

Chapter 2

Governing school evaluation

This chapter gives an overview of the major features of school evaluation governance in the Flemish Community of Belgium, including: the division of responsibilities for school evaluation; major information sources used for school evaluation; the design, role and extent of interaction between internal and external school evaluation; and structures to promote consultation and collaboration within and among schools. It then analyses the strengths and challenges to the current governance approach and recommends some areas for further policy development.

This chapter addresses the design and governance of school evaluation in the Flemish Community of Belgium, including the distribution of responsibilities among different stakeholders, the interaction between internal and external school evaluation activities and the improvement and accountability functions of school evaluation.

Context and features

In essence, school evaluation in the Flemish Community of Belgium rests on the three major pillars for quality assurance in the schooling system: centrally-set minimum learning objectives for students (attainment targets and developmental objectives); external controlling of schools' implementation of these learning objectives and their quality assurance, as well as compliance with other legal responsibilities; and offer of support to schools in developing and assuring their quality.

Responsibilities for school evaluation

Responsibilities for school evaluation in the Flemish Community of Belgium are conceived as a “triangle of quality” which sets distinct responsibilities for schools, the Flemish Inspectorate and the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV), and Pedagogical Advisory Services (*Pedagogische begeleidingsdienst*, PBD) attached to the different “umbrella organisations”. Umbrella organisations are representative associations of school governing boards (see below).

Schools

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, schools carry the major responsibility for the quality of education they deliver. Their central role was formalised in 2009 (Decree on Quality of Education) as one of three partners in the “triangle of quality”. Prior to this, the triangle was conceived as comprising three external institutions to ensure schools deliver good quality outcomes (the Inspectorate, the Pedagogical Advisory Services and the Department for Educational Development). The 2009 Decree explicitly states that each school is responsible for providing good quality education and supporting educational processes in an optimal manner. While each school defines “quality education”, all schools are obliged to produce results against the centrally-set attainment targets and to account for their efforts to pursue the centrally-set developmental objectives (see below). Therefore, schools must ensure that the curriculum they use addresses at a minimum the attainment targets and developmental objectives. In reality, schools' curricula are broader and are often set by their umbrella organisations.

Although school self-evaluation is not mandatory in the Flemish Community of Belgium, all schools “need to be able to account for their efforts to monitor and enhance their quality” and are inspected on this (Ministry of Education and Training and the University of Antwerp, 2010). Some form of self-evaluation activity is, therefore, inevitable. Further, there are specific self-evaluation requirements for schools receiving funds as part of the Equal Educational Opportunities Policy (GOK). GOK schools must perform a self-evaluation to plan the effective use of the additional funding (see Chapter 3).

The Flemish Inspectorate and AKOV

AKOV is one of four agencies under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Training and was established in 2009 to oversee all services related to quality improvement of education. AKOV plays an important role in school evaluation as it is responsible for defining the minimum standards for quality education that all schools in the Flemish Community of Belgium must meet. To this end, AKOV sets standard attainment targets and developmental objectives for all schools (see Box 2.1). These provide a framework for school evaluation, both internal and external.

AKOV has set attainment targets (*i.e.* schools must ensure that students meet these targets at a certain point in time) for primary and secondary education. In contrast, AKOV specifies developmental objectives (*i.e.* schools need to account for their efforts to reach these objectives) in nursery education, the first stage of technical and vocational secondary education and for special-needs education at the primary and secondary levels.¹ It is of note that attainment targets and developmental objectives were first implemented in 1998 as a means for the Flemish government to assure minimum quality across schools.

Box 2.1 Attainment targets and developmental objectives in the Flemish Community of Belgium

The Flemish government endorses a “core curriculum” that all schools recognised and funded by the government are required to respect and deliver. This is expressed via attainment targets for the end of key stages of education and developmental objectives during pre-primary education, for the first stage of B-stream secondary education and for special-needs education at primary and secondary levels. Schools are accountable for ensuring that their students meet the attainment targets which denote the “knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes which the educational authorities deem necessary and attainable for a specific pupil population”. As such, they are minimum objectives on which schools and educational networks should base their curricula. Curricula will reflect different priorities and cover broader areas.

An example of the nature of attainment targets in primary education

The developmental objectives used in pre-primary and the attainment targets for primary education are organised in five major areas: physical education; art education; Dutch; environmental studies and mathematics. For primary education there are also additional attainment targets for French and additional cross-curricular attainment targets in ICT, learning to learn and social skills. In each case, guiding text on the general principles for the specific content area is provided as well as the concrete attainment targets. For example, mathematics is divided into three domains (numbers, measurement and geometry) each including attainment targets for mathematical comprehension, language and factual knowledge, as well as for mathematical procedures. In addition, there are attainment targets for strategies and problem solving skills and attitudes towards mathematics.

The attainment targets are only provided for the end of primary education, there are no details of curriculum at earlier stages of primary education. Further, they describe a minimum content of knowledge, skills and attitudes that students should demonstrate by the end of primary education, but do not detail different levels of student proficiency or mastery of these different areas.

Source: www.ond.vlaanderen.be/dvo.

The Flemish Government has decreed external school evaluation the responsibility of the Flemish Inspectorate (see Chapter 4). There is compulsory inspection for every school that seeks “recognition” by the Flemish Government. “Recognition” implies the receipt of public funding by schools. The Inspectorate must provide advice on whether or not schools are included in the “recognition”. It is then the Flemish Government’s role to accept (or not) the Inspectorate’s recommendations and thus render them valid (invalid). As part of the external school evaluation, the Inspectorate inspects the school’s curriculum to ensure that it addresses the centrally-set attainment targets and developmental objectives. This ensures a minimum quality across schools, at the same time as respecting each individual school’s right to develop its own curriculum. External inspection uses an inspection framework including quality indicators for school context, input, processes and output (the CIPO framework).

Pedagogical Advisory Services (PBD)

Each umbrella organisation has its own PBD to provide professional support to schools. These are “among the most important partners of schools in quality assurance” (Ministry of Education and Training and the University of Antwerp, 2010). The school advisors offer support to different schools within their network, including in-service training, support for self-evaluation and quality assurance (including student assessment and teacher appraisal). A recent focus of training offered by the PBD is on the concept of the school’s “policy-making capacity”. This is seen as a crucial factor in whether the school is able to fully meet its responsibility to assure the quality of education it delivers.²

The PBD also play a role in external school evaluation. In the case that inspectors give a school a negative recommendation, the inspectors may determine whether or not that school has sufficient policy-making capacity to implement a successful improvement plan. If the inspectors judge that this is not the case, the school will be obliged to accept support from the PBD.

Other actors influencing school evaluation

The umbrella organisations can have significant influence on school evaluation, as they may support their schools by offering curricula and, for some of the larger umbrella organisations, also related student assessments. Of course, schools are free to choose whether or not to use these curricula/tests, but in reality many do. The curricula of course will be examined as part of the school inspection to ensure that the minimum attainment targets and developmental objectives are implemented. The tests may be used by schools as part of their internal evaluation process and schools may also choose to show these results to inspectors during an inspection.

The Agency for Educational Services (AGODI, *Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten*) provides administrative and financial services to schools, including the timely implementation of funding and providing support and information to schools in these domains. AGODI compiles data on administrative and financial resources in schools, including on school funding and financing of teaching staff, qualification, number and attendance record of teachers, as well as information on student attendance and truancy.³ AGODI reports these results for the Flemish system, but not for individual schools. But the school-level information is included in the Inspectorate’s school profiles.

Information sources for school evaluation

School external evaluation draws on much information collected by the inspectors during the main inspection and mapped against the CIPO inspection framework (see Chapter 4). However, central information systems have been recently established to strengthen the Inspectorate’s information base in determining the focus of inspection. The Ministry of Education and Training runs a Data Warehouse system containing school-specific information on student numbers in total and from “deprived background”⁴, student retention and school staff turnover. Currently, this information is available to the Inspectorate, but not to schools (although there is a proposal to share this with schools). This is of key importance to external school evaluation and the Inspectorate uses this as a basis to generate digital school profiles and reference profiles (*i.e.* profiles of schools sharing similar characteristics). As such, the Inspectorate is able to map available data to the context, input and output indicators within the CIPO inspection framework: context (infrastructure, location, staff recruitment); input (student enrolment by type of programme, student socio-economic background, school staff and their educational career); and output (school career, that is, student progress and effective enrolment; outcomes, that is, subsequent education or career progression for students⁵). The Inspectorate stores this information in the “digital monitor” including data for the past six years. This aids external evaluation, as inspectors can judge a school’s evolution on these indicators, as well as benchmarking schools on each indicator against similar schools in the reference profiles. For other key output data within the CIPO inspection framework on student performance and satisfaction (staff, students and partners), when a school is inspected: inspectors may consult school-held information from self-evaluation activities, if the school chooses to present this information during the inspection; the school must provide inspectors with a sample of student tests, examinations and portfolios from the previous two school years.

There has been an increased focus on output and student outcomes in recent years, both in the inspection framework (see Chapter 4) and as a way to monitor the implementation of attainment targets at the system level. Nationwide standardised testing or examinations of all pupils at certain points are not mandated in the Flemish Community of Belgium, but information on student outcomes is available from a number of externally designed tests available to help schools measure their outcomes. These include tests offered to schools as part of the National Assessment Programme (see Box 2.2), other nationally developed or supported tests and tests developed by umbrella organisations. The Ministry of Education and Training runs a special website that offers a selection of student tests for schools (*Toetsen voor scholen*). In addition to the parallel versions of tests from the National Assessment Programme, all registered primary schools can use the Flemish pupil monitoring system (LVS, *Leerringvolgsysteem voor Vlaanderen*), including a supporting manual of instructions. Schools can use this to monitor student progress in Dutch language and mathematics skills at different stages of their primary education. There is also a tool to monitor children’s Dutch language ability at the start of primary education (SALTO). There is no feedback report offered for the SALTO test, but schools can calculate where their school performs in relation to other schools, *i.e.* on the basis of norm data.

There are no specific externally available tests for schools offering special education services, although the LVS can be used by these schools.

Box 2.2 The National Assessment Programme (*Peilingen*)

The National Assessment Programme was introduced in 2002. It aims to give an insight of how well the attainment targets have been implemented at the level of the Flemish school system. As such, students in a representative sample of schools are assessed (minimum 1 500 students). However, participating schools do receive feedback on their students' performance and this can inform school self-evaluation activities. Further, such results are adjusted for school student composition and schools can compare their performance to the average performance of all schools assessed, as well as to schools with comparable student composition. School-level results are not shared elsewhere in the system, *e.g.* the Inspectorate does not receive these results and they do not systematically inform school external evaluation.

A parallel version of the assessment conducted is offered to other schools in the Flemish Community of Belgium via the Ministry of Education and Training's website Tests for Schools (*Toetsen voor scholen*). Schools choosing to conduct these parallel tests will receive a feedback report describing how many students have reached attainment targets, contextual value added results in relation to background characteristics, and including comparative data on similar schools in the Flemish Community of Belgium as well as comparative information from the *Peilingen* representative sample. In 2010, 49 schools, most of which were primary, requested feedback reports.

The information available to schools via the *Peilingen* aims to give feedback on student performance against a range of attainment targets. Therefore, the areas assessed change from year to year, as well as the level of education and the orientation in the case of secondary education (*e.g.* general secondary education at stage 1 [A stream] has already been assessed four times, but the B stream only once). There is no systematic assessment of particular learning areas each time. Eventually, there will be repeat assessments in different areas. The table below presents the assessments conducted or planned in primary education.

	Primary education	
	First assessment	Repeat assessments
Mathematics	2002	2009
Dutch language		
Comprehensive reading	2002	2007 2013
Listening		2007 2013
Environmental studies		
Nature and investigating skills	2005	
Time, space, society and use of information sources	2010	
French language		
Reading, listening, writing and speaking	2008	
Acquiring and processing information and ICT	2012	

For further information see: www.ond.vlaanderen.be/dvo/peilingen/.

The interaction between internal and external school evaluation

Currently, the external inspection of schools does not take into account results from the school's self-evaluation. This is a deliberate policy of the Flemish Inspectorate, as it believes this would lead to schools using self-evaluation rather for accountability than for improvement (*i.e.* to influence the focus of external evaluation) and the inclusion of school self-evaluation results in the published inspection report, which is deemed

inappropriate. However, schools are inspected on their efforts to monitor and enhance their quality. This means that external inspections do examine school quality assurance processes, which would typically include self-evaluation activities. Further, the recently adopted differentiated approach to school inspections implies that schools with better developed policy-making capacity and quality assurance processes will be inspected less regularly. The logic, therefore, is that this approach will stimulate schools to develop effective self-evaluation activities. This reflects a general approach by the Inspectorate to complement its traditional “control” function, with encouraging schools to develop their policies and practices for improvement.

Structures to promote consultation and co-operation

There are some structures in place to promote consultation and co-operation among schools and within schools. Each school belongs to an educational network and can choose to be represented by an umbrella organisation for policy discussions among networks and with the Ministry of Education and Training. Further, the Ministry of Education and Training promotes co-operation among schools by offering incentives for schools to join a “school community”. The vast majority of schools belong to a school community and benefit from additional resources and/or organisational advantages (see Chapter 1). Each school has a school council comprising key stakeholders in the school and the local community, which has an advisory or consultative role regarding the school’s policy. The Participation Decree in 2004 stipulates that all schools should promote participation of key stakeholders. Specifically it is obligatory: for secondary schools to have a student council; for primary schools to have a student council if at least 10% of the regular students aged 11 to 13 demand this; and for all schools to have an educational council if at least 10% of the school staff request this, as well as a parent council if at least 10% of parents request this. In each case, the councils play an important advisory role and members must be elected. Further, one of the basic teacher competencies stipulated in the 2007 Decree sets expectations for professional collaboration and participation in school policy (see Chapter 3).

Strengths

Schools have the major responsibility for the school improvement process

It is a considerable strength that schools carry the major responsibility for their improvement and related quality assurance systems. There has been recent legal clarification that schools hold the primary responsibility for school quality (the Decree of September 2009). Schools are legally required to implement a system of quality assurance, but the choice of design and type of quality system is up to the schools. The OECD review team formed the impression that there is a strong and shared appreciation of school autonomy and the importance of developing expertise at the school level and that many schools are readily taking up this agenda. Indeed, it is a long established tradition in the Flemish Community of Belgium that schools design and implement their own student tests and award student qualifications. Importantly, there is also a mechanism for some external evaluation of schools’ level of responsibility and/or capabilities to assure their quality via the inspection of school policy-making capacity (see Chapter 4).

The Ministry of Education and Training fosters a degree of common understanding of basic quality in schools

The Flemish government endorses the attainment targets and developmental objectives that together form the core curriculum. All schools are required to meet the Flemish attainment targets, which specify the knowledge, skills and attitudes that students should demonstrate by the end of primary education and the first, second and third stages of secondary education. The Ministry of Education and Training has a mechanism to monitor the implementation of these attainment targets via the Inspectorate's evaluation of schools' curricula and their results (see Chapter 4).

Further, there is a central monitoring of student mastery of attainment targets via the National Assessment Programme and this should also promote their implementation by schools. The original concept driving the development of the quality control system in the Flemish Community of Belgium was to allow the authorities to “control the minimum and also examine the effectiveness of schools” (DED, 1998). The latter mainly refers to the monitoring of student progress and the added value brought by schools in terms of student outcomes.

At the release of results from each round of the National Assessment Programme, the Ministry of Education and Training organises a conference for all key stakeholders to discuss the implications of these results. This could be in terms of the further refinement of the attainment targets or developmental objectives and therefore promotes a regular discussion about basic quality in Flemish schools.

Availability of robust student assessment tools for primary schools

In addition to the possibility for primary and secondary schools to administer the parallel tests from the National Assessment Programme, the Ministry of Education and Training offers two tools for schools to evaluate student progress during pre-primary and primary education. Schools can use these tools to monitor student progress in Dutch language and mathematics skills throughout primary education. With the correct leadership, schools can use these as an effective and key part of their self-evaluation activities. For example, schools can evaluate children's language needs and adjust and adapt their instruction as required. Further, in the case of the language monitoring tool SALTO, schools have access to a robust measuring tool, but have to calculate the results for themselves and produce their own feedback reports. This can stimulate a culture for monitoring and analysing results as part of the school's self-evaluation activities. In both cases, the tools provide the opportunity for timely diagnostic feedback to schools and teachers to follow up for student improvement.

During the OECD review, teachers at primary schools described a range of other available tests they used with primary and pre-primary pupils, including assessments to evaluate specific aspects of pupils' language skills. In addition, primary schools often use “method bound” tests, specifically linked to the textbooks they use. Further, two of the larger educational networks offer student tests for the final year of primary school (see Box 2.3). These are aligned to the respective curriculum. The OECD review team saw examples where schools use these results as a key part of school self-evaluation and school leaders encourage the staff to think of the results as an indicator of school performance overall, that is, all teachers in all classes contribute towards this.

Box 2.3 The major network developed student tests for primary schools

The two main tests are provided by OVSG and VSKO and both are for students in the 6th grade of primary schools.

The OVSG-*toets* (OVSG's test) is administered in the 6th grade and is also used by the majority of the GO! network schools and some private schools. It focuses on the breadth of the OVSG's curriculum and attainment targets in Dutch language, mathematics, environmental studies, arts education and French, but remains independent of textbooks used by schools. Practical tests were also available in 2010 in Dutch speaking, French speaking, Physical Education, Technology and Musical Training. All areas of learning are, therefore, represented and different methods of evaluation are combined. In June 2010, 19 600 students in 731 schools took this test at the end of primary education. Each year, the test has a central theme. In 2010 it was the theatre, including tests of cognitive and practical skills. Schools receive resources and student workbooks, instructions and CD-Rom with audio and video and digital versions of the tests. There is a Youtube movie example of students taking practical assessments. Since 2006/07, the processing of results has been online and results can be compared to average Flemish results but also to reference groups (schools with a similar profile) and to previous years' results.

The VSKO's *Inter-Diocesan Proeven* (IDP) are 6th grade tests based on VSKO's curriculum and attainment targets in Dutch language and mathematics. Largely using a multiple choice format, with some fill-in dictation and spelling, they have been available since the 1970s and are now taken written and electronically by almost 90% of all Flemish Catholic school students. In May 2010, just under 20 000 pupils took the test (2 000 more than in 2009). Schools receive overall results and results for different domains of language and mathematics. Results are reported compared to the national average for Catholic schools participating in IDP that year, as well as to the school's "GOK family group", that is, schools that share similar student population or contextual characteristics (see Annex D for GOK family reference group characteristics and 2009-10 percentages). Schools are guided to VSKO's website where, each year after test results have been distributed, a number of articles are posted with suggestions for related improvement strategies.

Source: OECD review.

An increasingly information rich environment for school evaluation

The Ministry of Education and Training has helped to stimulate an information rich environment for school evaluation by:

- Directly developing student assessments and offering tools for schools to use;
- Supporting Pedagogical Advisory Services for each school network which in turn have developed student assessment and evaluation tools for schools to use and offer support to schools to develop self-evaluation capacity.

There is also a growing awareness of the need to make better use of centrally held information and to compile more information where necessary (*e.g.* information to inform student outcomes for school inspections [further education, career] and a proposal to open the information in the Data Warehouse to schools).

Increased focus on the importance of engaging all stakeholders in school evaluation

The Participation Decree in 2004 gives key stakeholders the right to an official voice in school policy making. Although, this may be interpreted differently from school to school, the decree appears to have stimulated the availability of a number of external tools for schools to use to this end. For example, the Centre for Experience based Education's (ECEGO – *Experisecentrum Ervaringsgericht Onderwijs*) tool to measure primary student involvement and wellbeing, and the SAM-scale (Scale for Attitude Measurement: *Schaal voor AttitudeMeting*) to assess secondary students' attitudes such as flexibility, diligence and responsibility. Plus, the Student Organisation of Flanders (VSK) has developed an evaluation tool for teachers to explore students' responses to their learning experiences (see Chapter 3). Parents' input into school policy development is also assured by decree, and representatives of the parents' associations informed review team members that they are in the process of developing a questionnaire for schools to use to explore the extent to which they are "parent friendly". Schools will have access to the questionnaire and will be able to tell their story.

Challenges

The Ministry of Education and Training does not mandate or steer school self-evaluation

As described above, the Flemish education system is organised around the constitutional principle of freedom of education, which guarantees every natural or legal person the right to create and organise schools autonomously. The Ministry of Education and Training interferes only minimally in the organisation of schooling and has limited powers to steer school evaluation. Traditionally, schools have been governed by school boards or governing bodies, which operate within the umbrella organisation of each educational network (Day *et al.*, 2008). While school leaders are accountable to their boards, there is a tradition of school autonomy, with each school in charge of defining its own goals for quality within the minimum conditions set by the government. This organisation of education provides limited room for national authorities to intervene and ensure consistently effective school evaluation practice.

The governance context and strong tradition of freedom of education have resulted in resistance to initiatives that can be portrayed as top-down imposition from the government. Hence, while schools are obliged to monitor their educational quality, the Ministry of Education and Training does not further specify the areas to be evaluated and it has not promoted any particular model for schools to use in their evaluation approaches. This large degree of freedom may help encourage local ownership and innovation, but the lack of specificity can also be interpreted as indicating a low priority to school self-evaluation. While some school leaders may have the vision and capacity to implement effective school quality systems on their own, others may be inhibited by the lack of guidance. This may contribute to exacerbating already large between-school differences in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

However, even though the Ministry of Education and Training's room for manoeuvre is limited by the specific governance context of the Flemish education system, there are a number of levers that it can use to influence school evaluation practice. These include strategic leadership, funding, provision of training and dissemination of tools and information. As will be explored in more detail below, the OECD review team sees

further room for the Ministry of Education and Training to use some of these levers to a greater degree to guide and support effective school evaluation practice.

School evaluation is not well embedded in a larger vision for evaluation and assessment

The recent emphasis in the Flemish Community of Belgium on working with evidence and implementing school evaluation as a way to promote improvement in all schools is commendable. However, while the Ministry of Education and Training has helped develop a more information-rich environment for school evaluation, it has not established a powerful and persuasive narrative which aligns policy, strategy and practice around evaluation and improvement (Santiago *et al.*, forthcoming). There did not appear to be a clear commonly understood definition of the purpose of school evaluation across the Flemish Community of Belgium. In interviews with school-level professionals, the OECD review team had the impression that school evaluation was being perceived as a controlling mechanism rather than as a tool for schools to improve their own practice. The potential of school evaluation, internal and external, to help achieve educational goals and strive towards excellence was not commonly understood and no clear models for school self-evaluation had emerged generally.

The potential for synergies between different evaluation approaches is not fully exploited

Currently, the different elements constituting the framework for school evaluation in the Flemish Community of Belgium are not widely seen as a coherent whole. There is no policy document or strategic plan providing an overview of different evaluation and assessment elements and how school evaluation is intended to connect to them. In the schools visited by the OECD review team, policies regarding evaluation and assessment were often seen as a set of separate initiatives operating in compartments rather than part of a coherent evaluation strategy to improve school outcomes. Partly as a result, necessary synergies between various evaluation and assessment approaches are not being realised. The OECD review team identified three areas where linkages and complementarities between different evaluation aspects could be further developed and strengthened more systematically:

Linkages between self-evaluation and inspection

First, school self-evaluation and inspection are deliberately disconnected from each other in the Flemish Community of Belgium. This is in contrast to 13 OECD countries where self-evaluations are required and form a component of inspections in primary and lower secondary schools (see Annex E). In respect of the freedom of education principle, the Inspectorate is not entitled to obtain the school's self-evaluation results unless the school offers to provide them. There is a perception that using the school's own evaluation results as a basis for inspections would overemphasise the accountability function of self-evaluation at the expense of the improvement function. As a result of this deliberate disconnection, the Inspectorate may not be fully aware of the schools' own evaluation and planning cycle, its priorities and interpretation of recent developments.

The limited complementarity of internal and external school evaluation in the Flemish Community of Belgium makes it difficult to realise synergies between the two processes. It may lead to a costly duplication of data gathering and evaluation processes, and

significantly reduces the potential of inspections to test, affirm, strengthen and broaden school self-evaluation. It also limits the role that inspection can play in helping schools build their evaluative capacity and report progress effectively. In other countries, it has been found that external review can potentially play a key role in reinforcing and supporting school self-evaluation by either validating or challenging the school's own findings (more on this below).

Linkages between school evaluation and teacher appraisal

Second, stronger links could be established between school evaluation and teacher appraisal. In fact, the extent and rigour of teacher appraisal in the Flemish Community of Belgium is highly variable across schools. While teacher appraisal has been mandated by decree as a four-year cycle comprising both appraisal and evaluation interviews, there are strong indications that the implementation of teacher appraisal is not consistently effective across the Flemish Community of Belgium, partly because “schools do not have a tradition of conducting teacher assessments” and “still lack adequate expertise to perform teacher appraisal” (Ministry of Education and Training and the University of Antwerp, 2010, p. 100)

Yet, school evaluation could strongly benefit from the development of more systematic teacher appraisal practice. In order to implement a comprehensive and rounded approach to school self-evaluation, it is key to develop ways of systematically evaluating the quality of teaching and learning that occurs in individual classrooms across the school. It is only with such evidence that schools can adequately identify strengths as well as aspects of practice that may require priority attention in the school development plan (Nusche *et al.*, 2011). There is strong evidence from international studies indicating that the most effective way of improving school performance in any system is through focusing on improving the quality of teaching practice (OECD, 2005; McKinsey and Company, 2007; Pont *et al.*, 2008).

Inspections could also potentially play a stronger role in monitoring teaching and learning processes in Flemish classrooms. In fact, “teacher appraisal policy” is one of the process indicators of the CIPO inspection framework used by inspectors, which also indicates that teacher appraisal is an important element of the school's policy-making capacities. However, the OECD review team formed the impression that there is room for inspectors to provide a more systematic external validation of the processes put in place by schools to organise teacher appraisal. This would include holding the school leader accountable for implementing systematic teacher appraisal practices.

Linkages between school evaluation and school leader appraisal

Third, the appraisal of school leaders is the responsibility of the school's governing board and is not directly linked to either inspections or school self-evaluation. School leader appraisal, like teacher appraisal, follows a four-year cycle and is based on individualised job descriptions, appraisal discussions and a final evaluation discussion and evaluation report. The evaluator will typically be a delegate of the school group (in community education), the local magistrate for education (in provincial and municipal education) or a designated volunteer (in Catholic education and other privately-run subsidised schools) (Ministry of Education and Training and the University of Antwerp, 2010).

In addition to the appraisal of school leaders by the school's governing board, the Inspectorate also checks on key responsibilities of school leaders such as the development

of school vision, school staff quality and management of staff, logistics and well-being and educational policy. However, the inspection visits do not seem to be systematically informed of the outcome of the governing board's appraisal of the school leader, and the quality criteria used are not necessarily the same. Also, no information was available regarding the degree to which the evaluation of school leadership is part of school self-evaluation and whether it is generally influenced by the results of the governing board's appraisal of the school leader.

Insufficient emphasis on improvement and excellence in attainment targets

In the deregulated context of Flemish education, the development of some commonality and comparability of quality standards across schools is a clear challenge. The existence of system-wide attainment targets is a clear strength of the system and provides some indication as to the minimum level of performance that all students should reach. However, what is lacking in the Flemish Community of Belgium is some more extended guidance regarding different levels of proficiency that can be reached by students and some kind of aspirational standards illustrating the level of performance that can be achieved by the most successful schools. The attainment targets do not provide sufficient stimulus for schools to strive for excellence and continuous improvement.

Schools must ensure that all students meet the attainment targets – this represents the minimum learning objectives for students and schools. If schools use the parallel tests, they can see how their students perform against these attainment targets. However, there are no clear criteria or indicators to help schools evaluate the aggregated student performance levels beyond these minimum objectives. Hence, there is a high degree of variability in the nature and rigour of judgements made by schools when evaluating their own quality. Many schools are coming to their own evaluative judgements in isolation, with the consequent risk that they might be out-of-line and perhaps too limited in expectation in comparison with quality standards applied in the best performing schools (Nusche *et al.*, 2011).

There is a high degree of variation in school policy-making capacity within the Flemish Community of Belgium

There are indications that schools vary widely in their policy-making capacity, which includes their ability to work with evaluative information and plan strategically for improvement. The development and open promotion of a variety of instruments and approaches for student assessment and school self-evaluation requires an initial level of competence and commitment if it is to have real impact. However, a significant proportion of school leaders and key staff may not have the confidence and competencies to develop and maintain effective bottom-up approaches to evaluation and improvement planning. As a result, while some form of quality monitoring can be identified generally, its rigour and impact on practice is highly variable across schools. There is a risk that data are used mostly in a descriptive way and that process evaluation may focus more on administrative aspects than on the quality of teaching and learning and its impact on student outcomes.

The extent to which action may or may not be taken is very much at the discretion of individuals, particularly the school leader. There is no requirement for a school to give its own account to its community of where it stands currently and what its priorities are for improvement. The potential of self-evaluation reporting to engage stakeholders – students and parents – in the work of the school has also not been sufficiently exploited.

While the Pedagogical Advisory Services (PBD) have recently focused on developing professional development offers intended to build schools' policy-making capacities, little is known about the quality of the support offered by the different PBDs. An evaluation of the PBD is planned for 2012/13. Based on interviews conducted in schools and with stakeholders, the OECD review team formed the impression that there are concerns about whether the PBDs do indeed have sufficient resources and capacity to help schools develop and maintain the expertise necessary for implementing effective school evaluation and improvement strategies.

Lack of information flow impedes school evaluation efforts

While the OECD review team notes there have been efforts to create an increasingly information rich environment, there seems much room to improve the use of this information for school evaluation activities. Currently, schools do not benefit from accessing central data and benchmarks for their self-evaluation activities. The Inspectorate does not have information on student performance or key stakeholder satisfaction (two of the four aspects of "Output" within the CIPO inspection framework) before it conducts its preliminary investigation. A shift to a differentiated inspection necessitates high quality data on "Output", as this is the major focus of the inspection (see Chapter 4). On a similar note, the results of schools as part of the national assessment programme are not communicated to the Inspectorate, as these are perceived as part of a school's self-evaluation and development. Indeed, the Inspectorate may not necessarily benefit from results of a school's self-evaluation.

Policy recommendations

Recent moves to strengthen external evaluation, self-evaluation and accountability face considerable challenges in establishing themselves within a culture that places high value on the educational freedom of each school and educational network. While there is strong political will to encourage effective school evaluation practice, the vision and purpose of school evaluation has not been communicated clearly enough.

Leadership at the level of the Ministry of Education and Training will be essential to build a culture of evaluation focussed on evaluating teaching and learning practice and its relationship to student outcomes. Government policy should articulate much more clearly the legitimacy of a focus on achieving excellence in teaching and learning for both external evaluation and self-evaluation and that such a focus will be the key concern of wider accountabilities (Santiago *et al.*, forthcoming). The Ministry of Education and Training should also promote a better integration of self-evaluation and external inspection so as to create clarity, coherence and consistency across different elements of the school evaluation framework (more on this below). As part of this strategy, the OECD review team recommends the following steps:

- Further clarify common goals and expectations with a view to encouraging excellence and continuous improvement;
- Strengthen consistency and coherence of different elements of school evaluation;
- Promote the use of evaluation and assessment tools by schools for improvement;
- Further strengthen professional development for effective school self-evaluation;
- Strengthen information flow on key indicators from and to schools.

Further clarify common goals and expectations with a view to encouraging excellence and continuous improvement

For school evaluation to be effective in improving quality across the whole education system, it is crucial that all schools have a clear understanding of the level of performance that can be achieved by the most successful schools, and are able to accurately evaluate how their performance stands in comparison. This requires the development of a clearer set of reference goals and criteria for common orientation across the Flemish Community of Belgium. The education system could benefit from the development of more extended guidance regarding expected learning progressions and criteria to assess different levels of proficiency in various subjects (Nusche *et al.*, 2011).

The Ministry of Education and Training, together with key stakeholder groups, could evaluate the potential for developing more specific learning progressions that describe the way that students typically move through learning in each subject area. Learning progressions can provide a picture from beginning learning to expertise in particular learning areas. In that way, assessment based on the progressions can be used to identify different levels of proficiency and to measure growth in student performance, rather than just determining whether minimum standards have been achieved or not.

To assist schools in their everyday assessment and evaluation work, the Ministry of Education and Training together with stakeholder groups, should also facilitate the development of assessment criteria for rating different aspects of performance and exemplars illustrating student performance at different levels of proficiency. Such rubrics and exemplars can be used to define what constitutes adequate, good and excellent work and can enable teachers to clarify clear assessment criteria and quality definitions. Such materials can be promoted as voluntary resources that teachers can use as signposts and support in their assessment. This guidance can help raise aspirations and communicate a focus on excellence and continuous improvement.

For the purpose of whole-school self-evaluation, schools also need further support in making the link between teaching and learning processes and student outcomes. To this end, it would be helpful for schools to use the same framework of process quality indicators that is being used by the Inspectorate. One way of ensuring greater use by schools of the CIPO inspection framework and its process indicators is to further develop the integration of internal and external school evaluation (see below).

Strengthen consistency and coherence of different elements of school evaluation

Ensure a better integration between self-evaluation and inspection

Self-evaluation is integral to continuous improvement and allows schools to take ownership and accept responsibility for their own improvement cycles. However, self-evaluation can also be subject to self delusion where assumptions are not challenged and power relationships in the school community have an undue influence on what is evaluated and the nature of the judgements themselves (Santiago *et al.*, forthcoming). A combination of self-evaluation and inspection, as used in the Flemish Community of Belgium, is an approach which can maximise the benefits of both while counteracting the limitations arising from an over reliance on the use of only one.

However, the potential for school self-evaluation and inspection to mutually reinforce each other has not been fully realised in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Better alignment is needed between policy and practice in both external evaluation and self-evaluation. In particular, there is a need to ensure that the goals, indicators and criteria used in both spheres are sufficiently similar as to create a common language about priorities and about the key factors which influence high quality teaching and learning (see also Chapter 4). Lack of clarity about what matters is likely to reinforce confusion and relegate self-evaluation to something which serves to satisfy demands for external accountability rather than creating a platform for an exchange based on reliable and comparable evidence (Santiago *et al.*, forthcoming).

A school self-evaluation project conducted by the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates of Education (SICI) found that several elements of external support are necessary to enhance school self-evaluation as a driver for improvement (see Box 2.4). The Flemish Community of Belgium has already introduced the necessary legal framework to clarify that schools are responsible for the quality of education they deliver. In going further, SICI's findings suggest that it would be helpful for self-evaluation to be better aligned with external inspections. Such alignment could be promoted by:

- Providing schools with access to the school-specific information stored in the Data Warehouse, which will make the decision for the inspection focus more transparent;
- Recommending the use of the same set of criteria in both external and self-evaluation;
- Stressing the importance of teaching and learning processes and their links to student outcomes for self-evaluation leading to more open discussion of teachers' practice;
- Creating a framework for a school presentation during inspection which starts with their evaluation of teaching quality, student outcomes and the steps they are taking to optimise the relationship between the two;
- Having a stronger focus on how the school is going about its own self-evaluation and using the results to improve learning (Santiago *et al.*, forthcoming).

In 19 OECD education systems, there are requirements for schools to conduct self-evaluations (see Annex E, Table E.3). Among these systems, 13 include school self-evaluation as a component of the school inspection process. However, the form such self-evaluation requirements take varies considerably. While these are devised or organised by central, state or provincial authorities in many systems, in the Czech Republic, Portugal, the Netherlands and Sweden, schools or school boards organise these. Further, in the Netherlands and Sweden, self-evaluation is unstructured and varies from school to school depending on the strengths and weaknesses of the school. As such, schools still exercise a high degree of freedom in how they approach their self-evaluation activities.

Box 2.4 Outcomes of SICI's Effective School Self-Evaluation Project

The Effective School Self-Evaluation project, undertaken by the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates of Education (SICI) with European Commission funding, involved analysis of the quality and effectiveness of self-evaluation in 14 member states within the European Union. The project concluded that self-evaluation required a number of elements of national support if it was to be fully effective as a driver for improvement. Four main elements of this national support were highlighted:

The provision of **high quality data** on pupil outcomes and key processes, analysed and presented to schools in ways which make it easy for them to benchmark themselves appropriately against similar schools.

The development and maintenance of a common set of **quality indicators**, along with tools and guidance to support their use, establishing a shared language and shared criteria for evaluation.

Programmes of professional development and other **support for teachers and school leaders** which equip them with the skills to undertake self-evaluation and improvement effectively.

National or regionally organised programmes of occasional **external reviews** or inspections to moderate and calibrate self-evaluation consistently across the country and provide the basis for the development of national indicators and tools.

A coherent **national framework of legislation, policies and advice** that places appropriate duties and responsibilities on schools to evaluate and improve their provision.

Source: SICI (2003).

Ensure appropriate articulation between school evaluation and teacher appraisal

Arguably, the most important area for inspection and self-evaluation is what happens at the points where learning itself takes place. Failure to place teaching and learning at the heart of the evaluation process sends ambiguous signals about what matters and means that evaluation judgements can only be based on proxy indicators (Santiago *et al.*, forthcoming). Given that the systems of school evaluation and teacher appraisal and feedback have both the objective of maintaining standards and improving student performance, there are likely to be great benefits from the synergies between school evaluation and teacher appraisal. To achieve the greatest impact, the focus of school evaluation should either be linked to or have an effect on the focus of teacher appraisal (OECD, 2009). This indicates that school evaluation should comprise the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, possibly include the external validation of school-based processes for teacher appraisal (holding the school principal accountable as necessary), and school development processes should explore links to the evaluation of teaching practice. In the context of school self-evaluation, it is also important to ensure the centrality of the evaluation of teaching quality and the feedback to individual teachers.

Reinforce linkages between school evaluation and school leadership appraisal

Further enhancing the performance appraisal of school leadership is also important in providing leaders with external feedback, identifying areas of needed improvement and offering targeted support to improve practice. The Flemish authorities could consider providing resources to develop training and disseminate materials for governing boards on how to undertake effective performance review of school leaders. The evaluation of school leadership should also form a key element of school self-evaluation processes. It would be helpful for the Inspectorate to systematically have access to and consider documentation from principal appraisals as a basis for inspection visits to schools.

Promote the use of evaluation and assessment tools by schools for improvement

The development of an information-rich environment will provide the Flemish Community of Belgium with a strong basis to develop a multi-faceted school evaluation framework. However, as described above, there is a need to communicate more clearly about the different elements available to support school self-evaluation and promote their use. The OECD review team proposes a two-fold strategy involving (1) a review of all current tools available to schools for their self-evaluation and a mapping of the different purposes, advantages and limitations of each tool and (2) dissemination of evidence about schools effectively using different self-evaluation tools to improve school outcomes.

Conduct a comparative evaluation of the externally developed self-evaluation tools for schools

The Ministry of Education and Training, together with the Inspectorate and the PBDs could conduct a review and evaluation of the reliability and validity of different student cognitive tests available to schools. This stock-taking exercise should focus on the ability of the different tests to measure student progress and the added value that the school brings given the students' background characteristics and prior learning. It should cover widely used tools and tests including the NAP, school feedback project, VSKO and OVSG tests. The mapping exercise should provide an overview indicating for each assessment tool the:

- extent of coverage of the Flemish attainment targets or developmental objectives;
- subjects and range of skills covered;
- format of test (*e.g.* multiple choice *v.* open constructed; computer based *v.* paper and pencil; written *v.* oral; individual *v.* team work);
- level of feedback reported (individual student results, class groupings, school average, network average, average for the Flemish Community of Belgium);
- ability to monitor progress (stable elements in test to compare changes over time; ability/flexibility for educators to re-administer the tests to monitor student improvement);
- reporting and interpretation of results (contextualisation of results, adjustment for student characteristics [socio-economic background, gender, language spoken]; comparison to averages [number of schools included and student characteristics in those schools, *i.e.* is the average representative or skewed?]; information sheets

provided to aid interpretation of results; training and/or examples of how results can be used for improvement).

Promote examples of effective practice

There is also room for the Flemish education system to benefit to a larger extent from practice-based expertise and from the many successful evaluation practices that have already been developed by various schools. The Ministry of Education and Training could play a greater role in disseminating and sharing effective practices across schools and educational networks. The Pedagogical Advisory Services should be encouraged to collect examples of good evaluation practice from their work with schools. The Ministry of Education and Training could facilitate the development of guidance for schools on how to select good examples, facilitate quality assurance of such examples and feed evidence of good practice back into the system. One appropriate way to learn more about effective self-evaluation already happening in the Flemish Community of Belgium would be to conduct a thematic inspection of a sample of schools on issues such as constructive use of data, effective classroom observation and development of school improvement plans.

Further strengthen professional development for effective school self-evaluation

Prioritise support to building school policy-making capacity

As the Flemish education system is built around freedom of education and relies strongly on the evaluation and assessment capacities of school level professionals, it is important to continue investing in the capacity of school leaders and teachers to design effective whole school evaluation approaches. Teachers and school leaders not only need to develop the capacity to collect and analyse information for self-evaluation, but they also need to understand, interpret and make decisions based on evaluative information and report on progress to students, parents and their local communities.

As described in Chapter 3, the process of self-evaluation is hugely dependent on the capacity of school leadership teams to stimulate engagement and mobilise school staff around common improvement goals. Research internationally has shown that school leadership focused on goal-setting, assessment, appraisal and evaluation can positively influence teacher performance and learning environments (Pont *et al.*, 2008). Hence, building the capacity of school leaders should be a key priority of the system. Elements of a national strategy for strengthening school leadership should include: establishing a Flemish framework for leadership competencies; developing new leadership roles; refinements to leadership training and a Ministry-funded project on competency development; and provision of appropriate and accessible resources (Chapter 3).

For school evaluation to lead to improvement it is essential that school staff learn to interpret and translate evaluative information into actions. One option to encourage schools to follow up on self-evaluation processes is to require them to systematically develop improvement plans based on their own monitoring information. The key message should be that all schools, no matter how well achieving they already are, have room for further improvement.

More emphasis should also be placed on monitoring the effectiveness of school programmes and teaching approaches for different groups of students. In part, this may

involve providing additional training resources for teachers designed to support good collection and use of evaluative information. Such resources could be made available through the Internet, but should also be disseminated through workshops and targeted professional learning programmes, perhaps working with groups of similar schools or with universities and teacher education institutions (Nusche *et al.*, 2011). Embedding such support in initial teacher education, and particularly in training for members of the leadership team would be a potentially effective way of building school policy-making capacity.

At the same time, school self-evaluation activities should not remain an exclusive exercise for the school leadership team but should engage teachers, students and their parents. The systematic consultation of stakeholder views in self-evaluation can considerably deepen reflection about school practices and their effectiveness. Students in particular have a critical role to play in determining how schools and classrooms can be improved (Rudduck, 2007; Smyth, 2007; MacBeath *et al.*, 2000), even though they need support to learn how to provide powerful feedback (Pekrul and Levin, 2007). There are several approaches to engaging students' feedback, such as systematically using student surveys in schools and involving students in the feedback to teachers on their teaching (see also Chapter 3). Indeed, successful cases of Flemish schools making use of such evaluation approaches should be highlighted and shared.

Conduct an external review of the tools and services offered by the Pedagogical Advisory Services

The OECD review team strongly supports the planned evaluation of the quality of services provided by the Pedagogical Advisory Services. Like schools, the PBDs of each umbrella organisation are expected to monitor their own quality. However, there has never been an external inspection to validate the PBDs' self-monitoring. PBDs are expected to provide "qualitative school guidance" but in line with the principle of freedom of education, they are autonomous to define what "qualitative school guidance" means in the context of their umbrella organisation.

In this context, an external inspection of the PBDs should focus on whether they fulfil the requirement for self monitoring of their quality. This should include an external checking of the processes put in place by PBDs to evaluate the quality of their services offered to develop school policy-making capacity, which is instrumental for schools to improving their outcomes.

Strengthen information flow on key indicators from and to schools

Provide access for schools to information in the Data Warehouse

The OECD review team strongly supports the proposal to give schools access to information in the Data Warehouse. This would allow schools to benchmark against other schools with similar context and input factors. Further, it will be useful to present centrally held information in such a way as these highlight the CIPO inspection framework and feed into school self-evaluation activities (see Chapter 4).

Ensure schools systematically provide performance information to the Inspectorate

The OECD review team notes that the shift in balance of the quality control system (*i.e.* with schools bearing primary responsibility and the introduction of differentiated school inspections) gives leverage to demand more performance information from schools. The Inspectorate has adopted a risk-based approach to school inspection, thus moving away from full inspections as originally conceived in the quality control system. Currently, the Inspectorate does not have regular performance information for schools on which to base its risk assessment. With the current approach inspectors are only presented with a sample of school performance data during the inspection. There seems an urgent need to strengthen the Inspectorate’s “screening” information base by establishing a protocol whereby schools provide on an annual basis selected data on student performance from their chosen monitoring systems. Such data would be for the Inspectorate’s eyes only and would not be accessible to other actors. This would provide key missing information on the output part of the CIPO inspection framework. It is of note that in 2007/08, 94% of Flemish lower secondary school teachers were in schools whose principal reported retention and pass rates of students were considered with high or moderate importance in school evaluations (information on student enrolment and progression is held centrally by the Inspectorate). The equivalent reports were: 86% for student tests scores and 80% on other student outcomes (see Annex E). This indicates that *de facto* there is already a strong focus on a wider information base of outcomes for school evaluations, as reported by Flemish lower secondary school principals, now it is just a matter of sharing that information with the Inspectorate before it starts the preliminary inspection visit.

Improve availability and use of objective output measures for Flemish schools

Further, consideration should be given to strengthening the central information base of objective measures of student outcomes. Currently, this comprises information on schools participating in either international surveys or the national assessment programme. Plus, at the sub-system level there is comparable information available for schools administering one of the network tests at the end of primary education. In education systems with early differentiation of students into different school types, a key tool to promote the equity of access for all students is to inform such decisions with objective, robust data. For example, in the Netherlands, 85% of primary schools choose to administer the national assessment for 11 to 12-year-olds at the end of primary education – the “CITO test” (Shewbridge *et al.*, 2010). Indeed, Dutch research on the performance of students with an immigrant background on the CITO test and their subsequent educational pathways adds weight to the importance of these results as robust predictors of student progression through secondary education. Teacher recommendations remain the primary factor in determining students’ orientation, however, in the few cases where teacher recommendations deviated from the performance assessment in the CITO test, students changed school type at a later stage (Herweijer, 2009).

There is room to improve schools’ use of the parallel versions of the national assessment programme. A thorough evaluation of the NAP parallel tests and other available tests should help clarify the advantages of these tools for school self-evaluation. While the NAP provides useful and stable information on the Flemish education system by monitoring a breadth of topics, the Ministry of Education and Training could conduct a survey of schools to determine the demand for such tools at the school level and how these could be made most relevant for self-evaluation. This may include the possibility of

building on the concept of parallel tests to offer a range of tests for schools in particular topics and at different education levels.

An option to provide some comparable data for Flemish primary schools on core areas would be to devise a common equating of network tests administered at the end of primary education. This could capitalise on the suggested review of the major educational network tests and other tools (see above). Such an approach was used in Australia for many years to equate State and Territory tests and provide information for Australia as a whole. The starting point is that all networks are obliged to ensure coverage in their curricula of the Flemish attainment targets and developmental objectives. As such, it follows that there would be a certain degree of commonality in areas tested among the different network tests.

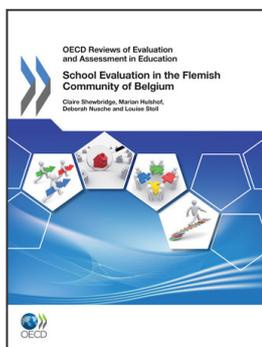
Notes

1. Readers can consult the attainment targets and developmental objectives at the following site: www.ond.vlaanderen.be/dvo/.
2. Van Petegem and Vanhoof (2009) define a school's policy-making capacity as "the extent to which schools use the available room for policy making to come to a continuous process of retaining or changing their work in order to improve their educational quality and attain both the external and self-imposed objectives".
3. Readers can access AGODI annual reports and other materials from its website: www.ond.vlaanderen.be/wegwijs/agodi/default.htm.
4. The Flemish Community uses a weighted funding system attributing more funds for students with "deprived" characteristics as judged in four main research-based indicators: parental education; home language; family income; and area of residence.
5. These have only been available to the Inspectorate over the past year. The school profiles now include information on students' further education, disaggregated by school and study course or discipline. Data on student career are currently being developed in collaboration with the Public Employment Service of Flanders (VDAB).

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