



## Foreword

What wise parents want for their children is what governments should want for all children. Everywhere, children from wealthier families will find open doors to a successful life. But children from poor families often have just one single chance in life, and that is a good school that gives them the opportunity to develop their potential. Those who miss that boat rarely catch up, as subsequent education opportunities in life tend to reinforce early education outcomes. Achieving greater equity in education is not just a social justice imperative, it is also a way to use resources more efficiently, and to increase the supply of knowledge and skills that fuel social and economic development and cohesion.

Most education systems now recognise this challenge. The discourse in education policy has advanced considerably from equality (where the assumption was that all students benefit from the same support), to equity (where all students get the support they need), to justice (where all students succeed because inequities in opportunities have been redressed). And yet, successive PISA assessments have shown that, in most countries, a student's or school's postal code remains one of the best predictors of success in education. So what stands between educational aspirations and reality?

PISA 2015 offers an important innovation by integrating a survey of teachers into the assessment; *Effective Teacher Policies* presents first findings from this survey. To some extent these findings are encouraging: more than half of the 69 countries and economies with comparable data now invest more teachers per student into disadvantaged than privileged schools. At the same time, few countries succeed in attracting the most qualified teachers to the most challenging schools. Quite the opposite, in fact: in most countries, teachers in disadvantaged schools are less-qualified and less-experienced, and principals feel that the lack of qualified teachers is a major barrier to overcome disadvantage and improve learning. This makes a big difference, because while the gap in academic achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged students seems unrelated to differences in class size, inequalities in outcomes are much larger in countries where teachers' qualifications and experience are inequitably distributed.

Intuition might suggest that where the hiring of teachers is centrally managed, teacher allocation would end up being more equitable. But the data suggest otherwise. In those countries where schools have greater autonomy over the hiring of teachers and over establishing their salaries, the quality of teachers seems to be better aligned to meet the needs of students and schools.



That obviously doesn't mean that increasing school autonomy will improve equity in teacher allocation. But it does suggest that school systems with an enabling and flexible work organisation that places considerable responsibility at the frontline also tend to be good at establishing conditions that better align resources with needs. So it is possible to reconcile aspirations for greater flexibility with the need to ensure quality, equity and coherence in school systems.

The report also shows that high-performing education systems tend to emphasise clinical education as part of initial teacher education; they provide bespoke opportunities for in-service teachers' professional development; and they put teacher-appraisal mechanisms in place that have a strong focus on teachers' continuous improvement. We know those things now because the OECD no longer collects data from students and teachers in isolation, but in a way that allows the two sets of data to be analysed jointly – and, intentionally, not at the level of individual teachers and schools, but in a way that provides education systems with insights into how to ensure that every student benefits from excellent teaching. This marks a major step forward for PISA's aim to help countries design more effective policies.

Of course, that is all easier to say than to do. It will always be difficult for teachers to allocate scarce additional time and resources to the children with the greatest need. People who laud the value of diversity in classrooms are often talking about the classes other people's children attend; it is hard to convince socio-economically advantaged parents whose children go to school with other privileged children that everyone is better off when classes are socially diverse. Policy makers, too, find it challenging to allocate resources where the challenges are greatest and where those resources can have the biggest impact, because poor children usually don't have someone lobbying for them.

But what could be more important than better supporting those teachers and schools working in the most difficult circumstances with holistic approaches in which teachers feel backed in their professional and personal life when they take on additional challenges, and when they know that additional effort will be valued and publicly recognised?

The results from PISA show that this can be done, and in some countries – and in some schools in many countries – even the most disadvantaged children are high performers. It is within our means to deliver a future for millions of learners who currently do not have one.

**Andreas Schleicher**

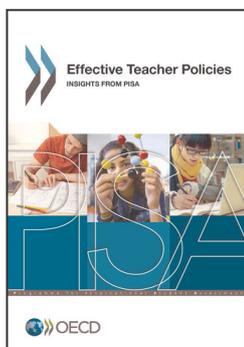
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