

Remarks on governance developments by Peter Michielsens.

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With regards to good government of the educational institution, the Flemish government has made a number of significant strategic decisions and has carried out many specific projects in order to improve the educational quality during the past couple of years.

When these decisions were made, the first ruling principle was the Flemish government's belief in the power of autonomous educational institutions. All recent policy measures with respect to education are therefore taking the policy making capacity of schools maximally into account. Good educational government implies not only clear choices regarding policy and projects but also the right and the autonomy for schools to shape the content and organisation of their educational services. That way schools will be able to both adequately and efficiently meet the challenges they are currently faced with and will face in the future.

When schools are to operate and decide on their policy making more autonomously, they are also expected to increasingly develop the capacity to implement and carry out that policy. This subsequently implies that the supervision by the educational inspectorate has to gain insight into that ability, which immediately forms a first choice of policy of the Flemish government. With respect for and trust in the expertise and autonomy of school teams as a basic principle, it is not our intention to audit schools on their policy making capacity. On the other hand the draft decree on educational quality explicitly assumes that the inspectorate of education will voice concerns on the school's policy making capacity when the school's output is determined as unsatisfactory. Only by offering them the necessary space, schools can not automatically be expected to develop a satisfying policy making capacity. Therefore the inspectorate will keep an eye on their output data.

By doing so, problems can be detected in time and necessary support can be sought. In the future, the correlation between reaching educational objectives and the school's policy making capacity will be mapped much more precisely by the inspectorate. The increased attention towards the correlation between the school's policy making capacity and the school's results must be seen within the framework of general focus or emphasis on output, which the Minister of Education, Frank Vandenbroucke, is aiming to include in the Flemish educational policy.

A second important strategic choice of the Flemish government relating to corporate governance is the opting for the development and stimulus of information-rich school environments. Most schools in Flanders have little tradition in gathering, conserving and governing data on their own functioning. The past few years, clear signals were sent on behalf of the government to make schools appreciate the value of well developed databases. At this moment we are developing a complete database fed by important input and output indicators (for example: social-economical profiles of pupils, success rates in further studies, intake and number of school-leavers ...). In a first phase this database will be

used by the inspectorate itself. By means of this database we want to work out well-defined profiles on which we will base specific and differentiated audits. After a certain period of time this database will possibly become accessible for schools in order for them to get a clear insight into their own profile, on which base they will then be able to permanently adjust their policy. It is clear that access to an extensive database containing data on each institution, forms an important base for optimising all functions involved. This furthermore offers added value to the autonomous policy making capacity.

A third strategic choice for good corporate governance is embodied in a stimulating policy on internal quality. It was only very recently when it became compulsory for Flemish schools to account for their internal quality policy. When, a couple of years ago, extra means were assigned to schools with large groups of less privileged scholars, a self-evaluation of their specific policy became compulsory. However, till date, the number of schools setting up valuable quality assurance systems remains rather limited. In the draft decree on educational quality that will be presented to the Parliament, it is stated that each school has to set up its own quality guaranteed assurance system. In the future the inspectorate will be able to audit the efforts that schools put into creating and maintaining their own quality policy. Previous studies indicate that an increased focus on quality only takes effect when the people involved can fill in the meaning of the term 'quality' themselves. Only when schools get more responsibility regarding their own quality policy, there is a good chance that they will develop more actions and initiatives on the internal quality policy, which will eventually increase the quality of learning.