

BELGIUM – FLEMISH COMMUNITY

Introduction

Freedom of education is a constitutional right in Belgium. In other words, every natural person or legal person has the right to organise education and establish institutions for this purpose. The authorities are not allowed to take preventive measures to prohibit the establishment of free schools. Finally, the authorities are constitutionally obliged to provide neutral education. The concept of the governing body (or school board) is a key concept in the organisation of education in Flanders. The governing body is responsible for one or more schools and can take the shape of an authority, a natural person or a moral person / moral persons. The governing bodies have a wide-ranging autonomy. For example, they are completely free with regard to the choice of teaching methods and are allowed to provide their education on the basis of a certain philosophy or educational view. They can also determine their own curriculum and timetables, and appoint their own staff. However, schools that want government recognition or financial support from the government must meet the attainment targets, be adequately equipped and have sufficient teaching materials. In many cases the educational networks, as the representative association of governing bodies, take over some of the responsibilities of the governing bodies. They draw up their own curriculum and timetables. This means that the governing bodies concerned surrender some of their autonomy to the networks. Traditionally a distinction is made between three educational networks:

- community education
- subsidised publicly run schools
- subsidised privately run schools

Compulsory education starts on 1 September of the year in which a child reaches the age of 6, and lasts in principle, 12 full school years. A pupil has to comply with compulsory education until the age of fifteen or sixteen. Afterwards only part-time compulsory education is applicable (= a combination of part-time learning and working). However, most young people continue to attend fulltime secondary education.

Compulsory education ends at the eighteenth anniversary or on June 30 of the calendar year in which the youngster reaches the age of 18. If they stop going to school on their 18th anniversary and do not finish the school year they do not have a right to a certificate or diploma of the course of study they attended. For young people who obtain a diploma of secondary education before they reach the age of 18, compulsory education stops at that moment.

Pre-primary education

Age	2,5 – 6 year-olds
Duration	3 years
Description	Although nursery education is not compulsory, almost all children receive nursery education in Flanders. Between the ages of 2.5 and 3 years, children can start mainstream nursery education at 6 times in the school year. Once the young child

	has reached the age of 3, he/she can start school at any time in the school year.
Timetable	/
School year and holidays	The school year starts on 1 September and ends on 30 June Holidays: check http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/infolijn/faq/schoolvakanties
Subjects	Nursery education tackles every aspect of the children's multifaceted education and encourages spontaneous development so that they become mature enough to move up to primary school. The child is taught skills (such as language acquisition, motor development, social skills, ...) and an initial way of exploring the world. The following subject areas are minimally studied: physical education; expressive education; Dutch; environmental studies; initiation into mathematics; French. Wherever possible, an attempt is made to interrelate the various learning areas.
Exams	No exams
Schools	Nursery schools

Primary education

Age	6 to 12-year olds
Duration	6 years
Description	The start of primary education normally coincides with the start of compulsory education (= the age of 6). This is also the age at which the few children who do not have received nursery education, (normally) start primary school. A child can spend a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 8 years in mainstream primary education. In exceptional cases, the authorities can allow a derogation from the minimum duration.
Timetable	Pupils have to attend each week 28 teaching times of 50 minutes for educational and developmental activities. Lessons are evenly spread over five days from Monday to Friday. Wednesday afternoon is free.
School year and holidays	The school year starts on 1 September and ends on 30 June Holidays: check http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/infolijn/faq/schoolvakanties
Subjects	In mainstream primary education, the educational provision covers the same areas as mainstream nursery education, and wherever possible, again in an interrelated way. Mathematical introduction is replaced by a real mathematics curriculum content. Attention is also paid to cross-curricular themes such as 'learning to learn' and 'social skills'.
Exams	At the end of primary education, pupils who have achieved the curriculum targets receive a certificate of primary education.
Schools	Lagere scholen of Basisscholen

Secondary education

Age	12 to 18 year-olds
Duration	6 years
Description	Secondary education is aimed at young people aged 12 to 18. In principle, all schools in secondary education are open to boys and girls. A school is not allowed to refuse children on account of their gender.
Timetable	At least 28 teaching periods of 50 minutes must be weekly organised with a maximum number of 36 lessons per week. The school year and the types of education determine the differences. In practice, almost all pupils attend at least 32 teaching hours per week. Lessons are evenly spread over nine half days from Monday to Friday. The school itself can define when the pupils are given a half day off. Classes start at 8 a.m. at the earliest. They finish at 3 p.m. at the earliest and at 5 p.m. at the latest. The lunch break lasts at least 60 minutes.
School year and holidays	The school year starts on 1 September and ends on 30 June Holidays: check http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/infolijn/faq/schoolvakanties
Subjects	<p>Since 1989, full-time secondary education has been organised in a uniform system. This uniform structure comprises stages, types of education and study disciplines. The definitive choice of subjects is postponed until the second stage so that pupils are first introduced to as many subjects as possible.</p> <p>The majority of teaching periods in the <u>first stage</u> is devoted to the core curriculum and consists of: Dutch; French and possibly English; mathematics; history; geography; education in the arts; sciences; technology; physical education; religion or ethics.</p> <p>From the <u>second stage</u>, we distinguish four different education forms: general (ASO - places an emphasis on broad general education), technical (TSO - places a special emphasis on general and technical theoretical subjects), vocational secondary education (BSO - a practical type of education in which young people learn a specific profession in addition to receiving general education) and secondary education in the arts. Within one of these education forms, the pupil opts for a particular course of study. A number of these courses only start in the third or even fourth stage.</p> <p>In the <u>second and third stage</u> there is a common and an optional part. In the optional part, the core curriculum is supplemented with a broad range of possible subjects. In the third stage, the specific education can be further narrowed down with a view to the ultimate choice of profession or possible educational careers in tertiary education.</p> <p>In the fourth stage consisting mainly of nursing education, no core curriculum is imposed because of the specificity of the training.</p>
Exams	A pupil gains the certificate of secondary education after successfully completing six years of ASO, TSO, or KSO or seven years of BSO. With a certificate of secondary education from any school, type of education or course of study, a young person has unrestricted access to

	<p>tertiary education.</p> <p>The class committee decides whether or not a pupil has passed, in other words, whether a pupil has efficiently achieved the objectives of the curriculum. The class committee consists of the head-teacher, and all the teachers who teach the pupil concerned. Every year is supported with an orientation certificate, a certificate, a study certificate or a diploma. The governing bodies can choose their own evaluation methods. With the exception of a few basic rules, the education authorities do not impose any standards with regard to pupils' assessment. The inspectorate does control the quality of the evaluation in the school audits.</p>
Schools	Secundaire scholen

More info:

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/2005/educationinflandersbroadview.pdf>