



Improving Lower Secondary Schools in Norway

Pointers for policy development

SCHOOL PRACTICES NEED TO ENGAGE ALL STUDENTS

International evidence

- One in four students in OECD countries is disengaged with school at age 15. Disengagement can arise because of:
 - a gap between what is taught and school practices that would engage students
 - insufficient basic skills on completion of primary education
- Schools need to be responsive to adolescents' needs by providing student centred teaching and learning strategies, a challenging, flexible and relevant curriculum and support to foster a sense of belonging.

Challenges in Norway

- Student motivation in Norway gradually declines starting between grades 5-10 in Norway (end of primary and lower secondary). Students do not clearly recognise what is excellent achievement, why it is important, and how to improve.
- This could be triggered by external factors and lack of incentives, and/or by how schools respond to their specific learning needs.

OECD recommendation to Norway: promote school improvement

- Develop a national strategy to strengthen schools as organisations to help build their collective capacity for engaging and motivating youngsters and to continuously improve their learning.
- Strengthen and support instructional leadership at the school level and across schools by requiring initial and on-going training for leaders and fostering collaborative support among schools.
- Ensure that schools provide a challenging and yet supportive environment and offer a relevant curriculum that gives some flexibility and choice to make it attractive to adolescent needs.

TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES CAN BE BETTER ADAPTED TO ADOLESCENT NEEDS

International evidence

- Lower secondary classrooms are characterised by greater emphasis on discipline and less personal teacher-student relationships in a time when students' desire for control over their own life is growing.
- Teachers need to be supported to deliver the curriculum effectively, but are also required to have solid content knowledge and teaching strategies that specifically cater to this age group.

Challenges in Norway

- While teachers are motivated, they require more knowledge preparation (*e.g.* subject areas, pedagogy of instructional skills and practices, or adolescent development).
- Better support and incentives are needed to attract top candidates and strengthen those already in the profession.

OECD recommendation to Norway: Nurture excellent teacher quality

- Strengthen the profession by:
 - building up teachers' skills in content, adolescent development and teaching strategies
 - raising the initial education level to a master's degree
 - linking to incentives to encourage high-quality candidates to enter the profession
- Enhance teachers' skills to implement the Knowledge Promotion curriculum in lower secondary by:
 - requiring continuing education/professional development to update pedagogical and content knowledge
 - providing teachers with concrete teaching strategies (*e.g.* maths and science) for different students' needs
- Use clear professional expectations/teacher standards to define what an effective lower secondary teacher in Norway, and provide regular feedback and evaluation to help meet these.

STUDENT TRANSITIONS ACROSS EDUCATION LEVELS SHOULD BE SMOOTHED

International evidence

- Academic achievement and engagement can decline in the transition from primary to lower secondary as students' leave childhood to enter adolescence while schools' appropriately escalate demands on students as they grow.
- Students who undergo two transitions (from primary and from lower secondary into upper secondary) seem to have larger risks of falling behind than those who undergo only one.
- Easing the negative impact of transitions is key to facilitating higher achievement gains and preventing students from falling behind and dropping out.

Challenges in Norway

- Not all Norwegian students finish primary education sufficiently prepared for lower secondary education.
- Also, PISA 2009 scores show that although progress is slowly being achieved, still a proportion of Norwegian students leave lower secondary without sufficient knowledge and skills to be successful.

OECD recommendation to Norway: ensure student success throughout effective transitions

- Better prepare all students to enter lower secondary education by intervening in early childhood education and care and in primary school and providing support as soon as learning difficulties are identified.
- Support the transition to lower secondary school by creating a culture of assessment, self-assessment, and feedback for improvement in all primary school classrooms.
- Ensure alignment of curriculum sequences and student supports by establishing vertical teaming in the content areas and assessing individual student needs from early childhood education and care to secondary school.
- Ensure effective transitions into upper secondary/VET by enhancing careers advice and curricular alignment.

GOVERNANCE ALSO MATTERS

International evidence

- Analysis of high performing countries' policies and practices shows some core principles need to be present across the education system to achieve good education results:
 - Clear goals on quality and equity, with public understanding and support
 - A focus on recruiting, developing and retaining excellent teachers and school leaders
 - Institutions and infrastructure to support improvement
 - An accountability and reporting system supporting the goals and information on student learning outcomes
 - Looking at the work of the individual schools where teaching and learning takes place

Challenges in Norway

- Norway's decentralised education system helps promote local engagement and control, but the system's governance is not adapted to this structure.
- There is no clearly defined implementation strategy for education reform throughout the different levels, including municipalities and schools.

OECD recommendation to Norway: align policy with governance

- Define and develop clear implementation strategies with a vision, and communicating a few key priorities for higher student engagement and performance. Through the Norwegian Directorate, develop implementation strategies, with public information campaigns and student/parental engagement.
- Reinforce the policy makers' role and capacities at the different system levels to ensure the implementation and adaptation of priorities and curriculum from the Knowledge Promotion reform. Provide them with information, support and skills to manage and deliver education services.
- Build a culture of evidence using data strategically to signal priorities and support lower secondary students' improvement by tracking and reporting on a limited set of key progress indicators. Create incentives to improve information management, accountability, shared responsibility and efficiency.

FURTHER READING

The report *Improving lower secondary schools in Norway* is part of OECD education policy national reviews focused on promoting effective policy design and implementation of specific country reforms. It was produced at Norway's request, and is intended to help education authorities in Norway and other OECD countries to find approaches to strengthen this key education level. For further information, please visit the website: www.oecd.org/edu/improvingschools.