



Managing for @ School of Success

E-book 4 Administrative Practices

Title: Managing for @ School of Success. E-Book 4 – Administrative Practices

Organizer: Renato Castro

Editor: EduFor

Date: March, 2018

Source of Finance: Erasmus+ KA2, Project N° 2015-1-PT01-KA201-013059

Format: E-book

Copyright:



This work is licensed by Creative Commons Licence Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International.

This publication only reflects the authors' opinions, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use made of the information contained therein.



With the support of the
Erasmus + programme
of the European Union

Managing for @ School of Success is a project included in Key Action 2 – Cooperation for innovation and the share of good practices – of the Erasmus+ programme, reference number 2015-1-PT01-KA201-013059 and financed by the Erasmus+ programme. It is included in the sub-group of strategic partnerships to promote improved teaching in schools and is formed of seven partners from six European countries: Portugal, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and the United Kingdom.

This e-book is the result of the work carried out during the Managing for @ School of Success (M@SS) project by the Liaison Assistants of EduFor¹, who formed Group B of the project (Group A was formed of the other participants, mostly head teachers, including the head teachers of the Associated Schools).

Therefore, the e-book emerges from the work done in the scope of the M@SS Project concerning the functioning of school administration services in the organisations of the partner schools.

It was known from the choice of partners that the situations of School Administration Services would be considerably varied, due to the characteristics of each education system. Those differences, which were in fact a factor inherent to the choice of the partnering bodies, were established according to five clusters identified in application to the project.

Application to the project established the previous condition that elements of Group B would be present at the meetings in Portugal, Spain and Italy to be able to understand the procedures and role of these services in each country. However, at least one element of Group B was present at all the Training Events, which allowed observation, albeit informally, of the respective School Administration Services (in the cases where these existed).

It was established that the elements of Group B of the schools associated with EduFor would be the existing “Liaison Assistants” who were given the possibility of attending English classes for a year to make them more familiar with the working language of the project and thereby improve their contribution.

It was initially assumed that the Spanish schools would present a more similar situation to ours regarding School Administration Services. However, these Services were found not to exist in Spanish schools, as they are operated by Local Authorities. So this work will focus initially on a brief characterisation of the situation observed in each country

¹ Administrative Staff who in each associated school assure the link, in the area of administration and logistics, between Schools and the School Association Training Centre (CFAE).

of the partner organisations and advancing some suggestions for good practices which, without intended as prescriptive, will share some reflections.

The Netherlands

Information about 's-HertogenBosch, Sint- Janslyceum school was collected through a survey made following the visit. The following information was gathered:

Its administrative services operate in one of the buildings of a group of schools (about 40) which form a kind of council within the Local Authority, in this case 's-HertogenBosch.

In the particular case of this school council, there are 8 employees with administrative functions. The number of employees is defined by the management team (normally the head teacher and/or deputy head teacher) who are also responsible for appointing them.

These services are autonomous in relation to central government but not in relation to the Local Authority.

Salaries and the school budget are established by central government and the local authority. Central government allocates an amount to the local authority which then allocates it to a kind of school council where its division between schools is negotiated. It is the School Council that draws up the budget. In the School Administration Services, salaries are processed and all current expenditure and investment is organised. The financial director makes regular financial reports of all those operations. The functional content is defined by the ministry with adaptations indicated by the school leadership.

Working hours are between 8:00 and 17:00. For the lunch break, the employee can choose one of three options:

- Once a day, 30 minutes;
- Twice a day, 20 minutes;
- Three times a day, for only a few minutes.

Most of these employees only work a half timetable.

Spain

At the beginning of 2017 (from 30 January to 3 February) the meeting in Madrid was held, with the opportunity to visit different school establishments. The entity receiving

us, the Spanish Confederation of Teaching Centres (CECE) arranged visits to some of their associated schools where it was possible to observe the situation of different levels of education and different types of schools.

In the CECE itself, we did not find similarities with our schools as that organisation is a kind of service provider for its associated schools (with various representations throughout the country which are called Federations) and by having organised administrative services is not representative of what this project aimed to observe. However, we learned that the federations (delegations of the CECE) are distributed among certain employees with each one being allocated to more than one federation, and it is above all with that person that information is exchanged with a view to efficient communication. So here we could find some similarity with our liaison assistants at EduFor.

The visits to schools associated with the CECE included those to Primary Schools (covering age groups from pre-school to 14/15 years), Secondary and Vocational Schools, and in no case were Administrative Services found to be organised similarly to those in Portugal.

In all of them we saw a service identified as “office” but its function amounted to receiving and forwarding correspondence from parents/guardians to the school or receiving and forwarding other types of requests made by them to the school leadership.

For that reason, this service is performed by just one person who in addition carried out other minor duties such as making photocopies for teachers, pupils and the leadership, receiving mail and forwarding it directly to the headteacher, answering the phone, etc.

All the work done by our school offices is carried out in Spain by the local authorities schools belong to.

It is also interesting to note that in all the schools we visited, the headteacher appoints an element of the teaching staff to assist in more administrative tasks, generally called the headteacher’s secretary.

However, in the visits we made to three vocational schools we could observe some differences between them. The mechanical and agricultural schools operated very similarly to the model described, whereas the Hotel and Tourism School of Alcalá de Henares, having more pupils and courses, had an office with more staff, but only due

to the much larger number of pupils. Their duties were the same, generally speaking. More was involved in everyday management, which justified more human resources. The functional content of the elements of these “offices” was very varied and so their availability to perform tasks outside their place of work was considerable.

Poland

On our visit to the Polish partner school, *1 Spoleczene Ogólksstalcace im*, in May 2017 (22 to 26), our aim was not to observe their administrative services, since we believed they did not exist (at least in the way they are organised in Portugal). However, the opportunity presented itself and it was possible to gather information.

We collected information from our partner school, which is a private institution, and one other State school.

In the first case, finance comes from fees and the local authority. In the case of the State school, this all comes from the local authority, and this is generally the main difference between these schools. However, another difference is that the private school's head teacher can strengthen pedagogical support for pupils by allocating more hours to teachers, always negotiating the situation with them.

Once schools receive the budget, this is managed by the head teacher and by an accountant working directly with the school and responsible for accounting. Briefly, this accountant is the person working most directly with the head teacher and the only person to be provided with accounts. The accountant must present a monthly financial report and another annually.

Office staff work on the school premises with a timetable from 7:30 to 15:30. There is no lunch interval but employees can eat whenever they want for a few minutes only.

The services carry out tasks related to daily business, registering expenses and contacting parents/guardians.

Salary-processing is the job of the accountant.

The salaries of non-teaching staff are negotiated with the head teacher. There is no career structure defined for employees. Salary increases are negotiated with the head teacher. The person in charge of administrative services (not the accountant) is also in charge of the cleaning staff. This person asks the head teacher for increases for these employees.

The functional content of this administrative staff is defined by the head teacher, who also defines the number of employees allocated to this service.

The school's total non-teaching staff is defined by the formula, n° of pupils/26.

Administrative services are very simplified and are generally directed to contacting parents/guardians and helping with bureaucratic situations. The person responsible for these services answers directly to the headteacher and is not involved in accounting matters. The staff is very small (according to the ratio) and they perform multiple duties. There is no defined career structure and their salaries are negotiated with the headteacher.

The headteacher also appoints administrative staff and assesses them.

The people we interviewed stated they felt like important elements in the organisation's success and said that although it was not usual to talk about this directly, they feel the headteacher appreciates their work.

Italy

On the visit to Italy in November 2017 (13 to 17) we expected to find an organisation more similar to our own, and this was in fact confirmed. Not only in the number of people but also in the duties performed. Coincidentally, our partner school, Istituto Omnicomprensivo Ridolfo Zimarino, was experiencing the initial stages of forming/being part of a Vertical Grouping. It was very interesting to be able to observe the difficulties and obstacles created in relation to this new situation for most of those involved, not only physically but also emotionally. The scattering of the establishments belonging to this grouping was an added difficulty in articulating all the administrative work.

The services are concentrated in just one building, in the group headquarters, which is an old building in a rural area far from the closest town, and this was where the visit took place. Working conditions were reasonable. The furniture was not very modern and the services were distributed over different rooms, although all on the same floor. Everyone said that working conditions could be better (better furniture, better computers, better internet connection), but they all agreed that the material conditions were sufficient and that these did not affect their work.

Nine people worked in the services for a total of 1000 pupils. They are completely autonomous in relation to central government.

However, responsibility for salaries is divided between the regional government of Chieti, in the case of secondary schools, and Scerni local authority, for the other levels

of education. Salaries are not processed in the school. One of the services' responsibilities is to manage the school budget and draw up periodic reports on its implementation.

Functional content is defined by the ministry and this corresponds above all to carrying out tasks to support the organisation's leadership, administrative tasks to support pupils, teachers and parents/guardians.

The Ufficio Scolastico Provinciale sets the number of employees for these services and is also responsible for their appointment through a competitive selection process.

Given the great distance between the headquarter school and some of the others, a procedure was determined whereby one administrative employee would travel to the most distant establishment one morning per week (on a pre-determined and duly publicised day) so that parents/guardians could see to school-related matters without having to go to the headquarter school. This could be considered a good practice.

As to the functioning itself, we can conclude that they still do not use specific software to support school management, and so we cannot consider this aspect as favourable.

United Kingdom

The visit took place during the Training Event, from 12 to 16 March 2018. Similarly to the other partner schools, these schools do not have administrative services organised in the same way as here. They have what they call an office, but it only consists of one or two employees and its functional content is mainly that of school reception. In all the schools visited in the United Kingdom there was no gate control, but there was a reception where anyone entering was subject to strict identification procedures. Beyond that point, it was only possible to enter with a document identifying us as visitors. Parents/guardians are also subject to this process when they go to the school to speak to teachers.

Besides this function, they also received correspondence which they forwarded appropriately and helped in multiple tasks such as taking photocopies and others requested by teachers. They answer directly to the headteacher who was also responsible for appointing them. One of those people deals more directly and particularly with financial matters together with the headteacher.

People's capacity to multi-task stands out.

Good Practices

The M@SS, Managing for @ School of Success project seeks to improve all the “paths” to school success. Aspects such as Autonomy, the Curriculum and Schools’ Self-Assessment are relevant but depend on, and are connected to the structures and procedures developed in everyday action in a school/group of schools.

With School Administration Services being one of the integral structures of our Schools/Groups, their main mission is to provide a quality service to our target public, the school community.

The diversity of tasks currently carried out in schools’ administration services is strongly marked by the weight of bureaucracy in some processes which even the use of modern computer programs does not simplify. Nevertheless, their use makes tasks quicker to perform and consequently reduces the associated stress.

Therefore, the constant search to identify Good Practices that allow daily tasks to be performed effectively and efficiently is of the greatest importance for all involved and principally for those who perform their daily duties and develop their career.

The responsibility of Group B of this project was to gather relevant information to compile a Guide to Good Practices. In doing so, it was quickly recognized that the Guide would not aim to be a kind of ready-to-use “remedy”. This, at least, was the understanding of all those who contributed to its elaboration. Not that it was unimportant, but rather because each case was known to be different and each situation has its setting, and so the answer to a difficulty can vary accordingly.

However, this did not prevent us achieving something, as long as it was clear it would not be the presentation of a solution to all problems.

So Group B presents a Guide to Good Practices, which is basically a set of ideas arising from dealing with these services’ particular difficulties on a daily basis. It puts forward some strategies that have been adopted or only idealized, aiming to be a starting point for the development of ideas and strategies adapted to each situation.

This Guide also shares some ideas about routines that can be introduced and that may help to create a truly participative climate for those involved.

This is all the more important given the relevance of creating an organisational identity which will be all the better the more its collaborators identify with it.

When Administrative Staff were asked, they said that Good Practices in Administrative Services can be identified at different levels:

- performing tasks;

- leadership guidance;
- promoting participation by all.

At the ***first level***, there is the recurring emergence of some ideas that must be present in performing duties:

- adopt work methods that promote teamwork;
- promote internal communication and cooperation between sectors;
- promote employee motivation;
- use common software (desirable) in schools in Groups dependent on the same Training Centre, since this makes it easier to provide training to all at a lower cost as well as exchanging information about its use.

Concerning the ***second level***:

- provide quality training in the different areas of administrative service operation;
- provide access to relevant information for the agent's able and efficient performance (employee, collaborator);
- create a coordinating group to orient and create common practices.
- hold work meetings with a view to sharing experiences and consequently streamlining and improving the effectiveness of processes;
- elaborate a platform to be able to spread examples of good experiences (blog, Facebook page or similar), one that is easily consulted.
- spread paper-saving practices, for example, using e-mail to circulate internal information; provide an agenda where everyone's commitments are easily consulted.
- exchange of knowledge between different heads of department (head of administrative services/leadership) aiming for better interpretation of norms.
- possibility of adjusting the employee's working hours with due respect to what is established by law;
- share tasks among employees whenever the workload justifies this;
- good working conditions.

Concerning the ***third level***:

- frequent short meetings (briefings) for timely information about how activities in administration services are progressing (more frequently with the person

directly in charge of the services, with members of leadership every three months).

- recognize and appreciate performance not only at times of formal assessment.
- promote a good working atmosphere, for example, by adapting working hours (with due respect for the law and the interests of the school community, but also according to the employee's needs).



Figure 1 - Working session of Group B, June 2018, Mangualde, Portugal.