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**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION
EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

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Meeting of the Education Committee at Ministerial Level

THEME 1: RAISING PERFORMANCE LEVELS FOR ALL

**SUB-THEME: DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND DEVOLVING
RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FRONTLINE**

Lead Speaker - Hungary

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Contact:

Mr. Bálint Magyar, Minister of Education, Hungary

Tel.: + 361 473 75 42; e-mail: balint.magyar@om.gov.hu

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Dear Hosts, dear Colleagues, dear Members of the OECD Secretariat,

In the following 10 minutes, I would like to introduce the second part of Theme 1: Raising performance levels for all. We have already talked about how educational standards can best be set and monitored, and now the discussions to follow should concentrate on the policy tools which we have to use to improve education for all. In my introduction, I would like to focus on three problems we have agreed to be key issues when we prepared this meeting:

- The problem of tracking and addressing the causes of quality differences between schools
- Effective policy tools to raise performance and improve service quality in schools, and
- The problem of how to devolve responsibilities to the “frontline”, the problem of school autonomy.

Issue 1: Addressing school quality differences

Performance differences between schools can be attributed to various factors. There is ample research evidence that family background, the socio-cultural level of the peer environment, home resources, and motivational factors play an important role in shaping student outcomes. We know from PISA that these factors interact with school quality factors (like teacher quality, school resources, classroom management, etc.).

Challenges

- How should one make a FAIR assessment of school quality i.e. in such a way that home background and peer effects - which are inevitably involved in the assessment of knowledge and skills - are separated out?
- How can one motivate, support (both financially and professionally) and reward poorly performing schools to improve?

Policy tools

Although we cannot eliminate differences between schools, we can make efforts to diminish these and we have to make efforts to reduce the educational consequences of social disparities. Policy measures aiming at the latter include measures like

- assessing school performance
- (including the measurement of pedagogical added value)
- designing specific support and funding mechanism for under-performing schools, or schools operating in difficult circumstances
- motivating schools (and school maintainers) to meet standards in a decentralized system.

The school performance assessment system – a new piece in the Hungarian policy toolbox

I would like to mention one area in which we think we have made a step forward. Recently, we have initiated a student performance assessment system which allows us to make schools face their own

pedagogical performance. On the basis of the information about the social intake of the school, we calculate the „estimated performance level” and report its estimated and actual performance level back to the school. This, we think, will give us a policy tool which can be used in discussing and planning quality improvement at different levels of decision making. The next step would be to reveal how the state can intervene or take targeted measures to assist and press quality improvement.

Issue 2: Targeted support systems

Governments face a mounting demand for support structures and additional funds to meet the growing demands for quality education for all. Added to this, social disparities and educational problems in schools seem to grow. Welfare mechanisms in education – like in health services – no longer seem to be supportable from the public budget at the required level.

Challenges

Thus the question arises whether a lower level of provision should be available for all, or support systems should be targeted at the students most in need. This is a real dilemma because

- there is a certain percentage of the student population which need huge extra investment in order to integrate them both culturally and economically. Disadvantaged students are concentrated in schools operating in disadvantaged areas where the social environment often counteracts improvement,
- differential school programmes often preserve inequities, because they do not target the same knowledge and skills.

Policy tools

A financial mechanism based on per student additional grant is often used – *Hungary uses it as well* – but we find that it does not always reach the desired goal, because it is difficult to determine at central level. Furthermore, this type of financial support is insufficient to manage school-specific cost differences. *In our experience the additional per student grants does not automatically provide incentives for the elimination of performance-based segregation, which, in Hungary, is often equal to social segregation.*

Project financing and project support mechanisms: Hungary has set up various development funds. We find that the advantage of this approach is that financing is targeted better at specific purposes. It also gives the opportunity for the central government to set its requirements, and apply a monitoring system which could enforce the success of projects.

With this approach we encounter the following problems:

- a) grants often do not reach the least active (disinterested) schools and the most impoverished school districts
- b) sometimes the grants are too small to make application worthwhile
- c) monitoring by external agencies is a costly effort
- d) the grant objectives do not match the school’s real (basic) needs
- e) the project goals are reached but there are problems of sustainability.

Supporting individual students: due to the low percentage of disadvantaged students, who continue their studies in the upper tracks of education, individual long term scholarships and/or loans are extensively used policy tools.

We find that students eligible for support need not only support to stay in school longer, but also additional pedagogical help which should be financed in a different way, directly targeted at the school. This includes the development of programmes, teaching aids and equipment. Programmes, textbooks, school equipment are not just important tools to transmit the required knowledge standards, but are also decisive elements of the learning-teaching process. School practice, development-oriented learning and programmes assisting differentiated learning are important elements to be developed.

Issue 3: Structure of decision-making and control; effects on performance

The increasing complexity of our public governance systems, including educational systems, requires responsibilities to be shared between local, regional, national levels of government and the institutions themselves. Devolving responsibilities to the “front line” means that decisions should be delegated to the level where information and competence are at hand to take informed and competent decisions.

Challenges

The weakening of direct state control over local and institutional processes raises the issues of:

- how education policy can harmonize national priorities with local and institutional objectives and the expectations of the local society
- how relatively autonomous stakeholders can be empowered to act efficiently and to co-operate with each other in the most effective way
- how a school can be motivated to raise its performance.

Policy tools

When we are talking about harmonization of priorities and goals articulated at different levels, we should bear in mind that we need to reduce risks of disintegration and ensure compliance with national goals while maintaining flexibility, and give room to different local needs, students’ and families’ individual aspirations. I’m convinced that on the basis of our new assessment system, one can identify the problems arising in schools, and empower the schools to make progress with appropriate assistance.

If we are to improve performance, it is not sufficient to define standards at national level, we must also empower schools to be able to increase performance by themselves. In order to enable schools to act independently, in Hungary we support quality schemes and self-development methods. It requires the organisation and the operation of schools to be transformed. The responsibility of the government is to simultaneously provide schools with

- a regulative framework enabling schools to continuous improvement
- capacity built on their own needs
- incentives and rewards

while educational providers should be made accountable.

I would like to emphasize that the above mentioned three elements for school development are equally important and interdependent. None of them can be discarded. If the schools are independent, but they lack the competence or interest, autonomy will only make them perform worse. If they master the appropriate competence, they still cannot act without independence or if there is no motivation to increase

performance. If they are motivated to increase performance, but unable to act due to lack of autonomy or competence, there will be no performance increase either.

It is my sincerest conviction that searching for answers to these problems is our common mission, in which the professional resources of OECD will be crucial.