

Abstract

The Belgian Court of Audit examined the educational and administrative support given to elementary and secondary schools

The Belgian Court of Audit noted that the educational and administrative support personnel's financing is sufficiently transparent. However, the system of points is not based on any needs measurements and has not yet been assessed by the authorities. Elementary education receives a much lower support per pupil than secondary education. Most schools, especially elementary schools, complain of insufficient support. Even after "schools communities" were created, cooperation between schools hardly improved on this matter. Although the education department implements the system of points in a fair way, there is room for better control of the use of overall points based allocations.

Context

The authorities finance and fund educational and administrative support to elementary and secondary schools through overall points based allocations allowing them to appoint staff. The points to take into account can vary with the staff member's qualifications or salary scale. The main personnel categories that are financed through those overall points based allocations are the management and support personnel in the area of elementary education (members of the administrative staff, training coordinators – zorgcoördinatoren - and IT coordinators) as well as the support staff in the secondary education sector (supervisors and members of the administrative staff). Particularly in the latter, it is also possible to recruit personnel of other categories (e.g. teaching personnel).

Justification and transparency

When they introduced this system of overall points based allocations, the authorities had specific aims in mind. Yet, the allocations were not calculated on the basis of solid criteria. The decisive arguments were the released budget margin or the existing staff number instead of measuring the schools' needs. The points' value corresponds to the qualification and salary scale. As the difference between the highest and the lowest amount of points is bigger than between both ends of the salary scale, it is not so interesting for a school to recruit more highly qualified personnel. The financing of the examined overall points based allocations is sufficiently transparent, except for the allocation intended for administrative support in elementary education.

Assessment by the authorities

Up to now, the authorities have followed up and assessed this support only in a limited way. They had a number of inspections carried out, but they did not intend to follow up the objectives' achievement or to identify

the actual support needs. Neither did they check what scale benefits had been achieved thanks to the larger “school communities” system.

Use of the points based allocations and task definition

Even though support in elementary education has been growing faster, regular secondary education still gets a support for each pupil that is almost three times higher than the support granted to regular elementary education. When asked about it, most elementary schools stated that they still did not get enough supporting staff. Some tasks carried out by the management and the teaching staff can be accomplished by the management and supporting personnel. The members of the administrative staff mainly take on executive administrative duties. The situation is pretty much the same in the secondary education sector. The supporting staff is hardly ever asked to give management support, which is mostly entrusted to the teaching staff. Since the introduction of the points based allocations system, the number of personnel with a bachelor or master degree has scarcely increased or remained the same. Elementary schools have a more positive attitude towards cooperation in the form of larger school communities than secondary schools. However, they think that the support received through this form of cooperation remains insufficient. The administrative workload still weighs heavily despite the authorities’ efforts to alleviate it.

Financing and funding legality

The points based allocations calculation is almost fully computerized. It is based on reliable data banks, thus reducing the risk of error. Supervising the use of the various points based allocations has its weaknesses. Consequently, a permanent automatic check would be more appropriate than a periodic check on the system. Besides, the department does not have any information about the actual allocation of points within the schools. On the other hand, there are sufficient guarantees that the salaries are duly paid.

Minister’s reply

The minister gave specific clarification on several report issues and commented on the Court’s recommendations. In his opinion, the report contains some facts and developments that the policy must properly take into account.