

Cour des comptes



MOBILISING THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY AROUND THE SCHOOL PLAN

Public thematic report

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Executive Summary

Although national expenditure on education is higher than the average for countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (USD 109,584 compared to USD 105,502 for the education of a pupil aged 6 to 15 in 2021¹), the French education system is struggling to produce satisfactory results; the difficulties encountered in its particularly centralised management raise questions about how schools can mobilise, at their own level, to build and implement an educational plan adapted to the specific characteristics of their pupils, in order to improve their success, on which parents' attention is focused. As international surveys show, the French school system is not succeeding in reducing inequalities; rather, they are tending to increase, despite the measures implemented to remedy the most disadvantaged situations, which have their limits.

Indeed, despite the equality objectives of the education system, all the reports on co-education in schools, as well as the analyses of the differences in results in national examinations and access to the general stream of the *lycée*, show the extent to which the national uniformity specified can deal with real large inequalities in the treatment of pupils.

In addition, decentralisation has enriched the strictly national management of education by transforming secondary schools [*lycées* and *collèges*] into local public education institutions (EPLs). By entrusting more responsibilities to local authorities while maintaining the extensive powers of central government, this new statute invited the institution to play its full role in managing education, in particular by exploiting the flexibility allocated to it. Adopted by Framework Act No. 89-486 of 10 July 1989, the notion of a school plan has been added to the methods of managing the EPLE.

The survey conducted by the Court sought to take stock of the situation by analysing how EPLEs mobilise themselves around this plan. It looked at the role of the local public education institution within the education system and its capacity to take action, as defined by the regulations.

The Court was able to measure the extent to which these institutions have been affected in recent years by normative provisions aimed at both their actions and their relations, in particular Law No. 2019-79 of 26 July 2019 on Trust in School, which has strengthened the role of evaluation at all levels of the education system.

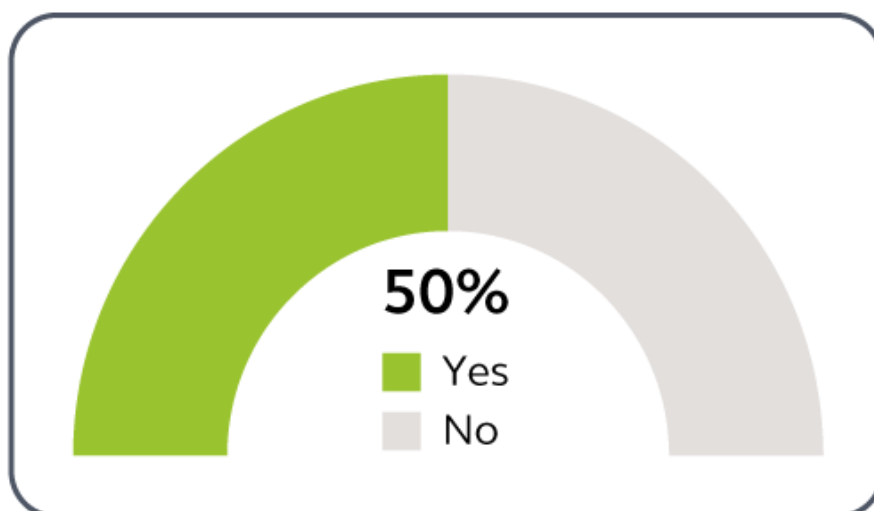
Its work also analysed the role of the headteacher in order to better highlight the ambiguities that are still attached to this post. There is thus a significant gap between families' perception of the role of headteachers and the reality of the levers that headteachers have at their disposal on a day-to-day basis to manage their schools.

A school plan that is still not sufficiently mobilised

As required by the French Education Code, each secondary school must draw up a school plan, setting out its educational choices and policy for the school for a period of three to five years. In particular, it is about adapting the national school framework to the characteristics of the school's pupils in order to promote their success. The process initiated by the headteacher is collective. On the basis of an analysis drawn from the evaluation of each school, it aims to define, together with the representatives of the educational community, the specific procedures for implementing national guidelines, objectives and programmes, as well as the academic plan. However, half of the schools do not have such a plan and, among those that do, the quality of the approach and scope of the document vary greatly.

¹ OECD, Education at a Glance 2022, 2022.

Survey question “Did your school have a school plan signed with the academic services?”



Source: Court of Accounts

The room for manoeuvre is underexploited

Beyond the legal autonomy granted to EPLEs by the regulations, their capacity to take action can be seen at several levels, including human resources management, the educational organisation of teaching hours, and pedagogical and educational management through building their school plan, which is adapted to the needs of pupils and the specific features of the area. However, it should be noted that, behind the declaration of formal autonomy, schools do not always sufficiently exploit the flexibility available. With comparable environmental, social, economic and cultural situations, and with similar teaching resources, two schools can have very different results in terms of educational achievement.

The Court sought to understand the reasons for this. It also attempted to measure the cost and effectiveness of the resources allocated to EPLEs and to identify ways of improving efficiency.

Faced with growing inequalities and the mixed results of French pupils in international assessments, an improvement in school organisation is essential. To do this, the Ministry must adopt a real strategy based on several pillars that are still lacking, the first of which should involve strengthening the role of headteachers and overhauling the methods of allocating resources to EPLEs.

Formal and limited legal autonomy

Based on observing some forty schools, the Court sought to understand what levers were available to schools to ensure their pupils' success, and how they used them to recommend possible changes. Although EPLEs legally have autonomy, in practice, the flexibility they have to adapt their educational organisation is unequal. Many obstacles can indeed limit the willingness of educational teams to mobilise themselves. These obstacles are as much linked to the governance of schools as to the various different stakeholders who must be brought together (schools, teachers, parents, and local authorities).

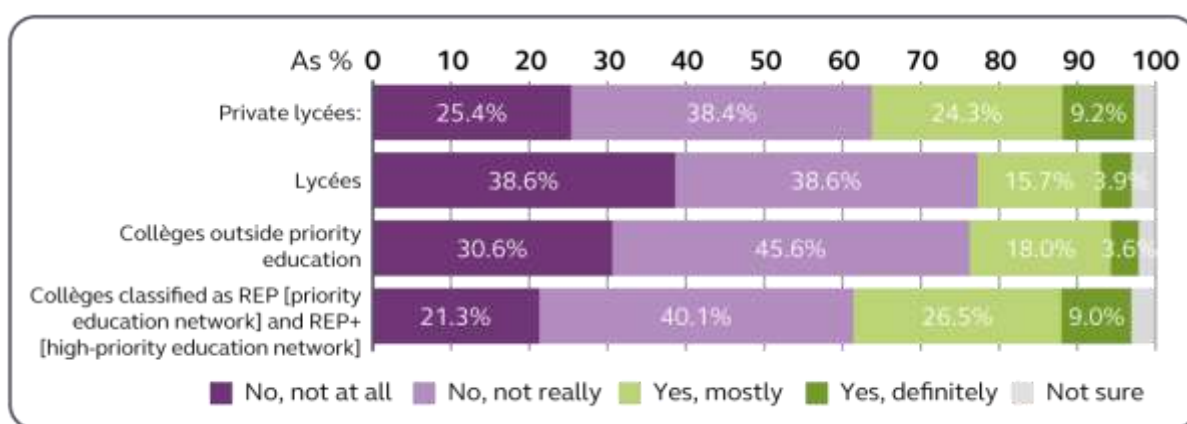
This inequality is the result of a combination of factors, primarily related to a rigid and highly centralised management model. Little room is left for the appraisal of educational teams in the face of an administration rooted in a “top-down” management culture. It also reflects the varying ability of headteachers to bring their teaching teams together. Finally, the social situation of the pupils as well as the geographic location of the school are determining factors in the educational choices made by an EPLE.

Empowering headteachers

Headteachers are key stakeholders in implementing a pedagogical and educational plan. They are responsible for building collective momentum within the school and ensuring its follow-up on a day-to-day basis.

Despite this, their legitimacy and the definition of their prerogatives suffer from shortcomings. Although positive developments have taken place in recent years to strengthen their local supervisory role, the levers at their disposal, particularly in terms of teacher evaluation, are still limited. They do not have enough flexibility to enable them to value the contribution of a teacher involved in the school's life, to motivate their team and to better reward those members who are the most committed.

Headteachers' responses to the question "Do you consider the level of autonomy within the overall allocation of teaching hours to be sufficient?"



Source: Court of Accounts

In view of this, the Court calls for a change in the conditions under which headteachers work in order to turn them into true senior managers within the institution, benefiting from the prerogatives associated with their status, without necessarily extending their current powers of recruitment. The Ministry must support this development by strengthening their training and support as well as by modernising the management of their careers.

Further adjusting the allocation of resources to EPLEs

The French school system is based on a generally uniform allocation of educational resources, with the exception of priority education institutions and the operating resources provided by local authorities. In most cases, the main criterion is the number of pupils attending the school in relation to a number of divisions (classes). The achievements and social situation of pupils, as well as the geographic context of the school, are not taken into account systematically throughout the country; some academies use methods for the gradual allocation of resources based on indicators developed by the Directorate for Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance (DEPP), while others do not.

Under the guise of equality, in reality, the school tends not to rectify existing inequalities sufficiently. To counteract this situation, the Court considers that the resources allocated to schools would be more effective if the methods for allocating them took greater account of the results of evaluations and the constraints of the school's location, and if they were better coordinated with the intervention of local authorities.

Audit recommendations

1. Ensure that each EPLE has an up-to-date school plan, which is a prerequisite for the implementation of an evaluation process (*MENJ*).
2. Streamline schools' management tools by making the school plan the pivotal document enabling the better ownership of the school's strategic action (*MENJ*).
3. Entrust the headteacher with the evaluation of secondary school teachers, with the possibility of appeal to the inspector (reiterated recommendation) (*MENJ*).
4. Annualise the service obligations of secondary school teachers, quantifying the individual and collective actions of teachers outside of teaching hours (reiterated recommendation) (*MENJ*).
5. Within the overall allocation of teaching hours, leave the headteacher with a number of hours making it possible to enable them to the value of teachers' contribution with regard to the objectives of the school plan (*MENJ*).
6. Reform the procedures for recruiting and transferring headteachers by reserving at the central level the sole appointment of specific posts, new appointments and staff changing academy (*MENJ*).
7. In the models for allocating resources to schools, include criteria that take into account the profile of the pupils enrolled, the specific characteristics of the school, particularly geographic, and the implementation of specific projects promoting pupils' success (*MENJ*).
8. Encourage schools, academies and local authorities to enter into contracts in order to integrate a real rationale that ensures that the resources provided to EPLEs complement each other (*MENJ*).