

Conditions of teaching and learning

Work file 8: How to develop school as a democratic community

EDC/HRE and the way to a democratic atmosphere cannot only take place in the classroom but also have to be developed within the school. In this respect, the most important key player is the school principal.

Within the Council of Europe EDC/HRE materials the tool “Democratic governance of schools” suggests key areas to work in and steps to take on the way to school as a democratic community (see also Unit 5 in this part, Work files 15-18).

These four key areas are:

1. Governance, leadership, management and public accountability
2. Value-centred education
3. Co-operation, communication and involvement: competitiveness and self-determination
4. Student discipline

Governance, leadership, management and public accountability

Various stakeholders such as legislators, local school boards, trade unions, students and parents as well as local communities make demands of school leadership. How are these challenges met by the school leader? What kind of management is applied by him/her in the school? Is leadership built on consensus and trust or is leadership characterised by mistrust and rivalry? How are responsibilities shared in the school? How is diversity dealt with by the school leader? And how does the school show accountability towards different stakeholders?

Value-centred education

How do values such as democracy, human rights and respect for diversity appear in formal and informal contexts in a school? How are values and social skills promoted as a prerequisite for peaceful co-existence in the modern globalised society? How are these values given thought in the school?

Co-operation, communication and involvement: competitiveness and self-determination

School is not separated from the rest of society or from the real world. How does a school communicate internally and externally? How does a school co-operate internally and externally? Does the school resemble more a dissociated company or does it resemble a door to the rest of society through its ways and modes of communication and involvement? What does a school mission statement say? How much is the school determined to put into practice its set goals when communicating and opening itself to the rest of society?

Student discipline

A lot of people work together in a school. What forces should be used to maintain discipline and order in a democratically governed school? What makes students follow given rules, and what makes them oppose them? Does a democratic school mean chaos without the students following any rules?