



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT
OF ALL LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Country Report: Belgium (Flemish community)



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BELGIUM (FLEMISH COMMUNITY) COUNTRY REPORT

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1. What reference is made to raising achievement in national policies? How is raising achievement defined?

With regards to national policies, it must be noted that Belgium is a federal state with Flemish, French and German communities. Each community has been responsible for its own education policy since the 1988 state reform. This report specifically outlines the education system of Belgium's Flemish community, and not of the entire state of Belgium.

Flemish primary education (kindergarten and elementary education combined) is regulated in the [Decree on Primary Education](#) (1997). The [Codex on Secondary Education](#) (2010) regulates secondary education. The [Codex on Higher Education](#) (2013) is the basis for higher education. Since the state reform, the federal government's responsibilities include, among others, the minimum standards to obtain a degree and establishing the compulsory education age. All other new regulations are passed in decrees per community. The Belgian Constitution, of course, remains the basis for the whole of Belgium. The Belgian Constitution provides that access to education is free of charge up to the end of compulsory education, at age 18. Moreover, freedom of education is a key principle in the Constitution. It determines that everyone is free to organise education. In addition to the Flemish, French and German communities, private persons, cities and towns are also establishing many schools. In order to be acknowledged and subsidised for, among other items, infrastructure and staff, the Flemish community imposes a number of conditions on all schools. In that way, it monitors education quality (Ministry of the Flemish Community, Department of Education and Training, 2008).

Flemish schools are organised into three education systems: free subsidised education (VGO: 76.95% of schools), official subsidised education (OGO: 1.32% of schools) and community education (GO: 21.73% of schools) (Ministry of the Flemish Community, Department of Education and Training, 2015).

The Flemish community considers 'raising achievement and building the capacity of schools and communities to include and support all learners' very important. This can be derived from the policy note for education of the Flemish community for 2014–2019 (Crevits, 2014). It contains the strategic policy choices of the Flemish community in terms of educational policy for the period 2014–2019.

In its educational policy, the government mainly wants to focus on talent development, to make sure every pupil is being challenged and has equal opportunities.



This should help to close the performance gap based on socio-economic background. For pupils to achieve their best possible learning performance, it is important to focus on each pupil's well-being. To that end, the government wants to establish an education system which ensures every pupil may progress to further educational pathways and/or to the labour market. In that regard, it is important for schools to get the necessary support. Schools must monitor their quality, but the government has a say in this as well. The policy note outlines it as follows:

Education wants to give all learners the opportunity to get the best out of themselves. Children, young people and adults have the right to have top quality education in our society. This allows them to evolve to further educational pathways or to the labour market, and become strong personalities. Quality education can be achieved with many and often outstanding teachers, lecturers and professors and their teams. They are not on their own, but are supported by their administration and managers. They also often receive the expert support of other partners. Education is mostly teamwork after all. Educational policy should never lose sight of that (Crevits, 2014, p. 7).

In order to limit this, the Flemish community proposes five pillars. Three of them contain aspects which are relevant for raising the achievement of all learners (Crevits, 2014, pp. 23–54). These three are outlined below.

Fully develop the talents of all learners

- Make sure children go to school from as early an age as possible. In that regard, the government has several facilities accompanying families from pregnancy and birth, such as 'Huizen van het Kind' and 'Kind en Gezin'.
- Make sure pupils are optimally prepared for secondary education by disseminating best practices of schools which manage to achieve a gradual transition from primary education to secondary education.
- Concentrate on differentiation in secondary education, in parallel with primary education.
- Set high standards for all pupils by modernising secondary education: make sure there is sufficient room in the curricula to challenge strong pupils and provide additional support for pupils who need it.
- Work on reinforcing language policy in education.
- Substantially reinforce vocational training in secondary education by establishing it in all labour-orientated disciplines.
- Make sure pupils make more informed choices about superior education by means of a preparatory course, to make sure they choose an education programme which fits their talents.
- Guarantee the right to study for each pupil by setting up pathways against the backdrop of education and well-being, tailor-made for young people at risk of marginalisation, or who cannot be integrated in an educational context for the time being.



- Further develop the policy for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in line with the Decree regarding measures for pupils with SEN of the previous legislature.
- Deal with financial barriers to educational participation by optimising school and study allowances.
- Improve (digital) literacy and media skills.

Reinforce educational institutions

- Further simplify the enrolment policy and modernise it, based on the following specific goals:
 - Maximum freedom of choice for parents.
 - Realise optimal learning and development opportunities for all pupils.
 - Avoid exclusion, segregation and discrimination.
 - Additionally for Brussels: protect equal educational and enrolment opportunities for Dutch speaking persons and maintain the Dutch speaking character of the education financed or subsidised by the Flemish community.

Pursue top quality

- Make the school's quality policy more central in external quality control of education by the education inspectorate.
- Supplement the reference framework for educational quality by establishing clear quality criteria, standards and/or development scales.
- Better guarantee the quality of home education by asking young people following home education to enrol with the examination committee of the Flemish community, and make sure they pass.

In order to achieve its educational policy, the Flemish community gives schools a lot of leeway and autonomy to pursue their own school policy and to determine their policies. However, the government monitors the quality of the education system by means of three institutions:

- The [Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training](#) (Agentschap voor Kwaliteitszorg in Onderwijs en Vorming – AKOV) of the Flemish community conducts quality assurance at the system level. Along with the education field, it develops the development goals and final attainment levels which constitute the basis of the curriculum for all pupils in primary and secondary education. AKOV also ensures quality achievement of the education curriculum. The process is outlined under question 3. AKOV also supervises the quality of degrees, by assessing the extent to which they meet the requirements of the Flemish qualification structure.
- The education umbrella organisations are transforming the development goals and final attainment levels into learning plans which are inherent to each educational network. The education inspectorate controls them and officially validates them. Subsequently, it also organises screenings in individual schools, whereby each



school is subject to external quality assurance at the school level at least every 10 years. Schools must demonstrate to the inspectorate how they realise their learning plans and how they guarantee that as many learners as possible reach the final attainment levels defined by decree (basic attainment targets) or development targets. The answer to question 5 describes what the inspectorate specifically questions and maps out.

- The pedagogic guidance services support schools in their internal quality assurance process. Pedagogic guidance services are organised per educational network. They support school management and teachers, particularly at the class and school level. They also have mentors with specific targets, such as supporting teachers in their competency development when dealing with pupils with SEN or those who speak a language other than the official school language, Dutch, at home. The tasks of the pedagogic guidance services are outlined under question 2.

2. What national policies specifically target raising achievement?

On the one hand, the level decrees guarantee education quality for all learners, at each education level. On the other hand, a number of decrees have been passed which changed these basic decrees to focus specific attention on some vulnerable groups.

The most relevant decrees, action plans and a recent policy decision on the [Master plan for modernising secondary education](#) (2013) are listed below. The reforms in school education are also summarised on the [Education in Flanders website](#).

Decree regarding the quality of education (2009)

The [Decree regarding the quality of education](#) guarantees the quality of primary and secondary education. Each educational institution is, taking into account its educational project, responsible for providing quality education and respectfully supporting the education offered. This supposes that the institution has the ability to pursue its policies, enabling it to pursue a quality policy independently. This independent policy respects the policy context, which is determined by the government. Each institution systematically assesses and monitors its own quality. The institution chooses how it wants to do this.

Schools are in that respect supported by the pedagogical counselling services (PBD) and by the pupil guidance centres (CLBs).

The PBD have the following seven goals:

- Support educational institutions in realising their own pedagogical projects and the CLBs in realising their own mission and guidance project.
- Support the educational institutions and CLBs in improving their educational quality, the quality of their pedagogical counselling and their development towards a professional learning organisation by:
 - fostering networking and supporting networks;
 - supporting or training managers;



- supporting the professional capabilities of the staff members within a school or centre and across institutions, with particular attention to junior staff and staff with specific assignments. In addition, high priority must be given to the competencies in the framework of education for pupils with specific educational goals;
- reinforcing the policy powers of institutions;
- supporting the quality assurance of institutions.
- At the request of the educational institution's management, support and guide the institution in implementing the indicated action points following an inspection.
- Present educational innovations, stimulate and support.
- Present and steer supply-orientated tutoring activities, including the tutoring of management.
- Discuss educational quality and the quality of pupil guidance with several educational actors at various levels.
- Participate in the steering or follow-up of support activities organised or subsidised by the Flemish Government, having the objective of supporting schools, teachers or tutors.

Each CLB is, taking into account its own mission and guidance project, responsible for providing quality pupil guidance, supporting in-school pupil guidance and helping to optimise it. The Decree regarding pupil guidance (1988) determines the tasks of these services (see below).

Decree regarding pupil guidance centres (1998)

According to the [Decree regarding pupil guidance centres](#), the CLBs have the objective of contributing to pupils' well-being. This results in an educational basis for all teachers, so throughout their educational career they can acquire the competencies required for current and continuous development and community participation. In order to achieve this task, the CLBs provide pupil guidance in the following domains:

- Learning and studying
- The educational career
- Preventive healthcare
- Mental and social functioning.

In performing this task:

- the CLB puts the pupil's interests first;
- the CLB's work is demand-driven, except for guidance, which is compulsory;
- the CLB's work is subsidiary to the school and parents; the CLB, the school and the parents have a common responsibility;
- the CLB works on counselling and guiding, whereby its guidance is preventive if possible and corrective if needed;



- the CLB works in a systematic, structured and transparent way, along with the school and parents;
- the CLB works in a multi-disciplinary way and approaches the pupils from a somatic, psychological, pedagogical and social perspective;
- the CLB works free of charge and discretely;
- the CLB works together with other services in a demonstrable network;
- the CLB pays particular attention to specific tasks in certain groups, and to pupils whose development and learning process is jeopardised because of their social background;
- the CLB develops an ethical code which, among other things, guarantees the independence of the staff members.

Decree regarding equal educational opportunities (2002)

Since the 1990s, the Flemish Government has strongly focused on equal educational opportunities for all pupils. This resulted in the [Decree regarding equal educational opportunities](#) (the GOK decree). It appeared that pupils with certain features had lower school success rates. An assessment took place 10 years after the GOK decree and resulted in amendments to the equal educational opportunities policy. At present, schools may obtain an additional package of teaching time/teaching hours and additional operating resources for the following pupils:

- Pupils from a family where a language other than the educational language is spoken
- Pupils whose mothers have not finished secondary school
- Pupils who receive scholarships (i.e. those from families with lower incomes or in another vulnerable situation)
- Pupils living in neighbourhoods with high levels of educational disadvantage.

Welcoming education for non-Dutch speaking children (2016)

In Flanders, there is [welcoming education for non-Dutch speaking children](#) (OKAN). This is targeted towards non-Belgian or non-Dutch newcomers with an insufficient command of Dutch. Through welcoming education, these pupils can learn Dutch as soon as possible. The welcoming education is organised based on the non-Dutch speaking learners who enrol in a school. To that end, the school is granted a number of additional teaching hours for these non-Dutch speaking learners. The schools are free to decide how they implement this. This exists in both primary and secondary education. In secondary education, non-Dutch speaking pupils receive Dutch language courses for one year. After that, they receive accompaniment in further education. In order to avail of these language courses, the pupils must meet the following conditions:

- be a newcomer, i.e. spend at least one year continuously in Belgium;
- on 31 December of the school year, be at least 12 years of age and under 18;
- do not have Dutch as a language spoken at home or a native language;



- have insufficient command of the educational language to successfully follow the courses;
- be enrolled for up to nine months in an educational institution that has Dutch as an educational language.

Decree regarding measures for pupils with special educational needs (2014)

Flanders has opted for more inclusive education, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006, ratified by Flanders and Belgium in 2009). The starting point is that each learner has the right to follow mainstream education, so the adjustments required for this are deemed reasonable. A school may only refer a learner to special education if the school can demonstrate that the reasonable adjustments required are disproportionate.

Achieving inclusive education is not easy in Flanders. Based on a long-standing tradition, Belgium has a firmly established system of special education. However, the Flemish Government has enabled 'Integrated Education' (GON) for specific groups of pupils with disabilities since 1980. Under GON, a special education teacher provides additional support to a pupil in mainstream education.

Furthermore, the Decree on Primary Education (1997), the Codex on Secondary Education (2010) and the Codex on Higher Education (2013), through the Special Educational Learning Tools Department, provide pupils with SEN with, among other things, sign language interpretation support, braille conversions, adapted furniture in schools, dyslexia software, etc.

Research has demonstrated that many learners in Flanders up to now ended up in special education, solely on the basis of specific GOK features. The Flemish Government aimed to change this. After 15 years of negotiations, in 2014 the [Decree regarding measures for pupils with special educational needs](#), known as the M-decree, was passed. This decree aims to ensure that a higher number of learners can follow mainstream education and receive the quality care they require. The M-decree is no longer based on a purely medical model, which provides support based on the learner's problem, condition or disability. The M-decree is more focused on provision which is adapted to each learner's specific educational needs.

Among others, the M-decree reinforces the enrolment right of all pupils. Hence, a school may no longer refuse pupils or refer them to another school. In that regard, each school must provide care continuously. This means that schools must provide tailored support for each learner's exact requirements. The first phase is broad basic care for all pupils, in which the school works preventively in a powerful learning environment. By providing differentiated learning paths, materials and methods, the school aims to prevent pupils being left behind. If broad basic care does not suffice, the school may offer the pupil a higher degree of care with the necessary reasonable adjustments. These may consist of differentiation, remediation, compensation or exemption measures. If this does not suffice either, the school may expand the care, for which it needs to involve a CLB. This phase involves assessing how the school can better accompany the pupil, for instance, by putting in place external accompaniment or therapy, or through support by GON mentors from special education. For the latter, there are a number of conditions: the CLB must go



through an action-orientated diagnostic pathway and determine, on that basis, whether all conditions have been met to draw a motivated report which grants GON accompaniment. In this case, the objective is still for the pupil follow the common curriculum and obtain a primary education certificate and/or a school leaving qualification. Within this common curriculum, the same final attainment levels or development goals are being pursued as for the other pupils. However, if it appears that the pupil, despite the reasonable adjustments, is unable to follow the common curriculum and the support in these phases appears to be insufficient, they may switch to an individually adapted curriculum.

In that regard, the class council determines the specific learning goals which it will put forward for the learner, and the required support. In order to do this, a report from the CLB is required. This report grants the right to access special education. It is the parents – and, from a certain age onwards, the learner – who choose whether to continue in special or mainstream education. Schools which demonstrate that they are unable to provide the necessary reasonable adjustments may cancel the pupil's enrolment and, along with the CLB, support the parents to find an appropriate school. Of course, schools may also decide to further accompany the pupil. They will thus receive support to provide the reasonable adjustments with a view to offering a tailor-made, individually adapted curriculum.

When going through the continuous process of care, the starting point of the M-decree is based on a vision of inclusion, and on the following principles:

- The pupil's educational needs are key; look at each pupil's individual situation.
- It is about adjusting and interaction: the pupil learns interactively and what is the effect of the teacher's approach to the pupil?
- The teacher matters: teachers have their expertise and play a crucial role in accompanying pupils.
- Positive aspects are of key importance and counteract negative, problematic aspects.
- Constructive collaboration, in which the co-operation of all people involved and their expertise, is being acknowledged.
- Targeted action and the objectives are systematically assessed.
- There is a systematic way of working, in phases and transparently.

Decree regarding the learning and working system in the Flemish community (2008)

Young people who have insufficiently experienced study success in the secondary education system can follow part-time education and part-time vocational training from age 16, or from the age of 15 for those who have fully completed the first two learning years of the full-time secondary education system (regardless of whether they have passed or not). This is important, as education is compulsory until the age of 18. The [Decree regarding the learning and working system in the Flemish community \(2008\)](#) reformed the conditions and the way of working of the former Centres for Part-time Education, and renamed them 'Centres for Learning and Working (CLW)'.



These Centres guarantee young people a more practically orientated education, and may focus on important attitudes and skills which are useful for the labour market. In this way, they contribute to fewer young people leaving the lower-secondary education system without any qualifications, and lower the numbers of those risk of leaving the education system without a degree.

Action plan against truancy and other forms of transgressive behaviour (2012) and Action plan against early school leaving (2013)

Further to the policy note, the Flemish Government has, along with all other important partners in the broad educational field, developed several action plans. These establish concrete actions to realise the policy objectives in practice. Focused on optimal achievement for all learners, the [Action plan against truancy and other forms of transgressive behaviour](#) and the [Action plan against early school leaving](#) are important.

At the Flemish and the European level, objectives have been put forward in recent years to lower the number of early school leavers. Early school leavers are young people who are above the age of compulsory education and who drop out of education before gaining qualifications. The European Union 2020 objective is to reduce the early school leaving rate to under 10%. With Pact 2020, Flanders is more ambitious and aims to halve the percentage of early school leavers. In practice, this means a drop in the early school leaving rate from 8.6% to 4.3% by 2020. The number of early school leavers in Flanders has decreased in the past few years. The action plan against early school leavers focuses on 19 targeted actions, which nonetheless should be seen in the context of a global education policy which also aims to significantly reduce early school leaving.

Truancy has a strong predictive power for early school leaving. Careful follow-up of pupils engaging in truancy is crucial for raising achievement for all learners. In the Action plan against truancy and other forms of transgressive behaviour, the government established targeted actions. The actions are split into six elements, with a continuous approach:

- Map out
- Inform/raise awareness
- Preventive action
- Accompany
- Sanction
- Actions directed towards specific target audiences, such as non-Dutch speaking newcomers, illegal pupils and trailer park residents.

Master plan for modernising secondary education (2013)

Secondary education in Flanders is scoring very well internationally. However, research and experiences point to important areas for improvement. In order to offer each pupil the best education adapted to their talents, interests and capabilities, secondary education in Flanders is currently being re-designed. The government described six reasons to modernise:



- One out of eight young people does not obtain a school leaving qualification. Modernisation should prevent unqualified drop-outs.
- Too many study disciplines do not offer what they promise. Pupils are not being equally prepared for higher education or the labour market: the differences between study disciplines are significant.
- Many pupils re-sit a study year, from primary education onwards. Re-sitting a year is too often considered to be the only possibility to differentiate when there are substantial shortcomings.
- Social class is a strong determinant for young people's school and study choice, success rates and study results. The current education system does not manage to do away with social inequality, despite the many efforts and investments.
- Final attainment levels (maths, French, project general courses) are insufficient in some disciplines. There is no consensus about the contents of general education. The proportion ratios are not always clear between the final attainment levels or the development goals and interdisciplinary competences, nor its operational application in the learning plans and manuals.
- International research demonstrates that the best pupils, as well as the average performers, are starting to perform significantly less well. This is the case for reading skills and maths based on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, among others.

As proposed by the Minister of Education, in May 2016 the Flemish Government validated the basic principles for modernising secondary education. This starts with a number of measures to smooth the transition from primary to secondary education. In the first term of secondary education, general training is reinforced and all pupils must attain a predefined level of skills. In addition to general training, there will be an option to explore new courses or to further study other disciplines. If necessary, compulsory remediation is foreseen here. In the second and third terms, there will be eight study domains instead of 29 areas of study. Thanks to the modernisation, the long-awaited roll-out of the [Master plan for modernising secondary education](#) (2013) will take final shape. It contains 71 measures to reinforce education. Many of these measures have been realised in the meantime (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths – STEM – action plan, inclusive education for learners with specific learning needs, action plan against early school leaving, pilot project work-study programmes, etc.). Some of them are being deployed.

With this decision, the Flemish Government aims to improve the transition from primary to secondary education, reinforce general education and the exploratory function of the first term as well as the proliferation of study disciplines in the second and third terms in a transparent and rational framework, based on two dimensions: study domain and objectives (proceed with studies/go to work).



3. What information/data are collected at national level on attainment and achievement?

The government organises periodic surveys to collect information about the state of affairs in specific domains of the curriculum. This information is the basis for reflecting, along with all stakeholders, on education quality in the researched domain. The Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV) of the Flemish community organises annual assessments, based on representative samples of schools. These determine the extent to which the learning plans, which the schools have developed themselves, meet the minimum attainment levels and development tools determined by decree. The [results of these assessments](#) of the level of the Flemish education system are made available on a government website. The results of individual schools are not displayed. The Flemish Government does not want to use a ranking system. However, the Minister of Education organises an open conference after each survey:

- Step 1: The researchers provide the government with the survey results.
- Step 2: The government communicates the results during a seminar, in an accessible leaflet and on a website.
- Step 3: The government invites all partners to reflect upon the survey results and sets up consultations with everyone who contributes to education quality.
- Step 4: The government sets up an open conference during which all education partners enter a discussion and look for levers to consolidate or improve Flemish education.
- Step 5: After the discussion, the partners convert the recommendations into concrete actions, in accordance with their vision, priorities and working. The government is one of those partners and is responsible for amendments to the final attainment levels, among others. Makers of learning plans, mentors, tutors, trainers, publishers, the education inspectorate, managers, teachers and potential other partners are committed to the actions they may take.

The Flemish Government also participates in international comparative research, including PISA. This kind of research shows that Flemish pupils continue to score very well in general education performance. However, there is a big gap between low and high performing pupils; social disenfranchisement and equal education opportunities are issues deserving extra attention. The results of this kind of comparative research are important sources of information for the government.

The Department of Education and Training itself collects a lot of data about the pupil and school population in Flanders, as well as about educational staff. To that end, it collaborates with the [Agency for Educational Services](#) (Agentschap voor onderwijsdiensten – AgODi). AgODi aims to be a knowledge and information centre. It considers itself as an essential connection between policy and the schools, teachers, pupils and parents. AgODi works for primary education, secondary education and part-time art education, as well as the pupil guidance centres. Furthermore, AgODi performs tasks for adult education and for the officials of the Flemish community.



Through AgODi, the government acquires a lot of statistics, including the number of pupils re-sitting years, pupils changing schools, newcomers and leavers, the primary education certificates and school leaving qualifications granted, the unqualified leavers, the number of pupils of specific target audiences in mainstream and special education, etc. A lot of statistics for the public are available in the [statistics section of the AgODi website](#). Among other things, the tool called 'Dataloop' allows users to look up a selection of relevant figures. This tool also offers a lot of opportunities for schools, school management and CLBs, and for their education umbrella organisations and guidance services.

AgODi also has an overview on specific pupil features, through the calculation of additional teaching time, for instance the number of pupils with a lower socio-economic status, pupils with specific disabilities or conditions receiving GON support from special education and so on. The Ministry of Education publishes the report *Flemish education in figures* annually. It gives an overview of statistic information on Flemish education for each school and academic year. The information is available by education level and is presented in tables and graphs. The general overview, introduction and full version of [Flemish education in figures 2014–2015](#) is available online.

As demonstrated by the statistical yearbook, the Flemish Government also collects data about proofs of study which were granted on a macro level. This data is available online in the [statistical yearbooks](#).

In order to check whether the policy yields the required results, the Flemish Government can put in place scientific support points that research the effects on educational reality. In 2016, the [Support point for policy-oriented educational research](#) (SONO) was established. This is a university support point which provides comprehensive scientific support to the government, and which receives allowances to that end. The support must encompass research and training as well as the development of material. SONO's first cycle (2016–2020) of policy-orientated educational research is grouped into three themes:

- The learner
- The teacher and the school as an organisation
- The organisation of education.

These three themes arise from the priorities in the policy note for education for the period 2014–2019 (Crevits, 2014). SONO should, among other things, provide an answer to strategic policy questions regarding the evolution of the quality, efficiency and equity of Flemish education. With regards to raising achievement for all learners, the second theme matters, in that the government raises the question as to how learning in school and in class can be optimally organised to realise the learning outcomes. Learner diversity is significant, and this requires tailor-made guidance and support. SONO has thus been asked to conduct research into the three central themes in the current education policy. First, it will collect more scientific insight into preventing truancy and early school leaving. Subsequently, it will – in the framework of monitoring and assessing the M-decree (the [Decree regarding measures for pupils with special educational needs](#)) – scientifically support insights into how the M-decree is shaped in Flemish education and which processes and mechanisms play a role.



4. What information/data on attainment and achievement (including the wider areas outlined above) are collected at school level?

AgODi does not collect any specific data about the learning results or performances of individual pupils or schools. The Flemish community highlights the importance of the policy-making abilities of schools based on relevant information.

Schools determine, based on their own needs, which data they collect and how they analyse and process it to optimise their internal quality.

Data about pupils' development levels and progress are certainly part of that. When a school wants to establish whether it is successful, it needs – among other things – good instruments to get a view on the pupils' performances.

That is why the government invests in developing tests that support schools in their internal quality assurance. The government makes these [instruments available to the schools online](#) without any obligation and free of charge:

- SALTO: a screening instrument at the start of primary education to assess language skills
- LVS: pupil voting system (Flemish version of CITO)
- Parallel tests of surveys, tests for reaching final attainment levels or development goals.

Schools and CLBs may download these tests and the corresponding manuals from the website for free. Educational institutions downloading this material agree not to pass it on to third parties. For SALTO and LVS, schools may take the tests and calculate the results themselves. It is not technically possible for schools to calculate the results of the parallel tests of the surveys themselves. If a school wants to take the parallel tests, it may request processing of the results and a feedback report through this website, free of charge. Schools from the survey sample and schools requesting the parallel tests may self-reflect based on the results of these scientifically-supported tests. Individual pupil results are not calculated, as parallel tests are not suitable for this. In a free feedback report, the schools receive feedback at a school level about:

- the percentage of participating pupils which has reached the final attainment levels or development goals, and how this result corresponds to the results of the schools in the survey sample;
- how the school performs compared to the Flemish average;
- how the school performs compared to what may be expected from a school with a similar pupil population.

The parallel tests are complementary to the other assessment forms which schools use, and certainly may not replace them. Collecting information about a school's own quality can be best done in varied ways, with different instruments and various stakeholders. Taking tests examining the achievement of a limited set of final attainment levels or



development goals is important. However, the results remain a limited part of the puzzle and are just a snapshot in the quality assurance process.

Of course, the feedback on parallel tests may be a starting point to improve or to make new arrangements in a school. The pedagogic guidance services may support schools that need help in using the feedback reports and/or when starting improvement actions.

Some 'educational networks' also organise a number of tests themselves, for instance at the end of primary school. These tests are also intended to compare the pupils' learning performance with those of other schools. Pedagogic guidance and information for schools is being related to this to learn from these results.

5. What information/data are used for school evaluation and quality assurance at national/local level?

The [education inspectorate](#) (Onderwijsinspectie) of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training inspects a number of schools and centres in Flanders and Brussels each school year:

- Schools for mainstream and special kindergarten and primary education
- Schools for mainstream and special secondary education and centres for part-time learning
- Adult education centres (the education inspectorate does not inspect the higher vocational training disciplines: these are inspected by the Dutch – Flemish Accreditation organisation)
- Centres for basic education
- Academies for the visual arts, music, drama and dance
- Pupil guidance centres (CLBs).

Each school must be inspected at least once every 10 years.

During an inspection, the education inspectorate seeks an answer to the following three questions:

1. Does the school respect the educational regulation?

The inspectors verify whether the school achieves the learning plans. They also look into elements such as:

- What is the situation regarding habitability, safety and hygiene?
- Is there a policy plan or policy contract with the CLB?
- Are the obligatory provisions included in the school regulations and in the school working plan?

2. Does the school monitor its quality?
3. What about the school's general policy?



When education inspectors inspect a school, they do a lot of preparatory study work, including vetting the institution's profile. This profile is specific to the institution and includes the following data from the Department of Education and Training: the number of pupils, the number of pupils re-sitting their year, the number of GOK pupils, the external and internal flows of pupils, educational underachievement, staff turnover, etc. The education inspectors also verify the position of the school versus other, similar schools, for instance schools which are all located in a city or schools with a similar pupil population.

During the inspection, the inspectorate collects and classifies all findings based on the [CIPO reference framework for the education inspectorate](#) (2010) with a number of indicators. The classification consists of four parts:

- Context: Is it a large or small school? Is it located in an urban or rural environment?
- Input: What pupils are enrolled? What is the staff like?
- Process: How does the school pursue its goals? What actions does it undertake for this?
- Output: What is the pupils' result?

In the investigation, the inspectorate takes the output as a starting point: they look at what the school manages to achieve with its activities for pupils. The processes explain whether or not the results are achieved. Finally, they look at the context and the input in order to better understand the functioning of the school and the results.

The 'process' component is further broken down into 'general', 'staff', 'logistics' and 'education' domains. The components and domains are further broken down into indicators and variables. The CIPO reference framework aims to take into account as much as possible the autonomy and policy space the schools have in order to reach their objectives.

The education inspectorate describes the observations of each inspection, including the weak and strong points, in an inspection report. The inspectorate prepares separate reports about school habitability, safety and hygiene.

During an inspection, the education inspectorate may produce limited positive advice. In that advice, the inspectorate mentions the shortcomings and the deadline by which the school or centre must resolve them. During the follow-up inspection, the education inspectorate checks whether the shortcomings have been resolved. A follow-up inspection usually takes one day to complete. A follow-up inspection report closing with positive advice is added to the initial inspection report. The education inspectorate writes the observations of the follow-up inspection in a follow-up report.

The reports are first and foremost meant for the government. The Minister of Education decides on the further acknowledgement of the school based on the advice in the inspection report. The school may use the report itself to take care of the quality of its operation. Anyone may digitally consult the inspection reports on the [education inspectorate website](#). This may be useful for parents in choosing their child's school.

Every year, the education inspectorate publishes its report, called *Onderwijs Spiegel*. It includes its general analysis and policy recommendations based on the school



assessments which were held that year in schools, CLBs and pedagogic guidance services. Relevant investigations from the inspectorate are also assessed. To that end, two specific investigations were conducted in 2015 and 2016 on literacy, integration and non-Dutch speakers.

The education inspectorate is not standing still: there is a renewed inspectorate in the making, which aims to be more relevant, effective and flexible and wants to focus on minimal planning burden. As of 1 September 2017, the inspectorate wants to look at schools from a different perspective by working together with them in a spirit of dialogue. The characteristics of the new education inspectorate are:

- Minimal common quality expectations in a reference framework for education quality
- Internal quality policy being more central in external quality monitoring
- Differentiated control of education quality
- Minimal red tape.

In addition to collecting information on behalf of the government, schools also collect a lot of other data on their pupils. Indeed, they autonomously determine which data they need to further optimise their internal education quality. For instance, schools regularly work together with universities, university colleges or tutoring institutions, to develop professional surveys, conduct them themselves or have them conducted, and become more professional in taking action based on the data collected in order to optimise their functioning and enhance it if needed.

6. Are there any specific initiatives in place to support/enable teachers and/or school leaders to raise the attainment and achievement of all learners?

As defined in the Decree regarding the quality of education, each school and CLB must draw a coherent tutoring plan based on a needs assessment each year.

The tutoring plan contains:

- The tutoring needs at the level of the institution and of every individual teacher
- All training efforts which develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the institution's staff.

The tutoring plan is strongly related to other policy domains of the school, centre or institution. School team involvement in drawing the tutoring plan is of key importance. It is essential that the plan is based on a common vision and on the school's priorities.

Determining the needs may result in a short- and long-term priority plan.

Schools have the choice. They may be:

- Supply-driven: they register for an existing tutoring offer, for instance from the pedagogic guidance services



- Demand-driven: they work together with a tutoring organisation of choice for professionalisation activities which are tailor-made to their needs
- Internal: They constitute professional learning communities within the school or within the school groups or school community.

Every year, schools are granted a budget which is earmarked for tutoring. The tutoring budget is calculated based on the number of organic tenures in the school on 1 February of the previous budgeting year. The [Decree regarding the quality of education](#) outlines the global amounts per education level.

School management determines autonomously, along with their teams, how these means are being spent. They may put forward certain priorities to improve the pupils' learning gains. They may for instance also focus on reinforcing the school leadership and/or the school's development into a professional learning community.

The Flemish Minister of Education also initiates tutoring around key themes each year. Tutoring is a means of professionalisation; developing, extending and broadening competencies is key to improve and support education quality. In 2015/2016 and 2016/2017, the key theme was 'the [implementation of the Decree regarding measures for pupils with special educational needs](#) (M-decree): support in schools and development of staff competencies'. The school management's role is considered crucial in this tutoring. The example in Annex 1 illustrates the professional learning communities which were and are active in light of this tutoring.

Furthermore, the pedagogic guidance services have the duty of organising tutoring. They may take part in the mentioned priority tutoring, and also set up a number of initiatives aimed at school managers, especially novice school managers. Universities and university colleges also offer extensive tutoring. For the university colleges, this should be seen in the framework of their decreed duty to provide community services and research.

To date, Flanders does not have any government-accredited training specifically and exclusively for school managers. However, for a few years now, some university colleges have organised an 'Advanced bachelor programme in school development' of 60 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits. A lot of the content is relevant for school leaders who want to innovate in their schools. Of course, various autonomous tutoring institutions are also trying to meet the training needs of school leaders.

7. What other policies may influence levels of attainment and achievement for all learners?

A lot of schools are working hard to improve their operations in terms of scale and optimisation. To that end, they receive incentives from the government, which is seeking efficient systems which are nonetheless sufficiently tailor-made to everyone. This has an impact on the way schools will be able to raise the achievement for all learners in the future.



8. Please provide a short commentary/critical reflection on the main policy challenges

Modernising secondary education is an important policy priority. The educational field is adopting a wait-and-see attitude to this major educational innovation and the resulting concrete regulations. The M-decree also has big ambitions. The government is planning an assessment to look at whether the ambitions will be achieved, and whether the M-decree will prove to be 'too far too soon' or 'too little too late' to crystallise, among others, the obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). The impact of the functioning of (the staff of) the schools for special education receives specific attention in this regard. Upon monitoring the M-decree, it seems to be necessary for Flanders to check whether the participation of more pupils in mainstream education is actually being achieved. In that regard, it is important that the focus is larger than the mere fact that the pupils are in mainstream education. The focus must be on full participation, with high standards for all pupils. Monitoring pupils' learning gains will be a focus of attention here: to what extent does the M-decree contribute to better learning performance and participation in society for these pupils? At the same time, there is attention on schools' effectiveness in taking into account the professional development of all teachers, so that schools may position themselves as professional learning communities that take responsibility for helping all learners advance in their learning process.

Despite the greater autonomy of Flemish schools with regards to internal quality assurance, schools often feel they are held accountable for many things. To date, the education inspectorate is considered very controlling, which seems to hinder real co-operation towards quality improvement. Hence, it is no coincidence that the inspectorate is seeking to mutually develop a 'reference framework for educational quality' with the pedagogic guidance services and education umbrella organisations, in order to launch a renewed inspectorate as of 1 September 2017.

With regards to the curriculum, the government is working on a substantive assessment of the final attainment levels and development goals. The education umbrella organisations are reflecting on how their learning plans should be implemented based on this to address 'education for the 21st century'.

Teacher teams learn how to reflect in a more focused way about adjustments such as remediation, differentiation, the implementation of aids and making sure the curriculum is more tailor-made. Among other things, they discuss special educational needs more with pupils and with their parents. They are working together more intensively along with the CLB and other support teams. Together they are looking for adjustments which make providing quality education reasonable for all pupils in general and for pupils with special educational needs in particular.

Teachers should not become specialists in learning disorders or disabilities. The specific knowledge is often already available in mainstream schools through support teams from special education, SEN co-ordinators and pupil mentors. Teachers must have a number of core competencies in order to be able to optimally teach all pupils:

- Assessing pupils' needs



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- Defining goals
 - Making reasonable adjustments, such as differentiation, remediation, compensation and exemption measures, etc.

The right to reasonable adjustments is the biggest change for mainstream education. Whether a pupil is able to attend a school depends on the adjustments required, and whether the school considers these adjustments reasonable.

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ANNEX 1. EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE TO RAISE LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

Example submitted by: Artevelde University College Ghent

Contact person: Mieke Meirsschaut, Lies Vanpeperstraete, Marijke Wilssens

1. Location of school/learning community and short description of context

The Professional Development Programme '[M-decree: motor, motivation, possibilities](#)' is subsidised by the Department of Education and Training of the Flemish community. A team of professional trainers from a partnership of three institutions collaborated intensively to develop this programme:

- Artevelde University College Ghent teacher training college
- the pedagogical counselling service of the 'Catholic Education Flanders – East-Flanders' educational network
- the pedagogical counselling service of the 'City of Ghent' educational network.

The main aim was to develop more inclusive schools in close partnership with all local partners such as parents, pupils, pupil guidance centres, pedagogical counselling services, special education teachers and other experts. This was in line with the priority theme of professionalisation, as decided by the Flemish Parliament for the school years 2015/16 and 2016/17. This focused on adaptive support for pupils with SEN, in a multi-tiered continuum of support which would give all learners access to a quality education for all. [More information about the M-decree and policy underpinning the programme](#) is available from the Eurydice website.

2. Summary information on school/learning community

All Flemish schools, from all school levels (pre-primary, primary and secondary education) had a chance to register for the professionalisation programme. In the school year 2015/2016, professional learning communities in 30 schools could freely enrol in a trajectory of eight coaching sessions. Another 30 schools started in the school year 2016/2017. As the programme was fully booked quickly, other interested schools were referred to one of the four other professionalisation programmes subsidised by the Flemish community.

Each of the 60 participating schools formed a core team consisting of five to ten professionals:

- At least two class or subject teachers from different grades
- One SEN co-ordinator
- One head teacher



- One critical friend from their partnerships.

Often, more teachers and partners participated, as core teams learned strategies to start to learn together in a learning community. Six out of the eight sessions took place in the school, mostly with the members of the core teams, at least once together with all members of the school team. Core team members also had opportunities to meet members of other core teams in a learning network above school level. Therefore, two sessions took place at Artevelde University College Ghent teacher training college: a kick-off meeting in the autumn term and an experience-exchange meeting in the spring term.

3. Summary of key feature/strengths of current practice

The core team could decide which priorities they wanted to focus on, e.g. reasonable accommodations, universal design for learning, collaborative teaming, co-operative learning strategies, the profile of teacher competencies, etc.

4. Data/information available

The project partnership drew up a final evaluation report after the first cycle of training sessions in 30 schools, which is followed up by the Department of Education and Training of the Flemish community.

5. Focus of example/work to raise achievement

Collaborative team practice, coaching, appreciative inquiry, school development, all focused on more inclusive pedagogy and inclusive school policy, removing barriers and investing in resources, good context conditions and inclusive leadership.

6. Summary information about developments/current work in this area

School teams are supported to reflect on specific accommodations, such as remediation, differentiation, the use of adaptive devices or tools and adapting the curriculum according to learners' needs. They have more collaborative meetings with learners with SEN and their parents. They collaborate intensively with guidance centres such as the CLB and with other support staff. Together they are developing accommodations that promote a high-quality education for all learners and specifically for learners with SEN.

7. Key learning points from this example

Teachers do not need to become specialists in (learning) disorders or disabilities. The specific knowledge is often already available in mainstream schools with the support staff from special schools, the SEN co-ordinators and other learning support staff. In order to keep teaching in an adapted way to support all learners, teachers need some basic competencies:



- Getting a clear picture of all learners' needs
- Developing and/or choosing appropriate learning targets
- Providing reasonable accommodations, such as remediation, differentiation, using compensatory tools, dispensation and adapting the curriculum.

The right to reasonable accommodations seems to be the biggest challenge for mainstream schools. Whether a learner really succeeds in learning to their highest potential depends on the accommodations required, and on whether the school considers these accommodations reasonable and provides them.

8. Supporting materials (web links, papers, presentations, etc.)

- [Information about these professionalisation programmes](#), as initiated and subsidised by the Flemish Government (in Dutch)
- [Course materials for the specific programme](#) (in Dutch) are available for schools, partners and the general public.