

# **COUNTRY SYSTEM MAPPING**

## **Country Report: Belgium (Flemish community)**

**European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education**



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## INTRODUCTION

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The goal of the Country System Mapping (CSM) activity is to identify, map and analyse the key features that impact the effective implementation of inclusive education policy in practice in all Agency member countries' education systems. In a departure from previous thematic activities undertaken by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency), CSM considers the **whole** education system from the perspective of implementing policy for inclusive education in practice. However, within this system-wide view, there is a focus on the specific priorities Representative Board members (RBs) have already identified in relation to monitoring and evaluation, cross-sector working and quality assurance.

The main output from the CSM work is a systematic mapping of information on each country's education system.

Information from the individual CSM Country Reports has been analysed in two ways:

- **Thematic Analysis** to highlight issues (challenges and opportunities) emerging from the reports to use as the starting point for the Agency's Thematic Country Cluster Activities (TCCA).

Challenges for inclusion are defined as things the country needs to work on to reach an inclusive education system. Strengths for inclusion are things that encourage and reinforce inclusive practice in the country and could potentially be shown as an example to other countries.

- **Mapping** to inform TCCA groupings, based on the system structures and processes countries have (or do not have) in common.

The agreed goal for the mapping element of the CSM analysis work was to highlight parameters, or comparative factors, that indicate which country systems are structured and/or working in different – or similar – ways.

The information from the CSM work will be used within the remainder of the [Multi-Annual Work Programme 2021–2027](#) (MAWP). As of autumn 2024, country cluster activities will be organised which are closely aligned to individual country approaches to key issues for inclusive education, as well as system structures and processes countries have in common.



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## Work within a shared vision for inclusive education systems

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All Agency work is aligned with the [position on inclusive education systems](#). This agreed position states that the ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that:

All learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers ([European Agency, 2022, p. 1](#))<sup>1</sup>.

Agency work focuses on supporting the development of inclusive education systems in member countries to ensure every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This aim is directed at all learners. However, all aspects of Agency work clearly recognise that some groups of learners face obstacles and barriers that mean they should be considered **learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education in mainstream schools in their local community, alongside their friends and peers**.

UNESCO identifies the possible obstacles and barriers to education learners may face as arising from:

... gender, remoteness, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion and other beliefs and attitudes ([UNESCO, 2020, p. 4](#))<sup>2</sup>.

Many learners may face a combination of these factors and the intersectional (inter-connected) nature of learners' needs must be acknowledged. Every learner has their own unique experiences of discrimination and/or barriers to learning. Everything and anything that can marginalise learners and increase their chances of exclusion from mainstream inclusive education must be understood and recognised.

All Agency member countries are committed to working towards ensuring more inclusive education systems. They do so in different ways, depending on their past and current contexts and histories. Inclusive education systems are a vital component within the wider aspiration of more socially inclusive societies that all countries align themselves with, both ethically and politically. However, all Agency work clearly recognises that countries have differences in their ways of thinking about, identifying and making provision for different groups of learners who may be considered vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

All countries have undergone key conceptual changes in their thinking and policy priorities for developments as they move towards inclusive education as an approach that ensures high-quality education for all learners. Across countries, the first shift was made from the concept of special educational needs to special needs education. This shift represented a focus away from the learner (identified as having special educational needs) towards a focus on the provision they receive (special needs education for learners who experience difficulties at school). The term 'special needs education' has also widened the focus

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<sup>1</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022. *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems*. Odense, Denmark

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, 2020. *Global Education Monitoring Report: Inclusion and education: all means all*. Paris: UNESCO



beyond learners with disabilities to include learners who appeared to be failing in school for a wide variety of reasons.

It is worth emphasising here that there have never been agreed definitions of the concepts of special educational needs or special needs education that can be consistently used across countries. The groups of learners considered as having special educational needs which require additional provision largely differ across countries.

The most recent shifts emphasise a move away from a concern with types of special needs or the categories a learner may or may not fall into, towards thinking of inclusion and inclusive education as an approach for all learners. They emphasise the barriers experienced by learners and focus overall on learners who may be vulnerable to exclusion from educational opportunities for different reasons.

Agency work focuses on supporting the development of inclusive education systems in its member countries to ensure every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This aim is directed at all learners, while recognising the need to specifically address learners who may be vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

## Overview of the Country System Mapping

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The information collected in the CSM activity aims to provide evidence of and reflection on **where countries currently are** in their inclusive thinking, policy and provision for all learners, but in particular for those learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

CSM work focuses on the **whole** education system and how certain structures, mechanisms and processes may impact on the implementation of policy for inclusive education in practice. It aims to get insights into how the needs of all learners – including individuals or groups of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education – are being considered. Many questions refer to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education. Countries have opportunities to clarify what 'learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education' means for them and their systems.

However, it is acknowledged that it may not be possible for countries to provide information covering all learners and all learner groups.

The questions specifically focus on four priorities RBs have identified for wider future Agency work in relation to:

- Monitoring and evaluation
- Cross-sector working
- Quality assurance
- Effective policy implementation.

There are six main sections:

Section 1. Background to the inclusive education system

Section 2. Overview of the education system

Section 3. Legislative and policy framework



Section 4. System governance

Section 5. Quality assurance and accountability

Section 6. Stakeholder collaboration, co-operation and effective communication

Where countries have provided additional comments and reflections, these are included in a separate Section 7.

In each of these sections, relevant information was collected covering International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 02 (pre-primary education) to 3 (upper-secondary education).

All questions were rephrased into statements for the purpose of this report.

### **System description**

Sections 1 to 6 include specific questions that aim to provide a factual description of key aspects of the legislation and policy framework for inclusive education in the country. The system information aims to accurately describe the relevant policy frameworks in countries.

Different types of questions are used to collect information that describes important system features – structures, mechanisms and processes – relating to governance, monitoring, quality assurance and collaboration. The descriptive information includes sources of original material and, where possible, is supported with quotes and citations from relevant policy documents and published work.

The descriptive information will be analysed to highlight parameters, or comparative factors, that indicate how countries are structured and/or working. This mapping will be used to inform country cluster groupings based on system structures and processes that countries have in common.

The descriptive information will also be used to prepare thematic cluster activities with Agency member countries. These activities will elaborate and collect even more detailed country information for the different priority areas from 2023 onwards.





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## SECTION 1. BACKGROUND TO THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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This section provides key background information in relation to inclusive education in the country.

### 1.1 Overview of the historical development of inclusive education

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**1914:** Belgium was one of the last European countries to introduce compulsory education, 25 years after the Child Labour Act. From 6 to 14 years of age, all children must receive free education at school or at home. Household education becomes compulsory for all girls. The Compulsory Education Act suspends compulsory education for children who, due to 'physical defects or feeble-mindedness', cannot attend school if it is more than 4 km from their home. The law also states that 'abnormal children' must be placed in separate classes.

**1920–1970:** Because the existing possibilities are insufficient, subsidies are introduced for charitable institutions to admit 'abnormal children' (deaf, blind, mentally ill). This gives rise to medical–educational institutes (MPI) to organise vocational or professional education. At the beginning of the 1930s, compulsory education for 'abnormal children' was extended. During the 1950s, the language used in legislation changes. A law of 1953 introduces education for 'socially, physically, and mentally retarded people' and establishes special schools and curricula. In 1968, already 46,000 learners are in some form of special education. The need for a specific legislation on special education becomes urgent.

**1970–1980:** The Act on special education defines admission procedures; in 1978, the classification with the known eight types of education and four forms of training is established (see section 1.2 below). Special education is open to children and young people from 3 to 21 years old who can follow an education, but for whom mainstream school is not able to provide an appropriate education. Special schools are separate from mainstream schools. Sometimes they are linked to other social and educational institutions for 'the disabled'. Children who are unable to attend school due to a disability receive home education from the nearest school in four teaching periods per week called 'Permanent Education at Home' (POAH).

**1980:** The law on special education is extended with the concept of 'integrated education' (GON). Within this system, mainstream and special schools work together to make (learning) activities in mainstream school available to children with disabilities. This was achieved with the contribution of staff from special education such as teachers, speech therapists and physiotherapists. This support (two or four hours a week) could take various forms: help for the learner, support for the parents, support and explanation to teachers, creation of specific material, etc. The idea is that with this support they can achieve the same attainment levels as their classmates. However, GON education was only open to learners who can follow the general curriculum (children with a physical, visual or hearing impairment, social–emotional problems, learning problems or mild



cognitive impairments). Moreover, learners with mild cognitive impairments, severe emotional or behavioural problems, or severe learning disabilities were only eligible for GON if they had previously attended nine months of full-time classes in special education.

**1994:** Belgium/Flanders signs the Salamanca statement but the 'integration' of learners with disabilities in mainstream education was only extended to learners with moderate or severe cognitive disabilities (ION) in 2003. In the ION system, the child attends mainstream education and based on an integration plan, a different level (different from the general curriculum) of learning goals needs to be achieved. The emphasis is on social integration. The support consisted of 5.5 teaching hours by a special needs teacher. The ION project was limited to 100 learners.

**2002:** The decree on Equal Educational Opportunities (GOK), aims to combat exclusion, social segregation and discrimination and therefore pays special attention to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The realisation of equal opportunities in education is based on three pillars: the 'right to enrolment', the local consultation platforms (LOPs) that supervise this, and the integrated support policy. The 'Equal opportunities and equal treatment policy' of 2008 prohibited discrimination based on disability in education. This includes the right of the person with a disability to subscribe to mainstream education, unless it is demonstrated that the accommodations needed would constitute a disproportionate burden for the school. A so-called 'capacity/capability assessment' had to be done in consultation with the parents and with the Centre for Pupil Guidance (CLB). At least five factors had to be taken into consideration: the parents' expectations; the learner's support needs; an assessment of the school's support base in terms of care; the support available within and outside the school; the parents' involvement.

**2007:** The 'Learning support framework' promises a reorganisation of special needs education that would combine resources of GOK, GON and ION as well as special education. The main goal was to integrate two educational systems (mainstream and special) in one, but although the proposal was approved in June 2007, it was not pursued by the next government and never implemented.

**2009:** Belgium/Flanders ratifies the UN Convention on the rights of people with disabilities (CRPD) and optional protocol.

**2014:** The M-decree enshrines the right to reasonable accommodations, the right for learners with a special education registration report to enrol in mainstream schools, and the right to support. Although the M-decree is a decree about special needs education, it is considered the first structural step towards inclusive education for all children.

**2017:** The 'support model' rolls out. The model organises additional support for inclusive education. It replaces the GON and ION system, and covers the possible outflow of learners from special to mainstream education.

**11 March 2021:** the House of Representatives approves the text submitted by the Senate containing a specific provision for persons with disabilities: In Title II of the Constitution, an article 22b is inserted, reading:

Art. 22b. Every person with a disability has the right to full inclusion in society, including the right to reasonable accommodation. The law, federate law or rule referred to in Article 134 guarantees the protection of this right.



## 1.2 Legislation and policy definitions linked to key concepts within inclusive education systems

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### **Inclusive education**

No definition.

### **Special needs education**

SNE refers to special needs education in separate schools as well as to support for learners with SEN in mainstream schools.

Decree on primary education of 25 February 1997, art 9 and 10 and the Codex Secondary Education of 17 December 2010, art. 259

Art 9: [Decreet basisonderwijs](#)

Art. 10: [Decreet basisonderwijs](#)

Art. 259: [Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende de codificatie betreffende het secundair onderwijs](#)

Learners with an official decision of SEN are entitled to follow the common curriculum in mainstream schools or an individual adapted curriculum in mainstream or special schools (buitengewoon onderwijs). Mainstream schools with learners with an official decision of SEN can receive support (Circular NO/2017/02; [European Agency EASIE data](#)).

### **Learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education**

In legislation there is not a definition of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education, but it does identify different groups of learners who are vulnerable during their school career.

**Newly-arrived learners with a foreign mother tongue** can attend reception classes and receive extra support in a follow-up year.

**Disadvantaged learners, migrant learners and learners from ethnic cultural minorities** may be prioritised at registration. Schools that welcome a minimum number of learners from these groups receive extra support within the framework of the equal educational opportunities policy.

Decree on primary education of 25 February 1997, art 3, 4<sup>o</sup>quarter and art. 133 and the Codex Secondary Education of 17 December 2010, art. 3, 2<sup>o</sup>/1 and art. 242.

Art. 3: [Decreet basisonderwijs](#)

Art. 133: [Decreet basisonderwijs](#)

Art. 3: [Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende de codificatie betreffende het secundair onderwijs](#)

Art. 242: [Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende de codificatie betreffende het secundair onderwijs](#)



The legal definition of learners vulnerable to exclusion from education is found in laws and policies. The Flemish Parliament Act of 10 July 2008 ([European Agency, Country Information; CPRA](#), p. 5).

Decree on Basic Education, art. 138–139 sexies decies, and art. 153 septies; Codex Secondary Education, art. 224–241/1 for mainstream secondary education, art. 317–322/1 for special secondary education ([European Agency, Country Information](#)).

Children with SEN, SNE and inclusion: [European Agency, Country Information](#).

### **Learners with special educational needs**

Learners with special educational needs are learners with long-term and important participation problems due to the interplay between:

- one or more functional limitations on a mental, psychological, physical or sensory level;
- restrictions on carrying out activities;
- personal and external factors.

Decree on primary education, art 3, 28°: [Decreet basisonderwijs](#)

Codex Secondary Education, art 3, 17°: [Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende de codificatie betreffende het secundair onderwijs](#)

Learners with disabilities are classified into eight types based on the nature of the (main) disability:

- Type ‘*basisaanbod*’ (basic support): for children/young people who are unable to follow the mainstream curriculum, nor an individual adapted curriculum in a mainstream school;
- Type 2: for children/young people with a mental disability
- Type 3: for children/young people with an emotional or behavioural disorder who do not have a mental disability
- Type 4: for children/young people with a motor disability
- Type 5: for children/young people who have been admitted to hospital, a residential setting or who are staying in a preventorium
- Type 6: for visually impaired children/young people
- Type 7: for children/young people with hearing impairments or speech or language impairments
- Type 9: for children/young people with autism spectrum disorder and who have no mental disability.

In secondary education, learners with disabilities are classified not only on type of disability, but also on the training form they are able to participate in:

- Training form 1: social adjustment, provides social education with a view to integration into a protected environment.



- Training form 2: social adjustment and suitability for work, provides general and social education and work training with a view to integration into a protected living and working environment.
- Training form 3: vocational education, provides social and vocational training with a view to integration into a mainstream living and working environment. Various training courses are organised.
- Training form 4: general, vocational, artistic and technical education, prepares for higher education and integration into active life. The courses of study correspond to the courses of study from mainstream full-time secondary education.

Sources: [M-decree on Measures for learners with special educational needs, art. 10 and art. 21](#); [Circular NO/2017/02](#); [European Agency, Country Information](#); [Eurydice 12.1](#)

### **1.3 Individuals or groups of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education focused on in the report**

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Children with disadvantaged backgrounds (migration, language, low socio-economic status) and/or mild learning disorders; children with specific disabilities (cognitive, visual, auditory, physical, multi); children with socio-emotional and/or behaviour problems; neurodiversity.

### **1.4 Development of thinking around learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education**

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In general, there is little evolution in the ideas around groups of learners vulnerable to exclusion because segregation of and exclusion from mainstream education is considered (by policy and in practice) in the best interest of that specific child and by extension for the other children, teachers and the whole school.

However, one can notice the intentions to change some ideas concerning the exclusion–inclusion divide influenced and guided by certain acts and decrees, but with little success.

#### **Concerning children with disadvantaged backgrounds (migration, language, low socio-economic status) and/or mild learning disorders**

Spurred on by the decree on Equal Educational Opportunities (GOK, 2002), an education-priority policy that specifically aims at disadvantaged 'migrant' learners and a focus on more care to improve the position of disadvantaged 'native' learners is generally accepted in mainstream schools. Although a categorisation of 'diversity' (native/of foreign origin) typifies the target group policy inherent in the integration perspective on education that prevails to this day.

For mainstream primary education, see the SES policy as of 2012. Every learner who scores well on one of the three SES indicators (the educational level of the mother, the receipt of an education allowance, or the home language is not Dutch) generates extra teaching hours for the school. The financing is integrated in the mainstream framework and schools must develop a care and GOK policy.



The GOK decree also provides additional hours to conduct a care policy in the school. The basic idea is that the mainstream school is accessible to all children and is responsible for the education of all children. Primary schools can count on an extra set of hours depending on the number of learners. The assumption is that every school has 10% of learners who temporarily need extra care. The school can decide to assign someone the position of care co-ordinator or to work with a care team. They are responsible for the co-ordination of all care initiatives at the school level, the support of the teacher's actions and the guidance of learners. This is called 'broadening care' and the objective is to stop the number of referrals to special education and include learners with learning difficulties linked to deprivation or an immigrant background.

Nevertheless, the socio-economic background is a determining factor in segregation at all levels of education. Analysing data shows that:

- Children of low-educated mothers are ten times more likely to end up in special education than children of highly educated mothers.
- The chance of being directed to special education is five to six times higher for poor children than for the average Flemish child. In special education, 54% of learners fall under the GOK or SES indicators.
- 77% of learners in special education are children from working-class families.
- 85% of learners in education for children with serious emotional or behavioural problems (type 3) are boys.
- Children with a migrant background or from under-privileged families are more likely to have an ADHD or ASD diagnosis.
- More trivial factors also play a role: by the second year of school, 20% of children born in November and December have been kept back or referred, compared to 6.34% of learners born in January to March.

### **Concerning children with specific disabilities (cognitive, visual, auditive, physical, multi)**

The M-decree introduced an 'Action-oriented assessment' to change the psycho-medical view and approach on disability and learning disorders in the Child Guidance Centres (CLB). Conforming to the WHO definition of disability that a disability is the result of the interaction between a person with an impairment and an inaccessible and non-adaptive environment, the CLBs changed from a static to a dynamic approach of assessment and diagnoses. The idea is that a school can apply for additional support based on a statement (motivated report). This statement must contain an evaluation of the teaching context and the reasonable accommodations offered and an assessment of the actions for the teacher, teaching context or child.

The shift towards an action-oriented assessment and approach depends on the knowledge and training of the CLB staff, and the culture in the CLB towards inclusion. The full implementation of this approach is the case in some CLBs for some staff, but not in all nor for all. CLBs have a leading role when it comes to encouraging schools towards more inclusion because they must write and agree on the statement that gives access to segregated special education.



Analysing the statements that activate additional support or give access to special education shows that the psycho-medical way of thinking is still dominant. The reasons and motivations in the statements are built around disorders and labels, information about the learning context is lacking, an analysis of desired actions and evaluation is often missing.

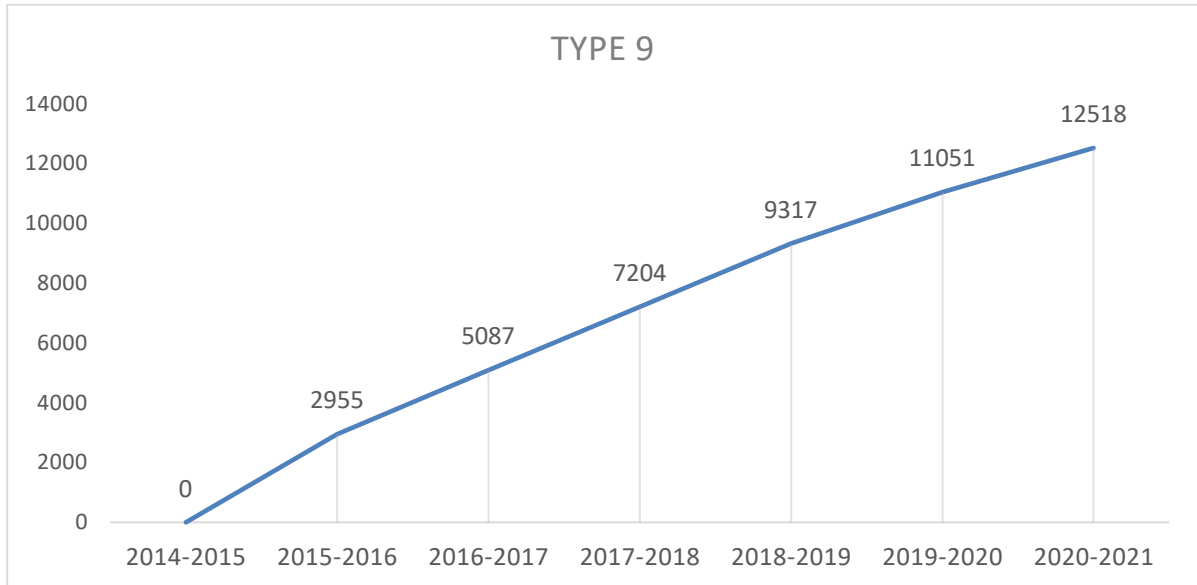
### **Concerning children with socio-emotional and/or behaviour problems**

One of the effects of action-oriented assessment and the implementation of the M-decree is that psycho-medical diagnoses are not necessary to get support. Figures in the 2018 report of the CLB show that the number of registrations for behavioural problems has increased by 32% in one school year. By abandoning a diagnosis for behavioural problems and the creation of access to support for this target group in 2017/2018 (support model) in mainstream education, the barrier for teachers to ask for support was lowered. On the other hand, the number of learners with dyscalculia and dyslexia fell by 14 per cent in one school year. This has to do with a more inclusive approach in the classroom: if a teacher teaches in a more diverse way, there are fewer children with 'problems', because they no longer fall outside the norm. 'Thinking in labels is gradually giving way to thinking in terms of concrete educational needs', the annual report continues. Many of the measures that a teacher can take do not support one or more individual learners but benefit the entire class group.

### **Concerning neurodiversity**

The M-decree broadens (segregated) special education with a new type of education for normally gifted children with an autism spectrum disorder (type 9). Until then, these children were spread out over different types of special education and mainstream schools without adequate support, unless they were entitled for GON support. As a result, the number of learners in special education type 9 boomed spectacularly since the M-decree entered into force, and it increases every year (see Figure 1 below). Following the creation of type 9, there was a decrease of learners with autism in other types of special education. This decrease did not compensate, however, for the increase of learners in type 9.

Supply creates its own demand. It must be clear that such an explosion is only possible when a psycho-medical diagnosis provides the ticket to special education, and action-oriented assessment and reasonable accommodation are put aside.



**Figure 1. Evolution learners in type 9 special education from the start of the M-decree**

## **1.5 Future education system developments that may impact positively or negatively on inclusive education**

Five years after the M-decree, the Flemish government takes a step back. They promote a realistic and pragmatic realisation of inclusive education: ‘Mainstream education if possible, special education if necessary’.

The coalition agreement 2019–2024 states that:

the M-decree must be abolished and replaced by a ‘guidance decree for children with care needs’. For many learners with special needs, special education remains the most appropriate form of support. Given the high level of expertise, we continue to give special needs education a fully fledged place in the educational provision. We reinforce the quality.

The new decree will be called ‘The Learning Support Decree’ (LSD) and is now in preparation. The decree wants to increase the quality of education, but also guarantee workability for schools and teachers. It does so by focusing on strengthening mainstream education, learning support and special education. The Flemish Government aspires to:

- a strong primary care and increased care in mainstream education;
- a sustainable learning support model with appropriate employment conditions for support staff;
- a fully fledged place and a strengthening of the quality of special education.

For mainstream education, the following targets are set:

1. All schools realise an effective policy on learner guidance. The school team has the necessary competences to realise this.





2. The pedagogical guidance services (PBD) and centres for pupil guidance (CLB) are reinforced on learner guidance, with effect on the classroom floor. They give increased attention to schools that are lagging behind.
3. The Education Inspectorate focuses on the quality of learner guidance in all its inspections and imposes a guidance process on schools and CLBs which do not provide effective learner guidance.
4. Teachers recognise easy learners – the gifted and exceptionally talented – and make education sufficiently challenging for them.
5. The mainstream and special schools (together) make maximum use of their responsibility in the field of guidance of the individual learner.

Specifically on the concept of learning support, the following goals are set:

1. A clear and broadly supported reference framework for quality support ensures a well-founded and uniform approach in the Flemish educational field.
2. The Education Inspectorate effectively monitors the quality of learning support by the inspection of learning support centres.
3. The support is provided to learners and their teachers and school teams who need learning support to extend care or an individually adapted curriculum.
4. Learning Support Centres have effective learning support, staffing, professionalisation and financial policy.
5. The delivery of learning support to mainstream schools is based on a clear and simple model.
6. The learning support team has sufficient disability-specific, pedagogical, inclusion and coaching expertise, which they develop together in an accessible, cross-network and regional way.
7. The flow of information and co-operation between mainstream education, the learning support centre, the pupil guidance centre and parents is focused on learning support.

Special needs education will be strengthened by following objectives:

1. Special needs education has to realise targeted, adapted education with a focus on learning gains and development.
2. The Special Education Department and the CLB must support the effective functioning in the schools and give increased attention to the schools that are lagging behind. The Education Inspectorate monitors the quality and imposes a guidance plan in case of shortcomings.
3. We make optimal use of the disability-specific expertise in special needs education in all Flemish education and for all learners.
4. Schools for mainstream and special education (together) make maximum use of their responsibilities in terms of support for individual learners, with special attention paid to the possibility of learners returning from special to mainstream education.



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The Learning Support Decree will go into force in the schoolyear 2023/24 and will have a serious impact on the actual and future inclusion of children with special needs and/or disabilities.



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## SECTION 2. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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This section provides information on the structures and features of the whole education system that influence the development and implementation of inclusive education in the country.

### 2.1 Overview of the education system

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In Belgium, the Communities are responsible for education, with the exception of three competences which remain a federal matter:

- the determination of the beginning and the end of compulsory education;
- the minimum requirements for the issuing of diplomas;
- the regulation of retirement for employees in the educational system.

In Flanders, the Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for all stages of education and training starting from pre-primary education.

Education in Belgium is compulsory from 5 until 18. Compulsory education, however, does not equal the duty to attend school. Parents may choose home schooling for their children.

A learner must attend full-time compulsory education until the age of 15. From 15 onwards, students may engage in part-time schooling and opt for a structured learning path which combines part-time vocational education in an educational institution with part-time employment.

In Belgium, freedom of education is a constitutional right. Every (legal) person may organise education and establish schools to that aim. The government has the duty to organise non-denominational education.

The constitution also guarantees a freedom of school choice for parents. Parents and children must have access to a school of their choice within reasonable distance of their residence.

In Flanders, school governing boards hold the responsibility over one or more schools. They have a wide autonomy and can decide freely on:

- teaching methods;
- philosophy of life;
- curricula (with respect to the attainment targets and development goals decided by the Flemish Parliament);
- timetables;
- staff appointments.

Education and training organised by the government is called 'official education' (*officieel onderwijs*); education and training organised by a private person or organisation is known as 'free education' (*vrij onderwijs*) or government-aided private education.



A small number of schools are not recognised by the government. These private schools do not receive funding from the government.

In Flanders there are three educational networks:

- GO! Education is the official education organised by the Flemish Community. The constitution prescribes a duty of neutrality for GO! Education.
- Government-aided public education comprises schools run by the municipal or provincial authorities.
- Government-aided private education is organised by a private person or organisation. The network consists primarily of Catholic schools. As well as denominational schools, this category includes schools not linked to a religion, e.g. alternative schools (on the basis of the ideas of Freinet, Montessori or Steiner) which apply specific teaching methods.

The school boards of an educational network may join an umbrella organisation. This association represents the school boards in government consultations and offers services to their schools such as drafting the curricula and timetables.

Elementary education (*basisonderwijs*) comprises both pre-primary education (*kleuteronderwijs*) and primary education (*lager onderwijs*).

Pre-primary education is accessible for children from 2.5 to 6. Although it is not obligatory for children up until 5 years old, almost all children participate in pre-primary education.

Primary education is targeted at children from 6 to 12 years old and comprises six consecutive school years. A child usually starts primary education when they are 6 years old and thus obliged to engage in education.

Secondary education (*secundair onderwijs*) is organised for youngsters from 12 to 18. Full-time secondary education contains three stages and various types of education.

Each stage consists of two grades. In the third stage of vocational secondary education, the successful completion of a third grade is necessary to obtain the certificate of secondary education. In the first stage of secondary education, a common curriculum is offered. Learners make a choice of study only at the start of the second stage.

From the second stage onwards, four different types of education are offered. In Flanders a learner chooses a course of study within one of the following types of education:

1. General secondary education (GSE), which focuses on broad general education. It does not prepare learners for a specific profession, but rather lays a firm foundation for higher education.
2. In technical secondary education (TSE), attention goes to general and technical–theoretical subjects. After TSE, a youngster may practice a profession or transfer to higher education. This type of education also contains practical training.
3. Secondary education in the arts combines a broad general education with an active practice of art. After secondary education in the arts, a youngster may practice a profession or transfer to higher education.



4. Vocational secondary education (VSE) is a practice-oriented type of education in which the youngster receives general education but the focus primarily lies on learning a specific profession.

In Belgium, a certificate of upper secondary education grants unrestricted access to higher education.

In technical secondary education and secondary education in the arts, labour market-oriented programmes can be organised after the second grade of the third stage. Since 2009–2010, these programmes are grouped under the heading of ‘secondary-after-secondary’ (*secundair-na-secundair*, or *Se-n-Se*). *Se-n-Se* programmes last one to three semesters and are organised by schools of secondary education. After successfully completing a *Se-n-Se* programme, a learner is granted a certificate.

Besides mainstream education, there also exists special needs (pre-) primary and secondary education. Special education (*buitengewoon onderwijs*) is organised for children who need temporary or permanent specific support because of a physical or mental disability, serious behavioural or emotional problems or severe learning disabilities (see section 1.3 above).

On 12 March 2014, the Flemish Parliament approved a parliamentary act on measures for learners with specific needs (M-decreet) with the aim to make education more inclusive. The act contains measures which allow learners with specific educational needs to participate fully, effectively and on an equal basis in mainstream schools and classrooms.

In a **Centre for Part-time Education** ([Centrum voor Deeltijds Onderwijs](#)), learners take classes for 15 hours a week. These classes are supplemented with working experience which matches the programme. Learners who are not yet ready to work in the mainstream economic circuit may fill their remaining 13 hours with a preparatory pathway or a bridging project with a recognised promoter, or with a personal development pathway in a **Centre for Part-time Training** ([Centrum voor Deeltijdse Vorming](#)).

In Flanders, apprenticeships are organised in a **SYNTRA training centre** ([SYNTRA opleidingscentrum](#)). SYNTRA is the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training. In the case of an apprenticeship, learners enter in a learning agreement which provides:

- four days of practical training in a small to medium-sized enterprise or with a self-employed person;
- one day of theoretical training a week in a SYNTRA training centre.

Source: *Eurydice – Belgium – Flemish Community*

Since the introduction of the parliamentary act on learners with specific educational needs in September 2015, more learners with specific educational needs take classes in mainstream education. When these learners follow the mainstream programme, they can obtain the same qualifications as the other learners. Learners who follow a curriculum that is adopted to their personal needs receive a certificate of completion with a list of competences they obtained (Codex Secondary Education, art. 115, § 1; [CPRA](#)). At the same time and since the school year 2018/2019, more learners with SEN are enrolled in special schools.



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## 2.2 Specific features that are present within the education system

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**Early tracking of learners into a particular educational pathway (i.e. streaming learners by abilities into different types of provision or school; this includes placing children into separate schools)**

With the separate structure of special schools (pre-primary, primary and secondary education), a substantial number of learners are subject to early tracking (52,115 – 4.32% – learners as at 1/2/2022). In special secondary education, there is a division of learners in four training forms (see section 1.2 above), as a kind of tracking.

In the first stage of secondary education, a common curriculum is offered. Learners make a choice of study only at the start of the second stage.

From the second stage onwards, four different types of education are offered. In Flanders, a learner chooses a course of study within one of the following types of education:

1. General secondary education (GSE), which focuses on broad general education. It does not prepare learners for a specific profession, but rather lays a firm foundation for higher education.
2. In technical secondary education (TSE), attention goes to general and technical–theoretical subjects. After TSE, a youngster may practice a profession or transfer to higher education. This type of education also contains practical training.
3. Secondary education in the arts combines a broad general education with an active practice of art. After secondary education in the arts, a youngster may practice a profession or transfer to higher education.
4. Vocational secondary education (VSE) is a practice-oriented type of education in which the youngster receives general education but the focus primarily lies on learning a specific profession.

Source: *Eurydice – Belgium – Flemish Community*

The support model supports mainstream schools to guide learners with special educational needs within the school (54,019 – 4.48% – learners in mainstream education as at 1/2/2022). When learners cannot follow the mainstream curriculum, they get a statement from the pupil guidance centre, on the basis of which parents can choose either an individually adapted curriculum in a mainstream school or a placement in a special school. Mainstream schools can refuse to organise an individually adapted curriculum if they can prove the necessary adaptations are disproportionate ([CPRA](#)).

**‘Double-shift’ patterns to the school day (i.e. learners attend for either a morning or afternoon session)**

Not present.

**Grade retention (i.e. holding learners back to repeat school years, instead of providing flexible support that enables learners to progress with their peers)**

Based on data, it appears that in the 2020/2021 school year, 2% of learners remained in mainstream primary education and 2.3% of learners in mainstream secondary education.



For school delay, the percentages are: 11.6% in mainstream primary and 23.1% in mainstream full-time secondary education.

In contrast, over 25% of students in Belgium report that they have repeated a grade ([PISA](#)).

### **Multiple languages of instruction**

In education, the language of instruction is Dutch. Education is not provided in the foreign language of refugee learners.

Some secondary schools experiment with CLIL (some subjects are given in another language – English, French or German – than Dutch).

### **Specific policies on access to compulsory education in local schools (i.e. school selection policies)**

Education in Belgium is compulsory from 5 until 18. Compulsory education, however, does not equal the duty to attend school. Parents may choose home schooling for their children.

A learner must attend full-time compulsory education until the age of 15. From 15 onwards, students may engage in part-time schooling and opt for a structured learning path which combines part-time vocational education in an educational institution with part-time employment.

In Belgium, freedom of education is a **constitutional right**. Every (legal) person may organise education and establish schools to that aim. The government has the duty to organise non-denominational education.

The constitution also guarantees a **freedom of school choice** for the parents. Parents and children must have access to a school of their choice within reasonable distance of their residence ([Eurydice](#)).

In mainstream and special education, a specific legislative framework is in place for the enrolment of learners in the school of their choice.

[Leerlingen inschrijven in het basis- en secundair onderwijs](#)

## **2.3 Public and private authorities responsible for different types of provision**

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In the Flemish educational system, different organisations can support schools:

The Decree regarding pupil guidance (Art. 2, 99, 110) sets out support for schools from Pedagogical Counselling Services (PBD) and Pupil Guidance Centres (PGC) in the whole learner guidance process. The decree outlines the role and tasks of every actor for all phases of the care continuum.

Within the support model, a continuous collaboration between mainstream schools, special schools, parents, and pupil guidance centres is expected, to determine effective support interventions in mainstream schools for teachers and learners. This is supported



by the Reference Framework for quality in education, which requires partnerships with parents and other stakeholders ([CPRA](#)).

In special education, there is often a co-operation with a multi-functional centre, under the responsibility of the Minister of Welfare or Medical Pedagogical Institutions.

## **2.4 Levels of autonomy open to educational institutions – schools, local authorities, school maintainers, etc. – within the system**

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In Flanders, school governing boards hold the responsibility over one or more schools. They have a wide autonomy and can decide freely on:

- teaching methods;
- philosophy of life;
- curricula (with respect to the attainment targets and development goals decided by the Flemish Parliament);
- timetables;
- staff appointments.

### [Eurydice: Belgium – Flemish Community](#)

The [Policy Paper Education 2019–2024](#) states that through in-service training close to teaching practice, and at the request of teachers and school leaders, the minister wants to further develop the existing system of continuing professional development (CPD) and support to schools. This will give more teachers and school leaders opportunities for professional development. Schools are given the means to do so as much as possible so that, based on dialogue between school leaders and teachers, they can devote these resources to the guidance and further training they consider necessary.

Schools and teachers are responsible for their own quality of education and have a lot of autonomy to develop their own CPD policy based on their own specific needs (with the professional profile and basic competences as a guideline). Schools are required to develop an in-service training plan (CPD), after which they can call upon limited financial support for teacher in-service training. This plan can contain formal and informal professional development activities (Decree on the quality of education, [8 May 2009](#), article 8).

Schools can request school advisory services for guidance in their development as professional learning organisations (Decree on the quality of education, [8 May 2009](#), article 15, § 1).

The Reference Framework for Quality in Education supports schools to deal positively with diversity. Schools are free to develop and implement their own pedagogical project, and umbrella organisations offer courses for school leaders ([CPRA](#)).





## 2.5 General mechanisms for funding schools

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### Personnel

Schools do not receive budget from the government but teaching hours for the recruitment of school staff. Teaching hours are allocated on the basis of the number of learners enrolled in the school.

### Operation budget

There are four **sub-budgets**: one for mainstream elementary education, one for special elementary education, one for mainstream secondary education and one for special secondary education.

Under the current financing system, part of the operational resources education budget is used to fund the objective differences between the schools. Subsequently, another part is distributed based on social learner characteristics. However, this is not used to distribute the special education operational resources. The remaining part – which constitutes the lion's share of the funding – is distributed according to school and learner characteristics.

**The rules and procedures in relation to financial management** imposed on school boards vary greatly between the different educational networks.

In **community education**, the school groups and the board assume the task of organising bodies. The board will continue to set the rules on the allocation of resources among school groups. The school groups themselves are responsible for the autonomous financial and material management of the schools within their school group. A Board of Accountants, appointed by the Flemish Government, supervises the financial policy of the school groups. This Board of Accountants is also charged with financial supervision of the Board of Community Education. The Board of Accountants consists of five members appointed for a term of four years.

In subsidised official education, the municipalities and provinces are responsible for the financial management of the schools. The budget must be approved at a higher level – by the Permanent Deputation (the provincial authorities) as regards municipal budgets, and by the Flemish Government as regards provincial budgets. Financial decisions at a lower level can be suspended at a higher level if the legislation is not complied with.

The school boards of subsidised private education have greater autonomy. However, they must comply with the accounting rules of the new non profit organisation legislation and all relevant controls.

Subsidised educational institutions, boarding schools and pupil guidance centres which meet the criteria for rationalisation and programming plans, can appeal to the government for investments.

The Decree of 4 July 2008 concerned the operational budgets in secondary education and amended the Decree on elementary education of 25 February 1997 concerning operational budgets.

Supervision of the use of operational funds is carried out by the audit service of the Agency for Educational Services ([Eurydice 3.1](#)).



Schools wishing to be officially recognised and receive public funding must comply with certain standards and pass a mandatory external inspection by the Education Inspectorate ([OECD](#)).

## **2.6 Specific mechanisms for funding the inclusion of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education**

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The Flemish Government is responsible for providing mainstream and special schools with basic funding for teachers and other staff and operation resources. Besides this basic funding:

- There is a policy on equal education opportunities. A financing system also provides schools that have a higher percentage of learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds with more financial means than other schools ([CPRA](#)).
- To support mainstream schools that have learners with severe learning problems, behavioural or emotional problems and learners with autism, support networks receive an amount of teaching hours and additional hours. This budget is used flexibly to meet the demands for support from mainstream schools. Every year the budget is calculated based on the number of learners in mainstream schools (for 70%) and the learners with special educational needs (for 30%). This financing method is in a transition phase. As part of the complete evaluation of the support model, an evaluation took place in September 2019. The annual budget can differ, depending on the effect of the mechanism to transfer resources from special to mainstream education ([CPRA](#), 4.1.1). The total budget can never be less than in the 2018/2019 school year (Decree on Basic Education, art. 172 quinquies; Codex Secondary Education, art. 314/8; [CPRA](#)).

The support for mainstream schools that have learners with mental, physical, visual or auditory impairment and learners with speech and language development problems depends on the number of learners: the amount of support varies according to the number of learners. Learners who can follow the mainstream curriculum with reasonable accommodations get an amount of teaching hours. Learners that follow an individual adapted curriculum get support equal to the support in a special school (Decree on Basic Education, art. 172quinquies/1; Codex Secondary Education, art. 314/9; [CPRA](#)).

- The Flemish Government finances special educational resources, such as technical equipment and adapted school materials that learners with disabilities in mainstream primary, secondary or higher education need – e.g. conversion to (digital) Braille for learners with visual impairment, Braille reading rules, interpreters for the deaf and hard of hearing, conversions or adaptations of textbooks or study material to (digital) large print, magnifying copies, copies of notes from fellow learners, speech-to-text device, reading magnifiers, etc. ([CPRA](#)).
- Within the Ministry of Welfare there was policy development on person-following financing for children with disabilities, but actually this is put on hold. Future policy on person-following financing for children will have an impact on education, both for learners who are currently in special schools and make use of welfare facilities, and for children with special needs in mainstream schools who qualify for a



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person-following budget (Decision of the Flemish Government concerning the development of a person-following budget for minors with a disability, 29 May 2019; [CPRA](#)).

- If available (there are long waiting lists to get a personal budget), a personal assistance budget accredited to a child with a disability can also be used to strengthen the child's support within the mainstream school context. A 'person-following financing system' for minors with a disability was in preparation and has been put on hold. Instead of a supply-driven model, a demand-driven model of support for children with disabilities is in place (Decision of the Flemish Government concerning the development of a person-following budget for minors with a disability; [CPRA](#)).
- Learners with disabilities who attend mainstream education can receive support via a personal assistance budget and other forms of support (*rechtstreeks toegankelijke hulp – RTH*). These support measures are financed by the department of welfare. The personal assistance budget is intended to support the learner in daily activities (National Overview, p. 11; [CPRA](#)).



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## SECTION 3. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

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This section provides information on the overall framework of legislation and policy governing the whole of the education system in the country.

### 3.1 Is there a single legislation and policy framework covering all learners in all educational settings?

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Yes.

#### 3.1a Description of the single legislation and policy framework

All legislation for pre-primary and primary education can be found in the decree on basic education ([Decreet basisonderwijs](#)). For secondary education, all legislation is included in the Codex Secondary education ([Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering houdende de codificatie betreffende het secundair onderwijs](#)). This legislation contains all regulations concerning mainstream as well as special education and specific arrangements for different target groups, for example, specific financing criteria, articles concerning the support model for learners with special educational needs, etc.

#### 3.1b Overview of the general education legislation and policy framework guiding the whole system

Not applicable.

#### 3.1c Overview of the specific education legislation and policy framework impacting on the inclusion of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

The Decree regarding measures for learners with specific educational needs (M-Decree 2014) facilitates the inclusion of learners in mainstream education. Learners who can work within the mainstream curriculum with reasonable accommodations receive an unrestricted entitlement to enrol in mainstream education through the M-Decree. When schools are unable to work with learners with SEN within the mainstream curriculum, they develop an individual adapted curriculum (related to the mainstream curriculum). Learners get a statement (*verslag*) and can remain in the mainstream school or enrol in a special school. On the other hand, the M-Decree still contains a framework for special schools based on types of disability as a parallel and equal system to mainstream education (Decree on Basic Education, art. 10 and 37/48; Codex Secondary Education, art. 259).

In September 2017, a new support model was introduced to assist mainstream basic and secondary schools to deal with learners with special educational needs (Decree on Basic Education, art. 172 quinquies and 172 quinquies/1; Codex Secondary Education, art. 314/8 and 314/9). A mainstream school can make use of support starting from the extended care phase (of the care continuum). The model consists of two tracks:

1. Support for mainstream schools that have learners with mental, physical, visual or auditory impairment and learners with speech and language development



problems. Schools choose one or more special schools to co-operate with, together with parents and the pupil guidance centre.

2. Support for mainstream schools that have learners with severe learning problems, behavioural or emotional problems and learners with autism. Mainstream and special schools work together in support networks. Support can be child-, teacher- or school-centred and is based on the support needs mainstream schools formulate together with parents and the pupil guidance centre.

Newly arrived learners with a foreign mother tongue can attend reception classes and receive extra support in a follow-up year.

Disadvantaged learners, migrant learners and learners from ethnic cultural minorities may be prioritised at registration. Schools that welcome a minimum number of learners from these groups receive extra support within the framework of the equal educational opportunities policy.

## **3.2 Is there a single curriculum framework covering all learners in all educational settings?**

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No.

### **3.2a Description of the single curriculum framework**

Not applicable.

### **3.2b Overview of the general curriculum framework**

All schools in Belgium have the freedom to develop their own curricula, assessments and self-evaluations. However, when developing the curricula, schools have to take into account the attainment targets and development goals decided by the Flemish Parliament. There is no single curriculum framework covering all learners in all educational settings: attainment targets apply to mainstream education; development goals apply to special education. Under Belgium's freedom of education principle, all schools are free to develop their own curricula (subject to the curriculum being compatible with achieving legislatively mandated educational objectives), while the regulation of specific evaluation and assessment practices are the responsibility of Community authorities ([OECD](#)).

The aim is for the learner to follow the common curriculum and obtain a certificate in primary education and/or a high school diploma. Within this common curriculum, the same final attainment levels or development goals are pursued as for other learners. However, if it appears that the learner, despite the reasonable adaptations, is unable to follow the common curriculum and needs more support, they may switch to an individually adapted curriculum (related to the mainstream curriculum) with goals formulated with the pupil guidance centre ([CPRA](#)).



### **3.2c Overview of specific curriculum framework(s) for different groups of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education**

Learners who can work within the mainstream curriculum with reasonable accommodations receive an unrestricted entitlement to enrol in mainstream education through the M-Decree. These learners have a motivated statement (*gemotiveerd verslag*) from the pupil guidance centre. When schools are unable to work with learners with SEN within the mainstream curriculum, they develop an individually adapted curriculum (related to the mainstream curriculum). Learners get a statement (*verslag*) and can remain in the mainstream school or enrol in a special school. The M-Decree contains a framework for special schools based on types of disability as a parallel and equal system to mainstream education (Decree on Basic Education, art. 10 and 37/48; Codex Secondary Education, art. 259; [CPRA](#)).

The [Decree](#) on learner guidance in basic education, secondary education and the pupil guidance centres (April 2018) stipulates the different roles of schools, pedagogical counselling services and pupil guidance centres with regard to student counselling. The learner is always at the centre. This decree promotes the total development of all students, enhances their well-being, prevents unqualified school leaving and creates more equal opportunities. Student counselling has four components: educational, career, learning and study counselling, psycho-social functioning. These components always have an integral and holistic approach and start from a 'continuum of care'. This continuum consists of basic care, increased care, expanded care and an individually adapted curriculum.

Newly arrived learners with a foreign mother tongue can attend reception classes and receive extra support in a follow-up year in secondary education.

### **3.3 Is there a single legislation and policy framework for all teacher education and professional development?**

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No.

#### **3.3a Description of the single legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development**

Not applicable.

#### **3.3b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development**

In Flanders, there are two sets of competence frameworks, both consisting of the same 10 functional entities. They were introduced by law in 1996 and reviewed in 2007 and 2018. They include:

- a professional profile: a competence framework for experienced teachers, who should strive towards these competences throughout their career (Decision of the Flemish Government on the professional profile of teachers, of [5 October 2007](#));



- basic competences: a competence framework that describes what a novice teacher should know and be able to do. These competences must be attained at the end of initial teacher education (Decision of the Flemish Government on the basic competences of teachers, of [8 June 2018](#)).

In 2018, the Flemish Parliament adopted a decree focusing on the reform and strengthening of initial teacher education programmes. The [Policy Paper Education 2019–2024](#) states that the minister will monitor the quality of teacher education closely and adjust it if needed. The minister will continue working, together with teacher education institutions, to strengthen initial teacher education, helping novice teachers to deal with the many challenges ahead of them.

### **3.3c Overview of specific legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development and what and who this specific framework focuses on**

Since the academic year 2019/2020, teacher training programmes have been set up exclusively by higher education institutions. Since September 2019, there are six types of teacher training programmes in Flanders with, in addition, the specific teacher training programme being temporarily phased out. Each teacher training programme has its own finality and is aimed at a specific group of prospective teachers:

- Educational graduate programme (non-university higher education first degree qualification) for secondary education (for VET subjects only)
- Educational bachelor's programme for pre-school education
- Educational bachelor's programme for primary education
- Educational bachelor's programme for (lower) secondary education
- Educational master's programme for (higher) secondary education
- Educational master's programme for arts subjects.

Source: [Eurydice 9](#)

The focus of the in-service training initiated by the government (*prioritaire nascholing*) was competence development of school personnel with regard to the implementation of the M-Decree from 2015/2016 to 2017/2018. In the 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 school years, the focus of the in-service training was competence development of support staff of the support model, who support school teams and teachers in mainstream schools. Support staff strengthen teachers in guiding learners with special needs ([CPRA](#)).

The government gives a small financial incentive (salary increase) to special needs teachers that follow an advanced bachelor programme (*Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering van 30/9/2005 betreffende de toekenning van een [niet-verworven salarisschaal] aan personeelsleden die houder zijn van een getuigschrift of diploma buitengewoon onderwijs*). Teachers that switch from special needs education to mainstream schools are allowed to keep this incentive (ibid., art. 1, § 4). The measures serve to encourage teachers to invest in this specific type of CPD and to lower the threshold to employment in mainstream education ([CPRA](#)).



### **3.4 Is there a single legislation and policy framework to ensure support for all learners throughout their school careers?**

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No.

#### **3.4a Description of the single legislation and policy framework that ensures support for all throughout their school careers**

Not applicable.

#### **3.4b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework that ensures support for the majority of learners throughout their school careers**

- Special elementary education: elementary education decree of 25 February 1997.
- Special secondary education: the law of 6 July 1970 on special and integrated education.
- [Equal educational opportunities](#) policy.
- OKAN: [reception education for non-Dutch-speaking newcomers](#).
- Dutch-language schools in Brussels and the peripheral and language boundary municipalities: integration of non-Dutch-speakers in peripheral and language boundary municipalities.
- The support model (2017) was introduced to assist mainstream basic and secondary schools to deal with learners with special educational needs (Decree on Basic Education, art. 172quinquies and 172quinquies/1; Codex Secondary Education, art. 314/8 and 314/9). A mainstream school can make use of support, starting from the extended care phase (of the care continuum). The model consists of two tracks:
  - support for mainstream schools that have learners with mental, physical, visual or auditory impairment and learners with speech and language development problems. Schools choose one or more special schools to co-operate with, together with parents and the pupil guidance centre;
  - support for mainstream schools that have learners with severe learning problems, behavioural or emotional problems and learners with autism. Mainstream and special schools work together in support networks. Support can be child-, teacher- or school-centred and is based on the support needs mainstream schools formulate together with parents and the pupil guidance centre.

#### **3.4c Overview of the specific legislation and policy framework that ensures support for learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education throughout their school careers**

See 3.4b.

In order to offer the appropriate support to learners in the right place, the Decree regarding measures for learners with specific educational needs (M-Decree) will be





replaced by a 'learning support decree' for learners with special educational needs (SEN) and their teachers. This will be a pragmatic and realistic implementation of support for learners with SEN: special education if needed, inclusive education if possible. Special attention will be given to upgrading the basic care/support in mainstream schools ([CPRA](#)).

The decree on learner guidance specifies that the school must not only have a learner guidance policy but also that a person within the school must be appointed as designated contact. This person must guarantee that every member of the school team is responsible for the care and guidance of learners (Codex Secondary Education, art. 123/22 decret BAO 47ter; [CPRA](#)).

Teachers and paramedical staff from special education schools are encouraged to become 'support staff' (special needs coaches) to special needs children in an inclusive school, and to share their knowledge with the teachers/school teams (support model). Personnel of the special needs schools can opt to make this career switch but cannot be obliged to take it up, since the function of support staff is completely different ([CPRA](#)).

### **3.5 Is there a single legislation and policy framework to ensure support for all learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life?**

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No.

#### **3.5a Description of the single legislation and policy framework that ensures support for all learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life**

Not applicable.

#### **3.5b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework that ensures support for the majority of learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life**

See 3.5c.

#### **3.5c Overview of the specific legislation and policy framework that ensures support for learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life**

A new type of support for children with special needs, global individual support (GIO), was developed by Welfare in collaboration with Education. GIO is directly accessible support that can be used for young children in inclusive contexts, with a focus on moments of transition (from home to childcare, from childcare to pre-primary education, from pre-primary education to primary education), as these are vulnerable moments in inclusive trajectories ([CPRA](#)).

The Flemish Government has adopted a new master plan for secondary education. The plan integrates existing measures, such as initiatives to reduce early school leaving and to improve equity, and is closely linked to other reform processes, such as rationalising school governance, updating educational objectives and a new system of dual learning. Legislative work assures a gradual implementation starting from 2018 ([OECD](#)).



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## SECTION 4. SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

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This section provides information on aspects of governance across and between different system levels, bodies and stakeholders in the country.

### 4.1 Shared responsibilities across and between central and local government

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Up and until 1 January 1989, the Minister for Education was the organising body for state education in each of the three Belgian communities. Within the context of *communautarisation*, Flanders transferred its responsibility as organising body to an elected Autonomous Council for Community Education (ARGO) which was established by the Special Decree of 19 December 1988. From then on, state education was termed 'community education'. The political agreement of 17 June 1998 on the allocation of responsibility, depoliticisation and decentralisation and the special decree of 14 July 1998 replaced the ARGO with a new public institution, 'Community Education' (with capital letter as organising body) – new management entities were created specifically for Community Education, namely school groups. Henceforth, the organising bodies of community education are the 28 school groups in conjunction with the [GO!](#) board rather than one exclusive central body.

A school group is governed by a general assembly, a governing board, a board of principals and a general director.

The decision-making authority pertains largely to the meso level, i.e. the **school group**. Every school group has administrative powers over all the Community Education institutions within a well-defined area and comprises at least a number of elementary and secondary schools, a centre for adult education and also (in most cases) a pupil guidance centre. It is at this level that education policy is shaped. The school group assumes the task of organising body and is managed by a general assembly, a governing board and a general director.

The constitutional principle of freedom of education is central to Belgian educational legislation. It gives every natural person or legal person the right to establish schools (the 'organising bodies' or, in elementary education, the 'school boards') and to organise and base them on confessional or non-confessional principles or on specific pedagogical or educational ideas. The organising bodies can select, recruit and promote teachers and support, administrative and management staff in accordance with statutory legislation. To support and represent their schools, they have established educational umbrella organisations.

To qualify for subsidies/funding, schools must accept the educational structure imposed by decree, follow a curriculum that recognisably contains the attainment targets and development goals, submit to the supervision of the educational inspectorate, participate in an LCP (local consultation platform), adhere to the principles of participatory decision-making imposed by decree, and apply a complete smoking ban.



In the funding system for compulsory education, the basic funding of the operating resources is the same for all networks.

At all levels and in all educational networks, participatory bodies are being developed. Educational institutions are increasingly being encouraged to work together administratively in larger partnerships: elementary and secondary schools in schools communities. There are also various other forms of partnership, such as **LCPs** (local consultation platforms on equal educational opportunities) and **RTCs** (Regional Technology Centres for collaboration with the business sector) ([Eurydice 2.7](#)).

## **4.2 Specific areas for shared responsibilities across and between central and local government**

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### **Policy development, implementation and co-ordination**

Initiative is taken by cabinet of the minister and the Ministry of Education. Formal consultation procedures are in place. School networks, Pedagogical Counselling Services (PBD) and Pupil Guidance Centres (PGC) are involved in implementation.

### **Identification of needs / referral for services**

Not present. Pupil Guidance Centres (PGC) have the autonomy to identify SEN and deliver statements for SNE. In the diagnostic process, they work together with schools and parents.

### **Data collection and sharing**

Government in co-operation with the schools and pupil guidance centres.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

Based on data collection and scientific research.

### **Quality assurance and accountability**

Not present. Inspectorate is responsible for quality assurance, partly based on self-evaluation of the schools.

### **Funding**

No information. School funding is the responsibility of the central government.

## **4.3 Formal and informal collaboration across ministries**

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There is informal collaboration across ministries on the level of the administration depending on the topic (e.g. co-operation between education and welfare concerning special needs, inclusive childcare, directly accessible help, person-following financing for children with disabilities, etc.).

On the formal level, consultation of advisory boards of other ministries is in place when new legislation is being prepared.



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## **4.4 Specific mechanisms for formal and informal collaboration that impact on inclusive education**

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### **Development of a shared vision for inclusive education**

Not present. However, the Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, VLOR) has issued an advice on strategic policy planning to ensure the realisation of inclusive education in 2020.

### **Policy development, implementation and co-ordination**

Not present. Initiative for policy development is taken by cabinet of the minister and the Ministry of Education. On the formal level, consultation of advisory boards of other ministries is in place when new legislation is being prepared.

### **Identification of needs / referral for services**

Not present. Pupil Guidance Centres (PGC) have the autonomy to identify SEN and deliver statements for SNE. On the level of the network of PGC, there is informal consultation with welfare. Some PGC can act as multi-disciplinary team for referral of children to welfare services.

### **Data collection and sharing**

Pupil Guidance Centres (PGC) collect information about the health and well-being of learners. Some of this information is shared with the Ministry of Welfare.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

No information.

### **Quality assurance and accountability**

Not present. Inspectorate is responsible for quality assurance, partly based on self-evaluation of the schools. There is no co-operation between inspection teams across ministries.

### **Funding**

School funding is the responsibility of the central educational government.



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## SECTION 5. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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This section provides information on the general and specific quality assurance and accountability frameworks and mechanisms informing the country's education system.

### 5.1 School inspection processes and structures for all forms of educational provision

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The Flemish Community's educational inspectorate works on behalf of the Flemish government and is responsible for overseeing the quality of education. The inspectorate has competence for elementary, secondary and part-time arts education, boarding schools and CPGs. It is also competent for secondary adult education and adult basic education. More information can be found on the [inspectorate homepage](#).

The decree of 8 May 2009 on quality of education contains all regulations concerning quality assurance of educational institutions ([Decreet betreffende de kwaliteit van onderwijs](#)).

The [Decree](#) on quality of education (2009) outlines the framework for schools and the pupil guidance centre. Every six years, the education inspectorate visits every school and pupil guidance centre. The Decree on quality of education outlines that every school and pupil guidance centre must have an internal quality framework. However, the schools and centres themselves can choose how to formalise this framework. This is because of the freedom of education, included in the constitution ([CPRA](#)).

At least 35% of the members of the inspectorate must have been recruited from within community education or subsidised official education, and at least another 35% of its members must have a subsidised private education background.

In addition, minimum levels of relevant professional experience have been defined for staff:

- Mainstream elementary education 40%
- Mainstream secondary education 26%
- Adult Education or Adult Basic Education 3%
- Co-ordination of pupil guidance or CPG 2%
- Artistic education or arts subjects 2%
- Special education 7%.

The organisation has also been given leeway to call on external experts for its full school inspections (e.g. at schools dealing with complex health and safety issues at work).

The educational inspectorate and the pedagogical counselling services meet together regularly as a permanent **consultation** body **in the light of their tasks**.



The inspectorate shall invariably issue its advice on whether or not any new institutions seeking accreditation or any institution seeking to have a new programme component accredited have/has met the necessary **accreditation criteria**. Once an application has been received, the inspectorate will conduct an on-site inspection to check whether the accreditation criteria have been complied with. Following this on-site inspection, the inspectorate presents its report featuring its accreditation advice to the Flemish Government. This report must be published within six months of the application; if not, the inspectorate will be deemed to have issued a favourable advice.

The inspectorate carries out **full inspections** of the educational institutions. The audit approach 'Inspection 2.0' means:

- carrying out methodologically sound audits and sharing the reference framework for quality in education with the educational institutions and school advisory services;
- the learner takes centre stage in each audit;
- each educational institution gets an assessment at least once every six years;
- engaging in dialogue with the educational institution on its quality development, while making a connection with the institution's in-house quality assurance system.

The full-inspection reports, follow-up reports and any ensuing advice on the accreditation of institutions are governance documents governed by the Decree of 26 March 2004 concerning administrative openness. Since 1 January 2007, the full-inspection reports can be consulted on the [inspectorate website](#).

Every year, the inspectorate issues a report on its activities in which it also discusses one or more qualitative aspects of the education system. The Flemish Government subsequently presents this report to the Flemish Parliament. For some years now, this report has been published under the name '[Onderwijsspiegel \(Mirror of Education\)](#)'.

**The inspectorate has no authority to monitor how a pedagogical project is fleshed out or to check the pedagogical or artistic guidance methods used.** Neither does it have any powers to inspect philosophy-of-life courses ([Eurydice 11.1](#)).

Inspectors consider a school's own monitoring of quality and examine school data, including on underachievement. They verify the position of the school versus other, similar schools, for instance schools that are all located in a city, or schools with a similar learner population. Inspection reports are meant for government, and the Minister of Education decides on the further acknowledgement of the school based on the advice in the inspection report ([CPRA](#)).

The education inspection may set out shortcomings and the deadline by which the school or centre must resolve them ([CPRA](#)).



## 5.2 Other quality assurance processes for all forms of educational provision

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In 2018, the Flemish Parliament adopted a decree focusing on the reform and strengthening of initial teacher education programmes. The [Policy Paper Education 2019–2024](#) states that the minister will monitor the quality of teacher education closely and adjust it if needed. The minister will continue working, together with teacher education institutions, to strengthen initial teacher education, helping novice teachers to deal with the many challenges ahead of them.

The education inspectorate drew up a frame of reference that outlines the expectations for schools and pupil guidance centres. The development and progress of every learner is a central element in the framework, as well as pupil guidance ([CPRA](#)).

The [Quality decree](#) (2009) stipulates in art. 4, § 1 that every institution is responsible for guaranteeing the quality of its education according to its pedagogical project. Moreover, each institution is obliged to support the education it offers in a qualitative manner. This implies that it is the responsibility of schools to develop proper policies to professionalise their personnel/teachers ([CPRA](#)).

Since 2017, a training course for teacher educators has been organised in Flanders, which is partly funded by the Flemish Government. The main objective of this training course is to strengthen the quality of all teacher educators. For now, the course is limited to teacher educators, associated with initial teacher training. In the near future, the target group will be widened to include mentors and teacher educators associated with CPD and induction. The training course focuses on the professional learning of teacher educators, with a link to learning of prospective teachers and pupil learning. Increasing the quality of teacher trainers is expected to enhance the quality of the (initial) teacher training and therefore also the quality of future teachers. The training course can be started after the induction phase of the teacher educator. It comprises a workload comparable to 20 ECTS (Decision of the Minister, August 2019, to give a project subsidy to a training course for teacher educators; [CPRA](#)).

The pedagogical guidance services (PGS) are support services organised by non-profit associations set up by the educational umbrella organisations. One positive educational programme (PEP) can be granted per umbrella organisation.

The tasks of the PGS are laid down in the Quality Decree. Some of the tasks are primarily aimed at strengthening the school's policy (policy-making capacity), while others focus on the professionalisation of teaching staff. The PGS' work is both supply- and demand-driven. This means that schools can subscribe to an offer of support from the PGS, but can also address specific pedagogical-didactical questions to the PGS of their umbrella organisation.

The Decree of 8 May 2009 concerning the quality of education stipulates that the role of the permanent resource centres is to boost the professionalisation of PGC staff. To that end, they must come to an arrangement with the pedagogical counselling services within their own central network ([Eurydice 11.1](#)).



The inspectorate is developing a new reference framework for quality of support in the context of the support model for mainstream schools.

Flanders regularly participates in international comparative educational research. The information obtained from the international comparison between education systems is one of the sources for evaluating the functioning of one's own education system. Output and outcome information play an important role in this, but are systematically supplemented with context, input and process information, such as from PISA, PIAAC, TALIS, TIMSS, PIRLS and ICCS ([Eurydice 11.1](#)).

## 5.3 Evaluation mechanisms used to monitor outcomes at different system levels

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### General outcomes (academic, social, well-being, etc.) for all learners

The [Decree](#) on Quality of Education (2009) guarantees the quality of primary and secondary education in general. The government monitors quality by means of two institutions:

- The agency for adult education, higher education, qualifications and study grants ([AHOVOKS](#)) conducts quality assurance on the system level. It creates development goals and final attainment levels which constitute the basis of the curriculum for all learners in primary and secondary education, and ensures quality achievement of the education curriculum.
- The education umbrella organisations are transforming the development goals and final attainment levels into learning plans which are inherent to each educational network. The Education Inspectorate controls these and officially validates them. It also organises inspections of individual schools, as each school is subject to external quality assurance on the school level at least every six years. The framework for education quality (ROK) that determines the expectations for quality education is used as reference in these inspections.

With the start of the new support model in 2017, it was set in law that the government would need to carry out monitoring and evaluation (by September 2019) of:

- mechanisms to distribute the resources between the schools involved;
- the staff effects;
- support in the classroom for the learner and the teacher and the learners' movements;
- the efficient use of resources ([CPRA](#)).

The inspectorate is developing a new reference framework for quality of support in the context of the support model for mainstream schools.

After a broad-scale public debate and the formulation of advice by various organisations and advisory councils, the Flemish Parliament adopted a decree laying down the basic principles of the reform of the attainment targets on [17 January 2018](#). There are 16 key competences, based on the European key competences. These include: citizenship;





economic, financial and digital competences; cultural and historical awareness, etc. The new attainment targets will have to be limited in number and clearly formulated. There must be coherence from pre-primary to secondary education.

Taking into account the fast evolution in society, the attainment targets will be subject to periodical evaluations and will be updated when needed. The reform of the attainment targets introduces the concept of basic literacy in the first stage of secondary education. It concerns the marking of certain attainment targets which must be reached by each learner individually. They contain minimum requirements with regard to basic competences such as mathematics, digital literacy and the Dutch language. These minimal requirements should guarantee that all youngsters acquire the basic competences needed to actively take part in society ([CPRA](#)).

### **Specific outcomes (academic, social, well-being, etc.) for learners vulnerable to exclusion**

From school year 2023/2024 onwards, primary and secondary schools will take standardised, validated, cross-network and cross-umbrella tests, with the aim of supporting the internal quality assurance of schools and strengthening the quality of education. The tests initially focus on Dutch (reading comprehension, writing, grammar) and mathematics.

### **Outcomes for schools (professional development, staff and personal well-being, etc.)**

Not present. Schools are responsible for the professional development and evaluation of the staff.

### **Outcomes for parents and families (support, participation, family well-being, etc.)**

Parents are involved in the evaluation of individual schools. The Education Inspectorate evaluates whether schools meet the quality expectations of the 'reference framework for educational quality'. This uses multiple [research methods](#) and resources, including interviews with parents and learners ([CPRA](#)).

The Inspectorate developed an online tool VOI.CE app – a free, accessible communication channel for all those involved in education (education professionals, learners and parents) to start a conversation about the quality of education.

Parents are also represented in the Flemish Education Council (VLOR, Vlaamse Onderwijsraad). The VLOR is the strategic advisory board for education and training policy. Representatives from the entire educational landscape and from socio-economic and socio-cultural organisations discuss education and training policies in the VLOR. VLOR then gives advice to the Flemish Minister responsible for education and training and to the Flemish Parliament (Decree on participation at school and the Flemish Education Council, April 2004; Decree on the strategic councils, July 2003; Decision of the Flemish Government on the composition of the Flemish Education Council, October 2005; [CPRA](#)).

Recently, a Disability Advisory Council (NOOZO – Nothing about us, without us) was installed to advise on new legislation from the Flemish Government. At the moment, this is still a development project; a structural arrangement is in preparation.



## 5.4 Evaluation mechanisms used to monitor the effectiveness of processes at different system levels

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### Effectiveness of teaching and learning processes

More details can be found in the Reference Framework for Quality in Education: [OK reference framework – Onderwijsinspectie](#).

The Reference Framework for Quality in Education describes a number of context and input characteristics which schools can best take into account in shaping their education. The core of the reference framework consists of quality expectations. They are divided into four categories: 'results and effects', 'development of learners', 'quality development' and 'policy'. Each quality expectation is explained in a quality image.

### Effectiveness of school management processes

More details can be found in the Reference Framework for Quality in Education: [OK reference framework - Onderwijsinspectie](#).

### Effectiveness of teacher professional development processes

The [Policy Paper Education 2019–2024](#) states that the minister will monitor the quality of teacher education closely. In particular, specific attention (in initial training, but also in teachers' in-service training and initial guidance) will go to:

- knowledge of Dutch;
- subject knowledge
- stronger didactics
- more practice-based educational research, the results of which should be visible and usable in the classroom;
- dealing with learners with behavioural and learning problems;
- dealing with giftedness;
- dealing with diversity in the classroom;
- drawing up valid tests.

Through in-service training close to teaching practice and at the request of teachers and school leaders, the minister wants to further develop the existing system of continuing professional development (CPD) and support to schools. This will give more teachers and school leaders opportunities for professional development. Schools are given the means to do so as much as possible so that, based on dialogue between school leaders and teachers, they can devote these resources to the guidance and further training they consider necessary.

### Efficiency and effectiveness of funding mechanisms

No information.



### **Effectiveness of (vertical) co-operation between stakeholders at different system levels**

No information.

### **Effectiveness of (horizontal) co-operation between ministries and ministerial departments**

No information.

### **Other(s)**

The Education Research Centre (Steunpunt onderwijsonderzoek, [SONO](#)) has played a role in the evaluation of effectiveness and quality in inclusive education. SONO (a partnership between several universities and university colleges) conducted scientific research on the themes that the Flemish government considered to be a priority for policy preparation and evaluation (2016–2020). Themes include:

- How is the M-Decree implemented?
- Are the objectives of the M-Decree realised at macro, meso and micro levels?
- What is the impact of the M-Decree on learners, parents, teachers and schools, mainstream and special education, on personnel in the pupil guidance centres, on referral processes and on the development of health care policy and practice in schools?.

The Flemish Government implemented the new decree on pupil guidance on 1 September 2018. With the new legislation, every school needs to set a policy for pupil guidance. Important for schools is the fact that pupil guidance is a pre-condition for recognition of the school. It is part of the global policy on the quality assurance of each school and is evaluated by the Education Inspectorate. The Reference Framework requires a positive and stimulating school and class climate. Schools develop a policy for pupil guidance in line with their pedagogical project, the needs of the school population (the learners in school), and the context of the school. The policy on care and the policy on equal education opportunities, as mentioned in the 'school work plan' (*schoolwerkplan*), are integrated in the policy for pupil guidance ([CPRA](#)).

## **5.5 Specific monitoring mechanisms relating to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education**

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In 2014, an agreement was made to monitor the impact of the M-Decree on the education of learners with special educational needs and on the school staff. Among other things, data were collected on:

- learner movements;
- referrals by the pupil guidance centres for support in mainstream schools or enrolment in special schools;
- refusals of learners with special needs by schools;
- teacher movements.



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A progress report on the new support model was published in December 2019 ([CPRA](#)).

Education policy also focuses on promoting the accessibility of school buildings. Since March 2010, a new Flemish urban development regulation on accessibility has applied (*Gewestelijke Stedenbouwkundige Verordening inzake toegankelijkheid*). To map the state of all the Flemish school buildings, the Agency for infrastructure in education (AGION) performed the second school building monitor in 2013. The monitor is carried out every five years. Governing bodies must pay increased attention to full accessibility of their school buildings. They must undertake initiatives to 'screen accessibility' to identify barriers to full accessibility and draw up a phased action plan (National Overview, p. 6; [CPRA](#)).

The Early School Leaving Monitor system aims to monitor and track the outcomes, socio-economic characteristics and study progression of those who leave education without an upper secondary qualification. The Monitor is one of the measures under the general framework of action, Together Against Early School Leaving, adopted by the government in 2016 (European Semester report, 2017).

## **5.6 Specific evaluation mechanisms relating to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education**

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No information.

## **5.7 Specific accountability mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education**

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In [Inspection 2.0](#), each partner plays its own role to realise quality education for every learner. By explicitly examining the quality development of the schools, the Education Inspectorate wants to encourage each school to take the lead in its own educational quality.



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## SECTION 6. STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION, CO-OPERATION AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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This section provides information on the structures, mechanisms and opportunities for stakeholder collaboration and co-operation in the country.

### 6.1 Does the legislation and policy framework specify learner voices are used to inform the development of learning and teaching environments?

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No.

#### 6.1a Description of the legislation and policy framework around the use of learner voice

Not applicable.

#### 6.1b Explanation

In legislation, parents and learners are named as partners that should be engaged in decision-making concerning the school career of the learner, reasonable accommodations and support that is needed. It has much more to do with the learner's individual situation than the overall development of learning and teaching environments.

### 6.2 Does the legislation and policy framework ensure curriculum development processes take account of all learners and their communities?

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Yes.

#### 6.2a Description of how the legislation and policy framework around curriculum development processes take account of all learners and their communities

The agency for adult education, higher education, qualifications and study grants ([AHOVOKS](#)) develops attainment levels and development goals which constitute the basis of the curriculum for all learners in primary and secondary education, and ensures quality achievement of the education curriculum. In this work, stakeholders are involved.

### 6.3 Does the legislation and policy framework support the active involvement of different stakeholders in ensuring inclusive learning environments?

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#### Parents and families

Yes. One of the competencies of the professional profile of teachers (Decision of the Flemish Government, 2007) is teachers acting as partners of parents (*typefunctie 6*). They



must deal discreetly with information about learners, be able to give information and advice to parents, involve parents in classroom and school practice, respect diversity among parents, be able to talk to parents about education and parenting, and to communicate with parents from different language backgrounds ([CPRA](#)).

Legislation about the new support model states that parents should be involved in formulating the support needs of the learner, teacher and school.

Support for schools ([CPRA](#) 1.12): Parents must be heard before the start of the bilateral collaboration between mainstream and special schools for support for intellectual disability, motor disability, visual impairment or hearing impairment. Parents are involved in the choice of the school for special education that will deliver support to the mainstream school. Parents have the authority to co-decide which special school is co-operated with. If there is discussion, the parents' choice is decisive (Decree on Basic Education, art. 172quinquies/1; Codex Secondary Education, art. 314/9; [CPRA](#)).

### **School-leaders/leadership teams, teachers and specialist staff**

Yes. Mainstream schools, together with parents and pupil guidance centres, identify the support needs for the guidance of identified learners (learners with a motivated statement or statement that opens the right to support – see [CPRA](#) 2.3.4). The school then requests support from a special school or support network (depending on the expertise needed) (Decree on Basic Education, art. 172quinquies and 172quinquies/1; Codex Secondary Education, art. 314/8 and 314/9; [CPRA](#)).

### **Stakeholders in the local communities**

Yes. The [reference framework for educational quality](#) (ROK) is an important guideline for a school's CPD policy and CPD plan. The Education Inspectorate developed the ROK in close co-operation with stakeholders and uses it when auditing schools. It contains minimum quality expectations for schools that stimulate the development of one's own (quality) policy. 'Dealing with diversity' and 'providing appropriate guidance for learners to realise equal educational opportunities' are aspects of the ROK.

Since the Decree on participation at school and the Flemish education advisory board (2004), schools are obliged to organise a school board (*schoolraad*) with a delegation of parents, school personnel and the local community. In secondary education, a delegation of learners also takes part in the school board ([CPRA](#)).

### **Local-level decision-/policy-makers**

No information.

### **Non-governmental organisations, disabled people's organisations or other organisations representing vulnerable groups**

Yes. The Ministry of Education subsidises three associations for parental involvement. These associations support local parent school involvement and participation of parents in the school community. They inform parents about the educational system and policy choices and reforms, and capture the voice of parents through surveys, communicating their positions towards the schools and the government. The Ministry expects the three associations for parental involvement to put a special focus on the involvement and



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participation of parents of vulnerable groups. Since the beginning of the M-Decree, the minister has asked the associations to pay particular attention to communication and raising awareness of inclusion and SEN, and to support parents of children with SEN (Decree on the financing of associations of parental involvement, June 1996; [CPRA](#)).

### **Other(s)**

Pupil Guidance Centres focus on learners' well-being, putting learner interests first.

On a macro level, learners' voices are heard through the representational bodies. The participation of learners is co-ordinated by the Flemish student council. This student council covers primary, secondary, vocational and special education ([CPRA](#)).

## **6.4 Does the legislation and policy framework ensure that curriculum development processes involve the participation and contribution of different stakeholders?**

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Yes.

### **6.4a Description of the legislation and policy framework ensuring the involvement of stakeholders in curriculum development processes**

See 6.2a.

## **6.5 Does the legislation and policy framework support the development of learning communities in local/regional areas?**

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Yes.

### **6.5a Description of the legislation and policy framework that supports the development of learning communities**

At all levels and in all educational networks, participatory bodies are being developed. Educational institutions are increasingly being encouraged to work together administratively in larger partnerships: elementary and secondary schools in school communities. There are also various other forms of partnership, such as **LCPs** (local consultation platforms on equal educational opportunities) and **RTCs** (Regional Technology Centres for collaboration with the business sector).



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## SECTION 7. FINAL COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

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Exit M-decree, enter Learning Support decree.

In 2023/24, the M-decree will be replaced by the Learning Support Decree (LSD). It is too early to evaluate the possible impact of the new policy; however, based on the texts available and the intentions and the (negative) commotion about inclusive education in policy and practice over the past five years, we can take a glimpse into the future. With the LSD policy in Flanders, there seems to be a step back in the evolution towards more inclusion in education.

On the one hand, there are positive incentives towards the professionalisation of teachers; the independent status for people working in additional support will improve, and support for easy learners – the gifted and exceptionally talented – will be granted.

On the other, the fundamentals of segregated education will be reinforced. The LSD guarantees ‘every child in the right place’ but that is a step back in comparison to the M-Decree. A culture of referral and diagnosis will be established more firmly and made even easier. Ultimately, the school will decide on whether a learner can stay or enrol without any possibility of appeal. Parents will be heard but are not considered an equal partner in the decision process. Children and their parents have a weak legal position and it is not clear if children/young people will be involved in their inclusion process. If there is discussion, the school’s choice will be decisive, not the parents’ choice. The decision power of the school and *raison d’être* of segregated education remains intact.

Discrimination between inclusive and special education remains: there is no guarantee of a certificate of study if an Individual Adapted Curriculum is followed, and there is no ambition to make changes in funding.

The idea that inclusive education must be realised together with parents, support staff, teachers and learners remains wishful thinking. No link has been made with the welfare policy area.

And again, there is no radical choice for inclusive education; the decree creates no urgency for schools to invest in or develop towards more inclusion, the right on reasonable accommodations is undermined and there is no plan, not even the intention, to end segregation in education. The reproduction of social inequality and segregation continues, also for the next generation.

The concept note of the LSD is in violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and not in accordance with art. 22 ter of the Constitution.