

## Chapter 4

# School organisation and operating schools in Estonia

*This chapter analyses how school organisation and the approach to operating schools in Estonia can contribute to the effective use of resources at the school level. It analyses the profile of school leaders as well as how responsibilities for school organisation and operation are distributed in Estonian schools. Furthermore, it discusses school quality assurance and development, outreach to parents and communities and the use of school facilities. The chapter places particular emphasis on areas of priority for Estonia such as the lack of feedback school leaders receive, the need to sustain capacity building for school development, and the lack of attractiveness of the school leadership profession. It also reviews the factors that constrain human resource management by school leaders.*

This chapter analyses how school organisation and the approach to operating schools in Estonia can contribute to the effective use of resources at the school level. Among other things, it considers how responsibilities for school organisation and operation are distributed; how school quality assurance and development are structured (e.g. school self-evaluation, externality in quality assurance); how school leadership is organised, distributed and prepared; how resources in schools are organised to create environments conducive to effective teaching and learning (e.g. organisation of learning, outreach to parents and communities); and how school facilities and materials are used to support such environments (e.g. use of school facilities outside instruction hours).

## Context and features

In order to introduce a comparative perspective, where possible, results from international surveys are cited. However, these surveys were administered in lower secondary education and as such their results give an insight to the organisation of general education in Estonia and how this compares internationally. For the Estonian 15 year-olds who sat the PISA 2012 assessment, 75% of the students were in Year 9, 23% were in Year 8, 2% were already following upper secondary education in Year 10 and only 0.4% were following vocational education (OECD, 2013a, Tables IV.2.4 and IV.2.6).

### ***A high level of equity and autonomy within the Estonian school system***

Compared internationally, Estonian schools have a high level of equity (see also Chapter 1). The performance of 15 year-olds in Estonia varies far less according to which school they attend than is the case in the OECD on average.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Estonia is one of the most decentralised school systems in terms of decision making. According to an international survey, in 2010-11, 76% of decisions were made at the school level in Estonia, compared to 41% on average in the OECD (OECD, 2012, Table D6.3). Estonia stood out internationally with schools having high levels of autonomy over the allocation of teaching staff (OECD, 2012, Table D6.10).

### ***Regulatory frameworks for schools***

Estonian schools operate within a national regulatory framework as well as a specific school framework (the school statutes). In 2010-11, 31% of the 76% of decisions made at the school level were made in full autonomy and the remaining 45% within a framework established by a higher authority (OECD, 2012, Table D6.3). The national regulatory framework specifies requirements such as the national curriculum including student assessment regulations, the maximum class size, minimum teacher salaries, etc. The area in which Estonian schools enjoy most autonomy is resource management (see Table 4.1).

Although the Ministry of Education and Research leads the national policy making process, Estonian schools have opportunities to participate in it. For example, in the case of a proposed new law or amendment to an existing law governing the organisation of schooling, the Ministry would draw up a proposal, including a text with reasoning and

Table 4.1. **Proportion of decisions taken at the school level in public lower secondary education, 2011**

	Estonia		OECD average		
	In full autonomy (%)	Within a framework set by a higher authority (%)	In full autonomy (%)	Within a framework set by a higher authority (%)	Other (%)
Organisation of instruction	33	67	39	30	6
Personnel management	25	50	16	12	3
Planning and structures	0	57	3	20	0
Resource management	67	6	21	10	1

Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2012-en>, Tables D6.4a and b.

justification of why this is necessary. School leaders and other stakeholders have a chance to contribute to the national policy making process via representative bodies, e.g. the Association of Heads of Pre-School Educational Institutions of Estonia, the Estonian Association of Heads of Schools. However, the Ministry of Education and Research may also co-operate with individual schools (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a).

The school statutes stipulate general information on the school (name, location and places of operation) and the rights and duties of students, parents and school employees (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 66). Also, the school statutes stipulate: the basic composition and function of school management and administration, including the function of the board of trustees and the school leader; the organisation of teaching and learning in the school, including the type and level of the education to be acquired in the school, the language or languages of instruction, the stationary or non-stationary studies carried out in the school or both and, where necessary, the classes and groups of students with special educational needs operating in the school; and the bases of organisation of the extracurricular activities carried out in the school.

The school statutes of a state school are established by the Minister of Education and Research and those of a municipal school by the procedures established by the school owner. All statutes are submitted to the board of trustees, teacher council and student council for comment.

### **Responsibilities for school organisation and operation**

Most responsibilities for school organisation and operation lie at the local and school levels. Beyond its role in drawing up proposals for the regulatory framework, the Ministry of Education and Research exercises national supervision over the schooling and education activities of educational establishments and monitors compliance with national curricula and other education standards (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). National supervision is actually carried out by Departments of Education of County governments and municipalities also monitor the numbers of children in compulsory education and whether their requirements are met.

The Departments of Education of County governments formulate education development plans for the county and these would aim to influence how schools operate and organise their activities. Municipalities are responsible for organising school medical services and catering (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). School owners (municipality, state or private entity) are responsible for appointing the school leader, for approving the school statutes and for school closure.

However, the school leader and various representative bodies hold the major responsibilities for the organisation and operation of schools (see Table 4.2). Within the limits of his/her competence, the school leader is responsible for the organisation and effectiveness of teaching and education, other activities carried out in the school, the overall condition and development of the school, and the lawfulness and purposeful use of the funds (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 71, Clause 1).

Table 4.2. **Advisory and decision making bodies in Estonian schools**

Body and composition	Function as stipulated in regulation
<b>General education schools</b>	
<b>Board of trustees:</b> School owner, teacher council (see below); and majority of members are representatives of parents, graduates and organisations supporting the school (and these must not be school employees); a representative of the student council if this exists (note that in upper secondary schools there must be a student representative).	Ensures joint activities (of the students, academic staff, owner, parents, graduates and organisations supporting the school) to guide, plan and observe teaching and education, and create better opportunities for teaching and education. For example, the board of trustees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• makes recommendations to the owner for better handling of school-related issues</li> <li>• participates in preparation of the School development plan</li> <li>• establishes the procedures for filling school staff vacancies</li> <li>• comments on the school leader's proposed school principles for staff remuneration</li> <li>• comments on proposed school curriculum and approves amendments to the list of subjects at school</li> <li>• comments on school leader (SL) proposal on procedures for school self-evaluation</li> <li>• comments on the draft budget</li> <li>• comments on draft admission conditions and any amendment to school rules</li> <li>• comments on draft procedures for development conversations</li> <li>• approves SL proposal to exceptionally increase size of a specific class beyond the maximum</li> <li>• assesses the needs and work organisation of hobby activities, long day groups and board school facilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher council:</b> School academic staff.	Organises, analyses and assesses teaching and education; makes decisions necessary for managing the school. For example, the teacher council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participates in the preparation of and comments on the school development plan</li> <li>• comments on proposed school curriculum</li> <li>• decides if a student must repeat a grade (must involve the student or his/her legal representative).</li> </ul>
<b>Governing body:</b> School leader and school council.	These are present in <b>private</b> basic schools.
<b>Vocational education schools</b>	
<b>Council:</b> School leader; School deputies; heads of structural units in the school and employees responsible for broad study groups; student representative and a trustee of the employees.	School leader forms the council (pursuant to the procedure provided for in the school's statutes) and manages the Council's work. The Council's mandate is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organise school activities and plan school development</li> <li>• develop school development plan for school leader approval</li> <li>• approve school annual report; rules for organisation of school studies; school work and training schedules; school curricula; school internal assessment report; school budget; statutes for school's student body</li> <li>• report on the execution of the budget and procurement plan</li> <li>• propose amendments to the school statutes.</li> </ul>
<b>Advisory body:</b> At least seven members that connect the school and society.	School leader forms the advisory body for five years. Its mandate is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• comment on annual school report and proposals for the right to provide instruction in a new curriculum group</li> <li>• assess the organisation of work practice at school, institutions and enterprises</li> <li>• assess school co-operation with state and municipal authorities and enterprises upon achievement of objectives in the school development plan</li> <li>• make proposals for school development, activity, assets, budget, management and amendments to school statutes.</li> </ul>

Sources: Ministry of Education and Research (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools: Country Background Report for Estonia*, [www.oecd.org/education/schoolresourcesreview.htm](http://www.oecd.org/education/schoolresourcesreview.htm); and Parliament of Estonia (2010), Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Tallinn, [www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/519032015002/consolide/current](http://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/519032015002/consolide/current).

### **Resource management**

International survey data indicate that in 2010-11, Estonia was one of 11 out of 35 education systems in the OECD where schools had full autonomy over the hiring and dismissal of teachers (OECD, 2012, Table D6.8) (see also Chapter 5). In Estonian general education schools (primary schools, basic schools, full cycle schools, *gymnasiums*), the school leader has a high level of responsibility for the appointment and dismissal of academic staff. The school leader concludes employment contracts with teachers and other employees and approves the composition of the school employees pursuant to the procedure established by the owner of the school. This is confirmed by Estonian school leader reports in PISA 2012 (see Figure 4.1). At vocational schools, the school leader also enters into contracts of employment with school employees.

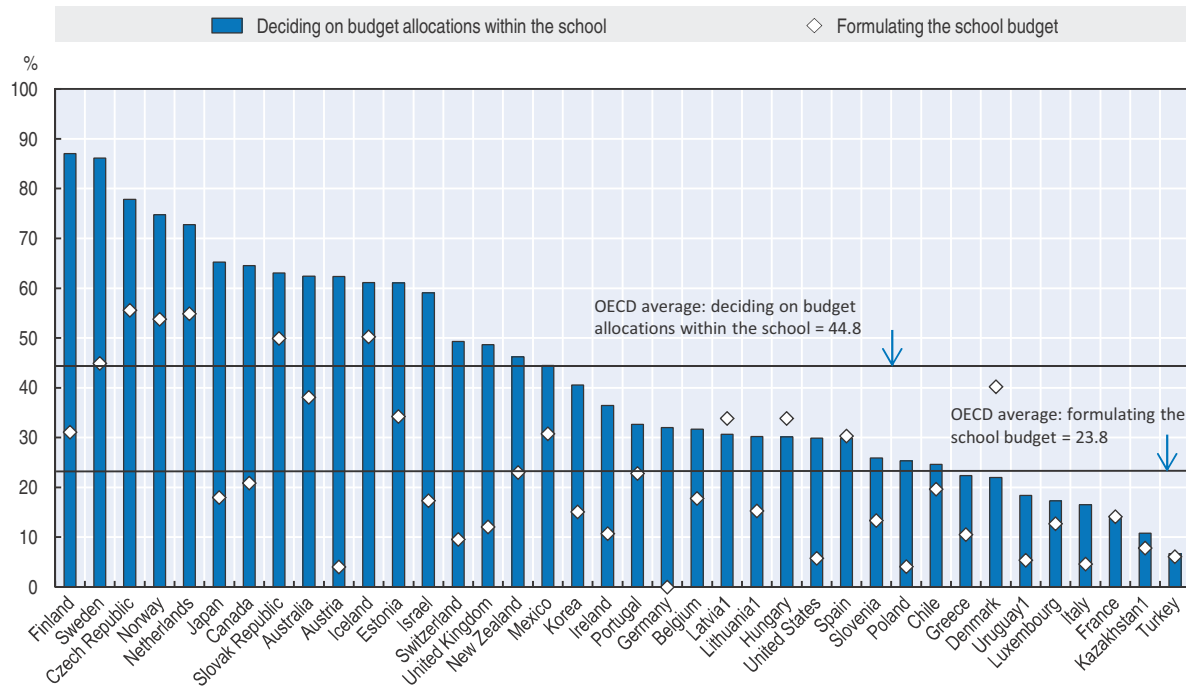
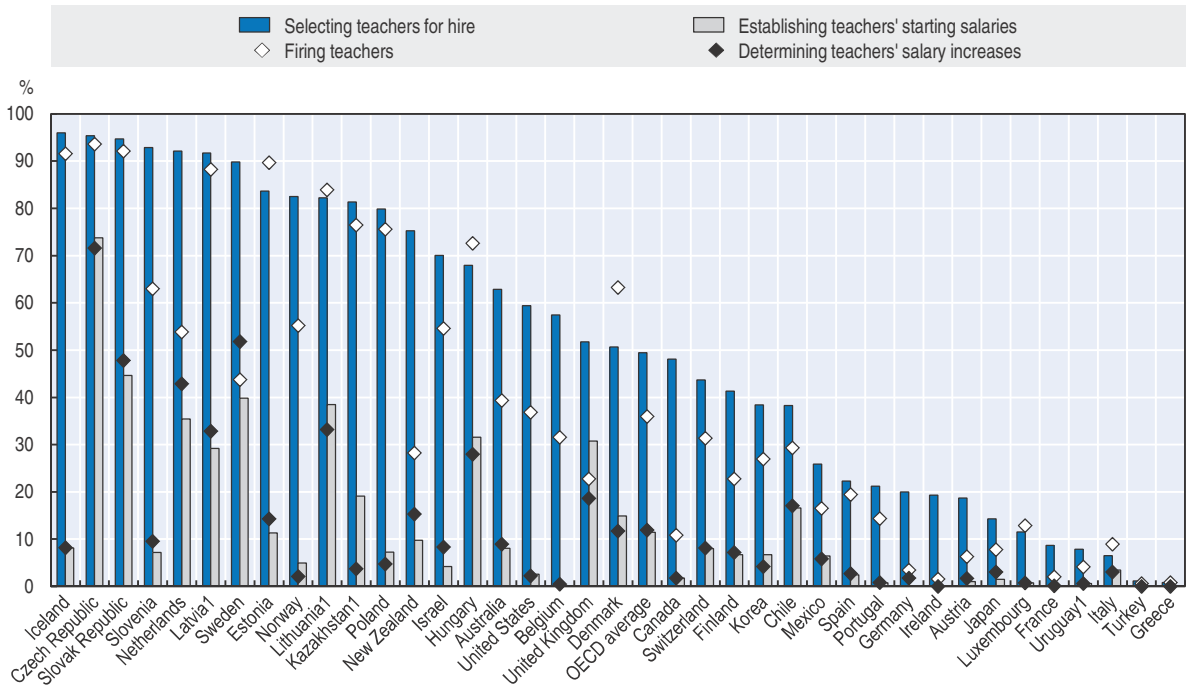
Equally, Estonian schools have autonomy over setting the duties, conditions of service and salaries for both teachers and non-teaching staff (OECD, 2012, Table D6.8). While the school leader in general education schools establishes the school's principles of remuneration, he/she shares them with the teachers and the board of trustees for comment, and then submits these to the school owner for official approval. The Minister of Education and Research also sets a national requirement on the minimum salary for teachers (see Chapter 5). Therefore, as can be seen from school leader reports in PISA 2012, responsibility for establishing teachers' starting salaries and salary increases does not lie solely with the school academic staff (Figure 4.1).

Using the national curriculum as a basis, the school leader has freedom to allocate the teacher's teaching time within the full-time working load of a 35-hour work week (pursuant to the Working Time of Educational Staff Act). This includes both contact hours (direct teaching) and other tasks as specified in the employment contract (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 75, Clause 2). As of 1 September 2013, there is no longer a specified minimum number of contact hours for teachers. The Ministry uses 35 working hours to calculate the minimum teacher salary. During the OECD review, teacher representatives communicated that a strong teacher council within a general education school can influence the allocation of working hours within the school.

Each Estonian pre-primary institution and school must have its own budget (see also Chapter 3). In the case of a private pre-primary institution or school, this must be separate from the accounts of the owner's other institutions and businesses. The school leader represents the school and allocates the budget within the school respecting the regulatory framework of the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act and the school statutes. Compared internationally, Estonian school leaders in general education have higher levels of autonomy for deciding on budget allocations within the school (Figure 4.1). This is also the case for formulating the school budget. In all Estonian schools, the school leader plans the budget. In a municipal school, the board of trustees comments on this and the municipality approves it. In a state school, the school budget is approved by the Minister of Education and Research. In a vocational school, the school leader must also prepare a budget and procurement plan and this must be approved by the Council. There is a National Accounting Act and most municipal schools have their accounts done by the municipality. There is a central accounting database into which all municipalities must enter payroll information at the end of each month (see Chapter 3 for a full overview of school funding).

Figure 4.1. **School leader reports on school responsibility for resource management, 2012**

Percentage of 15-year-old students in schools whose leader reports only he/she and/or teachers are responsible (PISA 2012) for:



1. Not a member of the OECD. Kazakhstan, Lithuania and Uruguay are participants in the OECD School Resources Review.

Source: OECD (2013a), PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>, data for Figure IV.4.2.

### **School quality assurance and development**

Estonian school leaders carry the major responsibility for school quality assurance and development. The school leader is responsible for drawing up and implementing the school development plan; approving the school curriculum; and approving the procedure for internal evaluation of the school (Article 71, Clauses 1, 2, 8 and 9). In this way, school leaders are expected to play a central role in the development of the school self-evaluation and development processes. According to recent research, representatives of municipalities reported that both very strong and weak school leaders could significantly influence school development (Põder et al., 2014). Requirements for school development planning and self-evaluation, however, envision the active participation of school representative bodies (see Box 4.1).

#### **Box 4.1. School development plans and self-evaluation in Estonia**

Estonian schools are required to draw up a School Development Plan (SDP) for a period of at least three years, specifying: school goals and objectives; directions for school development (including ensuring safety at the school); and student learning. The purpose of drawing up a SDP is to ensure the consistent development of the school (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 67, Clause 1).

The SDP should be prepared in co-operation with the board of trustees, teacher council, student council and experts from the school or external experts; the school owner must approve the SDP; and the school leader must arrange for the publication of the SDP on the school website (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 67, Clauses 2 and 3). The SDP should provide the school activity plan. In a school where the language of instruction is not Estonian, the SDP must include measures to ensure that basic school graduates are able to continue studies in the Estonian language.

The school must undertake an internal evaluation at least once over the period of the SDP. The school leader proposes a procedure for internal evaluation and submits this to the board of trustees for comment. Internal evaluation is a continuous process, the objective of which is to ensure conditions supporting the development of the student and continuous development of the school. For that, the strengths and areas for improvement are specified, which is the basis for preparing the SDP. Internal evaluation should pay attention to teaching, education and management and evaluate their effectiveness (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 78, Clause 1).

Source: Parliament of Estonia (2010), Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Tallinn, [www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/519032015002/consolide/current](http://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/519032015002/consolide/current).

### **Staff professional development**

There is a systematic allocation of central funding to support teachers' and school leaders' professional development activities. Until 2015, this equated to 1% of the central allocation for the labour costs of school leaders and teachers and amounted to EUR 1.8 million in 2014. As of 2015, funds for professional development are determined on the basis of a per student model (see Chapter 5). This amount is allocated to the local level (in the case of municipal schools) for distribution to the respective schools (see also Chapter 3). If the training needs of teachers and school leaders are covered, this support may be used for their remuneration (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). An international survey in 2010-11 indicates that Estonia is one of only 7 out of 36 education

systems within the OECD where schools make decisions on the allocation of resources for both school leader and teacher professional development (OECD, 2012, Table D6.10). Twenty-three education systems in the OECD set requirements for teacher professional development, but only eight of these, including Estonia, have a separate school budget allocated for professional development (see Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3. The school's role in deciding teachers' professional development activities, lower secondary education, 2013**

	Who decides the professional development activities undertaken by individual teachers?						Separate school budget allocated	Requirements for professional development planning
	Teacher	School management	Inspectorate	Local/municipal education authorities	Regional/sub-regional education authorities	Central/state education authorities		
Austria	Proposes	Decides	Decides	No role	a	No role	No	No plan
Czech Republic	Proposes	Decides	No role	No role	No role	No role	Yes	School plan
Hungary	Proposes	Decides	a	Validates	No role	No role	m	School plan
Portugal	No role	Decides	No role	No role	No role	No role	No	Teacher and school plan
Belgium (Fr.)	Proposes	Validates	No role	No role	No role	No role	No	Teacher and school plan
Estonia	Proposes	Validates	a	Proposes	a	No role	Yes	Teacher plan
Finland	Proposes	Validates	a	a	No role	No role	m	No plan
Germany	Decides	Validates	No role	No role	No role	No role	Yes	No plan
Israel	Proposes	Validates	No role	Other	No role	No role	No	Teacher and school plan
Poland	Proposes	Validates	Proposes	Validates	Proposes	Proposes	No	Teacher and school plan
Slovenia	Proposes	Validates	No role	a	a	Decides	Yes	Teacher and school plan
Turkey	Proposes	Validates	Proposes	Proposes	Decides	Decides	No	Teacher plan
Chile	Decides	Proposes	a	Proposes	a	Proposes	Yes	m
England	Proposes	Proposes	Proposes	No role	a	No role	a	Teacher and school plan
Greece	Proposes	Proposes	Decides	No role	Decides	Decides	No	School plan
Iceland	Decides	Proposes	a	No role	a	No role	Yes	School plan
Japan	Proposes	Proposes	a	Validates	Validates	Validates	Yes	Teacher and school plan
Scotland	Proposes	Proposes	No role	Proposes	a	No role	m	Teacher plan
Slovak Republic	Decides	Proposes	No role	No role	No role	No role	Yes	Teacher and school plan
Korea	Proposes	No role	No role	No role	Decides	Decides	No	Teacher and school plan
Luxembourg	Decides	No role	No role	No role	No role	Validates	No	No plan
Mexico	Decides	No role	No role	No role	No role	Decides	No	Teacher and school plan
Spain	Decides	No role	No role	No role	Proposes	No role	No	No plan

Notes: The figure presents information on requirements for teachers in lower secondary education. "Proposes" = Proposes the activities; "Validates" = Validates the choice; "Decides" = Decides in full autonomy; m = Missing; a = Does not apply.

Source: OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en>, Tables D7.1c and D7.2c.

62% of Estonian 15-year-old students were in schools where mathematics teachers had reportedly attended a programme of professional development with a focus on mathematics during the previous three months, compared to 39% on average in the OECD (OECD, 2013a, Table IV 3.12) (see also Chapter 5 for further information about the professional development of teachers).



## **School leaders**

### ***Qualification requirements and appointment***

School leaders (“the head of the school” or “school director”) are employed by the school owner. In vocational schools, the school owner is typically the state, but may also be a private entity or a municipality (see Table 1.6). For schools providing general education, the school leader in a municipal school may be employed by the rural municipality or the city mayor, the school leader in a state school is employed by the Minister of Education and Research, and a school leader in a private school is employed by a private entity. In the case of mayors and the Minister, an authorised official may actually conclude the contract.

A public competition must be organised to fill a vacant position of school leader and this must be declared by the school owner (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 71, Clauses 4 and 5). The school owner announces an open position of school leader, draws up a proposal of recruitment procedures and submits this to the board of trustees for comment (*idem*, Clause 6). Applicants must meet the qualification requirements set by the Minister of Education and Research: school leaders must have tertiary education qualifications and leadership competences. However, school owners may specify additional requirements. For example, the OECD review team visited the municipality of Jõhvi that has set competency criteria of knowledge of computers and at least conversational Russian and preferably ability in one more language.

The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act does not specify any requirements on the length of contract for a school leader. In public schools, school leaders are appointed for an unspecified term (OECD, 2013b, Table 7.A.2).

### ***Salaries***

The school owner determines the school leader’s salary. Estonia is one of only 9 out of 35 education systems in the OECD where school leader salaries and conditions of service are determined at the local level (alongside Chile, the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland and Sweden) (in two other systems – England and the Netherlands – these decisions are made at the school level) (OECD, 2012, Table D6.8). According to Ministry of Finance data, in 2012 the average monthly salary for a school leader in an Estonian public school was EUR 1 140 and it was EUR 870 in an Estonian public pre-primary school (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a, Table 22). Eurydice data give the annual average actual salary for an Estonian school leader as EUR 14 833 in 2013-14, that is, EUR 1 236 per month (Eurydice, 2015).

As is the case for teachers, the salaries of school leaders are paid by the school owner and, in the case of municipal schools, derive from the central funding allocation to municipalities which is primarily based on the number of students at the school (see Chapter 3) (while, in pre-primary education, are mostly based on municipal own resources). During the visit, the OECD review team learned that municipalities may keep in reserve a small proportion of the centrally allocated funding for teacher and school leader salaries and use this at the end of the year to reward school leaders and other staff that have been successful on locally specified criteria.

### Profile of school leaders

In 2013-14, there were 943 full-time equivalent management staff in Estonian general education schools (at the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels, including special schools and adult upper secondary education), a 6% decrease relative to the 1 001 full-time equivalent management staff in 2010-11 (data from the Estonian Education Information System, <http://ehis.hm.ee>). Overall, this means there is 1.7 management staff per school in Estonia.<sup>2</sup> Typically, in addition to school directors and their deputies, Estonian schools employ “head teachers” who have responsibility for teaching and learning within the school. In schools visited during the OECD review this position was typically called “Pedagogical Programmes Co-ordinator”. Larger schools may also employ a “financial manager” who would take responsibility for daily school management (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). According to the OECD TALIS (OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey) 2013 sample,<sup>3</sup> the ratio of teachers to management or administrative personnel in Estonian lower secondary schools was 6.7, compared to the international average of 6.3 (OECD, 2014b, Table 2.18).

According to the OECD TALIS 2013 sample, the Estonian school leaders in schools providing lower secondary education were on average 0.7 years older than their counterparts in other countries (OECD, 2014b, Table 4.3).<sup>4</sup> In contrast to 2008, the TALIS sample in 2013 indicates a higher proportion of Estonian school leaders who are aged 60 years or older and a smaller proportion of younger school leaders (OECD, 2014b, Table 4.3). The annual statistics report only provides a gender and age breakdown for teachers in general education and does not show this for school leaders, but in 2013, 26% of teachers were older than 55 years (Statistics Estonia, 2014, Table 5).

Female school leaders are in majority in Estonian schools. Compared to other countries, the proportion of female school leaders at the lower secondary level in Estonia is higher (by ten percentage points) (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. **Profile of Estonian school leaders in international comparison, TALIS 2013 and 2008**

In schools providing lower secondary education (ISCED 2)

	2013		2008	
	Estonia (%)	Average in TALIS (%)	Estonia (%)	Average in TALIS (%)
Aged 60 years +	22.3	17.1	9.4	11.5
Aged under 40 years	5.1	7.2	11.3	9.5
Mean age	52.2 years	51.5 years	-	-
Females	60.2	49.9	56.4	47.0
ISCED 5A qualification	95.9	92.7	97.6	92.8
ISCED 6 qualification	1.5	3.3	1.2	1.3
Employed full-time and teaching	25.4	35.4	-	-
Employed full-time, but not teaching	69.5	62.4	-	-
Employed part-time and teaching	3.0	3.4	-	-

Source: OECD (2014b), TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>, Tables 3.8, 3.8c, 3.9c and 3.13.

### Organisation of learning within schools

Schools are fully responsible for the organisation of learning, although there is a regulatory framework that covers many of the organisational aspects (see Table 4.1). The

Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act (Article 6) stipulates that schools (as well as the school owners) adhere to the following principles when organising learning:

1. General education of good quality is equally available to all persons regardless of their social and economic background, nationality, gender, place of residence or special educational needs.
2. There are no curricula-based impediments to the movement of students from one stage of study, form of study or level of education to another.
3. Upon organisation of their activities, schools act on the basis of the expectations of society as expressed in national curricula and the needs and interests of students, taking into account the proposals of the students and parents as well as the characteristics of the region.
4. The needs and interests of students are taken into account upon designing the curricula of schools and implementing individual curricula.

The remainder of this section presents the major regulations that impact the organisation of learning.

### ***School curriculum and assessment***

Each school draws up a curriculum based on the national curricula prepared by the Ministry of Education and Research. The national curricula set goals and objectives for studies and expected learning outcomes (see also Chapter 1). They also include details on student assessment criteria, with numeric grades and also descriptors that can be used instead of numeric grades for student assessment in stages I and II of compulsory education (Years 1 to 6). The school leader is responsible for establishing the school curriculum and submits the proposed school curriculum (or any amendment to an existing school curriculum) to the board of trustees, teacher council and student council for comment.

There are indications that general education schools would like more flexibility in how they develop their school curriculum and assessment (some stakeholders have raised the challenge that national curricula in general education are “too large and concentrating on facts”, Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a).

For vocational education, new output-based curricula started being progressively introduced as of 1 September 2013 based on professional standards (see also Chapter 1). The new vocational curricula aim to be more practical, shorter and allow a more flexible organisation of learning and are mapped to five different qualification levels of the national qualifications framework (see Annex 11 in Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a).

### ***Organising lessons and classes***

The Ministry of Education and Research determines the length of an academic year and of a lesson. The national requirements on the number of lessons that children should follow each week increase gradually with age, from 20 lessons in Year 1 to 32 lessons in Years 8 and 9 (see Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a, Section 5.2). In upper secondary education, a weekly number of lessons is not set, but the minimum academic workload is 96 courses with each course corresponding to 35 lessons in a given subject, that is 3 360 lessons in total during three years.

The maximum number of students in a class is regulated (see Table 4.5). There is a provision for smaller schools to merge classes which have less than 16 students and the school owner may increase the maximum class size on an exceptional basis for one academic year in a specific class, if all health and safety requirements are met (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). While there is no maximum class size noted for upper secondary schools in the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, the Ministry of Education and Research (2015) advises that this is set at 36 students. In the new network of state-run upper secondary general schools, it is planned to set the maximum number of students in a class at 28 students for small schools (planned for 252 students), 30 students for medium-sized schools (planned for 360 students), and 36 students for schools located in larger towns (planned for 540 and 750 students).

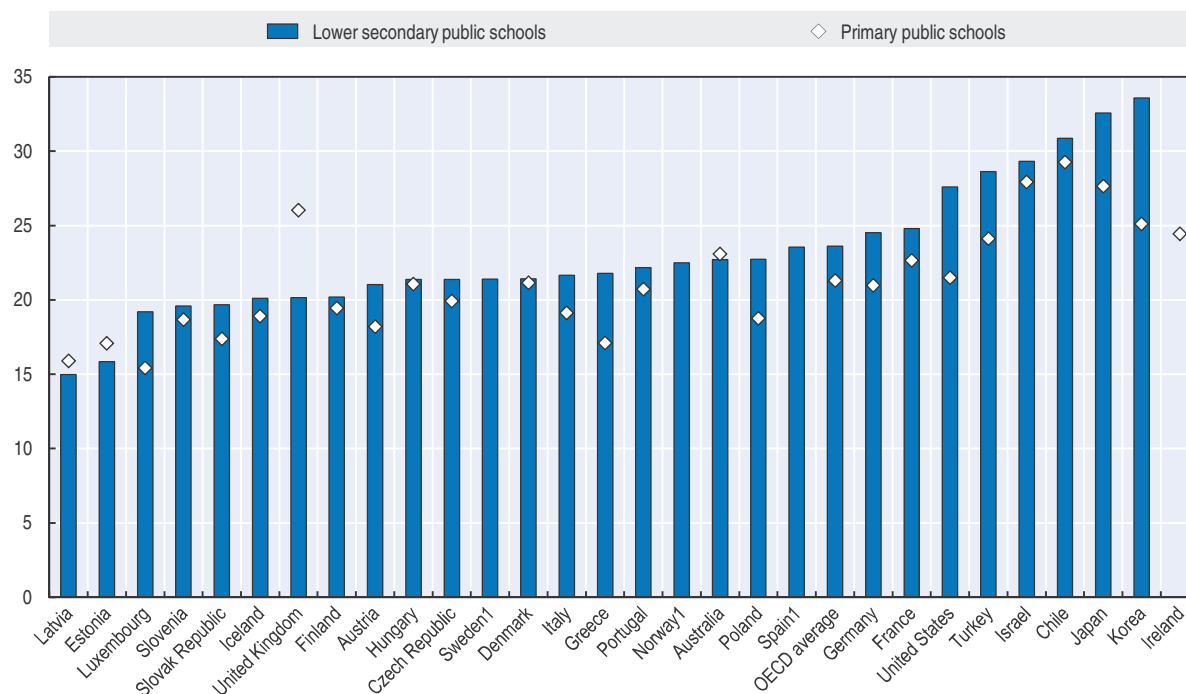
Table 4.5. **Regulations on class size in Estonian schools**

	Maximum number of students
<b>Type of class</b>	
Basic school class or study group	
School owner may set a lower maximum number of students	
School owner may set a higher maximum number of students on an exceptional basis as proposed by the school leader and approved by the board of trustees, with the exception of classes listed below	24
Classes for students with behavioural problems acquiring basic education	12
Classes for students with severe somatic illnesses	12
Classes for students with a speech impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment or physical/motor disability	12
Classes for students with specific learning difficulties acquiring basic education	12
Classes for students with mild learning difficulties acquiring basic education	12
Classes for students with educational problems acquiring basic education	12
Classes for students with emotional and behavioural disorders acquiring basic education	8
Remedial instruction groups for students acquiring basic education for provision of special education or speech therapy assistance	6
Classes for students with multiple disabilities acquiring basic education	6
Classes for students with moderate learning difficulties acquiring basic education	6
Classes for students acquiring basic education whom the counselling committee has, based on their specific educational needs, recommended studying in a small class, including students with autism spectrum disorders, activity and attention disorders or addiction disorders or students whose talent in combination with another special need results in the need to study in a small class	4
Classes for students with severe and profound learning difficulties acquiring basic education	4
<b>Rules for forming composite/mixed classes</b>	
Basic schools may form a composite/mixed class if the total number of students in two or three classes is 16 or less	..
Two or three classes of students with special educational needs may be merged	12

.. Not available.

Source: Parliament of Estonia (2010), Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Tallinn, [www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/519032015002/consolide/current](http://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/519032015002/consolide/current), Articles 26 and 51.

For general education, the average class sizes are much lower than the stipulated maximum at all levels of education. In 2013-14, the average primary class had 18.4 students, the average lower secondary class had 17.9 students and the average upper secondary class had 23.9 students (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a, Figure 64) (excluding private schools and classes for special needs students in both special and mainstream schools). In 2013, Estonian school leaders reported that the average class size at lower secondary level was 17 students. Among OECD countries, Estonia has one of the lowest reported class sizes (see Figure 4.2). According to Estonian student reports in the PISA 2012 assessment, the average class size in schools located in rural areas (less than

Figure 4.2. **Average net area per student (m<sup>2</sup>) across school types, general education, 2012**

1. Data as reported by school leaders in TALIS 2013. Note that in Estonia school leaders reported an average class size of 17 students. Sources: OECD (2014b), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>, Table D2.1; and OECD (2014a), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en>, Table 2.18.

3 000 inhabitants) was 14.9 students and it was 23.4 students in schools located in a city (over 100 000 inhabitants). In the OECD on average, the class sizes were 20.1 students and 24.6 students respectively (OECD, 2013a, Table IV.3.24). Out of the 210 Estonian municipalities, 117 have only one school and the average class size in these municipalities is 11.4 students in Years 1 to 6, 11.1 students in Years 7 to 9 and 15.1 students in Years 10 to 12 (see Table 3.8).

### **Educational materials**

The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act stipulates that schools shall provide students the use, free of charge, of all necessary reference books (textbooks, work exercise books and worksheets) needed to complete the school's curriculum. The Ministry of Education and Research will ensure schools have access to the minimum number of reference books necessary for the completion of national curricula. The school itself can choose the reference books needed in each class for the completion of the school's curriculum. In 2014, EUR 57 per student, i.e. a total of EUR 7.5 million were allocated as support for reference books and other teaching aids (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a).

According to Estonian school leader reports in both TALIS 2013 and PISA 2012, there are concerns with the instructional materials in many schools and this is more frequently reported than internationally (see Table 4.6). In the PISA 2012 mathematics assessment, there was a performance disadvantage of 18 score points (12 once student and school characteristics were taken into account) in Estonian schools using the same textbook in all

Table 4.6. **School leader reports on concerns with school educational materials**

	Instructional materials (%)	Computers for instruction (%)	Internet access (%)	Computer software for instruction (%)	Library materials (%)
<b>TALIS 2013:</b> percentage of lower secondary teachers whose school leader reported the following hindered the school's capacity to provide quality instruction					
Estonia	51	35	13	33	29
International average	26	38	30	38	29
<b>PISA 2012:</b> percentage of students in schools whose school leader reported the following hindered student learning					
Estonia	40	37	4	32	36
OECD average	20	34	21	32	26

Sources: OECD (2014b), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>, Table 2.19; and OECD (2013a), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>, Figure IV.3.8.

mathematics classes, although this was not associated with any performance difference in the OECD on average (OECD, 2013a, Tables IV.1.12b and c). Stakeholders raised the need for more state funding for learning materials (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a).

The availability of computers in Estonian schools is around the OECD average, as reported by school leaders (OECD, 2013a, Table IV.3.18), although Internet access appears to be comparatively better in Estonian schools (see Table 4.6).

### **School admission and student transfer policies**

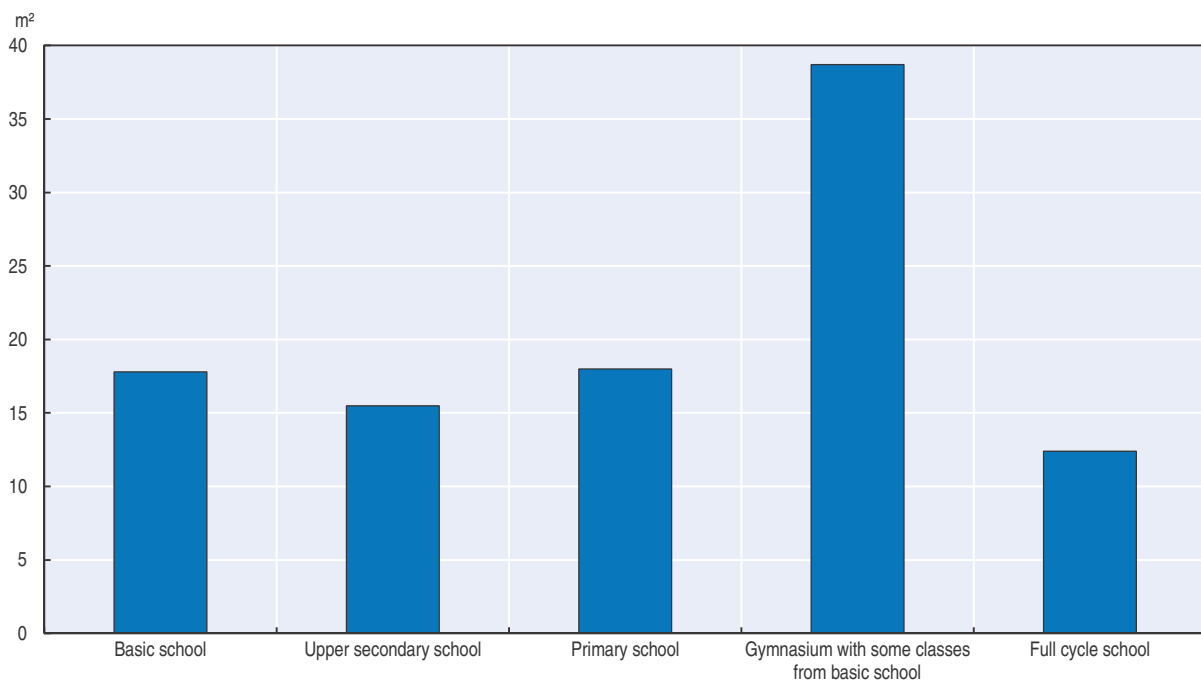
Estonian schools are required to admit all first graders for whom it is the “school of residence”, that is, they are assigned to that school according to where they live. However, Estonian parents are free to choose a different school for their child or children, if that school has a free place and, in the case of a private school, if they are willing and able to pay the school fees. The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act (Article 27, Clause 3) allows for upper secondary schools to select students according to their academic skills, as long as their admission criteria are objective and have been published. However, there are certain schools to which municipalities do not assign students and these schools can therefore administer tests to select students (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). In the PISA 2012 sample, 37% of 15-year-old Estonian students were in a school that always considered students' records of academic performance for admission to the school, which is around the OECD average of 39% (OECD, 2013a, Table IV.2.7). This was associated with a performance advantage of 9 score points in the mathematics assessment, compared to a 6 score point advantage on average in the OECD – although once student and school characteristics were taken account of there was no performance difference in academically selective Estonian schools (OECD, 2013a, Tables IV.1.12b and c).

School leaders make the decision on which children to enrol at the school and also on which students to expel (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Articles 27 and 28). Compared internationally, Estonian schools are less likely to transfer students with behavioural problems, but are more likely to transfer students with special learning needs. The percentage of students whose school leader reported this was “not likely”: 74% in Estonia, 58% in the OECD on average for behavioural problems; 57% in Estonia, 72% in the OECD on average for special learning needs. Only 4% of Estonian students were in a school where the school leader reported the transfer of a student due to low academic achievement, behavioural problems or special learning needs was “very likely”, compared to 13% on average in the OECD (OECD, 2013a, Table IV.2.9).

### Distribution and use of school facilities

A school offering general education typically has one building for studies and other activities. The majority of schools have a building with sport facilities. Most buildings are in a satisfactory condition to enable the organisation of schooling, but will need investment in the next five years (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). On average, in the 2013-14 school year, an Estonian general education school had 265 students and an average net floor area of 3 918 m<sup>2</sup>, meaning just under 15 m<sup>2</sup> of net area per student (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). Figure 4.3 provides the comparison of average net area per student across school types. The Ministry of Education and Research has a long-term goal that the use of area, excluding sports facilities, boarding school facilities and ancillary buildings, in general education schools would be less than 10 m<sup>2</sup> of net area per student by 2020. This is currently the case in less than one-third of general education schools (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a).

Figure 4.3. Average net area per student (m<sup>2</sup>) across school types, general education, 2013/14



Source: Ministry of Education and Research (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools: Country Background Report for Estonia*, [www.oecd.org/education/schoolresourcesreview.htm](http://www.oecd.org/education/schoolresourcesreview.htm).

There may be challenges for schools in rural areas to cover their operational costs, e.g. support staff and maintenance of the building. In comparison to larger municipalities, smaller municipalities pay a larger contribution to general education expenses (see Chapter 3). This is in part explained by the maintenance of school buildings that are no longer filled to capacity, due to fewer students in some localities. Parts of the school building may no longer be used, but still need to be maintained and heated to a minimum and “a vast amount of resources” is spent on this (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). However, reports from Estonian school leaders in rural areas (less than 3 000 people) on the quality of the physical infrastructure in their schools were more positive than by their counterparts in other schools (OECD, 2013a, Table IV.3.15).

As part of their duties to support the development of students, schools are able to form “long day groups” in the school for students following regular instruction. This is often driven by demand from working parents, who work until 5 pm (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). The board of trustees would prepare a proposal for “long day groups” and this would be approved by the school owner. Once approved, the school statutes specify the basis for organising extracurricular activities at the school. The school leader is in charge of organising and implementing this. “Long day groups” allow schools to offer extracurricular activities with supervision and pedagogical instruction and guidance to students in spending spare time, doing homework, pursuing hobbies and developing their interests (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 38, Clause 1). Such activities are planned and organised paying attention to the age of students, their home lives, availability of transport facilities and the school’s overall teaching and education goals. According to school leader reports in PISA 2012, the provision of extracurricular activities by Estonian schools is common place (see Table 4.7). Schools may also offer “hobby activities” and students have “the right to use the civil engineering works, rooms and library of their school and the teaching and learning, sports, technical and other facilities of the school pursuant to the procedure provided for in the internal rules of the school” (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 40, Clause 2). Students in long day groups must be provided an additional lunch at school which is paid for by the parents (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a).

Table 4.7. **Extracurricular activities offered by schools**

As reported by school leaders in PISA 2012

	Estonia (%)	OECD average (%)
Band, orchestra or choir	83	63
School play or school musical	58	58
Art club or art activities	75	62
Sporting team or sporting activities	97	90
Volunteering or service activities	84	73
Mathematics competitions	92	67
Computers and ICT club	42	38

Source: OECD (2013a), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>, Table IV.3.30.

## Strengths

### **Schools benefit from a high level of autonomy with a strong role for school leaders and staff in practice**

Compared to other OECD countries, Estonian schools enjoy higher levels of autonomy in all major aspects of school organisation and operation, and particularly with regard to personnel and resource management (see Table 4.1). Estonian school leaders in lower secondary education report that in practice the hiring and firing of staff is a matter for the school leader and teachers with no external involvement (see Figure 4.1). This is also largely the case for deciding on budget allocations within the school (see Figure 4.1), although the board of trustees (the majority of members are parents and other people external to the school) comments on the draft school budget and this is approved by the school owner (also represented on the board of trustees). In vocational schools, the Council approves the school budget and this largely comprises the school leadership team, although it does include an external member to the school (a trustee of the employees) (see Table 4.2).



### ***Schools have considerable flexibility in how to organise and deliver the national core curriculum***

Estonian schools (both public and private) develop a specific school curriculum based on the national curricula. In general education, the national curricula specify national learning outcomes, first for general skills, then for different study areas. These are defined for basic education in three blocks of learning periods: stage I (Years 1 to 3); stage II (Years 4 to 6); and stage III (Years 7 to 9). National learning outcomes for general upper secondary level (Years 10 to 12) are defined in national curricula for *gymnasiums*. Schools can decide on how to organise educational content within a regulated number of hours for each school Year. Some schools also offer instruction in the Russian language. In such schools, the entire national curricula are delivered in Russian, but there is an additional compulsory component of instruction in the Estonian language.

The national curricula for vocational education have been recently revised to introduce a higher degree of flexibility for schools. During the OECD review, representatives from the Ministry commented that this followed discussions in 2010 with schools on which methodologies in vocational education would need more flexibility to increase effectiveness of instruction. Vocational education comprises 180 study credits with 30 credits in general subjects. There are different modules that a vocational school can choose to offer in its school curriculum.

The design of the national curricula aspires to allow schools the freedom to offer a particular educational profile, while ensuring the delivery of core, compulsory content. While some concerns were noted by stakeholders over the content in the general education curricula (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a), the OECD review team saw examples of schools designing a specific educational profile. For example, a school offering three streams of general upper secondary education (health care; enterprise; European integration) and these subjects were woven into subjects in primary and lower secondary education from Year 1.

### ***Schools play a role in determining teacher salaries and rewards***

During the OECD review, representatives from the Ministry reported that there was a deliberate decentralisation strategy to make the school leader the key figure for human resource management. There are no longer centrally specified contact hours (direct teaching) for teachers; the school leader establishes this in a contract with each teacher. The aim of introducing an approach on the overall working time for teachers (35 hours) is “to spread the actual working time among teachers in a more even manner and this will motivate teachers to participate more in developmental activities in the school” (Ministry of Education and Research et al., 2014).

The central funding allocation for teacher salaries is based on the minimum salary (calculated on the basis of 35 working hours a week), with an additional 20%. This aims to introduce flexibility at the school level for the school leader to adjust salaries or allocate additional compensation. During the OECD review, representatives from the Ministry reported that in schools with an efficient teacher/student ratio, there would be a good level of funding available for school leaders to financially reward teachers. Each school sets its own teacher pay scale. These are relatively new responsibilities at the school level and their potential may not yet be fully understood, but they are designed to introduce greater flexibility for school leaders to reward good teaching.

During the OECD review, representatives from Tartu City reported that school leaders were given full autonomy in matters of teacher hiring, promotion and remuneration, but that the municipality controlled the school budget, which includes a specific line for “teacher salary – additional compensation”. However, they also reported that generally there is not much financial room within school budgets for school leaders to make use of this possibility. Schools visited during the OECD review reported using different ways to reward teachers, including praise and moral recognition, special trips and in one school a common financial contribution from each member of staff with the winnings going to “the golden teacher” nominated by the staff. There is also an annual reward programme (Annual Teachers Gala “Estonia learns and appreciates”) for which teachers and school leaders can be nominated at both the county and national levels (see [www.hm.ee/gala](http://www.hm.ee/gala)). In all schools visited during the OECD review, the culture was accepted that there would be individual negotiation between the school leader and each teacher regarding his/her salary. Representatives from the Estonian Association of Teachers reported that it had developed recommendations on which qualifications should be associated with salary increases.

### ***Schools have the ability to generate extra income***

Most general education schools make use of their facilities for extracurricular activities or for other community activities (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). General education schools can generate extra income by offering the use of their facilities, but this is typically for a modest fee and often local residents are not charged a fee (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a, Section 5.8). Schools can receive donations and during the OECD review some schools reported they had a separate account for this. In Tartu, municipal schools appeared to be able to keep an agreed percentage of the income generated from renting out school facilities, with the city taking the remaining income.

The vocational schools visited during the OECD review appeared to be successful in generating additional income. For example, via providing seminars with participant fees; charging for food at the school canteen; charging fees for use of school dormitories; providing services in particular fields of study at the school (e.g. car repair or hairdressing); or renting out sports facilities. Also, vocational schools can now be accrediting institutions which can be a source of income. For example, one of the schools visited during the OECD review issued Euro certificates for welders and external companies would refer their employees to the school.

### ***There is an emphasis on school self-evaluation and building professional responsibility and capacity***

A recent OECD review found that the vast majority of education systems in the OECD had legal requirements aimed at stimulating a school self-evaluation culture, but that these varied significantly in nature (OECD, 2013b, Table 6.4). A major recommendation from the OECD review was to raise the profile of school self-evaluation. In 2006, Estonia reinforced the role of school self-evaluation, with a requirement for schools to conduct a self-evaluation at least once over a three year period. This corresponds to the typical school development plan cycle and the school should evaluate its progress against this benchmark (see Box 4.1). This was in the context of a policy decision to move away from an established cycle of regular school inspection (external evaluation of the school as a whole) to implementing a quality assurance system, with school’s self-evaluation being the main focus, and conducting external evaluations on a different theme each year as set by the Minister of Education and Research (thematic supervisions) (Ministry of Education and Research, 2014a).

### ***Self-evaluation policies aim to engage the school community***

Estonian law requires schools to prepare the school development plan in co-operation with the board of trustees, the teacher council, the student council and any external experts (see Box 4.1). Also, the school leader must submit the proposed procedures for school self-evaluation to the board of trustees for comment. In this way, it is envisaged that the school community is actively engaged in the self-evaluation and development planning process. During its visit, the OECD review team learned of schools with well-developed self-evaluation processes involving the community and generating their ideas for school development. One school, having written the development plan collectively with the board of trustees and teacher council, also published the report on the municipal website for a period of two weeks to seek comments from parents and the general public. Teachers also reported that they had received special training in school development planning. Compared internationally, Estonia has a much more established culture of seeking written feedback from students for example on school lessons, teachers or resources (83% of Estonian 15-year-old students were in schools where the school leader reported this happened, compared to 60% on average in the OECD) (OECD, 2013a, Table IV.4.32).

### ***Central support to train school leaders in quality assurance management is available***

Estonian school leaders are responsible for the school development planning process and an evaluation of school progress against this. To support the legal requirement of self-evaluation in 2006, schools were obliged to use central advisory services between 2006 and 2009 and this was optional up until 2013 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2014a). There was, therefore, a major emphasis on building capacity at the school level to conduct self-evaluation. The Ministry of Education and Research no longer provides advisory services to schools and the basic approach involves a system of trained quality assurance advisors that schools can use to seek advice on how they conduct their self-evaluation (see Box 4.1). Schools would produce a self-evaluation report (the policy is that this should be done at least once during the typical three-year school development plan cycle) and then choose a trained advisor from an official list published on the Ministry's website ([www.hm.ee/et/sisehindamise-nounikud](http://www.hm.ee/et/sisehindamise-nounikud)). All officially trained quality assurance advisors are school leaders or other members of school leadership teams. There are around 200 advisors and each has received targeted training in quality assurance management. All schools must submit data about their self-evaluation report to the Estonian Education Information System and would include information on whether they used an advisor (Ministry of Education and Research, 2014a).

### ***Schools benefit from good information systems***

The use of reliable, comparative data in school self-evaluation supports a heightened objectivity in evaluation results (OECD, 2013b). The Ministry introduced a central information system for schools in 2004 that includes a series of "performance indicators" that can be used in self-evaluation (see Box 4.2). In PISA 2012, 96% of Estonian 15-year-old students were in schools that systematically recorded data on teacher and student attendance and graduation rates, student test results and teacher professional development, compared to 86% on average in the OECD (OECD, 2013a, IV.4.32). As these are publicly available they can also be consulted by parents and used by school owners (Ministry of Education and Research, 2014a).

#### Box 4.2. Information and materials to support school self-evaluation in Estonia

The “Estonian Education Information System” (see <http://ehis.hm.ee>) contains five sub-registers (records of education certificates; teachers and school leaders, including job vacancies; students enrolled; general data on educational institutions; curricula and education licenses). It provides access to all data that schools are legally obliged to report and allows a comparison with other institutions. For example, for general education institutions: support for students with special educational needs; the ratio of students remaining in the same class for the second year to the number of students acquiring basic education; the results of state examinations in basic schools by subject; the proportion of graduates of an upper secondary school among students who started Year 10 in the same graduating class; the proportion of students who do not fulfil the obligation to attend basic school; the number of graduates among the number of school entrants (for Years 9 and 12); the proportion of students continuing education among the total number of basic school graduates; the number of teachers with the required qualifications; the average amount of in-service training of teachers (in hours); the age pattern of teachers; the proportion of teachers who left the school during the academic year among the total number of teachers; the percentage of female teachers among the total number of school teachers; student-to-teacher ratios; average size of classes; the number of students per computer; and the number of teachers per computer.

The “Education Eye” is a visual information system with an interface that allows users to click on a map to find out information about schools, of any educational level and type, in that particular area (see [www.haridussilm.ee](http://www.haridussilm.ee)). It provides information about hobby education, teacher positions and salaries, education expenditure, student numbers, teaching staff and also contains some performance indicators.

The Ministry of Education and Research also provides materials to support school self-evaluation activities (see [www.hm.ee/et/tegevused/valishindamine/sisehindamine](http://www.hm.ee/et/tegevused/valishindamine/sisehindamine)).

Sources: Ministry of Education and Research (2014), *The Inspectorate of Education of Estonia*, Ministry of Education and Research, [www.sici-inspectorates.eu/getattachment/182ce6c8-0f9b-4b0e-805c-79c6fefd8ed1](http://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/getattachment/182ce6c8-0f9b-4b0e-805c-79c6fefd8ed1); and <http://ehis.hm.ee>.

#### School “boards” to link school processes with the school community are well established

There are legal requirements for all Estonian schools to have “boards” with representatives from the school community and these come in different forms (see Table 4.2). In vocational schools, the “Council” is a major decision-making body that is managed by the school leader and it includes a student representative and a trustee of the employees. Vocational schools also have an “advisory body” comprising at least seven members that connect the school and society. The vocational schools visited during the OECD review each included a representative from the Ministry of Education and Research, as well as 8 to 9 representatives from business and industry. Members are volunteers and the schools actively recruit these with an aim to represent each of the major branches of study offered at the school. In doing so, the school may make appeals to the Chamber of Commerce. One school included a member of the Public Employment Service on the advisory body.

In general education schools, there are two decision-making bodies: one comprises all school academic staff (Teacher Council) and makes decisions to help manage the school and organise teaching and learning; the other comprises a majority of members who are

external to the school (board of trustees) and guides, plans and observes teaching and learning. The board of trustees elects a chair and vice chair and holds a meeting at least once every four months during the school year (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 73, Clause 9). The board of trustees in the schools visited during the OECD review had a broad membership, including parents from different study stages of the school, representatives from supporting organisations that were relevant to the age and characteristics of the students educated at the school and, at the upper secondary level, two student representatives. It would appear that there are open channels for students to contribute to school matters even at the lower secondary level. Compared internationally, Estonian students reportedly play a stronger role in giving feedback to the school on lessons, teachers or resources (83% of 15-year-old Estonian students were in schools that have internal or external evaluations and seek written feedback from students, compared to 59% on average in the OECD) (OECD, 2013a, Table IV.4.33).

### ***Well-organised “boards” can be responsive to school development cycle and parents’ needs***

The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act (Article 73, Clauses 10 and 11) guarantees the rights of students and parents to address the board of trustees directly in the event of any matters of dispute concerning teaching and learning at the school and also states that the school leader reports to the board of trustees. During the OECD review, the schools visited reported that their board of trustees or advisory board met between two to four times a year, but more often if needed. In one school the board of trustees communicated an active role, including listening to feedback from students and parents and making direct proposals to the school owner regarding specific school developments. In another school, the board of trustees had taken a lead role in planning the implementation of the State requirement to implement instruction in the Estonian language and was proud to be the first school in the area to implement this measure. In the vocational schools visited during its visit, the OECD review team saw examples of the advisory body playing a role in the appointment of a new school leader in one school and helping to write the school investment plan in another school. Members of the advisory bodies would help identify companies to provide apprenticeships to students. One school appeared to have a very active advisory body that would also invite the school leader to information seminars for top managers in industry, as well as make direct suggestions to the school owner on fields of studies. Ministry representatives reported that frank and constructive feedback from business and industry representatives on the advisory body was invaluable.

### ***Municipalities provide support to promote the role of “boards”***

During the visit, the OECD review team also learned of examples of municipal support to promote the role of school “boards”. In Tartu, there was a periodic training offered to members of boards of trustees. In Tallinn, the city’s quality assurance scheme included feedback from parents on the role of boards of trustees and there is an annual competition to nominate “the best board of trustees of the year”.

### ***School leaders are recognised as a key resource and their professional development is considered crucial***

There is clear political recognition of the important role that school leaders play in Estonian schools. The 2014 annual meeting of Ministers of Education in the three Baltic States underscored the importance of school leaders and Ministers decided to focus

on this aspect in their subsequent meeting (Ministry of Education and Research, 2014b). The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy is the basis on which the government will make its decisions for educational funding for the years 2014-20 and for the development of programmes that support the achievement of necessary changes. The role of school leaders features prominently, with one of the five strategic goals being to develop competent and motivated teachers and school leaders (see Chapter 1). The lifelong learning strategy assumes that school leadership takes responsibility to: provide the strategic leadership for the institution, create an organisational culture that supports learning and development, and support the professional development of teachers (Ministry of Education and Research et al., 2014). The strategy foresees an updated professional development offer for school leadership to help implement the new approach to learning and to manage student learning and development more generally (Ministry of Education and Research et al., 2014). In addition, specific professional development programmes for established school leaders, newly appointed school leaders and future school leaders are being implemented in 2015 (see Box 4.3). In January 2015, the Ministry of Education and Research, Tallinn University, the University of Tartu, the Estonian Association of Heads of Schools and the Estonian Rotary Centre signed a co-operation agreement for the development of a programme for Estonian school leaders, which will send each year at least five school leaders to globally recognised outstanding schools (Ministry of Education and Research, 2014b). There are also plans to strengthen the evaluation of the performance of school leaders (see Box 4.3).

Compared internationally, Estonian school leaders report having received good levels of formal training for their position (see Figure 4.4). Virtually all Estonian school leaders sampled in TALIS 2013 reported they had followed a school administration or principal training programme or course. This compared to 85% internationally on average. Also, continued professional development appears to be more wide spread among Estonian school leaders. 63% of Estonian school leaders reported having followed formal training in instructional leadership after they had taken up their position at the school, compared to 53% internationally on average (see Figure 4.4). As already noted, the central list of advisors for school self-evaluation comprises school leaders who have received targeted training in quality assurance management.

### ***A good use of school facilities is made outside regular instruction time***

The Ministry of Education and Research (2015) presents results of a specific survey on how schools use their facilities. The results revealed a wide use of school buildings for extracurricular activities – and these results are mirrored in school leader reports during the PISA 2012 survey (see Table 4.7). Roughly four in five of the surveyed schools reported they allow the use of their facilities for organising activities that are not directly related to the school, although this was more frequently the case in municipal schools (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). During its visit, the OECD review team also noted an established culture of renting out facilities to cultural and sports associations etc. This was also the source of a modest income for these schools. According to the Ministry of Education and Research (2015) survey, schools typically do not charge local residents and non-profit associations for the use of their facilities and any fees charged are typically paid to the school owner.

### Box 4.3. Estonian strategy to further develop school leaders, 2014-20

#### Plans to strengthen the evaluation of school leader performance

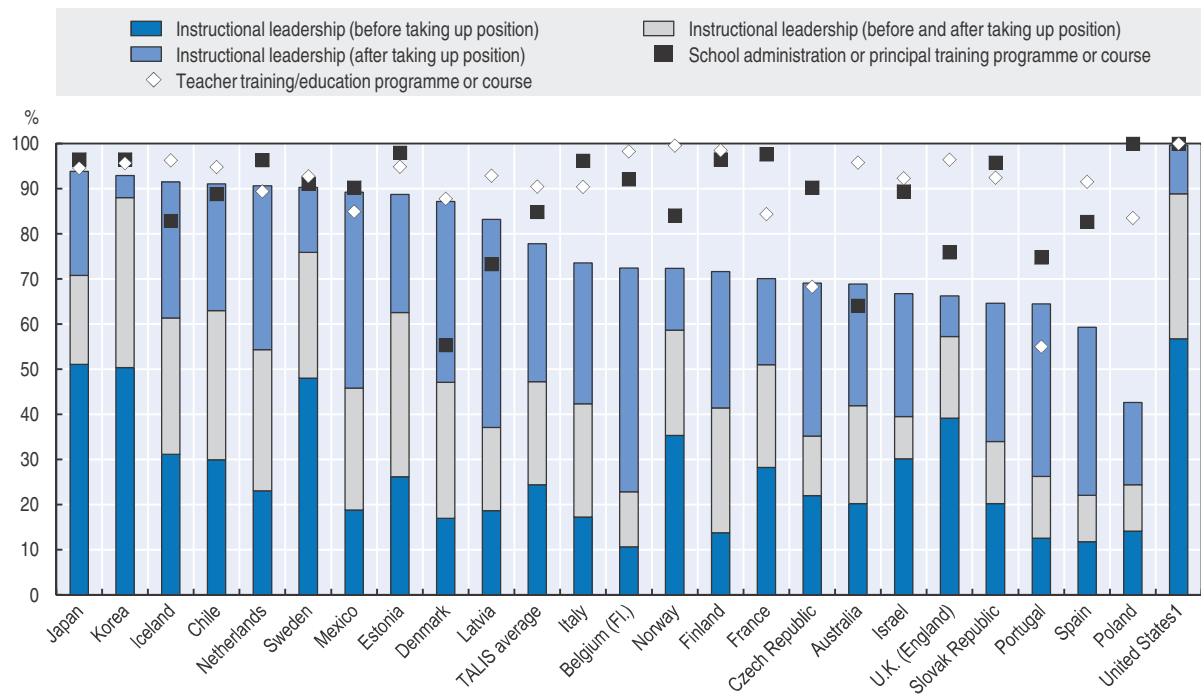
School leaders should be regularly assessed against the competence requirements for the position. The role of a school leader in creating a school's culture is of crucial significance, because the learning environment depends first and foremost on the school leader – whether they value, motivate and support a learner and their developmental potential, whether they support the development of teachers and other school staff members, and whether the school works well with the community and families. In order for Estonian schools to be led by competent and motivated school leaders, who have the determination and ability to carry out the objectives set out in the strategy, the following steps need to be taken:

- Associations of School Leaders of pre-primary institutions, general education schools, vocational schools and institutions of professional higher education, and school owners will develop and the Ministry of Education and Research will implement competence requirements for school leaders. This will be the basis for recruiting school leaders, providing feedback on their performance, as well as offering additional training, which among other things also emphasises the objective of implementing the new approach to learning.
- The Ministry of Education and Research will launch a training programme for future school leaders, from which the best candidates will be chosen through open competition (see below).
- The Ministry of Education and Research, in co-operation with school owners, will develop an external appraisal system for school leaders, through which they will get regular professional feedback about their work and how it relates to the school's results, as well as suggestions for additional training. The quality indicators of the institution will be used as the basis in assessing the results of the work of the school leader.

#### New professional development programmes for school leaders in 2015

- **School team development programme:** 12-month management training programme with the school leader and two other staff members, covering different school management topics. Each module includes tasks which form the basis of a school development project. There is a follow up six months after the end of the programme to observe how the project is being implemented.
- **School Leader Offspring Programme:** 24-month development programme for future school leaders, open to school staff, plus individuals from other sectors. Participants are selected via a competition. Each participant has a mentor and performs field training in schools. The programme offers different modules, including an introduction to pedagogy and the management of learning for those not in the education sector.
- **Programme for new school leaders:** A programme designed to help new school leaders with implementing their responsibilities and to shorten their introduction period. It provides an overview of legislation, financial management, innovation in education, trends, etc. and provides a co-operation network.

Sources: Ministry of Education and Research, the Estonian Co-operation Assembly and the Education Forum (2014), *The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020*, [www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian\\_lifelong\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf); and Ministry of Education and Research (2015), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools: Country Background Report for Estonia*, [www.oecd.org/education/schoolresourcesreview.htm](http://www.oecd.org/education/schoolresourcesreview.htm).

Figure 4.4. **School leader reports on formal training, lower secondary education, 2013**

1. The response rate was too low to ensure comparability.

Source: OECD (2014b), *TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>, Table 3.10.

## Challenges

### **School leader appraisal practices vary and professional feedback is inadequate**

The school owner is responsible for both the appointment and dismissal of the school leader. There is no central framework for school leader appraisal and appraisal is not mandatory (OECD, 2013b). The procedures for school leader appraisal are entirely at the discretion of the school owner. Although school self-evaluation is mandatory and this should include an evaluation of management, the procedures for conducting and reporting the results of school self-evaluation are entirely at the discretion of the school. In the case that school owners do conduct regular school leader appraisal, there are likely to be very different criteria in use for the appraisal of school leaders and there is also little guarantee that these would be aligned to school self-evaluation criteria. While the Ministry has developed tools for school self-evaluation, Estonian schools are under no obligation to use these and the OECD review team does not have information on how widely these are used by schools.

During the OECD review, the review team gained the impression that there were open channels of communication between school leaders and school owners to discuss school concerns and/or needs. All schools the review team visited reported regular communication with either the State or municipality about different aspects of school organisation. However, there did not appear to be such a strong culture of professional feedback to the school leader on his/her performance and conduct. School leader representatives reported that professional feedback is generally weak in Estonia. The frequency of professional feedback discussions between the school owner and school leader varied, as well as the nature of these discussions and whether or not these were linked to some form of professional reward or sanction.



Tallinn uses a type of performance-based appraisal system for its school leaders. The official appraisal takes place every two years (representatives from Tallinn's Department of Education commented that the department does not have the capacity to undertake this on an annual basis). Depending on the official appraisal results, school leaders may be eligible for a salary bonus. Representatives from Tartu City reported that there is no official appraisal system in place and therefore the Department of Education's policy is that school leader salaries are equal. However, Tartu City would organise periodic observation in schools, e.g. every two years. Representatives from Narva Department of Education reported that Narva has a set of criteria it uses for the differentiation of school leader salaries. These criteria are agreed by the City Council and include efficiency and quality criteria (e.g. student results in state examinations and Olympiads).

At the same time, there have been attempts to develop criteria for the appraisal of school leaders. The Ministry of Education and Research led a project to establish competency criteria in 2006-07 (Reliability, e.g. setting demanding goals for his/her work, law abiding; Orientation in society, e.g. providing a holistic education, to the economy and the labour market; Learning and educational process management, e.g. setting priorities for school organisation, focus on student development, supporting teacher development; Ensuring a functional organisation, e.g. creating a team, delegating and motivating staff, effectively organising work; self-development). In 2008, the Ministry of Education and Research and Tallinn University also ran a project that developed a set of generic, core and basic competencies (Generic competencies; Core competencies – conceptual thinking, holistic thinking, understanding societal development, pedagogical philosophy; Basic competencies – operations and performance, communication and collaboration, self-management and personal effectiveness, systems thinking, integrity, honesty, trustworthiness). In 2009 a new school leader competency model was developed, but the conclusions of the working group were that this should be used as a basis for school leader self-evaluation, but would not be practicable as an appraisal instrument. The major areas in the competency model are: managing organisational development; learning environment; managing people; managing resources; managing oneself. The major challenge has been implementing this self-evaluation competency model as it is entirely voluntary (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015a). It very much depends on the school owner as to how much this self-evaluation competency model is promoted. For example, the OECD review team learned that Narva municipality had requested school leaders to complete a written self-evaluation and school leaders reported this was a positive development with the municipality taking interest in their work.

***There is a need to sustain capacity building for school self-evaluation and quality assurance***

***The school leader's role as the pedagogical leader could be further strengthened***

School self-evaluation is legally defined as a "continuous process, the objective of which is to ensure conditions supporting the development of the student and continuous development of the school" (see Box 4.1). At the same time, schools are legally required to undertake this "at least once" over the period of the school development plan (typically three years) (see Box 4.1). Compared with school leaders in other countries, Estonian lower secondary school leaders were less likely to report that they had engaged in specific activities related to the school development plan over the previous 12 months. In 2013, 58% of Estonian lower secondary school leaders reported they had worked on a

professional development plan for the school over the previous 12 months, compared to 79% internationally (OECD, 2014b, Table 3.3). The use of student performance and evaluation results was reportedly more regular, but still lower than on average internationally (82% of school leaders in Estonia; 89% of school leaders internationally) (OECD, 2014b, Table 3.3). Notably, Estonian school leaders appear to less frequently observe instruction in the classroom compared to counterparts in other OECD countries (see Figures 4.5 and 4.6). This is the major tool for ensuring the quality of teaching and learning and a core part of effective self-evaluation activities (OECD, 2013b).

### **Engaging the school community in its quality assurance role is not systematic across schools**

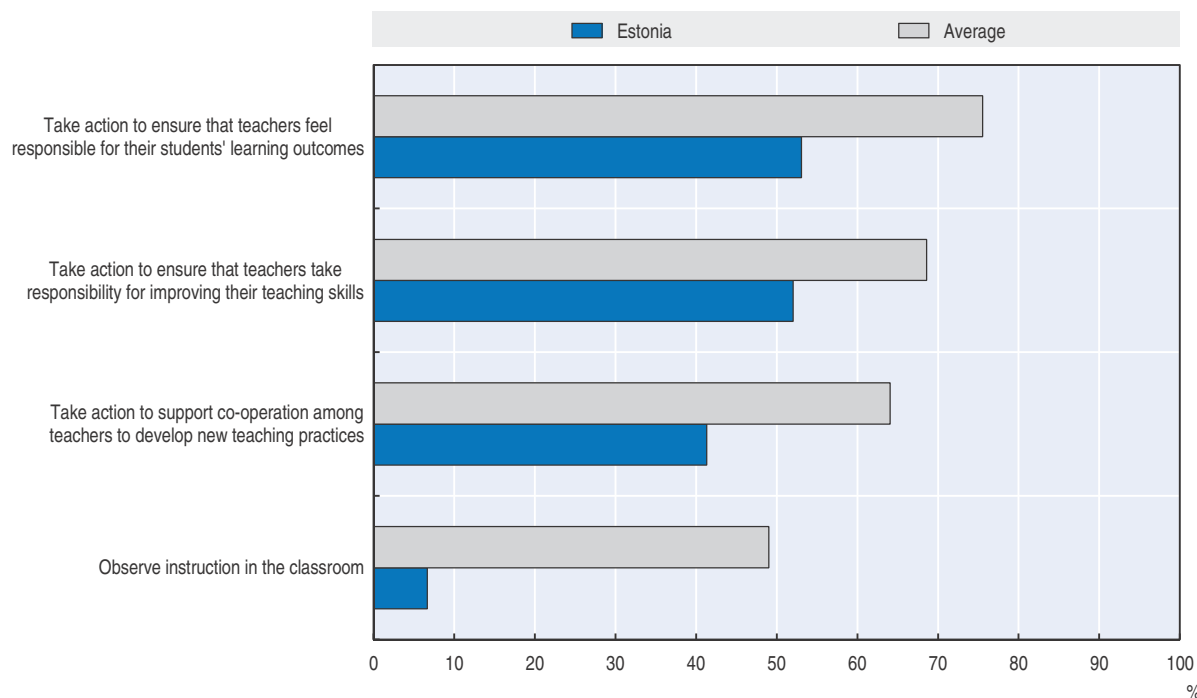
A significant strength in Estonia is the role that is given to school “boards” to influence and actively shape the operation and organisation of schools. However, this very much depends on the capacity of different boards to undertake this role. During the OECD review, the review team noted quite some variation in the approach to school planning and how involved the school community was in this. In the case of instability of school leadership or a lack of strategic vision and oversight, the school community would have an immediate role to play in challenging the school leadership.

### **School leadership is ageing and there is a need to develop new leaders**

International data indicate that the average age of a lower secondary school leader is around 51 years (see Table 4.4). In Estonia, 22% of lower secondary school leaders are aged 60 years or over and this proportion has more than doubled between 2008 and 2013 (see

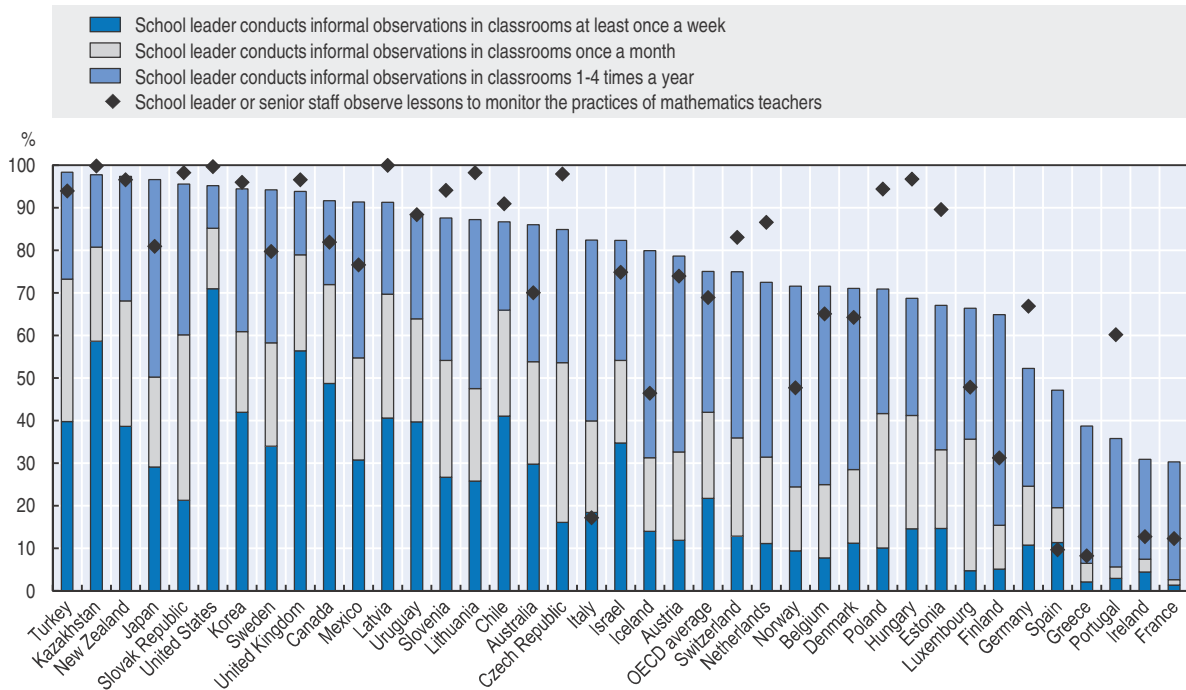
**Figure 4.5. Reported frequency of pedagogical leadership activities**

Percentage of lower secondary school principals reporting they had engaged “often” or “very often” in the following (TALIS 2013):



Source: OECD (2014b), TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>, Table 3.2.

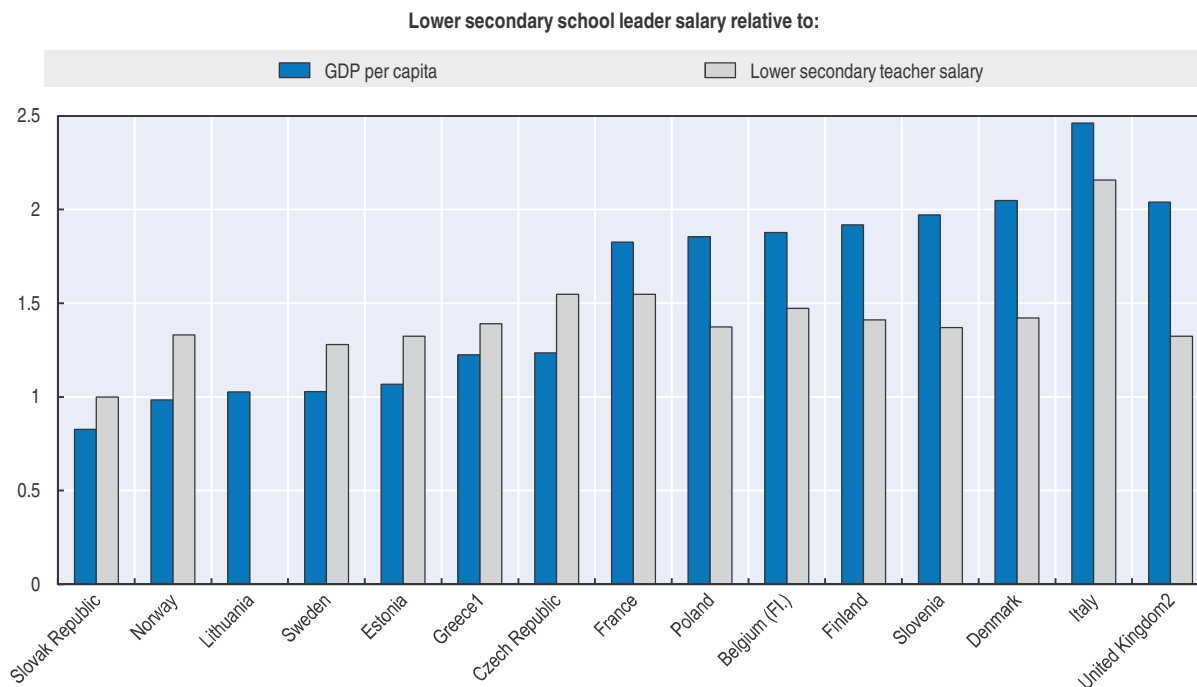
Figure 4.6. **Reported frequency of classroom observation by school leaders**  
Percentage of 15-year-old students whose school leader reported the following (PISA 2012):



Sources: OECD (2013a), PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>, Table IV.4.34; and PISA 2012 Student Compendium, Question ID SC34Q19 (available at [www.pisa.oecd.org](http://www.pisa.oecd.org)).

Table 4.4). Also, Estonian school leaders appear to have been working longer as school leaders: 12 years, compared with 9 years on average internationally (OECD, 2014b, Table 3.12). These indicators raise a pressing concern to attract new recruits to school leader positions in the future. While the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy recognises the need to improve the attractiveness of the school leader career and makes specific reference to more competitive salaries and a work organisation that would be more highly valued by society (Ministry of Education and Research et al., 2014), the OECD review team notes that within the strategy document there are no specific indicators set for school leaders. Rather, under “Competent and motivated teachers and school leadership” there are three indicators to be achieved by 2020 (percentage of teachers aged 30 and under will be 12.5% or more; there is increased competition for study places in teacher education; there will be 25% male teachers in general education) (see Table 1.2).

The OECD review team notes that there is currently not a distinct career structure for Estonian school leaders. In a recent OECD review of evaluation and assessment frameworks, Estonia was one of only four systems without a distinct career structure for school leaders (the other countries were Denmark, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia) (OECD, 2013b, Table 7.A.2). There is no specific framework for school leader salaries in Estonia. Eurydice data on the average actual salaries of school leaders show that Estonian school leaders earn around the same amount as GDP per capita (see Figure 4.7). On this indicator, the school leader career is much more attractive in other European countries.

Figure 4.7. **Indicators of relative attractiveness of school leader salaries, 2013/14**

1. GDP data are for 2012.

2. Excludes Scotland. School leaders of bigger and/or multiple schools earn 2.43 times GDP per capita and 1.57 times the actual salary for lower secondary teachers. Countries are presented in ascending order of school leader salary relative to GDP per capita. Actual average salary data are for 2013/14 and GDP per capita data are for 2013.

Sources: Calculated from data in Eurydice database (<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice>); and Eurydice (2015), *Teachers' and School Heads' Salaries and Allowances in Europe, 2013/14*, Eurydice Facts and Figures, [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts\\_and\\_figures/salaries.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/facts_and_figures/salaries.pdf).

### ***A range of factors constrain human resource management by school leaders***

#### ***Professional development support to school leaders for new responsibilities is limited***

As noted, the need to improve professional development activities for school leaders has been recognised in the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy (see Box 4.3). In particular, there is a need to provide professional development opportunities to school leaders to help them meet their new responsibilities in the areas of human resource development. This is ever more pressing, given the broader context that there is lack of political clarity over the responsibility for re-organising the teacher workforce, including bringing new talent into the profession (see Chapters 3 and 5).

#### ***Changes to the central funding formula affect the planning of resources by school leaders***

During the OECD review, representatives from the National Audit Office (NAO) raised the challenge that regular changes to the central funding allocation mechanism cause problems for school leaders in planning school resources. The NAO hears complaints from municipal and school leader representatives each spring following adjustments to the central allocation formula. Frequent changes in the central funding formula have also promoted the idea that teacher salaries and employment is not an important concern for municipalities (see Chapter 3).

### ***Some schools may have tight budgets and operate within wider political agreements***

Although the central funding allocation is calculated on the basis of the minimum teacher salary with an additional 20%, in practice the budget may be tight in some schools. Schools at higher risks of tight budgets are those with smaller student intakes and/or with many senior teachers. During the OECD review, representatives from the Estonian Association of Teachers reported that there is limited room for manoeuvre for school leaders with regard to financial compensation for teachers. Representatives of school leaders appreciated the freedom in being able to set teacher salaries, but noted different constraining factors: a perception that the rules are very strict on how teacher salary and bonus funding could be used; that it is a complicated process to balance the number of teachers and support staff required to ensure quality education within the allocated funding; that there is a need to encourage some staff to retire early.

There are a number of small schools in Estonia. The PISA 2012 sample revealed significantly lower student-teacher ratios in socio-economically more disadvantaged Estonian schools (OECD, 2013a, Table IV.3.9). Data on class sizes (as presented above) indicate that many schools are operating well below the maximum class sizes as specified in national regulations. In fact, the average class size for Years 1 to 6 in municipalities with only one school is lower than the national maximum class size regulation for students with behavioural problems, specific learning difficulties, a sensory impairment or educational problems (see Tables 3.7 and 4.5). This suggests extremely tight budgets for teacher salaries in such schools. Also, representatives from the Estonian Association of Teachers identified the tension that cities and towns have larger classes in order to subsidise smaller classes in rural areas. They raised concerns that there may be a lack of political will to consolidate in the case there are two nearby schools with low enrolment.

School leaders may need to manage teaching workloads within local political agreements, either at the municipal level or within a school via the teacher council. Representatives from Tartu City informed the OECD review team of Tartu's agreement with the local trade unions on a number of teaching hours (23 contact hours). The Trade Union's motivation to establish this agreement was reportedly a concern that school leaders would have too much decision making power on teacher remuneration.

### ***A number of schools face challenges in finding and hiring staff with appropriate qualifications***

The Estonian school leader reports on staff shortages are roughly in line with those of their counterparts internationally, however, in the context of overall student/teacher ratios that are internationally very low in Estonia, such perceived shortages are quite striking (see Table 4.7). This is most notable regarding the perception of qualified and/or well performing teachers, which would appear to be dominated by the perception of "performance" (given reports on lack of qualified teachers in particular subjects are in line with international averages). Estonia is one of four OECD systems where reported concerns on teacher shortage are associated with a less positive disciplinary climate at school (OECD, 2013a, Table IV.5.13). During the OECD review, representatives of the Estonian Association of Teachers commented that schools sometimes have to ask retired teachers to stay on due to a lack of qualified teachers coming in. The Ministry of Education and Research (2015) notes that stakeholders comment that vocational education is not sufficiently funded, as a result of which schools are not able to hire professionals to conduct specialised studies. Even at the lower secondary level (i.e. general education), Estonian school leaders reported some shortage of vocational teachers (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8. **School leader reports on staff shortages in international comparison**

	Estonia (%)	International average (%)
<b>Percentage of lower secondary teachers where this was reported (TALIS 2013)</b>		
Shortage of qualified and/or well performing teachers	50	38
Shortage of teachers with competencies to teach students with special needs	61	48
Shortage of vocational teachers	13	19
Shortage of support personnel	49	47
	Estonia (%)	OECD average (%)
<b>Percentage of 15-year-old students where this was reported (PISA 2012)</b>		
Lack of qualified mathematics teachers	17	17
Lack of qualified science teachers	18	17
Lack of qualified language-of-instruction teachers	6	9
Lack of qualified teachers of other subjects	16	21

Sources: OECD (2014b), TALIS 2013 Results: *An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>, Table 2.19; and OECD (2013a), PISA 2012 Results: *What Makes Schools Successful (Volume IV): Resources, Policies and Practices*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en>, Figure IV.3.5.

National policies may also place additional challenges on some schools. National data show quality differences (in terms of educational performance and income level) between graduates from Estonian-instruction and Russian-instruction schools. Reforms aiming to address this seek to improve the Estonian language skills for all students coming out of the school system. During our visit to Narva, the OECD review team learned how this was posing challenges for schools to find and recruit Estonian language teachers.

### ***The engagement of specialist support staff is more difficult in small schools***

There are indications that smaller schools may have difficulty to engage specialist support staff. Representatives from local government informed the OECD review team that municipal policy is to provide support staff *in situ* in schools with 500 to 600 students. Teacher union representatives commented that in smaller schools without support staff, there are demands on the school's teachers to be a psychologist, speech therapist, etc. Evaluations by the National Audit Office have revealed that some schools have had problems with paying for support staff. In 2012, reportedly this problem was identified in 25 of the 210 municipalities and in 2013 in 20 municipalities. The central funding allocated for salaries may only be used to pay teachers and school leadership, not support staff. However, there was a regulation for several years that extended the right to use the central funding to pay for support staff. Representatives from the National Audit Office informed the OECD review team that this had caused problems for several municipalities and that it would be conducting an audit to investigate this further. The current approach is to incentivise small schools to buy a variety of support services from the new regional counselling centres (*Rajaleidja* centres).

## **Policy recommendations**

Given the high level of autonomy at the school level in Estonia, the organisation of schooling is largely in the hands of the school community with a key role for the school leader. As such, the OECD review team suggests policy options that address the management and further development of the school leader role and that seek to introduce a greater level of external challenge to ensure school quality improvement.

### **Develop a strengthened school leader appraisal process**

Estonian school leaders enjoy a high level of autonomy and responsibility. Leithwood et al. (2004) argued that given their potential impact on policy implementation, efforts to improve school leader recruitment and career advancement, including appraisal and ongoing professional development, can constitute highly cost-effective measures for making education policies effective and for improving teaching and learning for all students. In fact, several countries recognised the potential high rates of return on investments in improving school leadership during the 2012 International Summit on the Teaching Profession (Asia Society, 2012; Schleicher, 2012). In this context, the OECD review team strongly supports the Estonian policy commitment to strengthen the appraisal of school leader performance (see Box 4.3).

The OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks examined research and practices in OECD countries and recommended different procedures to improve the objectivity of school leader appraisal (see Box 4.4). While there is considerable need for the ability to adapt appraisal procedures to the local context, in the absence of any common procedures or framework, there may be concerns with the accuracy, utility, validity, reliability and fairness of appraisal procedures (OECD, 2013b). The challenge is to develop appraisal processes, frameworks and conditions that do not require an excessive investment of time and effort, that serve as an effective tool for improving practices and that are perceived as useful and relevant by school leaders (OECD, 2013b).

In Estonia, there is a pressing need to develop and ensure implementation of a regular and more coherent approach to school leader appraisal. The use of a central reference on which to base school leader appraisal is highly desirable in increasing the objectivity of appraisal procedures. Earlier efforts to develop professional standards for school leaders in Estonia can provide input for the plans to develop an “authoritative” set of professional standards. The OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks provides recommendations for the development of professional standards, including that school leaders should be actively involved in this task, as is currently envisaged in Estonia. Professional standards should (OECD, 2013b):

- Map out what school leaders are expected to know, be able to do and how: reflecting the complexity of school leaders’ tasks and responsibilities; providing a concise statement of the core elements of successful leadership.
- Provide a multilevel career structure: distinguishing between different levels of experience, development needs and leadership positions; guiding the appraisal of all school leadership positions.
- Provide a central reference that can be adapted to local needs: for defining individual objectives and/or the selection of appraisal aspects and criteria; for informing selection and recruitment processes and initial school leadership preparation and induction programmes; for informing ongoing in-service training and professional development opportunities and career advancement.
- Highlight the importance of school leadership for evaluation and assessment: practices related to monitoring, evaluation and appraisal, e.g. supporting and observing teachers, and observing students and classrooms.

#### Box 4.4. OECD recommendations on procedures for school leader appraisal

##### Promote the appraisal of pedagogical leadership together with scope for local adaptation

A focus on pedagogical leadership is essential to encourage school leaders to take direct responsibility for the quality of learning and teaching in their school. However, a focus on pedagogical leadership in appraisal must:

- **Be manageable and relevant:** local selection of criteria in line with central/state guidance that emphasise the importance of pedagogical leadership; focus on priority areas relevant to a particular school and the leadership required in that context; promote individual as well as school needs, e.g. through the mandatory use of a range of reference standards and documents, such as individual job descriptions and school development plans; recognise that successful school leadership requires choices on time investment and management and administration-oriented tasks may at times be equally important as pedagogical leadership tasks.
- **Recognise the need for and promote professional development:** ensuring access to high-quality, targeted and relevant professional development opportunities to develop pedagogical leadership; embedding appraisal for pedagogical leadership within a comprehensive leadership development framework; providing an opportunity for feedback and identifying areas for school leader's development.

##### Promote the appraisal of school leaders' competencies for monitoring, evaluation and assessment

School leaders play a key role for the effectiveness of evaluation and assessment frameworks, particularly for teacher appraisal and school evaluation. Therefore, school leader appraisal should address their ability to:

- **Manage internal teacher appraisal processes,** e.g. through evaluating school leaders' competencies to manage staff; to authentically evaluate teaching and learning; to understand, observe and recognise good teaching; and to give developmental feedback to teachers.
- **Lead the school's self-evaluation processes,** e.g. involving the school community in self-evaluation processes, ensuring their school's collaboration during external evaluations, and communicating external evaluation results to their school community.

It should also lead to opportunities to improve these competencies. For example, with professional development in how to observe classrooms and interview teachers; how to analyse data; how to use school evaluation results; how to develop school improvement plans; how to involve teachers, students and parents in school self-evaluation.

##### Promote the use of multiple instruments and sources of evidence

Research has increasingly stressed the benefits of using multiple tools to form a fair, valid and reliable picture of a school leader's performance from a comprehensive perspective. Limited research has provided some insights into the benefits of different tools and the caution needed when using others:

- The use of school leader portfolios, if embedded within wider support structures, may ensure a school leader's views are adequately represented in the appraisal process and help strengthen the formative dimension of appraisal.
- The use of stakeholder surveys requires an awareness among evaluators of the politics that appraisal may involve. Teachers' views may add most value to an appraisal process considering their close insights into a school's daily routine.
- Given the wide range of factors that influence student outcomes within and outside schools, and persistent evidence that the impact of school leaders on student learning is mainly indirect and mediated through others, holding school leaders directly accountable for improved student test scores or the value-added by the teachers in their school faces serious challenges and risks.

Source: OECD (2013b), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en>.



The mapping out of current responsibilities is an important part of developing professional standards. The OECD review team notes that the professional standards should devote sufficient attention to competencies in resource management, given that Estonian school leaders are responsible for the effective organisation of schooling, including school budget and staff management. In particular, the OECD review team underlines the need to adequately reflect school leader responsibilities for staff appraisal and school self-evaluation. International data indicate that there is room for Estonian school leaders to step more authoritatively into this role, particularly with regard to classroom observation. Effective school leaders are those who can make evidence-informed decisions, provide the instructional leadership that teachers need to help all their students succeed in school, and create a collaborative school environment in which teachers take part in school decisions (Schleicher, 2015).

### ***Sustain and strengthen policies to attract and develop new school leaders***

Estonia shares the challenge that other OECD systems face to attract new talent to prepare for and eventually take up school leader positions. But international data suggest that the ageing of the school leadership in Estonia is particularly acute (see Table 4.4). The OECD project on *Improving School Leadership* by Pont et al. (2008) highlighted several barriers to attracting new school leaders, including heavy workload, lack of adequate support and remuneration and uncertain career advancement prospects.

### ***Create a distinct career structure and national framework for school leader salaries***

Estonia does not have a distinct career structure for school leaders. There are no possibilities for advancement to different positions with different levels of responsibility. This is a challenge in many OECD systems and very few have established opportunities for school leaders' career advancement (OECD, 2013b, Table 7.A.2). As the OECD project on *Improving School Leadership* suggested, career development prospects as well as salary scales for school leaders that are separate from teachers' salary scales and that reflect leadership structures and school-level factors may help attract high performing leaders to all schools (Pont et al., 2008). Importantly, the OECD recommends that the suggested development of an authoritative set of professional standards underpin a multilevel career structure for school leadership. OECD systems as diverse as Australia, Canada, France, Israel, Korea, Mexico and Norway offer school leaders a multilevel career (OECD, 2013b, Table 7.A.2).

### ***Continue to support professional development programmes to attract and develop new school leaders***

The OECD review team commends the development of the School team development programme and the School Leader Offspring Programme (see Box 4.3). While these are newly offered in 2015, they hold promise to develop and attract new talent into school leadership positions. In particular, the competitive and selective nature of the School Leader Offspring Programme supports an approach to attract the highest quality candidates. It will be important to evaluate these new programmes and where necessary to adapt them, but the approach to engage and develop new talent should be supported as a priority.

**Strengthen the degree of external challenge to further improve school self-evaluation practices**

A considerable strength in the Estonian approach is the sustained focus on the importance of school self-evaluation. This supports the further development of professionalism and responsibility at the school level and, with effective procedures in place and an actively engaged school community, underpins a continual evaluation of the effectiveness of the organisation of schooling.

However, the OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks underlined the importance of ensuring an adequate degree of external scrutiny to challenge the findings of school self-evaluation (OECD, 2013b). In the current approach, there are two main elements that ensure a degree of externality in school self-evaluation. First, Estonian schools have ready access to comparable data that can support a more objective self-evaluation. Schools must also report data on their self-evaluation, which is a way to hold schools accountable for their self-evaluation procedures. Although, the National Audit Office had raised some concerns over the reliability of some school reporting and this would obviously lessen the usefulness of such data for school self-evaluation (National Audit Office, 2013). Nevertheless, comparable data allows schools to benchmark their own data and to set specific goals for improvement in their school development plans. Second, Estonian schools can engage the services of an external advisor to technically support their self-evaluation procedures. Although, a school may engage an advisor simply to advise on procedures and not to help with analysing and challenging the results of self-evaluation. Therefore, neither of these elements guarantees that there will be an external challenge to the results of school self-evaluation.

In the context of a research study in systems with external whole-school evaluation, two external factors were found to promote improvement in school self-evaluation practices: a clear communication of what is a “good school”, that is, clear criteria for school evaluation, and the fact that evaluation results are shared with key stakeholders, such as school boards, parents and students, as they are sensitive to the results and this leads to pressure for improvement (Ehren et al., 2013). In the Estonian context, there could be stronger emphasis on the publication and use of results from self-evaluation. Many OECD systems have introduced reporting requirements for schools (OECD, 2013b). In particular, part of the self-evaluation pays attention to school management. This is an area where there could be clearer procedures and requirements for either the board of trustees or the advisory body to publicly comment on the results of school self-evaluation and to underline areas for future development. The OECD review revealed some interesting examples of support to build capacity of school “boards” to perform their responsibilities. It would be valuable at a system level to identify and share examples of effective “boards” and to promote their role in school quality improvement.

The OECD review team recommends that careful consideration is given to extending the external school evaluation approach to conduct whole-school evaluations where data indicate there may be particular quality concerns. There are important central resources to help inform the quality throughout the Estonian school system. Alongside central student assessments, the approach to conduct external evaluations on particular topics allows the collection of evidence on current school practices. This information, coupled with information reported by schools in the Estonian Education Information System, forms an important information base to judge an overview of quality throughout the Estonian school system. In schools where risks have been identified, there could be a thorough

examination of the school self-evaluation results and procedures and targeted support from advisors where necessary. The OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks revealed varied capacity for school self-evaluation at the school level within all education systems reviewed. In recognition of this, many systems with external whole-school evaluation adapt their evaluation cycles or intensity of evaluation according to the school's capacity to conduct rigorous self-evaluation. Those schools where self-evaluation procedures are less robust are subject to a more frequent or more intense external school evaluation. Another possibility is to externally validate school self-evaluation processes through an audit system led, for instance, by inspection services (see also Chapter 2).

### **Consider building up support services to schools with senior, experienced teachers**

The OECD review team notes challenges that some schools face in hiring and/or paying for specialist support staff. At the same time, in the context of low student/teacher ratios in Estonia in comparison to other countries, reported concerns on finding and hiring staff with appropriate qualifications are striking. There may be room to build up school support services using senior and experienced teachers. This should be seen in the broader context of overall funding for education (see Chapter 3).

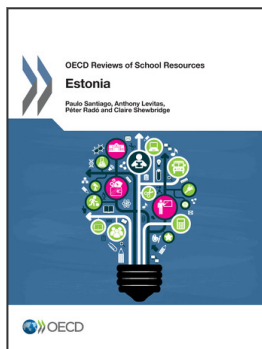
### **Notes**

1. For example in the PISA 2012 mathematics assessment, total variance of student performance in Estonia was 77% of that across OECD countries and of this only 13% was between schools (compared to 37% on average in the OECD) (OECD, 2013a, Table IV.1.12a).
2. 943 management staff in 556 schools (including 42 special schools and 16 adult high schools).
3. TALIS is the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey, which was implemented in 2008 and in 2013, covering lower secondary education and with the participation of 24 and 34 countries respectively. TALIS 2013 enabled countries to also conduct the survey in their primary and upper secondary schools. Estonia participated in both editions of TALIS with a sample of teachers restricted to lower secondary education. The results derived from TALIS are based on self-reports from teachers and school principals and therefore represent their opinions, perceptions, beliefs and their accounts of their activities. Further information is available at [www.oecd.org/edu/school/talis.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/talis.htm).
4. Lower secondary education (ISCED 2) comprises Years 7 to 9 in the Estonian school system and thus can be offered in basic schools, *gymnasiums* with classes for basic school and full cycle schools. Note that special education schools are not included in the OECD TALIS sample.

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