

# Systems for accountability, supervision, and control

## School inspection

**School and teacher quality and accountability can be ensured through effective external review systems.**

All around the world schools are inspected with the rationale that inspection contributes to the quality of schools and education systems. Although different traditions use different terms—such as school accreditation, inspection, or supervision—these processes generally have two interwoven objectives: public accountability and school development.(2)(3) The particular balance of these objectives and their impact on learning and teaching in schools are dependent on the political context and education system of individual countries.(9)

## **Issues and Discussion**

### **Different Traditions and Terminologies**

School inspections are institutionalised and practised in various ways around the world, resulting in a range of different terminologies.

In most of Europe and in many developing countries, the term ‘School Inspection’ is defined as the process of periodic, targeted scrutiny carried out to provide independent verification and report on whether the quality of schools is meeting national and local performance standards.(15)(24)

‘Accreditation’ is the term used widely in the [United States](#) and Canada to denote a specific quality control process that gives a ‘stamp of approval’ indicating that a school has met certain minimum standards and ensuring that it is committed to continuous improvement.(4)(21)(33)

Recently, the term ‘School Supervision’ has been used in an increasing number of developing countries to realise the goal of improving schools through ongoing support and guidance. (8)(16)

Other terms used include school evaluations and school or pedagogical advisors. Despite these different designations, collecting data and giving feedback for

institutional, professional, and system improvement remain fundamental to the undertaking.

### **Basics of a well-functioning inspection and accreditation system**

*Organisational Structure:* The organisational structure varies across education systems, but it generally consists of a national and/or regional School Inspectorate or an Accreditation Agency.

This agency governs inspection/accreditation systems through three main groups of functions; a) giving a public account concerning the quality of education; b) providing a guarantee of compliance with standards and regulations, and c) providing a service for quality management and improvement.(15)

A 'hard' governance approach includes target-setting, performance management, benchmarks and indicators, and data use to foster competition and improvement. A 'soft' governance approach refers to processes of mediation, creating networks and partnerships of actors that rely on self-evaluations, giving good examples and learning from best practices. Most inspection/accreditation processes move within the continuum of 'hard' versus 'soft' governance.(9)

*Setting Standards and Criteria within a Framework for Inspection:* The school inspectorate or accreditation agency sets up a framework outlining the purpose of inspection, what aspects of quality should be inspected, what standards/indicators should be used, and how the inspection will be followed with further steps for quality improvement.

The key aspects addressed in an inspection may include:

1. Overall effectiveness: the purpose, direction, quality and standards of education;
2. Effectiveness of leadership and management;
3. Quality of teaching, learning and assessment;
4. Personal development, behaviour (attendance, punctuality) and welfare of pupils;
5. Learning outcomes of pupils (different abilities, backgrounds, etc.);
6. Resources and support systems.

Many inspectorates produce handbooks or guidelines for both inspectors and schools to explain these standards and criteria, and the processes of inspection.(1)(23)

*Inspection Methodologies:* Both internal and external evaluation approaches typically employ four stages:

1. The gathering of quantitative and qualitative data against the set standards and criteria;
2. Assessment and analysis;
3. The drafting of the evaluation report;
4. The implementation of changes.

Internal evaluation, also known as school self-evaluation, allows the school to identify its own weaknesses and develop plans for quality improvement.(29) Such self-evaluation is, in most countries, regarded as a source of information for the inspector; this information plays a role in setting the agenda for the inspection visit and can make inspection more relevant and useful.(9)

External evaluation is conducted by inspectors not affiliated with the school, who provides feedback to schools about strengths and weaknesses and indicates ways to develop. In both internal and external evaluation systems, realistic and transparent criteria help to make a more useful inspection report.(10)(13)

Inspection reports are also used to monitor schools and ensure that improvements are introduced in practice.(15)(34)

*Inspectors' Competences:* The quality of school inspections, to a certain extent, depends on the competences of the inspectors involved. Inspectors must see their work as neutral and objective, should avoid conflicts of interest, and should act as 'critical friends'. The inspectors' relationship with schools, their communication styles and the feedback and advice they offer schools are important in making the school willing (or not) to act on the issues raised by the inspection.(20)(11)(17)

Inspectors should be able to identify and distinguish between genuine achievements of schools and a fabricated performance in order to meet inspection requirements. They are required to have specialist knowledge and managerial experience to make judgements on the teacher's and school's quality, and support self-evaluation culture in schools.(18)(26)

Criticism of inspectors is not uncommon. Therefore, inspectors are expected to be committed to basing judgements on first-hand evidence and to applying inspection criteria objectively and reliably.(18)(26)

## **Effective Practices for Feedback and Improvement**

Clear and explicit feedback that is given by credible inspectors and reflects an accurate picture of the schools' performance, their strengths and weaknesses against the standards, will inspire schools. Schools in difficult and challenging circumstances need different types of feedback from schools with high socio-economic status pupils.(10)(30)

Regardless of the type of school, if actual improvements are to come about, plans for follow-up must be embedded in the inspection system. In addition to providing feedback directly to schools, other follow-up mechanisms include the publication of results, development of improvement plans, rewards, and sanctions.(35)

In some cases, the follow-up may need to occur outside the school itself, such as through systemic improvements in teacher training, especially for issues that appear to affect many schools or the entire sector.

**Cautions about the use of Inspection Results in School League Tables and Public Media**

Teachers and principals in many countries find that performance league tables have negative effects on their well-being, causing loss of control, a sense of constraint without creativity, and frustration at having to work to a political (and sometimes commercial) agenda.(5)(19)(22)(25)(27)(28)(31)

Mass media have considerable power in representing, naming, and constructing meanings of school inspections—sometimes with adverse effects.(5)(6)(7)(22)(28)

## **Inclusiveness Considerations**

### **Schools outside the mainstream system**

Inspections with appropriate criteria should also be carried out at schools that are outside the mainstream public system—such as low-fee private schools, international schools, and schools serving minorities or specific ethnic communities. This practice helps to ensure that all students are attending schools of an adequate quality.(12)(32)

Plans and policies

- The Netherlands [[Website](#)]
- Jamaica [[Website](#)]

- New Zealand [[Framework for School Reviews and Review Process](#)]
- The United States [[AdvancED Website](#)]
  - [Accreditation Policies and Procedures for AdvancED Accreditation](#)
  - [AdvancED Standards for Quality Digital Learning Institutions](#)
  - [AdvancED Standards for Quality Early Learning Schools \(Nursery\)](#)
  - AdvancED [Standards for Quality Schools](#)

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