Assessment and recommendations

This chapter summarises the main findings and key recommendations of the OECD education policy review of German-speaking Community of Belgium. Following the structure of the report, it focuses first on strengths and challenges concerning the governance of the school system, the use of data to steer education policy and the funding of schools in the Community. The chapter then summarises the key findings related to equity and inclusion, focusing on newcomer students, students with special education needs and gifted students before presenting key strengths and challenges related to the quality of teaching, school leadership and learning environments. The chapter closes with a selection of policy recommendations addressing the challenges identified by the OECD review team. For the full set of strengths and challenges identified by the OECD review team and the corresponding policy recommendations, readers are encouraged to refer to the report's main substantive chapters. The education policy review was undertaken by a team of OECD Secretariat staff and an external expert. The findings presented here take into account a background report prepared by the Ministry of the German-speaking Community of Belgium; interviews conducted with public officials, institutional representatives and stakeholders during a virtual review visit in May 2021; and the subsequent document review and analysis by the OECD review team.

Context

The school system achieves average to above average outcomes in international assessments but remains below its potential

At age 15, students in the German-speaking Community of Belgium participate in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in mathematics, reading and science. In 2018, students performed above the OECD average in mathematics (505 vs. 489) and at the average in science (483 score points vs. 489) as well as reading (483 vs. 487). Students in the German-speaking Community performed similarly to those in the French Community, but worse than those in the Flemish Community in all three subjects. They scored at the same level (i.e. statistically not distinguishable) as students in France, but fared worse than German students in reading and science and than Dutch students in science and mathematics. Compared to 2015, 15-year-old students in 2018 performed significantly worse in reading and science, losing 18 and 22 score points respectively, while the performance in mathematics remained stable.

The gap between high-performing and low-performing students in the German-speaking Community is narrow, in part due to a small and diminishing share of top-performing students. In 2018, the share of 15-year-old students performing at proficiency Level 5 or above was close to the OECD average in mathematics (9.1% vs. 10.9%) but below the OECD average in reading (5.4% vs. 8.7%) and science (3.2% vs. 6.8%). Since 2006, the share of top-performers has halved in all three domains. While the share of low achievers remains below the OECD average across the three domains of the PISA test, their share has increased in reading and science from around 14% in 2015 to around 20% in 2018. At the same time, the share of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who perform among the top 25% of students after accounting for economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) stood at 14.1% (compared to 11.3% on average

across the OECD, 10.7% in the Flemish Community and 7.1% in the French Community), indicating a relatively high level of resilience or educational mobility.

The German-speaking Community's school system is underpinned by a sustained and, at the secondary level, above-average level of educational investment, which allows for favourable learning conditions, including comparatively small class sizes and student-teacher ratios. Per-student expenditure at both the primary and secondary level is above the OECD average (see Chapter 2). In light of the significant resources invested into its school system, it appears as though the German-speaking Community remains below its potential when it comes to translating these inputs into educational outcomes. Some of the OECD's top-performing school systems in Europe, including Estonia, Poland and Ireland report lower levels of investment than the German-speaking Community. Likewise, the Flemish Community of Belgium performs not far from the OECD's top-performers in PISA. This suggests significant potential for the German-speaking Community to raise students' outcomes further by increasing the effectiveness of its resource allocation.

The German-speaking Community is in the process of developing an overall vision to guide reforms in a decentralised education system

The German-speaking Community of Belgium is in the process of developing an overall vision for its education system (the "*Gesamtvision Bildung*", henceforth *Gesamtvision*) to guide reforms until 2030 and beyond in order to improve education quality and equity. The development of the vision will be informed by a bottom-up diagnosis of the system's challenges based on stakeholder perspectives, which was completed in early 2020, as well as the OECD's education policy review, which provides a complementary analyses and recommendations from an international perspective. Based on the overall vision, the government intends to develop a Master Plan in 2023, laying out an implementation strategy for the reforms needed to achieve the goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*, accompanied by indicators to measure progress towards them.

The German-speaking Community's schools are organised in three networks: the Community Education System (*Gemeinschaftsunterrichtswesen*, GUW), which includes public pre-primary, primary and secondary schools funded and run directly by the Minister of Education and Scientific Research of the German-speaking Community; the Official Subsidised Education System (*Offizielles subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, OSU) run by the nine municipalities, which covers 52 of the 57 primary school sites and most pre-primary schools; and the Free Subsidised Education System (*Freies subventioniertes Unterrichtswesen*, FSU), which includes the publicly subsidised private schools, all of which are currently run by the Association of Catholic Episcopal schools (*VoG Bischöfliche Schulen in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft*, BSDG). Education in the three Belgian Communities is subject to the principle of "freedom of education", which means that parents are free to select a school of their choice and are guaranteed a place for their child as long as they meet the general admissions criteria.

The Ministry of the German-speaking Community is responsible for formulating the Community's education policy and oversees its implementation in all schools. It provides most of the public subsidies for education and validates schools' curricula. In addition, the Minister of Education and Scientific Research assumes responsibilities as a school provider (*Schulträger*) of the Community schools. The school providers (the minister in the case of GUW schools, the municipalities in the case OSU schools and the BSDG in the case of FSU schools) are responsible for approving their schools' curricula, for the pedagogical methods applied in their schools, for the recruitment of staff and for the organisation of learning.

Strengths and challenges

The development of an overall vision has the potential to provide the education system with clear goals to guide and lend coherence to reform initiatives

Establishing clear goals and an understanding of core values is key to guiding policy improvements in school systems that are as complex and decentralised as the German-speaking Community. Two main strategic documents currently guide reforms in the education sector for the period from 2019-2024: the Community's regional development concept (*Regionales Entwicklungskonzept*, REK I-III) (MDG, 2019[1]) and the government's working programme (*Laufendes Arbeitsprogramm*, LAP). While both documents list a series of reform projects for the education sector and an envisaged timeline for their implementation, the Community lacks a widely known, clearly articulated vision for the education system. Widely recognised visions and overarching goals can strengthen school systems' capacity to lend coherence and direction to reform processes and mobilise actors across the system in pursuit of a set of shared goals or aspirations for the education system. They can also give stakeholders certainty about the direction of reforms and made it easier to communicate the rationale of planned initiatives.

The development of the overall vision (the *Gesamtvision*) provides the government with an important opportunity to fill this gap. The overall vision could allows to formulate clear goals for the education system, strengthen coherence across different reform areas, sequence and prioritise the significant number of reform processes that have been planned or initiated, and sustain the focus on long-term objectives. It could also help to create synergies between the revision and implementation of the core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*), as well as reforms related to school leadership and teaching, the core curricula, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation. An overall vision could also align initiatives developed at the central level with bottom-up planning and school improvement efforts at the local level.

Reforming the policy framework of the teaching and school leadership professions has been a priority for the German-speaking Community since in 2015 when the "good personnel for good schools" initiative (*Gutes Personal für gute Schulen*, GPGS) started a process to modernise and simplify the teacher service code. The reform initiative's scope was wide-ranging, including topics such as teachers' recruitment and career structure, their professional development and working conditions. Following a stakeholder consultation, it was agreed for the reforms to be embedded in the development of the *Gesamtvision*. This is an important strategic choice as it allows to align the reforms with the German-speaking Community's overall goals for the school system and to create synergies across policy areas. It will also help in creating a clear narrative around the reform's goals that speaks to teachers, leaders and other stakeholders alike.

The limited availability of data on educational performance and resources reduces transparency and makes it difficult to monitor and evaluate quality and equity

In comparison to other OECD countries, both the availability of data on educational quality and the capacity to analyse it at the central and school level are limited in the German-speaking Community. In contrast to most OECD countries, the German-speaking Community does not use standardised central examinations with formal consequence for students at the upper secondary level. Instead, students participate in a number of standardised assessments without stakes. This includes comparative assessments (*Vergleichsarbeiten*, VERA) in year 3 of primary education (VERA-3) and in year 2 of secondary education (VERA-8), as well as international standardised assessments, such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which assesses 15-year-olds' performance in mathematics, science and reading, and tests for the Diploma in French Language Studies (*Diplôme d'études en langue française*, DELF). In contrast to the French and Flemish Communities, the German-speaking Community does not participate in international comparative assessments at the primary level (e.g. the TIMSS and PIRLS assessments of 4th grade students in mathematics, science and reading).

Although school leaders and teachers appear to recognise the value of standardised assessment, their capacity to use the results to drive school and system-level improvement could be strengthened. Besides the results of standardised assessments, very little data on educational performance and other relevant concepts is available, even at the central level, and the scope for international benchmarking is limited. For example, no data is collected on individual students' performance, school-leaving qualifications or socio-economic background, the incidence of grade repetition, average class sizes, or the number of vacant staff positions across the school network. Likewise, the Community does not have a data infrastructure in place that would allow for the longitudinal analysis of students' pathways across primary and secondary education or a systematic data collection on school-to-work transitions. The lack of a central education database also makes it difficult for the ministry to relate school performance results to data on school characteristics such as their financial resources, staffing, or social composition. Strengthening this evidence base would be an important condition for monitoring equity and efficiency in the school system more continuously. It would also help to increase transparency and accountability and to enable parents to make more informed choices about their children's education.

The relative lack of disaggregated data and gaps in the systems monitoring and evaluation system raises particular challenges for the support of disadvantaged students and diversity. In general, educational outcomes and well-being are not systematically monitored in a disaggregated manner for a variety of diverse students. Doing so would support policy makers' ability to differentiate between different groups of students and help them develop targeted policies and practices. Data collections should be disaggregated by relevant dimensions, not only based on gender and potential special education needs, but also based on their immigrant status or other individual characteristics where allowed by the legal system. The trade-off between privacy concerns and the system's ability to collect data to monitor sensitive student outcomes in order to better respond to their needs should be taken into account when designing monitoring systems. A further challenge is that policies, programmes and projects on inclusive education are rarely evaluated. This makes it challenging to highlight effective programmes and pilot projects and to scale them up across the Community.

The main school funding allocation mechanisms do not compensate for socio-economic disadvantage

A key concern in the design of school funding mechanisms is to ensure that resources are allocated equitably. Providing high-quality education to students with certain characteristics or schools in specific contexts may require more resources than it does to provide the same quality of education for another student in another school. The German-speaking Community shows relatively low levels of educational inequality. It provides some funding for language classes of immigrant students and schools can request additional staff resources, for example to support students with special education needs. Nevertheless, the German-speaking Community is an outlier among OECD countries in that its main funding allocation mechanisms for staff resources and schools' operating grants do not compensate for socio-economic disadvantage at the student or school level. Additional analyses and careful monitoring would be needed to evaluate whether the level of resources allocated for students with SEN and newly arrived immigrant students is sufficient and whether they reach the schools and students most in need of additional support (see Chapter 3). It is unusual, however, that no compensatory funding is provided for disadvantaged students in the German-speaking Community who do not belong to these groups.

A range of efforts are undertaken to prevent school failure and facilitate students' transitions, but repetition rates remain high and career guidance could be strengthened

The German-speaking Community recognises the importance of addressing school failure and facilitating students' successful transitions across levels of education and into the labour market. A range of initiatives and educational offers have been developed to prevent drop-out and provide students who are struggling

to complete regular schooling with alternative pathways to educational and professional opportunities. This includes part-time vocational education, the supervision offered by the Time-Out centre, and the one-year pre-vocational programme offered by the ZAWM Centre for Training and Continuing Education. Despite important efforts, the rate of grade repetition also remains high. PISA 2018 data suggests that, among 15-year-old students in the German-speaking Community, 28.4% had repeated a grade at least once in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary school, compared to the OECD average of 11.4%.

Providing strong guidance for students is particularly important in a stratified system like that of the German-speaking Community, where students are streamed into separate tracks at the beginning of secondary education, typically at age 12. Although students have the option to switch pathways as they progress through the school system, tracking can have the unintended consequence of creating a hierarchy among educational pathways and stigmatising the attendance of the vocationally oriented stream. Due to data limitations, the de facto permeability of the system and the number of students who successfully transition between pathways is also difficult to gauge.

A wide range of initiatives in the German-speaking Community bring together actors from education institutions, businesses, the ministry, private and public agencies to provide students with career guidance. This offer is critical to help students navigate difficult choices about their future careers and develop ambitious and realistic expectations about their future based on their interests and talents. Nevertheless, ensuring that this relevant information reaches the students that need it the most remains a challenge since students' participation in career orientation activities largely depends on their own initiative. A 2021 survey suggests that only 12% of graduates had obtained career advice through information events and individual counselling, respectively, which suggests that a large part of the student population does not take advantage of these offers. At the same time, in-school career guidance is less developed than in other OECD jurisdictions.

Inclusion is seen as a priority by all stakeholders and recent reforms are going in the right direction but there is a narrow understanding of what inclusive education means

Inclusive education is growing to become a central element of the German-speaking Community's school system and different stakeholders recognise its importance for students. Over the years, the Community has built a structured support system, in particular for students with special education needs (SEN), newcomer students and gifted students. To support students with SEN, the Community relies on a combination of high-threshold support, "grade protection" and special accommodations through low-threshold support and the "compensation of disadvantage" (see Chapter 3 for a detailed description). The support system emphasises flexibility and tailoring support to each student who requires help, regardless of their diagnosis. Moreover, the expertise and knowledge developed in special schools is progressively being mobilised to support mainstream schools, which are now the primary education settings for most students with SEN. The quality of inclusion and individualisation of support measures is further strengthened by the fact that many classes in the German-speaking Community are small and distances are short.

Besides students with SEN, the Germany-speaking Community provides structured support to newcomer students in the area of language learning in order to ensure that they have the linguistic means to integrate academically and socially. In pre-primary education, language acquisition takes place in the first two years using the immersion principle, which teaches the language of instruction through play. In primary school, eligible students from the age of five (third year of pre-primary and primary school) can either attend language learning courses or a language learning class four days a week. In secondary education, three schools offer language learning classes. These classes each receive resources for 30 hours of teaching for up to 12 newcomer students. More teaching time is granted for language classes with more than 12 newcomer students.

Another group of students receiving specific support are gifted students, who have increasingly become a priority in the German-speaking Community of Belgium since 2018. Even though the ministry uses a broader definition of giftedness, support has so far been focused on the group of gifted students that show high intellectual potential. The Community's schools use a number of pedagogical strategies to support gifted students, including individualisation through internal differentiation, acceleration, enrichment and grouping. The Community's structured support system around giftedness not only addresses students, but also their schools and teachers. Schools can receive support in the form of advice when developing and implementing internal school projects for the support of gifted children. Moreover, teachers involved in the implementation of these school projects can receive information and further support from the Centre for Special Needs Pedagogy (*Zentrum für Förderpädagogik*, ZFP).

Although external evaluations show that students in the German-speaking Community learn to perceive and accept diversity as a natural part of school life, the focus on inclusion lies mostly on students with SEN, with some focus also on newcomer students and gifted students. Other diverse groups of students who may need additional support are not considered to a great extent. This narrow understanding of inclusion corresponds to a limited use of practices, tools and methods to promote inclusion in schools, including the use of differentiation and formative student assessment. The limited use of these techniques can also contribute to higher levels of grade repetition since students may fall through the cracks. Grade repetition often particularly affects vulnerable students the most and undermines their inclusion in schools. Furthermore, the school system and out-of-school care (*außerschulische Betreuung*, AUBE) are not well integrated, which may further limit the support available to all students.

Teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff in the German-speaking Community do not seem well prepared to teach students with some types of special education needs while reporting greater confidence in dealing with other disorders. Even though a number of trainings and professional learning opportunities are offered in the area of SEN, they are not offered regularly enough. This is also the case in the area of professional learning for students with autism. This is in line with a previous study, which found teachers to feel particularly under-prepared to support students with autism as well as those with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, most training and professional learning does not seem to cover broader areas of diversity, equity and inclusion such as multiculturalism and supporting newcomer students and other diverse students.

The support system for students with special education needs and newcomers can be rigid and would benefit from greater coherence in the identification of students' needs

Despite the support available for students with special education needs in the German-speaking Community, the system can be overly bureaucratic and rigid. If a child or young person may need special education support (i.e. if general educational measures in the classroom are no longer sufficient), a request for an "integration project" is initiated through Kaleido. The request must be made in writing by the parents or guardian or by the principal of the mainstream school. If the mainstream school wants to initiate the procedure, the parents or guardian must agree. The principal of the mainstream school can contact the Support Conference, if those responsible for the student do not agree. The application must be submitted by 1 February at the latest for special education support to be provided in a mainstream or special school from the following school year. This application process seems quite lengthy and students may need to wait for nearly a year to receive support since there appears to be only one deadline to apply for support.

The German-speaking Community's SEN support system also suffers from a lack of clarity and coherence around its approach to defining and classifying students' special educational needs. While the system does not aim at grouping students to assign them support measures, it still categorises them in different ways. First, the system still incorporates the five groups of different needs (learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, developmental delays, socio-emotional and medical issues), each of which is eligible for specific support measures. Although certain disorders can fall in more than one group, which grants some

flexibility, it is not clear how the groups contribute to the efficiency of the support system or the process of identifying students' needs.

Second, there is a clear distinction between the types of support measures offered to students with SEN, gifted students and newcomer students. Newcomer students almost exclusively receive language support, even though some of the support offered to students with SEN could be generalised and adapted to newcomer students too. This includes, for example, the use of individual learning plans and the provision of low-threshold support to help them catch up with their peers. A more universal and inclusive approach could make these interventions more accessible and reduce the need for separate systems and rules governing the support for distinct groups of students. A more inclusive approach to pedagogy and support measures would also make the system more adaptive and prepared for future social changes.

The education system recognises the importance of multilingualism

Research shows that multilingualism is associated with cognitive, social, personal, academic and professional benefits. Children exposed to more than one language tend to perform better at school than their monolingual peers. In the German-speaking Community, multilingualism is seen as a strength and source of potential for the education system. German is the language of instruction in all schools in the German-speaking Community of Belgium, except in the French-language school in Eupen (ECEF) and in primary schools where French-speaking sections have been set up to cater to the French-speaking minority. The first foreign language is usually French, except for the French-speaking sections in primary schools, where German is the first foreign language.

Students start learning their first foreign language during their pre-primary education. This early immersion in a foreign language is a strength of the German-speaking Community's school system. From the first year of primary school, the first foreign language is a compulsory subject with a minimum of two hours per week, which progressively increases up to at least five hours by the sixth grade. In primary education, the subjects of art, music and sport can also be taught in the first foreign language. In addition to the pilot project at the pre-primary level, at the secondary level, teaching in a foreign language can be expanded to the subjects of mathematics, geography, history and science and account for a maximum of 40% of the total teaching time. In general secondary education, students need to receive at least four lessons of French-language instruction per week. In technical and vocational secondary education, students are taught French for at least two lessons per week.

While the level of foreign language proficiency reached by students appears to vary across schools and different parts of the Community, the overall objective should be for all to reach sufficient competency in the foreign language to enable them to communicate with their fellow Belgian citizens, to participate fully in society and to study in their own country. Furthermore, besides achieving proficiency in both German and French, there are also demands among stakeholders to promote English language skills further in order to foster a truly multilingual Community.

There have already been encouraging efforts to make teaching and school leadership more attractive professions, but further reforms are needed

School principals' reports suggest that the German-speaking Community faces considerable shortages of teaching staff. In the PISA 2018 survey, two thirds (66%) of 15-year-old students attended a school whose principal believed that teacher shortages hindered its capacity to provide instruction to some extent or a lot (compared to the OECD average of just 27.1%). Likewise, almost half of the 15-year-old students attended a school whose principal reported that instruction was hindered by inadequate or poorly qualified teaching staff in 2018 – the highest proportion among participating OECD jurisdictions. In light of the significant staff shortages raising the attractiveness of a career in schools is an important policy objective for the German-speaking Community.

In recent years, several encouraging efforts have been undertaken and there remains a political commitment to pursue further reforms that make teaching and school leadership more attractive professions. In order to improve the job security of beginning teachers, a new type of temporary open-ended contract was created to absolve fully qualified teachers from reapplying for their positions on an annual basis until they obtain a permanent post. In addition, the creation of middle manager and subject team leader roles in secondary education has created new career opportunities for teachers while strengthening school capacity and reducing the burden on school leaders. Further measures aimed at increasing the attractiveness of working in schools included raising school leaders' salaries in the 2021/22 school year, the introduction of head secretaries in primary education and the introduction of pre-primary assistants to support the work of pre-primary teachers. These initiatives and reforms constitute important steps in the right direction should be built upon. In order to continue attracting promising candidates to pursue a career in schools and retain its best teachers, the Community needs to undertake further efforts to ensure that the profession is intellectually rewarding and motivating throughout the entire career.

The support that beginning teachers receive at the school level constitutes an important area for further improvement. The transition from initial education to primary and secondary teaching is a critical stage in preparing teachers and helping them to be effective in the classroom, particularly if many teachers enter the profession with limited pedagogical training. While the *Autonome Hochschule Ostbelgien* (AHS) – the German-speaking Community's higher education institution – offers a two-year induction programme consisting of regular meeting for secondary, primary and pre-primary teachers to learn from one another during their first years on the job, there is no systematic support at the school level. Effective induction programmes of sufficient duration and intensity, including pedagogical coaching and direct feedback, can have a strong positive impact on beginning teachers. This type of support is best provided closer to the teacher, in a format that allows for continuous, hands-on and more contextualised support to help new teachers address the day-to-day challenges they encounter in their schools. The OECD review team has seen examples of schools providing mentorship programmes for beginning teachers and plans to provide more systematic support for these practices could be an important step in the right direction.

Further efforts are also needed to provide teachers' with opportunities for professional growth in order to maintain their long-term motivation and mobilise their growing expertise to contribute to leadership and school improvement processes. At the secondary level, the introduction of the middle manager role constituted an important step towards strengthening leadership teams and providing teachers with formal leadership responsibilities and increased remuneration. The role of subject team leaders (*Fachteamleiter*), while not remunerated, also constitutes a step in the right direction by recognising the ability of experienced teachers to share their knowledge and co-ordinate teachers' collaboration to raise the quality of teaching in their schools. Beyond this, however, opportunities for career advancement within the classroom remain very limited, especially in pre-primary and primary schools where no selection positions exist. Although school leaders in the German-speaking Community can create some degree of job differentiation by giving teachers special pedagogical assignments (*Pädagogische Sonderaufträge*) in exchange for reduced teaching hours, these are temporary and not associated with clear competency profiles or a formal career progression leading to further opportunities to assume leadership. This absence of a merit-based career structure providing opportunities for ongoing professional advancement based on teachers' observed performance risks reducing the attractiveness of a career in schools.

The Community's core curricula are critical for high-quality education, but teachers feel little ownership over them and are not sufficiently involved in their revision

The German-speaking Community is in the process of revising its core curricula. This offers a unique opportunity to provide teachers with a shared aspiration for student learning around which they could be supported to further develop their practice and collaborate. Research suggests that curricula that afford more decision-making freedom to schools – such as the German-speaking Community's – may offer less guidance to teachers but tend to be more sustainable in the long run, provided that school leaders and

teachers understand the principles underlying the curriculum and build capacity to teach accordingly. Participating in ongoing school and curriculum development activities could also provide a good context for continuing professional learning and for fostering teachers' sense of belonging to a recognised profession. For this to be the case, however, the German-speaking Community needs to ensure that the process of developing, revising and implementing the new core curricula is sufficiently inclusive for teachers and other school staff to develop a sense of ownership and commitment to them. As it stands, professional ownership of the core curricula is low. Few of the teachers interviewed by the OECD review team appeared to see the core curricula as a useful instrument and reference to guide their professional practice. Ensuring that teachers are actively involved in the revision of the core curricula at the school level will therefore be critical to ensure their successful implementation (see Chapter 2).

School-wide training days are an important investment but teachers' engagement in other forms of collaborative professional learning remains limited

Continuing professional learning (CPL) is vital for teachers to refresh, develop and broaden their knowledge, and to keep up with changing research, tools and practices to respond to students' needs. The evolving context of learning and teaching in the German-speaking Community will continue to place new demands on teachers, such as the development of school-based curricula or providing differentiated teaching to increasingly diverse learners. To equip teachers to meet these challenges, the German-speaking Community needs to make continuing professional learning a key element in its vision for the teaching profession and strengthen its support for continuing professional growth at all stages of the teacher career. This is particularly vital for a system with a large number of teachers who enter the profession with minimal pedagogical training or completed their initial teacher education outside the Community.

Schools in the German-speaking Community can choose three to four days a year to dedicate to the professional learning of all of their teaching and support staff. The release time dedicated to these training days constitutes a significant investment in teachers' professional learning and provides an opportunity for all staff to receive co-ordinated training or discuss and contribute to school development plans in a collective setting. To achieve sustained, cumulative and quality professional learning as a basis for effective teaching, whole-school events need to be complemented with activities that allow teachers – on their own or in groups – to transfer and assimilate new ideas into their classroom practice. Yet, although the AHS offers a range of professional development courses, teachers' participation in continuing professional learning is low in international comparison, particularly when it comes to school-based, collaborative forms of learning.

A number of factors may contribute to teachers' low level of engagement in professional learning. Participation plays a marginal role in the teacher recruitment process, opportunities for career advancement are limited and professional learning is only weakly linked to teachers' appraisal process. In the absence of central requirements, there are few incentives for teachers to engage in professional development beyond the school-wide training days, at least once teachers have obtained a permanent or open-ended fixed-term contract. Participation in professional learning then largely depends on teachers' individual motivation and the OECD review team formed the impression that there was a lack of clear expectations around teachers' professional learning.

In addition to the limited incentives, there is little structural support for teachers' engagement in sustained and collaborative CPL beyond the school-wide training days. In many successful school systems, time is made available to ensure that professional learning is a normal part of daily work life in schools. In the German-speaking Community, teachers do not have the right to a given amount of individual professional learning and there is no time, besides the whole-school training days, that is explicitly set aside in their schedules to engage in learning activities with their peers. School leaders cited their difficulties in freeing up time for teachers to attend external CPL opportunities, following up on them and creating conditions for

teachers to team teach or observe each other. This means that even motivated teachers may find it difficult to take part in professional learning, especially if their school suffers from staff shortages.

Research suggests that the most effective forms of professional learning involve continuous, school-based formats that are embedded in teachers' everyday work, rather than the external, one-off courses and linear modes of provision that predominate in the German-speaking Community. Regardless of its format, for professional learning to be effective, it needs to be responsive to the needs of schools, individual teachers and, ultimately, their students. Linking teachers' professional learning to their regular formative appraisal can be an effective strategy to accomplish this goal. In the German-speaking Community, there is still scope to make more use of teachers' formative evaluations as a tool for professional growth by linking it to individual goal-setting and professional learning opportunities. Formative appraisal is currently not mandatory and rarely carried out for teachers on permanent contracts. As a consequence, few schools practice a culture of regular feedback and teachers' choice of professional learning activities is mainly guided by their personal interests and not always centred on improving teaching or their school's development goals.

School autonomy has the potential to foster pedagogical diversity and innovation, but requires further capacity building at the school level

Schools and school providers in the German-speaking Community enjoy a high degree of autonomy. School providers are free to decide on the pedagogical methods used in their schools, as well as their choice of student assessment practices. Each school also has wide-ranging autonomy in their implementation of the core curricula, the use of their staff, as well as the organisation of instruction, including the course offer and class sizes. Combined with free school choice, this autonomy has the potential to incentivise local innovation and foster a variety of pedagogical approaches in the Community. The structure of the Community's school network and its strong geographical coverage, particularly at the primary level, also creates the potential for a high responsiveness to the characteristics and needs of local communities. The autonomy of schools and school providers provides them with a good basis to tailor their profiles to local needs. However, whether school choice and a diversity of providers leads to innovation and a better match between the educational offer and local needs in practice, depends on a variety of factors, notably the capacity of school leadership. To capitalise on these opportunities, the German-speaking Community will need to strengthen the capacity of schools and school providers.

School leaders require more support to engage in pedagogical leadership and use their autonomy to improve educational quality

School leaders play a pivotal role in elevating the quality of teaching and learning in the German-speaking Community's and in ensuring that reforms result in improvements in the classroom. They are critical for shaping their school's pedagogical profile by implementing the new core curricula and in creating an environment in which teachers continuously improve their competencies to support student learning. The successful exercise of pedagogical leadership demands taking an active role in the school's self-evaluation and improvement efforts, in developing school-based curricula in pursuit of the school's educational project, in observing teachers in the classroom and supporting staff in their continuing professional learning to respond to the evolving needs of their students. The recent reform of school leaders' salaries and the introduction of new support roles at the primary level have been important steps to make the principals' role more attractive. Nevertheless, the OECD review team identified multiple challenges that need to be addressed for school leaders to exercise their role as effectively as they could. A relatively low level of preparation, training and support, combined with school leaders' limited autonomy in some areas of school management reduce the attractiveness of their role, which makes it difficult to attract and retain qualified and motivated individuals to the school leadership career. These challenges are described in more detail in the following.

First, school leaders have few opportunities to gain relevant experience prior to assuming their positions and some feel insufficiently prepared for their new roles. Building school leaders' capacity starts requires a strong system of preparation and continuing development. This will be even more important for the German-speaking Community going forward since dropping the requirement for school leaders to hold a teaching certificate means that lateral entrants into the profession may that have neither the expertise, nor the perceived legitimacy to provide instructional leadership when assuming their roles. For many principals, learning happens mostly on the job. The limited opportunities for teachers to gain prior experience in intermediary leadership roles may contribute to these difficulties, as does the absence of mentorship structures that would allow experienced school leaders to support new colleagues.

Second, school leadership in the German-speaking Community is not sufficiently distributed and lack the structural support to pursue their pedagogical leadership role effectively. Although the creation of Middle Managers in secondary schools and head secretaries in primary schools can be expected to bring improvements, school leaders, still receive relatively little structural support in the form of an extended leadership team that could alleviate their administrative burden and assume shared responsibility for key aspects of school improvement. At the primary level, school leaders have no personnel supporting them in their leadership responsibilities, which is particularly problematic for leaders of larger primary schools and can contribute to a sense of professional isolation. As a consequence, the OECD's interviews suggested that – despite their expressed desire to engage in pedagogical leadership – school leaders find too little time to support their teachers' development, for example by engaging in regular lesson observation and providing feedback.

Third, there is a need to build further capacity for schools' self-evaluation and to strengthen synergies between the inspectorate, the external evaluation and support services. Since 2009, the German-speaking Community has made significant progress in fostering school improvement by introducing regular internal and external school evaluations. Nevertheless, according to external evaluations, many schools show deficits when it comes to their self-evaluation process and school improvement cycle. School leaders require further support to select evaluation areas that are aligned with their school project (interview partners pointed to a deficit-oriented approach to school evaluations prevailing in many schools), to place teachers' professional learning and the quality of teaching at the centre of their school project and development plans, and to actively build on evaluation results in the process. Although there have been efforts to generate awareness of the importance of school development, not all schools embrace the external evaluation process as a tool for school improvement and effectively followed up on evaluation results. To address this challenge, the Community will need to further strengthen the capacity and build synergies between the inspectorate, the external evaluation and additional support services, including the school development counselling service (*Schulentwicklungsberatung*) the AHS' pedagogical advisory services (*Fachberatungen*).

Finally, although school leaders in the German-speaking Community enjoy significant autonomy over the pedagogical orientation of their schools, they leaders have limited control over key aspects of school management, including the recruitment of teachers, which reduces their ability to develop talent and create a good match between the staff and the schools' pedagogical project. School leaders in the GUW and OSU networks are required to select teachers using a point-based ranking system (*Klassierung*) based on a limited number of criteria that privilege experience and formal qualifications but do not include interviews, letters of motivation or trial lessons, which could provide more evidence of teachers' performance, motivation and their fit with the schools' profile. This significantly reduces school leaders' ability to exercise professional judgement and autonomy in the selection of teachers. The decentralised nature of the teacher recruitment process and lack of a unified service code gives rise to inefficiencies, limits teachers' mobility and creates uncertainty for both teachers and schools. Each of the three school networks (and, in the case of the OSU network, each municipality) organise their own teacher recruitment process, applying slightly different selection and eligibility criteria. The differences in teachers' service codes across providers have

created obstacles for synergies, such as the creation of a shared pool of substitute teachers, and reduce teachers' mobility between networks (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion).

Policy recommendations

Use the development of the Gesamtvision to provide a renewed vision for the education system, strategic guidance for reforms and a basis for an actionable implementation strategy

The development of the overall vision for the education system (the *Gesamtvision*) presents a unique opportunity to drive reforms that will shape the German-speaking Community's education system for the years to come. It has the potential to build a shared understanding of the system's overarching goals and underpinning values, identify the most important challenges that the system needs to address, point to a coherent set of policy options to achieve the system's goals and provide a basis for an actionable implementation strategy (the *Master Plan* to be developed in 2023). For the *Gesamtvision* to successfully guide, prioritise and lend coherence to education reforms and to serve as a foundation for an implementation strategy that will lead to tangible improvements in the classrooms, it will need to be well-designed with these goals in mind.

To develop an effective strategy document, the *Gesamtvision* should articulate a clear vision for the system. Such a vision statement could provide the overarching rationale for the development of the strategy, guide the selection of focus areas for reforms, align policy actions and help to mobilise the various actors in the system around a shared aspiration. To fulfil this function, the vision statement should be concise and focus on a small number of key aspirations, which may be underpinned by a commitment to a set of high-level values that the system seeks to embody or impart. Successful vision statements are frequently developed through a process of wide-ranging consultations or co-development, in order to secure the ownership of the stakeholders they concern.

Furthermore, the *Gesamtvision* will need to identify the system's most important challenges, formulate specific goals, and propose policy actions to accomplish them in order to provide a strong basis for an actionable implementation strategy. To ensure coherence across the goals formulated across the different policy areas covered by the *Gesamtvision*, they should be aligned with the overarching vision for the education system and a narrative that explains their selection. The successful implementation of the Community's revised core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*) would be one such objective that will require a whole-of-system approach and synergies across a number of policy areas, including, but not limited to, teachers' professional learning, school leadership and the evaluation system (see Chapter 4). Bringing about the conditions to implement a new curriculum successfully is one example of a narrative that could help to link the Community's high-level objectives and the specific goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. The development of the *Gesamtvision* and the revision of the core curricula should therefore be closely aligned.

To make the *Gesamtvision* actionable, it should associate the identified challenges and goals with specific policy actions to address them. The description of policy actions should include a causal narrative explaining how specific measures are expected to contribute to realising the associated goals. Reforms that are already planned or underway should be aligned with the development of the *Gesamtvision* in the process. This concerns, for example, the ongoing revision of teacher competency frameworks as well as, most importantly, the development and implementation of the revised core curricula, which should be seen an important opportunity to bring the aspirations formulated in the overall vision to life and into the classroom. The creation of the Master Plan in 2023 should aim to operationalise the overall vision's goals and link them to measurable indicators to track progress towards their attainment. Supplementing the Master Plan with effective indicators will require the Community to develop a corresponding strategy for

data collection (see below). An effective implementation strategy may also include a description of follow-up actions and mechanisms to adjust policies if the progress is inadequate.

The German-speaking Community has already involved a wide range of relevant stakeholders during the first two diagnostic phases informing the *Gesamtvision* and it should continue doing so throughout the development and the implementation of its vision. During its stakeholder interviews, the OECD review team witnessed an impressive range of actors within and outside the school system who are invested in improving education in the German-speaking Community. This high level of engagement can provide a good basis to keep stakeholders closely involved throughout the development of the *Gesamtvision*. Innovative approaches to stakeholder engagement taken by other OECD countries, such as Finland's Education Experimentation Lab (see Chapter 2), can offer inspiration and opportunities for mutual learning. In addition to lending coherence to reform processes and mobilising actors across the system in pursuit of a set of shared goals or aspirations, a widely recognised vision and overarching goals can also give stakeholders certainty about the direction of reforms, make it easier to communicate the rationale of planned initiatives and reduce the risk of reform fatigue. This will be important to build ownership of the vision and the reforms derived from its implementation among teachers, leaders and other stakeholders.

Align the revision of the core curricula with the development of the Gesamtvision and bring teachers on board for their successful implementation

As described above, the revision of the core curricula can be an important lever to advance the overall vision for the German-speaking Community's education system, provided that core curricula's revision is aligned with the goals formulated for the education system more widely. To fulfil this role, the timeline for the revision of the core curricula should be adjusted to permit their alignment with the overarching vision formulated in the *Gesamtvision*. Many of the policy options identified in this report would facilitate the implementation of the revised core curricula and vice versa. An emphasis on differentiated teaching and student guidance in the curricula, for example, could promote equity and facilitate inclusive education (see Chapter 3). In turn, a reform of teachers' working conditions and their professional learning as well as efforts to strengthen pedagogical leadership would help to create the collaborative environment in schools in which competency-based curricula can come to fruition (see Chapter 4). The revision and implementation of the core curricula is therefore intricately connected with the success of the overall vision and should be pursued in tandem to create synergies between them.

The core curricula's adaptation into school-based curricula has the potential to make them more relevant to the local context and thus more engaging for students, but it also requires teachers and school leaders to take responsibility for shaping the curricula. Without a sense of ownership among the profession, no curriculum – regardless of its design and content – will live up to its promise and affect meaningful changes in the classroom. In order to foster this professional ownership and ensure teachers' buy-in during the implementation phase, it is critical that teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders are strongly engaged in the development and revision of curricula, from the beginning.

As it stands, teachers' involvement in the revision of core curricula is limited. The most successful examples of curricula reforms in OECD countries have emphasised the importance of teacher agency and approached the revision process as a collaborative "bottom-up" process based on broad stakeholder involvement, rather than a technical task for specialists. Reforms in systems like Wales, New Zealand and Ontario (Canada) offer instructive examples in this regard (see Chapter 4). The German-speaking Community should, ensure that teachers' input is guiding the curricula's revision from the very start and that teachers' involvement at the school level is of sufficient intensity, involving structured discussions and professional exchange. Achieving teachers' buy-in will also require authorities to demonstrate a credible long-term commitment to the new curricula. The curricula should therefore be designed to be broad and general enough to ensure their long-term relevance and flexible enough to allow schools to adapt them to emerging needs over time.

Explore the introduction of equity funding to compensate for schools' and students' disadvantage

Allocating additional resources to schools that are most in need of support is an important means to promote vertical equity. Compensating schools for additional resource needs that may arise from factors related to the socio-economic composition of their student body is also likely to raise efficiency by directing resources to where they have the biggest impact. The German-speaking Community should therefore explore introducing equity funding, for example by adding weights to the student-based formula used to allocate staff resources or to the formula used to calculate the operating grants of FSU and OSU schools (an equivalent mechanism would need to be developed for GUW schools).

A considerable number of OECD countries compensate for the greater financial needs of disadvantaged schools using index-based weightings in their main allocation mechanisms. Different forms of index-based equity funding are used in the Netherlands, England (United Kingdom), France, Australia, New Zealand as well as different parts of the United States, Switzerland and Canada. The indicators used to distribute equity funding in the Flemish Community of Belgium and some federal states in Germany provide further opportunities for peer learning (see Chapter 2).

The introduction of equity funding relies on the availability suitable data on students' socio-economic background or needs whose collection may be facilitated by the German-speaking Community's introduction of a new school-level data management system. First, however, it will be important, to reach an agreement on the concept of inequality or disadvantage that a social index should reflect, as well as a suitable set of indicators and weightings that could be used to construct it. The search of appropriate indicators should be an integral part of the data development strategy discussed in the following.

Consider simplifying funding mechanisms and creating a clearer division of responsibilities between the two public school networks

In order to reduce the administrative burden placed on schools and central authorities and to provide greater clarity over funding streams, the German-speaking Community should consider whether there is scope for streamlining its funding mechanisms. Particularly in the OSU and FSU networks, schools receive resources through a variety of per-capita earmarked funding streams with overlapping and sometimes unclear purposes. In addition to their operating grant, they receive per-student funding intended to cover expenses on pedagogical materials and to replace parental contribution. In practice, funding allocated through all three of these mechanisms can be used for similar purposes. While this gives school leaders additional flexibility in the use of these funds, it is difficult to justify the administrative burden that monitoring the use of this earmarked funding would require in theory. The Germans-speaking Community should therefore consider the advantages of distributing this funding through a single allocation mechanism. Some schools in the German-speaking Community also struggle with the administrative burden of submitting individual requests to cover expenses on school equipment, for additional contract staff (BVA), school projects or lunch break supervision. In order to could free up capacity and reduce delays, the Community should consider whether these is scope for integrating some of this funding into schools' regular budget for operating expenses and giving them greater discretion in its management.

For a school system of its size, the German-speaking Community's historical division into three distinct school networks creates a high level of complexity and the split of responsibilities for public primary schools across two levels of administration further complicates the picture. At the time of the review, three public primary schools were part of the GUW network under the authority of the minister while all other public primary schools were part of the OSU network and managed by their respective municipalities. The German-speaking Community should consider reforming this governance arrangement with a view to simplify the network structure and explore whether municipalities should be the exclusive provider of public primary schools. Consolidating the authority over public primary schools in the OSU network could have a

number of advantages. Across OECD countries, it is not uncommon for local authorities to be closely involved in the management or supervision of primary schools, given that most students at this level live near their schools and local authorities are thought to be in an advantageous position to identify and respond to local needs as they arise. Absolving the minister from overseeing schools at two distinct levels of education could allow a more efficient use of limited administrative capacity. In addition, creating a clearer division of responsibilities between the two public networks could facilitate the co-ordination between public primary schools whose structures currently exclude the GUW network's primary schools. Lastly, it would ensure that all public primary schools are funded based on the same funding mechanism.

Strengthen the system's data collection in line with the Gesamtvision and Master Plan, monitor student performance and equity and consistently evaluate the effectiveness of policies and practices, particularly in the area of inclusion

The German-speaking Community should strengthen its data infrastructure and information management system to support the monitoring of educational quality and resource use in schools and to promote evidence-based decision making at all levels of the system, from parents and schools to the central administration. In comparison to other OECD countries, the German-speaking Community suffers from limitations to both the availability of data (including comparative benchmarks with other Communities and countries) and the capacity to manage and analyse it. To address these shortcomings, the ministry should develop a central education database covering all schools, teachers and students that would allow the Community to monitor key school characteristics (related to their student body, resources, staffing and performance) as well as students' educational trajectories.

A central information management system should be designed with multiple purposes in mind. It could help schools manage their data and make informed decisions to better support their students in collaboration with external sources of support. It could also provide a much-needed basis for authorities to identify opportunities to make better use of resources to advance educational quality and equity. At the same time, it would improve transparency and strengthen schools' accountability towards education authorities, parents and other stakeholders. As the German-speaking Community advances towards the realisation of its *Gesamtvision* it should consider to regularly publish reports summarising key indicators and developments in the education system, which can be an effective way to track the system's progress and keep the wider public involved once clear objectives and measurable targets have been identified. In light of the German-speaking Community's limited capacity, the development of indicators and the collection of data needs to be strategic and proceed with a view to support the monitoring of progress towards the goals formulated in the *Gesamtvision*.

Systematically collecting data on students' needs and the social composition of schools is also an important precondition to compensate for socio-economic disadvantage and monitor inequities across the system. In addition to developing indicators to monitor the outcomes of diverse student groups, the German-speaking Community should also formulate clear targets to be reached. This effort should involve not only the system level, but also the school and classroom level to support formative evaluation and generate sound evidence for any change in policy and practices. Moreover, collecting disaggregated data for diverse groups of students, such as students with SEN or with an immigrant background, would allow monitoring their outcomes against those of their peers and evaluate the level of inclusiveness of the system. Systems like New Zealand, which have developed comprehensive indicator frameworks to monitor students' outcomes and well-being, which can provide fruitful opportunities for peer learning (see Chapter 3).

Given the methodological challenges involved in interpreting data and using it for school improvement purposes, it will be vital to ensure that school leaders are equipped to interpret standardised assessment results correctly and to complement them with other means of monitoring and providing feedback on the quality of learning in schools. To strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of its school system, the German-speaking Community should also undertake efforts to consistently evaluate pilot projects, policies

and programmes in the area of inclusive education. These evaluations should generate rigorous evidence to assess which interventions have proven effective in improving the system's equity and inclusiveness as well as the academic and well-being outcomes of its students. Consistent evaluations of pilot projects would allow authorities to identify local policies or practices that can be scaled up and adapted to different schools or classes throughout the Community. An interesting example is that of Austria, which engages in monitoring and evaluation of policies through the Federal Institute for Quality Assurance in the Austrian School System (*Institut des Bundes für Qualitätssicherung im österreichischen Schulwesen*).

The limited availability of data also concerns the level funding across schools and school networks. The lack of a central reporting framework covering all schools' overall revenues and expenditures in the German-speaking Community limits the ability to relate schools' inputs to outputs, to evaluate the effectiveness of their resource use and to detect potential mismatches between schools' resources and their needs. In order to increase transparency and improve its ability to evaluate the school funding system, the German-speaking Community should develop a central reporting framework to regularly collect school-level data on revenues and expenditures across all three networks. This should include the funding received by each school from the Community, from municipalities (in the case of OSU schools) and private sources. A better empirical picture of school-level revenues could also create greater transparency, help education authorities to detect and address potential inequities and foster trust in the system.

Place students and their individual needs at the centre of learning

Placing students and their individual needs at the centre of learning will be key to developing a more inclusive education system in the German-speaking Community. The review report develops several policy recommendations to guide education authorities towards this goal. These include streamlining the process for students with SEN to obtain support, strengthening differentiated teaching and student learning, integrating mandatory training in the area of inclusive education during initial teacher education and providing regular professional learning opportunities on the subject for teachers, school leaders and non-teaching staff. A more student-centred approach to teaching and learning is also critical to successfully implement the Community's competency-oriented core curricula. This requires a sustained effort to foster greater cooperation and exchange among teachers, which is discussed in a separate recommendation below.

As discussed above, the German-speaking Community of Belgium uses a relatively narrow definition of inclusive education. Adopting a broader definition of inclusivity in the education system could enable the Community to further strengthen its focus on supporting all students in mainstream schools according to their individual needs. Inclusion in education is defined by UNESCO as "an on-going process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination". In an inclusive education system, all personal differences (with respect to age, gender, ethnicity, indigenous status, language, health status, etc.) are acknowledged and respected, and the core principle is that every learner matters and matters equally. Adopting such a broader definition of inclusion would help the German-speaking Community in strengthening its commitment to support each student based on their specific needs and to overcome the focus on a limited set of student groups. For instance, this would entail considering not only students with SEN, newcomer students and gifted students, but also the specific needs and challenges of girls and boys in schools, and of students who belong to the LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) community.

Overall, it would be helpful to link the definition of inclusion to the overall vision (*Gesamtvision*), the core curricula (*Rahmenpläne*) and the system's mission statement (*Leitbild*) to ensure coherence across the education system and its approach to inclusive education. Portugal, for instance, has recently introduced a clear commitment towards the development of an inclusive education system that ensures equity and inclusion for all learners in its legislation. The Decree Law No. 54/2018 states that "schools shall include

in their guidance documents the lines of action for the creation of a school culture where everyone will find opportunities to learn and the conditions for full realisation of this right, responding to the needs of each pupil, valuing diversity and promoting equity and non-discrimination in accessing the curriculum and the progression in the educational system."

To help place students at the centre of learning, the German-speaking Community should also undertake efforts to streamline the provision of support for diverse student groups. The current process for students that need extra resources or teaching to apply for support is quite bureaucratic and rigid, which can cause delays in the time it takes for students to get the support they need. Measures to streamline this process could improve the equity and inclusivity of the system. First, schools should be able to draw on different types of support for each student including not only specialised teachers or teaching assistants, but also non-teaching staff. Moreover, flexibility in responding to students' specific needs should be supported by the provision of a pool of materials, accommodations or modifications that can address each student's needs. Secondly, since the procedure for demanding support for a student with SEN is lengthy and bureaucratic, greater flexibility in the system could reduce the waiting time for students to receive the necessary support.

Concerning students with an immigrant background and specifically newcomer students, the language support system should be made more flexible and adapted to students' needs. In particular, the language support programme should be more easily extendable beyond two years where necessary, as could be the case for late newcomer students. In doing to, the Community would need to strike a balance between the need to support students' language learning and that of quickly integrating them into mainstream education to avoid their exclusion and ensure that they participate in learning of other subjects, develop social skills and take part in the daily life of their peers in mainstream classes.

Across OECD countries, some education systems have implemented language support for students in pre-primary education, often targeting immigrant or disadvantaged students, who may need additional support to improve their language skills before accessing primary education. In the Netherlands, for example, young children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are entitled to receive language-development support. These children can participate in targeted programmes at the pre-primary level (*vooren vroegschoolse educaties*) that provide support before and during the first years of school (see Chapter 3).

Another way in which the German-speaking Community should reorient its system to place students at its centre would be to offer systematically differentiated instruction based on a diagnosis of students' different learning levels and styles. Differentiated instruction is particularly important to support the learning and well-being of gifted students, and to respond adequately to the needs and learning styles of students with special education needs. For differentiation in the classroom to succeed, it will be critical for teachers to be adequately prepared to incorporate behavioural interventions and practices such as positive reinforcement, generalised behavioural intervention techniques and behavioural prompts into their teaching.

To successfully create more inclusive classroom environments, each teacher should be prepared to teach diverse students in mainstream schools and use differentiated teaching practices to respond to each student's needs. Inclusion should be integrated into teachers' competence profiles (*Kompetenzprofile)* and included as required modules in both initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional learning (CPL) activities for in-service teachers. ITE and CPL activities should cover inclusion not only with a focus on SEN but also that of students with an immigrant background, gifted students or members of the LGBTQI+ community and beyond. ITE and CPL activities should therefore also cover topics such as multilingualism, multiculturalism, differentiation and beyond. In addition, aspiring teachers should be required to complete at least one internship in a special school, in an inclusive school or in a mainstream school with an inclusion teacher, in the Community or abroad.

Reform the school calendar and seize opportunities to reduce learning gaps

The rhythm of the school calendar is an important element in the lives of students from early childhood to late adolescence. A reflection on how to optimise the school calendar concerns the well-being of children and young people but also provides opportunities to further strengthen the equity and overall performance of education systems. The German-speaking Community is currently considering the advantages and disadvantages of introducing a 7/2 school calendar that divides the school year into alternating periods of seven weeks of lessons and two weeks of holidays while shortening the summer holidays.

For the successful implementation of a school calendar reform in the German-speaking Community, it would be important to consider the needs of families carefully, including the availability of childcare and the calendar's compatibility with parents' jobs. A school calendar reform would need to be carefully prepared to investigate which impact the change would have on students, particularly on the most vulnerable, as well as their families and school personnel. It would also be crucial to invest in alternative activities to offer during the holidays that are accessible for all students, including the less advantaged, newcomers, etc. This offer could diminish the risk that students incur learning losses while ensuring that parents – and particularly mothers – do not have to compromise their working life and careers to care for their children during those weeks.

Nevertheless, there are clear benefits to shortening the summer breaks for the German-speaking Community. An alignment with the French Community, which is rearranging the school calendar in the school year 2022/23, would benefit families with children in both systems who would otherwise face significant organisational challenges dealing with two different school calendars. In addition, the non-teaching time provides an opportunity to offer additional continuing professional learning activities for teachers and support staff, who could take advantage of this time to both rest and prepare their classes as well as to receive training in particular areas. Recent school calendars reforms and holiday activities offered in other OECD countries provide instructive examples that could inform the German-speaking Community's reform (see Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion).

Strengthen teachers' professionalism and support their continuing professional growth throughout the teaching career

It is clear that the teaching profession will play a pivotal role in ensuring that the reforms guided by the *Gesamtvision* translate into meaningful changes in the classroom and improvements in student learning. In order to strengthen teachers' professionalism, sustainably address teacher shortages, attract talented individuals to the teaching career and sustain their motivation over time, the German-speaking Community needs to undertake further efforts to ensure that the profession is intellectually rewarding and oriented towards continuing professional growth. To mobilise the profession in achieving this vision for the education system, it will be important to reflect on the types of competencies and attitudes that teachers will need to play their part in fulfilling it. The Community currently lacks a clear, widely shared vision for the teacher profession and the development of the *Gesamtvision* could be a good opportunity to develop one, guided by the question what and how the Community want students to learn, and what teachers need in order to enable this.

Alongside a concise vision statement for the teaching profession, the German-speaking Community should consider developing a set of well-structured and widely supported professional standards for the teaching profession that could serve an integrating role in harmonising different elements of teacher policy. As policy tools, such standards could serve as a reference point to inform the curricula for teachers' initial education, to guide school-level teacher evaluations and to support teachers' self-directed professional development. In due course, they could also provide the basis for a transparent, merit-based career ladder (see further below). The standards could be differentiated according to different levels of experience (e.g. beginning, intermediate and advanced) and include concrete examples of effective teaching practices. This would

make them more effective tools for structuring formative evaluations and give teachers a clear sense of the steps they can take to advance their careers, especially if these standards are aligned with and direct teachers to a relevant professional development offer. Developing teacher standards in close collaboration with the profession is key to their successful implementation. In addition, the process could galvanise teachers' aspirations, foster a dialogue on the future of the profession and set high expectations for quality teaching.

To ensure that beginning teachers quickly become effective educators, the German-speaking Community should consider concrete steps to further support teachers during the first years on the job. Helping new teachers in bridging the gap between theory and practice, dealing with workload challenges, improving classroom practice and management, and understanding the school culture is particularly important given the high share of teachers who entered the profession through alternative pathways or completed their ITE outside the Community. It would therefore be important to complement the support groups organised by the AHS with more continuous forms of support at the school level. A number of OECD countries, including the Flemish Community, Japan and Ontario (Canada), have introduced induction initiatives providing orientation, on-the-job training and mentoring for new teachers (see Chapter 4 for a detailed description). Plans to introduce systematic mentoring support (including training for mentors) in the German-speaking Community should be pursued as an important step in this direction.

To raise the quality of teaching in the German-speaking Community further, effective forms of continuing professional learning (CPL) will be critical. As it stands, teachers' level of engagement in professional learning beyond the mandatory school-wide training days is limited. Including teacher's engagement in continuing professional learning as a dimension of the professional standards discussed above would help to create a clear expectation that CPL is a core part of their practice. To increase teachers' sense of ownership over the training offer and to ensure that it matches teachers' needs, the Community should also consider how to involve them more actively in the development of the professional learning catalogue, for example by ensuring the representation of active teachers in the professional development commission.

To link teachers' professional learning more strongly to their individual development needs and those of the system, their schools and their students, the Community should strengthen the role of formative appraisal. Teachers at all levels of experience should receive regular feedback on their work and school leaders should use it as an opportunity to discuss teachers' goals and learning needs and create individual professional learning plans to address them. This would strengthen teachers' accountability while supporting them in their learning choices. There is also scope to review more systematically how the school-wide training days are used and how activities undertaken during this time can be linked effectively to schools' improvement plans. The skills that teachers acquire through their successful engagement in professional learning should be recognised and rewarded. As discussed further below, connecting professional learning to opportunities for career advancement could be an effective means to incentivise teachers' continuing improvement and ensure that highly effective teachers assume responsibilities in the school community that are concomitant with their skills.

In addition to setting clear expectations for teachers' engagement in professional learning, teachers should be provided with the time and resources needed to pursue both individual as well as collaborative forms of professional learning. Many OECD countries set aside such time for their teachers. In Singapore, for example, every teacher is given 100 hours per year to invest in training, with guidance for their development decisions and access to teacher networks. As a result, the pursuit of continuing learning has become a regular part of teachers' day-to-day work and is engrained in schools' shared vision of the profession. Even though Singapore does not require teachers to engage in CPL, it is one of the countries with the highest levels of participation in training.

Create the conditions for greater collaboration within and between schools to improve the quality of teaching and successfully implement a competency-oriented curriculum

The successful implementation of the competency-oriented core curricula will depend on the Community's ability to foster greater cooperation and exchange among teachers. The Community's core curricula describe the general and subject-specific competencies that students are expected to develop at key stages of their primary and secondary education. Teachers in each school are expected to work in teams and take these central core curricula as a basis to develop their own school-based curricula (*schulinternes curriculum*), defining the school's approach to specific subjects (*Fachcurricula*) in line with the school's educational project, as well as the school's approach to teaching inter-disciplinary competencies across subjects (*Teilcurricula*). The development of school-internal curricula and the integration of inter-disciplinary competencies will therefore only be effective if it is understood as a collective endeavour that all teachers in a school engage in, across subject lines. This would allow teachers to collaboratively tailor teaching contents and pedagogical approaches to the needs of their students.

According to evaluations conducted between 2016 and 2020, many schools had not yet developed school-based curricula and teachers had little confidence in working with the core curricula. Promoting teachers' work with the core curricula and fostering a culture of systematic collaboration in schools will take time and needs to be supported by pedagogical leadership and resources. The experience of OECD countries shows that collaboration and the implementation of new curricula is greatly facilitated if schools operate as learning organisations in which the importance of individual, collaborative and collective learning is recognised at all levels. To make professional learning a collaborative effort, schools should not only encourage teachers to act as multipliers passing on their learning from professional development courses, but to engage in regular peer observation or enquiry projects. Assigning subject team leaders or middle managers to focus on teacher collaboration and whole-of-school projects can be an effective strategy for secondary schools with sufficiently developed leadership structures. To be effective, collaboration needs to focus on improving the quality of teaching and requires dedicated time, protocols and processes to guide teachers' conversations and actions. Central authorities should support these efforts by strengthening school leaders' competencies to support collaboration, but also by offering technical support and developing protocols that schools can draw on.

Finding the time for collaboration can be difficult in a context of acute teacher shortages, but school leaders should seek to set aside dedicated time for collaboration and collaborative learning by co-ordinating teachers' non-teaching hours. In order to facilitate this process, the German-speaking Community should consider the benefits of employing teachers under a workload system that defines their overall working time. Conceiving of teachers' working time exclusively in terms of their teaching hours fails to provide formal recognition for the time that teachers spend on important tasks outside the classroom. At the same time, it can diminish school leaders' capacity to plan their teachers' time based on a holistic conception of their work. Shanghai, Austria and Ontario (Canada) offer examples of different approaches to creating more time for teachers to collaborate (see Chapter 4).

Reform the teacher recruitment process and service codes to enable school leaders to build successful teams, facilitate teacher mobility and create synergies across networks

The German-speaking Community should seek to harmonise teachers' service codes across school networks and modernise the recruitment process in GUW and OSU schools to enable school leaders to build effective teams of teachers. The Community emphasises the autonomy of school networks and school leaders to develop their own pedagogical profiles and approaches. To turn this pedagogical autonomy into practice, it is important for school leaders to create a good match between their schools' educational project and their teachers to ensure that they can contribute to their schools' vision and continuing improvement. The Community should therefore advance plans to allow school leaders, or school providers, to consider additional information to gauge the performance and motivation of applicants

as well as their fit with the school. This could involve conducting interviews, considering motivation statements or assigning greater weight to evaluation results. To limit the strain placed on schools' administrative capacity, some OECD countries mixed systems that combine a higher degree of school autonomy with elements of a centralised recruitment system. For example, schools could be allowed to express their preferences over a given number of candidates that are selected through a centralised process or to recruit a certain share of their teaching force locally (see Chapter 4).

Another source of inefficiency in the German-speaking Community's teacher recruitment system stems from its lack of a unified teacher service code. Making the service code and the selection and eligibility criteria for teaching positions consistent across providers would increase transparency and provide the basis for further synergies in the recruitment process across the three networks. A unified service code could, for example, facilitate the introduction of a common pool of substitute teachers serving schools of all three networks. To improve teachers' mobility in the first years of their careers, the Community should also consider recognising teachers' prior service across school networks, rather than requiring the 720 days of service needed for a permanent position to be accrued in schools of a single provider.

Expand elements of distributed leadership to strengthen school leaders' capacity for pedagogical leadership and create opportunities for professional growth

In order to successfully implement student-centred curricula and develop schools into learning organisations, the German-speaking Community will need to strengthen its schools' capacity for pedagogical leadership. Creating more opportunities for teachers – not only in secondary education – to assume responsibilities associated with formal career steps would facilitate distributed leadership by enabling principals to delegate certain aspects of their work to experienced teachers and focus on their core responsibilities. Creating deputy or middle manager roles in primary schools above a certain size and adding additional career steps in secondary schools would strengthen school leaders' ability to capitalise on teachers' skills, exercise autonomy in their differentiation of roles within the school while at the same time creating a pipeline for future school leaders. Better prospects for career progression could also improve teachers' long-term motivation and raise the profession's attractiveness for top-performing students considering initial teacher education.

Countries like Estonia and Singapore provide examples of how multi-stage career structures can be used to support teachers' professional growth (see Chapter 4). A reformed career structure in the German-speaking Community could build on existing roles, such as those of middle managers and subject team leaders, and should be associated with a corresponding salary progression. Different career stages should be linked to competency levels (e.g. corresponding to a differentiated set of teacher standards and including a dimension for leadership competency) and teachers' advancement should be based on merit, rather than their seniority. Career advancement could be based on a voluntary system of registration statuses that teachers need to obtain to apply for a promotion and periodically renew. The decision on teachers' career progression or certification for professional advancement should have an external component and a greater degree of formality than teachers' regular formative appraisal, in order to ensure fairness across schools. While the process can be mostly school-based and led by the school leader (or another member of the management group), the inspectorate or an accredited external evaluator with expertise in the same area as the appraised teacher should be involved.

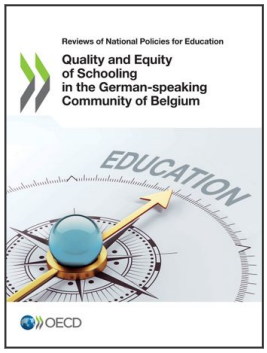
Strengthen schools' capacity for self-evaluation and student-centred school improvement

A more distributed and strengthened leadership could also strengthen schools' capacity to engage in self-evaluation and collective school improvement efforts. Since 2009, the German-speaking Community has made significant progress in fostering school improvement by introducing regular internal and external school evaluations. Nevertheless, schools' capacity to engage in self-evaluation and continuous work on

their development remains uneven. To address this challenge, the Community should not only seek to strengthen schools' internal capacity, but also that of the external support services that assist schools in following-up on evaluation results. To this end, the government should pursue plans to create an institute for school development (*Institut für Schulentwicklung in Ostbelgien*, ISEO). The institute could more closely integrate the work of the school development counselling service and the pedagogical advisory services, which would create synergies, facilitate their collaboration and make it easier for schools to access the help they need. In the process, education authorities should seek to identify where additional expertise is required (e.g. in the areas of pre-primary education or special education needs) and seek to strengthen the support services' capacity accordingly.

International evidence suggests that school evaluation and improvement systems based on "internal accountability" are more effective than compliance-oriented ones since they encourage teachers and schools to take ownership of their school improvement and exercise agency to make such improvement happen, including through professional learning. External evaluations should therefore place particular emphasis on schools' processes for self-evaluations, formative staff-appraisal and development planning and evaluate whether they use them effectively, rather than focusing on compliance alone. Where needed, targeted, intensive follow-up support (from the school development counselling services, pedagogical advisory services or others) should be readily available for schools to help them implement their development evaluation plans and address the needs identified in the evaluation process.

In the longer-term, the German-speaking Community could consider moving towards a risk-based approach to school evaluation by reducing the frequency and intensity of evaluations for high-performing schools. An example for this approach can be seen in the Netherlands, where the inspectorate acknowledges the progress made by schools with strong self-evaluation systems while focusing the evaluation's resources and follow-up support on schools that are most in need of rapid improvement (see Chapter 4). To strengthen schools' capacity for self-evaluation, the German-speaking Community should refine its leadership training and accessible resources to help leaders develop and use multi-year school development plans to advance their "school project", to place the quality of teaching at the centre, and to collect and use relevant data to support the process. A greater emphasis on collaboration, distributed leadership and continuing professional learning in schools (see above) would complement and support this process, as would strengthening inter-school collaboration, e.g. by pairing experienced school leaders with less experienced peers.



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