

PRESS RELEASE

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Report to the Flemish Parliament

School boards in compulsory education

An analysis by the Court of Audit shows that good cooperation between school boards and school directors is related to better follow-up of pupils and higher quality of care and equal educational opportunities (EEO) policies, participation policies and the 'community school' policy (working together with the neighborhood, parents and local education, culture, sports, youth, childcare and welfare partners). In general, chairmen of the school boards and school directors estimate their cooperation fairly positively, but the degree of cooperation decreases with larger boards that manage more schools. In addition, school boards in compulsory education tend to lack expertise in the policy areas of care and EEO, pedagogics and participation.

Introduction

Because of the freedom of education, school boards in Flanders can take very different forms. The Court of Audit has investigated the characteristics of the school boards in terms of composition and operation, how they implement policy and to what extent there is a connection between policy implementation and certain quality aspects of education.

Individual characteristics

An executive board consists on average of 8 members. 44.4% of the board members have management experience, 35.5% have teaching experience. 32% are female and 3.8% are remunerated. 11% of the boards do not have any board members with teaching experience.

Because of their ultimate responsibility for the schools, the presence of expertise in the boards is indispensable. The Court of Audit asked the presidents to assess whether their board has sufficient expertise in 9 policy areas. The 3 policy areas in which expertise is most often lacking are the care and EEO policy (lacking in 31% of the school boards), the pedagogic policy (21%) and the participation policy (19%).

Implementation of policy

Scientific research shows how important good cooperation between board and director is for the proper functioning of the schools. In general, both presidents and directors estimate this cooperation as fairly positive, but directors did give lower scores. 5 to 17% of them gave a negative opinion because they are not sufficiently involved in the decisions of the school

board. The degree of cooperation is higher with school boards that govern only one school, but decreases with larger boards.

Decision rates of boards differ greatly between policy domains. Almost all boards systematically make decisions about financial and material policy. A large majority also decides on strategic policy and personnel policy. Only half of the boards systematically decide on participation policy and quality policy. The policy areas in which school boards make the least decisions are pedagogical policy and care and EEO policy.

In terms of task definition, a distinction occurs between policy-making boards (board takes initiative), supervisory boards (school takes initiative and must account for itself at the school board) and empowering boards (school takes initiative, school board takes knowledge and approves). A majority of the boards are policy-making as to the strategic policy, the financial and materials policies, and the policy on external relations. With regard to pedagogical policy and care and EEO policy, they rather have a supervisory or ratifying role. Chairmen and directors' perceptions of the board's task differ to a large extent. In general, presidents see the board more as policy-determining than directors do.

Relationship between policy implementation and educational quality

The Court checked whether school board's policy management is related to the quality of education. The analysis showed that good cooperation between director and board is connected to a better follow-up of pupils and a higher quality in care and EEO policy, participation policy and community school policy. In addition, a link appeared to exist between the extent to which school boards make decisions themselves rather than systematically delegating them, and the quality of the participation policy. Because the governance context is not always the same, other connections may show within specific populations or contexts. For primary schools in free subsidized education, the Court's analysis showed, for example, that certain combinations of aspects of policy-making are related to better learning performance. Further research is advisable on this point.

Response of the minister

The minister confirmed the importance of sufficient expertise within school boards and of cooperation between school board and management, but pointed out that the support a school receives from its school board is equally important. Consultation with all stakeholders and any additional research can certainly contribute to taking crucial steps towards more good governance in education.

Information for the press

The Court of Audit exerts an external control on the financial operations of the Federal State, the Communities, the Regions and the provinces. It contributes to improving public governance by transmitting to the parliamentary assemblies, to the managers and to the audited services any useful and reliable information resulting from a contradictory examination. As a collateral body of the Parliament, the Court performs its missions independently of the authorities it controls.

The audit report on *School boards in compulsory education* has been sent to the Flemish Parliament. The full version and this press release can be found on the Court's website: www.courtsofaudit.be.