School Governance and Autonomy

This paper considers how school functions are divided at school level, at the local level and at central government level across a number of jurisdictions. It considers international trends and the principles of effective governance, and sets out governance arrangements in a number of European and English-speaking countries around the world.¹

Executive Summary

Introduction

This paper considers school governance, particularly the extent to which responsibilities are devolved to the local and school level across a range of countries internationally.

It covers the following countries:

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¹ This paper was commissioner by SPICe from the Northern Ireland Research and Information Service.
**Trends**

The trend over recent decades has been towards decentralisation in education, with increasing responsibilities devolved to local authorities and to schools. Responsibilities are divided across multiple stakeholders and there is an increased emphasis on self-regulation. Countries have different starting points in terms of decentralisation, with countries such as the UK and Finland having a lengthy history in this regard.

**Links with performance**

Research indicates that the relationship between school autonomy and student performance is complex. While, overall, it suggests that countries with greater educational autonomy for schools perform better, the effects may be limited and only apply to some countries. In addition, the nature of accountability mechanisms is an important factor in this regard.

**Principles of modern governance**

Research suggests that there is no one correct governance approach, and that processes take precedence over structures. However, any approach must be holistic and take account of factors such as accountability and innovation.

The central element of the education system, often the ministry, has an important role to play in providing vision, steering reform and setting out guidelines. Capacity building and stakeholder involvement are also key.

**Conclusion**

The research shows a range of different governance models in place internationally. Some systems, such as the UK and Finland, have longstanding policies and procedures supporting school autonomy. Others, such as the Republic of Ireland, take a more centralised approach to school administration and management.

However, the overall trend is towards decentralisation. Despite this, the evidence suggests a limited impact of this approach on student outcomes. The relationship between the two is complex, and other factors, such as accountability mechanisms, play an important role.
1 Introduction

This research paper considers how school functions are divided at school level, at the local level and at central government level across a number of jurisdictions. It considers international trends and the principles of effective governance, and sets out governance arrangements in a number of European and English-speaking countries around the world.

2 Overview

The OECD reports that internationally, there has been a trend for decentralisation within education systems within the past few decades. Not only is greater responsibility devolved to local authorities and schools, but there has been a move away from a hierarchical approach to one with divided responsibilities and greater self-regulation. This multi-level governance approach tends to involve more flexible links between those involved.²

Countries such as the UK and Finland have a long history of decentralisation in education, while others have had different starting points. There is of course an added layer of complexity in federal states where authority is spread over national and state levels. Education ministries maintain responsibility for ensuring high quality, efficient and innovative education at the national level.³

The OECD finds better student performance overall in countries where students have greater autonomy, and notes that it is important that schools combine autonomy with accountability for schools.⁴ However, a number of studies find that increasing autonomy may improve performance only to a limited extent, and only in some countries.⁵ This suggests that relationships between school autonomy and performance are complex.⁶

However, increased autonomy at the local level is thought to be an important factor in enabling schools to improve and to meet changing stakeholder expectations. Schools with greater autonomy may be better equipped to adapt to changing circumstances and drive improvements, although there is a lack of robust evidence on this.⁷

3 Principles of modern governance

NFER reports that the key principles and components of governance are more important than the model employed.⁸ The OECD set out five key principles for

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modern governance in its research on educational governance in 2016. Figure 1 below highlights these.

Figure 1: OECD’s principles of education governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Overview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No one right governance approach</td>
<td>• Almost all structures can be successful under the right conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Processes are more important than structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole-system approach is essential</td>
<td>• Education systems need to consider and balance factors such as accountability and trust, innovation and risk avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective governance requires capacity, open dialogue and stakeholder involvement</td>
<td>• Although strategic direction is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central level remains important</td>
<td>• Key role in providing vision, steering education reform and setting out guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a need to develop key principles for system governance</td>
<td>• Principles should be based on a whole-system approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Should include both where to go and how to get there</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Northern Ireland: Boards of Governors’ autonomy

Structure

Northern Ireland has a complex educational structure with a range of bodies involved in its management and administration.

The Department of Education has overall responsibility for the education of the people of Northern Ireland and for effectively implementing educational policy. A number of arm’s length bodies, each accountable to the Department, support it in delivering its functions. This includes the Education Authority which manages and delivers services, ensuring sufficient educational provision and acting as the employing authority for staff in many schools.

At the individual establishment level, a Board of Governors governs each school, whose composition varies according to the school type.

Governance reforms

In 1990 the introduction of Local Management of Schools led to greater school autonomy by giving Boards of Governors and principals responsibility for resource

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allocation. Under these arrangements, the Education Authority delegates a budget to individual schools and the school decides how best to spend it.  

There are a number of school types in Northern Ireland, with differing governance arrangements: some have greater autonomy than others. A Board of Governors governs each school; whose composition varies according to the school type.  

- **Controlled**: The Education Authority provides and manages controlled schools through Boards of Governors. Primary and post-primary Boards of Governors for controlled schools include transferor members (from the three Protestant churches). There are also a number of controlled integrated schools.

- **Catholic maintained** (also known as voluntary maintained): The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) is the employing authority for these schools, and they have a Roman Catholic ethos. Their Boards of Governors include trustees appointed by CCMS.

- **Grant-maintained integrated**: These schools have an integrated ethos and high levels of autonomy. They are under the management of a Board of Governors.

- **Other maintained schools**: The majority of other maintained schools are Irish-medium. The Church of Ireland owns three other maintained schools.

- **Voluntary grammars** (voluntary non-maintained): Post-primaries that select on the basis of academic ability. These schools have high levels of autonomy and are self-governing under the management of a Board of Governors. Boards of Governors include trustee and foundation governors.

Controlled and maintained schools are funded through the Education Authority and voluntary grammar schools and grant-maintained integrated schools are funded directly by the Department of Education.

**Accountability**

Schools are held accountable through outcome measures, namely teachers’ assessments for pupils aged up to 14 and GCSE and A level (or equivalent) results. The Education and Training Inspectorate also plays a key role through school inspections.  

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England: High levels of autonomy for schools

The UK is among the OECD countries that grant the greatest autonomy to schools. This is in terms of resource allocation and making decisions around curriculum and assessment.\(^\text{13}\)

Structure

The UK Government has overall responsibility for the education system. Local authorities must ensure provision of sufficient school places and support school improvement and vulnerable young people.\(^\text{14}\)

Devolved school governance is well-developed in England. Each school has a governing body comprising the principal, parent and staff representatives, the local education authority and political representatives.\(^\text{15}\) The governing body provides strategic leadership and accountability by:\(^\text{16}\)

- Ensuring clear vision, ethos and direction;
- Holding senior leaders accountable for educational performance; and
- Overseeing the school’s financial performance.

Maintained schools and academies have high levels of autonomy, with most financial and management functions delegated to governing bodies and principals. From their budget allocation boards of governors are expected to cover all revenue costs, including staff salaries, teaching resources and repairs and maintenance.\(^\text{17}\)

Governance reforms

In the 1980s and 1990s reforms moved staffing and budget responsibilities to school governing bodies, reducing the role of local authorities. Local authorities retained responsibilities around school provision, support and improvement.\(^\text{18}\)

Since 2010 further reforms have led to significant changes to the education system. Academies make up a majority of post-primary schools and a significant minority of primaries. Collaborative structures such as multi-academy trusts and teaching school

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\(^{13}\) OECD (2011) *PISA in Focus: School autonomy and accountability: Are they related to student performance?* Paris: OECD Publishing


alliances prove a middle tier of management that was formerly held by local authorities.\textsuperscript{19}

However, research indicates a mixed picture of governance across academy chains, with some highly centralised and others affording greater autonomy to schools. Evidence on the performance of academies suggest that their impact has not been as transformative as was originally envisaged.\textsuperscript{20}

**Accountability**

Within the English education system accountability is based on outcome measures in the form of national tests and qualifications taken at ages 11, 16 and 18, and the inspection of providers.\textsuperscript{21}

6 Wales: Decentralised approach

**Structure**

The Welsh Government has overall responsibility for the education service, while local authorities must ensure adequate school provision, support school improvement and help vulnerable pupils.\textsuperscript{22}

In Wales all state schools are local authority maintained schools, including community schools, foundation schools, voluntary maintained schools and voluntary aided schools.\textsuperscript{23}

Many responsibilities are devolved to schools, particularly through governing bodies. School governors provide strategic leadership and accountability, monitoring the school’s educational and financial performance and ensuring clear ethos and direction.\textsuperscript{24}

Local authorities provide funding to schools through the individual schools budget, using locally agreed funding formulae (although 70% of the formula must relate to pupil numbers).\textsuperscript{25}

**Reforms**

In line with England, reforms in the 1980s and 1990s devolved greater responsibility to schools, with staffing and budget responsibilities given to governing bodies. As in

\textsuperscript{22} Eurypedia (2016) United Kingdom (Wales) [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/United-Kingdom-Wales:Overview
England, the local authority role reduced as a result of these reforms, but authorities retained responsibility for school provision, improvement and support.  

**Accountability**

Accountability for schools is based on outcome measures: teacher assessment results and attendance data for primaries and national qualification results and attendance data at post-primary. It is also based on inspection outcomes.

7 Republic of Ireland: Centralised approach

**Structure**

School governance is much more centralised in the Republic of Ireland than in England, Northern Ireland or Wales. Its education system has been described as a partnership between the State and a number of private agencies. All primary schools and most post-primaries are privately owned (by organisations and religious denominations) and state-funded, but governed by boards of management.

The Department of Education and Skills has responsibility for the administration of education at primary, post-primary and special education, and for funding further and higher education.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) directly pays teacher and staff salaries and provides schools with capitation grants to cover the day-to-day running of schools (for example, heating and maintenance). The capitation mechanism based on school enrolments gives boards of management autonomy in how they use and target grant money.

Most schools receive funding directly from the DES through capitation grants, although post-primary vocational schools and community colleges receive their funding from the relevant Vocational Education Committee (VEC) (which distributes DES funding).

**Reforms**

Legislation in 1930 afforded the State a greater role in some areas, by setting up vocational education committees and state-owned vocational schools. The 1960s saw the development of comprehensive and community schools, and the Department began to play a greater role in developing and implementing policy.

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29 OECD (2013) Education policy outlook: Ireland


Despite these reforms, the Republic has maintained a centralised education system, with no comprehensive regional structure for schools.\(^{32}\)

**Accountability**

The education system is evaluated through school self-evaluation, through review of state examination outcomes and external school inspection by the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate.\(^{33}\)

8 **Denmark: Limited role for the regions**

**Structure**

In Denmark the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality largely holds responsibility for education, while other ministries have certain responsibilities in this area.\(^{34}\) Denmark’s five regions have limited duties in regard to education, but they are responsible for the operation of social and special education institutions.\(^{35}\)

At the school level the principal and an elected board administer the institutions. Two bodies govern primary and lower secondary schools, and the school principal is accountable to both:\(^{36}\)

- The local or town council opens and closes schools, recruits teachers and administers the budget;
- The school council, comprised of elected parent representatives, advises the town or local council of the school’s curriculum design and activities.

At primary level, the principal develops a proposal for the school’s budget (within the local council’s framework) and activities and presents it to the school’s board for approval. At post-primary the board establishes a budget with the principal’s recommendations within the local council’s framework and is responsible for the school’s financial management.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{34}\) Eurydice (2016) *Denmark: Overview* [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ffpis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Denmark:Redirect

\(^{35}\) Eurydice (2015) *Denmark: Administration and Governance at Central and/or Regional Level* [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ffpis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Denmark:Administration_and_Governance_at_Central_and/or_Regional_Level


\(^{37}\) Eurydice (2012) *Denmark: Administration and Governance at Local and/or Institutional Level* [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ffpis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Denmark:Administration_and_Governance_at_Local_and/or_Institutional_Level
At both primary and post-primary the board supervises the school’s activities, approves its budget and works within the local council’s framework. It also develops a proposal for the school’s curriculum to be submitted to the local council.  

In addition, each school has a pedagogic council, comprising all staff that have educational and teaching functions, to advise the principal and enable debate on educational issues and innovation.  

9 The Netherlands: Among the highest autonomy for schools  

Dutch schools are consistently noted to have among the highest levels of school autonomy across OECD countries. From the late 1980s the Dutch Ministry of Education gave schools almost complete authority to self-govern. The approach combines centralised policy with decentralised school administration and management.  

Structure  

In the Netherlands the Minister of Education, Culture and Science and the State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science have overall responsibility for education. The Minister sets out statutory requirements and sets the framework for schools to operate within. There is no national curriculum, but attainment targets exist.  

At the provincial level authorities have a limited role in education, and are responsible only for supervisory and legal tasks. For primary and secondary schools administration and management is organised locally. The school’s board has responsibility for the school and educational quality.  

Accountability  

Schools are responsible for themselves, but the inspectorate intervenes where it assesses a school to be at risk of underperforming.  

The inspectorate draws on a series of indicators to identify which schools to inspect, and deems schools to be ‘normal’, ‘weak’ or ‘very weak’. Underperforming schools

38 Eurydice (2012) Denmark: Administration and Governance at Local and/ or Institutional Level [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Denmark:Administration_and_Governance_at_Local_and/or_Institutional_Level  
39 Eurydice (2012) Denmark: Administration and Governance at Local and/ or Institutional Level [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Denmark:Administration_and_Governance_at_Local_and/or_Institutional_Level  
41 Eurydice (2014) Netherlands: Administration and Governance at Central and/ or Regional Level [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Administration_and_Governance_at_Central_and/or_Regional_Level  
receive follow-up inspections and ‘very weak’ schools have two years to improve or they will be closed. During this period the inspectorate engages with the school and monitors it, and weak schools receive support.\textsuperscript{44} The school’s autonomy reduces during the improvement period with the increasing role of the inspectorate.\textsuperscript{45}

This approach has had mixed results. While it has reduced the number of schools receiving poor inspection results, some schools have further deteriorated. In addition, the response of individual schools, teachers and parents is hard to predict. The OECD suggests that this example shows that managing change in a complex system requires sensitivity in regard to the many factors affecting school performance.\textsuperscript{46}

The OECD suggests that this example highlights that educational interventions create cycles that may be virtuous or vicious, and can interact together in unexpected ways.\textsuperscript{47}

\textit{Multiple school accountability}

In addition, multiple accountability for schools is important in the Netherlands. All schools must identify relevant stakeholders and involve them in the formation of strategy, decision-making and evaluation.

This is provided for through education governance codes, and national organisations of school governance boards set compliance with these codes as a condition of membership. This has increased participation the governance codes.

10 \textbf{Finland: High levels of educational autonomy at the school level}

The Finnish education system is characterised by decentralisation and high educational autonomy at all levels, and local administration and educational institutions play a crucial role in this regard.\textsuperscript{48}

\textbf{Structure}

The Ministry of Education and Culture has overall responsibility for education and works with the Finnish National Board of Education and a number of other organisations to develop educational aims and approaches.\textsuperscript{49}

Local municipalities provide most pre-school, primary and post-primary education. At the institution level, schools and teachers have much freedom to design curricula and teaching approaches.

\textbf{Reforms}

\begin{itemize}
\item Burns, T., Köster, F. (2016) \textit{Governing Education in a Complex World} Paris: OECD Publishing
\item Burns, T., Köster, F. (2016) \textit{Governing Education in a Complex World} Paris: OECD Publishing
\item Eurydice (2017) \textit{Finland: Overview} [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Finland:Redirect
\item Eurydice (2017) \textit{Finland: Overview} [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Finland:Redirect
\end{itemize}
In 1985 Finland began a process of decentralisation in education that would last until the mid-1990s. At this point even more responsibilities were devolved to schools, and school inspections were abolished.\textsuperscript{50}

11 Sweden: Decentralisation at the municipal level

Sweden’s education governance is characterised by decentralisation to the municipal level. There is no regional administrative level, however county councils may have responsibility for upper secondary schools.\textsuperscript{51}

Structure

Sweden’s government has overall responsibility for education and sets its framework. Municipalities organise education, and much school funding originates from municipal tax revenues.\textsuperscript{52}

Each municipality draws up a school plan for their area demonstrating how it will fulfil the national goals, noting finance, organisation, and development and assessment of each school’s activities.\textsuperscript{53}

At the school level, the school administrator develops (in conjunction with other staff) a local work plan for issues not dealt with in the national regulations, such as curriculum, organisation and teaching methods. The principal is responsible for making sure national and municipal goals are translated into robust educational objectives.\textsuperscript{54}

Reform

In the 1990s Sweden began to decentralise administrative responsibilities to the municipal level, and changed its funding approach to provide lump sums to municipalities instead of direct government transfers. The aim was to increase local autonomy and facilitate local needs.\textsuperscript{55}

Under the new model the central administration steered national goals while municipalities were responsible for deciding how to reach the goals. There was no


\textsuperscript{51} Eurypedia (2017) \textit{Sweden: Administration and Governance at Central and/ or Regional Level} [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ftpis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Administration_and_Governance_at_Central_and/or_Regional_Level

\textsuperscript{52} Eurydice (2017) \textit{Sweden: Overview} [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/ftpis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Overview


clear guidance on the process and, as a result, many ad-hoc governance approaches were employed by municipalities.\textsuperscript{56}

The rapid move to decentralisation proved problematic for municipalities, who struggled to adapt to their new-found autonomy and had little time to develop strategies for coping with their new duties and powers. The lack of internal discussion led to ambiguity in roles, and a hands-off approach by central government led to insufficient capacity building.\textsuperscript{57}

The OECD reports that the Swedish example highlights the complexity of decentralisation, indicating a need for effective strategic vision, planning and capacity building.\textsuperscript{58}

**Accountability**

The move towards decentralisation was accompanied by a liberalisation of school choice, and included a strong shift towards student testing as a way of monitoring performance. Nonetheless, accountability was ‘minimal’ within this approach.\textsuperscript{59}

12 **Germany: Coordination across the Länder**

**Structure**

The Federation and the Länder (states) share responsibility for the German education system. However, the Länder hold primary responsibility for the administration of the school system and educational legislation. The Federation’s responsibilities in education include early childhood education and care in day-care centres and child-minding services, financial assistance for pupils and students, vocational education (outside school) and higher education.\textsuperscript{60}

Under the Basic Law each Länder must fulfil governmental responsibilities. The Basic Law includes some fundamental provisions on education, including the rights of parents.\textsuperscript{61}

In 1948 a *Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany* was established, with a view to coordinating shared characteristics and promoting comparability across Germany’s education system. Based on an agreement between the Länder, the Standing


Conference brings together the relevant ministers and senators of the Länder to deal with educational policy matters.62

The Standing Conference’s resolutions can be adopted unanimously, with a qualified majority or with a simple majority, and have the status of recommendations. The resolutions are implemented in the individual Länder as administrative action, ordinances or laws, with the Land parliaments playing a role in the legislative procedure.63

The Ministries of Education in the Länder are responsible for schools and develop policy guidelines, adopt legal provisions and administrative regulations and cooperate with other bodies.64

At the school level, public sector schools are maintained jointly by the Land and the local authorities. The Land pays for teaching staff while the local authority pays for other staff or material costs. The local authorities are responsible for the establishment and maintenance of schools. Specialist schools are maintained by a Land.65

Within the school system supervisory authorities exercise academic, legal and staff supervision. School supervisory authorities and the institutes for school development provide special educational support and academic evaluation.66

Accountability

External quality or evaluation agencies inspect and evaluate schools in almost all Länder. Responsibility for this lies with school supervisory authorities in some Länder and with the institutes for school development in others. Germany’s Standing Conference established the Institute for Educational Quality Improvement in 2004 to monitor education across the Länder.67
13 **Australia: Decentralised approach**

A decentralised approach is also employed in Australia, with nationally-based agreements with states and territories.\(^{68}\)

**Structure**

The six states and two territories have responsibility for delivering school and vocational education. Most educational decisions are taken by the states and territories. National and state governments have agreements in place defining education goals. States make most planning, structure and resource decisions, including personnel management.\(^{69}\)

Teachers have extensive autonomy. However, there are concerns around the robustness of accountability mechanisms for teachers including limited opportunities for professional feedback and varying quality of teacher assessments.\(^{70}\)

**Reform**

Since the early 1980s Australia has devolved greater responsibilities to schools.\(^{71}\) The OECD reports further increased autonomy since 2003, noting that schools take 49% of decisions, while states take 51%.\(^{72}\)

14 **Canada: No department of education**

Canada is the only country in the developed world with no department of education or federal office. Instead, then ten provinces and three territories are responsible for education.\(^{73}\)

**Structure**

At the provincial level, responsibility is shared between the central provincial government and locally-elected school boards. The premier chooses the minister for education from members of the provincial legislature.\(^{74}\)

In Ontario the education ministry is responsible for setting targets, providing funding and supporting struggling schools. The district’s role is to support schools, while there is an understanding that it is at school level where change must be implemented.\(^{75}\)

School boards have responsibility for student achievement and wellbeing, for resource management and for delivering effective education. They must also provide

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for staff recruitment, buildings maintenance and monitoring school policies and student achievement.\textsuperscript{76}

In Quebec the school board plays an important role, acting as a local democratic institution offering and organising educational services within their assigned territory. Commissioners govern school boards, and are elected through a general election.\textsuperscript{77}

The school board network in Quebec includes 72 schools boards across 2,340 pre-school, primary and post-primary school, as well as across adult and vocational training settings.\textsuperscript{78}

**Reform**

Canada granted schools greater autonomy from the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{79} The four leading provinces placed an increased emphasis on centralised testing and curriculum planning, while some of the provinces employed a ‘tight-loose’ approach to school improvement. This involved combining greater, centralised accountability with more school-level control.\textsuperscript{80}

More recent reforms include capacity-building efforts and attempts to encourage teachers to buy into the improvement strategy. The OECD reports that Canada has become a ‘world leader’ in terms of its education reforms.\textsuperscript{81}

**Accountability**

Canada places an emphasis on results, particularly for provincial assessments. Where it identifies poor performance, the approach is to intervene and support, rather than to punish and apportion blame.\textsuperscript{82}

15 **New Zealand: Highly devolved self-managing school system**

New Zealand’s schools have among the most autonomy across OECD countries.\textsuperscript{83}

**Structure**

The government sets annual objectives for education, and the Ministry of Education develops the national policy framework, including curriculum and assessment standards. It also provides funding and interventions for failing schools.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{77} Education Internationale *The Quebec school system* [online] Available at: http://www.education-internationale.com/en/about-us/quebecs-education-system/
\textsuperscript{78} Education Internationale *The Quebec school system* [online] Available at: http://www.education-internationale.com/en/about-us/quebecs-education-system/
Elected school boards manage schools and their focus is on student achievement. Principals have a wide range of responsibilities within a framework of significant autonomy. School boards often delegate the recruitment and appraisal of teachers to the school's principal.  

Teachers also have a great deal of autonomy. The OECD highlights the importance of capacity building for teachers and principals to complement their high levels of autonomy.

Reform

Since 1988 New Zealand has devolved management responsibilities to schools, and since 2001 the Ministry has had augmented powers to make interventions for failing schools.

These reforms have led to particularly high levels of autonomy at the school level, with schools taking over three-quarters of decisions in 2007. The OECD reports that only English and Dutch schools have higher levels of autonomy.

Accountability

Schools and principals are afforded trust to conduct self-assessment, and this is supported by external evaluations.

16 Conclusion

Recent decades have seen a trend towards decentralisation in education systems. Local authorities and schools now have greater responsibilities for matters such as resource management, and many countries emphasise self-regulation for schools. Education ministries maintain duties in respect of ensuring high quality and effective education at the national level.

The research suggests a complex relationship between increased autonomy and student performance, indicating that it only improves student achievement to a limited extent. Effective accountability mechanisms are important where schools have greater autonomy.

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