



Foreword

The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial survey of the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds. It has been designed to allow valid comparisons across countries and cultures.

The results of PISA should not be taken out of context as the sole marker of educational progress. To achieve a stellar education system, one which generates high quality education and results for all students, a country or region must get not just one thing right, but many. PISA results can however be a useful tool or marker. They can point to specific problems a country or region needs to address, and to possible solutions and best practice. Often, PISA results make already known trends more widely-known to the public.

In the most recent PISA study of 2009, Spain opted to increase the number of students participating in the assessment, so that there would be a representative sample of students from many Spanish regions: the Canary Islands, the two cities of Ceuta and Melilla (combined), and 13 other regions.¹ Consequently, PISA results for the Canary Islands can be compared to those of most other regions in Spain, Spain as a whole, and other participating countries.

The results for the Canary Islands were seen as disappointing within that region. This led the government of the Islands to ask the OECD to evaluate the school system in the light of PISA outcomes, in order to diagnose the problems and suggest practical solutions and improvement routes.

Education is indispensable in modern society. Given the rising skill demands in modern labour markets, basic proficiency levels have become a minimum requirement for successful entry into the labour market and participation in lifelong learning. In a globalised economy, education is a crucial element of prosperous social and economic development. Even a relatively small skills improvement can have a large impact on the future wellbeing of society. For example, if Spain were to improve PISA performance so that all students achieve at least the basic proficiency level,² statistics suggest that the average annual growth rate could increase by 0.69% (OECD, 2010a).

As international research consistently shows, young people with higher qualifications enjoy many benefits, such as higher salaries, better working conditions, higher participation in adult education and training, and less likelihood of becoming or remaining unemployed (OECD 2006; OECD 2010b). Society, in turn, profits from these personal benefits in the form of higher tax revenues, lower incidence of economic dependency and enhanced capacity for innovation (OECD, 2006; Levin, 2009; Belfield and Levin, 2007). Yet, as the benefits of educational investments take some time to show up, the value and importance of education is often underestimated. This seems to be the case in the Canary Islands, which twenty years ago was a traditional rural society in which job-finding did not depend on formal qualifications. The region's labour market consisted mainly of jobs in construction, agriculture and tourism that did not require high educational attainment levels. However, the economic crisis and developments in the global economy and society have increased the importance of formal educational qualifications. Improving students' cognitive skills, and providing higher-quality education that meets the changing demands of the regional labour market, have become priorities for the Canary Islands.

The challenge now is to find ways of improving student performance from the low levels revealed in PISA. Improvement is most likely to be achieved if everyone in the Canary Islands society shares a conviction that education matters. The success of the Finnish education system, which performs so well in international comparisons, has much to do with the huge significance attached to education – not just for its economic value, but also for its social and cultural value and contribution to a functioning democracy (OECD, 2005). A successful education system is one which ensures high participation and equal opportunities, and respects the needs and interests of all students.

This report is first of its kind and is published as part of the OECD's *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education* series. It sheds light on PISA results and suggests pragmatic solutions to the challenges PISA revealed for the Canary Islands. The review team hopes that this report proves useful to the government and stakeholders of the Canary Islands in raising school standards and developing their school system. PISA is a means to an end – good education for all children. While PISA results can and often do drive changes in education policy, such changes should be made on the basis of all evidence available in the country or region, with full collaboration of all stakeholders and in the best interests of all students. This report should be considered as a contribution to ongoing discussions on the PISA results within the Canary Islands.



Preparations for the review began in April 2011 and the review team carried out the site visits to the Islands in June 2011. Financing for the review was provided by the Canary Islands government. During the site visits the OECD team held discussions with a wide range of stakeholders in the Canary Islands to try to pinpoint the reasons for the PISA outcomes, and identify the best way ahead. Sadly the fieldwork schedule could not accommodate visits to all the islands, but stakeholders from some of those islands joined meetings with the team.

The counterparts met by the team included the President and Education Minister of the Canary Islands and many senior officials in the regional Education Ministry; students, teachers and Principals of primary, secondary, upper secondary and all-age schools; representatives of parents' associations, Schools Councils, teachers, employers, trade unions, municipalities and the media; students, professors, Deans and Vice-Deans of universities offering teacher training; and senior School Inspectors, Commissioners and Provincial Directors of Education.

Representatives of education and civil society were already aware of many of the issues behind the PISA data. Although there have been genuine efforts to reform and upgrade the education system in the Canary Islands, it seems that their rationale has not been fully discussed or explained to stakeholders, who feel excluded from the dialogue. And though all the parts of the education system function, they do not seem to be synchronised or working together towards a joint end. It is also true that a number of issues arise from the overall Spanish education system: the Canary Islands education authorities can only make changes in these areas by working with the central government.

The OECD team asked the following questions, which stakeholders in the Canary Islands may also wish to discuss as part of the process of taking the recommendations forward.

- What are the main questions raised by the PISA data?
- Which of these issues are already known to the country/province? Which are new, or unexpected in the light of known country data?
- Where PISA results suggest a problem, is the solution clear? Or is there a need for further evaluation or research before the problem can be tackled?
- Which issues are already being addressed by new programmes? Have these programmes been evaluated to make sure that they are producing the desired results?
- Is education funding being used to best effect now? How could likely future funding best be deployed and prioritised to achieve measurable improvements?
- Of the issues that have been identified, can any of them be addressed simply and quickly, at local or national levels? Which are medium term and longer term?

This report has sought to identify features of the education system in the Canary Islands which might be addressed by the Provincial Education Administration, on its own or working with central government education authorities. The OECD team believes that some of the recommendations made to address issues raised by PISA 2009 could be taken forward in the short or medium term. Others, such as curriculum change, could take longer. In some cases, where fieldwork time only permitted the team to make a broad initial assessment, further analysis and evaluation of local conditions and existing programmes may well be helpful.

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Notes

1. For Spain, the data for all of the participating regions, including Canary Islands, adhered to the PISA sampling standards and international comparability was internationally adjudicated.
2. Defined here as obtaining a score of 400 on the PISA tests (one standard deviation below the OECD average).

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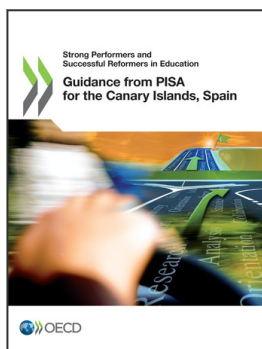
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From:

Guidance from PISA for the Canary Islands, Spain

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264174184-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2012), “Foreword”, in *Guidance from PISA for the Canary Islands, Spain*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264174184-1-en>

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