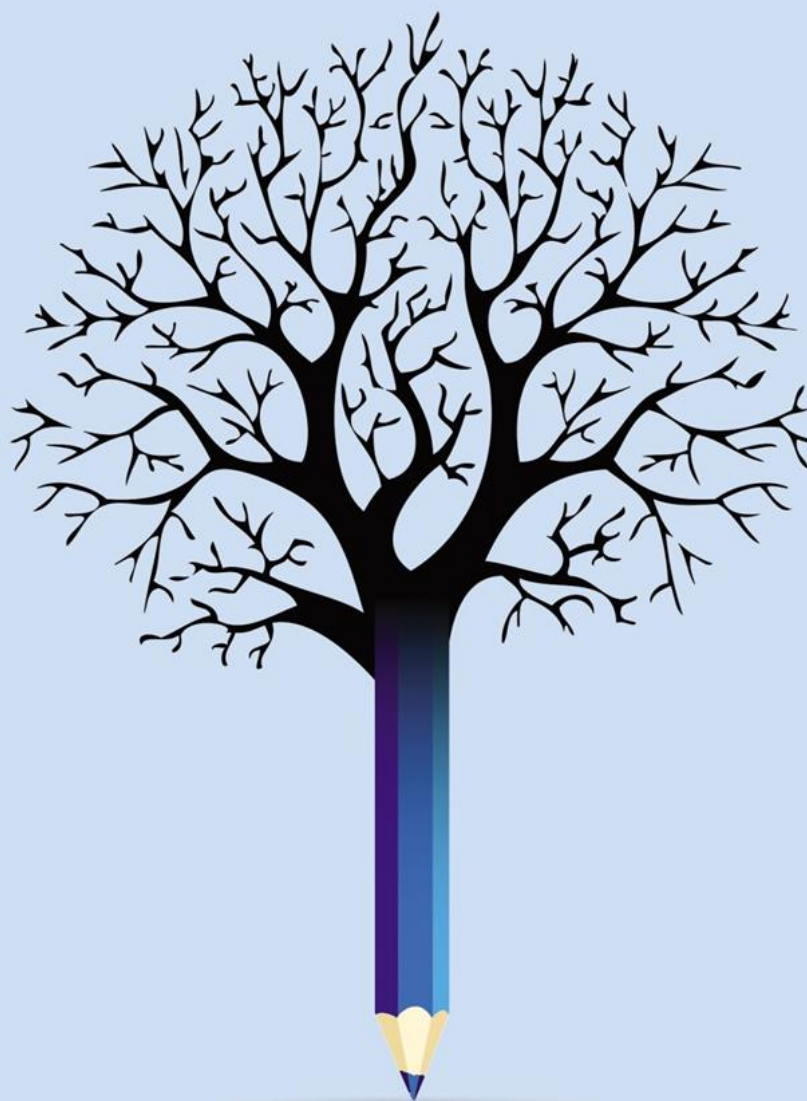# OECD Education Policy Perspectives

No. 15

EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK IN

FRANCE

June 2020

EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK

Note: Most of the content in this profile was written before the COVID-19 outbreak. As such, this document offers insight into pre-existing conditions that may influence the system's responsiveness in the context of the crisis and help inform longer-term efforts to strengthen resilience. Spotlight 1 summarises France's initial responses to the crisis. Its structure is based on work by the Education Policy Outlook in 2020 to support countries in these efforts.

This **policy profile on education** in France is part of the *Education Policy Outlook* series, which presents comparative analysis of education policies and reforms across OECD countries. Building on the OECD's substantial comparative and sectoral policy knowledge base, the series offers a comparative outlook on education policy. This country policy profile is an update of the first policy profile of France (2014) and provides: analysis of the educational context, strengths, challenges and policies; analysis of international trends; and insight into policies and reforms on selected topics. It is an opportunity to take stock of progress and where the education system stands today from the perspective of the OECD through synthetic, evidence-based and comparable analysis.

Designed **for policy makers, analysts and practitioners** who seek information and analysis of education policy taking into account the importance of national context, the country policy profiles offer constructive analysis of education policy in a comparative format. Each profile reviews the current context and situation of a country's education system and examines its challenges and policy responses, according to six policy levers that support improvement:

- Students: How to raise outcomes for all in terms of 1) equity and quality and 2) preparing students for the future;
- Institutions: How to raise quality through 3) school improvement and 4) evaluation and assessment;
- System: How the system is organised to deliver education policy in terms of 5) governance and 6) funding.

Some country policy profiles contain spotlight boxes on selected policy issues. They are meant to draw attention to specific policies that are promising or showing positive results and may be relevant for other countries.

Special thanks to the Government of France and, in particular, the French Ministry of National Education and the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for their active input during consultations and constructive feedback on this report. Brigitte Devos participated in the project on behalf of the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission.

Authors: This country policy profile was prepared by Eric Charbonnier, Diana Toledo Figueroa, Clément Dumont and Christa Rawkins in the Policy Advice and Implementation Division, led by Paulo Santiago. Editorial support was provided by Stephen Flynn and Rachel Linden. This profile builds on the knowledge and expertise of many project teams across the OECD's Directorate for Education and Skills, to whom we are grateful.

Sources: Subject to country participation, this country policy profile draws on OECD indicators from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and the annual publication Education at a Glance, and refers to country and thematic studies such as OECD work on early childhood education and care, teachers, school leadership, evaluation and assessment for improving school outcomes, equity and quality in education, governing complex education systems, school resources, vocational education and training, and tertiary education. This profile also draws on information in the OECD Education Policy Outlook National Survey for Comparative Policy Analysis completed in 2018 by the Government of France, as well as information provided by the Ministry of National Education between 2018 and 2020 as part of the Education Policy Outlook's activities with countries.

Most of the figures quoted in the different sections refer to Annex B, which presents a table of the main indicators for the sources used throughout the country policy profile. Hyperlinks to the reference publications are included throughout the text for ease of reading, and also in the References and further reading section, which lists both OECD and non-OECD sources.

More information is available from the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills (www.oecd.org/edu) and its web pages on the Education Policy Outlook (www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm).

In the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, some information is provided about initial responses.

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France's education context

Students: In France, 15-year-olds scored slightly above the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science in PISA[1] 2018. However, disadvantaged students were five times more likely not to reach minimum proficiency in reading (PISA level 2) than their advantaged peers. Disadvantaged students are also over-represented in secondary vocational education and training (VET), with efforts undergoing to improve social esteem of this stream. Thus, 87% of young people entering VET have parents who have not had higher education, compared with only 51% in general education. In France, inequalities in student outcomes appear from an early age and become more pronounced as students move through the system. As in many European countries, guidance and support for students moving from secondary to tertiary education could be improved, with high failure rates in certain fields. In France, young people's integration into the labour market is very much linked to their level of educational attainment, more so than in most OECD countries.

Institutions: Most schools in France benefit from a climate conducive to learning, but France is in the group of countries facing greater challenges related to classroom discipline. School leaders in France have limited responsibility for teacher recruitment and pedagogical matters; this is particularly marked in primary education, where school leaders are teachers who, while retaining their status, are responsible for administrative and pedagogical functions (most frequently part-time). As in many countries, teaching is not always seen as an attractive profession in France, particularly in science subjects or certain academies. Multiple mechanisms are used to evaluate French schools. These could benefit from being part of a general evaluation framework aimed at improving teaching and learning. The culture of evaluation has developed quite recently in France, in contrast to inspection and certification procedures.

System: France has a centralised education system in which the State defines pedagogical guidelines and curricula, and carries out the recruitment, training and management of school management staff, and teaching staff in public schools as well as those in private schools which have a contract with the State. A different ministry to the Ministry of Education is also responsible for institutions for children under age 3. This may inhibit the development of coherent strategies for all early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. Funding for educational institutions mostly comes from public funds through relatively transparent and coherent mechanisms. However, despite recent initiatives, France continues to exhibit a notable disparity in the distribution of per-student spending between primary and secondary education, in favour of the latter, and also between higher education institutions. Annual expenditure per pupil/student in tertiary education is higher in France than the OECD average, but universities still lack resources when compared to other higher education institutions.

Key policy issues: The key challenge for the French system is to provide equal opportunities for all students to succeed. This objective underpins many of the reforms underway, including extending the starting age of compulsory education to 3 years old, to introducing compulsory education or training up to the age 18. To this end, it is recommended that greater support be given to disadvantaged students and schools by allocating additional resources where they are most needed, and from the earliest age. Making the teaching profession more attractive by strengthening the professional and practical components of initial teacher education, and by facilitating access to relevant continuous professional development throughout their careers that is more responsive to their specific needs and offered available near close to their workplace are also important challenges. Strengthening the role and capacities of school leaders in identifying requests for teachers' training requests and taking them into account in the school project is also of great importance. Similarly, monitoring teachers' careers and providing opportunities for formative evaluation is essential. It would also be appropriate to continue to strengthen the quality of professional streams and further increasing their social esteem. Improving guidance mechanisms and facilitating the transition between education and the labour market are important challenges. As for schools, having the opportunity to improve the academic performance of students within a coherent assessment framework and ensuring that resource allocation meets the needs of certain disadvantaged areas are the main challenges. The Law for a School of Trust (Loi pour une école de la confiance, 2019), which aims to raise general standards and social justice across the system, has the potential to meet several of these challenges (see Spotlight 4).

Strengthening adaptability and resilience in the context of COVID-19 (see Spotlight 1)

Pre-existing resources in the education system appear to have facilitated some areas of France's initial response to the pandemic. Local collaboration is reported to have played an important role in France's response, with participants from the civic service (*service civique*) and other local volunteers. In addition, regional approaches, such as the Priority Education Networks (REP and REP+) and Educational Cities (*Cités Éducatives*) seem to have facilitated the delivery of additional support and resources to disadvantaged students. As France works to balance short-term responsiveness with ongoing strategic aims, priorities evolve. As elsewhere, a range of resources supporting distance education has been put in place for teachers and school leaders, but educators could benefit from more opportunities and spaces for professional collaboration, with, for example, a focus on enhancing digital skills. Finally, although disruptions to student assessment were considerable, the cancellation of examinations and use of continuous assessment could strengthen the support and knowledge needed to implement the ongoing Reform of the Baccalaureate, provided that France actively engages stakeholders in these changes.

Spotlight 1. The French education system's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic. Education systems across the world have felt the force of the crisis as confinement measures triggered widespread closures of education institutions. On 12 March 2020, France announced the closure of all educational institutions, from ECEC to tertiary level, as of 16 March 2020. The reopening of classes began on 11 May. In light of the work of the **Education Policy Outlook** in 2020 in the context of this pandemic, this spotlight offers an insight into system readiness and immediate responses across five key areas of analysis:

1. **Ensuring continued access to learning and smooth educational pathways**: During the closures, France required educational institutions to maintain pedagogical continuity using online materials. The National Centre for Distance Education organised 4-week learning blocks for 5-18 year-olds, accessible free of charge for teachers, students and families. Eduscol, the Canopé Network and the websites of the regional administrations (*academies*) also have digital resource banks. At the same time, the Learning Nation (*Nation Apprenante*) campaign aimed to mobilise national and regional media, in particular *France Télévisions* and *Radio France*, to support student learning. The Ministry of National Education and Youth supported educators to use these tools through mobilising its network of digital education advisors and developing a training programme with tutorials and webinars. The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation also collated resources and information to support pedagogical continuity in higher education institutions. France cancelled the national end-of-cycle examinations (*baccalauréat*, *brevet*), using the average performance of students in assessments that took place before confinement to inform students' final grade. Higher education institutions either switched to online assessments or postponed examinations; other post-secondary national and institutional examinations have been postponed and/or adapted.

2. **Strengthening the internal world of the student:** In February, the Ministry of National Education and Youth issued guidelines for schools on pedagogical continuity with students in the event of closure.

3. **Collecting, disseminating and improving the use of information about students**: Student assessments conducted remotely during school closures were not used to inform final grades. However, examination boards would continue to take into account the students' attendance and engagement throughout the school year.

4. **Providing targeted support and interventions for vulnerable children and families**: Support for disadvantaged students has focused on: 1) the distribution of technological equipment; 2) more mentors and tutors for disadvantaged students mobilised through local volunteer networks; and 3) additional financial support for disadvantaged students during the summer holidays. The Learning Holidays initiative (*Vacances apprenantes*), which expects to benefit one million children, aims to redress the gaps in learning that may have accrued during school closures and minimise the risk of increased student drop out. The initiative also aims to have a social impact by offering children some enriching experiences during the summer holidays.

5. **Harnessing wider support and engagement at local and central level**: Throughout the period of closures, educational institutions continued to provide emergency childcare for the children of essential workers, including during school holidays. This action was coordinated by schools and regional administrations, in collaboration with regional health agencies. In partnership with the national postal service (*La Poste*), schools distributed educational resources on a weekly basis to students without access to digital resources at home. The national online platform, I want to help (*Je veux aider*), was set up to connect local volunteers with charities addressing local needs, including childcare, tutoring and mentoring. Furthermore, approximately 25 000 young people (16-25 year-olds) participating in the national civic service programme (*Service Civique*) were similarly redeployed.

Selected indicators of system readiness (OECD)	France	Average	Min	Max
Students' readiness (according to students' self-reports in PISA 2018)				
1 Index of self-efficacy	-0.10	0.01	-0.61	0.36
2 Percentage of students in disadvantaged schools with access to a computer at home that they can use for school work	82.1%	81.5%	23.5%	96.5%
Teachers' readiness (according to lower secondary teachers' self-reports in TALIS 2018)				
3 Percentage of teachers with a high level of need for professional development related to ICT skills for teaching	22.9%	17.7%	5.3%	39.0%
4 Percentage of teachers agreeing that most teachers in the school provide practical support to each other when applying new ideas	73.5%	77.9%	64.7%	86.5%

Note: The information presented in this spotlight covers key measures announced or introduced **before 22 April 2020**.

KEY TRENDS IN PERFORMANCE AND ATTAINMENT

In PISA 2018, 15-year-old students in France achieved an average reading performance of 493 score points, the main subject assessed, which was slightly above the OECD average of 487 points. Average performance in reading in France has not changed significantly since 2009 (see Figure 1), or since the first edition of the PISA test in 2000. However, the apparent stability of the average performance over the period 2000-2018 masks divergences between students. Between 2000 and 2009, the performance level of the highest performing students tended to increase in France while that of the weakest students declined. However, this growth in performance inequalities did not increase over the more recent period from 2009 to 2018.

Figure 1. Trends and comparative performance of 15-year-olds in reading, PISA

Mean reading score, PISA 2018

Mean score in reading trend, 2009 to 2018 (PISA)

■ France ◆ OECD average — Min — Max

— France – – OECD average
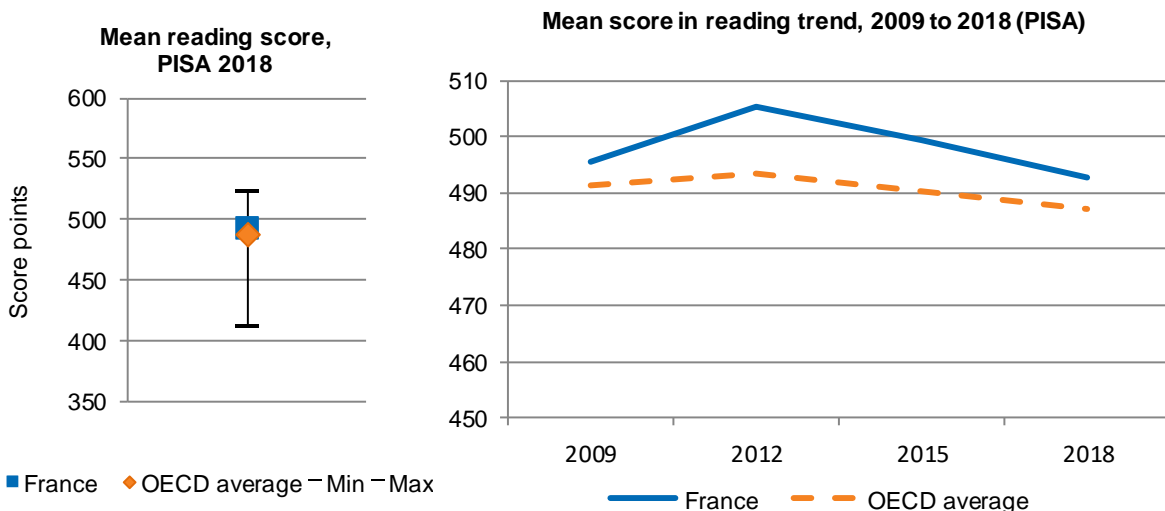
Note: "Min"/"Max" refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values.
Source: OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en.

In 30 years, France has caught up with other OECD countries in terms of educational attainment. In particular, there has been a significant increase in the share of tertiary graduates over this period, who now represent 47% of all 25-34 year-olds in France, compared to 44% on average across the OECD. Among older adults (55-64 year-olds), however, only 24% were qualified at tertiary level, compared to an OECD average of 27%. The share of upper secondary graduates is also above the OECD average: among 25-34 year olds in France, 87% have at least one upper secondary qualification, compared to 85% on average across OECD countries (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Evolution of secondary and tertiary attainment among 25-34 year-olds, 2000-18
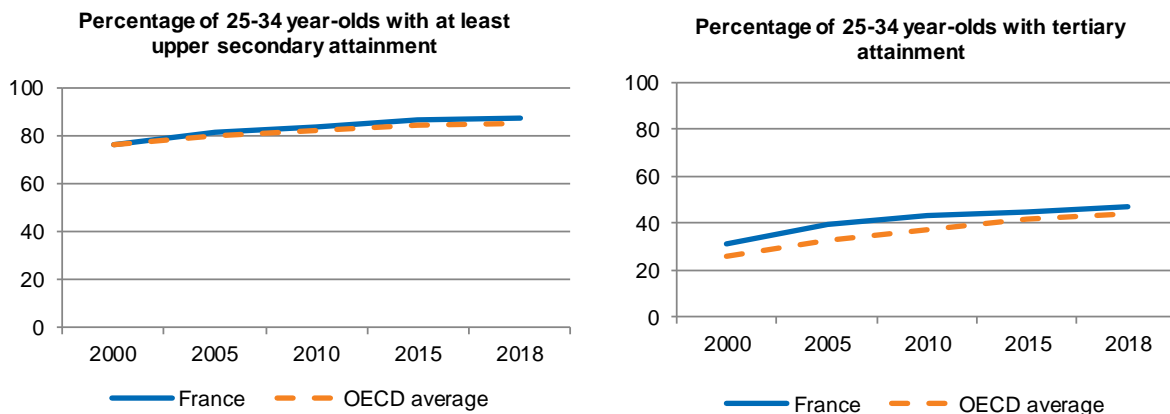
Percentage of 25-34 year-olds with at least upper secondary attainment

Percentage of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary attainment

— France – – OECD average

— France – – OECD average

Source: OECD (2019), *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en

Spotlight 2. Key policies, challenges and previous OECD recommendations for France

Main education policies from France included in this country policy profile	**Key challenges identified and recommendations previously provided by the OECD**
STUDENTS	

▪ Law of 22 July 2013 on higher education and research ▪ Law on the Guidance and Planning for the Restructuring of the Republic's Schools (*Loi d'orientation et de programmation pour la refondation de l'École de la République* (2013)) ▪ Primary and secondary schools for ambition, innovation and success (*Écoles, collèges et lycées pour l'ambition, l'innovation et la réussite,* ÉCLAIR, 2011) ; Priority education networks (*Réseaux d'Éducation Prioritare*, 2014) ▪ Strengthened focus on primary education (2014); reduction in class sizes (2018) ▪ All Together to Overcome School Dropout (*Tous mobilisés pour vaincre le décrochage scolaire*, 2014) ▪ Reform of lower secondary education, 2016; Homework Done scheme (*Devoirs faits*, 2017) ▪ Individual Pathway for Guidance and Discovery of the Economic and Professional World (*Parcours individuel d'orientation et de découverte du monde économique et professionnel*, 2013) ▪ Transformation of secondary vocational tracks (2018) Baccalaureate reform (general and technological tracks); reform of the upper secondary cycle (2018) ▪ National Action Plan for the Reception and Support of Migrant Groups (*Plan d'action national pour soutenir l'accueil et l'accompagnement des publics migrants*); Welcome refugees (*Accueil des réfugiés*) information portal (2015) ▪ Student Plan (2017) ; new online admissions portal (*Parcoursup*) (2018) ▪ The Law for a School of Trust (*Loi pour une école de la confiance*, 2019)	**Key challenges identified [2015, 2017, 2018, 2019]:** The OECD has previously identified a need to improve the equity and quality of the education system as a whole, as well as to increase individual support for the most vulnerable students. Specifically, the OECD highlighted the challenge of improving the performance of the French education system by reducing inequalities between students from different socio-economic backgrounds. The OECD also identified the challenge of organisation and governance in childcare, noting that a single pedagogical framework for the whole of early childhood should be considered. Previous OECD analyses also suggest the importance of improving student guidance mechanisms and the transition from school to the labour market. Finally, previous OECD work also emphasises that the quality and social esteem of vocational tracks in upper secondary education should be enhanced by involving employers more in the design of curricula and by strengthening the presence of core skills, specifically numeracy and literacy), to help ensure future career mobility. **Summary of previous OECD recommendations:** The OECD has recommended actions to make pre-primary education the key focus of efforts to tackle inequalities, and to strengthen the training of both teachers and assistants (specialised territorial agents, ATSEM) of these institutions to increase parents' awareness of the benefits of early childhood education and care (ECEC). Based on OECD data, the OECD has also recommended strengthening the vocational education and training (VET) system through improving transitions to the labour market for graduates from vocational pathways. In this context, the OECD emphasised the importance of providing quality education and developing apprenticeships to better prepare young graduates from vocational tracks for the world of work. Finally, the OECD recommended further strengthening guidance and counselling services for students, targeting specifically such services at young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are more likely to leave school prematurely or without a qualification.

INSTITUTIONS	
▪ Masterisation Reform (*Réforme de la mastérisation,* 2010) ▪ Teacher Assessment Reform (2017) ▪ Reform of initial teacher education (*Réforme de la formation des enseignants*, 2013); creation of National Higher Institutes	**Key challenges identified [2015, 2017 2018, 2019]:** The OECD has previously identified a need for France to continue to improve the initial training of primary and secondary teachers, particularly those working in disadvantaged schools, and to develop their ongoing professional development. Previous OECD analyses indicate that there is also a need to improve the quality of teaching, increase the nascent professionalisation of the teacher role and

of Teacher Education (*Écoles supérieures du professorat et de l'éducation*, 2019)

- Law for the Reform of the Republic's Schools (2013) introduces efforts to improve system evaluation

- National student assessments in mathematics and French (2018)

- Improving the general school climate and combatting bullying and violence in schools (2013)

- Creation of the National School Evaluation Board (*Conseil national d'évaluation du système scolaire*, 2013); replaced by the School Evaluation Council (*Conseil de l'évaluation scolaire*, 2019)

strengthen the pedagogical leadership function of school leaders. Previous OECD studies also note the importance of clarifying the roles, responsibilities and authority of principals, as well as providing them with appropriate training and to create a clearer school leader role with a distinct professional status for those in primary education. The OECD has also identified the challenge of stimulating more reflection on the status of teachers and principals and developing a stronger collaborative culture within schools. Finally, the OECD previously emphasised the need to ensure the coherence and continuity of the many existing evaluation components within the French education system. For example, France has carried out several reforms at ECEC level relating to the quality of education for children between 2 and 6 years old, but the follow-up of these reforms has been uneven.

Summary of previous OECD recommendations: The OECD has recommended strengthening teachers' and school leaders' pedagogical and professional knowledge, particularly through initial training, and developing access to quality professional development opportunities which target areas of need and promotes the use of innovative teaching practices differentiated to the needs of students. The OECD has also recommended offering more attractive salaries and careers to teachers working in schools with many students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Finally, the OECD has suggested that national evaluations should be developed to better steer education policies, identify levers for action and establish ways of supporting schools in achieving their strategic objectives.

SYSTEM

- New curricula for all levels of compulsory education, including ECEC (2013/14)

- Reform of the national scholarship system for higher education (2013, expanded 2014/15, new measures 2017); upgrading of scholarships from 2019/20

- New system of upper secondary scholarships (2016)

- Communities of Universities and Institutions (*Communautés d'universités et établissements*, 2013)

- Digital Plan for Education (*Plan numérique pour l'éducation*, 2015)

- Establishment of the Scientific Council of National Education (*Conseil scientifique de l'éducation nationale*, 2018)

- Establishment of the General Inspectorate of Education, Sport and Research (*Inspection générale de l'éducation, du sport et de la recherche*, 2019) through mergers

- Educational Cities (*Cités Éducatives*), 2019

Key challenges identified [2015, 2017 2018, 2019]: The transfer of some responsibility for administrative and pedagogical matters from central government to local authorities or schools is one key challenge previously identified by the OECD. Another refers to the need to align school budgets with the number of students, including supplements for students from low socio-economic backgrounds or whose mother tongue is not French. Finally, in higher education, the OECD identified the challenge of improving system efficiency by deepening institutional autonomy in areas such as financial and human resource management, including tuition fees, and aspects of teaching, such as student selection

Summary of previous OECD recommendations: The OECD has previously recommended that France reduce the imbalance in the distribution of education spending between primary and secondary education by targeting public spending at the lower levels of education, as well as at disadvantaged schools. The OECD also recommended giving more autonomy to primary schools and reforming the higher education system. In this regard, the OECD recommended overcoming the fragmentation and complexity of the tertiary system in order to help improve higher education outcomes.

Note: The information on key challenges and recommendations contained in this spotlight draws from a desk-based compilation from previous OECD publications (subject to country participation). The spotlight is intended for exploratory purposes to promote policy dialogue and should not be considered an evaluation of the country's progress on these recommendations. Causality should not be inferred either: while some actions taken by a country could correspond to previous OECD recommendations, the OECD acknowledges the value of internal and other external dynamics to promote change in education systems.

Main sources: 2017, 2015, 2013: *OECD Economic Surveys: France*; 2014: *OECD Reviews of Innovation Policy: France 2014*; 2015, 2018 and 2019: *Education Policy Outlook*; 2015: Better Policies series - *France, Vers un système d'éducation plus inclusif en France?*; 2018: *Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care.*

Spotlight 3. The European Union perspective

France's education and training system and the Europe 2020 Strategy

In the European Union's growth and employment strategy, *Europe 2020*, education and training is recognised as a key policy area in contributing to Europe's economic growth and social inclusion. The European Union set a twofold target in education by 2020: reducing the rates of early school leaving below 10%, and reaching at least 40% of 30-34 year-olds completing tertiary or equivalent education. Countries set their own related national targets. The Europe 2020 goals are monitored through the European Union's yearly assessment of the main economic and growth issues.

The *European Semester Country Report 2020* identified a number of key issues for France in education and training:

- Socio-economic and regional disparities in educational outcomes remain considerable at all levels of education. This points to a need for significant investment, particularly in some regions. Overall public expenditure on education stood at 5.4% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017.
- The 2018 PISA results show that the French education system combines good overall outcomes with persisting socio-economic and regional inequalities. The performance of 15-year-olds has remained stable and the shares of low achievers in all three areas tested (reading: 20.9%, mathematics: 21.3% and science: 20.5%) were just below EU averages. France remains one of the EU member states where the link between socio-economic status and performance in PISA is the strongest. There is also a significant attainment gap between students in rural and urban areas, and between those with an immigrant background and their native-born peers.
- Participation in early childhood education and care, from age 4 to the starting age of primary education, is 100%, above the EU average of 95.4%. Reforms have been introduced at pre-primary and primary levels to improve basic skills and reduce inequalities, such as lowering the starting age of compulsory education to three, and halving the size of classes in disadvantaged schools labelled as "*education prioritaire*". However, about 70% of disadvantaged children are not enrolled in such schools and so do not benefit from this measure.
- The teaching profession faces challenges. The share of French teachers reporting that content, pedagogy and classroom practice in some or all subjects taught were not included in their initial education is higher than on average across the EU, and comparatively small shares of French teachers reported having undertaken continuous professional development. Statutory salaries for primary school teachers remain below the OECD average, reflecting years of stagnation and decline. Teachers in disadvantaged schools tend to have fewer qualifications than teachers in advantaged schools.
- In 2019, 47.5% of 30-34 year-olds had tertiary education as their highest level of attainment, well above the EU average of 41.6%. However, the employment rate among 20-34 year-olds, who had graduated from either upper secondary or tertiary education at some point in the three years prior to 2019 was at 75.7%, below the EU average of 81.5%. Employers in France consistently report a lack of suitably skilled workers as the main barrier to recruitment. The most sought-after recruitment profiles, such as care-related jobs, IT specialists and engineers are also the sectors which report having the most recruitment difficulties. The lack of skills is seen as well in the shares of both graduates of Information and Communications Technology, who account for only 3% of all graduates, and those of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) tertiary graduates, which was only 25% in 2018.
- The number of apprentices continues to increase, supported by ongoing reforms. Apprenticeships in higher education account for 75% of this increase, and these programmes now represent over 40% of all apprenticeships. More than 500 requests to open new learning centres, in addition to the 965 already in existence, have been submitted. As participation in apprenticeships is set to increase, potential challenges include ensuring equal access opportunities and employability.
- In 2019, the share of early school leavers aged 18-24, at 3.0%, was below the EU average of 10.3%. The updated individual learning account, launched in November 2019, aims to increase learning opportunities for people without qualifications or with disabilities. This could rebalance access to training, which has so far mostly benefited more highly skilled people. So far, rates of participation in vocational training among the unemployed has been comparatively low at 17.5% in 2019. Free professional guidance will be rolled out at regional level through a network of existing providers; both the quality and reach of this service will require ongoing monitoring.

The 2020 country-specific recommendation issued to France by the Council of the European Union, and adopted in July, is: "Mitigate the employment and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis, including by promoting skills and active support for all jobseekers."

EQUITY AND QUALITY: PERFORMANCE INEQUITIES HAVE NOT INCREASED SINCE 2009 BUT REMAIN HIGH

In PISA 2018, as in 2015, students in France had **slightly above average performance** in reading, mathematics and science, but with **lower equity indicators** than on average across the OECD. In France, about 9.2% of students were high performers (PISA level 5 or above) in reading, which was slightly above the OECD average share of 8.7%. Conversely, 21% of students in France did not achieve minimum proficiency (below PISA Level 2) in reading, which was a slightly smaller share than the average of 23%. Average performance in reading and science in France has not changed significantly since the first edition of PISA in 2000; in mathematics, average performance stabilised between 2006 and 2018, having decreased between 2003 and 2006. The reading performance of 15-year-olds in France, in PISA 2018, correlated strongly with their socio-economic and cultural status, which predicted 17.5% of the variation in reading scores compared to an OECD average of 12%. France thus needs to improve the equity of its education system, which is an important challenge. Students from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (top quartile of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status) scored 107 points higher than disadvantaged students (bottom quartile of the index) in reading. Students with an immigrant background also perform less well than their non-immigrant peers in France. In PISA 2018, the average reading performance of first-generation immigrants (those born abroad to parents who were born abroad) was 77 score points below the average performance of their non-immigrant peers; the OECD average difference was 54 points. However, in France, the gap narrows to 13 points after taking accounting for the socio-economic profile of students and schools while the OECD average gap only narrows to 24 points.
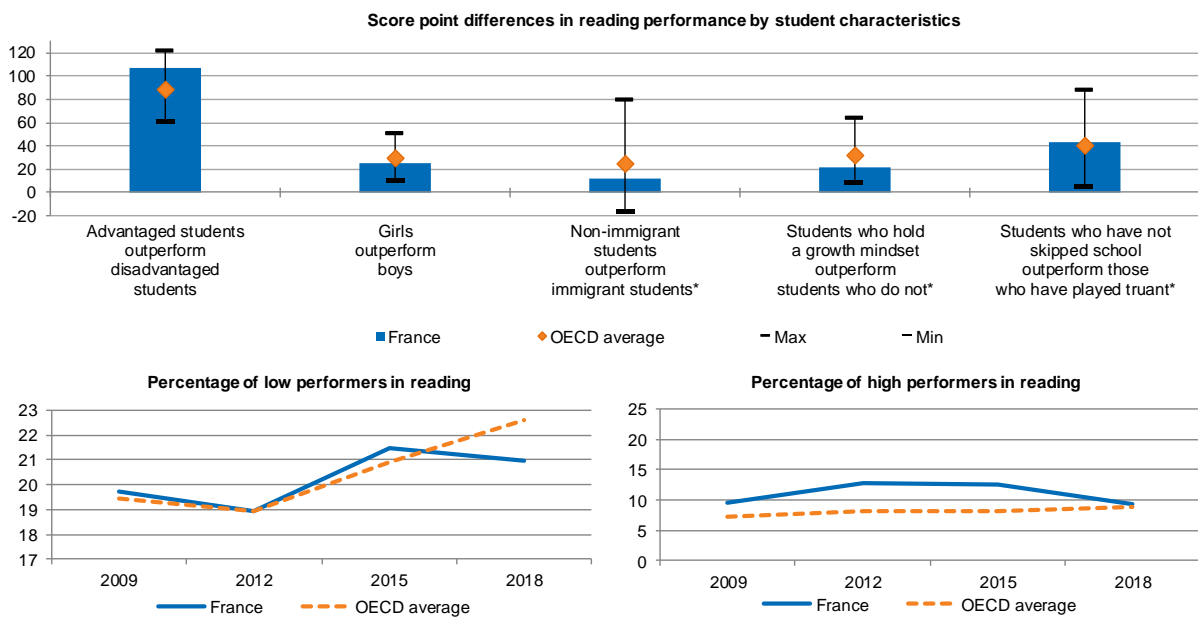
By tackling inequalities from an early age, **early childhood education and care** (ECEC) policies can increase the equity of education systems. In France, pre-primary education (*enseignement préélémentaire*) starts at age 3, with some children from disadvantaged areas attending from age 2. In 2017, enrolment in ECEC among 3-year-olds was universal in France at 100%. Since then, from 2019/20, France has lowered the starting age of compulsory education from 6 to 3 years old. In France's ECEC sector, children/staff ratios are among the highest in the OECD, with 23 children per teacher in 2017 compared to a 16 on average. However, France makes greater use of ECEC assistants (*agents territoriaux spécialisés des écoles maternelles, ATSEM*) than other countries, bringing the ratio down to 16 children per contact staff compared to an OECD average of 12. In France, ECEC governance is split across two ministries and national standards are organised by age group: the Guidelines for Public Health and Facilities (*Orientations du code de la santé publique et les projets d'établissements*) guide provision for 0-2 year olds, and a national curriculum (*L'école maternelle: un cycle unique, fondamental pour la réussite de tous*) establishes learning and development objectives for those aged 3 to 5. The OECD (2017) has highlighted that a split mode of governance may hinder the development of clear and coherent strategies for all ECEC services. Furthermore, in France, services for those under 3 years old (crèches, kindergartens, nursery assistants etc.) are not provided by qualified teachers, and could benefit from clearly defined pedagogical objectives.

According to OECD data, some **system-level policies** can promote equity, such as a longer period of compulsory education, delayed tracking, limited grade repetition and mechanisms to foster social and academic diversity among students in schools. In France, compulsory schooling begins at age 3 and ends at 16, with a planned extension to age 18, from 2020/21 (see "Preparing students for the future"). Students in France are first tracked into different educational pathways for upper secondary education (theoretical starting age of 15); the most common age among OECD countries is 16. The PISA 2018 isolation index for high-performing students, for France, which indicates the extent to which high-performing students are concentrated in certain schools, was similar to the OECD average. Nevertheless, low-performing students are more frequently concentrated in the same schools in France, with an isolation index of 0.29 compared to 0.22 on average. This often occurs in vocational upper secondary institutions, for example. Previous OECD evidence suggests that grade repetition can lead to student disengagement and early school leaving. According to PISA 2015, 22% of 15-year-olds in France had repeated at least one grade during their education, double the OECD average. France reduced this share considerably between 2009 and 2015 (from 38% to 22%), although this has not yet had a positive impact on PISA performance, which has remained stable. The OECD (2015) recommended introducing concrete measures to better prepare teachers to support students at risk of grade repetition.

Policies that aim to ensure from ECEC upwards that all students reach at least a minimum level of proficiency by the end of secondary education, are essential. According to PISA 2018, the quality of teaching resources and infrastructure in schools in France varies less according to the socio-economic background of students than on average across the OECD. Indeed, at 5.3%, the difference in the share of school leaders from disadvantaged and advantaged French upper secondary schools (*lycées*) reporting a shortage of educational materials is much smaller than the OECD average difference of 13.5%. On the other hand, according to TALIS 2018, disadvantaged lower secondary schools in France tend to have less experienced teaching staff with a higher rate of turnover than in other schools: 21.5% have less than five years' experience and stay for 8.2 years, on average, compared to 12.1% and 10.2 years in other schools. This may inhibit the impact of budgetary and other policy efforts to target resources towards disadvantaged areas, such as reducing class sizes (see "Recent policies and practices", see Funding). Assigning teachers who are better qualified to succeed in more challenging environments should be a priority for France in the future.

Key strengths and challenges in equity and quality (pre-crisis analysis)

Key strengths

- Participation in ECEC is universal for children from 3 years old, and has been compulsory since 2019 and new pre-elementary programmes adapted to young children exist.
- In reading, France has a slightly larger share of high achieving students in PISA than on average, and average performance remained stable between 2009 and 2018.
- France experienced a considerable reduction in the rate of grade repetition between 2009 and 2015.

Key challenges

- Tackling inequalities from an early age.
- Better integrate disadvantaged students and those with an immigrant background into the education system.
- Developing clear and consistent strategies for ECEC services across the age range (0-6 years old).
- Strengthening the training of teachers and assistants in pre-primary education.

Recent policies and practices

An important part of The Law on the Guidance and Planning for the Restructuring of the Republic's Schools (*Loi d'orientation et de programmation pour la refondation de l'École de la République,* 2013) aimed to strengthen equity and reduce performance gaps. Measures targeted the least advantaged areas, known as priority education (*éducation prioritaire*), which serve about 20% of the school population, as well as the earliest levels of education. The main goal of the reform was to reduce achievement gaps between students in priority education and their peers to less than 10%. The Law for a School of Trust (*Loi pour une école de la confiance*, 2019) and other measures taken since 2017 aim to reinforce the importance of combatting inequalities from the earliest levels of education (see Spotlight 4).

From 2017/18, the Homework Done (*Devoirs fait*s, 2017) scheme introduced measures in lower secondary schools (*collèges*) to provide students with supervised study time, in school, to complete their homework. Time is allocated during appropriate hours, not necessarily at the end of the school day, and the amount is determined by the school. This initiative is free of charge and is designed according to the needs of students, so as to encourage the reduction of inequalities that may exist according to the level of help that families are able to provide to children at home.

Lastly, the National Action Plan for the Reception and Support of Migrant Groups (*Plan d'action national pour soutenir l'accueil et l'accompagnement des publics migrants*) was revised in 2017. These revisions strengthen efforts to provide education to recently-arrived students, with minors and the most vulnerable as the main target group. The Plan mobilises inspection units and a national network of specialist academic centres (*Centres académiques pour la scolarisation des élèves allophones nouvellement arrivés*, CASNAV, 2012). Since 2015, migrants have also been able to access information on their rights via the information portal Welcome Refugees (*Accueil des réfugiés*, 2015) and to enrol in university courses offered in French as a foreign language.

Figure 3. Selected equity and quality indicators for France, PISA 2018

Score point differences in reading performance by student characteristics

■France ◆OECD average ‒Max ‒Min

Percentage of low performers in reading

Percentage of high performers in reading

——France ----OECD average

Note: "Min"/"Max" refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values; [*] Score point difference after accounting for students' socio-economic status and language spoken at home.
Sources: OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en; OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, PISA, OECD publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en; OECD (2020), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en.

Spotlight 4. Shifting the focus of priority education policies towards the earliest levels of education (2013-19)

France's priority education policy, pursued since 1981, aims to redress the negative impact of social and economic inequalities on students' educational outcomes. Until 2013, the policy was based on two principal measures: the Éclair programme (*Écoles, collèges et lycées pour l'ambition, l'innovation et la réussite*, 2010), which aimed to improve the school climate in institutions with challenging student behaviour by fostering innovations in pedagogy and school life; and, the School Success Networks *(Réseaux de réussite scolaire*, 2007), which worked to strengthen the pedagogical coherence of students' educational pathways from pre-primary (*école maternelle*) and primary (*école primaire*) school to lower secondary (*collège*). Despite these policy efforts, educational inequities have persisted in France (see "Equity and Quality").

From 2013, having learned from previous efforts, France has taken a new direction. The labelling of priority areas changed: at the start of 2014/15, France established the Priority Education Networks (*Réseaux d'Éducation Prioritare*, REP) and Reinforced Priority Education Networks (*Réseaux d'Éducation Prioritare Plus*, REP+). The following academic year, France concluded the Éclair and RRS schemes. Furthermore, from 2013, policy efforts have focused on the earliest levels of education (pre-primary and primary) where national and international evidence indicate that inequalities first take root.

The Law on the Guidance and Planning for the Restructuring of the Republic's Schools (2013) allowed for the implementation of new measures to reduce social and regional inequalities by targeting the first levels of education, such as:

- The creation of new teaching posts in pre-primary education from 2013/14, to enable higher enrolment among children under 3 years old, with priority given to REP and REP+, as well as isolated rural areas and France's overseas territories;

- The More Teachers than Classes initiative (*Plus de maîtres que de classes*) in primary education, which aimed to improve the student-teacher ratio in the most challenging areas. The initiative introduced a new maximum of 12 students per class in the first two years of primary education in schools belonging to REP and REP+. By having more teachers available, the programme also aimed to foster greater pedagogical innovation;

- The introduction of Complementary Pedagogical Activities (*Activités pédagogiques complémentaires*) in primary education, which are offered to students who encounter difficulties;

- From 2016, the introduction of measures to strengthen language learning, to create time for personalised learning and to foster interdisciplinary practices in lower secondary education.

In the implementation of these measures, France created 60 000 new posts, for teachers and classroom support staff) between 2012 and 2017. Following this, the introduction of the Law for a School of Trust (2019) and measures taken between 2017 and 2019 reinforced the emphasis on combatting inequalities from an early age. Two flagship initiatives were the lowering of the age of compulsory education from age 6 to 3 and the halving of class sizes in the first two years of primary school in schools belonging to REP and REP+.

Prior to the extension of compulsory education, although enrolment rates for 3-year-olds were near-universal, provision varied by geographical area and socio-economic context, and children's attendance at pre-primary school was sometimes irregular. By making pre-primary education compulsory for 3-year-olds from 2019/20, France aims to provide a common educational framework that will give all children the same opportunity to succeed in school. This is particularly important as children who fall behind early find it more difficult to catch up and succeed in their education and beyond.

By halving class sizes, France aims to better support all students to master basic skills by the end of primary education; in PISA 2018, 20% of 15-year-old students in France had not reached this level of proficiency. The reform also aims improve the school climate in classrooms, increasing the use of differentiated teaching and personalised approaches learning and enhancing training and support for teachers. This is why the measure is accompanied by a strengthening of in-service training for the teachers who benefit from the scheme. The halving of class sizes was implemented gradually over three years, from June 2017. In total, the measure has resulted in the creation of 10 800 new classes in the first two years of primary school in REP and REP+ schools. By September 2019, approximately 300 000 children (about 20% of the age cohort) benefitted. This measure will be extended to the last year of pre-primary education, in REP and REP+, from 2020/21. Across the country, France is gradually limiting all other classes in these year groups to 24 students, maximum.

In early 2019, the Directorate of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance (DEPP) reported the first results of the impact of class size reductions, showing positive overall initial outcomes. Between the beginning and the middle of the first year of primary school (*Cours Préparatorie*, CP), when comparing students in classes that had been halved in size with their peers from similar socio-economic backgrounds in standard-sized classes, the share of students falling significantly behind in French was smaller by 7.8%, and by 12.5% in mathematics. A second round of results was published in September 2019. They remain encouraging: student performance at the start of the second year of primary education (*Cours Elémentaire* 1, CE1) rose between 2018 and 2019, and the performance gap between students in priority education and their peers in other schools narrowed. However, challenges remain. While there is a reduction in the achievement gap between priority and non-priority education in the first half of CP, the gap actually increases from the mid-point of CP to the start of CE1. This is likely a result of the fact that children in disadvantaged areas sometimes find themselves less stimulated by their environment during the school holidays. This suggests the need for some reflection on the introduction of a specific scheme for the summer period. However, this increase in the gaps between mid-PC and early-CE1 does not erase the general trend towards a reduction in the gaps between priority and non-priority education.

France must continue to carefully monitor the effects of this policy in order to fully evaluate the impact. The OECD has previously reported PISA data analysis indicating that the effectiveness of quantitative measures, such as reducing class sizes, is often linked to the quality of teaching. The quality of professional development provided to teachers working in these classrooms will therefore be important in ensuring positive learning outcomes. Moreover, as the extent to which the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated educational inequalities becomes clearer, such arrangements could play an even more important role in addressing inequity.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE: THE LOW-SKILLED CONTINUE TO FACE DIFFICULTIES WHEN ENTERING THE LABOUR MARKET

An education system's capacity to develop **skills and labour market perspectives** can play an important role in the educational decisions of the population. In France, skill levels among adults (16-65 year-olds) were among the lowest of countries participating in the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2012. This was largely due to the comparatively low performance of older adults (45-65 year-olds), while 16-44 year-olds scored closer to, but still below, average. In France, labour market integration is facilitated by educational attainment, and employment prospects for those who drop out of school can be precarious. The share of young adults (25-34 year-olds) who have not achieved an upper secondary qualification in France is slightly below the OECD average, at 13% in 2018, compared to 15%. However, the unemployment rate for those who have not reached this level of education is one of the highest in the OECD at 25% compared to an average of 14%. Unemployment rates are also relatively high for those with an upper secondary qualification at 12% compared to 7%. Furthermore, 18% of 18-24 year-olds in France are not employed, nor in education or training (NEETs), compared to the OECD average of 14%.

At **upper secondary** level, students in France can choose between two educational pathways: the general and technological track (3 years), or the vocational track (2-3 years). At the end of each pathway, students take the corresponding school-leaving examination: the general, technological or vocational Baccalaureate (*baccalauréat*), or the Vocational Aptitude Certificate (*certificat d'aptitude professionnelle*, CAP). All holders of the Baccalaureate may continue to tertiary education but, generally, those with the vocational Baccalaureate are more successful when they enter short-cycle tertiary programmes than when they enter bachelor's programmes. Among the cohort of vocational Baccalaureate holders due to enter the third year of a bachelor's degree in 2014/15, only 4.2% of those successfully did so; 11.3% had repeated one or two years during their studies while nearly 84% had already left university. The reform of the general and technological Baccalaureates, which is currently underway (see Spotlight 5), aims to improve transition to higher education and completion rates. Furthermore, the planned reforms of the vocational pathway, which will be finalised in 2022, aims to make vocational upper secondary education more attractive by focusing on future high-demand professions, including personal services, sustainable development and digital transformation (see Spotlight 5).

Vocational education and training (VET) can facilitate entry into the labour market. In France, students at upper secondary level can follow a three-year VET programme if they wish to go on to higher education; however, these rarely adopt the dual-VET model. Indeed, in 2016, the share of students in upper secondary vocational programmes in France was 41% compared to an OECD average of 44%, but only one-fifth of these students were in programmes combining work and study. In France, only 13% of young people entering the vocational track, in 2015, had at least one parent with a higher education qualification, suggesting that there are inequalities in the distribution of students across upper secondary tracks. At tertiary level, vocational training is mainly provided through two-year, short-cycle programmes in University Institutes of Technology (*instituts universitaires de technologie*, IUTs), which are attached to universities, or in Higher Technician Sections (*sections de technicien supérieur,* STS). Reforms were also undertaken to increase the attractiveness of professional tracks (see Spotlight 5). In order to open up higher education programmes to students of all backgrounds, France has established quotas determining the minimum share of vocational Baccalaureate holders in STS and a minimum share of technological Baccalaureate holders in IUT.

Higher education institutions in France include universities, the *Grandes Écoles*, which are the most prestigious tertiary institutions, and IUTs or STS, which offer short-cycle tertiary programmes. All these courses can be accessed by all upper secondary graduates with a Baccalaureate. In 2018, 47% of 25-34 year-olds in France had a tertiary qualification, compared to 44% on average across the OECD. Tertiary education offers the best labour market opportunities: 85% of 25-34 year olds with tertiary education are employed in France, compared to only 51% of those without at least an upper secondary qualification. In this context, short-cycle courses (*Bac+2*) are very popular with both employers and young people, including those with a general Baccalaureate. In France, almost one-third of tertiary graduates have a short-cycle qualification as their highest level of attainment. The relative incomes of higher education graduates are similar to the OECD average: in 2015, holders of tertiary qualifications in France earned, on average, 57% more than those with an upper secondary qualification only. However, not all higher education qualifications have the same value. An adult in France aged 25-64 with a bachelor's degree earned 47% more than one with an upper secondary qualification in 2017, compared to an OECD average difference of 44%. For holders of a master's degree, however, the wage advantage is more than double at 110%, compared to an OECD average advantage of 91%. As in many European countries, France faces persistent challenges in the transition of students from secondary to higher education, leading to high drop-out rates, especially in the early stages of university education and predominantly for courses which do not require entrance examinations. In fact, only around one-third of students (34%) entering a bachelor's programme in France obtain their degree within the expected three years; 7% successfully reorient themselves towards short-cycle programmes while the rest either continue studying for the bachelor's beyond the three years or leave without a qualification. Three years beyond the theoretical duration of a bachelor's programme (six years in total), the completion rate increases from 34% to 59%, in France, compared to an increase from 37% to 64%, on average across the OECD.

Key strengths and challenges (pre-crisis analysis)

Key strengths

- Significant increase in levels of educational attainment among the general population over the last 30 years.
- Significant decrease in the number of students dropping out of school between 2008 and 2018.
- Short-cycle tertiary (Bac+2) programmes are appreciated by employers and students alike.

Key challenges

- Enhancing and improving the quality of upper secondary vocational tracks.
- Improving student transitions between secondary and higher education.
- Facilitating access to quality lifelong learning for adults and those with low qualification levels.

Recent policies and practices

Transition from secondary to tertiary education has been the subject of several reforms in recent years (see Spotlight 5):

- The Reform of the Baccalaureate, due to be fully implemented from 2021, introduces continuous assessment of student achievement alongside final examination. Vocational tracks will also be reformed to improve alignment with key professions of the future.

- A new online tertiary admissions portal (PARCOURSUP, 2018) for those applying to higher education has been launched as part of the Student Plan (*Plan Étudiants,* 2017). It aims to reduce the number of students who leave higher education without a qualification by improving guidance mechanisms. The portal replaces the Post-bac Admission platform (2008) and presents the knowledge and skills expected for each higher education track, the number of places available and general entrance criteria.

Tackling early school leaving is an ongoing priority in France: the share of 18-24 year-olds who left education and training early decreased from 12.7% in 2010 to 8.2% in 2019. Policy efforts include:

- As part of the Law for a School of Trust (2019), from the start of 2020/21, 16-year-olds will be obliged to remain in education or training until age 18. This goes beyond the former practice of guaranteeing young people's right to return to training or right to access vocational training. It includes schooling, apprenticeships or traineeships, employment, civic service, a mentoring programme or specific programmes for social integration and labour market transitions.

- The All Together to Overcome School Dropout action plan (*Tous mobilisés pour vaincre le décrochage scolaire,* 2014) introduced bridging programmes providing temporary, tailored support for students in secondary education at risk of marginalisation at school. The plan aimed to develop partnerships, in particular among local actors, to target young people who have left school early. In 2017/18, several measures continued to be implemented, including the Personalised Educational Success Programme (*Programme personnalisé de réussite éducative*), internships and tutoring, and the School Drop-out Prevention Groups (*Groupes de prévention du décrochage scolaire*).

The Individual Pathway for Guidance and Discovery of the Economic and Professional World (*parcours individuel d'orientation et de découverte du monde économique et professionnel,* 2013) is a guidance system in lower and upper secondary schools aimed at supporting students to discover a range of occupations. Measures include teaching and classroom-based initiatives, as well as contact with employers and workplace observation. In order to prevent guidance being reactionary, implemented in response to underperformance, an approach which often resulted in more challenging students being directed into vocational, the Law for the Reform of the Republic's Schools (2013) established the conditions for a new public student guidance service organised with the regional authorities.

Figure 4. Percentage of 18-24 year-olds in education and not in education, by employment status, 2018
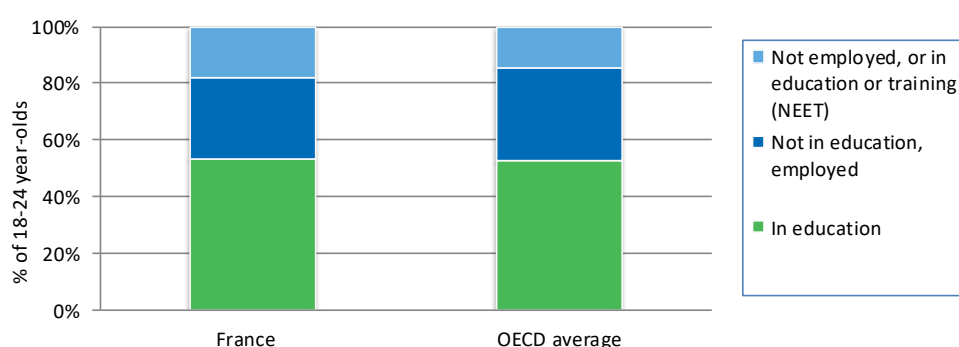
Source: OECD (2019), *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en.

Spotlight 5. Improving student transitions to higher education and the labour market

Improving the quality of transitions between upper secondary and tertiary education, and increasing the completion rate in tertiary education. are two important objectives for France. This is why France has undertaken several actions to meet these goals.

1. **A new Baccalaureate**: Since 2019, both the organisation and curricula of general and technological upper secondary education have been evolving in preparation for the implementation of the new Baccalaureate, which comes fully into force in 2021. Replacing the former prescribed course programmes, the reform introduces opportunities for students to choose courses better suited to their interests and ambitions. Students will follow three programmes:

   - A broad, future-oriented programme of core subjects, for all students, covering science, humanities and culture.
   - Specialist subjects, chosen by the student: three in the second year (*première*) of upper secondary education, from which two are then selected for the final year (*terminale*).
   - An ongoing programme of career guidance across the three years to support students when selecting their specialist subjects, as well as a career path and, as relevant, higher education programme.

Some optional courses have also been introduced, to complement and complete students' study programmes. These new courses are designed to develop a shared culture of scientific enquiry among students, as well as teaching them to code and to understand the key challenges of the 21st century. The technological path retains its current organisation with students following a common core programme and selecting one of eight sector-focused specialist programmes. The curricula for *première* and *terminale* have been revised.

In terms of assessment, all students must take written and oral examinations for French at the end of the penultimate year. In the final year, students take four examinations:

   - Two written examinations for the relevant specialist subjects;
   - One written assessment for philosophy;
   - A 20-minute oral examination, which is prepared throughout the final year of upper secondary education.

Results in these examinations will constitute 60% of the student's final grade; the remaining 40% will be measured via continuous assessment. Already in place in the vast majority of OECD countries, in France this will be based on standardised assessments in the first and final years of upper secondary education. To ensure equal treatment between candidates and schools, a national online resource bank outlines the subjects to be assessed, and papers are anonymised and marked by teachers other than the student's own. School report cards across the three years of upper secondary will account for 10% of the final grade, in an effort to encourage greater consistency in student engagement across the education level.

2. **A new online admission portal:** A new online portal, *Parcoursup*, was launched as part of the Student Plan (2017) for students applying to higher education. It aims to reduce the number of students who do not complete higher education by improving guidance and transitions. As of 2020, it brings together more than 15 000 higher education courses including bachelor's degrees, short-cycle courses in STSs and IUTs, preparatory courses for the *Grandes Écoles* and courses in engineering schools. From 2018/19, *Parcoursup* has enabled students wishing to enter higher education to compile their application, submit their preferences and respond to admission proposals online. *Parcoursup* provides all students with comprehensive information on the courses available to them: the knowledge and skills needed to successfully complete the course, the number of places available and the general criteria for selection. Supplementary local services provide personalised support to two target groups: applicants with specific needs, such as students with disabilities, specific health needs or family responsibilities, or students who are high-level athletes, and those without an offer. In 2019, 897 956 candidates registered and confirmed at least one preference on *Parcoursup*; this was an increase of 10.6% from 2018. In 2019, tertiary institutions made nearly 2.9 million admission offers via the portal, an average of more than 3 offers per candidate; 606 864 candidates accepted an offer.

3. **More attractive vocational tracks:** France faces the ongoing challenge of increasing and broadening the opportunities for further study available to vocational graduates. As a result, and in connection with the reform of the Baccalaureate, France is strengthening upper secondary vocational pathways, with the aim of making the VET sector more attractive, more efficient and better oriented towards the needs of an evolving labour market. The reform aims to improve the support, guidance and opportunities available to vocational students by fostering greater collaboration between a variety of actors. This builds on the Job Campuses (*Campus des métiers et qualifications*) established since 2013, which aimed to open up VET institutions to establishing stronger links with higher education and research institutions, other training providers and economic actors at local level. From these, the reform aims to develop Campuses of Excellence, dedicated to economic sectors with strategic importance for the future and focused on action at regional and local level. The reform also introduces measures to strengthen apprenticeships and work-based learning in all vocational upper secondary schools; the range of practical training courses offered on *Parcoursup* has already increased by 27% between 2019 and 2020. Finally, the reform also aims to gradually support the transformation of VET programmes for low-demand economic sectors and strengthen partnerships with employers to better facilitate transitions to the labour market. Implementation began in 2018, with full implementation planned for 2022.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: A NEED TO HARMONISE AND REVALORISE THE ROLE OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Creating positive **learning environments** for students is essential. According to PISA 2015, on average, students in France enjoy learning more than their peers in other OECD countries. Furthermore, in PISA 2018, 69.6% of students in France reported being satisfied with their lives, which was slightly higher than the OECD average of 66.9%. However, France is also one of the OECD countries where students report the greatest concern about disciplinary problems in the classroom. At 51.8%, just over half of students in France reported that there is noise and disorder in most or all of their classes, in PISA 2018, which was well above the OECD average of 31.5%. Similarly, lower secondary school teachers in France reported in TALIS 2018 that they spend more class time managing students' behaviour on average across the OECD at 17% compared to 13%. Nevertheless, in France. Around 20% of students reported being victims of bullying at least a few times a month compared to an OECD average of 23% while 16% reported skipping a full day of classes at least once in the two weeks before the PISA test, which was less than the OECD average of 21%. However, 57% of students in France reported arriving late to school at least once during the same period, compared to 48%, on average across the OECD.

Attracting, retaining and developing quality **school leaders** is key to improving the quality of learning environments. The status of school leaders in France differs by education level. At primary level, school principals (*directeurs d'école*) are generally teachers who, while retaining their teacher status, take on administrative and pedagogical leadership tasks, generally on a part-time basis. At secondary level, public schools are run by school leaders (*chefs d'établissement*) who represent the State and who are appointed either through competitive examination, from a selection list of suitable candidates or via a secondment. At each level of education in France, management staff undergo statutory initial training during their first year in the role, organised by the regional authorities (*académies*) and teacher training institutions. School leaders in France receive limited training in instructional leadership and have limited responsibility for teacher recruitment. According to TALIS 2018, at lower secondary level, only 43% had attended courses or seminars on teaching methods or other aspects related to pedagogy in the last 12 months, the lowest share in the OECD where the average was 70%. At primary level, school principals in France could be better valued, both in terms of their level of responsibility and their salary. Due to their specific status, primary school principals in France have even less autonomy than their counterparts in secondary education. They also receive almost 25% less pay than school leaders at lower secondary level; this is the largest difference in remuneration between the two levels of education found across the OECD.

A strong supply of highly qualified and engaged **teachers** is vital to the success of every education system. French teachers are relatively young[2] compared to their peers in other OECD countries: about 31% of lower secondary teachers are aged 50 or over compared to an OECD average of 37%. In TALIS 2018, 74% of lower secondary teachers in France reported that they would still become a teacher if given the choice again, but only 7% reported feeling valued by society compared to respective OECD averages of 76% and 26%. Teachers in France are highly qualified by international standards: 70% have a master's degree or higher, which is well above the OECD average of 45%. However, they are less well-prepared for the pedagogical aspects of the profession than their OECD peers: only 66% of current teachers have studied both the subject content and pedagogy of the subjects they teach, and had the opportunity to put them into practice with students, compared to 79% on average across the OECD. Opportunities for continuous professional development could also be made more relevant to teachers' practice in France: in TALIS 2018, only 20% of teachers in lower secondary education reported participating in the type of courses considered to be high impact, such as coaching, compared to an OECD average share of 44%. Recent PISA 2018 results also show that teachers in France could further develop their digital skills: only 55% of school leaders in France agreed that their teachers have sufficient technical and pedagogical skills to integrate digital tools into their teaching, which was well below the OECD average of 70%.

Regarding **working conditions**, teachers at both primary and lower secondary level in France deliver more hours of teaching than their counterparts in many OECD countries, at 8 100 hours per year compared to 7 500 hours on average across the OECD. Primary school teachers spend about 60% of the total class time during the school year teaching the cores skills in reading and mathematics, compared to the OECD average of 40%. With the exception of pre-primary settings, class sizes in France are similar to those on average across the OECD average, although DEPP (2019) has reported that there are wide regional variations. In France, teachers' salary progression during the early years of a career is slow. This leaves mid-career teachers at a particular disadvantage: in 2018, statutory salaries for teachers with 10 to 15 years of service was at least 18% below the OECD average at both primary and secondary levels whereas differences at the beginning and end of the career were smaller at around 5% and 7%, respectively. There are important differences in teachers' working conditions according to the level of education taught. France is one of the few countries, for example, where primary school teachers deliver more than 30% more teaching hours[3] per year than their lower secondary colleagues.

Key strengths and challenges in school improvement (pre-crisis analysis)

Key strengths

- Teachers in France are relatively young compared to the OECD average, especially at primary level.
- A high level of qualification (master's level) is required to become a teacher in primary and secondary education.
- A high share of teaching time, from primary school onwards, is dedicated to developing core skills, which may help to support the most disadvantaged students.

Key challenges

- Making teaching more attractive by strengthening practical components of initial training, increasing professional development and improving remuneration.
- In primary education, establishing a clearer role for school principals.
- Strengthening the role, responsibilities and career paths of school leaders, prioritising those working in challenging contexts.

Recent policies and practices

France recently increased the presence of information and communications technology (ICT) in the curricula, especially regarding information quality and computer sciences. At upper secondary level, France created two new courses: digital and technological sciences (*Sciences numériques et technologiques*), compulsory in the first year, as of 2019/20; and digital and computer sciences (*Numérique et sciences informatiques*), an optional specialist subject within the general Baccalaureate. France also developed a Reference Framework of Digital Competences (*Cadre de référence des compétences numériques*), based on the European framework, covering primary, secondary and tertiary education with end-of-cycle assessments. All new teachers must hold the accompanying certification and a new programme to develop specialist ICT teachers has been created.

France has taken measures to combat bullying in schools (2013). The No Bullying online platform (*Non au harcèlement*) brings together all school-level anti-bullying and cyberbullying campaigns and provides information and resources on what peers, parents or teachers can do for victims of bullying. The 2018/19 campaign focuses on cyberbullying and tackles the issue of sexting. The 2019/20 campaign encourages students to come together to defend victims of bullying.

Efforts to enhance the training and status of teachers are ongoing. France improved remuneration for teachers working in challenging contexts with a gradual salary increase totalling EUR 2 000 per year (net) from 2019/20. Other measures include:

- Initial training: In 2010, the Masterisation Reform (*Réforme de la mastérisation*) raised the minimum qualification level required for teachers in primary and secondary education from a bachelor's to a master's. The Reform of initial teacher education (*Réforme de la formation des enseignants*, 2013) established Teacher Training and Education Colleges (*Écoles supérieures du professorat et de l'éducation,* ESPEs), to strengthen the pedagogical and practical components of teacher training, such as internships, work-study periods and coaching or mentoring. In 2018, France began transforming entry routes, both to enhance the attractiveness of the profession and strengthen initial teacher education. As of 2022, the competitive selection examination (*concours*) will take place during the second year of the master's programme. From 2019, the ESPEs were replaced by the National Institutes of the Teaching Profession and Education (*Instituts nationaux supérieurs du professorat et de l'éducation,* INSPÉ), aiming to better align educational training and research, achieve greater consistency in the quality of teacher training across regions and reaffirm the role of the State as teachers' employer. France also introduced a system of pre-professionalisation, supporting aspiring teachers to gain practical experience earlier and providing financial support to student-teachers. A new training framework for future teachers and education advisers (*Former l'enseignant du XXIe siècle,* 2020) specifies the objectives, training areas, skills and expected outcomes for the master's programmes for aspiring teachers.
- In-service training: 2019/20, France introduced the Master Plan for Continuous Professional Development for Educators (*Schéma directeur de la formation continue pour l'ensemble des personnels de l'éducation nationale*). Its three objectives are: 1) to ensure staff develop a common base of core skills and knowledge through institutional training, to support transition to the workplace; 2) to provide continuous professional development enabling staff to perfect their professional skills; and 3) to support staff in their professional development. Teachers would also benefit from training on digital tools for teaching, which proved to be indispensable during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Spotlight 1).

Figure 5. The learning environment according to students, PISA 2018
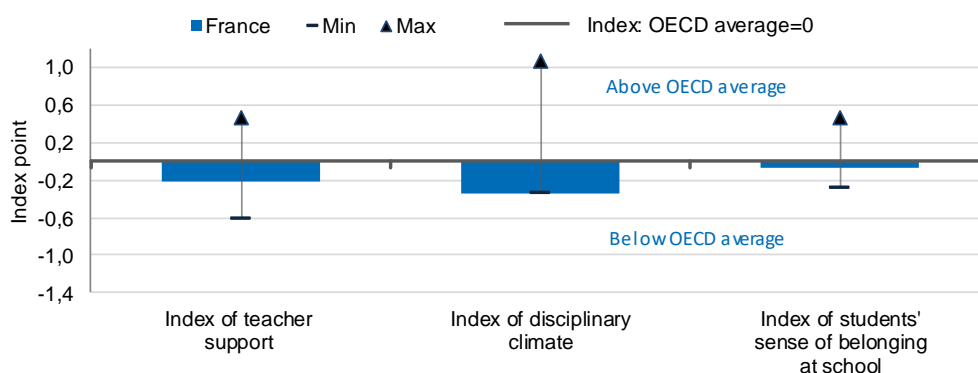
Note: "Min"/"Max" refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values.
Source: OECD (2020), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT: MULTIPLE EVALUATION COMPONENTS ARE IN PLACE BUT WOULD BENEFIT FROM A COHERENT EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Defining strategies for evaluation and assessment is an important step towards improving student outcomes and developing a better and more equitable school system. **System evaluation** can provide evidence to help decision-makers craft informed policies and increase the transparency of education system outcomes. System evaluation in France occurs through two main approaches: a heterogeneous set of components which monitor for quality, equity and internal and external efficiency; a homogeneous and regular evaluation procedure to improve the State's fiscal management. New measures have been taken to improve evaluation practices and strengthen the links between the results of the various evaluation outputs (see "Recent policies and practices").

School evaluation of public primary and secondary institutions is compulsory in France, and takes various forms depending on the region. It is the responsibility of inspection bodies, regional authorities and school leaders. The latter must also carry out school self-evaluations and compile an overview of actions implemented in their school. All public institutions, and most private institutions, must establish a contract agreement with the State, on which they produce an annual progress report. Specific indicators are in place to support schools to diagnose needs, develop steering mechanisms, and carry out monitoring and evaluation. The results of school evaluations inform the evaluation of regional authorities and management teams. In PISA 2015, however, France was the country to request feedback from students the least to inform school evaluation processes: 23% of 15-year-olds in France were enrolled in a school whose principal reported seeking written feedback from students on the teaching they receive, compared to an average share of 69% across OECD countries. School self-evaluation is also less frequent in France than in many countries. According to PISA 2015 data, only 78% of school leaders state that their school must carry out a self-evaluation compared to 93% on average. They are also less likely to report receiving external evaluations of their school at 57% compared to an OECD average of 75%.

According to OECD evidence (2013) **teacher appraisal** can strengthen professionalism and performance, provided it emphasises developmental evaluation and facilitates progression across a career. In PISA 2015, 22% of students in France were in schools whose principals reported that standardised tests were used to judge teacher effectiveness, compared to an average of 37% across the OECD. In practice, teachers in France are subject to an assessment of their practice at the end of initial teacher education and then throughout their career. Prior to 2017/18, teacher appraisals occurred at irregular intervals across a career but recent reforms introduced three moments for appraisal and career discussions, to help assess teachers' professional competence (see "Recent policies and practices"). However, teacher appraisal remains relatively infrequent in France, according to the principals of lower secondary schools. In TALIS 2018, only 36% of teachers were formally assessed at least once a year by their school leader, compared to an OECD average of 63%. Moreover, according to school leaders' reports, following formal assessment, only 23% of teachers benefit, either most of the time or always, from a formative feedback discussion, compared to an OECD average of 63%. Similarly, the principals of only 27% of French teachers state that a training plan is drawn up, either most of the time or always, compared to an average of 46% for the OECD. Finally, teacher self-evaluation and peer evaluation practices seem to be much less frequent in France than elsewhere in the OECD. According to school leaders in France, only 9% of teachers are formally evaluated at least once a year by other teachers, compared to 31% on average across the OECD, and only 23% of teachers conduct a formal self-evaluation, compared to an OECD average of 68%.

In terms of **student assessment**, in PISA 2015, 51% of 15-year-olds in France were enrolled in secondary schools where the principal reported that standardised tests were used to make decisions on student promotion or retention, compared to an OECD average of 31%. Measuring student outcomes is central to the management and evaluation of the French education system. Numerous forms of assessment coexist, covering a range of objectives. Continuous assessment, both formative and summative, follows students throughout their school career. The national standardised assessments in upper secondary education leading to a diploma, such as the *baccalauréat* but with the exception of the national diploma for lower secondary education (*brevet*) indicate that the student has reached a level of knowledge and skills that enable a smooth transition to either the next level of education or into working. Although students in France are regularly assessed by their teachers throughout the school year, PISA 2018 data indicate that students feel less support from their teachers to improve learning. For example, less than one in four students in France reported that their teacher often or always tells them about their strengths, compared to one in three on average across OECD countries. Also, at 38%, just under two-fifths of students in France reported that their teacher often or always tells them how to improve their results compared to an OECD average of 45%. Improving the support given to students to manage their learning could help strengthen their resilience capacity.

Key strengths and challenges in evaluation and assessment (pre-crisis analysis)

Key strengths

- There are many mechanisms in place for evaluating the education system and its actors.
- Students in France are assessed more frequently than in many countries, which could help inform more personalised support approaches if efforts are made in this direction.

Key challenges

- Ensuring the coherence and consistency of evaluation components to support more effective monitoring of educational policy work.
- Improving the teacher evaluation system by complementing existing systems with formative evaluation approaches within institutions.
- Developing a national process for institutional evaluation to support more effective monitoring of educational policy work.

Recent policies and practices

Within the framework of the Law for a School of Trust, France established the School Evaluation Council (*Conseil de l'évaluation de l'école,* CEE, 2019) to independently evaluate the organisation and outcomes of schooling. From 2020, its two principal tasks are to ensure the consistency of school evaluations and establish a national system of school evaluation. The CEE replaces the National Council for School Evaluation (*Conseil national d'évaluation scolaire*, CNESCO), which in turn becomes the National Centre for the Study of School Systems. This is integrated into the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts (CNAM). In this new ecosystem of educational research, and with funding from the Ministry of National Education and Youth, the CNESCO continues its work to improve knowledge of the French and foreign school systems, in order to stimulate progress.

The reform of teacher appraisal, implemented from 2017/18, schedules moments of career support for teachers at regular intervals across a career and career meetings, which are privileged moments of exchange on acquired skills and professional development prospects. The career appointment is planned as a dedicated time to look back over a period of professional life (on average every 7 years), at times when it seems relevant to take stock of the path covered professionally. Three career appointments are introduced to assess professional value: at step 6, step 8 and step 9 of the normal grade. The aim is to facilitate a time of exchange on the skills acquired and the prospects for professional development.

In 2018/19, France introduced national student assessments in mathematics and French in the first and second years of primary school (CP and CE1) and in the first year of lower secondary school (*sixième*). These aim to support teachers to adapt their teaching to help all students succeed. For students in CP, assessments take place both at the beginning and in the middle of the school year. In *sixième*, assessments take place at the beginning of the school year. The results are in theory available a few days after the tests. The national assessments are based on five principles: 1) rigorous and scientific assessment tools, developed by the Directorate of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance (DEPP), in collaboration with the Scientific Council for National Education (CSEN) and the General Directorate for School Education (DGESCO); 2) increase and ensure the reliability of assessment procedures; 3) provide results to families; 4) support teachers to respond effectively to students' needs; and, 5) providing tools for monitoring at regional and local level.

Figure 6. Percentage of students in schools where the principal reported assessments of students in national modal grade for 15-year-olds, PISA 2015
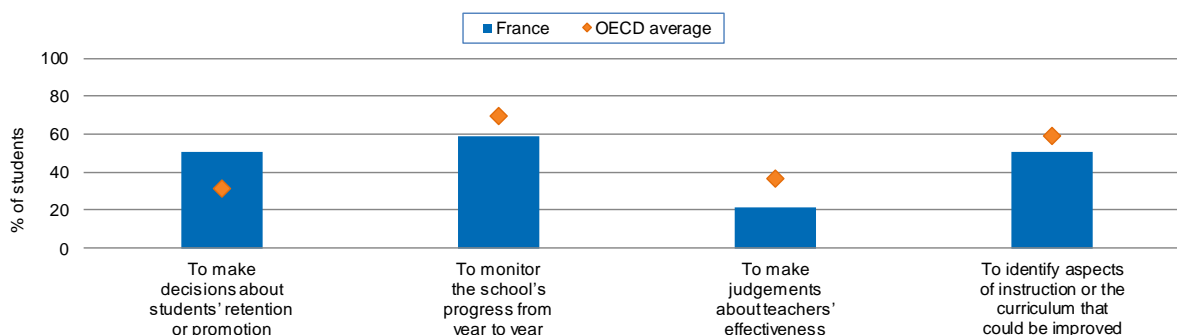
Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en.

GOVERNANCE: A HIGHLY CENTRALISED SCHOOL SYSTEM WITH MORE AUTONOMY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

France has a centralised education system. The Ministry of National Education and Youth is responsible for the school system while the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation steers the higher education sector. The State defines curricula and study programmes, and ensures the recruitment, training and management of school management and teaching staff in both public institutions and private institutions which are under contract. The ministries develop national standards, organise examinations and define the scope of national qualifications such as the Baccalaureate. Other bodies relevant to national education policy include:

- The General Inspectorate of Education, Sport and Research (IGÉSR, 2019): prior to 2019, system evaluation was the responsibility of general inspectorates attached to the Ministry, including the General Inspectorate of National Education (IGEN) and the General Inspectorate of the Administration of National Education and Research (IGAENR). In 2019, these bodies merged with the Inspectorate of Youth and Sports and the General Inspectorate of Libraries to become the General Inspectorate of Education, Sport and Research (IGÉSR). This merger aims to provide a more coherent approach to the evaluation of the education system.

- Since the decentralisation of administrative powers in the 1980s, local and regional authorities have been responsible for the material functioning of the education system: municipalities (*communes*) are responsible for pre-primary and primary schools, departmental authorities (*départements*) are responsible for lower secondary institutions, and regional authorities (*régions*) are responsible for upper secondary institutions.

- At regional level, the *academie* and the *rectorat* are responsible for implementing education policy and work together in collaboration with the relevant municipal, departmental and regional authorities.

- Various structures, some of them consultative, guide decision-making bodies in France. These include the Higher Curriculum Council (which designed the new curricula for all levels of compulsory education in 2013 and 2014), the National Council for the Evaluation of the School System (since 2013), the Higher Education Council, the Joint Ministerial Technical Committee, the Territorial Council for National Education, the National Council for Higher Education and Research, and the Conference of University Presidents. More recently, two further Councils have been created: the Scientific Council of National Education (see "Recent policies and practices"), and the School Evaluation Council (see "Evaluation and Assessment").

Schooling decisions in primary and secondary education are mostly the responsibility of regional administrative bodies (*academie* and *rectorat*) and regional, departmental and municipal authorities (*régions*, *departements* and *communes*). The administrative bodies ensure the implementation of national education policy at local level. The regional and local level authorities are responsible for the construction and maintenance of school buildings, school transport, the provision of teaching materials, and the recruitment and management of non-teaching staff. Secondary schools have partial autonomy in the way they manage state budgets and implement pedagogical strategies to achieve national standards. Therefore, in France, although school leaders have considerable responsibility for school organisation and the school climate, they have little autonomy over matters related to budget expenditure and teacher recruitment. This is particularly true in primary schools, where school leaders are teachers who, while retaining their status, are responsible only for administrative and pedagogical functions (see "School Improvement").

The **distribution of educational decision making** between national, regional and local authorities, and schools is a much-debated topic in many OECD countries, and that includes France. More than half of the decisions at lower secondary level in France are taken at central level, compared to one-quarter on average across OECD countries. Only 10% of decisions are taken at school level, and only 2% are taken completely autonomously; on average across the OECD, 30% of decisions are left to the school's discretion. The level of school autonomy in France in terms of resource allocation is lower than on average across the OECD: in PISA 2015, 36% of school leaders in France stated that their school is primarily responsible for resource allocation, compared to an OECD average of 54%. However, levels of school autonomy over the curriculum in France are in line with the average across the OECD with 73% of school leaders reporting that their school has primary responsibility for the curriculum.

In **higher education,** universities have administrative, financial, pedagogical and scientific autonomy. They have the power to determine their status and internal governance structures. The Law of 22 July 2013 established clusters of universities and other higher education institutions across the country, to encourage a more regional approach to strategic governance and foster institutional collaboration (see "Recent policies and practices"). In 2015, the French government launched a new e-learning portal as part of its efforts to modernise higher education through digital means. In addition to the courses previously offered, the new portal offers more than 30 000 digital education resources, including case studies, tutorials, interactive lessons and lectures, videos, and web documentaries. Data collected by the European Union indicate that most learners using the new portal in 2015 were graduates; participation among undergraduates remained low (European Commission, 2015).

Key strengths and challenges in governance (pre-crisis analysis)

Key strengths

- Multiple structures exist to guide decision-making bodies, some of which are consultative.
- A new online admission portal (*Parcoursup*) for students applying to higher education.

Key challenges

- Decentralising teacher management and giving more autonomy to school leaders.
- Overcoming the compartmentalisation and complexity of the higher education system to improve performance.

Recent policies and practices

In 2013/14, the Higher Programme Council (*Conseil supérieur des programmes*) implemented new educational curricula for all levels of compulsory education, including pre-primary. The new curricula, based on a common framework of knowledge, skills and culture, aim to provide students with the necessary tools to achieve their ambitions.

- 2018: The Scientific Council of National Education was created to enable the entire educational community to benefit from the latest advances in research. Complementing the work of the CNESCO (see "Evaluation and Assessment") and the general inspectorates, the Scientific Council takes a multidisciplinary approach, aiming to stimulate pedagogical reflection by making the results of cutting-edge research and field experiments available to all actors across the system. Its work also has an impact on the training of managers within the national education administration through the Institute for Advanced Studies in Education and Training (*Institut des hautes études de l'éducation et de la formation*). The Council's work is also intended to enrich the content of initial teacher education and continuous professional development.
- 2019: The Ministry for Cities and Housing and the Ministry of National Education and Youth have collaborated in an effort to address social inequalities at their root. In 2019, following a pilot programme in 2017, 80 locations across the country were identified as Educational Cities (*cités éducatives*). The programme introduces measures to mobilise all the stakeholders within the educational community at a local level, including representatives of the State, regional and local administrative bodies and authorities, schools and other education and training institutions, parents, associations, extracurricular staff, and social workers to come together around the school and its students to improve educational conditions in disadvantaged communities.

In 2019, three general inspectorates under the Ministry and the Inspectorate of Youth and Sports (IGJS) merged to become the General Inspectorate of Education, Sport and Research (IGÉSR). This marks an effort to improve coherence in the monitoring and evaluation public policies. The various areas of expertise brought together within the IGÉSR are intended to improve alignment of the various public policies related to education, sport, community engagement and library services. In this way, the IGÉSR aims to support the implementation of such policy efforts at institutional level, across the system, with the wider aim of contributing to social cohesion and reducing regional inequalities. The IGÉSR's primary task is to guarantee the quality of public services through consistent monitoring.

Since 2013, the Communities of Universities and Institutions (*Communautés d'universités et établissements*) aim to better structure and simplify the higher education system. Each Community establishes a contract with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research which determines the relationship between the two entities, shifting the focus of governance to the regional level, which is considered more conducive to structuring and implementing coherent local policies with a stronger national and international presence. By 2017, there were 25 clusters of higher education institutions in France, of which 20 had agreed and signed contracts with the Ministry. In 2018, the State adapted its legislative role to encourage new forms of co-operation, consolidation or merging within university clusters. At the same time, strategic management dialogues were launched, on a voluntary basis, for institutions to share their priorities, constraints and strategic vision. France also introduced other measures to increase the international visibility of French research and to improve the international ranking of university groupings.

Figure 7. Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government for public lower secondary schools (2017)
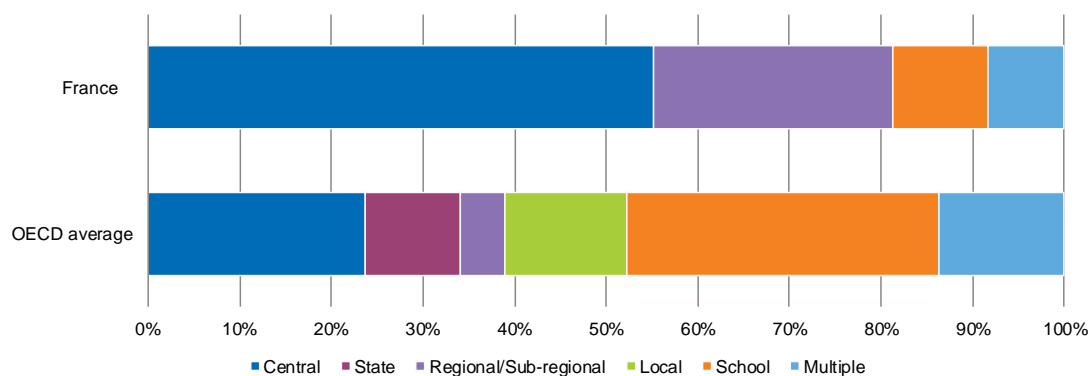
Note: This figure considers four domains of decision-making: 1) Organisation of instruction; 2) Personnel management; 3) Planning and structures, and; 4) Resources.
Source: OECD (2018), *Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2018-en.

FUNDING: PREDOMINANCE OF HIGH PUBLIC FUNDING WITH UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION ACROSS EDUCATION LEVELS

The distribution of **overall expenditure on education** across different levels of the system reflect the relative importance that countries attribute to each cycle of education, as well as the relative costs of education. In France, investment in educational institutions from primary to tertiary level, as a share of national wealth, is higher than on average across the OECD, constituting 5.3% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016, compared to an average of 5.0%. A large share of the expenditure on educational institutions is financed by public funds at 87% in France, compared to 83% on average across OECD countries, in 2016. The share of private expenditure is therefore lower than the OECD average share at 13% compared to 17%, of which two-thirds comes from household contributions, in the form of tuition fees. Between 2010 and 2016, public spending on education in France grew at a slower pace than total public spending, with respective increases of 1% and 6%. This trend is also observed at the OECD level, but the difference is less pronounced**.**
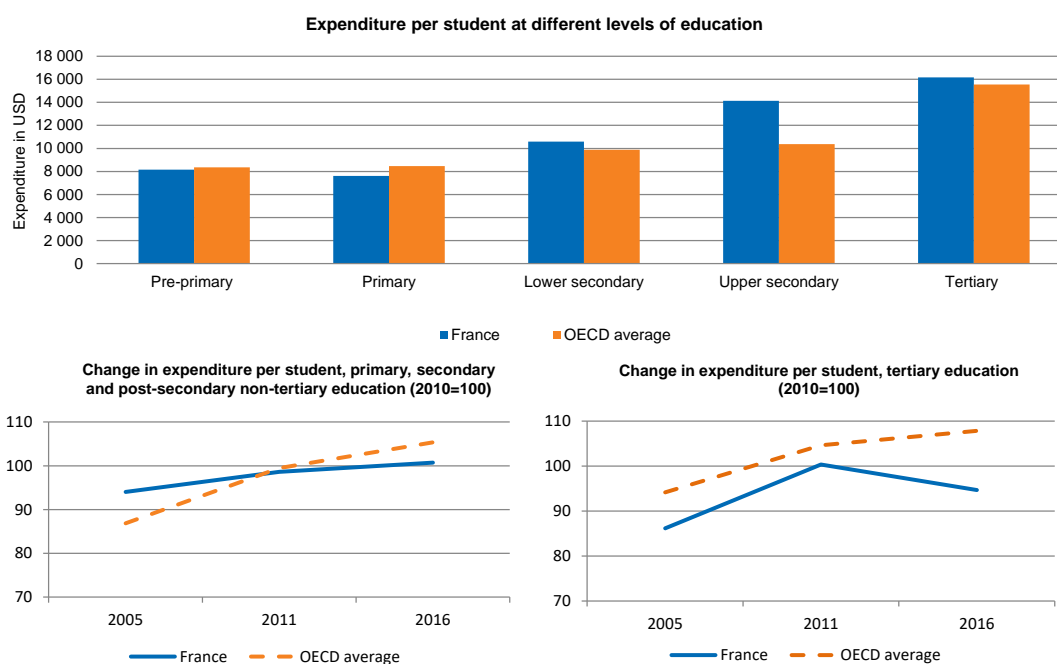
In France, annual per-student spending from primary to tertiary education, in 2016, was USD 11 364, 8% more than the OECD average of USD 10 502. However, there is a notable imbalance in the distribution of per-student funding across education levels. Expenditure per student is higher than the OECD average by 7% in lower secondary education at USD 10 599 compared to USD 9 884, and by 36% in upper secondary education (including general or agricultural secondary schools, and apprenticeships in work-linked training centres (*Centres de formation en alternance*)), at USD 14 132 compared to USD 10 368. In contrast, France's per-student spending at primary level is 10% below the OECD average, at USD 7 603 compared to USD 8 470. At tertiary level, annual per-student expenditure (including research and development activities) is USD 16 173 compared to USD 15 556 for the OECD average. Between 2010 and 2016, while spending per-student remained relatively stable at primary and secondary level with an increase of 1% in France compared to an OECD average increase of 5% for the OECD, it decreased at tertiary level by 5% compared to an OECD average increase of 8%. This decline is in large part due to an 11% increase in student numbers over the same period, compared to an increase in expenditure of 5%.

Funding for **primary and secondary schools** varies according to their status as either public or private institutions. Public funds finance public schools and cover the costs of teaching staff in private schools that have a contract with the State, which is most of them. Departmental and regional authorities also contribute to the financing of private secondary schools under contract (lower and upper secondary schools); non-contracted private schools do not receive public funding. Approximately 58% of the current expenditure on public primary and secondary education institutions in France is for teachers' salaries, which is a smaller share than the OECD or EU23 averages of 63%. In France, an important share of expenditure is devoted to non-teaching staff at 22% compared to 15% on average across the OECD and the EU23. To promote equity between regions and target resources where most needed, the distribution of public resources is based on the principles of equity and efficiency, with additional resources allocated to schools with more challenging contexts or high shares of students falling behind. Nevertheless, inequalities persist between primary or secondary schools, and also across regions. For example, in TALIS 2018, more than two-fifths of primary school leaders in France reported that insufficient Internet access affects their school's ability to provide quality education. Another 57% said that digital equipment for teaching is insufficient or unsuitable. These obstacles are more prevalent in priority education at 70% and 76%, respectively and for schools located in large cities at 65% and 73%, respectively.

Higher education is 77% publicly funded (66% on average for OECD countries). Half of the private funding comes from households and is used to pay the various fees related to tuition in a higher education institution. In France, tuition fees for public universities are relatively modest: in 2017, the average tuition fee was USD 237 for a bachelor's degree, USD 330 for a master's degree and USD 504 for a doctorate. The same year, more than one-third (38%) of students in France received a needs-based grant from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. Students and their families are also eligible for a wide range of assistance from other authorities such as housing assistance and tax reductions. However, French universities lack resources, in comparison to the institutions offering preparatory courses for prestigious universities (*classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles,* CPGE), the *grandes écoles*, and the IUTs and STSs. For example, in 2018, 85 100 students were enrolled in CPGEs compared to 1 614 900 students in universities, excluding IUTs. Hence, France spends around EUR 15 760 per year on a student enrolled in a CPGE, which is 50% more than is spent on a student at a university. To keep up with demographic growth and an increase in the number of students accessing higher education, additional resources are being made available. In 2018, France allocated EUR 71.5 million to create a total of 38 000 additional places. Furthermore, since 2018, universities have benefited from additional resources amounting to EUR 32 million for Yes, if (*Oui-si*) a scheme providing personalised interventions and pathways to students in need of more support to successfully transition to tertiary education. Unlike in most OECD countries, registration fees for foreign students from outside the European Union, were, until 2019, the same as for domestic students. Differentiated tuition fees were introduced for the 2019/20 academic year for non-EU students as part of the Welcome to France (*Bienvenue en France*) strategy. Nevertheless, these differentiated fees are linked to additional grants from the French government, as well as partial exemptions allocated by French embassies abroad and higher education institutions themselves.

Key strengths and challenges in funding (pre-crisis analysis)

Key strengths

- Educational expenditure is higher than on average across the OECD, with a large share of public funding at every level of education, including pre-primary.
- Resource allocations in higher education have increased, although this does not fully compensate for the growth in student numbers over the same period.

Key challenges

- Allocating more resources to disadvantaged institutions.
- Rebalancing the distribution of spending between primary and secondary schools.
- Increasing university resources and facilitating the participation of disadvantaged students.

Recent policies and practices

The Law on the Guidance and Planning for the Restructuring of the Republic's Schools (2013) and the Law for a School of Trust (2019) have worked to re-balance education spending by investing more in the first levels of education (see Spotlight 4). In 2014, as well as creating new teaching posts the former policy also introduced the Student Care and Support Allowance (*Indemnité de suivi et d'accompagnement des élèves*), a bonus payment of EUR 1 200 (gross) per year to teachers in pre-primary and primary education. In 2017, investment in the first levels of education continued with the lowering of compulsory schooling to 3 years of age and the halving of class sizes in the first and second years of primary school for schools belonging to REP and REP+ (see Spotlight 4).

The Digital Plan for Education (*Plan numérique pour l'éducation*, 2015) is part of a comprehensive and stable education strategy designed to develop pedagogical innovation and improve student learning. Public funding for the scheme is estimated at EUR 1 billion. Following this, digital technology is now present in all school curricula from primary to upper secondary. In order to enable teachers to adopt digital tools and use them to enhance teaching and learning, a major digital training plan has been deployed from 2016 with a mandatory three-day training course for all lower secondary teachers. For the past two years, the ministerial strategy has placed data (both protection and enhancement) at the heart of its strategy. The Ministry is also targeting support towards the communities and regions with the biggest challenges in accessing digital technology.

France introduced a new system of upper secondary scholarships (2016) to simplify the application process for families. The amount of social funds in schools has thus increased by 85% since 2012, representing a total of EUR 65 million, in 2017.

Finally, the reform of the system of needs-based grants for students in higher education (2013-19) has particularly favoured the most disadvantaged students and students from middle-class families. In 2017, after having reformed the national scholarship system (2013-16), France invested EUR 550 million in financial aid for higher education students. This reform aimed to improve the success rates among students from lower-income families, who are sometimes forced to work excessively long hours in paid employment. A central element of this policy is that direct aid to students now amounts to EUR 2.3 billion, the majority of which is allocated in the form of social grants (this amounts to EUR 2.12 billion). More scholarship holders are now accessing higher education: 21 835 more high school students in 2019 compared to 2018 (a 30% increase). In addition, scholarship students, who join a study programme in an institution located under a regional administration other than their own, are eligible for an additional grant of EUR 500. For students who do not have access to higher education courses in their area, 13 Connected Campuses were created in 2019 to allow for distance learning.

Figure 8. Annual expenditure per student (2016) and recent trends, by level of education

Expenditure per student at different levels of education

Change in expenditure per student, primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (2010=100)

Change in expenditure per student, tertiary education (2010=100)

Source: OECD (2019), *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en.

ANNEX A: STRUCTURE OF FRANCE'S EDUCATION SYSTEM
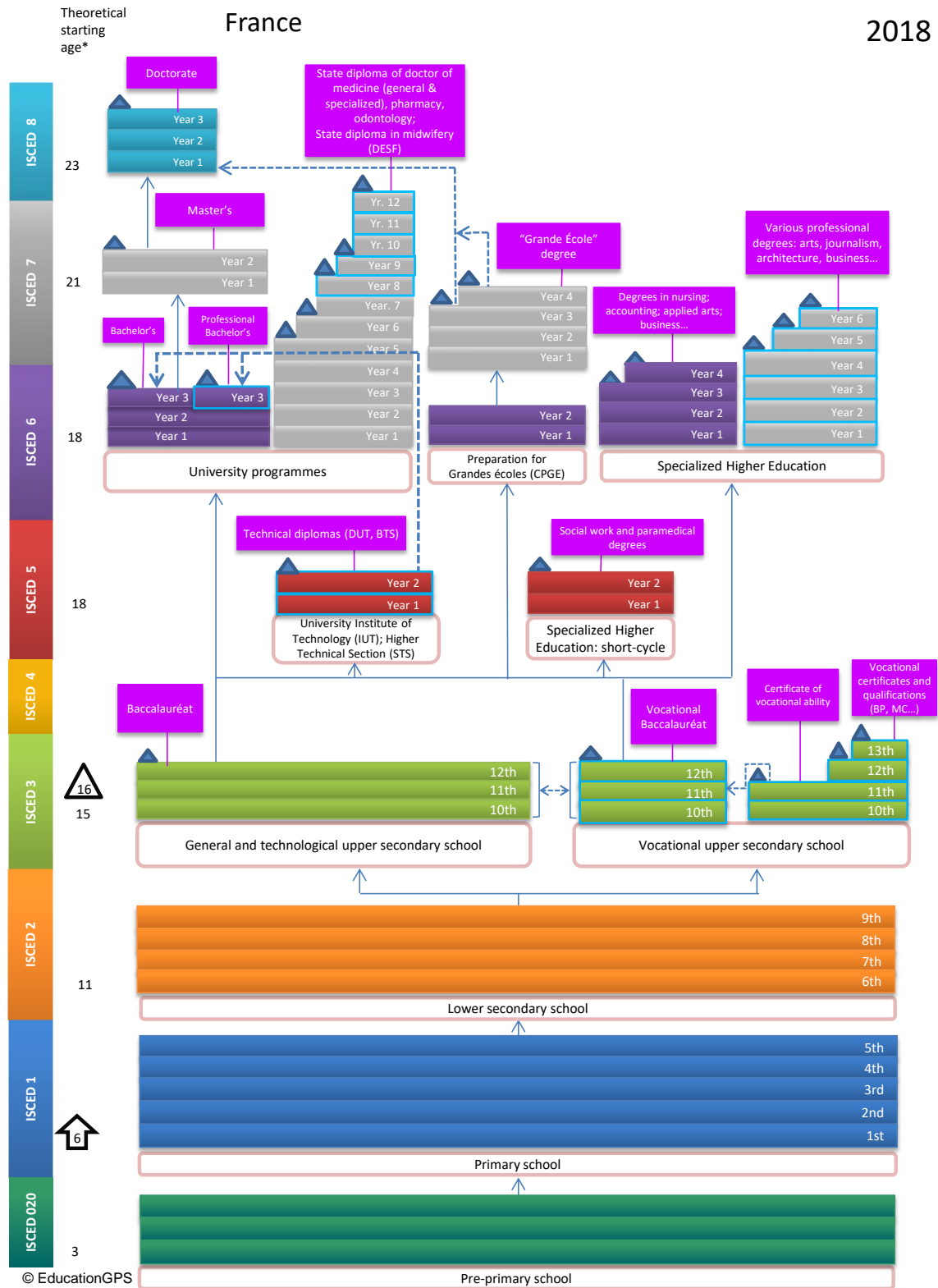
Note: The key for the interpretation of this table is available at the source link below.
Source: OECD (2019), France: Overview of the Education System", *OECD Education GPS*,
http://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/FRA/FRA_2011_EN.pdf.

ANNEX B: STATISTICS

#	List of key indicators[1,2,3]	France	Average or Total	Min OECD	Max OECD
	Background information				
Economy					
1	GDP per capita, 2016, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs (OECD Statistics)	42 067	42 441	14 276	107 775
2	GDP grow th, 2016 (OECD Statistics)	1.1%	1.8%	0.6%	6.6%
Society					
3	Population density, inhab/km^2, 2017 (OECD Statistics)	105	37	3	517
4	Population aged less than 15 as a percentage of total population, 2018 (OECD Data)	18.0%	17.0%	12.2%	28.4%
5	Foreign-born population as a percentage of total population, 2018 or the most recent available year (OECD Data)	12.5%	14.4%	0.8%	47.6%
	Education outcomes				
6	Mean performance in reading (PISA 2018)	493	487	412	523
7	***Average three-year trend in performance across PISA assessments, by domain (PISA 2018)*** [4,5]				
	Reading performance	-0.4	0.4	**-4.9**	**7.1**
	Mathematics performance	**-2.5**	-0.6	**-9.1**	**6.4**
	Science performance	-0.8	-1.9	**-10.7**	**6.4**
8	Enrolment rates of 3-year-olds in early childhood education and care, 2017 (EAG 2019)	99.9%	79.3%	2.4%	100%
9	Percentage of 25-64 year-olds w hose highest level of attainment is low er secondary education, 2018 (EAG 2019)	13.8%	14.4%	0.8%	39.9%
10	***Educational attainment of the population aged 25-34 by type of attainment, 2018 or latest available***				
	At least upper secondary education, 2018 (EAG 2019)	87.0%	85.4%	50.1%	97.8%
	Tertiary education, 2018 (EAG 2019)	46.9%	44.3%	23.4%	69.6%
	Vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, 2018 (EAG database 2020)	30.6%	24.5%	1.8%	50.1%
11	***Unemployment rates of 25-34 year-olds by educational attainment, 2018 (EAG 2019)***				
	Below upper secondary	24.8%	13.7%	3.0%	37.3%
	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	12.3%	7.3%	2.5%	25.1%
	Tertiary education	6.4%	5.5%	1.7%	23.2%
	Students: Raising outcomes				
Policy lever 1: Equity and quality					
12	First age of selection in the education system (PISA 2018)	15	14	10	16
13	***Students performing at the highest or lowest levels in reading (%) (PISA 2018)***				
	Students performing below Level 2	20.9%	22.6%	11.1%	49.9%
	Students performing at Level 5 or above	9.2%	8.7%	0.8%	15.0%
14	Percentage of students in schools w here students are grouped by ability into different classes for all subjects, PISA 2015	3.4%	7.8%	0.0%	56.1%
15	Percentage of students w hose parents reported that the schooling available in their area includes tw o or more other schools, PISA 2015	30.8%	36.8%	20.4%	56.9%

#	List of key indicators[1,2,3]	France	Average or Total	Min OECD	Max OECD
16	Percentage of students reporting that they have repeated at least a grade in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary schools (PISA 2015)	22.1%	11.3%	0.0%	42.6%
17	Percentage of variance in reading performance in PISA test explained by ESCS (PISA 2018)[4]	17.5%	12.0%	6.2%	19.1%
18	Score difference in reading performance in PISA between non-immigrant and immigrant students AFTER adjusting for socio-economic status (PISA 2018)[4]	**-13**	**-24**	**-80**	**16**
19	Score difference between girls and boys in reading (PISA 2018)[4]	**25**	**30**	**10**	**52**
Levier de politique 2 : préparer les étudiants pour le futur					
20	Mean proficiency in literacy among adults aged 16-64 on a scale of 500 (Survey of Adult Skills, PIAAC, 2012)	262.1	267.7	220.1	296.2
21	Difference in literacy scores between younger (25-34) and older (55-65) adults AFTER accounting for age, gender, education, immigrant and language background and parents' educational attainment (Survey of Adult Skills, PIAAC, 2012).	18.2	15.6	-8.3	37.6
	Share of students in upper secondary education in 2017 following:				
22	General programmes (OECD Stat - INES 2020)	60.1%	58.1%	27.6%	100.0%
	Vocational programmes (OECD Stat - INES 2020)	39.9%	43.1%	9.0%	72.4%
	Combined school and work-based programmes (OECD Stat - INES 2020)	9.6%	18.3%	1.0%	58.0%
23	First-time graduation rates from tertiary education, 2017 (Below the age of 30, excluding mobile students / OECD Stat - INES 2020)	m	36.6%	10.1%	49.9%
24	Percentage of 18-24 year-olds not in education, employment or training, 2018 (EAG 2019)	18.2%	14.3%	5.9%	29.8%
Institutions: Improving schools					
Policy lever 3: School improvement					
25	***The Learning Environment - PISA 2018***				
	Mean index of teacher support in language-of-instruction lessons	-0.22	0.01	-0.61	0.47
	Mean index of disciplinary climate	-0.34	0.04	-0.34	1.07
	Mean index of students' sense of belonging	-0.07	0.00	-0.28	0.46
26	Percentage of teachers in lower secondary education aged 50 years old or more, 2017 (EAG 2019)	30.9%	37.0%	6.3%	54.2%
27	***Number of teaching hours per year in public institutions by education level, 2018 (EAG 2019)[7]***				
	Primary education	900	783	561	1063
	Lower secondary education, general programmes	684	709	481	1063
28	Ratio of actual teachers' salaries to earnings for full-time, full-year adult workers with tertiary education, lower secondary education, general programmes, 2016 (EAG 2019)	0.88	0.88	0.64	1.40
29	Proportion of teachers who believe the teaching profession is valued in society (TALIS 2018)	6.6%	25.8%	4.5%	67.0%
30	Proportion of teachers who would become a teacher again if they could choose (TALIS 2018)	74.4%	75.6%	54.9%	92.2%

#	List of key indicators[1,2,3]	France	Average or Total	Min OECD	Max OECD
	Policy lever 4: Evaluation and assessment to improve student outcomes				
31	***Percentage of students in schools where the following arrangements aimed at quality assurance and improvement at school are used (PISA 2015):***				
	Internal/Self-evaluation	77.7%	93.2%	74.8%	100.0%
	External evaluation	56.7%	74.6%	20.8%	97.4%
32	***Percentage of students whose school principals reported that standardised tests are used for the following purposes (PISA 2015):***				
	To make decisions about students' retention or promotion	50.7%	31.3%	3.4%	60.6%
	To monitor the school's progress from year to year	59.1%	69.4%	26.2%	97.7%
	To make judgements about teachers' effectiveness	21.7%	37.0%	4.4%	87.5%
	To identify aspects of instruction or the curriculum that could be improved	50.3%	58.9%	14.1%	92.4%
33	Percentage of lower secondary teachers whose principals report conducting formal appraisal of their teachers at least once per year (TALIS 2018)	35.9%	63.5%	16.2%	98.1%
	Systems: Organising the system				
	Policy lever 5: Governance				
34	***Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2017 (EAG 2018)***				
	Central	55.2%	23.8%	0.0%	83.3%
	State	a	10.3%	0.0%	62.5%
	Regional/Sub-regional	26.0%	4.9%	0.0%	33.3%
	Local	0.0%	13.3%	0.0%	71.9%
	School	10.4%	34.0%	0.0%	91.7%
	Multiple levels	8.3%	13.8%	0.0%	100.0%
	Policy lever 6: Funding				
35	Expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP (from primary to tertiary), 2016 (EAG 2019)	5.2%	5.0%	0.0%	6.5%
36	***Annual expenditure per student by educational institutions, for all services, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, 2016 (EAG 2019)***				
	Pre-primary education	8 165	8 349	1 579	17 533
	Primary education	7 603	8 470	2 961	17 913
	Lower secondary education	10 599	9 884	2 561	21 739
	Upper secondary education	14 132	10 368	3 001	21 231
	Tertiary education	16 173	15 556	5 787	48 407
37	***Relative proportions of public and private expenditure on educational institutions, 2016 (EAG 2019)***				
	Public sources	86.9%	82.7%	62.7%	97.6%
	All private sources (includes international sources)	13.1%	17.4%	2.4%	37.3%
38	***Change in the share of expenditure on educational institutions, EAG 2019 (Percentage-point difference between 2010 and 2016, primary to tertiary education)***				
	Public sources	-1.5	-2.7	-9.8	6.3
	All private sources	1.4	2.5	-6.3	7.0

Notes

1. The average, total, minimums and maximums refer to OECD countries except in the Survey of Adult Skills, where they refer to participating countries. For indicators 6, 13 and 17-19 the average value refers to the arithmetic mean across all OECD member countries (and Colombia), excluding Spain. For indicator 5, the average value refers to the arithmetic mean across all OECD member countries (except Japan, Korea and Poland) as calculated by the Education Policy Outlook.

2. "m": included when data is not available.

3. "a": included when the category is not applicable.

4. Statistically significant values of the indicator are shown in bold (PISA only).

5. The average three year trend is the average change in PISA score points from a country's/economy's earliest participation in PISA to PISA 2018.

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NOTES

[1] On 25 May 2018, the OECD Council invited Colombia to become a Member. While Colombia is included in the OECD averages reported in this publication for data from Education at a Glance, the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Teaching and Learning International Survey, at the time of preparation of these OECD datasets, Colombia was in the process of completing its domestic procedures for ratification and the deposit of Colombia's instrument of accession to the OECD Convention was pending.

[2] Public and private institutions subsidised by the State only.

[3] Typical teaching time (teaching time required from most teachers when no special circumstances apply).

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