

## 1. The scenario

This report focuses mainly on information strategies and dynamics affecting the public school system. Private schools in Oslo are indeed quite marginal: only 6% of the students in primary education attend a private school. In Norway there are no private schools parallel to the public schools; they are subject to pedagogical (Steiner, Montessori), religious, or linguistic alternative (international schools, German school, French school). Recently, the new Government has further limited the possibility to open new private schools.

The City of Oslo, defined as the “owner” of all the public primary and junior-high schools based on the municipal area of Oslo, is responsible for the information provided to the families on school enrolment and choice.

In general, individual schools do not have specific communication strategies oriented to attract new pupils. The normal process is that the parents of future 1st grade students, based on the catchment area linked to the residential address of the child, get an offer from the local school that the parents can accept/reject. In general, the acceptance rate of places provided in the local school is quite high (95% approx) (Abildsnes, 2020), although there are some variations among the city districts as we will explain later. Parents can get to know the catchment area associated with the residential address by accessing the Oslo city website <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/skole-og-utdanning/>. It contains a section “Which school will your child attend”, where prospective parents also find information on the existing free school choice options (forms to fill in to ask to be registered in a different school than the local one). On the same website, it is also available a link to the data base “Minosloskole” (see below), which gives institutional information about individual schools in Oslo (among them, national test evaluation and percentage of children with special education needs); Open-days or other communication activities oriented to attract new pupils are not provided by public schools in Oslo. A large number of schools has a facebook page where they present pictures and information on events and activities taking place at the school.

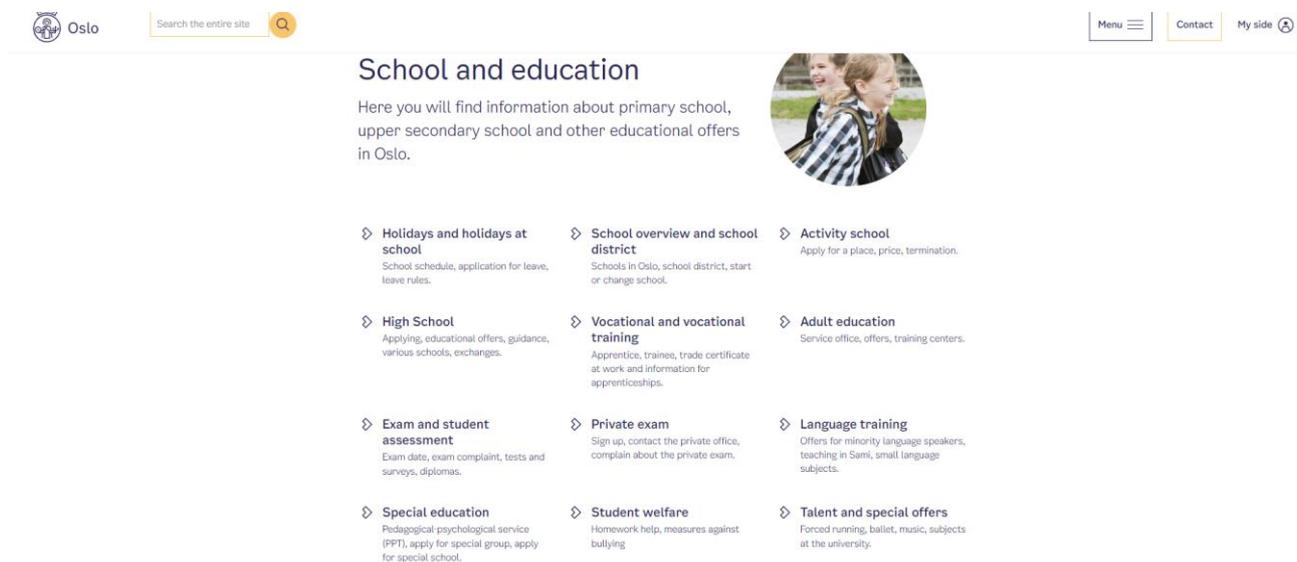
The main challenge in relation to the information provided on the public schools in Oslo lies in this ambiguity: on the one side there is a general aim to keep school choice at a low level and support the local school principle; on the other side the Municipality provides extensive information about each school (on national tests evaluation, and some important aspects of socio-demographic composition of the population) that can result in information asymmetry among different segments of the local population. Although there are not systematic empirical investigations on the role of information strategies and school reputation dynamics, the public debate has recently raised concern about the specific role of information asymmetry in worsening trends of school and residential segregation at local level (Wangberg, 2020).

## 2. Information contents and information channels

Both at a national and at the local level there is a large amount of information on the public school system, published at different websites.

**-The Municipality of Oslo has a dedicated website for general information**, legal rights and contact points for users like parents and pupils as well as the general public. Most of this information is available in English and for certain information in several other languages (Somali, Polish, Urdu, Turkish...). Basically, all the information is online (websites and social media), while other tools are not used (Open Days, flyers, etc).

The main portal on education in Oslo: <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/skole-og-utdanning/#gref>



**School and education**

Here you will find information about primary school, upper secondary school and other educational offers in Oslo.

- Holidays and holidays at school**  
School schedule, application for leave, leave rules.
- School overview and school district**  
Schools in Oslo, school district, start or change school.
- Activity school**  
Apply for a place, price, termination.
- High School**  
Applying, educational offers, guidance, various schools, exchanges.
- Vocational and vocational training**  
Apprentice, trainee, trade certificate at work and information for apprenticeships.
- Adult education**  
Service office, offers, training centers.
- Exam and student assessment**  
Exam date, exam complaint, tests and surveys, diplomas.
- Private exam**  
Sign up, contact the private office, complain about the private exam.
- Language training**  
Offers for minority language speakers, teaching in Sami, small language subjects.
- Special education**  
Pedagogical-psychological service (PPT), apply for special group, apply for special school.
- Student welfare**  
Homework help, measures against bullying.
- Talent and special offers**  
Forced running, ballet, music, subjects at the university.

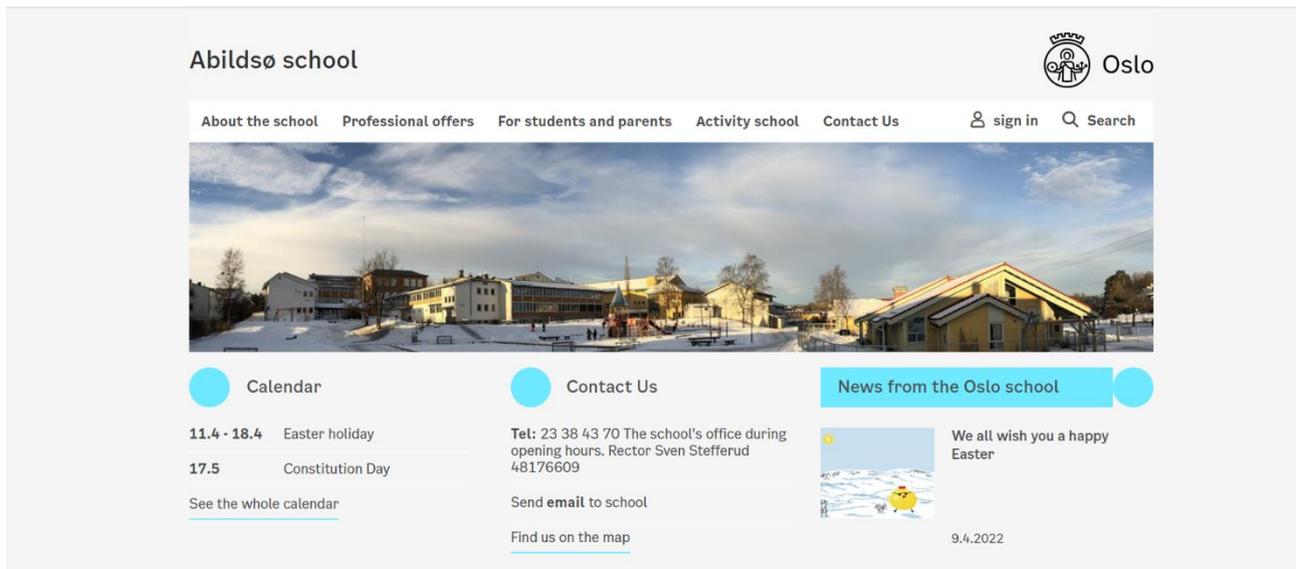
As mentioned above, the information provided is not oriented to affect school choice, at least in an intentional way. The main portal is oriented to provide basic information on regulations, holidays, catchment areas, language training for children with weak knowledge of Norwegian, special education needs and some specific educational offers (schools with special offer in music, dance and English).

As far as special education is concerned, pupils who have the right to special education must, in principle, complete the education at the local school in the ordinary education group. Oslo Municipality has a limited number of places in city-wide special schools/special groups for students with extensive needs for physical and special educational facilities. Parents decide whether they want to apply to change from the local school to a special school or special group. All students, both in primary and secondary education, have a legal right to adapted Education.

Pupils with a mother tongue other than Norwegian has the right to special language education. They may also be entitled to mother tongue training and / or bilingual vocational training if they need it.

The information on the general portal of Oslo Municipality is essential but clear and easy to understand. However, most of the information is only in Norwegian language.

**Osloskolen** is a website that provides detailed information about all the public schools in Oslo. The same information is provided for each school, although schools have the possibility to personalize the website according to their needs.

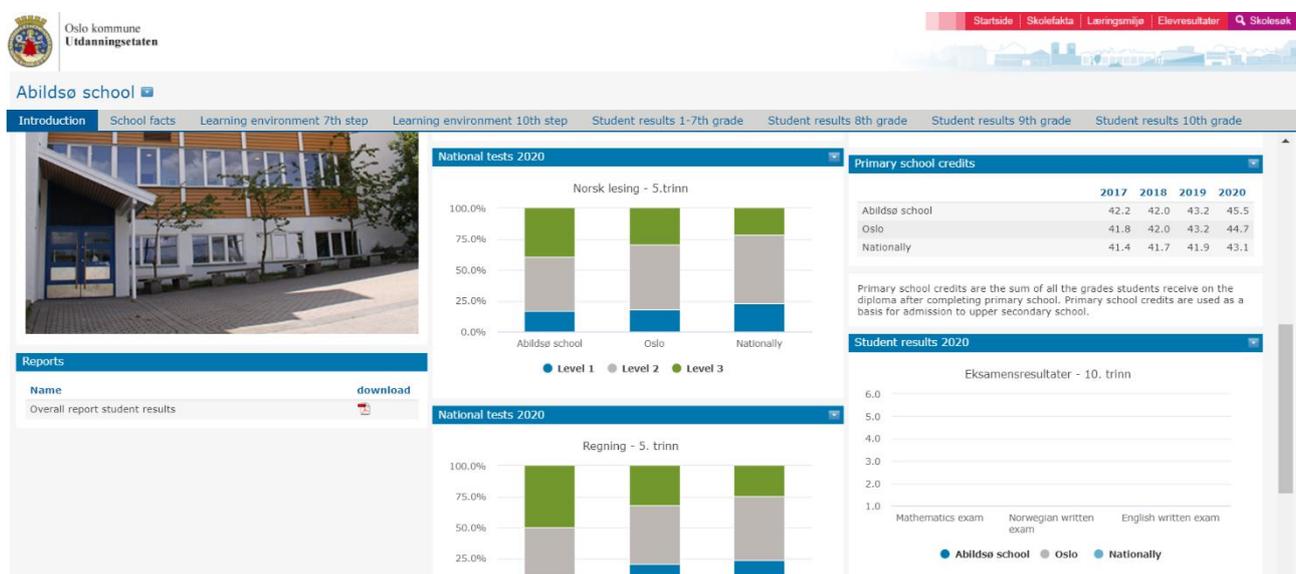


The screenshot shows the website for Abildsø school. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links: "About the school", "Professional offers", "For students and parents", "Activity school", "Contact Us", "sign in", and "Search". Below the menu is a large banner image of the school building. Underneath the banner, there are three main sections: "Calendar" with dates 11.4 - 18.4 for Easter holiday and 17.5 for Constitution Day; "Contact Us" with phone number 23 38 43 70 and email 48176609; and "News from the Oslo school" with a post titled "We all wish you a happy Easter" dated 9.4.2022.

**Facts about the School** - provides a comprehensive overview of facts about the school, school history, management and organization, contacts and the school's framework conditions and use of resources.

**Learning environment** - Under this tab, links to results from the Student and Parents Survey are presented, which all Oslo schools carry out under the auspices of the Norwegian Directorate of Education.

-This section provides the link to **minosloskole.no**, a portal that displays many statistics related to the school. Among them: national test results in literacy, numeracy and English; value added indicators, percentage of pupils in Special education needs and Second language training.



The screenshot shows a detailed view of the Abildsø school website. It features a navigation bar with tabs: "Introduction", "School facts", "Learning environment 7th step", "Learning environment 10th step", "Student results 1-7th grade", "Student results 8th grade", "Student results 9th grade", and "Student results 10th grade". The main content area is divided into several sections:

- National tests 2020 - Norsk lesing - 5. trinn:** A stacked bar chart comparing Abildsø school, Oslo, and Nationally across three levels (Level 1, Level 2, Level 3).
- National tests 2020 - Regning - 5. trinn:** A stacked bar chart comparing Abildsø school, Oslo, and Nationally across three levels (Level 1, Level 2, Level 3).
- Primary school credits:** A table showing the sum of all grades students receive on the diploma after completing primary school.
- Student results 2020 - Eksamenresultater - 10. trinn:** A line chart showing Mathematics exam, Norwegian written exam, and English written exam results for Abildsø school, Oslo, and Nationally.

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Abildsø school	42.2	42.0	43.2	45.5
Oslo	41.8	42.0	43.2	44.7
Nationally	41.4	41.7	41.9	43.1

The municipality has decided that regular and systematic documentation of the students' learning outcomes are published. This mainly applies to results on national tests, final grades (end of school), exam grades and Oslo tests.

All the information on [www.minosloskole.no](http://www.minosloskole.no) is provided in Norwegian language. The website displays mainly statistics and a link to the explanation on the main indicators provided. The provision of these statistics may however generate information asymmetry among users able /not able to navigate statistics and familiar / not familiar with national test results outputs and other information. However, there is not systematic empirical evidence of this possible gap.

**Skoleporten.no** (new name in 2022 – Figures and research) is a National web-based portal for providing schools and school owners in Norway with relevant and reliable data about primary and secondary education. The aim is to give schools and school owners (the local and county authorities) easy access to relevant and reliable information for use in local quality assessment activities. Skoleporten is a key part of the national quality assessment system and it provides data relating to the fields of learning dividends, learning environment, completion of upper secondary education, resources and school facts. The fields of learning dividends, learning environment, completion of upper secondary education and resources are called "assessment areas" as they contain relevant information for local assessment activities.

Norway has for several years calculated the value added indicators for 1.- 4. grades and 5.-7. grades. The results are presented at municipal and school level. The indicator is a statistically calculated value where it is corrected for the differences in the schools' average scale points due to differences in the pupils' prerequisites (family background for 1. – 4th grade and, for 5th-7th grade, results on national tests in 5th grade). A negative value of the school contribution does not mean that the students have no progression, but it indicates that the pupils at the school have had a lower progression than other pupils in the country with similar conditions.

The value-added indicators does not tell the whole truth about a school's contribution to students' learning. It is therefore important to analyse the results in connection with other information about the school, and in connection with the local knowledge about the pupils that the school possesses

The field "school facts" provides facts about Norwegian schools. Although the website is accessible to the public, the target is for expert groups.

Finally, each school use **social media such as facebook** to publish information on activities at school, providing pictures of the school facility, as well as the students and teachers. This is also a way to communicate a particular image of the school and the relation with the local community.

*Final consideration:*

In general, National and Municipal portals provide extensive information related to the organization of the public school system, regulations, rights to special education, after school activities and other practical issues. This information is clear, understandable and homogeneous, although displayed only (or mainly) in Norwegian.

Additionally, there is a very high availability of information related to the socio-demographic composition of schools and national tests output, although statistics and indicators can be more friendly to parents with high education and knowledge of the Norwegian school system and processes.

Finally, what is quite absent, is the information on aspects related to pedagogy and educational offer. This is mainly due to the general homogeneity of the educational offer in Oslo, although small differences (for example use of iPad at school; few schools with specialization in music, dance, English).

### **3. Focus on different contents particularly relevant for school choice**

#### **4.1. Quality:**

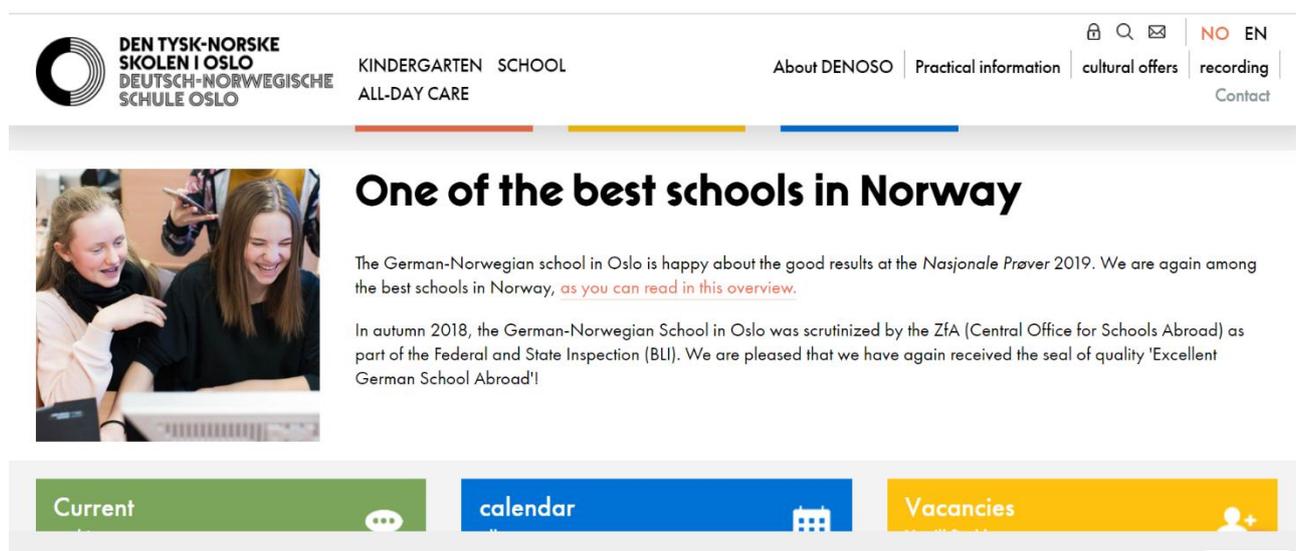
The website of the Municipality of Oslo displays a section intitled “Quality of the schools”, that is linked to the website [www.minosloskole.no](http://www.minosloskole.no) (which provides information on schools composition, national tests evaluation, and the results of the survey on parents’ and students’ satisfaction). As already discussed above, this can be problematic in terms of information asymmetry, since indicators and statistics are friendlier for high-educated parents. Additionally, the aim of publishing such information is not consistent with a system *de facto* supporting the local school principle. Admission to schools in Oslo is organized in catchment areas. According to national legislation, all children have a legal right to go to their local school. The assessment of which school is the student's local school is based on the distance to the school from the student's place of residence, but also other factors are considered (safe school roads, sibling affiliation, overall local environments, the capacity of the school or special individual consideration). However, parents can apply for their children to access another school. If there is a vacancy at the school applied for, the application must be granted. If there are more applicants than vacancies, the applicants are ranked according to the criteria given in the regulations on school exchange rules (distance, siblings, and safe school roads). If the school does not have vacancies, the school will refuse the application. School choice are indeed very limited and uncertain, so the publication of this information is quite ambiguous since most of the parents do not have a real choice other than the local school. However, an article recently published in “Oslospeilet” (2020) shows that even if almost 95 per cent of children attend their local school, in 9 of 104 schools, the percentage of children attending a different school than the local one is between 40%-70%. These schools are mostly located in a few central areas of the city. The reasons of the school choices operated by the families have not been investigated. However, in most of these schools, non-Norwegian-mother tongue children are currently overrepresented.

#### **4.2 Test-score:**

As reported above, the test results for all schools are public. Systematic empirical evidence of the implications of this factor on school choice is missing. However, many master thesis reporting qualitative analysis on school choice in Oslo highlight how they have affected parental strategies in terms of school selection or relocation before the child reaches the school-age, which is by far the most important strategy for school choice in Oslo (Rogne et Al. 2021). In the last years there has been an increasing attention on school segregation and one target for criticism has been the publication of test results and statistics. In the recent book «School choice - about schools that compete and students who are selected away», author Ida Sjøraunet Wangberg (a journalist) has written about her personal experience as parent dealing with school choice in

Oslo. Through a journalistic investigation, based on interviews and social-media analysis, she reports about increasingly class- and ethnic division in the Norwegian capital. Wangberg believes that segregation increased after the former Conservative City Council introduced free school choice, along the publication of school results in the early 2000s. According to the journalist, behind the diffuse label of "good" and "bad" schools, there is little information about the quality of the schools (teaching or infrastructures). On the opposite, she believes that what is crucial in the processes of reputation formation and stigmatization is the perceived "quality of the students".

Test scores are also important assets in the communication strategy of some private schools, that use these results intentionally to attract new pupils.



**DEN TYSK-NORSKE SKOLEN I OSLO**  
**DEUTSCH-NORWEGISCHE SCHULE OSLO**

KINDERGARTEN SCHOOL  
ALL-DAY CARE

About DENOSO | Practical information | cultural offers | recording | Contact

## One of the best schools in Norway

The German-Norwegian school in Oslo is happy about the good results at the *Nasjonale Prøver 2019*. We are again among the best schools in Norway, [as you can read in this overview](#).

In autumn 2018, the German-Norwegian School in Oslo was scrutinized by the ZfA (Central Office for Schools Abroad) as part of the Federal and State Inspection (BfI). We are pleased that we have again received the seal of quality 'Excellent German School Abroad!'

Current | calendar | Vacancies

### 4.3. Reputation

School reputation is a very relevant factor affecting school choice in Oslo. The first dimension of reputation is however related to neighbourhood level. As mentioned earlier, Oslo is an extremely divided city, and according to a recent investigation (Haandrikman et Al. 2021) it scores first among Nord-Western European capitals as far as macro-areas segregation is concerned. It means that the areas characterised by quite homogeneous population are extended and easy to identify at geographical scale. However, at school level, there are situations of even more extreme overrepresentation of minority tongue pupils in comparison to the general level of the district, probably due to high level of school choice and white flight affecting specific schools (Cavicchia, Cucca, 2020). This is reported in the easter-outer area of Oslo and in some schools in the easter-inner area. According to a recent article (Kadasia et Al., 2020), this is the case of a school located in a gentrifying area of Oslo city center, which is characterised by a high percentage of municipal housing stock and residential instability. For some of the parents interviewed by the authors, the local school was a crucial reason in the decision to move out of the area before children start school; for others it was an influencing factor. According to the authors, the reasons were mainly related to a poor reputation of the school due to a large «proportion of low-resource immigrants at school» and residential instability due to short rental contracts in the area. Among those parents with pre-school children, information shaping their perception of the local school was mainly second-hand (such as information from friends and acquaintances, or media).

The perceptions were mainly related to language competence and learning environment, and the informants seemed to be hesitant about sending their own children to the local school. Indeed, this is among the cases with lower percentage of children attending the local institution (Abildsnes, 2020). Emotions were also part of these stories. Most informants reported a complex internal discussion in connection with the choice of moving out of the district. Several respondents pointed at the moral implications of moving out, such as bad conscience: "I felt, it may be me, that we fail when we move" (woman in her forties). "I kind of sit and think about so many of these things; I have a bad conscience and I am a bit angry with myself» (man in his thirties) (Kadasia et Al., 2020),

To sum up, school reputation basically follows a territorial pattern in Oslo and its strictly related to the social composition of the neighbourhood. However, some schools in similar areas may be affected by specific dynamics of stigmatization due to statistics or second-hand information related to school composition (more than the quality of the education offered).

## 5. Conclusions

The main challenge in relation to the information provided on the public schools in Oslo lies in this ambiguity: on the one side there is a general aim to keep school choice at a low level and support the local school principle; on the other side the Municipality provides extensive information about each school (on national tests evaluation, and some important aspects of socio-demographic composition of the population) that can result in information asymmetry among different segments of the local population (and may increase segregation dynamics)

Another aspect to take into in consideration relates to the public communication (mass media debate) on the situation of the most vulnerable schools in Oslo. There is a spread attention towards the social challenges that schools are supposed to deal with in specific neighbourhoods, and this can magnify stigmatization trends. In order to break the vicious circle "diversity=social challenge", the local institutions could design communication strategies bringing more positive information associated with diversity in schools. Many studies indeed highlight the positive processes attributed to school diversity on academic and social skills development. Social-media campaigns "branding diversity" could be especially helpful to avoid white-flight dynamics in neighbourhood characterized by socio-demographic heterogeneity.

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