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THE FLEMISH APPROACH TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT

A CASE STUDY REPORT FOR THE OECD ACTIVITY IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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SYSTEMIC APPROACHES TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: THE FLEMISH APPROACH

This report is part of a larger OECD study exploring school leadership policy issues (Box 1). It aims to provide information and analysis on the Flemish “communities of schools” a particular Flemish approach to school leadership for systemic improvement. School communities are voluntary collaborative partnerships between schools, introduced by the Flemish Ministry of Education for secondary education in 1981 (updated in the 1999-2000 academic years) and for elementary education in the 2003-2004 academic year. A school community can have decision-making powers for matters or organisation of rational education provision, pupil orientation and staffing policy among others. The Ministry has provided incentives to promote school communities by way of additional staff (teacher or support staff) and other incentives. In the 2006-2007 academic year, there were 367 school communities within elementary education, covering 97% of schools and 118 communities in secondary education, covering 95%.

The “communities of schools” were selected by the OECD as an example of a model of school leadership cooperation for the benefit of students and improved schooling outcomes. This report is based on a study visit to Flemish Belgium, organised by the Flemish Ministry of Education upon request by the OECD, which included meetings with a range of stakeholders in Brussels and two site visits (Annex 1). This report provides an overview of the reason for exploring this approach of school leadership, sets the Flemish context within which these communities operate, defines the communities of schools as a systems innovation and provides examples, analyses the practice in terms of constructs and impact, and ends with some recommendations as to how they can be made sustainable.

1. Introduction: Some background

School leaders in OECD countries are facing challenges and pressures with the rising expectations for schools and schooling in a century characterized by rapid and constant technological innovation, massive migration and mobility, and increasing economic globalization. As countries struggle to transform their educational systems to prepare all young people with the knowledge and skills needed to function in a rapidly changing world, the roles and expectations for school leaders have changed radically. They are no longer expected to be merely good managers but leaders of schools as learning organizations. Effective school leadership is increasingly viewed as key to large-scale education reform and to improved educational outcomes. This is the reason why the OECD has developed an activity on this topic (Box 1).

Box 1. Box 1: The OECD Improving School Leadership Activity

The purpose of the OECD activity is to provide policy-makers with information and analysis to assist them in formulating and implementing school leadership policies leading to improved teaching and learning. The activity has the following objectives: (i) to synthesise research on issues related to improving leadership in schools; (ii) to identify innovative and successful policy initiatives and practices; (iii) to facilitate exchanges of lessons and policy options among countries; and (iv) to identify policy options for governments to consider.

Methodology: Parallel complementary approaches have been developed to achieve these objectives more effectively. Participating countries have provided a country background report following a common framework (analytical strand). Additionally, a small number of case studies in a) school leadership for systemic improvement and b) training and development of school leaders complement the work by providing examples of innovative practice (innovative case study strand). This approach permits the collection of information necessary to compare country developments while at the same time adopting a more innovative and forward looking approach to policy making.

Participating countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Belgium (France), Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Korea, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom (England), United Kingdom (N. Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland).

The **definition of school leaders** guiding the overall OECD activity suggests that effective school leadership may not reside exclusively in formal positions but instead be distributed across a range of individuals in the school. Principals, managers, academic leaders, department chairs, and teachers can contribute as leaders to the goal of learning-centred schooling. The precise distribution of these leadership contributions can vary and can depend on factors such as governance and management structure, levels of autonomy and accountability, school size and complexity, and levels of student performance. Principals can act as leaders of schools as learning organizations which in addition can benefit and contribute to positive learning environments and communities.

1.1. Why and how to explore systemic approaches to school leadership?

Within the broader OECD mandate to explore school leadership, there was a need to better understand the roles and responsibilities of school leadership focusing on improved schooling outcomes. One of the foci is on “system improvement,” where the school leaders take responsibility for contributing to the success of other schools as well as to their own school or on partnerships or collaborations of schools with other organizations in which the organization and management arrangements distribute leadership across a combination of individuals, organizations and groups.

A number of case studies have been chosen to explore this concept of school leadership for systemic improvement based on specific criteria (Box 2). The aim is to provide information and analysis for policy makers and researchers on models of school organization and management and leadership approaches that are aiming for systemic improvement. The case studies: 1) document details regarding the structure, content, processes and outcomes of the practice examined; 2) analyse the content in terms of specified constructs and 3) identify the policy conditions that are and/or should be in place to support the innovation at the systemic level. The different case studies will be compiled in a publication on school leadership policy and practice to be published in 2007.

Box 2: Criteria for the selection of innovative case studies

The final set of case studies reflects the diversity of education governance systems, financing arrangements, and political cultures of the countries represented in the activity;

The full range of relevant stakeholders is involved;

The practice has been in operation for a period of time sufficient to establish its operational viability;

The practice focuses on educational results and reflects a clear theory of action grounded in the current literature with promise of achieving those results;

The practice can demonstrate initial results that suggest that it is on track to achieve its intended outcomes;

Full access to the site and to relevant data is afforded.

The practice can demonstrate models of school organization and management where leadership roles and responsibilities are distributed in new ways;

The practice takes a systemic orientation that situates the leaders' behaviours and effects on student outcomes in the whole of the school or larger system or explores the interactions of the school with larger elements of the education or community systems.

1.2. The case study visit to Flemish Belgium

The Flemish communities of schools were selected by the OECD as an example of a systemic approach to school leadership, fitting into the above definitions and according to the defined criteria. From reading the literature and in discussions with Flemish representatives, it seemed that this approach fit into

the criteria defined for the selection of the case studies and would represent an example of how to develop models of school and school leadership cooperation for the benefit of students and school outcomes.

This report is based on the country background report prepared for the OECD activity on improving school leadership (Devos and Tuytens, 2006) and a further study visit to Flemish Belgium, organised by the Flemish Ministry of Education upon request by the OECD in May 2007. The visit included meetings with a range of stakeholders in Brussels and two site visits (Annex 1). In Brussels, the study team met with representatives from the Ministry of Work, Education and Training, the Christian Teaching Union, the group of Brussels Community schools, the Antwerp City school system, and the umbrella organisation of Jesuit schools. The site visits covered a Community of Catholic schools in Louvain and a Community of former state schools in Willebroek. We take the opportunity to thank all participants for their openness and engagement in discussions.

The study team was composed of four members: Dr. Christopher Day (Rapporteur), Professor of Education and Director of the Teacher and Leadership Research Centre (TLRC) at the University of Nottingham, UK; Dr. Jorunn Møller, Professor at the Department of Teacher Education and School Development, University of Oslo and Professor II at the University of Tromsø, Norway; and two members of the OECD Secretariat, Beatriz Pont (Team Leader) and Deborah Nusche.

2. The Flemish Context

Belgium is a federal state with three levels of government: the central State, the Regions (the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the Brussels Capital Region) and the Communities (the Dutch-speaking Flemish Community, the French-speaking Community and the German-speaking Community). Education is under the control of the Communities.

Flanders has merged the Flemish Region and Community powers so as to create a single Flemish government, with its capital in Brussels. With 58% of the total population, Flanders is the largest Belgian Community. It is densely populated and highly urbanized.

2.1. System governance

The Flemish education system is based on the constitutional principle of “freedom of education”, which guarantees every natural or legal person the right to establish and organise schools autonomously. Parents and students can choose any school they want and funding will follow the students. The Flemish Ministry of Education interferes only minimally in the organisation of schooling. It sets final attainment levels for students, provides a legal framework for schooling, and allocates funding for salaries and operating costs.

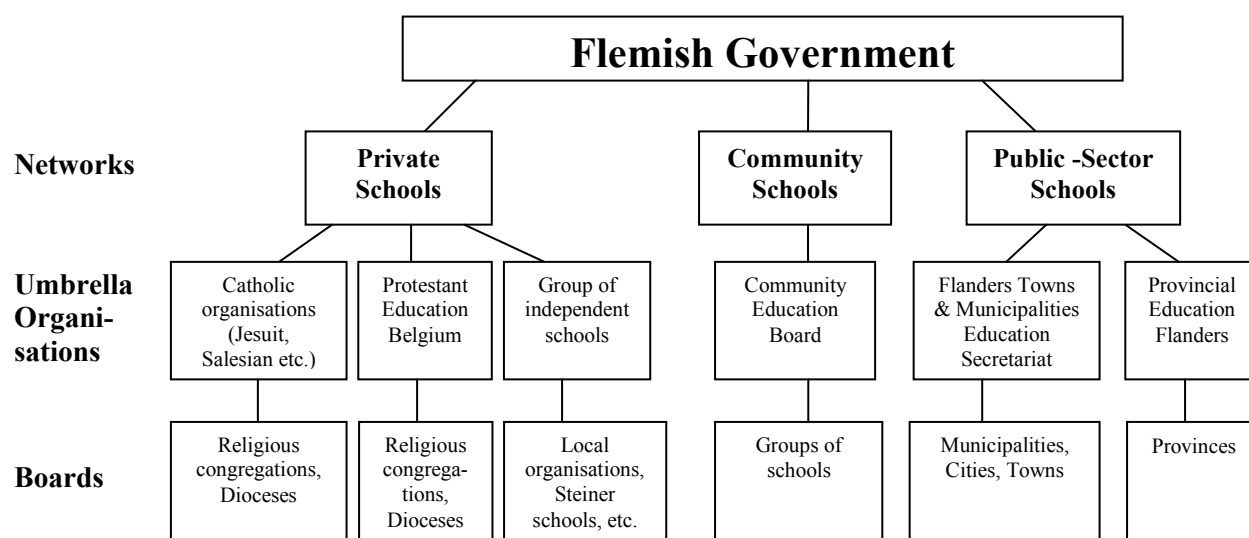
Most Flemish schools and educational services are grouped into one of the following three networks (OECD, 2001; McKenzie et al., 2004; Devos and Tuytens, 2006):

- **Community education** (former State schools): public-authority schools provided by the Flemish Community government. These schools are required to be neutral in regard to religious or ideological views. They enrol about 14% of students (OECD, 2001). Within this network, the decision-making power is held by groups of schools (comprising maximum 50 schools), which act as school boards. At the central level, the groups of schools are represented by the Community education board.
- **Subsidised public-sector education:** public-authority schools governed by municipal or provincial authorities. Religious and ideological neutrality is also required. They enrol about 17%

of students (OECD, 2001). Within this network, the local authorities act as school boards. The school boards are grouped under two umbrella bodies: the “Flemish Towns and Municipalities Education Secretariat” and “Provincial Education Flanders.”

- **Subsidised private education:** schools founded by private individuals or associations. The vast majority of these schools are linked to the Catholic Church. Private schools enrol about 69% of students (OECD, 2001). Most of the school boards are linked to Catholic dioceses. The Catholic school boards are grouped under different umbrella organisations, such as the Jesuit or Salesian umbrella organisations. There are also a small number of non-Catholic private schools, including Protestant schools and schools following a specific educational method, such as Steiner or Freinet.

Figure 1: Governance of the Flemish Education System



School boards within each network enjoy far-reaching autonomy. In the Flemish system, a school board can be defined as the natural or legal person who is responsible for one or several educational establishments. The boards devise their own curricula, regulations, educational methods, and personnel policies. Board members can be volunteers chosen by the parents or professionals paid by the networks. Schools within one geographical unit, such as a town or village, may be governed by different school boards, which can lead to a costly duplication of structures and a lack of cooperation between schools.

School leaders are in charge of their school under the supervision of the school board. Status, position, job description, selection, and training of school leaders vary according to the education network within which they work.

2.2. Funding

The financing scheme for schooling in Flanders is based on parental choice. The government finances teacher salaries according to the same criteria for all recognised (public and private) schools. Funding is based essentially on the number of students enrolled. Parents are treated as clients who chose the best quality school. As funding is calculated according to student numbers, the system favours schools that can attract and retain students. Traditionally, schools have thus competed for students and resources.

2.3. Assessment and evaluation

In Flanders, there are no standardised tests of learning outcomes, neither in primary nor in secondary education. Most people interviewed by us agreed that national testing was unnecessary and could potentially be harmful.

School inspections are formative in nature and inspection reports are not written in a way that would allow for inter-school comparisons. There is no systematic evaluation of school leadership, and principals are not held accountable for student performance.

There is a growing emphasis on the principals' responsibility to monitor and evaluate teacher performance. But principals do not receive any kind of training fostering their skills to coach teachers in a way as to improve students' learning outcomes. The largest teaching union, among others, suggests that the principals' increased responsibilities for teacher evaluation should be accompanied with increased principal training and preparation.

Externally organised assessments such as PISA provide some information on the performance of Flemish students. Flemish PISA results stand out in two ways: On the one hand, students' mean PISA scores place the region within the group of highest performing countries for each subject area. On the other hand, Flanders is also characterised by a very wide distribution of achievement scores.

2.4. Equity issues

The 2003 PISA results show that there are very large differences between the strongest and the weakest students in Flanders. Belgium as a whole has the largest performance dispersion of all participating countries. Socioeconomic status (SES) and language spoken at home have an important negative impact on the performance of Flemish students in the PISA tests (De Meyer et al., 2005). The PISA results have raised concern about the 'tail' of underachieving students in Flanders.

One of the factors leading to inequality seems to be the secondary education system which streams students into three types of schools: academic, vocational and technical. Children with lower SES are overrepresented in vocational and technical schools, and there is an image of lower quality attached to these schools.

In practice, the principle of freedom of choice does not guarantee to parents that their children will actually be enrolled in the school of their choice. In prestigious and high achieving schools, the demand for enrolment often exceeds the schools' capacities, so that parents may spend hours and days at the school hoping to be able to register their children. The coordinator of Jesuit schools regretted that the 'first come first serve' system does not allow for positive discrimination.

2.5. School leadership framework

School leaders are appointed by the school boards. The only Community-wide formal requirement for school leaders is to have a teaching qualification. The different school boards may define additional criteria. In the majority of cases, school leaders are selected from the teaching staff in a rather informal way. Vacancies are not widely advertised and recruitment processes seem to lack in openness and transparency. As a result, not all interested candidates may get a chance to apply. Many schools, especially in primary education and in "difficult" areas, are facing difficulties in finding qualified candidates.

Compared to management positions in other sectors, the working conditions of school leaders are not very attractive. After a 12 month probationary period, school leaders are appointed for a permanent position. They do not have many further career opportunities. Salary differences between school leaders

and teachers are small. Remuneration of school leaders is far below the average for management positions in the labour market.

Most stakeholders agreed that the training and support structures offered to school leaders are insufficient. Only the network of Community education provides mandatory pre-service training for school leaders. The other networks offer some voluntary, mostly in-service training opportunities.

As in many other countries, school leaders in Flanders are faced with a wide range of tasks and challenges. Depending on the boards and networks, they have different degrees of responsibility in administrative, budgetary, pedagogical, personnel and public relations matters. Most of the times, the school boards delegate substantive powers, such as hiring and firing teachers, to the principals. The school leaders' wide-ranging autonomy is not matched with a systematic evaluation or accountability system, and their essential role in school development is not accompanied with central support structures or performance-based remuneration.

2.6. Summary - Choice, competition and identity

It is clear from this that there are five key components by which we can identify the educational system in Flemish Belgium. These provide a lens through which we may examine the 'communities of schools' innovation:

- **Choice:** parents choose the school which their children attend. Thus, as a group, they can determine the size of schools by means of their preference.
- **Competition:** traditionally because funding follows the students, schools have varied in size because they have competed for resources.
- **Identity and Autonomy:** all education is publicly funded but choice and competition have resulted in the formation of three governing 'networks' representing private (mostly Catholic), public (municipal / provincial), and Community (former State) schools. (Within these, there also exist special groups, for example, the Jesuit schools have their own umbrella organisation, and the public schools are organised differently according to where they are, urban or provincial). Of these, the network of Roman Catholic schools is by far the largest, representing 68.4% of all students (Opdenakker and Van Damme, 2007). Whilst the schooling system is diverse, there is strong identity within it.
- **Standards and Equity:** we have seen that Flemish Belgium scores highly in its PISA results but that it has one of the widest margins between the level of achievement of the highest group and the level of achievement of the lowest group. PISA data also shows that the differences in performance between schools are very strong and that a large proportion of this between school variance is explained by the differences in socioeconomic background of students (OECD, 2004).

To these we may add a fifth which provides an important additional perspective in relation to the focus of this report:

- **Leadership:** traditionally, schools have been governed by school boards. These have operated within the 'umbrella' board of each network. The school boards are mostly made up of volunteers and whilst the headteachers of schools are accountable to the boards, there is a tradition of headteacher autonomy. More importantly, there is, according to some research, a, 'lack of strong participative professionally-oriented leadership in the majority of Flemish secondary schools'

which has meant, according to that research, that headteachers themselves have not significantly affected school practice (Opdenakker and Van Damme, 2007, p. 196).

3. Systems innovation: Communities of schools

‘We have a tendency to do new things and forget to abolish the old...every decision is part of a complicated negotiation’.

In 1999, the Flemish Ministry of Education established ‘communities of schools’ for secondary education, having regard to issues of choice, competition and identity. These were also established for primary education in 2003-2004. These communities are voluntary collaborative partnerships between schools. For primary schools, their collaboration possibilities are more open. For secondary education, eleven ‘competencies’ were set out through which such communities were charged with consulting about staffing, curriculum and resource allocation. Box 3 provides a more detailed definition of what these communities of schools entail¹.

There are now 118 communities of schools in secondary education, covering more than 95% of schools in Flanders, with an average of 6 to 12 schools belonging to a community. There are 367 in primary education, covering 97% of schools. During the site visit, the OECD team focused on communities of schools in secondary education. Secondary school communities have been operational for a period of time long enough for stakeholders to adapt and respond to the new framework. Primary school communities, on the other hand, have been attributed less resources and powers during the 2003-2005 pilot years. A revised school community policy was launched only in 2005-06, and its impact on the organisation and management of schooling is not yet very visible (for more detail, see section 6).

The objective of the communities of schools was to make schools work in collaboration by sharing resources, to rationalise supply of courses and to promote cost savings across schools. The government’s aspirations were that this new system would enable the enhancement of student guidance systems, particularly in relation to their educational career trajectories; the lessening of the managerial-administrative burden on headteachers in order that they might become pedagogical leaders; the increased use of ICT; and the rationalisation of resourcing both in relation to staff recruitment, functioning and evaluation and in relation to cooperation in curriculum.

The government incentivised participation by allocating additional staffing and other resources (e.g. ‘envelopes’ of teaching hours) specifically to be used through collective decision-making processes to be established freely by the communities of Schools. In elementary education the incentive is a staffing points system. The number of points allocated to a community of schools is determined by the number of pupils enrolled. For secondary education the incentives are larger: favourable rationalization standards, transfer of teacher hours in full-time secondary education, extra teacher hours for schools in Brussels, extra teacher hours for school communities, favourable calculation standards for support staff, adding up of ‘residual’ hours, provision of non-organic staff training, wider availability of a staff members, maximum use of facilities. In both elementary and secondary education, a school community must have 900 pupils on the first school day in February prior to the date the school community begins to operate.

Box 2. Box 3: Definitions of communities of schools in Flanders

Primary education communities of schools (created in 2003-2004):

¹ The Decree of 14 July 1998 regarding secondary education provides the legal framework for school communities in secondary education. The Decree regarding elementary education and the Flemish Government order regarding the points system for elementary education school communities provide the legal framework for school communities within elementary education.

In primary education, a school community consists of several schools which belong to either the same or different school boards and/or education networks. The school communities can decide autonomously to make available resources for a co-ordinating director. They can have decision-making powers for specific matters. The school board or school boards to which the school within the community belongs decides whether it transfers powers to the school community or not. The powers that can be transferred are: the use of resources as a stimulus within the school community; the use of a staffing points system for care, ICT and administration, ICT staff within the school community; sharing special education school expertise; or the inclusion of additional schools within the school community. The school community can make agreements about these issues and submits these to the school board/boards of the schools that are part of the school community.

Secondary education communities of schools (created in 1999):

In secondary education, a school community consists of one school or a group of schools which belong to either the same or different school boards and/or education networks. A co-ordinating director may ensure that the school community operates smoothly in secondary education. They have the following powers (based on decree):

Concluding agreements regarding the organization of rational education provision;

Concluding agreements regarding objective pupil orientation and support;

Concluding agreements regarding the staffing policy in place: criteria for appointing staff, for the overall functioning of staff and for assessing staff;

Concluding agreements/making decisions regarding the distribution of extra teacher hours within its establishments;

Concluding agreements regarding the determination of the criteria and the use of weekly teacher hours that can be combined at a school community level;

Concluding agreements regarding the distribution of resources for support staff for its establishments;

Concluding agreements regarding the use of resources for ICT co-ordination;

Making recommendations about investment in school buildings and infrastructure, with the school board using the investment resources of Community Education or the education infrastructure agency Agentschap voor Infrastructuur in het Onderwijs (AGION) (for the other networks);

Entering into collaborative partnerships with one or several other schools than those that belong to the school community.

Source: Devos and Tuytens, 2006

The immediate effects of the innovation were to establish internal markets which regulated competition for students between schools and increased opportunities for collective action to be taken for allocation of staffing and other resources, and for student guidance systems and curriculum. Whilst these are important features, it must be acknowledged that the scope for collective decision-making was at the margins and did not interface with the autonomy of headteachers.

With only a small number of exceptions, the communities of schools remain nested within the traditional 'networks' structure, and are, to a greater or lesser extent, dependent on the traditional 'systems leadership' of boards and directors within that structure.

Whilst it may be said that the innovation added another layer of bureaucracy to the existing system, the reality is that schools and systems have responded in different ways. The report will provide examples of these in section 3 following.

Because the innovation was centrally initiated, a form of 'contrived collegiality' (Hargreaves, 1994) was imposed. Thus, schools have clustered in different ways. They are rather loosely coupled within

systems which are in different phases of development and may not yet be said to have become 'communities'.

There are three keys to understanding this system innovation which are:

- The government's concern with 'evening out' and raising what was perceived as diverse quality of education in schools;
- The government's concern with closing the equity gap between students which had existed over many decades and which is so evident in the PISA results;
- The government's concern not to 'interfere' with the strong sense of identity and autonomy, both of the networks, the school boards and the individual schools themselves.

3.1. Examples of systems innovation in Flemish Belgian schools

Figure 2 below gives an illustration of the different stages of development of a range of communities of schools in Flanders. It shows the ways in which existing network and board managers, as well as individual schools have adapted to the innovation. The model presents the different levels of change on a continuum from status quo (no evidence of change) to transformation (development of a community identity). The section then provides brief examples of the different practices which were presented during the visit and it explains how these examples fit into the framework of change levels. It will be followed, in Section 4, by an analysis of the leadership practices at each level of this multi-layered system.

Figure 2: Adaptations of Networks to Communities

Change Levels	Catholic Jesuit schools	Community schools, Willebroek	Community schools, Brussels	Public sector schools, Antwerp	Catholic schools, Leuven
1. Status Quo No evidence of change to structures, roles and responsibilities, culture. Power remains at the network level	✓				
2. Minimum Change Evidence of some change to existing structures but not to cultures or roles and responsibilities. Power remains at the network/group level		✓	✓		
3. Adaptation (early signs) Evidence of change in structures, roles, responsibilities and cultures. Power is distributed				✓	✓
4. Transformation Communities of practice have established an identity which supersedes network identity					

a) Private (Catholic Jesuit) Communities of Schools

The coordinator of seven Catholic Jesuit school groups with 800 staff spread across Flanders spoke of the special bond between them to be preserved. Thus, although the schools had joined communities of schools, it was not perceived as a key development tool. There was some scepticism about the extent to which the quality of education would be improved through such membership. Under the pre-existing system, distributed leadership was practised through school group teams of headteachers, with one of these taking leadership as ‘primus inter pares’. The school board leaders met monthly, and the leaders’ group met weekly. The school board continued to take final decisions, ‘on everything’ and headteachers were accountable to the board. They had, ‘a sense of being responsible together’ for the education in their region. The coordinator was responsible for system wide staffing and administration, and staff and headteacher training. In effect he acted as a Director of Education.

c) Example of Communities of Schools in “Community education”

According to the director of the regional ‘group’ of schools, communities of schools were ‘a theoretical concept’. It was the director together with the school group who decided upon policy. Two communities of schools (one for primary and one secondary schools) had been created within the group of schools. Although the communities of schools each had a co-ordinating director, they were accountable to the group director who was accountable to the board. As in the Jesuit school network, and as in the example which follows, the director and his staff led the vision and the policy making. They administered the system and had benefited from the establishment of the internal market which had led to reduced competition between schools. The director was also clearly responsible for the ‘hiring and firing’ of school headteachers, and for ‘steering’ policy in the group of schools. Within the group of schools, some headteachers had already been responsible for the ‘systems leadership’ of more than one school prior to the establishment of school communities.

e) Communities of Schools in “Community education” (Brussels)

This system was managed from the centre by a general director with 30 staff. Unlike the example that follows, however, leadership had not been widely distributed. There were three communities of schools (Primary, Secondary and Art schools) and headteachers had responsibilities for ‘hiring and firing’ teachers (responsibility delegated by the board to the headteacher). The general director and his staff were responsible for all administrative and financial tasks, leaving the headteachers to ‘concentrate on pedagogical matters’. There was no history of cross school curriculum planning, although the communities (and the network as a whole) were now focusing upon developing curricula and teaching pedagogies which would better assist in solving the problems of the 80% of students for whom Dutch was not their first language. Support for this was provided at the level of each community of schools. All headteachers had job descriptions and there were detailed criteria and procedures governing the recruitment and appointment for all staff. Headteachers met monthly, and there were in-service competency-based training programmes available. According to the General Director, not all secondary school headteachers saw the need for a full-time Coordinating Director of their community of schools.

d) Public (Municipal) Communities of Schools (Antwerp)

The network in Antwerp had established itself as a ‘Learning City’ department with 5 to 6 ‘companies’, each with their own co-ordinating directors under the coordination of a director who reported to a single board. In this sense it was similar to Willebroek. However, cross school projects which were centrally funded were available by application and social policies for disadvantaged students (50% did not speak Dutch as a first language) were centralised. Within each community of schools, headteachers were beginning to take specialist, cross-school responsibilities (e.g. ICT, guidance). ‘Hiring and firing’ was, as in Willebroek, the responsibility of the director of the school board. Antwerp was in the process of establishing campuses on which several schools existed which specialised in different fields of study, and there was a long and strong tradition of leadership advice, career counselling and development.

a) Private (Catholic) Communities of Schools (Leuven)

This community comprises 14 secondary schools, and one campus of three schools and a teacher training institute which had been established with one director 25 years previously. The community of schools had begun, six years previously, with 11 school boards and these had reduced to 7. It had appointed an ex headteacher of one of the prestigious, respected and high achieving schools as its full-time coordinating director. Under her leadership, the headteachers from the schools had begun to meet monthly and, though they still described themselves as ‘scanning’, ‘getting to know each other’ and ‘building trust’, they have established a clear agenda for improving the individual guidance and counselling services for students, agreeing a common process for selection, thus reducing competition within the Community, negotiating common working conditions for teachers, and creating curricula for students with special educational needs. Teachers themselves were described as being, as yet, ‘barely aware’ of changes and despite a collective ‘vision for integration’, different schools still had ‘distinct visions and interests’. The community had recently agreed to provide targeted support (from the ‘envelope’ of hours provided to the communities) for one of its members which was finding difficulty in recruitment and staffing.

4. Multi-layered systems leadership

The management and leadership of this systemic innovation may be identified as being ‘distributed’ across four levels: i) the central government of Flemish Belgium; ii) the private and public networks (which also have a legitimate vested interest in survival); iii) the communities of schools themselves; and iv) school level.

4.1. Central Government Level

The management of this innovation by the central government may be summarised in the words of one senior official: *'We want them to go their own way towards the goal that we want'*.

This respect for localised decision-making within the watchful eyes of the existing networks characterised systems leadership at this level. It created opportunities for the establishment and growth of communities of schools but did not and does not provide systems leadership. For example, there is no centrally provided training for systems leadership or leadership of communities of schools, no monitoring and evaluation of the use which communities of schools make of additional, centrally provided resources and no systemic efforts to collect and disseminate examples of practice in communities of schools. There has been one government evaluation of the scheme (Department of Education, Flemish Ministry of Work, Education and Training, 2005b). It found that the progress of the systems innovation had been, in the words of government officials, 'uneven' and 'a little bit slow'. They suggested that many boards had, 'slowed down the pace, in some instances to paralysis' and that the innovation was now, 'at a turning point'.

4.2. Network Level

'Networks are the sparring partners, defending their position against the Ministry and the Unions'

Networks responded to the innovation in different ways. As we have seen in Section 3 of this report, in some instances (e.g. Leuven) the number of individual school boards had reduced, but only nineteen of the communities of schools in the Catholic system are at present under the governance of one school board. This suggests a resistance to change by many school boards. In Community education (i.e. former state schools) one school board is the rule. At the network level, also, there are a variety of leadership models which illustrate the different responses to the innovation. These range from those which have changed minimally those which have adapted by making some changes, but retained existing structures and those which have made moderate changes to structures of governance and whose culture has begun to change in the direction of becoming a more mature community of schools.

4.3. Communities of Schools Level

No communities of schools are self-governing, independent of the networks to which they belong. The nature of the leadership within the communities depends upon two key elements which interact: i) the extent to which leaders within the traditional network structures distribute leadership; and ii) the vision and strength of leadership from within the newly formed communities. Thus, in the public schools networks in municipalities (e.g. Antwerp and Brussels), communities of schools are serviced and led by a general director and his staff under a single board (the parallel would be a local city authority in England). In the case of Brussels, there are three schools groups but they are communities principally for the purposes of staff recruitment, in-service training and leadership development and to attempt to solve the problem of significant number of non-Dutch speaking students in their schools. In the case of Antwerp, a different, more distributed leadership model exists in which a number of municipal companies (sub systems) have been created, each with their own leadership. Leadership training is strong in both sub systems. The public school network in Willebroek (a province), is based upon the traditional leadership of large 'groups' of schools by a Director and his staff. However, within the group are two 'co-ordinating directors' (one full-time primary, one part-time secondary). In all three cases the directors and the boards have a clear responsibility for the vision and direction of the groups of schools. The same would be true of the Jesuit network. However, in the case of the Catholic system in Leuven, it is clear that the coordinating director, working closely with the headteachers, has taken this responsibility.

4.4. School Level

'No one knows about the quality of principals'.

Whilst this report focuses upon systems leadership it is, nevertheless, important to discuss briefly the role of leadership at school level for two reasons: i) the innovation ultimately relies for its success upon headteachers; and ii) the communities of Schools' coordinators are drawn largely from the ranks of the existing or former headteachers. The headteachers of each school or sub group of schools (which, in the case of Leuven existed prior to the innovation) retains responsibility for his/her own schools' direction. Thus, ultimately the impact of the systems innovation at school and classroom level depends upon the extent to which they recognise its benefits and upon the quality of their own leadership.

In Flemish schools although it is the principal who is responsible for pedagogical leadership, in general, this leadership does not seem to be exercised. Principals have little time left for pedagogical leadership, as they are increasingly expected to exercise managerial and organisational tasks. In addition to managing relations with students, parents, educational authorities and the local community, they are taking on increasing responsibilities for personnel management, monitoring, evaluating and continuously motivating their staff. A second challenge is for them to ensure student care and well-being in environments with growing social and cultural diversity. Finally, as the government is increasingly focussing on the role of individual schools in quality assurance, principals' are taking larger responsibilities for school self-assessment and evaluation processes.

Many stakeholders mentioned that middle management is of utmost importance to allow the principal to focus more on the school's educational project. Middle management may also provide opportunities for shared leadership and strengthened policy implementation capacities within the school. During the visit, we observed that some schools (for example the Catholic schools in Leuven) had a well-functioning middle management structure with distributed responsibilities for different aspects of management (ICT, material, student well-being). In other schools this seemed to be less present. In a 2005 study, Van Petegem et al. (in Devos and Tuytens, 2006) call for middle management to be further developed in Flanders. According to the director of the Jesuit network, such a structure is an essential pre-condition for the success of communities of schools.

Part of the stated rationale in establishing communities of schools was that the headteacher could be freed from many bureaucratic tasks in order to spend more time in pedagogical leadership. We did not always observe this. In some cases the communities of schools even seemed to add to the principal's workload. On the other hand, by compelling principals to work together, school communities are beginning to engage them more in pedagogic leadership: regular meetings between headteachers, exchange of practices, views and understandings, as well as joint training initiatives were found all across the communities of practice.

5. Conceptualisation

5.1. Systemic leadership conceptualisation

Communities of schools in Flemish Belgium are a systemic innovation in which a more localised structure of relationships, roles and responsibilities have been created. The traditional networks (public and private) had adapted but, essentially, continue to dominate in the leadership of those communities. Once it had created and provided some resource for the communities of schools, for reasons of choice, autonomy and identity, central government has taken no further direct role in their development. If there is a theory of action, then it is that networks and communities of schools should be free to find their own ways of providing leadership. Based on a tradition of minimal interference by the Ministry of Education, the

Flemish Community government provides no guidance on what kind(s) of leadership may be more, or less, effective. Nor has it provided support for communities in developing a sense of community vision, leadership, strategic direction or pedagogical advancement.

Hopkins (2007) proposition that, 'a school head has to be almost as concerned about the success of other schools as he or she is about his or her own schools', and that, 'sustained improvement of schools is not possible unless the whole system is moving forward', assumes a reality that is not yet in evidence in Flemish Belgium, since the system of communities of schools is neither monitored nor evaluated. It might be the case, but we did not discern any evidence about how the whole system was moving forward. From the evidence presented, it is also clear that 'moving forward' has different meanings for those within the system.

Hopkins recognises, however, that the 'aspiration of systems transformation being facilitated by the degree of segmentation existing in the system only holds when certain conditions are in place: i) First, that there is increased clarity on the nature of intervention and support for schools at each phase of the performance cycle; and ii) second, that schools at each phase are clear as to the most productive ways in which to collaborate in order to capitalise on the diversity within the system.

In the case of Flemish Belgium the responsibilities and power to determine the nature and direction of the communities of schools may be said to be distributed to those communities. However, the result is that neither of Hopkins' conditions for the facilitation of system transformation are met. Communities of schools are not yet clear as to the most productive ways in which to collaborate in order to capitalise on the diversity within the system *because there has not been increased clarity on the nature of intervention and support in the process of the innovation.*

Not resolving the tensions between respecting the rights of all communities to exercise autonomy and the responsibilities of government to provide leadership guidance and support for the implementation, continuation and institutionalisation phases of the innovation has resulted in systemic development which is slow and uneven.

5.2. Power and responsibility

Power is a fluid, interactive and reciprocal process. School leaders at all levels do have power in their formal position, but at the same time they are aware of the relative nature of power. To see power as a relationship means that power relations are always two-way, even if the power of one actor in a social relation is minimal compared to another. Both the actions of subordinates and the actions of superiors influence the structures of domination. As one of the coordinating directors said, "*We need to have the headteachers on board in order to succeed.*" At central level it was emphasized, that "*in this country you convince people to follow. It is a country of negotiation.*"

The configuration of power relationship in the community of schools is shaped by the mutual understanding of the authority and influence of the school boards and the influence of coordinating directors and headteachers. The headteacher enjoys a high degree of authority but there are constraints on its exercise which leads to a greater reliance on a wide range of sources of influence.

Both centralization and decentralization of the educational system, irrespective of motives, puts in focus the balance between political and professional power over education (Lundgren, 1990). On the one hand, a system change like introducing communities of schools might be interpreted as a form of centralization within the context of Flanders where the school boards have enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. A new intermediate level is introduced, the drive for change is top-down, and a potential for a change in power relationship has been created. On the other hand, the Flemish approach has allowed for

different interpretations in the different communities, aligned with the history and tradition of the country, and the power structure of the school boards is preserved.

The balancing act of introducing an intermediate level like the communities of schools can be framed as “decentralised centralism” (Karlsen, 2000), and the question of who has the responsibility is sharpened. Such a system change may result in contradictory decisions. Universal acceptance of any balance is difficult to achieve because some stakeholders’ interests are always compromised (Hoyle & Wallace, 2005). In addition, there will remain a tension between decentralization efforts and the need for central control (Weiler, 1990).

Similar to the configuration of power relationships, patterns of responsibility are reciprocal. Responsibility concerns the obligations teachers and school leaders, as part of a profession, have to each other in answering questions about what has happened within one’s area of responsibility and provide a reliable story of practice; what has happened and why it has taken place. As Elmore (2006) has argued, for each unit of responsibility given, a unit of support must be provided. According to him, the present accountability policy² will not increase school performance without a substantial investment in human capital aimed at developing the practice of school improvement in a diverse population of school leaders and teachers.

6. Program Effectiveness

Three broad intended objectives of the communities of schools policy can be distinguished. First, the policy was explicitly aimed at making schools collaborate in order to rationalise and improve the provision of curricula, staffing, facilities, student orientation, administration, care, and ICT. Second, a less explicit intention appeared to be to introduce a layer of educational policy implementation based on geographic proximity rather than on affiliation with a board or network. Third, the innovation of communities of schools seems to be ultimately geared towards improving the quality of teaching and learning.

There is little quantitative evidence about the degree to which these objectives have actually been achieved. The government does not systematically monitor or evaluate its policy of communities of schools, but there have been two evaluations of communities of schools undertaken by the Flemish Education Ministry. One focused on primary school communities (Box 4), while a second one evaluated communities of secondary schools after five years in operation.

Box 3. Box 4: Evaluation of Primary School Communities (February 2005)

After a pilot phase of two years (2003-04 and 2004-05), the Flemish Ministry of Education evaluated a randomly selected sample of 29 primary school communities. The evaluation consisted of a survey questionnaire sent to both teachers and principals, and interviews conducted with representatives from each school community. The findings can be summarised as follows:

Usefulness: The overall feedback from respondents was positive. Almost all participants affirmed that school communities were a useful concept and the great majority believed that the communities helped to increase the schools’ capacities.

Positive outcomes: The great majority of respondents (25) considered “cooperation” in itself as the most positive outcome. Others mentioned a “common vision” (4), a common care policy (5), and a better distribution of tasks among schools (4).

² Although it is possible to lexically distinguish between *accountability* and *responsibility*, in policy documents accountability to some extent has replaced responsibility.

Reasons for joining a school community: 16 respondents indicated that their major motivation for joining a community was to receive extra resources from the government. 11 respondents explained that the creation of their communities was merely a formalisation of pre-existing school collaboration structures. 8 respondents mentioned pressure from Brussels or from their respective school boards as a reason for joining.

Domains of cooperation: Material cooperation is very important for the surveyed school communities: most communities share facilities such as libraries and gymnasiums (19), and many combine their schools' purchasing power when ordering materials (17). Many respondents cooperate in the field of ICT (17) and care policy (16). Teacher exchanges take place in only one community. There seems to be very little, if any, pedagogical cooperation: some (9) do not at all cooperate in the pedagogical domain, while some others (9) indicated that they organise common "study days".

Impact: Participants were asked about the perceived impact of school communities on a range of different stakeholders. The majority of respondents agreed that:

- there is no impact on the school personnel (19)
- there is no impact on students (29)
- there is a negative impact on principals because the communities have increased their workload (14)

The results from this evaluation led the Ministry to introduce some changes to the design of the school community policy, namely an increase of the amount of resources allocated to the communities. The increased bonus was aimed at allowing primary school communities to appoint a formal Coordinating Director (a principal exempted of some tasks at his/her own school).

Source: Department of Education, Flemish Ministry of Work, Education and Training, 2005b.

The evaluation undertaken for secondary school communities shows that they some of their objectives have been reached. Communities have strengthened cooperation in some areas, such as developing common personnel policies and policies to allocate human resources across the schools involved. There seems to be informal cooperation with other school levels - such as primary schools and special education and there is still large scope for cooperation in the future. However, there are some areas where cooperation could be stronger: there is still much room for progress in rationalising education supply and infrastructures across schools and in providing effective guidance for students. In addition, while some school communities organize working groups on a broad range of topics with participation of the unions, in general, teaching unions complain that school boards and school leaders always want to push through their own proposals rather than work for the school communities (Department of Education, Flemish Ministry of Work, Education and Training, 2005b).

Overall, from the available evaluation of primary school communities (Box 4) and secondary education as well as from our observations and interviews, it became evident that the very existence of cooperation between schools was considered as an intrinsically positive development by all stakeholders (even if some remained sceptical whether the concept of school communities was the best way to achieve such inter-school cooperation).

"It has been an evolutionary, partly incrementally journey of what you hope will become a community in 10-20 years. A lot has happened during seven years. Before, we were very competitive. Now we collaborate more, and it is new to work together. It is a small revolution when you look back"

Perceived benefits of cooperation through communities of schools are:

- The creation of an internal market which has reduced competition between individual schools within networks within geographical areas;
- The possibilities of creating better student orientation and guidance systems;

- The possibilities of creating community-wide curricula which address students with special educational needs;
- The creation of an internal labour market for teachers;
- The creation of areas of community based discretionary judgement relating to the distribution of (marginal) resources, HR policy and care;
- Reduced bureaucratic workload for headteachers and new possibilities for pedagogical leadership.

On the other hand, perceived constraints on cooperation are:

- Communities cannot offer training or do not have capacity and resources;
- Communities do not have significant budgetary control;
- Several boards within one community can create tensions and may disagree as to vision, direction and strategy;
- The decision-making power of communities is problematic because of their relationships with ongoing, pre-innovation management structures which persist;
- Separate communities of secondary and primary schools, and communities based upon network membership may not be conducive to the development of coherent localised systems of effective schooling.

The intention of creating a more efficient local/regional entity for policy implementation was only partly realised. Government representatives had expressed hopes that the creation of communities of schools would induce mergers of school boards so that eventually all schools in one community would belong to the same board. The rationale behind this was to avoid inefficiencies and duplications of structures. Whilst some mergers have taken place, this process of rationalisation seems to be slow and uneven.

As to the third objective of improving school quality, tangible benefits for schools from this innovation seem from the outside to be small. So far, communities of schools do not seem to have any impact on students who are generally not even aware of the existence of communities of schools. Though from the inside the innovation has been described as a ‘small revolution’, opening up dialogue and new possibilities for learning and pedagogical leadership, there is as yet little evidence of the effect upon teaching, learning and the equity gap.

7. Food for Thought

First, it is important to note that the Flemish communities of schools fit well with our school leadership for systemic improvement focus. The theoretical construct is directed to ensuring that principals work together across schools and can act as leaders of schools as learning organizations which in addition can benefit and contribute to positive learning environments and communities. The OECD team agreed that these communities have the potential to raise equity and quality of education outcomes and to improve cooperation in an environment of heavy competition. This can lead to improved learning outcomes in Flanders.

However, the way these communities of schools have been launched and operationalised can be revised. Overall, the OECD review team felt that the government did not provide strategic leadership, educational vision, or a theory of action to guide the development of the communities of schools. The Flemish authorities initiated the development of communities of schools, but they did not further influence the development process or outputs. This hands-off policy has resulted in a lack of clarity about the purpose of communities in terms of school leadership and organisational culture. At the levels of the schooling networks, school boards, communities, and individual schools, there are many different understandings of the nature and purpose of school communities. As a consequence, there is a diverse landscape of various types of school communities with different degrees of cooperation. Some issues and key tensions may need to be resolved if communities of schools is to be sustained.

Leadership or management: Sustaining communities of schools

The evidence from a range of innovation practices around the world is that innovation is a process rather than an event. The process, therefore, needs to be managed in terms of resource allocation and infrastructure – for example, ‘in time’ training and development programmes. However, it also needs to be led. People need to feel involved, to have a sense of ownership through participation. To achieve these requires leadership in, for example, the development of a collective and distinctive vision, sense of direction, collegiality and achievement. This is especially the case where new systems are developed whilst previous systems remain. At present, there is no evidence of a view of what communities of schools might become. It is a top down innovation where the government’s vision seems unclear from below. Maybe that is one of the reasons why we could only identify incremental and very small changes.

Improving school quality and equity

From our meetings it became clear that communities of schools did not as yet have any tangible impact on teaching and learning, and they did not seem to reduce the equity gap. However, we observed that communities of schools can provide a framework to improving equity, as they allow for improved student guidance. Teachers and principals affirmed that thanks to the communities of schools they are more aware of all available study options in the community. This knowledge allows them to better orient students according to their interests and abilities.

There is some evidence of changes in systems of student orientation and educational trajectory, of a focus on students with special educational and language needs, and on care and well being. As yet there seems to be no discernible change in teaching and learning strategies. At least, this was not in the forefront of our conversations with the different stakeholders in the communities of schools. Communities of schools could become important tools to improve equity and quality of education if this was better spelled out and clear teaching and learning strategies were adopted for them.

Choice and cooperation: A dilemma of democracy

As funding follows the student, schools in Flanders have traditionally competed for students and resources. The practice of communities of schools seems to try to go beyond the tradition of school competition to make schools work together. As schools are allocated resources collectively, school leaders are compelled to get together regularly and consult on the use of these resources. We heard that in some cases cooperation is limited to this very aspect of resource distribution. In many schools, however, the externally imposed cooperation on resource matters has had a spill-over effect: communities of schools provided a structure and platform for knowledge sharing and collective action among school leaders and teachers from all types of secondary schools (technical, vocational and academic).

In order to cooperate it is necessary to give away a measure of individual voice and to accept the will of the majority. Where individual schools on the one hand and school boards and networks on the other are not willing to give power over decision-making away it is unlikely that democracy in communities of schools will flourish.

Overall, the nature of collaboration-competition balance as it emerges from the interactions of headteachers within and across the communities of schools remains unclear. It is an irony that the government introduces collaboration but is in practice also strongly committed to competition as a means to increase effectiveness and school quality.

Identities and change: bridging the old and new structures

Most communities of Schools continue to locate their identity in networks, and this is encouraged by the network managers. The strong power of the networks has not been significantly altered, as communities of schools remain affiliated to their respective network and the new structure of communities of schools seems to have had a marginal impact on the institutional landscape of secondary schools. In a way, the creation of communities of schools has added an additional layer of bureaucracy without abolishing any of the old layers. At the same time, however, the intervention has induced a degree of localisation / regionalisation of responsibility from the networks and boards to the school community level.

If communities of Schools are to continue to develop as means for improved education for all students in their communities, then they need to develop a strong community orientation. So long as networks and school groups continue to absorb and control significant resources, it is unlikely that community oriented identities will develop.

In Flanders the diffuse borderline between political and professional power and responsibility seems to represent a major problem. Unless both the coordinating directors and the headteachers get better training, the communities of schools are unlikely to gain greater influence because the boards are so strong in some places. The Ministry has the power to make leadership programs mandatory, but so far central level, in accordance with tradition, has been reluctant to intervene with the local level. If the intention is to give more power and responsibility to the communities of schools, both better opportunities for robust leadership training and a unified board are required.

Leadership training and support

There is no evidence that the Flemish authorities provide support to strengthen systemic leadership at the community level: There are no centrally organised support structures for principals, no monitoring and evaluation of leadership, and no dissemination of best practices. However, we observed that in successful communities systemic leadership had evolved locally: school leaders had made use of the community structure to establish mechanisms for peer support, school leaders of successful schools had shared best practices with more disadvantaged schools, and the coordinating director of the community had taken on a coaching and mentoring function to provide guidance for principals. We heard about communities of schools in Limburg and Antwerp, where shared leadership evolved as each principal of the community specialised in a certain field such as personnel, pedagogy, or infrastructure. The quality of shared leadership at the community level seems to depend on local factors, especially on the involvement of committed individuals at the school, community, or board levels.

Whilst networks have earmarked funding for in-service training for headteachers and staff, this is not always spent in meeting the needs which communities identify. This lack of training for leadership and management of these new communities of schools is a key reason for their uneven development and a hindrance to the establishment of strong community identities.

It is reasonable to assume that the less preparation coordinating directors and headteachers have, the more likely they are to fall back on their lay theories of leadership that are often premised on a very narrow experiential base of prior experience as a teacher. Also, due to rapid changes in society, lay theories are likely to maintain outdated concepts of heroic leadership rather than a concept of sustainable leadership (Møller & Schratz, 2008, forthcoming). Leadership programs have the potential of influencing the principals' learning trajectories, their emerging leadership identities, depending on which form of leadership is considered appropriate within the life cycle of the particular school (Sugrue, 2005).

Sharing Practice: Discussion and dissemination

At present there is no mechanism for identifying and disseminating the work of individual communities of schools. This is a responsibility of those who initiated the innovation and needs to be addressed with urgency. To engage in this would mean the Ministry and schools boards representing communities working together in order to understand and define examples of good practice.

Box 5: Summary conclusions and recommendations

Flemish communities of schools fit well with our school leadership for systemic improvement focus. The theoretical construct is directed to ensuring that principals work together across schools and can act as leaders of schools as learning organizations which in addition can benefit and contribute to positive learning environments and communities. The OECD team agreed that these communities have the potential to raise equity and quality of education outcomes and to improve cooperation in an environment of heavy competition. This can lead to improved learning outcomes in Flanders.

This report has revealed a number of obstacles for these objectives to be fully achieved and it has advanced a number of policy recommendations to address these:

- **Sustaining communities of schools:** Innovation practices like communities of schools need to be managed and led. For stakeholders to develop a sense of ownership through participation, it is important to develop a collective and distinctive vision, as well as a sense of direction, collegiality and achievement.
- **Improving school quality and equity:** School communities could have a stronger impact on quality and equity if this aim was spelled out more explicitly and if clear teaching and learning strategies were adopted in this respect.
- **Moving towards cooperation:** As currently the government seems to support both competition and cooperation between schools, there is a need to clarify a broader framework and vision for the communities in relation to an educational system traditionally based on choice and competition.
- **Bridging the old and the new structures:** There is a need to better define the roles and responsibilities of school communities vis-à-vis the networks, boards and individual school leaders. These stakeholders all need to give away some power over decision-making to allow for community-oriented identities to develop.
- **Providing leadership training and support:** As communities of schools rely for their success upon school principals, it is of utmost importance to provide training and support for them to develop their capacities.
- **Sharing practice:** An evidence-based approach geared towards monitoring and evaluating the development of school communities would allow for continuous learning and development of communities of schools to fit to the evolving needs of schools and students. It is therefore essential to define, share and disseminate good practices.

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ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND VISITS

Tuesday, 22nd May
Department for Education, Koning Albert II-laan 15, 1210 Brussels

Time	Name	Post
9.00 – 10.30 am Focus on context for policy making	Mr. Gaby Hostens	Director-General Member OECD Education Committee
10.30 – 11.30 am Focus on roles and responsibilities of communities of schools in secondary education	Mrs Hilde Lesage	Head of Division for teaching staff policies
11.30 – 12.30 am Focus on roles and responsibilities of communities of schools in secondary education	Mr. Michel Van Uytfanghe	Chairman of the Christian Teaching Union (COC)
12.30 – 14 pm	Lunch	
14.00 – 15 pm - Implementation of groups of schools and communities of schools - Distributed school leadership	Mr. Jacky Goris + Mr. Luc Debacquer	General Director group of community schools in Brussels (= former state school) Director Coordinator of community of secondary schools (community schools)
15.00 – 16.00 pm Focus on roles and responsibilities in communities of schools in primary education	Mrs Sonja Van Craeymeersch	Head of Division policymaking in primary education
16.00 – 17.00 pm - Implementation of communities of schools - Distributed school leadership - Preparation and development of school leaders	Mr. Luc Tesseur	Head of the Antwerp City School System

Wednesday, 23rd May

Sacred Heart Institute Heverlee and Paridaens Institute Louvain with Mrs Hilde Lesage

Time	Name	Post
9.00 – 10.30 am	School visit Sacred Heart Meeting with school leaders, teachers and students	
11.00 – 12.30 am	School visit Paridaens Institute Meeting with students and teachers.	
12.30 – 13 pm	Lunch Paridaens Institute	
13 – 13.30 pm Focus on distributed leadership within <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community of schools - Implementation of community of schools. 	Mrs A. Claeys	Director of Community of Catholic Secondary Schools in Louvain
13.30 – 15.30 pm Focus on school leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective school leadership - Distributed leadership in the Sacred Heart Institute (a diversity of schools with one board) - School boards and their search for effective school leaders 	Mr. Debontridder Mr Schoenaerts Mr Haest	School leader technical school VTI Headmaster Sacred Heart Secondary Institute Chairman board of community of catholic schools Louvain and chairman board of the Sacred Heart Institute
15.45 – 17.00 pm Focus on improving school leadership through networking within community of schools	Mrs Claeys and Mrs Verhavert and Mrs Van Ael	Teachers

Thursday, 24th May
Morning : Willebroek Rivierenland Group of Schools

Time	Name	Post
8.30 am	Departure for Willebroek	
9.30 – 12.30 am Focus on distributed school Leadership and on development of school leaders	Mr. Luc Van Gasse Mr. R. Schoofs Mrs. M. Heynick Mr. J. De Clercq	General director of regional group of community schools (= former state schools) Director, CLB (Guidance and Counselling centre) Director, primary school Senior primary school teacher
12.30 am	Lunch at school	
14.00 pm	Departure for Brussels	
15.00 – 16.00 pm Focus on assessment and evaluation of communities of schools in the catholic school system	Mr. Geert Schelstraete	Deputy Chief of Cabinet Minister of Work, Education and Training
16.00 – 17.00 pm Focus on - Communities of schools - Distributed school leadership	Mr. Paul Yperman	Coordination of Flemish Jesuit Schools
17.00 – 18.00 pm	Debriefing with Mr Gaby Hostens	