

Educational reform facilitates more autonomy

In June 2017 the Austrian National Council adopted far-reaching measures to be implemented in the education sector. At the heart of this reform there is the extension of school autonomy.

With this reform, schools and teachers are provided with more scope in the organisation of teaching. It will be possible for them, for example, to adjust class and group sizes flexibly depending on how they design the learning phase in a pedagogical and didactic respect. In addition, neither the minimum nor maximum numbers for groups will be specified centrally. The resources, which will remain unchanged overall and have been legally enshrined, can be used flexibly at the various locations for measures taken as part of school autonomy.

The duration of the periods of instruction can also be chosen flexibly. The 50-minute lesson will only serve as a parameter of calculation for resource allocation. The entire teaching time for teachers and pupils based on the applicable curriculum will not change. This will simplify project-oriented teaching, block instruction and topic-centred teaching, for example.

The schools' opening hours will be laid down at the respective locations in school partnership agreements. The school infrastructure can be used in a flexible and better way.

Between two and eight school locations in a region can merge into so-called school clusters. The individual school locations will still be schools and will be strengthened due to cooperation in the cluster. The school cluster management will fulfil a cross-location management function. Timetables and the distribution of subjects will be elaborated centrally in the cluster in consultation with the locations. Each school location will still have one point of contact to support the cluster management on site. A specific advisory body for each school cluster will give the school partners in the cluster an additional opportunity to have a say.

Another important point of the educational reform is the depoliticisation of school administration. In the future, the school heads will be selected based on an Austria-wide standardised procedure in which external experts will carry out evaluations. Furthermore the new school heads will be assisted in specific programmes. In the future the heads of the school or school cluster will themselves carry out the selection process for newly employed teachers. The public authority will examine the formal requirements and will assume functions related to service legislation; it will only intervene in a regulatory capacity if no suitable applicants are found for specific locations.

In-service teacher training held in-house will be expanded. The share of these measures will be more strongly geared towards the requirements of the school locations or clusters. An electronic portfolio accompanying their career will document all the in-service and continuing education and training measures attended by the teachers.

The grouping of pupils and the forms of teaching can be handled as flexibly as the duration of the periods of instruction. Opening hours can also be laid down with more scope for design.

Another new development which was adopted by Parliament this June was free basic education for adults ("adult education initiative"). Between 2018 and 2021, adults will have the possibility to obtain a compulsory school certificate free of charge. The federal government, the provinces and the European Social Fund will provide more than EUR 111.5 million for that period. This scheme aims to reach more than 27,000 people.

More information:

Press memo on the autonomy package by the Education Ministry:

<https://www.bmb.gv.at/ministerium/vp/2017/20170628a.html> (retrieved on 28.07.2017)

Update Schule [An Update on School] – information brochure on the autonomy package of the educational reform: <https://www.bmb.gv.at/schulen/autonomie/updateschule.pdf?61edxg> (retrieved on 28.07.2017)