



Whole-school improvement processes

A whole school approach aims to raise quality and standards across the entire school. For this approach to be effective, schools need to identify and address the needs of the school community and engage in continuous, cyclical processes for improvement. Schools that actively use school planning and school (self-)evaluation will be in a stronger position to eradicate early school leaving.

External monitoring and assessment mechanisms

Based on quantitative and qualitative measures that reflect the diversity of activities for which schools are responsible, and the different starting point/contexts in which schools operate (e.g. trying to measure the school's 'added value'), quality assurance mechanisms can play an advisory and supportive role to schools in implementing their early school leaving strategies. Qualitative indicators, in particular, can help schools reflect on measures that are in place or that can be developed to address early school leaving. Quality assurance mechanisms seem to be most effective when both their 'summative' function (related to accountability, control and compliance check) and their 'formative' function (related to improvement and development) are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Networking between schools

Cooperation and networking between schools of different types and levels which are located in the same catchment area can facilitate exchange of practices, and help make the crucial transitions from early childhood education and care to primary schools, and from primary to secondary education easier for learners and their families. Local authorities may have a key role to play in promoting this cooperation.

Source: Directorate-General for Education and Culture, *Education & Training 2020 / Schools policy*, 2015



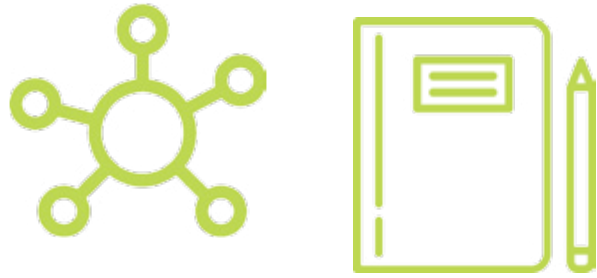
A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH to Tackling Early School Leaving



Policies to reduce early school leaving should be embedded in an overall inclusive **learner-centred vision of education**, in which high quality education is accessible to all.

In such a vision, **schools** have a crucial role to play to ensure that all learners reach their full potential for growth irrespective of individual and family-related factors, socio-economic status and life experiences.

Schools should be safe, welcoming and caring learning environments, striving for learners' engagement, in which children and young people can grow and develop as individuals and members of the **community**, feel respected and valued and recognised in their specific talents and needs.



Because of the multi-faceted nature of the issue, schools cannot address **early school leaving** and educational disadvantage alone. Different stakeholders and services, inside and outside the school, need to collaborate and integrate efforts. The school is the logical site to initiate community collaboration. This calls for a whole-school approach.

Developing a **whole school approach** to reducing early school leaving means that the objective of eliminating drop-out and encouraging school success for all should be promoted consistently and systematically across all those dimensions of school life which may have an impact on educational achievement.

In a whole school approach, all members of the school community (school leaders, middle management, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families) feel responsible and play an **active role** in tackling educational disadvantage and preventing drop-out.

A whole school approach also implies a cross-sectoral approach and stronger **cooperation** with a wide range of stakeholders (social services, youth services, outreach care workers, psychologists, nurses, speech and language therapists, guidance specialists, local authorities, NGOs, business, unions, volunteers, etc.) and the community at large, to deal with issues, which schools do not (and cannot) have the relevant expertise for.

The concept of a whole school approach allows for the entire system of actors and their inter-relationships in and around schools to be considered, acknowledging that each stakeholder has a part to play in supporting the learners' educational journey and nurturing their learning experience.

School Governance

Competent and effective **school leadership and governance** are necessary to promote a positive and collaborative culture and ethos, which involves all school actors and to establish strong bonds with the community around the school. The following aspects are essential.

Greater flexibility/autonomy to schools

The complexity of early school leaving requires more flexible and innovative approaches. More flexibility should be granted to schools with regards to school governance arrangements, teaching practices and curriculum implementation (with enhanced scope for experimental approaches to school drop-out) for example. Enhanced school autonomy, coupled with strong accountability enables schools to identify the most appropriate solutions to complex situations and to best provide for the specific needs of the school community.

Selection, support and training for school heads

School heads have a crucial role to play to develop and implement 'whole school approaches', in particular by adopting a more distributed leadership style and by creating space and time for cooperation. They need leaders with a clear vision, sense of organisation, capacity to take on new responsibilities, share authority and power, involve and promote dialogue between all school actors and with other stakeholders around a set of shared goals and responsibilities.

Distributed leadership

Implementing a distributed leadership model in school with an objective that is focused on improved learning requires developing a reflective practice and sharing tasks and responsibilities across the entire school community. School heads should be in a position to encourage teachers to take on leading roles in a particular area of expertise, assume responsibility and take initiatives as individuals or groups; they should promote teamwork, multi-disciplinarity and professional collaboration among teaching and non-teaching staff, other stakeholders, professionals and services. Adopting a distributed leadership model also requires enhancing learners' and families' participation in school life and in formal and informal decision-making processes.