

Executive summary

There are entrenched inequities in the Czech school system. In international comparison, the average socio-economic background of students at a school is very strongly associated with the school's average performance and educational mobility rates are the lowest in the OECD. Notably, there is significant economic variation among the fourteen Czech regions, with varying challenges in terms of internal migration and unemployment. However, the national funding mechanism to allocate funding for “direct costs” (including staff salaries) does not include weightings to address such inequities; simply, it allocates funding on a per student basis with a different set amount for five different age bands (the national “normatives”). The Czech regions are then responsible for allocating this funding to pre-schools and basic schools (managed by municipal authorities) and to the schools they manage directly (mainly providing upper secondary education). Czech regions prepare regional development plans, however, regional funding mechanisms are rigid and overly complicated and impair the matching of funding to strategic priorities. At the same time, the majority of Czech regions have faced efficiency challenges in their school networks, with a large decline in the school-aged population. There is evidence of reorganisation and consolidation in the school networks, which has been supported by, among other factors, the per student funding allocation mechanism. However, the need to further consolidate remains a strategic challenge in several regions and notably for schools offering lower and upper secondary education.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (the ministry) Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2020 (“Strategy 2020”) puts new focus on addressing inequities in the Czech school system – a clear priority. The proposed extension of the early childhood and care offer and introduction of a compulsory year of pre-primary education is expected to better mitigate socio-economic influences on early childhood learning development. As of 1 September 2016, students with special educational needs have the legal right to support measures in mainstream education, which is expected to underpin a drive to lower the proportion of children educated in segregated provision. Notably, a clear priority in Strategy 2020 is to secure more resources for teacher salaries, which remain very low in international comparison and compared to other tertiary graduates in the Czech Republic. The ministry has also led work to develop a new career structure for the teaching profession, although a challenge is to secure additional funding to implement this fully. Compared to the OECD average, the amount of expenditure per student aged 6 to 15 in the Czech Republic is very low. Finally, Strategy 2020 recognises the need for stability and more strategic oversight. Political instability has impacted on the capacity for general management at the ministry and its subordinated organisations and there are considerable capacity challenges with a highly fragmented local government administration.

The following policy priorities were identified to improve the effectiveness of resource use in the Czech school system.

Strengthen strategic oversight by school founders and develop guiding principles for school network planning

Regions should take the lead in developing models for reporting progress against the stated objectives in the regional development plan, for example, reports could include a set of clear goals – in some cases, where feasible, including targets to be achieved – and subsequent reports would present a report of progress against each of these goals. A more proactive role and regular reporting of results, including of the student final examinations, by the Czech regions would build trust in the broader community. Obvious areas that are current strategic challenges for many Czech regions include the need to consolidate the provision of both lower and upper secondary education. The ministry could lead a collaborative exercise to establish a set of authoritative guiding principles, rules and even target quotas for capacity at different key stages of schooling. The focus on educational stage as opposed to school type is important. For example, lower secondary education is offered by basic schools and is seen as part of a basic service to be provided as close as possible to where the children live, that is, even in small villages. This structural feature of the system makes it difficult to create school units of appropriate “size efficiency” and some areas with severe demographic pressures may face significant cost-efficiency and organisational problems in a system of per capita funding. With active collaboration and strong political will, there is a solid basis to plan a more efficient organisation of the regional education systems, including: good channels for policy discussion among the central, regional and municipal levels, as well as representative bodies for private and church schools and employers; objective demographic data and statistical forecasts with regional breakdowns; plus a strong administrative tool (the school registry) comprising a comprehensive listing of different educational fields and capacities.

Introduce more flexibility into the funding allocation system to better support strategic priorities

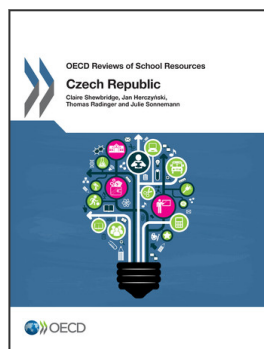
The national allocation system, based on the pure numbers of students in five different age bands, is very rigid and does not reflect the complexity and the variation of the Czech education system. It needs to be more flexible by, for example, increasing the number of parameters, to reflect different factors which have impact on class sizes and on per student costs of providing education. Such factors must be objective and informed by research and analysis. A more flexible national allocation system could better support the national policy priority to address educational inequities. Different allocation scenarios can then be discussed and reviewed by key stakeholders to ensure that their impact is consistent with national education policies. At the same time, it is recommended to shift the object of the regional budgeting process from an educational programme to the school itself as an institution. Currently, the regions are legally obliged to define and implement a very large number of normatives for secondary schools according to a very detailed methodology of different educational programmes. This supports historical inefficiencies, but regions must have more flexibility to plan for the introduction of new education programmes, to phase out others and to consolidate the offer of lower and upper secondary education in line with demographic pressures. Another complexity is the current requirement for regions to reallocate the national funding for direct costs to municipalities. It would be more efficient to transfer national funding directly to municipal budgets. The ministry needs these direct links, and the necessary policy dialogue they will promote, to better understand the problems of the Czech school system and to better plan its development.

Increase efforts to attract and retain high calibre teachers and to promote collaboration for professional learning

Improving the attractiveness of teaching is a key priority and the Strategy 2020 rightly identifies the need to implement the new teacher career structure and to continue to increase teacher salaries. To raise the public profile of teaching, the ministry should consider highly selective entry pathways at two stages: first, the quality of candidates accepted into initial teacher education, and second the standards that must be demonstrated to graduate from beginning teacher to qualified teacher. At the first stage, the ministry should explore approaches that can help better screen candidates into initial teacher education, such as encouraging providers to use more in-depth procedures that assess whether the individuals wanting to become teachers have the necessary motivation, skills, knowledge and personal qualities (specific assessments). Additionally, flexible programme structures can provide student teachers with school experience early in the course, with opportunities to transfer into other courses if their motivation towards teaching changes as a result. The ministry's plans to establish assessments at the end of the first year of teaching should help to raise teacher selectivity. However, assessments on their own will not be effective in changing teaching practice in a sustained way unless there is also a culture of continuous improvement and deep learning in the school. It is recommended that teacher job descriptions in the new career structure incorporate the use of peer observation, demonstration and feedback. These practices can be embedded within specific programmes such as learning communities and mentoring in the school. While the new career system will expand mentoring, there should be more of a focus on establishing intensive learning communities in schools (which is currently missing). Teachers promoted to the highest career levels in the new career system could promote and lead professional learning communities.

Base school leadership appraisal on a robust assessment of school progress against central quality criteria

The current distribution of responsibilities for oversight of school principals and school monitoring by the school founder provides the conditions for stronger local accountability. Oversight at the local level can foster important relationships between school principals and the local government, which would otherwise be impossible in a situation where direct responsibility lies at a higher level. However, there is room to significantly increase the oversight of educational quality at the local level by making more effective use of existing processes and documents that are underpinned by national legislation, notably: a prominent role for the school strategic development plan (SDP); the monitoring of the school principal's work and progress to achieving SDP goals; adequate follow-up at local level and also by the ČŠI. Importantly, regional, municipal and school leaders will need to proactively work toward shaping these instruments to better suit their needs. An important piece of glue to join these elements should be the new set of evaluation criteria being developed by the ČŠI. This should become an authoritative set of quality criteria to underpin regular school self-evaluation (although leaving room for local criteria to be added for specific development goals), feeding into school development planning. In turn, school councils and school founders can use these instruments to discuss progress and challenge and recognise achievements of school management where necessary.



From:

OECD Reviews of School Resources: Czech Republic 2016

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264262379-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

Shewbridge, Claire, *et al.* (2016), "Executive summary", in *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Czech Republic 2016*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264262379-3-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.