

## *Executive summary*

Greek society places a strong value on education. Its importance for personal, social and economic development – and for addressing challenges of the current crisis – is well understood. This has greatly affected the education system at different levels: it has created pressures on government educational spending, in educational staff hiring; in job prospects, leading to the emigration of tertiary graduates; while increases in immigration and refugees are also requiring educational responses.

In this challenging environment, average student performance in Greece has declined, as measured in by the OECDs Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) – to below OECD average levels. In 2015, almost one out of three students in Greece did not reach the PISA baseline level of performance in science, with similar proportions of low performers in numeracy and literacy. Other indicators show more positive trends and demonstrate the capacity of the education system to perform in terms of equity, attainment of tertiary education, and high student motivation.

Greece has recognised the need for improvement and has engaged in a series of reforms that tackle some of their key education policy challenges. A three-year education plan (2017) outlined guidelines and proposals in a range of priority areas for 2017-19. Actions have been taken on a number of fronts and have involved consultation processes among key education stakeholders. Some of the initiatives undertaken, covered in this report, include the founding of all-day primary schools, the modernisation of school curricula, the proposal to develop a new support scheme for primary and secondary education, the development of school self-assessment and school leadership appraisal, a higher education governance reform and the further rationalization of graduate studies.

To continue its reform path, it is important for the Greek education system to focus its efforts on strengthening the delivery of education in its schools and universities. High quality education delivery can ensure that Greek students have the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to improve growth and social development and boost well-being in Greece in the future.

### **Policy issues**

Greece is now slowly emerging from a decade of severe economic crisis. Building on the current education reform agenda, a future orientation can focus on placing the students more clearly at the centre of education policy and on deciding what kind of future Greece wants for its children. To achieve this, it is important to identify and respond to the core policy issues at stake.

### ***Governance and funding***

Greek education, like all other sectors in the public sphere, is embedded in a large administrative pyramidal structure; schools are units in a larger system. “School units” have fragmented and diffused responsibilities and finances, low levels of autonomy and high levels of prescription. A lack of comparable educational funding data does not allow to make clear policy choices about the potential underfunding of the system, or to unlock the challenges raised by the short-term recruitment and allocation of substitute teachers, which can lead to inefficiencies.

### ***A focus on student learning***

There is a national commitment to achieving greater equity in educational provision as well as to student outcomes. Current challenges are related to how the system targets inequities, including through Education Priority Zones (ZEP), all-day schools and support for refugee education. All-day schools are specifically targeted towards helping many students and their families by creating an environment conducive for additional school help and other activities.

More generally, the current curricular and upper secondary education reforms provide an opportunity to define and enhance learning for all students. The high stakes associated with the Panhellenic university entrance exam will need to be addressed. Widespread shadow education attendance undermines the role of the schools and the proper educational benefits as opposed to learning techniques to pass exams, which is the exclusive role of the shadow education. Furthermore, the increasing dependence of primary and secondary education on substitute teachers is creating a number of serious problems on the educational system.

### ***An emerging school improvement culture***

With a qualified and well-engaged teacher workforce in Greece, there are opportunities to promote school improvement, including by: recruiting high-quality teachers and school principals, reviewing working conditions, and the allocation of teachers to schools, and continuing support for teacher professionalisation. An incipient culture of accountability and the use of data to support improvement is reflected in initiatives such as the new MySchool database of school indicators, the introduction of school self-evaluation, of school principal appraisal, and establishment of the Authority for Quality Assurance in Primary and Secondary Education (ADIPPDE).

### ***High value placed on tertiary education***

Greek society places a high value on higher education. Yet, even before the economic crisis, graduate employment in Greece was still lower than in most European countries. The Greek tertiary education system has been undergoing sweeping changes in recent years. An incipient accountability system is gathering traction. There is increasing consensus on the best approach for the system to manage its way out of the constraints invoked by the economic crisis. The highly detailed and technical character of the Greek legislative style, allied with frequent legislative changes, has led to highly complex governance and funding arrangements in the sector.

## Recommendations

Analyses of high-performing education systems' policies and practices show that there are some core principles that can guide governments: having clear goals, with public understanding and support; maintaining a strong focus on educators' professionalism, including new recruitments and development of excellent teachers and leaders in the system; building institutions and infrastructure to support educational improvement; ensuring reporting systems provide objective information on outcomes for accountability and improvement; and maintaining a focus on the work of individual schools, where teaching and learning take place. Improvements across an entire education system can come with strong, consistent and sustained political support and leadership.

Greece has introduced a number of reforms targeting many of the relevant policy areas. The OECD suggests that Greece should continue to focus on improving the quality and equity of its education system and on student learning and proposes a series of policy recommendations:

### ***Align governance and funding to be more school centred***

Streamlining and improving the governance and financing of Greek education are necessary for the education system and its schools to function well. For individual schools to thrive, governance and funding need to be aligned. This requires developing an overall future-oriented vision of education for Greece, providing financial clarity on resources available, developing and supporting school founding organs, giving schools an identity and capacities of their own, and creating a permanent teacher workforce in schools which can contribute to develop strong educational institutions delivering high-quality education for their students.

### ***Support learning for all students***

Greece's commitment to equity can be balanced by raising efforts to maintain and improve equity and quality across the board while focusing on the more disadvantaged. More concretely, ensuring that all students reach higher levels of performance can be achieved by raising expectations, adapting the education system to the future building on the current curricular reform, reducing the impact of the high-stakes Panhellenic examinations and reviewing the impact of shadow education on the public system. At the same time, it is important to continue to focus on targeted interventions for disadvantaged students and schools.

### ***Support school improvement***

Greece has a committed teaching body which is accomplishing average results. An environment where school improvement can take place is needed. This includes: improving workforce management in terms of allocating, supporting individual and collective professional development of teachers and principals, and developing capacity and a strategy for evaluation and assessment for accountability and improvement of schools. In addition, a focus on developing effective tools and processes for school evaluation and for appraisal of educators, as well as valid and reliable student assessments will be necessary pre-conditions for success.

***Establish the pre-conditions for tertiary education to be effective***

With high participation in higher education, but relatively lower proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving among Greek tertiary graduates in comparison to countries participating in an international survey(PIAAC), it is important to continue investing in the pre-conditions for the tertiary education system to function effectively and with high quality and performance.

One aspect that may be targeted is to focus further on improving the governance of the tertiary education system as a whole and of its institutions. A progressive approach to providing greater autonomy to institutions, improving the alignment between the funding system and the government's strategy for higher education, and counterbalancing increased autonomy with greater accountability for outcomes is needed.



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