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Schools, Principals and Inspectors

This chapter will consider Canary Islands schools from three perspectives in which PISA findings are relevant: schools and their communities, school accountability and school autonomy. It will consider school governance and the role, responsibilities, skills, training, recruitment, accountability and autonomy of school principals and School Councils. It will also consider the similarities and differences between public and private schools in the Canary Islands.

SCHOOLS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

Public and private subsidised schools in the Canary Islands have strong roots in their local communities. Eighty per cent of students in the PISA 2009 sample were in schools where the principal reported that admission to the school was always based on the area of residence – more than in any other Spanish region except Catalonia and Ceuta and Melilla and well above the Spanish average of 66% and OECD average of 43%. And 43% of students were in schools where the principal reported that preference is always given to family members of current or former students (Spain 32%, OECD 16%).

Basing admittance mainly on proximity can have positive effects: it can help schools build good relationships with the community and local parents; teachers may know the students and their families better; and this admissions basis can secure equal opportunities and a good social and ability mix, provided there is a good social and ability mix in the local area. On the other hand, if all or most families in an area come from one end of the socio-economic spectrum, social differences can be reinforced. PISA and other research has shown that children from disadvantaged backgrounds often do better academically if schooled with others from more advantaged families; if all the students in a school come from less well-off families because that is the nature of the locality (true of at least one school the team visited), average student performance is likely to be lower, other things being equal. This may be because, in such communities, both parents and teachers tend to have lower expectations.

Another negative effect of basing school admittance primarily on residence area is that parents have little or no choice of school, and so may feel less positive towards the school their children attend. Before visiting the Canary Islands the OECD team asked the regional authorities "If parents do not want their child to go to their local school, or wish to take the child away from it, what can they do?" In response, the team was given statistics for school applications in 2011/12. These showed that only 4% of parents applied from outside their designated area, another 12% from its fringes, 72% from within the area and 12% not known. This did not wholly answer the original question, and raised new ones, such as "Is the percentage applying from outside the area so low (4%) because parents really do not want to send their child to any other school or because they know that an out-of-area application is unlikely to be accepted? Were some of the 4% applying from outside the area doing so because they intended to move into it, or were they all dissatisfied with their local options?" and "Were the 12% of parents applying from the fringes of the area exercising choice, or was the school applied to actually their nearest?" PISA does record, however, that 61% of the Canary Islands students in the 2009 sample were in schools where it was likely or very likely that a parent's request to move their child to another school would be granted (Spain 59%, OECD 69%).

PISA also asked about the degree of competition schools faced from others in their locality. The Canary Islands had the lowest percentage in Spain of students in schools competing with two or more other schools in same area, and the third highest percentage in Spain of schools competing with no other schools. This lack of competition is presumably related primarily to the residence area basis of school admissions, secondly to the Islands' geography and thirdly to the low number of private schools, concentrated in the bigger urban areas.

PISA shows that greater local competition does not necessarily, on its own, produce better performance. Nor does allowing parents more choice in where their child is schooled. However, any or all of these things put schools under pressure to achieve better results if they wish to keep their numbers up – pressure which often pays off in higher student attainment. In the Canary Islands, such external pressures are either absent or relatively low. Schools which face few competitive pressures to improve their performance may nonetheless feel impelled to achieve by the pressure for high standards from parents of existing students – but, as recorded in the previous chapter, Canary Islands schools also face very little of that pressure either, compared to schools in other jurisdictions. In the absence of either competitive or parental pressure, international experience suggests that high standards will only be achieved and maintained if schools not only have well-trained teaching forces whose every member is committed to continuous improvement, but also have strong accountability systems and effective school leaders with the autonomy to take the decisions and implement the action needed.

SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

High-performing education systems have in recent years focussed less and less on controlling inputs, more and more on delivering outcomes. A focus on outcomes requires the establishment of clear standards of quality and attainment for educational institutions, and holding institutions accountable for delivering them. Over the past decade, accountability systems based on student performance have become increasingly common across OECD countries. Results are often widely reported and used in public debate to inform parents about school choice and to prompt improvements in schools. There is international debate about the effects of testing on the teaching process, the need to avoid education becoming driven by test results and the effects of this on schools and students. However the Canary Islands system does not appear either to maximise the use of existing data to improve teaching and learning or to have in place basic assessment approaches that would help this to happen.

PISA reported on schools' accountability to parents of existing students, the test of accountability being how parents are informed of their child's results. According to PISA, 51% of the Canary Islands students in the 2009 sample were in schools which provided

information to parents on their child's performance relative to other students in the same school, which is higher than the Spanish average (38%) and a little higher than the OECD average (47%). However, it is much more useful to inform parents about their child's performance relative to national or regional benchmarks, because regional and national benchmarking allows for performance comparisons independent of the average performance of the school. Only 17% of Canary Islands students were in schools which did this, slightly below the Spanish average of 19% and way below the OECD average of 47%. More useful than information relative to other students in the same school, but less useful than information relative to national or regional benchmarks, is information relative to students in other schools. Only 12% of Canary Islands students were in schools which did this, slightly above the Spanish average of 11% but only half the OECD average of 24%. Therefore, the accountability to parents of schools in the Canary Islands appears weak by international standards. The low average performance levels PISA revealed make it even more important to inform parents fully, against regional or national norms, about student performance relative to national and regional benchmarks. Parents who are only told how their child is doing compared to his or her classmates could be unnecessarily concerned if the child is at a high-performing school, lulled into a false sense of security if the child's school is low-performing. Of course, to establish regional norms, or indeed to make reliable comparisons between results in different schools, it is necessary first to develop standardised tests which measure achievement against clear and agreed curriculum standards, as recommended in Chapter 4.

PISA also asked principals whether students' achievement data is made publicly available, to inform stakeholders of the comparative performance of schools. On the Canary Islands 16% of students are in schools where achievement data is posted publicly: these may of course tend to be the higher-performing, often private, schools. This figure is the second highest in Spain (average 8%) after Navarre, but well below the average across OECD countries (38%). And while such data will be interesting to Canary Islands stakeholders where it is provided, the lack of standardised assessment must raise doubts about how reliable comparisons between schools can be.

PISA also established that around 20% of Canary Islands students are in schools where achievement data are used to evaluate the principal's performance. This figure is again high for Spain (average 17%), though the Balearic Islands, Catalonia, Ceuta and Melilla and Galicia are all higher, but well below the average across OECD countries (38%). 40% of students are in schools where achievement data are used to evaluate the teachers' performance, compared to 45% on average in the OECD area, and although the Canary Islands figure is higher than Spain's it is lower than the figures in the Balearic Islands, Cantabria, Castile and Leon, Madrid and Murcia. The OECD team considers that the degree of accountability in these areas in the Canary Islands figures, though quite good for Spain, falls somewhat below average OECD standards and cannot compensate for the lack of accountability in other areas. Looking at results separately for private and public schools, the team noted that accountability procedures are more common in private schools.

It is striking that 93% of students in the Canary Islands are in schools whose achievement data are tracked over time by an administrative authority. The average for OECD countries is 66%, for Spain 65%. No other Spanish region reported such a high figure, and in Galicia, just 35% of students are in such schools. The OECD team does not know exactly what use is made of this data at regional level. The team understands that data is shared with inspectors, who use it to judge schools' relative performance; but schools are not routinely shown how their results compare with those of other schools. And the team is concerned that those who do use this data to judge relative performance and/or whether schools are improving may be drawing unsafe conclusions, given that the tests on which achievement data are based are not standardised between schools or over time. Principals the team met agreed that there could be no assurance that teachers in different schools, each devising their own tests for their own students with no external input, were all setting the same standards. One secondary school principal told the team that his only reliable guide to how his school performed relative to others, was the results achieved in national examinations taken at age 18, the *Bachillerato* and the *Selectividad*.

Students' achievement data can also be used to monitor teacher practices, and almost two-thirds of students across OECD countries attend schools whose principals reported doing this. In Spain about half the students are in schools where teachers are monitored by tests or assessments of student achievement. In the Canary Islands the figure is only one-third, far below OECD and Spanish averages – 54% in private schools and 24% in public schools. Many schools across OECD countries also use qualitative assessments, such as teacher peer reviews, assessments for school principals or senior staff, or observations by inspectors or others external to the school. All these ways of monitoring teacher practices are far less established in the Canary Islands, and principal or senior staff observations of lessons are virtually absent: just 2% of students are in schools where this happens, compared to 13% in Spain and 69% across the OECD. It seems therefore that, by international standards, there is an extremely low level of monitoring of teachers' practice in the Canary Islands. In the light of the region's PISA results this is very worrying. Teachers clearly need help to improve their teaching, yet seem to have little regular access to knowledgeable fellow-professionals who have seen them teach and could advise them.

SCHOOL AUTONOMY

Accountability is closely linked to autonomy, because it is not useful or fair to hold individuals to account for outcomes they cannot influence. Since the early 1980s, many countries have sought to raise the performance of their schools by introducing reforms giving their schools greater autonomy to make decisions on their own operations and the education they provide. PISA measures school autonomy using two specially-constructed indices: the *index of school responsibility for resource allocation*, and the *index of school responsibility for curriculum and assessment*. The latter index is particularly important: the PISA evidence is clear that in countries where schools have greater autonomy over what is taught and how students are assessed, students tend to perform better.

As PISA 2009 results show, Spain's educational system is characterised by low school autonomy in terms of teacher salaries, dismissal and promotion. 95% of Spanish students are in schools where those decisions are made by regional or national education authorities. In the Canary Islands, three-quarters or more of students are in schools where the regional authority decides about teachers' salaries, dismissal and promotion. Overall, Spain has a mean *index of school responsibility for resource allocation* of -0.47, compared to an OECD average of -0.06. School autonomy in the Canary Islands, at -0.57, is low even relative to other Spanish regions – only principals in Ceuta and Melilla reported a lower degree of school autonomy.

The *index of school responsibility for curriculum and assessment* includes establishing student assessment policies, choosing textbooks, determining course content and deciding which courses are offered. Spain's figure on this index (-0.48) is well below the OECD average (-0.03). Again the Canary Islands' figure (-0.55) is below Spain's. The figures of other Spanish regions are instructive here. From the strictness with which Spain's national authorities lay down the exact proportion of the national curriculum which may be varied by regional authorities (35% in all autonomous regions except the Basque Country and Catalonia, which have their own languages and are allowed to vary up to 45%), one might have expected to see similar figures all round Spain for the amount of curriculum autonomy delegated by regional authorities to schools. In fact, regional figures vary from -0.76 in Murcia to -0.05 in the Basque Country. The next highest regional figure is -0.10 for the Balearic Islands. If it is legally possible to confer this level of curricular autonomy on schools in the Balearic Islands, the OECD team assumes that it is also possible in the Canary Islands; though principals and teachers in the Canary Islands may not yet have the preparation and training to make best use of such autonomy.

In the course of their visit the team met the School Principals' Board and many school principals. Lack of autonomy was their main complaint. As examples of lack of autonomy over resource allocation, principals said that they pay the bills for services provided but could not make complaints about poor services; they cannot sign for procurements; and all decisions made in the schools have to be approved at Regional level. Principals would also welcome a greater degree of autonomy with regard to the carrying out of minor repairs and decoration to buildings, arguing that this could be done more quickly and effectively if managed at local level. And despite being educational leaders responsible for the quality of education being provided in their schools, they have no role in the selection of teachers for the school, or indeed for the assignment of duties for the staff. This means that they are unable to make decisions on how best to organise teachers and teaching to meet educational objectives – a key role for school principals in most OECD countries.

Not only principals, but also other stakeholders, raised with the team this issue of the limited autonomy afforded to schools. The Canary Islands school system appears to be regulated by central and regional authorities to an unusual degree. This dampens the commitment and initiative of those who work in schools and limits what they can achieve. Over-regulation can foster a culture of dependence on the centre, and be used as an excuse for not addressing issues, even if those issues can best be resolved by people at school level. It can also convey the impression, intended or not, of a lack of trust in school staff.

The clearest case of over-regulation seems to be the current process for selecting teachers for posts in individual schools. School principals have no role in the selection, and this can have profound implications for the exercise of effective leadership and for planning school development initiatives at individual school level. If schools had the freedom to select their own teachers, within the general guidelines set down by the Government, they would almost certainly achieve a closer match between appointees and school needs.

Another process handled by the level above the level best able to handle it, is the control of student absenteeism. The responsibility for this rests at municipal level, whereas direct intervention at school level is more likely to result in more positive outcomes. The team observed encouraging examples of the improvement schools could achieve when they took this responsibility upon themselves, even in compliance with existing regulations. For example, one school used electronic messaging systems to inform parents of absent students immediately after the end of the first class session, and sent monthly reports to the municipal authorities.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The quality of the leadership provided by school principals can have a profound impact on school performance (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Fullan, 1991 and 2009; Shelton, 2011). Shelton states that in a climate of heightened accountability and limited resources, effective leadership is critical to improving teaching and learning. She adds: "Research confirms that, among school-related influences

on student learning, principal leadership is second in importance only to classroom teaching. Nearly 60% of a school's influence on student achievement is attributable to principal and teacher effectiveness: principals account for as much as a quarter and teachers over a third of a school's total impact on achievement."

Recruiting, training and supporting effective principals is one of the most effective ways of ensuring that schools will provide high quality education. Effective principals are the keepers of the school's vision and the shapers and custodians of the school culture. They attract, develop and retain talented teachers and motivate them to do their best work. They are skilled in processing student data to improve achievement. They mobilise parents and the community in support of the school.

The challenges facing principals in public schools in the Canary Islands are formidable. These include leading staff who for a number of reasons may be de-motivated and demoralised; mobilising the school community around a shared vision for the school; marshalling scarce resources to support change; addressing the key issues of absenteeism, repetition, failure and dropout; improving academic performance; and encouraging teachers to engage in professional learning activities in support of school improvement initiatives.

Applicants for principalship are required to have a minimum of two years teaching experience. Applicants for principal vacancies must take an examination and prepare and defend a "school project", setting out what they intend to achieve at the school and how they will do this. The recruitment and selection process are laid down in a Government order of December 2009, which also governs training requirements for those who become principals. They must complete an initial training programme covering all aspects of running a school. Apart from two face-to-face sessions, one at the beginning and a second at the end of the programme, the training is conducted on-line. Upon assuming the position of principal, further on-the-job training is provided.

Principals are appointed for an initial period of four years. This can be extended for a second four-year term following a favourable evaluation by an Inspector. The maximum period a principal can serve is twelve years: though as Spain has had a series of education laws, each one changing the limit laid down in the previous law and restarting the clock, the team understands that relatively few principals who wish to stay in post have yet hit the limit. (One principal the team met had led his school for over forty years.) Newly-appointed principals serve a one-year probation period.

Outgoing principals return to the classroom upon completion of their term of duty, and the team understands that many are glad to do so. The burdens of being a principal are heavy and the extra remuneration principals receive is very modest, providing little incentive to seek the role. Inspectors confirmed that schools often have difficulty filling principal positions. The role of the principal is very demanding and time consuming. It involves a heavy administrative workload, leaving principals little or no time to teach or give instructional leadership – which may be one reason why they so rarely observe teachers' practice in classrooms.

The School Principals Board and other principals the team met during their visit were generally satisfied with their training, and with the mutual support they get from one another. They emphasised, however, many reasons why their job is difficult and thankless, and their effectiveness and influence is constrained. Chief among their complaints is the lack of autonomy given to schools – see the examples given above. All decisions made in the schools have to be approved at Regional level.

The biggest complaint of public school principals is that they cannot influence the allocation of teachers to their schools or indeed the assignment of duties to the staff. This means that neither staff nor principal are necessarily committed to working together, and there may be little match between teachers' skill sets and the needs of the classes they teach – which in turn has profound implications for the exercise of effective leadership and for planning school development initiatives at individual school level. This situation arises from teachers' rights as civil servants (though these may have been generously interpreted in agreements negotiated regionally), which effectively enable teachers with seniority to pick their posts. The OECD team was told that often principals do not know who their teachers will be until just before the start of a school year.

There is just one way in which public school principals can choose their staff – by engaging teachers of their choice on "service commissions". Service commissions involve bringing in, for a limited period, as if on secondment, a teacher who has a full-time permanent post elsewhere. One primary school the team visited had two staff on service commissions, recruited for specific purposes. The principal told the team that such arrangements are under constant attack by the unions who see them as bypassing the usual civil service post allocation procedures, and can only be set up if the principal has the support of their inspector, who agrees that these particular staff are needed to fulfil the school project. This principal told the OECD team that the best thing our report could do for him would be to trigger change in current staffing rules so as to enable principals to choose the teachers in their schools.

Principals would also welcome a greater degree of autonomy than they have now for allocating and re-allocating resources within their school budgets (at present they are constrained by immensely detailed regional regulations and reporting requirements); managing school services; carrying out minor repairs and decoration to buildings; and managing absenteeism. They argue, with some justice, that all these things would be handled more quickly and effectively at school level.

SCHOOL COUNCILS

As Spanish law requires, in the Canary Islands every school has a School Council; there are also School Councils at municipal and regional levels. At school level, the School Council is made up of the school principal and representatives of the main stakeholders: teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, pupils and the school's local community. The School Council has an important role in ensuring that the school responds to the needs of its clients by providing an education of the highest quality possible, and that the rules and regulations prescribed by the Government are observed. Councils approve school plans and budgets, review academic performance and extra-curricular activities and take part in the selection of principals.

The OECD team was informed, however, that School Councils in the Canary Islands have limited authority, and can make suggestions, but do not take any decisions. Therefore, though similar in composition to School Governing Bodies in England and Wales or South Africa, School Boards of Management in the Republic of Ireland, School Boards in Denmark or School Governing Councils in South Australia, they lack these bodies' executive and decision-making powers over important matters such as the school budget, school policies, school curriculum and school standards. There are bodies called Schools Councils in other European countries – England and Wales, Sweden, Germany and the Conseils de la Vie Lycéenne in France – but these are intended primarily to give students some influence and involvement in school governance. Austria's School Committees, Councils for Schools Affairs and School Forums come somewhere in between; they can take decisions, but over a limited range of issues.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The regional government asked the OECD team to include in its report a comparative assessment of the quality of education in private and public schools. The team brings together here all the points worth noting about private schools: some information has already been mentioned in previous chapters.

There are two types of private schools in the Canary Islands – 100 private but state-subsidised schools with around 20% of pupils, and 96 fully private schools with no state subsidy and around 5% of pupils (evidently, the fully private schools are much smaller on average than the private subsidised schools). Private schools are fewer, and take a lower percentage of pupils, in the Canary Islands than in Spain as a whole; one-third of pupils are in private schools across Spain and some regions have up to 50% of students in these schools. The proportion of private schools on each island ranges from nil in the two smallest islands to 20% in Tenerife. PISA sampled both private and public schools. The OECD team visited a small number of private subsidised schools but no fully private schools.

As already mentioned in Chapter 2, private schools (of both types) outperformed public schools by 59 points in reading, 44 points in mathematics and 57 points in science. Though Canary Islands private schools are below the averages for Spanish private schools in all subjects, they are closer to the Spain figure than the public schools figure in all subjects, and in reading and science the differences between Islands private schools and Spanish private schools are relatively small.

Part of private schools' performance advantage over public schools is unquestionably due to the fact that private school students are generally from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds. If scores are adjusted for socio-economic differences, private schools' performance advantage over public schools disappears. However, in an education system like Spain's, containing three types of schools, differentiated by whether parents of students can afford to pay nothing, or a modest amount, or a lot to send them there, the students in each type of school are already largely pre-sorted into socio-economic groups. It is not possible to conclude from PISA evidence, for example, that private subsidised schools and public schools would achieve identical results if they had socio-economically identical pupils. This theory can never be tested because fee-charging and free schools can never have socio-economically identical pupils – unless some other agency pays all fees on poorer parents' behalf. It should be remembered that, despite the existence of a number of private schools in the Canary Islands, the PISA data for the Islands demonstrates a greater differential within schools than between schools, indicating that learning is less affected than in many other OECD countries by the social status of the school itself.

Public schools and private subsidised schools have many similarities. Teachers for both have the same qualifications and initial training. They must operate the same admissions rules, giving general priority to students from the surrounding area and particular priority to low-income families (though it is not clear how these families would manage to pay private school fees unless subsidised by the school, which the team understands does sometimes happen but is most likely for post-compulsory students whose fees are higher). The regional curriculum has to be followed in both types of school. The region makes financial allocations to cover teaching and curriculum costs on the same basis to private subsidised and public schools. And both school types are covered by the same detailed and constraining financial regulations, which private school administrators complained about as vociferously as their public school counterparts.

A number of differences – other than students' socio-economic status – were noted between private and public schools in the Canary Islands. The following differences seem likely to help private schools to perform better than public schools.

- In private schools principals can select their own staff and assign them to the classes and duties for which they are best suited – teachers are not allocated by the regional authority and allowed to pick their classes according to civil service seniority rules.

Private school principals can also recruit their own specialist staff to work with struggling or special needs students, rather than relying on area teams.

- Because private schools select their own staff, they can insist that those staff take in-service training. Consequently, the teachers the team met in private schools seemed to have taken more, and more recent, in-service training than their public school counterparts.
- In general, the school climate seems to be more conducive to learning in private than in public schools. In PISA, private school principals were only half as likely as their public school counterparts to report teachers' low expectations of students, student absenteeism, students skipping classes and staff resistant to change. Lack of respect for teachers at least to some extent was reported in the schools attended by around half of public school students, but by only 9% of students in private schools. There were reports of students not being encouraged to achieve their full potential at least to some extent in the schools attended by 45% of public school students and no private school students; this was said to happen a lot in schools attended by 8% of public school students but in no private schools. And principals of private schools did not report any teacher absenteeism; teacher absenteeism was reported in the schools attended by around 16% of public school students.
- Private schools tend to have far lower repetition rates: in PISA, 17% of students in private schools reported having been made to repeat a year during secondary schooling, compared to 47% of students in public schools. One principal explained to the team that fee-paying parents would not accept their children being made to repeat as often as is typical in public schools.
- Engagement with parents seems to be better developed in private schools. This is partly, no doubt, because private schools appreciate the importance of keeping fee-paying customers satisfied.
- Accountability to parents and students seems to be better developed in private schools. Private schools are more likely than public schools to post students' achievement data publicly (by 24% to 13%) and to use it to evaluate teachers' performance (52% to 36%) and monitor teacher practices (56% to 24%).

The following differences, however, may be thought to give public schools an advantage over private schools, and help the public schools to achieve better results, particularly for less advantaged students.

- Private subsidised schools are in fact only partly subsidised. They are funded for teaching and curriculum costs, not for a range of other costs relating to the school premises, school facilities, school administration, and entering pupils in national and regional diagnostic tests and external exams. One private school the team visited said that just 49% of the school's running costs were met by the public subsidy; the remainder has to come from fees or fund-raising. (The OECD team is unable to judge whether this percentage is typical.)
- In particular, private schools are not generally eligible for special programmes – such as those which fund reinforcement classes for struggling students in the afternoons, and support for various special needs.
- Intimidating or bullying of students was reported in PISA as happening in schools attended by slightly more students in private schools than public schools (22% to 16%), as was drug use by students (9% to 6%).
- Public schools also reported more tracking of achievement data over time (in schools attended by 95% of students, compared to 83% – though as mentioned before, the team is doubtful whether non-standardised data is fit for this purpose) and using achievement data in decisions about instructional resource allocation to the school (49% to 40% – though when public schools say they do this, they may have in mind the use of achievement data to decide which students should be put onto special programmes, which are closed to private schools.)

THE ROLE OF THE INSPECTORATE

In the Canary Islands School Inspectors constitute an important bridge between the regional Education Ministry, which employs them, and the school system. They are the only real source of educational expert advice and support to school principals. The OECD team was not able to study the role of the Inspectors in depth, but formed the view that most work well with, and are valued by school principals, particularly where the relationship is supportive and the Inspector usually backs the principal's requests for staffing or other changes. There is scope for Inspectors to play an even wider role in school improvement and external accountability.

OECD TEAM VIEWS

Many of the conditions required to provide high quality education are already in place in the Canary Islands. School buildings are (by and large) as good as or better than in many OECD countries. Class sizes are manageable and student-teacher ratios not high by international standards, and there are no serious teacher shortages – indeed, more teachers are emerging from initial training than can find jobs. The regional government has the autonomy to tailor a significant proportion (35%) of the national curriculum to regional needs, and could (in the sense that there is no legal impediment) devolve to schools as much curriculum autonomy as schools and teachers enjoy in most high-performing PISA countries. Minority students and students from less well-off family backgrounds suffer less relative educational disadvantage than in many countries.

What, then, is missing? What more needs to be put in place? Change and reform are clearly needed if the quality of education revealed by PISA is to be ratcheted up. Earlier chapters have considered what needs to change in relation to students and learning, teachers and teaching. The changes the team believes are needed in relation to schools and principals are set out below.

School accountability

The region's policies governing school location and school admission seem suitable for the Islands' conditions and its geography, and seem to be achieving a reasonable degree of equity between socio-economic groups. However, as they generate so little competition to stimulate higher standards, this deficit needs to be compensated for by strengthening other pressures for improvement and achievement.

As the PISA 2009 report explained, schools' performance is strongly influenced by the ways in which they are held accountable for their results and what forms of autonomy they are allowed to have. Accountability depends both on the information that is made available about performance and the use made of that information, whether by administrative authorities, schools or the parents. Thus the issues of autonomy, evaluation, governance and choice interact in providing a framework in which schools are – or are not – given the incentives and the capacity to improve.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the accountability to parents of schools in the Canary Islands is weak by international standards. Though the team knows that over half of schools provide parents with some information on results, PISA evidence leaves open the possibility that a large minority of schools provide none. Only a small minority provide what the PISA reports says is the best sort of information, showing how each student's performance compares to national or regional benchmarks; and even that information is suspect if it is not based on standardised tests taken across the region, which it very rarely is.

The previous chapter recommended that the Regional Education Ministry develops a bank of standardised tests, which will be suitable for application at the end of each year of compulsory education, in core subjects. All schools receiving the tests would be required to ensure pupils took them, and to return results or marked papers to the Ministry. The Ministry can use its impressive data-processing capacity to produce reports showing each school how its results compare to those of other schools on the same island and across the Canary Islands; the information should be broken down by school year and school type. Schools would also be required to share the full reports with parents.

In the interim before region-wide standardised tests are available for every year group and key subject, it will be helpful for parents to receive whatever locally-generated information on achievement each school has available, e.g. from tests developed by teachers (indicating that these are results of non-standardised tests). It could of course be helpful to continue to offer parent-teacher assessment results alongside standardised test results in the longer term, so that teachers can let parents know if their child's test performance was above or below their general classwork standard.

In addition to these achievement reports, the team recommends that parents should be given information, soon after the end of each school year, on the number and proportion of students in the school, in each year and in each teacher's class who were made to repeat that year. As with achievement data, the team suggests that the regional Ministry collects the data from schools and returns it to them in a standard format, to be passed on to parents.

Both types of report will help the work of schools inspectors, and will have the great advantage of ensuring that schools and inspectors have the same information base, which is not the case now. It is uncomfortable for school principals and teachers when inspectors and regional authorities have sole access to information and are using it to make judgements about them.

The achievement and repetition reports the team has recommended may generate some excitement among parents, particularly those not used to receiving any data, or those who realise for the first time that by regional or Island standards, the school their child attends is not doing particularly well. However, that is all to the good. As PISA has shown, parents putting pressure on schools to achieve higher academic standards can be a powerful force for improvement.

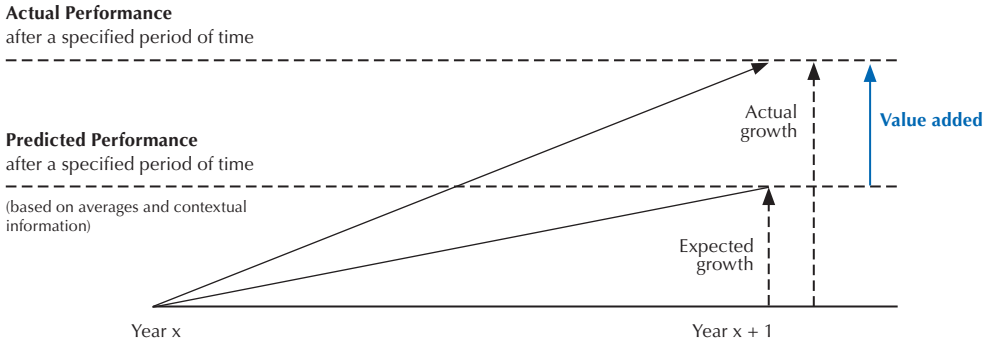
Alternatively, if schools are concerned about these reports being used to construct "league tables", the regional authority may wish to make the information available to the principal, teachers and the School Council members electronically through a password-protected system.[1]

One reason why teachers and principals may be sensitive about inter-school comparisons is that they feel readers of these comparisons take insufficient account of differences between schools' pupil populations. Some schools have more pupils with special needs, or more pupils from poorer families, than others. These concerns can be met by giving details of the pupil characteristics in different schools, or grouping schools into "families" of similar schools for comparison purposes, or – probably the best and fairest approach – adjusting results for differences in pupil characteristics generally associated with differences in pupil progress or outcomes. This last approach is called value-added modelling: Box 6.1 illustrates how it works.

Box 6.1 **Assessing the value-added of schools: enhancing fairness and equity**

Value-added modelling (VAM) is a method to make more accurate and fairer assessments of schools' contributions to student learning outcomes and growth, as benchmarks can be tailored in consideration of individual school characteristics. It is used by education authorities in several OECD countries (Norway, Poland, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and the United States) to strengthen school accountability and improvement efforts.

The basic unit of accountability used in VAM is the individual school. Value-added scores can be calculated for individual students, subject, areas, grade levels, schools and other jurisdictional entities (e.g. municipalities). VAM scores are inherently relative to other schools' performance. Specifically, the score for an individual school is an estimate of the difference between the individual school's contribution to the learning of its students and the average contributions of a given group of other schools participating in VAM to the learning of their respective students. The use of data from another grouping of schools, for example, would yield different value-added scores.



Source: OECD (2011)

Within an accountability framework, assessments of school performance usually result in actions and consequences for teachers. Similarly, assessments should also provide school staff with information on what works and how to improve, as well as the opportunities to do so.

The initial phases of establishing an accountability framework that includes VAM should identify priorities and opportunities for school improvement efforts. Positive incentives that reinforce and enhance the performance of schools, staff and teachers, could be combined with further evaluations, assistance and resources for underperforming schools.

The development of value-added methods requires careful design and planning to address effectively the challenges involved as all empirically-based indicators of school performance are subject to variability and bias. The design of robust value-added methods needs thus to address various statistical, methodological and implementation issues.

Sources:

OECD (2011), *Establishing a Framework for Evaluation and Teacher Incentives: Considerations for Mexico*, OECD Publishing.

Goldschmidt, P., et al. (2005), "Policymakers' Guide to Growth Models for School Accountability: How do Accountability Models Differ?", paper commissioned by the Councils of Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC.

Martínez-Arias, R., J.L. Gaviria and M. Castro (2009), "Concepto y evolución de los modelos de valor añadido en educación", in *Revista de Educación*, Vol. 348, pp. 15-34.

The team recommends that the Canary Islands Education Ministry tests out these approaches and adopts the most suitable. All require information on pupil characteristics to be collected by the body producing the achievement data. The OECD team is not sure whether the regional Education Ministry collects information on the characteristics of individual pupils. If not, they could start to do so, for example via an annual "school census", such as the one done in England.[2] Annual censuses are time-consuming for schools to complete once a year, but save time later by reducing the need for *ad hoc* information requests.

The team also recommends that, as soon as reliable data based on standardised tests become available, it should become universal practice for School Councils to use this data and repetition data to monitor and evaluate performance. As a final thought on accountability, the OECD team noted the low priority given in the Canary Islands to evaluating what has worked and what has not, and

reporting on it to stakeholders. This is true both at the level of government programmes – none of the special programmes introduced across the Islands since 2007/08 appears to have been evaluated – and at individual school level. The team recommends that every school should conduct a whole-school review and evaluation (already suggested in the previous chapter as a useful way of conducting in-service training as teachers go about their normal business) at regular intervals. This would help to promote a culture of enquiry and reflection on the performance of the school among the staff and the wider school community, and set the scene for devising development projects aimed at addressing weaknesses and introducing improvements.

School autonomy

The OECD team believes that in the Canary Islands, there is too little autonomy at the level of the school and that this is depressing school performance. Research on school improvement clearly indicates that the best outcomes are achieved when all levels of the education system agree education strategy but education professionals (principals and teachers) take responsibility for the quality of education being provided in their schools. The central – or, in the Canary Islands' case, regional – authority's role is to create the agenda and the conditions for improvement and change; the schools' role is to plan and implement improvement and change, building in appropriate evaluation and accountability arrangements. It is a particular weakness of the system that opportunities for introducing meaningful change in schools are constrained by lack of delegated authority, staffing constraints, financial constraints, or by the fact that the change was not envisaged in the school project. As the discussion earlier in this chapter makes clear, the big areas where the team believes more autonomy is needed are: teacher incentives; resource allocation; and the delivery of the curriculum.

The team recommends that the regional authority should devolve to school principals responsibility for the selection of teachers for posts in their schools. Principals would be required to make their selections in association with the School Council, from among those deemed qualified for appointment by the regional authority. If necessary for legal reasons, appointments could be formally made or ratified by the regional authority. Principals should also be given the authority to assign teachers to particular classes and duties as they deem appropriate, and to ask the regional Education Ministry to re-assign elsewhere teachers who both under-perform and refuse to undertake re-training the principal regards as necessary. They should be entitled to select teachers for promotion to the new middle management roles the team recommends introducing (see next section).

The team recommends also that school principals are given greater autonomy over resource allocation, in the areas they mentioned to the OECD team – allocating and re-allocating resources within their school budgets, provided they do not overspend their total budgets or divert to other purposes money given to the school specifically for special programmes or projects; managing school services; carrying out minor repairs and decoration to buildings; and managing absenteeism.

The team recommends too that school principals, in association with the School Council, be given autonomy to make some curriculum-related decisions, such as decisions on which textbooks and teaching materials to use (in practice, the School Council and the principal would develop policy and general guidelines governing the selection of textbooks and teaching materials for implementation by the teaching staff); decisions on adjustments to the standard weekly curriculum to meet the needs of students in the school or allow them to study the options of their choice; and decisions on which special programmes should be offered to help struggling students. New types of training should be developed and made available to principals, on initial appointment and in-service, to help them make effective use of this autonomy to improve results – as recommended below.

The role of the school principal

In the Canary Islands, many key decisions relating to the management of the school are made not by the principal, but by others. The OECD team sees this as a significant cause of under-performance. For example, neither the principal nor the School Council can decide on the selection of teachers or their assignment to classes. In this scenario, especially where there is high staff turnover (the team visited one school where half the staff will change in the next academic year), it can be very difficult to make realistic plans. Principals also complain about their huge administrative burden, which frustrates any efforts to provide instructional leadership, and their lack of autonomy to make financial and resource decisions. The demands and stresses of the role, combined with the lack of pay incentives to take it up, are discouraging many teachers from putting themselves forward for the role.

A further problem is the time limit for serving as a principal, and particularly the initial term of four years, which the OECD team considers far too short. It takes at least seven years for newly-appointed principals to shape the school in directions which will lead to sustained development and improvement – one year to get to know the school, the staff and the community and become familiar with the prevailing school culture; two years to plan, negotiate and introduce improvement initiatives; a further three years to bed down the initiatives; and another year to evaluate the impact of what has been done and decide on possible changes. The team appreciates that applicants for principalship are required to plan a school project, which they expect to implement on appointment, and that successful principals can be re-appointed for a further four-year term. However, the team doubts the wisdom of any new principal committing to a project without first getting to know their school and consulting those likely to have a key role in implementing it.

A number of changes in the role of the public school principal are recommended. The current limit of 4 years, which can be renewed for a further 4 years, should be reviewed with a view to extending the initial contract for a longer period. Secondly, principals should be given greater autonomy in staffing, financial and educational matters as recommended in the previous section. Thirdly, the pay differential between senior teachers and principals should be increased, to the extent necessary to make the role attractive to good candidates.

Fourthly, steps should be taken to ensure all principals are supported by effective middle management structures in their schools. To achieve this the team suggests that the functions of departmental heads at secondary level be expanded to include management responsibility for teachers in their departments, organising the curriculum, monitoring the academic progress and pastoral needs of the students, and preparing progress reports. Similar structures should be developed for primary schools. The team believes that an effective middle management system will help to distribute the burden of administration and leadership in the school, free up the principal to devote more time to visiting classrooms and engaging in instructional leadership, enable aspiring principals to gain relevant experience and provide a career path for teachers.

Fifthly, though the Canary Islands government is to be commended for the detailed training provided for newly appointed principals, which does reflect some appreciation of the burdens of this office, the team recommends that the current training programme be supplemented, with additional modules focussing on how to improve education quality, including by monitoring and developing teacher practice, and allocating resources to ensure that all students at risk of failure are given the necessary help.

The role of the School Council

The team suggests that School Councils in the Canary Islands could make a greater contribution to school development and improvement, and could provide more useful support to school principals, if they could be given more executive responsibility, on the model of School Governing Bodies in England, School Boards of Management in Ireland or School Boards in Denmark. In these systems, the school principal and staff remain responsible for implementing the aims, objectives and programmes of the school on a day-to day basis, but the School Governing Bodies/Boards of Management decide the overall management and accountability structures and policies under which the school operates. In PISA, these three countries all performed rather better than Spain. By way of example, Box 6.2 describes the role of Danish School Boards.

Box 6.2 **School Boards in Denmark**

Danish legislation requires a School Board to be set up at every school. In general, the voting members are: 5 or 7 elected parent representatives, one of whom chairs the Board; 2 representatives of teachers and other staff elected by and from among the staff of the school; and 2 elected pupil representatives. The non-voting members are the school principal and his/her deputy, one of whom is Board Secretary; and a member of the municipal council, if it wishes to be represented. Parent representatives are elected for 4 years, other members for 1 year. School staff cannot be parent representatives. Parent and pupil representatives may be repaid for expenses incurred, but receive no other compensation.

The School Board is responsible for supervising the activities of the school and laying down policies for these activities, including the organisation of teaching; the number of lessons taught to each year group; the length of the school day; optional subjects to be offered; the special education to be provided; the distribution of pupils in classes; arrangements for school-home co-operation; the information parents should receive about pupil outcomes; the distribution of the work between teachers; arrangements for pupil care during school hours, school camps and work experience; and extra-curricular activities. The School Board is also responsible for approving the school budget within the financial framework laid down for the school; approving teaching materials and draw up school rules; Boards are also the *de facto* decision-makers on school curricula, innovation and development work beyond what is already planned, and headteacher and teacher appointments – though formally these are decided by the municipal council on the Board's recommendation.

Every Board must prepare an annual report and convene a joint meeting with all parents of children at the school, at least once a year, to discuss it.

Source: Danish Ministry of Education.

The OECD team suggests that the schools and students in the Canary Islands would benefit if School Councils could be granted greater autonomy and responsibility and be designated as the main decision-making body for the management of schools and for the quality of education being provided in them. This would be a considerable extension of the present role of School Councils, and involve giving them responsibility for reviewing and approving school plans and projects, for overseeing the selection of teachers (from among the applicants the regional government regards as qualified for the role), for evaluating performance, for putting in-school evaluation procedures in place, and generally for assuming ultimate responsibility for the quality of education the school provides. These tasks require a sound knowledge of the educational system and the rules and regulations under which it is expected to function, as well as a good working familiarity with the requirements of corporate governance, so members of the Councils would need appropriate training.

The team understands, however, that the role and remit of School Councils is laid down in Spanish national law and, like anything in national law, could be very difficult to change. Therefore, the team recommends that the Canary Islands government reviews the role of the Councils; seeks ways of giving them greater legal responsibilities in the areas mentioned; and meanwhile takes steps to ensure that they are routinely consulted on issues and developments in these areas and that their views are taken seriously by decision-makers. The review the team recommends should, among other things, consider whether school principals should continue to chair Schools Councils, or whether it would be better for a parent or other representative of the wider school community to chair, as international best practice suggests.

Private schools

There is every reason for the Canary Islands government to wish to keep some private schools in the system. Private subsidised schools appear to be performing well compared to public schools, and – being only partly subsidised – provide education at lower unit cost. Some stakeholders suggest that they achieve their performance advantage by devious means, such as engineering admissions to achieve an advantaged intake. However, the requirement to pay fees (even relatively small fees) inevitably filters out the poorer families.

In the OECD team's view, having more advantaged pupil populations is only one reason for the relative success of private subsidised schools in PISA. Other reasons are that, as PISA has shown, they tend to do a number of things better than public schools, including engaging with parents and having higher expectations of students; and that their principals are free to select their own staff, assign them to classes and require them to take in-service training. The team is recommending that public schools be given the same freedoms, in the interests of achieving a good standard of education for all students.

The role of the Inspectorate

The team suggests that in future the Inspectorate should play a greater role in offering schools practical support and in relation to external accountability, while giving less priority to reporting back on schools to the regional Education Ministry. In particular, the team suggests that Inspectors should share with principals the supervision of teachers new to the profession during their probation periods, and confirm the final decision on whether they have passed probation. Inspectors should also share with principals, and train principals in, the assessment of individual teachers' classroom performance. Every teacher should be assessed and told the results of that assessment at specified intervals; teachers causing concern should be assessed in between times by Inspectors at the principal's request. Inspectors would then be in a position to give a second opinion on proposals by the principal to reward outstanding teaching (if, as recommended in Chapter 5, such rewards are introduced) and to require teachers to take refresher training. Inspectors should also have the explicit role of reviewing school results annually with the principal and discussing possible action to improve them the following year: continuous improvement should be an aspiration for all schools, whatever their results. Also recommended is a more explicit role for the Inspectorate as external evaluators of the school as a whole, including the effectiveness of management, leadership and links with parents, and the quality of the buildings and resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

- To foster **accountability to parents**, the Canary Islands Education Ministry should develop a bank of standardised tests in core subjects for schools to use at the end of each year of compulsory education. Test results should be fed back to the Ministry, which should produce reports showing each school how its results compare to those of other schools on the same island and across the Canary Islands. Schools would be required to share the full reports with parents.
- Parents should receive similar reports on repetition rates, compared to other schools.
- The Education Ministry should test out ways of linking up performance data with data on pupil characteristics, so that performance and repetition reports can be read with awareness of each school's context.
- Every school should conduct a **whole-school review and evaluation** at regular intervals.
- **School principals**, in association with their School Council, should have the **autonomy** to select teachers for posts in their schools, to assign teachers to particular classes and duties, to request re-assignment of teachers who under-perform and refuse to undertake re-training, and to select teachers for promotion to middle management roles.

- School principals should also be allowed greater autonomy to re-allocate resources within their school budgets, manage school services, carry out minor repairs and decoration to buildings and manage absenteeism.
- School principals, in association with the School Council and teaching staff, should be allowed to decide on textbooks and teaching materials, curriculum adjustments and special programmes for struggling students.
- The current standard pre-set legal **limit to the time principals can remain in one school** should be reconsidered.
- The **pay differential between senior teachers and principals** should be increased, to the extent necessary to make the role of principal attractive to good candidates.
- Principals should be able to create and maximise the use of **middle management** structures in their schools, to support them and allow them more time for instructional leadership.
- The current **training programme for principals** should be supplemented by additional modules: on improving education quality, monitoring and developing teacher practice, and allocating resources so as to minimise the risk of student failure.
- The Canary Islands government should review the role and functioning of **School Councils,** seek ways of giving them more executive authority, and until that is possible, should ensure that the Councils are routinely consulted on school management and quality issues.
- The **Inspectorate** should play a greater role in offering schools practical support and in relation to external accountability, while giving less priority to reporting back on schools to the regional Education Ministry. In particular, Inspectors should share with principals the supervision of new teachers on probation; confirm decisions on whether they have passed probation; train and assist principals in the assessment of individual teachers' classroom performance; and give a second opinion on proposals by the principal to reward outstanding teaching and require teachers to take refresher training. Inspectors should also review school results annually with the principal; advise on how to improve them; and act as external evaluators of the school as a whole, including the effectiveness of management, leadership and links with parents and the quality of the buildings and resources.

Notes

1. Such as England's RAISE online system.
2. Its official name is PLASC, and it starts in January each year.

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