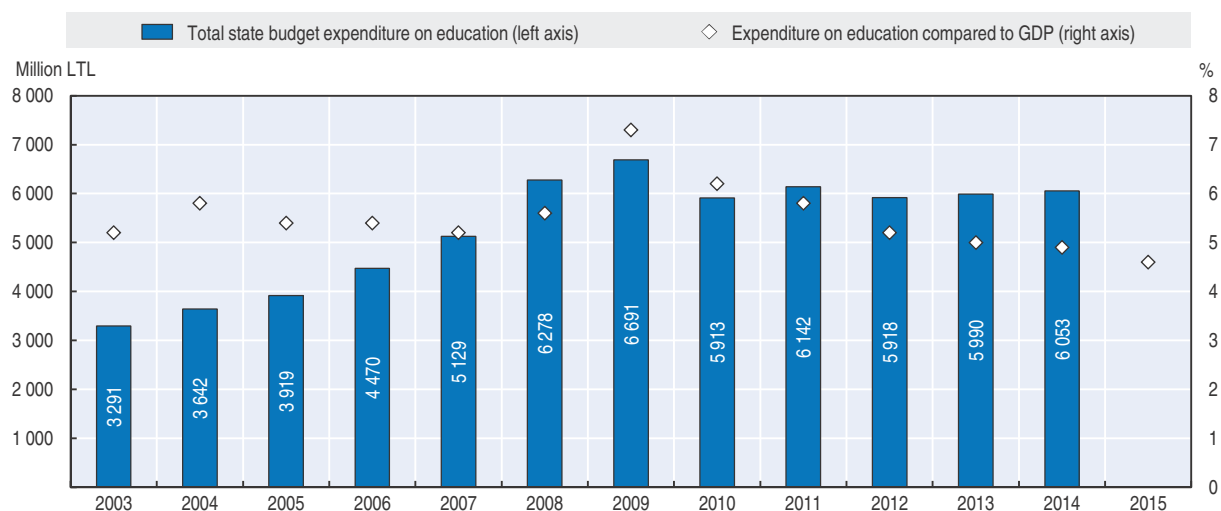
Additionally, the National Audit Office provides occasional independent scrutiny of the Ministry's activities through its performance audits.

The economic crisis had significant impact on funding for education

Funding for school-level education in Lithuania (excluding funding provided by external organisations such as the European Union) comes from two main sources: appropriations from the state budget and amounts made available from municipal budgets. The total amount of funds allocated to education in Lithuania increased year-on-year in cash terms until 2009. In 2009 the allocation to education and science was the largest during the overall history of the independent state (LTL 6.691 million) and the largest amount in comparison to GDP (7.3%).

However, in 2010, with the economic downturn and an associated and challenging public expenditure climate, the overall budget for education decreased. From 2010 to 2014, the overall allocation has remained reasonably stable; however, as the economy recovers, the relationship between state education expenditure and GDP decreases every year (Figure 2.1). The current figure proportionate to GDP is more in line with the target of 4.8%

Figure 2.1. **Financing of education in 2003 to 2015**



Note: In 2015, Lithuania adopted the euro as currency.

Source: NASE (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools: Country Background Report for Lithuania*, National Agency for School Evaluation, www.oecd.org/edu/school/schoolresourcesreview.htm.

set in the government's programme to ensure financial sustainability of the public sector in 2020 (see Chapter 1, Table 1.1). These wider policies for financial sustainability are at odds with the higher targets set within the National Education Strategy 2013-22 (to equal at least 5.8% of GDP in 2017 and 6% of GDP in 2022) (NASE, 2015).

While it is important to note that, because of the significant decreases in the school-age population (see below), education funding per student is actually growing, it is also relevant to consider that public expenditure per student remains one of the lowest among EU countries and cumulative expenditure per student up to age 15 is lower than in almost all OECD countries (Figure 1.4 and Table 1.4).

In 2014, the overall allocation from the state budget for education was EUR 1.75 billion (4.9% of GDP). In 2014, school-level education (ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) Levels 1 to 4) received EUR 819 000 (46.7% of the total national budget on education). This breakdown is provided in Table 2.1. Chapter 3 deals in more depth with how this level of funding is allocated and accounted for at municipality and school level.

Table 2.1. **Expenditure of Lithuanian national budget on education, by level of education, 2014**

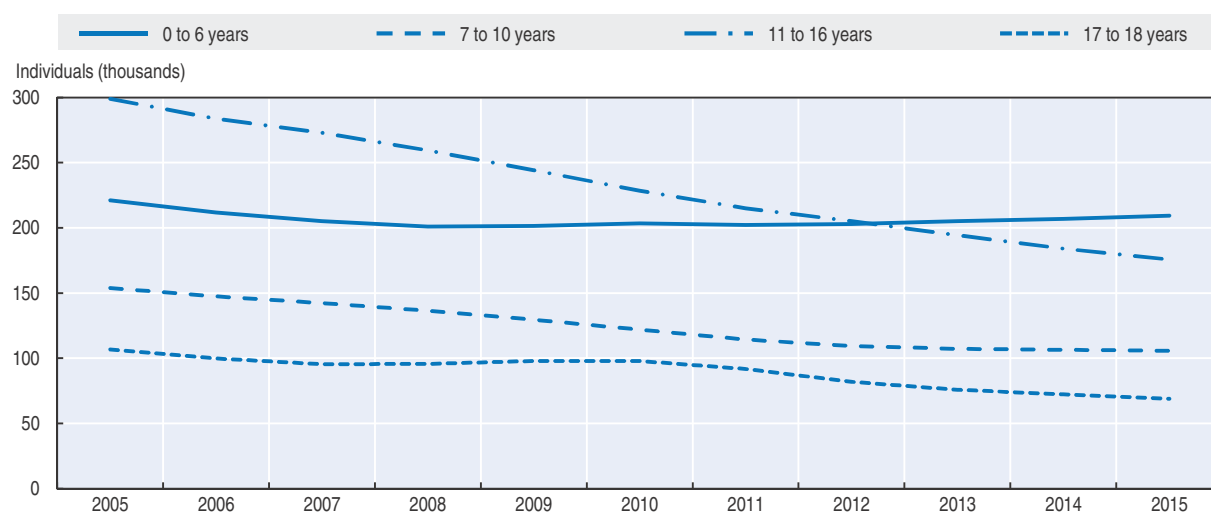
Level of education	Expenditure (EUR, thousands)	Percentage of total expenditure
Pre-school education (ISCED 0)	225.7	12.9
General education (ISCED 1, 2, 3)	729.6	41.6
Vocational education (ISCED 2, 3, 4)	89.6	5.1
Tertiary education (ISCED 5 and 6)	226.2	12.9
Other (non-formal education, etc.)	482.0	27.5
Total	1 753.1	100.0

Source: Statistics Lithuania (2015), *Švietimas 2014 (Education 2014)*, <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=18138>.

Demographic changes have presented considerable challenges to the school network

As noted in Chapter 1, Lithuania has experienced a very significant level of demographic decline over the past 20 years. During its visit, the review team heard countless examples of the impact of demographic decline at state, municipality and individual school level. These examples are borne out by official statistics – for example, a decline of 12.6% in the overall population of Lithuania during the period between the 2001 census and the 2011 census. In comparison with trends in the school population overall in OECD and EU countries, the drop in the number of children is particularly stark in Lithuania (Figure 1.2).

As can be seen in Figure 2.2 and Table 2.2, the population decline has been across all school-age groups and has impacted the numbers of students in all school years from primary through to upper secondary education. Over the past 10 years, the drop in the population aged 11 to 16 has been particularly acute (Figure 2.2) and this has presented significant challenges to schools providing lower secondary education, notably, basic schools and secondary schools. There are half as many students in Years 6, 7 and 8 in 2015/16 compared to in 2004/05 (Table 2.2). Furthermore, a steady decline in the primary education age group (7 to 10 years) indicates that the pressure on lower secondary provision will continue (Figure 2.2). Overall, the dramatic decline in school-age population has presented significant governance challenges for those charged with planning, funding and providing quality school-level education.

Figure 2.2. **Evolution of the school-age population, 2005-15**

Source: Statistics Lithuania (2015), Švietimas 2014 (Education 2014), <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=18138>.

Table 2.2. **Change in number of students in Years 1 to 12 from 2004/05 to 2015/16**

	Students in 2004/05	Students in 2015/16	Change in number of students	2015/16 numbers as a proportion of 2004/05 numbers
Year 1	38 190	29 438	-8 752	0.77
Year 2	41 604	27 409	-14 195	0.66
Year 3	42 322	26 688	-15 634	0.63
Year 4	43 653	26 659	-16 994	0.61
Year 5	47 234	26 601	-20 633	0.56
Year 6	52 854	26 919	-25 935	0.51
Year 7	54 040	26 675	-27 365	0.49
Year 8	55 616	28 152	-27 464	0.51
Year 9	54 226	29 624	-24 602	0.55
Year 10	56 073	32 161	-23 912	0.57
Year 11	45 268	26 793	-18 475	0.59
Year 12	43 112	27 453	-15 659	0.64

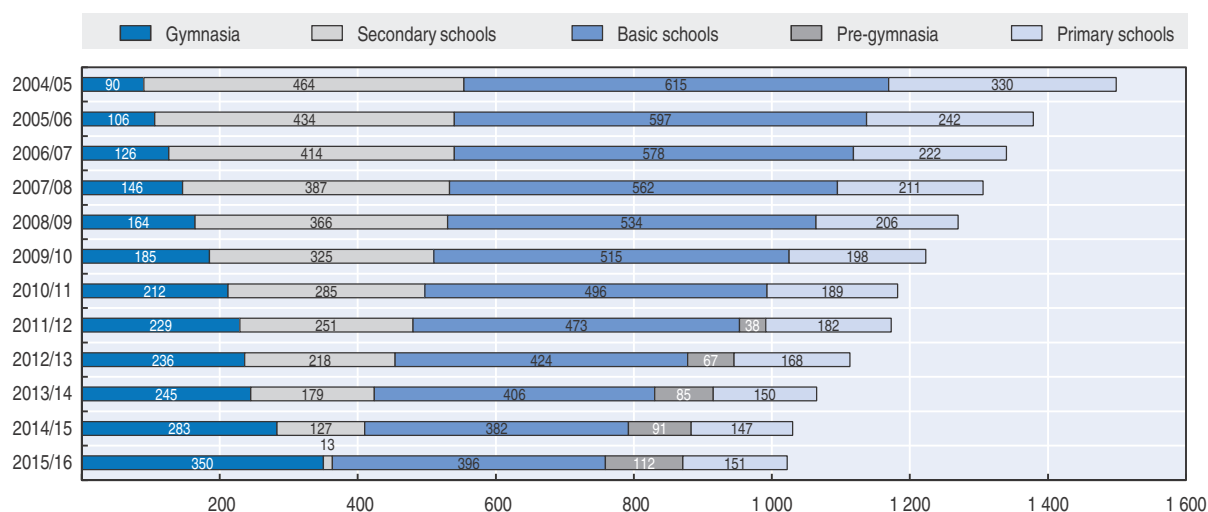
Source: Data from the Lithuanian Education Management Information System (EMIS).

Initiatives to reform the school network

One of the consequences of the decline in the school-age population in Lithuania has been the need to reorganise the pattern of school provision to ensure that all children can have access to quality education in reasonable proximity to their homes and in a manner that delivers value for money.

Reorganisation of the school network at local level has become a significant challenge for many municipalities in a context where public expenditure is constrained. The new Education Law places responsibilities on municipalities to have in place an optimal network of schools. This ensures the continuation of a process that was initially piloted in six municipalities and then taken forward in earnest in 2005 and that has required the development and agreement of initial plans within all 60 municipalities. Since 2004/05, there has been considerable reorganisation of general education schools within the school network (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Changes to the school network from 2004/05 to 2015/16



Source: Ministry of Education and Science (2015), *Lietuva Svetimas Regionuose Mokykla 2015 (Lithuanian Regional School System 2015)*, Svetimo Aprupinimo Centras, Lietuvos Respublikos svietimo ir mokslo ministerija, Figure 1.

At a strategic level, the Ministry of Education and Science determined in 2011 that the structure of general education should be reformed with a focus on four types of school: primary school; pre-gymnasium; basic school; and gymnasium. The intention was that the “secondary school” category would cease to exist from September 2015; however, this was delayed until 1 September 2017. There has been significant progress toward this goal (the reorganisation of 272 secondary schools over the last 6 years), including 114 secondary schools in 2014/15 (Figure 2.3). In 2015/16, 13 secondary schools remain in operation. Among the municipalities visited by the OECD review team in 2014, Vilnius City operated 22 secondary schools, Vilnius District operated 16 secondary schools, Šiauliai City operated 2 secondary schools and Klaipėda and Rietavas each operated 1 secondary school.

As part of the reorganisation of “secondary schools”, there has been an expansion of the school type “Gymnasium” (260 new *gymnasia*) and the creation in 2011/12 of a new school type “Pre-gymnasium” (these numbered 112 in 2015/16). Since 2004/05, 451 secondary schools were reorganised into *gymnasia*, basic schools or pre-gymnasium. At the same time there has been significant reorganisation of primary schools and basic schools: 219 basic schools were reorganised into pre-gymnasium, gymnasium or a basic or primary education unit within a secondary school; 179 primary schools were either reorganised as a gymnasium, basic school or a primary unit within a pre-gymnasium or closed (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015). As a result, the total number of general education schools has dropped from 1 499 in 2004/05 to 1 022 in 2015/16 (Figure 2.3).

The reorganisation of the school network takes place within a set of Rules for establishing a network of schools implementing formal education programmes (see NASE, 2015, Appendix 5 for more details). These rules set the parameters within which municipalities are expected to advance reform of their school networks. To deal with the particular challenges experienced in rural areas, the government has set out priority measures that address the preservation of small primary schools in rural areas and concerns about safe transportation to school. These priorities also seek to ensure that an overriding factor in advancing school network reform must be quality of service and that decisions should not be influenced by purely economic factors.

As part of the proposal to phase out “secondary schools”, an accreditation process has been put in place to determine whether existing secondary schools that wish to transform to become *gymnasia* can meet the more rigorous requirements of the curriculum at Years 11 and 12. Conditions are set for the average number of students studying in secondary education programmes and the number of classes at Years 11 and 12. Thresholds vary, however, depending on the population that a school is serving (for example rural or urban; border area; language of instruction). Schools must meet these requirements before they can be designated as a *gymnasium*.

In summary, significant progress has been made, but the challenge of delivering further rationalisation of school provision remains and is explored in more detail below.

Commitment to support educational provision in minority languages

A notable feature of the school network in Lithuania is a commitment to support an offer of instruction in a minority language. Eleven per cent of general education schools offer instruction in a minority language. The two largest national minorities (Polish and Russian) form the lion’s share of minority-language instruction schools (Table 2.3). All minority-language schools must teach the Lithuanian language as a subject, as well as offering History and Geography instruction in Lithuanian.

Table 2.3. **General education schools offering instruction in a minority language, 2013/14**

Language of instruction	Number of schools
Polish	54
Russian	33
Lithuanian and Russian	13
Lithuanian and Polish	10
Russian and Polish	9
Lithuanian, Russian and Polish	6
Lithuanian and English	4
English	2
Belarusian	1
French	1

Source: Statistics Lithuania (2015), *Švietimas 2014 (Education 2014)*, <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=18138>, Table 5.7.

Provision of education for students with special educational needs

Parents are free to decide on how to educate their child and whether to enrol their child in a mainstream school, in a special school (e.g. providing adapted education for children with physical disabilities or cognitive impairment) or in a school providing specialised education (e.g. for children with talents for arts or sports). One of the government’s basic conditions for establishing a school network is to create conditions for students with special needs to attend a school which is close to their place of residence. The Law on Education includes four categories of special educational needs according to the nature and duration of educational difficulties: minor, moderate, major and severe.

In Lithuania, a special school (*Specialioji mokykla*) is defined as one that caters to students with major and severe special educational needs. Students attending special schools do not generally attend classes in mainstream schools. Mirroring the rationalisation in the school network, the number of special schools has dropped from 61

in 2005 to 47 in 2015 (Lithuanian Education Management Information System – EMIS) and between 2010 and 2015 the average number of students in a special school has increased by 12 students (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015). Twenty-six of the 47 special schools are for students with intellectual disabilities (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015, Table 19). There is great diversity in the type of provision in special schools. While the average number of class sets in a special school is 11, this varies from 4 or 5 class sets in five schools, to over 20 class sets in three schools (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015, Figure 17). In 2014, the expenditure per student in special schools was EUR 4 024.6.

Since 2011, general education schools are obliged to provide the necessary educational assistance for a variety of student learning needs. All mainstream schools providing compulsory general education are expected to offer education to children with special educational needs. Schools use adapted curricula and may employ special educational needs teachers, psychologists and social pedagogues. Municipal psychological pedagogical services provide assistance to general education schools and teachers, including informing and training school staff and providing consultation services. Schools also organise transportation for students in specially adapted buses. Where appropriate, the educational environment is adapted and special learning and technical assistance tools are provided. In the per capita funding system (the student basket), additional funding is provided for a child with special educational needs to help the school organise the necessary provision (see Chapter 3). National rules set limits on the number of students with “major or severe” special educational needs in general education classes to no more than three. Also, each student with special educational needs is counted as two students, so for example, one student with special educational needs would mean that there could be at most 22 other students in a primary education class in order to respect the maximum number of 24.

Since 2011, the overall number of students with special educational needs has decreased, but the proportion enrolled in special schools has increased slightly (from 8.3% in 2011 to 9.4% in 2015) (EMIS).

Strengths

At national level the strategic importance of education is recognised

Official documentation, notably the Education Law and the Education Strategy 2013-22, recognises the strategic importance of education for the future wellbeing and prosperity of individual citizens and of the nation as a whole (see also Box 2.1). During the review visit, interviews with stakeholders also underlined the key importance of education to Lithuania’s future development. There is clear recognition of the value of primary and secondary education and of the need to ensure that the curricula followed at all stages of compulsory education are relevant in the 21st century. In common with many other EU nations, the curricular requirements for primary and basic education and for secondary education have been revised in recent years to ensure a focus not solely on knowledge acquisition but on the development of competencies and attitudes and on thinking skills and creativity. Pathways are being developed for young people; these include options in vocational training which are increasingly recognised as being important for the future economic wellbeing of the nation.

There is distributed responsibility for governance, with a role for all principal actors

One of the characteristics of the education system in Lithuania is the existence of a model of distributive governance. While it is clear that the Ministry of Education and Science carries overall accountability for developing strategy and overseeing policy and for the performance of the education system, responsibility and accountability for the quality of schooling in an area and for the outcomes that students achieve also rest with municipalities and with schools themselves.

As a result, municipalities and individual schools also carry a significant degree of autonomy – they can take decisions at local and school level in order to deliver improvement. This is an important strength and can help ensure that there is an understanding of how schooling contributes to the wider social and economic wellbeing of communities, families and individuals. Compared internationally, Lithuanian school leaders report higher levels of autonomy in school resource allocation and in assessment and curriculum policies (Annex 2.A1, Tables 2.A1.1 and 2.A1.2). Notably, compared to in the OECD on average, Lithuanian school leaders have much greater autonomy over selecting and firing teachers and play a greater role in determining teachers' salaries (four out of five reported having some responsibility for this, compared to only one out of four internationally) (Table 2.A1.1b).

In the meetings it had with schools, the OECD review team noted the value that school communities placed on local decision-making in areas such as expenditure, staffing and curriculum delivery, self-evaluation and on matters such as the nature of professional development for teachers. It also noted the model of governance represented by the school council and the inclusive nature of this model which includes representatives from the school staff, parents, the local community and, importantly, the students themselves.

The school council representatives that the OECD review team met talked passionately and knowledgeably about their role and responsibilities, highlighting the importance of ensuring connections between the school and the community it served and the value there was in ensuring that different perspectives were articulated before final decisions were made on how best to deploy available resources.

Commitment to equity and evidence of some core efficiencies within the school system

A notable feature of the strategic vision for education in Lithuania is its focus on inclusion and access. The education legislation passed in 2011 makes specific provision to ensure that students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs can access education and also contains protections for those from national minority-language backgrounds that are designed to ensure that they can receive instruction both in Lithuanian and in their native language. A comparatively low proportion of Lithuanian students are educated in segregated settings, as the provision in special schools is only for students with major and severe special educational needs. Given the significantly higher costs of segregated education, this is an important efficiency challenge in many countries. Siewecke (forthcoming) finds that, although there are few studies and mainly in the United States, evidence on integration reveals slight positive effects both academically and socially for students with mild special educational needs and no adverse effects on other students – although there is some variation among schools, so wider school organisational aspects play an important role.

Some characteristics that research (OECD, 2012) shows militate against equity are not notable features of the school system in Lithuania. The Ministry's data (NASE, 2015, Table 2.7) points to low levels of school year repetition (see also Chapter 1). Policies to make students repeat a school year are very costly and play against equity. Assuming that repeaters would obtain a maximum of lower secondary education, analysis of PISA 2012 results indicates that costs in systems with higher rates of repetition could amount to around 10% of the annual national expenditure on primary and secondary school education (OECD, 2013a, Figure IV.1.5). Additionally, only a minority of students did not successfully complete secondary education (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015). The share of early leavers from education and training in Lithuania (6.3% in 2013) compares favourably with the benchmark of "less than 10%" set by the EU in Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) and with the EU average in 2013 of 12.0% (European Commission, 2014). While policy makers in Lithuania remain committed to reduce this further, this is a positive indicator of relatively high efficiency, with respect to limited waste of the educational opportunities offered to and the instructional investments made in students.

Another encouraging trend indicating greater equity is that the percentage of young people aged between 18 and 24 without upper secondary education and not studying is falling – from 8.7% in 2009 to 5.9% in 2014 (Statistics Lithuania, 2015).

Emerging culture of school evaluation for improvement

At a strategic level, there is a good understanding of the importance of evaluation in informing improvements in education.

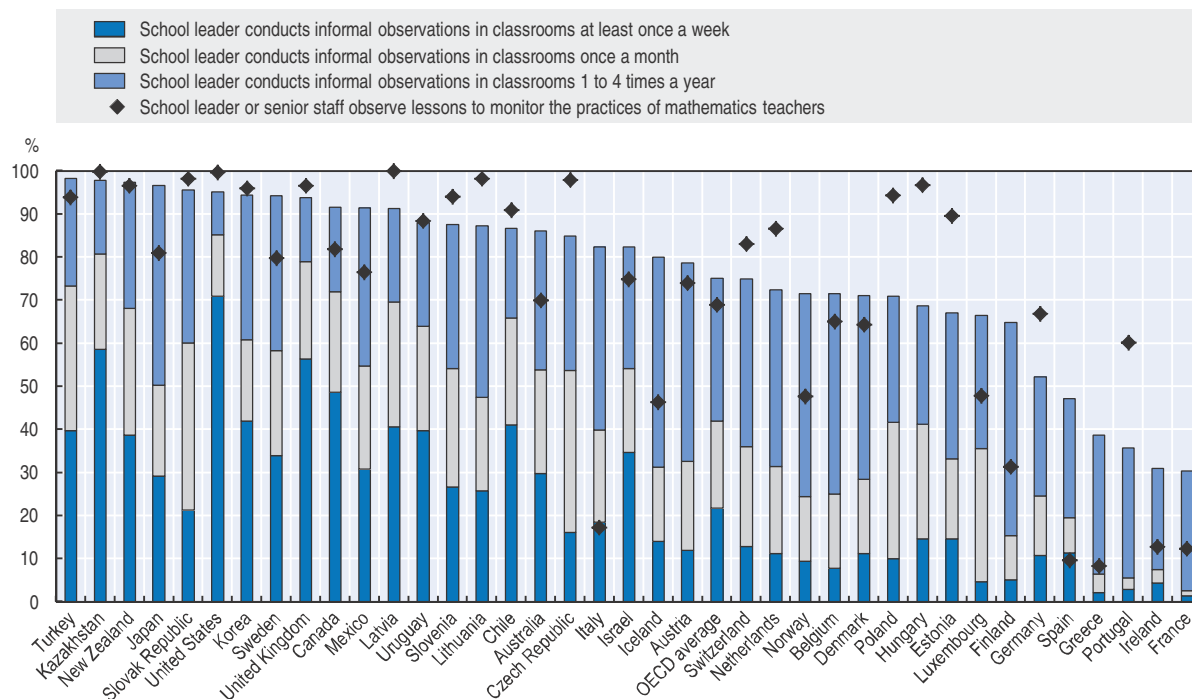
The relationship between evaluation and improvement is highlighted in Education Law – the 2011 law makes clear the role of self-evaluation and external evaluation in helping to improve education quality and places particular responsibility on schools to ensure that self-evaluation takes place. This reflects a broad trend in European countries to introduce requirements for self-evaluation at the school level (OECD, 2013b). Certainly, school leader reports in PISA 2012 indicate that virtually all participating Lithuanian schools had self-evaluation in place and systematically recorded key data on teacher and student attendance, student test results and graduation rates and teachers' professional development (Annex Table 2.A1.3). Similarly, school leader reports indicate a relatively intense use of student assessment data for many purposes, including notably, monitoring the school's progress from year to year (Annex Table 2.A1.4).

Also, there is evidence from PISA 2012 that classroom observation is a broadly established feature in Lithuanian schools, whether conducted by the school leader or senior staff (Figure 2.4). Classroom observations that focus on providing constructive feedback to teachers on how to improve the quality of teaching and learning are a critical element of an effective self-evaluation culture (OECD, 2013b).

In its meetings with the Ministry and with the National Agency for School Evaluation, the OECD review team identified a clear and nuanced understanding of the particular role of external evaluation in supporting school-led self-evaluation for improvement. The model of external evaluation that has been developed starts with a goal of promoting good quality self-evaluation that builds on a school's own self-evaluation and leads to improved outcomes for students. It also recognises the importance of recording success stories and sharing good practice.

Figure 2.4. **School leader reports on classroom observation (PISA 2012)**

Percentage of students in schools where the school leader reported the following:



Source: OECD (2013a), PISA 2012 Results: What Makes a School Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>, Table IV.4.34 and PISA 2012 Student Compendium, Question ID SC34Q19, <https://pisa2012.acer.edu.au/downloads.php>.

The current model of operation (NASE, no date) is based on all schools being externally evaluated on a 7-year cycle and against a framework which has five key areas of focus (see Table 2.4), each supported by a number of key themes and supporting indicators.

Table 2.4. **Framework of general school evaluation methodology, 2009**

Evaluation area	School culture	Teaching and learning	Achievements	Support for students	School strategic management
22 evaluation themes, for example:	1.1. Ethos	2.3. Quality of teaching	3.1. Progress	4.2. Pedagogical, psychological and social support	5.1. School strategy
67 indicators, for example:	1.1.1. Values, standards of conduct, principles 1.1.2. Traditions and rituals	2.3.1. Teaching approach and techniques 2.3.2. Relation between teaching and living	3.1.1. Individual students' progress 3.1.2. School progress	4.2.1. Learning support 4.2.2. Psychological support	5.1.1. School vision, mission and objectives 5.1.2. Planning procedures

Note: The table presents a random selection of evaluation themes and indicators.

Source: NASE (no date), *Basic Information and Data*, National Agency for School Evaluation, Vilnius.

The OECD review team was encouraged to note that, when schools are evaluated as part of these arrangements, they receive feedback on both strengths and areas for improvement and that, after the evaluation is completed, the expectation is that the school itself will take responsibility for acting on the findings from the evaluation. Importantly, however, students' interests are protected through the annual follow up that takes place if external evaluation assesses quality in any of the five areas of focus as being less than

satisfactory and through the follow up evaluation that should take place after three years if only a “satisfactory” assessment is received in any of the areas of “teaching and learning”, “achievements” or “school management”.

Subsequent to the OECD review, the Minister of Education and Science approved an Action Plan for Quality Culture Development which should be fully implemented by 2022. This goes further in strengthening the accountability of the school community and strengthening evaluation and monitoring.

Increased national recognition and support for pre-primary education

There is a clear recognition of the importance of early childhood development and a corresponding commitment to providing opportunities for learning from the earliest years – pre-school education, while not compulsory, is widely available for children from birth to six years of age and is provided in settings including state and private kindergartens and according to dedicated pre-school and pre-primary curricula. A compulsory year of pre-primary education for 6-year-olds will be introduced in 2016. Parents also receive information on early childhood development and can access special educational or psychological assistance from the earliest stages. Pre-primary education is provided free of charge to 6-year-olds in the year before they reach compulsory school age and has a high enrolment rate (93.4% of eligible 6-year-olds in 2014 [EMIS]).

The OECD review team was advised that plans are in place to extend the availability of pre-school education, particularly in areas where there is a shortage of places to meet demand, and consideration is also being given to funding extended duration of pre-school and pre-primary education (from four hours per day to eight hours). Additionally, the 2015 national budget provided an uplift of 10% in the salaries for pre-school and pre-primary teachers in recognition of the importance of having highly skilled and motivated professionals delivering early years education. The budget provides additional funding from September 2016 to fund a compulsory year for pre-primary education (EUR 1.448 million) and for renovating and adapting early childhood education premises (EUR 1.738 million). Also, new funding will be provided for transporting children to school and pre-school, with both European Structural Fund investment (EUR 1.248 million) and a state budget allocation (EUR 1.7 million). This aims to address one of the key findings in an EU funded research project carried out by the Education Supply Center in 2012-13 that a lack of appropriate transportation services was one of the main reasons for low participation rates in pre-primary education in rural areas.

Investment to support the greater integration of students with special educational needs

During the country visit, the OECD review team saw evidence at national, municipal and school level of the particular commitment to ensuring the inclusion of students with special educational needs. The Ministry explained that, in 2015, 91% of students with special educational needs were enrolled in general education schools and the municipalities visited provided additional information on how those students, and the students in special classes in mainstream schools (8%) and in special schools (1%), were supported by schools and by dedicated pedagogical psychologists, speech and language therapists and other professionals. The number of special education schools fell from 67 in 2008/09, to 60 in 2012/13, and stood at 47 schools in 2015/16 (NASE, 2015, Appendix 5, Table 1 and EMIS).

There has been considerable investment in support structures for students with special educational needs, notably funding allocated as part of the EU Operational Programme for Promotion of Cohesion 2007-13. Over that period, LTL 34.3 million was spent on upgrading the facilities of municipal pedagogical psychological services and the working environment for specialist support staff within schools (NASE, 2015, Table 4.5). In 2013, 4 259 pedagogical support staff were employed in general education schools (NASE, 2015, Figure 4.8).

There is also evidence of progress in adapting early childhood education and care provision to better fit the special educational needs of some children. For example, 88% of municipalities report that they organise integrated support for children with special educational needs – this is 2.5 times more than reported in 2012.

Action for structural reform to the school network has helped to limit the decline in cost-effectiveness

The need for reform of the school network in Lithuania is clearly recognised and action to deliver structural reform is well underway. The demographic changes outlined above and in Chapter 1, coupled with the aspirations of the government to deliver improvements in the quality of school-based education in Lithuania and the need for there to be a clear focus on affordability and value for money, present a compelling case for change to how the pattern of school provision across the country is planned and delivered.

Throughout its visit, the OECD review team received numerous examples at national and local level of how shifting demographic changes and the requirement to deliver the best possible quality within constrained financial resources were driving reform of the school network. It was clear to the team that the case for reform was well understood at all levels within the education system.

It was equally clear that this need for reform was being translated into action. Statistics provided by the Ministry of Education and Science to the review team (see Table 2.5) show that the number of municipal schools has reduced from 1 429 in 2005 to 1 107 in 2015. In light of the significant demographic challenges with 39% fewer students in 2015 than in 2005, the reform efforts over the past ten years have helped to limit the inefficiencies of running a system with too many empty school places. While the student/teacher ratio stood at 11.6 in 2015, without structural reforms to the municipal school networks this would have been as low as 8.4 (assuming the 2005 number of teachers remained constant). The impact of the school network reform is also illustrated by the fact that the relative decline in average class size has been slower than the relative decline in number of students over the period 2004/05 to 2014/15 (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015, Figure 4).

Table 2.5. Municipal schools and population data

	Number of schools		Number of students		Number of teachers		Student/teacher ratio	
	2005	2015	2005	2015	2005	2015	2005	2015
Numbers	1 429	1 107	523 939	317 831	37 668	27 140	13.9	11.6
Index of change 2015 (2005 = 100)		0.77		0.61		0.72		0.84

Source: Data from the Lithuanian Education Management Information System (EMIS).

Clear national documentation with data, models and analytics to support school network reform

The OECD review team consulted a set of national documentation with a rich array of data, analytics and models that had been prepared to support school consolidation initiatives. The Ministry of Education and Science prepared “Recommendations for Establishing a Network of Schools” which was a large volume including national guidelines for municipalities. An important supporting document was the “Workbook for municipalities” that the Ministry piloted initially with six municipalities and then incorporated examples from the pilot municipalities into an official publication. The guidelines and workbook, once finalised, formed an important pillar of the school network reform. The Ministry also prepared sample plans for school network reform that municipalities could use as a basis for their planning.

In developing these publications, the Ministry collected a rich set of data, with a notable initial challenge being to pull together comparable data on student achievement. The outcomes data is now enriched with results of standardised tests run by the National Examination Centre, which are used to compile different indicators for municipality and school comparison. These data-rich publications were a key resource in negotiating politically difficult times with different municipalities and defending the need to stick to the municipal school network reform plans. Reliable and sufficient data were critical to inform public consultation and to communicate the key principles of the school network reform.

Home to school transport arrangements are recognised as integral to school network reform

A further strength in relation to structural reform in Lithuania is the level of understanding of the need for assurance to parents and communities about the safety and wellbeing of students who may, as a result of rationalisation, have to travel further to reach their nearest school. This is a fundamental factor that is typically overlooked in considering the costs and benefits of school consolidation (Ares Abalde, 2014) and it is a considerable strength that the Ministry of Education and Science has recognised the importance of safe and reliable transport in these circumstances. It is worth noting that the Programme of Government (December 2012) also contains (paragraph 173) a specific commitment to “guarantee safe transportation for every child living in a village which is more than 3 km away from the nearest school, as well as every child with special education needs, who has difficulties getting to school”.

Supported through EU Structural Funds, the Ministry has invested significantly in increasing the size of the school bus fleet across Lithuania. The review team was told that the Ministry has been purchasing school buses for municipalities since 2000 and that, between 2000 and 2014, almost 700 buses have been purchased with a further 150 bus purchases planned in the next three years.

During the OECD review, in conversations with municipalities and, particularly with school leaders and students themselves, it was clear that this investment has done much to ease the transitions that result from school network reform and to improve access for young people, not only to school but in relation to extracurricular activities.

There is some evidence, at municipality level, of clear and decisive strategic leadership

The role of the sixty municipalities in delivering education is explained above. It is clear that the particular and complex challenges that demographic change places on municipalities requires strong, strategic leadership to ensure that the pattern of school provision is capable of delivering a high quality learning experience for all students.

During its visit, the OECD review team met with several municipalities and noted the different approaches being taken. Kėdainai District runs a network of general education schools with three main school types: primary schools, basic schools and *gymnasias*. In 2010/11, it operated 30 general education schools for 7 803 students. While the number of students had decreased to 6 187 students in 2014/15, Kėdainai District had reorganised its network to include 20 general education schools. The average school size, therefore, had increased from 260 students in 2010/11 to 309 students in 2014/15. Perhaps not surprisingly, the team observed that the most effective progress was being made in areas where there was a clear vision for education and a corresponding focus on quality; an understanding of the local dynamic and of the needs and aspirations of the community; a clear plan of action; and a determination to ensure that the best educational interests of children and young people were put to the fore. This combination of features is effectively illustrated in the example of Šiauliai City (see Box 2.2).

There is evidence of innovative thinking in relation to some aspects of school network reform

The OECD review team was impressed to see some examples of innovative and collaborative thinking in responding to the challenges presented by the need to rationalise school provision. One example was the investment in multi-function centres (*daugiavfunkcis centras*) in isolated rural areas by some municipalities. These multi-function centres bring together kindergarten/day care with pre-primary and primary education and a community facility under a single management structure. Funding has been provided from EU Structural Funds to assist in the development of these centres. In 2015, 11 municipal primary schools and 40 municipal basic schools were operating as part of a multi-function centre (Chapter 1, Table 1.6).

The primary purpose is often to address issues of quality and accessibility of public services and reduce exclusion and rural isolation. This integrated approach allows for the benefits from economies of scale and collaboration which a small, isolated primary school could not, on its own, provide. It also provides the opportunity to better align pre-primary and primary education – a concern that had been picked up in an EU funded research project in 2012. The example below captures some interesting features.

Revised funding mechanism to support non-formal education provision

The current approach to provision of non-formal education in Lithuania is a mix of activities offered by students' regular school and activities offered by specialised non-formal education schools (e.g. sports, music or fine arts). Typically, students can attend non-formal education activities at their schools free of charge. Both regular schools and specialised non-formal education schools receive public funding to subsidise the provision of different activities and classes. However, the budget for non-formal education was negatively impacted by the financial crisis with cuts over recent years, but with some additional funding included in the 2015 Budget. An audit of non-formal education during

Box 2.2. Šiauliai City Municipality's school network reform

The OECD review team had the opportunity to visit and receive evidence from the mayor and officials from Šiauliai City Municipality. It was clear that the municipality attached considerable political importance to ensuring that students across the city had access to high quality education at all levels. In fact, Šiauliai invests more than any other municipality in teacher professional development (EUR 90.8 per teacher, compared to EUR 58.3 per teacher on average) (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015, Figure 13).

School network reform has been underway in the city since 2003 and the review team was told that the situation had changed radically over the past decade. Ministry of Education and Science statistics show the network has been reorganised to include three major school types providing mainstream education. This was a key starting point: Šiauliai City opted for a school network structure that would see younger children educated in primary schools and pre-gymnasia and progressing to gymnasia. In 2013, Šiauliai City operated 3 primary schools (with an average student-teacher ratio of 10.4), 14 pre-gymnasia (with an average student-teacher ratio of 11.2) and 9 gymnasia (with an average student-teacher ratio of 10.1). Also, two secondary schools remained in operation (with an average student-teacher ratio of 7.5) (although subsequent to the OECD review visit there are no longer any secondary schools). In addition to these 28 schools offering regular educational provision, Šiauliai City operates six schools providing specialised education (two youth schools, two basic schools providing special education, one basic school for children with speech impairment and one basic school for children with hearing impairment).

Considerable work was also undertaken to determine the “optimal school” and to develop a corresponding “optimum school plan” supported by success criteria used to determine quality of provision. The review team was told that schools are measured against these criteria and that there is both support and challenge to ensure that the quality of education can be safeguarded.

Key features in the city were the level of political leadership demonstrated and the recognition of the need for community engagement. There appeared to be flexibility, that is, reform was not pushed through in the absence of community buy-in but there was a clear focus on leading conversations with local communities from the perspective of ensuring quality educational experiences for young people. In fact, the review team was told of one school which was allowed to continue and which has, in recent times, reached its own decision to seek a merger with a neighbouring school following a school-led self-evaluation that identified that this would be in the best interests of its students.

It is of note, also, that Šiauliai City has a transparent funding formula to allocate its school maintenance funds, mirroring the national approach to allocation of funding for teaching expenses (student basket funds) (see Chapter 3).

the period 2011-13 finds that provision varied enormously throughout Lithuania with limited access to activities for children and youth in rural areas (National Audit Office, 2015). The report drew attention to wide-spread inadequacies in material resources and the education environment in non-formal education.

The National Audit Office (2015) also found that during 2011-13 part of the funds allocated for non-formal education were used by municipalities for other activities. During 2013/14, four municipalities had tested a new financing method of non-formal education through a student education voucher. Results of the pilot of the “non-formal education student basket” showed that it helped to increase the supply and use of

Box 2.3. Example of a multifunctional centre in Klaipėda

The multi-functional centre *Slengių mokykla-daugiafunkcis centras* opened in 2012. It serves a small community of 5 800 local residents, responding to a desire among families in the area that children should learn close to their homes without the quality of their education being compromised and to a desire to bring young and old together.

The centre provides education for 106 children from pre-primary to Year 4 and incorporates a kindergarten which provides day care for younger babies and children. Children are transported from surrounding villages by a new school bus, recently purchased for the municipality. School meals are transported from a central meals kitchen 9 km away.

A key feature of provision is the variety of non-formal programmes that the centre offers – these include singing, drama, art, theatre and national music. These activities often run alongside activities for older people, allowing inter-generational connections and opportunities to celebrate together.

non-formal education services (NASE, 2015). This new funding mechanism was implemented by all municipalities in October 2015. Based on the evaluation of the pilot, it is expected that this new funding approach will support a strengthened supply of non-formal education activities.

Non-formal education is recognised as having an important role alongside formal education in helping children and young people reach their full potential. The OECD Thematic Review of Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning (OECD, 2010) recognised that learning that takes place outside formal education institutions can be a rich source of human capital and can help young people to complete their formal education while developing skills that can help enhance their employability. The support of non-formal education is particularly important in the context that Lithuanian students have one of the longest summer school holidays in Europe (Eurydice, 2014). The provision of non-formal education and activities during the summer can be particularly beneficial for students from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Gromada and Shewbridge, 2016).

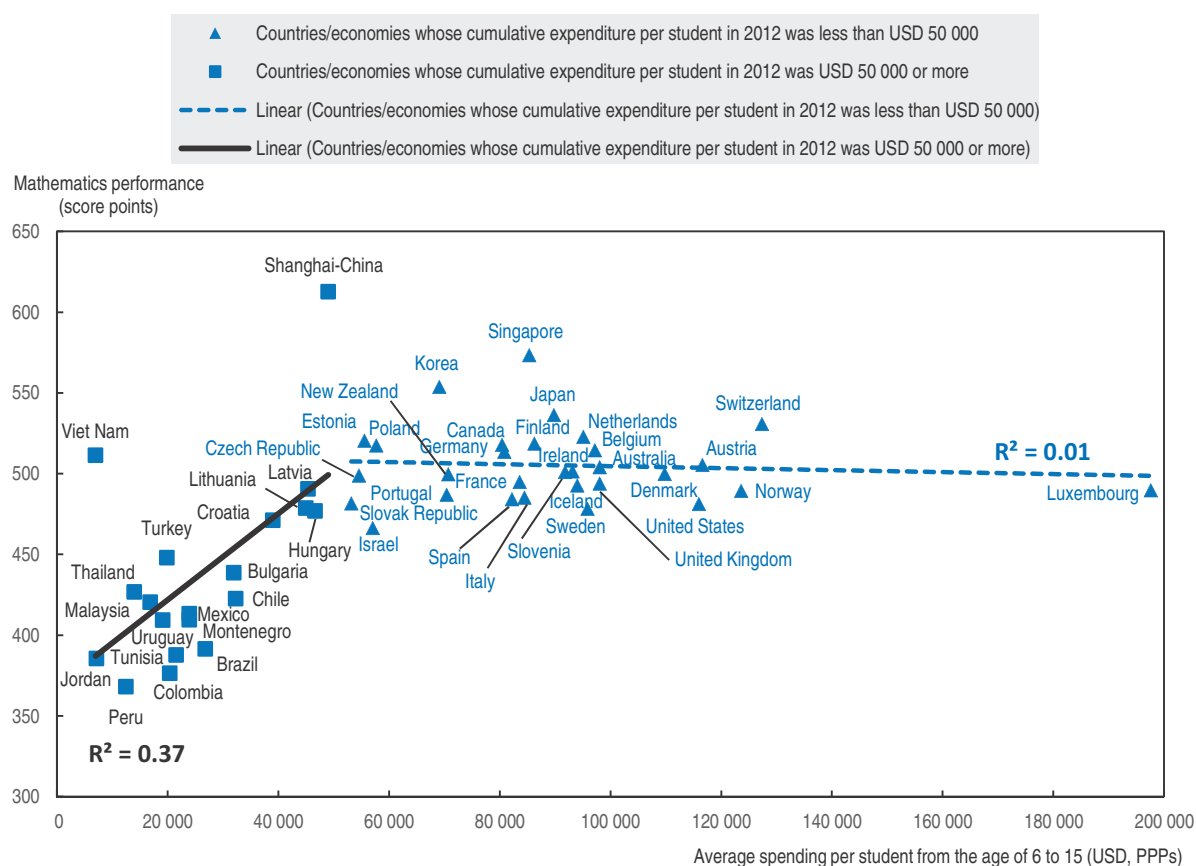
Challenges

Maintaining adequate investment in education

A recurring debate during the OECD review team's visit was about the level of funding provided by government for education. This was clearly influenced by the fact that despite the commitment to greater investment with the targets set in the National Education Strategy 2012-22, there are considerable constraints imposed as part of the convergence programme to ensure sustainability of public sector finances (Chapter 1). The convergence programme includes investment targets that contradict those in the National Education Strategy and that are considerably lower. As Figure 2.1 shows, national budget allocations for education and science, when measured as a percentage of GDP, have been in decline since reaching a high point of 7.3% in 2009 and, in 2015, the figure stands at 4.6%. Available international data show, however, that this is not an uncommon trend: while GDP rose (in real terms) in most countries between 2009 and 2010, public expenditure on educational institutions fell in one-third of OECD countries during that period, probably as a consequence of fiscal consolidation policies (OECD, 2013c).

Lithuania, therefore, is not alone in the challenge that broader consolidation policies have posed to the school education budget. However, the observed relationship between the level of national investment in school education (spending per student from age 6 to 15) and how 15-year-old students performed in the PISA mathematics assessment underline the importance of ensuring an adequate level of investment (Figure 2.5). In countries with internationally low levels of spending per student, there is a clear relationship with expenditure and educational outcomes (countries shown in black in Figure 2.5): those investing more resources see better outcomes.

Figure 2.5. **Spending per student from the age of 6 to 15 and mathematics performance in PISA 2012**



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

A short-term strategy for the Ministry has been to diversify funding, by drawing on European funding (NASE, 2015). The reliance on European funding has supported continued investment while limiting national expenditures. However, these initial investments need to be maintained. A National Audit Office of Lithuania (2014) report showed considerable concerns about levels of debt in several municipalities. Over the period 2003-13, municipal debt increased by a factor of five and around 50% of the total municipal debt was attributed to co-financing of EU-funded projects. Many municipalities are close to their borrowing limits and 25 municipalities had debts representing over 45% of their revenue and, therefore, no longer have the right to borrow for investment projects (National Audit Office of Lithuania, 2014, Annex 3).

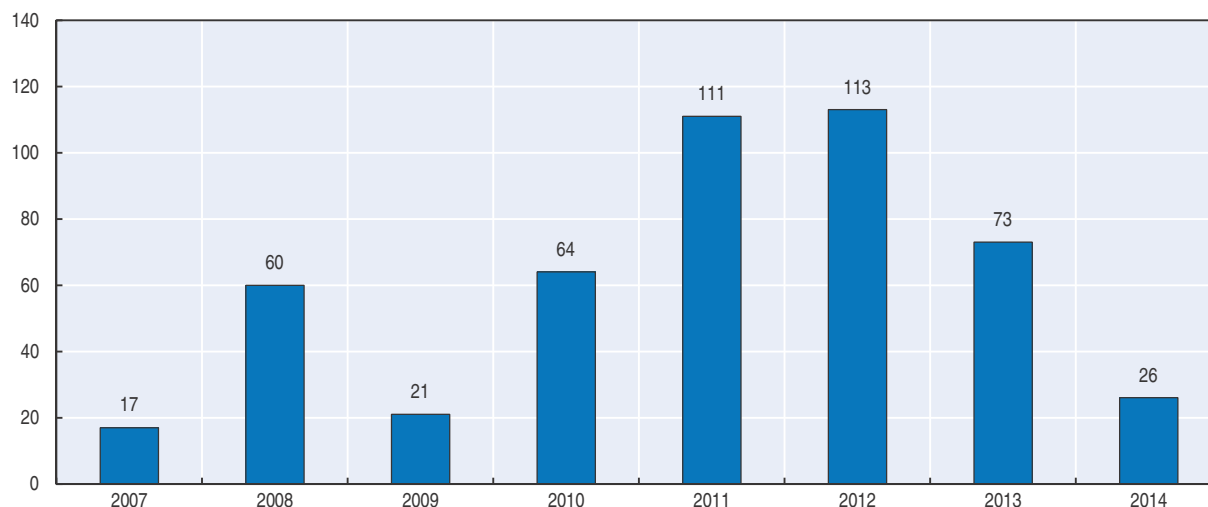
Inadequate focus on how educational investment is targeted and what it delivers

As noted above, during the OECD review the debate on funding was primarily focused on the *quantum* of resource available for education. A key challenge will be to ensure that the focus of government, and of education stakeholders, is also placed on how effectively this resource is used and the extent to which it delivers the best possible outcomes for all students. This was a point also made by Lithuania's National Audit Office during the review team's visit – it told the team that it wanted to see a more focused approach not merely on accounting for expenditure but on demonstrating its effectiveness. Subsequent to the OECD review visit, the National Audit Office (2015) published an audit of non-formal education that points out a lack of quality assurance in this area, including incomplete and inaccurate data to monitor, analyse and evaluate the impact of funding changes.

Regularity and coverage of external school evaluation

The number of schools benefiting from external evaluation is falling (Figure 2.6) and there is patchy coverage across different municipalities (Table 2.A1.5). Lithuania's National Agency for School Evaluation (NASE) promotes the benefit of evaluation (both self-evaluation and external evaluation) in delivering improvement and operates a transparent model of external evaluation. It aims to evaluate every school at least once in a seven-year cycle. Over the seven year period from 2007 to 2013, 459 schools were evaluated (Figure 2.6). It would, therefore, require a significant increase in central capacity for external school evaluation to meet the ambition to evaluate each school in Lithuania every seven years. The number of schools evaluated in recent years has fluctuated considerably and, despite a short period of increase, fell again in 2013. Additionally, accessibility to external evaluation varies considerably among municipalities. The data from NASE demonstrates that external evaluation helps drive improvement. It also provides a rich seam of evidence to affirm good practice, challenge less good performance and inform teacher professional development. Inconsistency in the frequency of, or accessibility to, external evaluation therefore presents a real risk that schools that stand most to benefit from it will not be included in the external evaluation programme.

Figure 2.6. **Number of schools externally evaluated from 2007-14**



Note: Since 2014, external evaluations have been conducted in fifteen vocational training schools.

Source: NASE (no date), *Basic Information and Data*, National Agency for School Evaluation, Vilnius.

Persistent inequities in access to early childhood education and care for urban and rural families

According to student reports in PISA 2012, around 2003 (when they were six years old) there were stark differences in access to pre-primary education for children in big cities versus children in a village or rural areas (among participating 15-year-old students, 27% of those in rural areas reported having followed at least one year of pre-primary, compared to 74% in big cities; such differences are much more pronounced than on average in the OECD – 67% and 76% respectively) (Table IV.3.34, OECD, 2013a). UNESCO (2015) points out that in 2003, Lithuania, as in other Eastern European countries, was faced with the challenge of poor accessibility of pre-school education for poor, particularly rural, families. Within the former Soviet Union, early childhood provision was centrally organised, but this was decentralised thereafter and there were significant inequities across regions and districts in the organisation of provision (Zafeirakou, 2006). Consequently, in Lithuania the National Education Strategy 2003-12 included the following goals (UNESCO, 2015): all children, especially from socially deprived families, should have the conditions to prepare them for school and start attending it; all children (over three years of age) from socially deprived families should have a guaranteed access to free pre-school education; pre-primary education should become universal.

The introduction of the partial “pre-primary basket” helped to address this in part (improved enrolment figures overall). However, national statistics show persistent inequities in participation rates for children aged three to six years (Table 2.6), although of course, the data for rural areas will in fact be higher as some families enrol their children in pre-primary provision in urban areas. In 2014, pre-school establishments in six municipalities were oversubscribed: 88 places per 100 children attending pre-school in Šilalės Region, 94 places in Zarasu Region, 96 places in Marijampolės District and Vilnius City, 95 places in Vilnius City, 99 places in Traku Region and Šiauliai City (Statistics Lithuania, 2015, Table 3.15). Access to pre-primary education is, therefore, problematic in some areas. However, national data show that in the majority of other Lithuanian municipalities there is an oversupply of pre-school places, that is, there exists capacity for increased enrolment in pre-school establishments. In rural areas on average, there are 121 places per 100 children attending pre-school establishments (Table 2.6). At the same time, there are only sufficient places on offer for 33% of the current population of children at pre-school age in rural areas (Table 2.6).

Table 2.6. Early childhood and care participation and provision

		Urban areas		Rural areas	
		2010	2014	2010	2014
Enrolment rates (%)	Under 3 years	34.1	42.1	7.5	11.7
	3 to 6 years	82.8	97.4	38.3	44.5
Number of places	Per 100 children attending pre-school establishments	97	102	97	121
	Per 1 000 children of pre-school age	597	802	156	325

Source: Statistics Lithuania (2015), Švietimas 2014 (Education 2014), <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=18138>, Table 3.5.

This indicates that the issue of supply and demand is quite complex and among other things may relate to proximity of the pre-school establishment, participation fees and different values. Among European countries, social norms in Lithuania place a comparatively high expectation on women to take care of children: analysis by Levin et al., 2015 (in Bussolo, Koettl and Sinnott, 2015) of data from the Generations and Gender Survey 2004-12 showed that around 70% of respondents aged 50 years or older and 55% of respondents aged 49 or younger agreed with the statement “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works”. According to NASE (2015), the government’s decision to implement a year of compulsory pre-school education lacks the support of parents. They perceive pre-school education as providing only the traditional function of childcare and not educational services, and would prefer to take care of their children at home. This echoes a finding from the Education Supply Center’s research project “the development of pre-school and pre-primary education” in 2012-13.

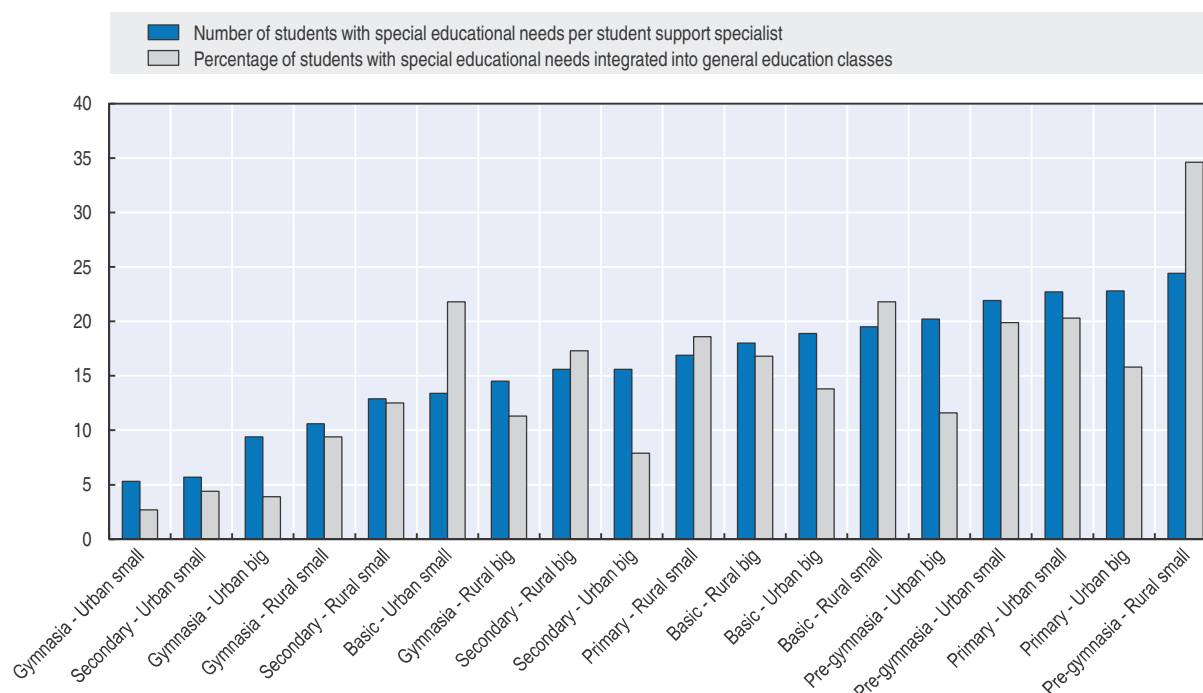
A need to better allocate and use support systems for students with special educational needs

Despite considerable investment in support structures for students with special educational needs (see above), these are not yet universal and capacities vary among municipalities. In 2014, primary schools in nine municipalities did not have access to specialist support staff despite having students with special educational needs integrated in their schools (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015).² On average, there is significant variation in the allocation of student support specialists to students with special educational needs according to the type, size and location of the school (Figure 2.7). In pre-gymnasia and in big urban primary schools there are at least 20 students with special educational needs per student support specialist.

While there has been a European-funded commitment to reform special schools and to establish methodological centres, the OECD review team notes that only 26% of the LTL 5 million allocated for this purpose was absorbed (NASE, 2015, Table 4.5). Nonetheless, these investments aimed to better support the education of children with special educational needs in mainstream general education schools. The proportion of special educational needs students integrated into general education classes varies enormously by school type, size and location (Figure 2.7). Among the secondary schools still operating in 2014, those in urban areas have less than 10% of special educational needs students integrated (small schools 4%; big schools 8%).

Students with special educational needs can access a wide range of specialist support in Lithuania, including from educational psychologists, speech therapists, social pedagogues and other professionals. They can also have their needs met within a mainstream school setting. Evidence presented to the OECD review team, however, suggests that schools often do not use effectively the resources they already have at their disposal and that there can be a dependency upon external professional input. This point would appear to be borne out by local research. Results from a survey carried out in Lithuania by academics from Šiauliai University (as reported in the Proceeding of the International Scientific Conference in May 2013) acknowledge the inclusive nature of education for students with special educational needs, but drew conclusions that traditional forms of pedagogical support in schools still dominated (Ališauskas et al., 2009).

Figure 2.7. **Integration of students with special educational needs in different general education schools, 2014**



Source: Ministry of Education and Science (2015), *Lietuva Svietimas Regionuose Mokykla 2015 (Lithuanian Regional School System 2015)*, Svietimo Aprupinimo Centras, Lietuvos Respublikos svietimo ir mokslo ministerija, Tables 26 and 27.

Additionally, more could be done to encourage collaboration between teachers and professionals, including through increased opportunities for joint professional development and, particularly, to extend specialist professional support to early years' providers to ensure that needs are identified and supported at the earliest possible stage in a child's education. This reflects research findings (e.g. Mendez et al., 2011) that clearly highlight the benefits of identifying developmental disorders at the earliest possible stage and reflects the evidence that early intervention significantly improves the chances of overcoming difficulties.

The OECD review team also received feedback that the bureaucracy and paperwork related to seeking additional educational assistance for students with special educational needs could be streamlined, with more being done to help teachers identify and support difficulties more quickly. A further point was made in relation to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and the need for teachers to be supported to deploy a wider range of strategies for managing behaviour in the classroom.

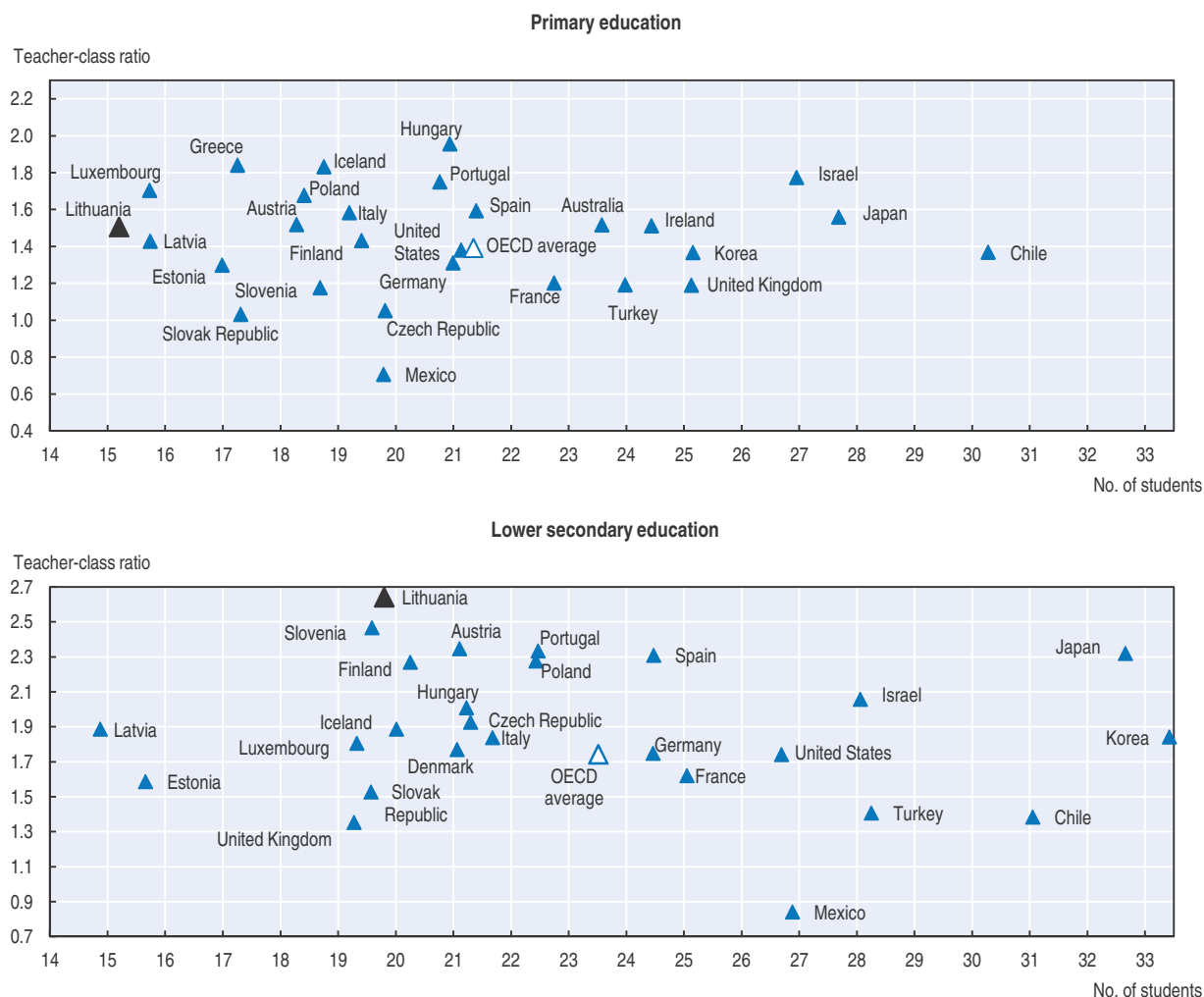
Continued pressure on the efficiency of the school network, especially secondary provision

Despite the evidence of considerable reform to the school network, this is not yet fully complete. The magnitude of the demographic challenge means that there is continued pressure on schools and a need for constant review and adjustment of the school network. Although central governmental efforts to negotiate school network optimisation with municipalities, coupled with the per capita funding approach introduced in 2001 (see Chapter 3) were successful in avoiding a continuing decline of cost-effectiveness,

student-teacher ratios were stabilised at a relatively low level and cost-effectiveness remains low in international comparison (see Chapter 1). This suggests that, in theory, there is considerable scope to tap into further efficiency gains by increasing the student-teacher ratio. Indeed, in Europe, Lithuania has the second highest concentration of teachers in the active population and the ministry recognises the need to address the oversupply of teachers (see Chapter 4).

A more detailed international comparison reveals that small class sizes in small schools are unlikely to be exclusively responsible for the low student-teacher ratio. Figure 2.8 presents the two key components of the student-teacher ratio: class size and teacher-class ratio. Note that the student-teacher ratio can be arithmetically decomposed into these two factors, as it can be written as the product of class size and the inverse of the teacher-class ratio. While the average class size in primary education is lower in Lithuania than in any OECD country or Latvia, the number of primary teachers per class is only

Figure 2.8. **Teacher-class ratio and average class size in European countries, 2012**



Note: Calculations based on number of students and number of classes.

Sources: Derived from OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en>, Tables D2.1 and D2.2; and Eurostat (no date), "Pupil/Student – teacher ratio and average class size (ISCED 1-3)", Eurostat online database, last update 15/04/2015, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/EDUC_ISTE.

slightly above the OECD average (1.50 in Lithuania, compared to 1.39 in the OECD on average). National data show that the average class size in primary education has stabilised and slightly increased over recent years (14.5 students per class in 2005; 15.7 students per class in 2015) (NASE, 2015, Figure 5.1 and EMIS).

Average class size is also comparatively low in lower secondary education and national data show a steady and continuing decline (in Grades 5 to 10 and Gymnasium Grades 1 and 2) between 2005 and 2015 from 21.1 to 18.1 students per class (NASE, 2015, Figure 5.2 and EMIS). Notably, the decline is clear in urban schools (23.3 students per class in 2005; 20.7 students per class in 2015) and cannot be attributed to a rural, small school phenomenon. International data reveal that the student-teacher ratio lags further behind other European countries due to the high number of lower secondary teachers per class. (This is higher than in any of the OECD countries or Latvia.) While Lithuanian schools employ 2.64 lower secondary teachers per class on average (compared to 1.74 on average in the OECD), the majority of European countries fall in the range between 1.60 and 2.34. This implies that there is considerable scope to improve the cost-effectiveness of lower secondary education – this level of education being currently provided in basic schools, pre-gymnasia, *gymnasia* or secondary schools – and underlines the need to fully implement the school reform.

A fundamental challenge moving forward will be to maintain the strategic leadership needed at both national and municipal level and to encourage an appetite for continued rationalisation of the school network. Linked to this is a need to ensure there is a clear and unambiguous focus on the breadth of curricular and other opportunities provided to students and indeed to teachers and other school staff (see below). In this regard, the delegated model of governance and responsibility can present challenges: if the appetite for change and reform is greater in some areas than in others, then there is a corresponding risk of inequity for students.

Perception that the accreditation programme for designation as a gymnasium risks becoming less robust

The concept of ensuring that only those secondary schools capable of offering high quality teaching and learning through a broad and balanced upper secondary curriculum are designated as *gymnasia* is sound. Such a step ensures that the quality of education is put to the forefront, with students' needs appropriately prioritised. However, as the date for phasing out secondary schools approaches, caution is needed to ensure that this focus on quality and depth of the educational provision is not lost. The review team heard some observations that the accreditation process had in recent times become less rigorous, possibly due to the pressure to reach decisions on the future of some secondary schools.

It is very important for the future of students and of societal and economic development in Lithuania that a strong focus is maintained on quality and breadth of provision at upper secondary level, ensuring that students have the opportunity to study economically-relevant STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and other subjects. A network of *gymnasia* offering a broad range of courses delivered by teachers with appropriate subject specialisms, supported by good quality careers education, is critical and it will be important to resist any calls to dilute the accreditation programme for designation as a *gymnasium*.

Vocational pathways lack the parity they deserve to have with other pathways

Across Europe, the importance of having access to a range of pathways that can lead to employment opportunities is well recognised. In Lithuania, students can access vocational education from Year 10: they can complete their basic education in a two-year training programme at a vocational school that, at the same time, allows them to develop their knowledge and skills in a vocationally relevant area. Alternatively, they can complete their basic education at school and then move, in Years 11 and 12, to a vocational educational school to specialise in a chosen area. However, in Lithuania the proportion of students following vocational education and training (VET) programmes in secondary education remains comparatively low. Lithuania is one of four European systems with less than 30% of upper secondary students enrolled in VET programmes – this compares to 50% on average in the EU (European Commission, 2014, Figure 3.5.1).

The European Commission (2014) underlines the important role that high quality VET can play in lowering youth unemployment and facilitating the transition to the labour market. While the youth unemployment rate in Lithuania has come down from 35.7% in 2010, following the impact of the financial crisis, in 2014 it remains nearly twice as high as the overall unemployment rate (19.3% versus 10.9%) (Table 1.2). The need to further invest in improving the attractiveness of vocational education is an area that the Council of the European Union (EU) has highlighted in its country-specific recommendations. In 2015, the Council of the EU acknowledged that Lithuania is taking action to improve and extend apprenticeships and work-based learning, but reiterates that the number and quality of such programmes is still insufficient.³ The lack of prestige of the vocational education system is a challenge that Lithuania shares with many other countries. This is a challenge that needs to be addressed, including through greater partnership working between general and vocational schools and through the provision of up-to-date and economically relevant careers education, information, advice and guidance not merely at the point at which students begin to make choices but from the earliest stages of compulsory education.

Additionally, building on good practice that is already evident in vocational education schools, more needs to be done in conjunction with employers and their representatives to showcase the high quality provision that is clearly present in many vocational schools and to highlight the successes of students, not just as they leave school but over the longer term.

Policy recommendations

This section presents policy options and recommendations designed to build on the strengths in the governance of the education system in Lithuania and to address some of the challenges identified above. The OECD review team argues for the need to secure an adequate level of national funding for education, in parallel with continuing to improve the efficiency of the school network. To this end, a general point is to strengthen the capacity for resource management, in particular, for monitoring systems with a stronger focus on outcomes (both via student assessment and the evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning at schools). This will further strengthen the focus in policies for school network reform from solely an efficiency issue to a matter of improving educational quality.

Reaffirm commitment to the strategic importance of education for societal and economic development

Mass emigration and low birth rates pose a considerable challenge to Lithuania's future societal and economic development. Total fertility, as in many European and Central Asian countries, is lower than the replacement rate: in 2012, there was an average of 1.6 children per woman in Lithuania and this would need to be 2.1 children (Bussolo, Koettl and Sinnott, 2015, Figure 1.1). These two demographic factors have immediately impacted the school-age population and posed significant challenges to the efficiency of the school network. Reforming the school network remains, therefore, high on the policy agenda. However, there is also a need to understand the key role that education can play in addressing these demographic challenges.

Sipavičienė and Stankūnienė in OECD (2013) point out that emigration is an established tradition in Lithuania and claim that due to the widely held assumption that Lithuanian emigrants would eventually return to Lithuania, there has been little attention paid to analysing and understanding the underlying reasons for emigration. Among other things, they identify significant challenges for the education system to address the needs of the Lithuanian labour market, identifying a high correlation between unemployment and increased emigration. The OECD review team presents analysis that supports this claim. Young people aged 20 to 34 years have made up more than half the emigrants over recent years (OECD, 2015) and they have been most impacted by increased unemployment following the financial crisis (Table 1.2). In July 2015, the Council of the EU recommended that Lithuania address the challenge of a shrinking working-age population by improving the labour-market relevance of education and increasing attainment in basic skills.

Along with Latvia, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia, Bussolo, Koettl and Sinnott (2015) find that the low average probability of a second child in Lithuania may be attributed to institutional barriers, such as policies on parental leave or childcare. European survey data indicate that Lithuanian families reported among the lowest usage of formal childcare (Table 2.7, Bussolo, Koettl and Sinnott, 2015). Many OECD countries have given more priority to early childhood education and care as a support to increase the participation of women in the labour market, which is linked to demographic challenges of falling fertility and the need to increase employment (OECD, 2006). While the overall employment rate for Lithuanian women aged 20 to 64 (70.6% in 2014) compares favourably with the European Union average (63.5%), this is much lower for younger women (Table 2.7). European survey data reveal that those Lithuanian children in formal childcare

Table 2.7. Employment rates for women and use of formal childcare

	Lithuania	European Union (28 countries)
Employment rates for women (2014)		
55 to 64 years	54.3	45.2
25 to 54 years	80.9	71.7
15 to 24 years	24.1	30.6
Percentage of children in formal care arrangements (2012)		
Children up to three years (%)	8	27
Children from three years to compulsory school age (%)	72	81

Source: Eurostat (no date), "Employment rates by sex and age", Eurostat online database, last update 16/02/16, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/mare_lfe3emprr.

arrangements are most likely to be in for 30 hours or more per week – this reflects a low degree of flexibility in working arrangements with 10% of Lithuanian women working part-time (European Commission, no date).

While the OECD review team notes the complexity of understanding the demand for early childhood and care, the higher emigration of young families (OECD, 2015), the relatively rigid labour market and the varying offer and participation fees for these services across municipalities suggest that a stronger and more accessible supply could prove attractive to young families. The relatively high poverty rates among children and youth also underline the importance of a strong supply of early childhood education and care, as this, if high quality, is an efficient way to mitigate socio-economic inequities at earlier ages (see below). A review of research shows that well-funded, integrated, socio-educational programmes improve the cognitive and social functioning of children at risk (OECD, 2006).

These factors underline the importance of reaffirming the government's commitment to supporting and improving the quality of education. Within the context of fiscal consolidation in the public sector, there is a need to protect and ensure an adequate level of educational investment. There is also a need to invest in the future teaching workforce and to make room for new teachers (see Chapters 3 and 4). The OECD review team sees these as critical points in working toward the improvement of educational provision, and importantly, educational experiences and outcomes for young Lithuanians.

Recognise the need for both adequate funding and efficiency gains to improve education quality

In parallel with the need to continue reforms to the school network (see below), the OECD review team's analysis underlines the need to maintain an adequate level of funding for education. In international comparison, Lithuania invests low levels of resources in compulsory education. Although the economy started to recover, nominal education spending did not change significantly and the share of total education spending in the GDP has shrunk from 5.8% in 2011 to 4.9% in 2014 and 4.6% in 2015 (Figure 2.1). However, in the context of internationally low investment in education, the declining number of students presents an opportunity to secure the school education budget and to invest additional funds in quality improvements. In particular, expenditure per student in secondary education compared to GDP per capita is amongst the lowest in Europe: in 2011, 20% in Lithuania, compared to 26% in the European Union (Figure 2.A1.6). This low level of educational investment could not allow for any substantial increase in teacher salaries, even with improvements in the efficiency of spending (notably, the challenge to increase the student-teacher ratio in lower secondary education).

Continue to invest in and to promote the quality of early years' education

Early childhood education is increasingly becoming a policy priority for governments across Europe and beyond. A growing body of research recognises that good quality, accessible early years' provision helps build firm foundations for lifelong learning. However, the Lithuanian families who may stand to benefit most from access to high quality early childhood provision are less likely to have access to this: as noted above, there are still persistent inequities in provision between rural and urban areas.

Even at the earliest stages in a child's life, good quality education and care makes sense. In a report by the Wave Trust (2013) for the Department for Education in England, the authors conclude, following a review of nine approaches from across the world to

evaluating the outcomes of early years' investment, that "there is general expert consensus that it is somewhere between economically worthwhile and imperative to invest more heavily, as a proportion of both local and national spend, in the very earliest months and years of life".

Investment in quality early years' provision also makes sense from an equity perspective: the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances carried out in the UK, indicated that there was "overwhelming evidence that children's life chances are most heavily predicated on their development in the first five years of life" (UK Government, 2010). It is family background, parental education, good parenting and the opportunities for learning and development in those crucial years that together matter more to children than money, in determining whether their potential is realised in adult life.

This evidence suggests that Lithuania is right to seek to invest more in making early childhood education and care more accessible. However, there is a need to ensure that there is a clear focus on ensuring the quality of provision. This distinction is an important one: research by the OECD (2011) makes that merely expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children or the long-term productivity benefits for society. Furthermore, research has shown that if quality is low, it can have long-lasting detrimental effects on child development, instead of bringing positive effects.

Recognising the importance of early diagnosis and early intervention, there should also be a focus on supporting early years' professionals to identify special educational needs and to develop strategies for assisting children with additional learning needs.

Consider different ways to monitor progress on the commitment to increase investment in education

The OECD review team notes and commends the government's commitment to increase the level of investment in education. However, some reflection should be undertaken with regard to the most suitable metric for measuring education investment. While the approach of using a GDP-related indicator allows for assessment of the relative priority being attached by a government to education, it can, by its nature, be impacted on by other economic factors. Equally, setting an investment target related to GDP may be unrealistic. The Ministry of Education and Science may therefore wish to consider gathering and publishing other indicators that allow monitoring of the investment in education – for example the extent to which the "buying power" of the level of investment is maintained (i.e. whether public funding keeps pace with or exceeds inflation). This might be a more realistic measure of commitment to invest in education.

Strengthen and secure a more consistent approach to external school evaluation

As noted above, much has been done to promote and embed in schools a culture of self-evaluation that can be supported with external evaluation. However, the reach of external evaluation is not what it could be: data clearly show that there is not currently enough capacity for external school evaluations. External school evaluation is a key element in Lithuania's strategy for quality assurance. The high level of school autonomy also underlines the importance of having a balanced accountability system to ensure the quality of educational experiences for children and the effective use of public investment. It is recognised that external evaluation can be seen as a resource intensive process. However, there is evidence from the NASE that external evaluation is effective in helping

schools build on strengths and address areas for improvement and the findings of external evaluation represent an important means of helping schools account for the quality of their provision.

This is consistent with a key finding in the OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education (OECD, 2013b): there is a need to ensure a sufficient degree of “externality” in school evaluation. Essentially, this refers to a degree of challenge, through the use of objective and comparable benchmark data and/or the scrutiny of the procedures and/or results of school self-evaluation by external professionals or peers, for example, other school leaders. Self-evaluation is integral to continuous improvement, but can be subject to self-delusion where assumptions are not challenged and power relationships in the school community have an undue influence on what is evaluated and the nature of the judgements made. One way to heighten the objectivity of self-evaluation is to ensure that the criteria used in both self-evaluation and external evaluation are sufficiently similar (see below). Another strategy is for external evaluation to put a strong focus on how the school is undertaking its self-evaluation and using the results to improve students’ learning. External evaluators could also collaborate with schools to validate the results of self-evaluation and also the school plans for improvement and steps to implement these.

The OECD review team, therefore, recommends a more consistent approach to external evaluation in Lithuania. There are compelling arguments to secure resources to ensure a regular cycle of external school evaluation. School self-evaluation has been strongly promoted via different legal requirements in the majority of OECD countries over the past 10 to 15 years, but in all countries there is evidence of significant variation in schools’ capacity to undertake this effectively (OECD, 2013b). This is a familiar pattern across countries with hugely varied cultural contexts and underlines the need to nurture an evaluation culture. Some schools will develop self-evaluation capacity more quickly than others and external school evaluation can be designed to recognise this. For example, external school evaluators may visit schools with a mature and effective self-evaluation culture less frequently (on a longer cycle) or spend less time at these schools (a lighter evaluation of only key elements of the school quality framework or a validation of the school’s self-evaluation results). New Zealand and England offer examples of different approaches to make external evaluation more proportionate to the assessed need (OECD, 2013b). The need for external evaluation can also be judged on a set of central indicators of risks to quality (national comparative data, parental complaints, school leadership turnover, etc.). The Netherlands offers an example of a “risk-based” school inspection approach (OECD, 2013b).

These different approaches aim to free up central resources for external evaluation to conduct evaluations more frequently or with greater intensity in those schools that would benefit most from external feedback. However, it is important that those carrying out external evaluation have the opportunity to see and affirm the very best practice as well as provision that needs to improve. The identification and sharing of best practices for school self-evaluation and improvement plans is an important resource for overall school system improvement (OECD, 2013b).

Establish an authoritative national view of what constitutes quality school education

The commitment to ensuring that young Lithuanians receive a quality education is a clear and shared objective among those involved in leading the schooling system in Lithuania and the review team was able to identify a shared understanding that high

quality education is essential to providing young people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they need to succeed and that are fundamental to the health of the economy and society.

However, there appears to be less of a shared understanding among those involved in delivering education in Lithuania of what actually constitutes a high quality educational experience and a consequent absence of agreement on how quality might be defined and measured. In order to address the challenge of focusing on how effectively resources are used, there is also a corresponding need to develop a shared understanding of quality. The use of a set of clear, authoritative criteria on school quality can support a more effective and efficient school evaluation culture, as it would increase the objectivity of self-evaluation in Lithuanian schools and strengthen the alignment with external school evaluation (OECD, 2013b).

During its visit, the OECD review team heard views on the importance of many factors that contribute to delivering a quality educational experience but these were often presented individually. For example, municipalities often defined quality by measuring their progress in right-sizing the network of schools to meet need or by reference to the size of schools. Schools referenced delivery of the required curriculum, experience of teachers and measures such as rates of success in school leaving examinations and (frequently) the numbers of pupils performing well in Olympiads. Many of those we met, from students and parents to researchers and teacher educators spoke of a very clear focus on “teaching” which sometimes appeared to be at the expense of “learning”. In general, discussions on quality focused more on inputs and activities and much less on outcomes and experiences from the perspective of the student.

Definitions of quality schooling of course vary widely from country to country and can be challenging to agree and even more challenging to measure in a meaningful and sophisticated manner. The World Education Forum, in the Dakar Framework for Action (Dakar – 2000) affirmed that quality could be described as “a fundamental determinant of enrolment, retention and achievement”. Its expanded definition of quality set out the desirable characteristics of:

- learners (healthy, motivated students)
- processes (competent teachers using active pedagogies)
- content (relevant curricula)
- systems (good governance and equitable resource allocation).

In Lithuania, the framework for external school evaluation provides a definition of quality as noted above, with 67 individual indicators. However, the review team noted that these were rarely (if ever) mentioned in conversations with schools and municipalities or with teachers and teacher educators.

Other countries across Europe and beyond offer different examples. In Northern Ireland, for example, the government’s school improvement policy (DENI, 2009) sets out the core characteristics of a successful school and provides indicators (27 in total) of effective performance linked to each of these four characteristics:

- child-centred provision
- high quality teaching and learning
- effective leadership
- a school connected to its local community.

These indicators are also reflected in the framework for school inspection and in frameworks for school self-evaluation, thus ensuring coherence between policy and planning.

Ensure monitoring at the national level of quality and equity of student outcomes

The OECD (2012) defines equity in education as meaning that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion). A further challenge for Lithuania is to ensure that its focus on improving quality is not at the expense of improving equity. A key feature of the highest performing systems, internationally, is that the vast majority of students have the opportunity to attain high level skills, regardless of their own personal and socio-economic circumstances.

While there are clear policies to support the education of students in minority-language groups and with special educational needs, it was perhaps surprising, given the strong correlation between poverty and educational under-attainment that is a feature of systems across the world that the review team did not find the same focus in national monitoring on students from poorer backgrounds.

The European Commission (2013) reports that one-third of the Lithuanian population remains at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Indeed, national data (NASE, 2015) suggests that about 30% of Lithuanian children are growing up in families at risk of poverty. For these students, a commitment to provide support was evident to the review team – but the focus was often on providing inputs (for example social assistance measures such as access to free pre-school education or free school meals) rather than on monitoring the outcomes of this group of students in order to determine the extent to which the education system serves their needs. The contribution of education in helping to overcome poverty and social disadvantage is well documented: it would therefore seem important, moving forward, that the focus of the education system shifts from measuring inputs to considering how effectively resources are being targeted and whether they are having an impact on improving outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Equally there did not appear to the review team to be a sufficiently strong focus at system level on ensuring equity in terms of gender. Information presented in the Country Background Report (NASE, 2015) did not disaggregate performance by gender. However, evidence from international student assessments (see Chapter 1) shows a clear performance disadvantage for Lithuanian boys in core skills. The difference between boys and girls in reading and in science performance is one of the largest among PISA-participating countries and economies, in favour of girls (OECD, 2014; see also Table 1.7).

Ensure the effective use of performance and other data to monitor progress

There is a need to ensure effective use of performance and other data to monitor progress in improving outcomes for all students. The OECD review team received information on the Education Management Information System (EMIS) which collects key data on various areas of education including human and material resources. The OECD review team was told that the system enables decision-makers to analyse the current state of human and material resources at the national, municipal or school level and to adopt data-driven decisions.

It is clear that there has been significant investment in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems within education in Lithuania. The focus now should be on how to ensure that this investment contributes to delivering improvements. First, it is important to review whether the EMIS captures all relevant data and can present and disaggregate it at a number of levels in order to inform decisions with the aim of improving the quality of the educational experience for groups of students, particularly those at risk of underachievement. This could include use of assessment data at school level in a way that can directly inform teaching and learning as well as use at municipality or system level as a means of determining the effectiveness of policy decisions or identifying opportunities for intervention and support. At all levels there is a need to ensure that leaders have the capacity and the confidence to interrogate the EMIS system and that it can present accessible, easily analysed information at that can be used to effect positive change.

Promote an environment of inclusion and aspiration for students with special educational needs

While the vast majority of students with special educational needs receive their education in mainstream school settings, there remains a need to ensure that inclusion is not defined merely in relation to the type of institution but also in relation to the educational experience. As Lithuania continues to roll out its reform programme, society and schools alike must have high expectations for all students, including those with special educational needs, and encourage students who face barriers to learning to achieve to their full potential.

Evidence presented to the review team from specialists in the field of Special Educational Needs pointed up the significant level of support available but also highlighted the need for greater differentiation in teaching and learning within the classroom, citing the frequency with which special needs students were taken out of the classroom to receive additional support and the need to address this through more diverse strategies that allowed these students to learn in the classroom alongside their peers. This evidence also highlighted the need to ensure that students with special educational needs, and their parents, were encouraged to have high aspirations and supported to realise these.

Provide a greater central challenge to maintain traction on school network reform at the municipal level

While good progress has been made, the OECD review team underlines the need to maintain traction on school network reform, providing a greater central challenge where necessary. This is necessary not merely to achieve efficiencies and ensure that public funding invested in education can have maximum impact; but crucially, school network reform must be about enhancing the quality of provision for students (see also below).

The government's focus in advancing school network reform needs to continue to emphasise that the overriding factor should be quality of service and that decisions should not be influenced by purely economic factors. The OECD review team gained the impression that this had not fully permeated the system – and data on the number of different school types in each of the 60 municipalities show that the reform has been implemented with varying success. The OECD review team's engagement at school and municipality level suggested that in some cases the focus was more about logistical factors – numbers of schools; types of schools; distance to be travelled – than about the

opportunities that school network reform presented to improve the educational experience for students, and indeed for teachers. There are cases where priority is given to accessibility (and popularity), rather than to quality.

While decisions on school planning are delegated to municipality level, it will be important for the Ministry of Education and Science and its national agencies to monitor progress and, where appropriate, exercise a challenge function to ensure that students and teachers are not disadvantaged by any lack of willingness at municipality level to embrace reform and provide access to a wide and rich curriculum experience.

At the same time, municipalities should look at the opportunities for collaboration and partnership between schools, including through clustering and joint management arrangements. Particularly in more sparsely populated areas, this should also include collaboration and partnership between municipalities and with vocational and special schools. It is worth noting that 12 of the 60 municipalities have fewer than 10 schools.

Ensure consistency of the upper secondary accreditation procedure as a matter of quality and equity

The OECD review team underlines the importance of ensuring a robust and consistent implementation of the accreditation procedure for upper secondary provision. There are several important indicators that support the importance of the national focus on the quality of the upper secondary curriculum and the associated accreditation procedure.

First, evidence on outcomes indicates underlying differences in the quality of upper secondary provision. Near the end of compulsory education, students in rural schools, on average, demonstrate a clear performance disadvantage compared to students in urban schools. National statistics on the *Matura* results show clear differences on average, although these do not allow for socio-economic differences between students in rural and urban schools (Table 2.8). However, a statistical adjustment for socio-economic background can be made for student performance on OECD PISA and this shows that a strong disadvantage remains for students in rural schools (Table 1.8). Such evidence raises significant concerns on the quality of educational opportunities that secondary students have access to in rural locations and calls for a more in-depth analysis of national results that also indicate comparatively weaker outcomes for students in small schools – regardless of their location (Table 2.8).

Table 2.8. National evidence on performance differences by school location and size, 2015

		Students taking the examination		
		Number	Proportion	Average score (in points)
Overall in Lithuania		29 204		50.58
School location	Urban	25 574	87.6	51.70
	Rural	3 630	12.4	42.37
School size	Up to 400	6 816	23.3	43.22
	401 to 600	9 848	33.7	49.00
	601 to 800	8 895	30.5	55.40
	801 or more	3 645	12.5	54.22

Source: Data provided to the OECD review team by the National Examinations Centre.

Second, during the OECD review, representatives from schools' students' unions articulated very clearly the limitations in terms of subject choices, careers education and different teaching and learning styles in some upper secondary provision. These criticisms were made for schools in both urban and rural areas. In a review of research literature on school size, Ares Abalde (2014) finds that larger schools are likely to be able to offer a broader curriculum, more specialised teachers and courses, a broader range of extracurricular activities and a higher share of administrative staff and para-professionals offering support to teachers and school leaders. While there are diminishing returns, that is, quality does not improve beyond a certain total school size, there are clear and strong arguments that medium and larger sized schools can provide higher quality secondary education. For older students, therefore, the potential benefits of attending a larger school appear to outweigh the potential negative effects of increased transportation time and fewer links to parents and the local community (Ares Abalde, 2014).

Third, there are indications that not all students have equal access to quality upper secondary provision due to the presence of an established "shadow education system": private tuition that can help students secure a higher level of attainment in the important *Matura* examinations. The OECD review team was referred to an international tutoring survey carried out by the Education Policy Centre at Vilnius University in 2004/05 which suggested that over 50% of first year university students surveyed had hired private tutors in Year 12. Feedback from student representatives who met the OECD review team suggested that, in 2014, this practice was still common. Students reported a very clear perception that, in many cases, the teaching and learning they received at school was too narrow to allow them to reach their full attainment potential. This feedback was tested with, and corroborated by, representatives from the universities who also expressed concern about the level of independent thinking that was being demonstrated by many students entering higher education.

While there will be an element of private tuition in almost all systems where there are high stakes examinations, it is important that the reasons for its apparent prevalence in Lithuania are explored and the equity issues fully considered. There are also risks that the higher outcomes of students paying for private tuition could mask important indicators of the quality of teaching and learning, thereby preventing support from being provided where it is needed to effect improvement. The focus at school and municipality level needs to be on ensuring that all students at this level are receiving the highest quality teaching and learning while at school, thus reducing the risk that those who cannot afford to pay for private tuition do not have equal opportunity to access different types of further education.

Develop a strategy to improve access to quality education for students in rural areas

The OECD review team notes the evidence, both national and international, of substantial performance differences on average between students in rural and urban schools. As noted above, there are strong arguments to increase investment in early childhood and care provision, particularly in rural areas. Innovative solutions that are already being rolled out, notably the multifunction centres and the combining of pre-primary education and primary education, should be reviewed for impact and scaled up accordingly and where feasible. A priority for educational investment should remain to provide access for younger children to high quality education near their home. As such, the OECD review team argues for targeted funding to support small schools in rural areas offering the primary and basic curricula where it is clear that consolidation is not practicable (see Chapter 3).

However, innovative solutions should also be sought at the secondary level. A consistent implementation of the accreditation of upper secondary programmes should ensure access for all students to high quality education. Part of this process will see the further consolidation of both urban and rural schools providing upper secondary programmes. The Lithuanian National Reform Programme for 2014 (Republic of Lithuania, 2014) identifies early school leaving as a particular issue within rural communities. While it reports that the percentage of early school leavers aged 18 to 24 is falling (from 7.9% in 2010 to 6.3% in 2013), it highlights large gaps between urban and rural areas (3.6% and 11.4% respectively in 2013)⁴ and comments that “the main causes for such increasing regional differences are believed to be inadequate school network, underdeveloped infrastructure of educational support, and insufficient qualifications and competences of teachers”. These are compelling arguments to invest in ensuring students in rural areas have access to high quality secondary education.

In an overview of school size literature, Ares Abalde (2014) presents an overview of rural school policy development in Korea that illustrates the complexity of addressing the considerable challenges to efficiency and quality of the school network that internal migration posed (Youn in Ares Abalde, 2014). In Korea, during the 1980s and 1990s, changes in employment structures saw the mass migration from rural to urban areas. As such, educational policies gave strong focus to maximising the efficiency of schools in rural areas and put considerable pressures on schools to merge or, for schools with fewer than 180 students, close. Frequently schools opted to be organised into “hub schools”, where two to four schools would be grouped and one would take the lead in managing educational programmes and facilities. However, from 2004 there was a shift in focus of policies to improving the quality of education in rural areas. This involved national support to develop a set of excellent “high schools” in rural areas (providing secondary education), providing financial support and facilitating public boarding schools. In parallel, the Korean government pursued policies to promote co-operation and support among schools and to provide funding support to improve the provision of early childhood education and care in rural areas. Significant national investments were made to modernise school facilities in rural areas. This involved tough decisions to prioritise the quality of educational provision in certain rural locations. The government’s approach was to focus mainly on schools that had merged and were in a “strategic region”. The choice of “strategic regions”, of course, would remain a largely political issue, and critics of the Korean government’s policy point to the inevitable losses in areas that were not chosen.

Build the relationship between general and vocational schools

While the planning and oversight of mainstream secondary schools rests with municipalities, vocational schools are funded directly by, and accountable directly to, the Ministry of Education and Science. This separation of functions is likely to contribute to the lower esteem attached to vocational education and to the perception that vocational education is only a pathway for the less academically able.

In Lithuania, vocational education schools are being encouraged to become self-governing institutions and to forge stronger links with business and industry. This presents a real opportunity for vocational schools to foster increased collaboration with general lower and upper secondary provision in order to provide a broader range of curricular opportunities for students and to allow students to experience at first hand the high-quality facilities that exist in many vocational education centres. Increased

opportunities for students and teachers in general and vocational settings to learn together and to engage with employers and businesses could represent an important step in breaking down the perceptions that exist about the validity of vocational pathways for young people. Showcasing the successes of vocational education and identifying role models who can enthuse and inspire young people to take an interest in vocational pathways would also be a positive next step.

Promote further the identification and sharing of good practice

The OECD review team heard evidence at school, municipality and national level of a readiness to share and learn from best practice and of arrangements that allow for the celebration of excellence. An example of this was the awarding of a “best municipality” title annually to reflect progress in achieving national strategic objectives. The National Agency for School Evaluation also publishes good practice reports and filmed examples of good practice.

Sharing best practice has some particular benefits. It acknowledges and celebrates the good practice itself and affirms the work of those responsible for it, thus encouraging them to embed and to improve further. Importantly, it shows others what is possible and gives them encouragement to innovate or change their practice. Finally, it challenges those who do not believe that improvement is possible by demonstrating that, in similar circumstances, other people can effect positive change. Sharing best practice does not need to be restricted to an individual phase or type of education – strategies and practices that work in special education or vocational education may be highly relevant to those involved in basic education.

With this in mind, the Ministry should consider structures and arrangements that identify best practice in a range of areas and encourage those responsible for the governance of education at all levels in Lithuania not only to share this but also to consider how it informs and is reflected in teacher professional development, including initial teacher education.

Notes

1. Republic of Lithuania – Law Amending The Law On Education: 17 March 2011 No. XI-1281.
2. This concerned primary schools in Akmenes District, Alytaus District, Jonavos District (rural areas), Jonisko District, Kaisiadoriu District (urban area), Pakruojo District, Pasvalio District, Plunges District (rural areas) and Rokiskio District.
3. See Council of the European Union recommendations: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/csr2015_council_lithuania_en.pdf.
4. In 2014, the overall percentage of early school leavers has fallen further to 5.9%, while the urban (4.2%)/rural (8.7%) gap has narrowed.

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ANNEX 2.A1

*Data for Chapter 2*Table 2.A1.1. **PISA 2012 index of school responsibility for resource allocation**

a) Average index and teacher employment												
	Average index	Selecting teachers for hire			Firing teachers							
		1	2	3	1	2	3					
Maximum (Netherlands)	1.26	92	8	0	54	46	0					
Lithuania	0.78	82	18	0	84	16	0					
Latvia	0.60	92	8	0	88	12	0					
Estonia	0.14	84	16	0	90	10	0					
OECD average	-0.05	49	27	24	36	30	34					
Finland	-0.28	41	45	14	23	36	41					
Poland	-0.34	80	18	2	76	21	3					
Minimum (Turkey)	-0.72	1	6	93	1	5	94					
b) Teacher salaries and budget												
	Establishing teachers' starting salaries			Determining teachers' salary increases			Formulating the school budget			Deciding on budget allocations within the school		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Maximum (Netherlands)	35	53	12	43	40	17	55	45	0	73	27	0
Lithuania	38	39	22	33	45	21	15	64	21	30	57	13
Latvia	29	27	44	33	33	34	34	61	5	31	66	4
Estonia	11	14	74	14	30	55	34	54	11	61	35	4
OECD average	11	15	73	12	19	69	24	48	28	45	49	6
Finland	7	8	85	7	15	78	31	39	30	87	12	1
Poland	7	12	81	5	14	81	4	44	52	25	47	28
Minimum (Turkey)	0	2	98	0	2	98	6	73	21	7	79	14

1 = Only "school principals and/or teachers"; 2 = Both "school principals and/or teachers" and "regional and/or national education authority", or "school governing board"; 3 = Only "regional and/or national education authority". Source: OECD (2013a), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes a School Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>, Figure IV.4.2.

Table 2.A1.2. **PISA 2012 index of school responsibility for curriculum and assessment**

a) Average index, student assessment and textbooks							
	Average index	Establishing student assessment policies			Choosing which textbooks are used		
		1	2	3	1	2	3
Maximum (Japan)	1.15	98	2	0	89	7	4
Lithuania	0.66	34	65	1	54	46	0
Estonia	0.49	39	61	1	70	30	0
Poland	0.37	57	43	0	82	18	0
OECD average	-0.04	47	41	13	65	27	8
Finland	-0.05	50	40	10	89	11	0
Latvia	-0.19	44	52	5	61	38	1
Minimum (Greece)	-1.15	29	10	61	5	6	89

b) Courses						
	Determining course content			Deciding which courses are offered		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
Maximum (Japan)	89	7	4	90	6	4
Lithuania	54	36	10	48	51	1
Estonia	35	62	2	48	52	0
Poland	83	17	0	36	33	31
OECD average	40	36	24	36	46	18
Finland	34	42	24	49	41	10
Latvia	22	40	38	33	54	14
Minimum (Greece)	2	3	95	4	3	93

1 = Only “school principals and/or teachers”; 2 = Both “school principals and/or teachers” and “regional and/or national education authority”, or “school governing board”; 3 = Only “regional and/or national education authority”.
Source: OECD (2013a), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes a School Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>, Figure IV.4.3.

Table 2.A1.3. **PISA 2012 index of assessment practices**

a) Average index and frequency of use for different purposes				
	PISA 2012 index of assessment practices	Percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that assessments of students in the national modal grade for 15-year-olds are used:		
		For four of the eight purposes	For five of the eight purposes	For six or more of the eight purposes
Maximum (New Zealand)	5.5	0.0	30.6	63.6
Latvia	5.5	2.4	39.7	56.7
Poland	5.0	23.0	35.4	36.9
Lithuania	5.0	13.7	33.5	42.4
OECD average	4.6	20.0	26.4	32.6
Estonia	4.4	12.5	25.3	30.4
Finland	3.9	24.2	19.9	13.2
Minimum (Greece)	3.4	19.6	12.1	8.8

b) Percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that assessments of students in the national modal grade for 15-year-olds are used for the following eight purposes:				
	To inform parents about their child's progress	To make decisions about students' retention or promotion	To group students for instructional purposes	To compare the school to district or national performance
Maximum (New Zealand)	100.0	76.7	93.6	92.8
Latvia	100.0	96.9	38.1	92.5
Poland	99.2	97.7	55.0	58.2
Lithuania	99.5	84.6	53.1	61.4
OECD average	98.1	76.5	50.5	62.6
Estonia	99.5	82.0	20.7	64.7
Finland	98.7	93.3	17.0	45.8
Minimum (Greece)	100.0	98.2	8.1	17.0

	To monitor the school's progress from year to year	To make judgements about teachers' effectiveness	To identify aspects of instruction or the curriculum that could be improved	To compare the school with other schools
Maximum (New Zealand)	100.0	67.7	99.4	87.5
Latvia	99.8	92.5	99.6	85.5
Poland	96.3	78.9	95.4	59.4
Lithuania	94.1	73.9	82.1	59.7
OECD average	81.2	50.4	80.3	52.9
Estonia	78.0	65.5	83.1	58.9
Finland	59.5	15.5	60.5	21.1
Minimum (Greece)	55.9	14.0	49.4	21.9

Source: OECD (2013a), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes a School Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>, Table IV.4.30.

Table 2.A1.4. **PISA 2012 indicators on quality assurance and school improvement**

Percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that their schools have the following measures aimed at quality assurance and improvement:

	Internal evaluation/ self-evaluation	Written specification of the school's curriculum and educational goals	Systematic recording of data, including teacher and student attendance and graduation rates, test results and professional development of teachers	Written specification of student-performance standards	Teacher mentoring
Estonia	99.4	92.5	95.5	88.3	79.9
Finland	95.9	94.1	74.0	75.3	55.2
Poland	97.4	67.6	99.2	82.8	86.6
OECD average	87.1	86.2	85.5	73.6	71.5
Latvia	100.0	96.4	99.8	87.7	71.9
Lithuania	95.0	72.7	98.0	78.6	53.5

	External evaluation	Implementation of a standardised policy for mathematics (i.e. school curriculum with shared instructional materials accompanied by staff development and training)	Seeking written feed-back from students (e.g. regarding lessons, teachers or resources)	Regular consultation with one or more experts over a period of at least six months with the aim of improving the school
Estonia	77.1	88.0	83.4	39.2
Finland	51.4	63.2	74.4	10.3
Poland	78.6	81.8	69.6	39.4
OECD average	63.2	62.2	60.5	43.4
Latvia	84.2	51.7	76.5	23.5
Lithuania	56.5	30.3	75.2	40.2

Source: OECD (2013a), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes a School Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>, Table IV.4.32.

Table 2.A1.5. **Total number of municipality schools evaluated, 2007-14**

School governance	School number in total	Evaluated schools	Percentage of evaluated schools
Rietavo sav.	3	0	0.0
Širvintų r. sav.	11	0	0.0
Visagino sav.	5	0	0.0
Trakų r. sav.	17	1	5.9
Pasvalio r. sav.	13	1	7.7
Molėtų r. sav.	11	1	9.1
Kelmės r. sav.	18	2	11.1
Zarasų r. sav.	8	1	12.5
Ignalinos r. sav.	7	1	14.3
Pagėgių sav.	7	1	14.3
Plungės r. sav.	20	3	15.0
Jurbarko r. sav.	18	3	16.7
Šiaulių r. sav.	24	4	16.7
Mažeikių r. sav.	29	5	17.2
Vilniaus r. sav.	45	8	17.8
Šalčininkų r. sav.	21	4	19.0
Telšių r. sav.	26	6	23.1
Kauno r. sav.	27	7	25.9
Šilutės r. sav.	23	6	26.1
Utenos r. sav.	19	5	26.3
Radviliškio r. sav.	18	5	27.8
Biržų r. sav.	14	4	28.6
Šilalės r. sav.	14	4	28.6
Elektrėnų sav.	10	3	30.0
Šiaulių m. sav.	34	11	32.4
Kazlų Rūdos sav.	9	3	33.3
Rokiškio r. sav.	15	5	33.3
Skuodo r. sav.	9	3	33.3
Raseinių r. sav.	14	5	35.7
Kalvarijos sav.	8	3	37.5
Klaipėdos m. sav.	40	15	37.5
Anykščių r. sav.	10	4	40.0
Klaipėdos r. sav.	20	8	40.0
Palangos m. sav.	5	2	40.0
Panevėžio r. sav.	22	9	40.9
Joniškio r. sav.	12	5	41.7
Akmenės r. sav.	9	4	44.4
Vilkaviškio r. sav.	22	10	45.5
Vilniaus m. sav.	120	56	46.7
Ukmergės r. sav.	17	8	47.1
Marijampolės sav.	24	13	54.2
Prienų r. sav.	12	7	58.3
Panevėžio m. sav.	25	15	60.0
Varėnos r. sav.	15	9	60.0
Alytaus r. sav.	12	8	66.7
Kaišiadorių r. sav.	15	10	66.7
Švenčionių r. sav.	9	6	66.7
Tauragės r. sav.	18	12	66.7
Pakruojo r. sav.	13	9	69.2
Kauno m. sav.	66	48	72.7
Kėdainių r. sav.	19	14	73.7
Šakių r. sav.	16	12	75.0
Jonavos r. sav.	21	17	81.0
Kretingos r. sav.	16	13	81.3

Table 2.A1.5. **Total number of municipality schools evaluated, 2007-14** (cont.)

School governance	School number in total	Evaluated schools	Percentage of evaluated schools
Druskininkų sav.	6	5	83.3
Lazdijų r. sav.	13	11	84.6
Kupiškio r. sav.	14	13	92.9
Alytaus m. sav.	17	17	100.0
Birštono sav.	2	2	100.0
Neringos sav.	1	1	100.0
MUNICIPAL SCHOOLS	1 108	468	42.2
PRIVATE SCHOOLS	40	5	12.5
STATE SCHOOLS	24	3	12.5
Total	1 172	476	40.6

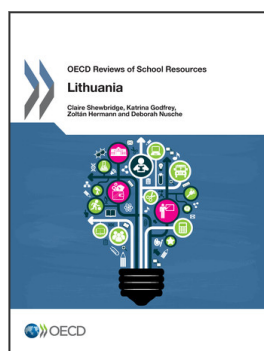
Note: Municipalities are presented in descending order of percentage of municipal schools evaluated.

Source: NASE (no date), *Basic Information and Data*, National Agency for School Evaluation, Vilnius.

Table 2.A1.6. **European countries' expenditure per student relative to GDP per capita, 2012**

Primary education		Lower secondary education	
Latvia	15.9	Latvia	16.1
Czech Republic	17.2	Lithuania	18.2
Germany	18.8	Hungary	19.9
Netherlands	19.1	Norway	20.4
France	19.3	Luxembourg	22.9
Norway	19.4	Germany	23.1
Hungary	19.5	United States	23.5
Lithuania	19.8	Italy	25.4
Ireland	20.1	Ireland	25.6
Slovak Republic	21.2	Sweden	25.9
Finland	21.5	France	26.4
United States	21.8	Estonia	27.4
Austria	22.0	Poland	28.1
Italy	22.1	Netherlands	28.6
Spain	22.3	Spain	28.6
Luxembourg	22.7	Czech Republic	28.8
Estonia	23.0	Belgium	28.9
Belgium	23.8	Japan	28.9
Sweden	24.4	United Kingdom	29.7
Japan	24.9	Austria	31.3
Switzerland	28.5	Finland	33.4
Poland	28.6	Switzerland	33.5
United Kingdom	29.0	Slovenia	35.2
Slovenia	32.4	Slovak Republic	..

Source: Eurostat (no date), "Annual expenditure on educational institutions per pupil/student based on FTE, by education level and programme orientation", last update 24/02/16, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/educ_uoe_fini04.



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