

- page 1 : Is a common definition of inspection possible ? ● page 3 : The organization of inspection in France
- page 6 : Current trends ● page 8 : Assessments ● page 12 : The impact of inspections ● page 14 : Bibliography

## SCHOOL INSPECTIONS: FROM CONTROL AND REGULATION TO SUPPORT AND COUNSELING ?

School inspections have changed significantly since the 1980s. Despite relatively limited staff numbers, inspection services have played a key role in the policies that have been introduced over the last thirty years to assess the quality of education. International comparisons have shown that the aims and organization of education vary widely in different countries. Unlike other educational systems, the French system uses individual inspections. By contrast, education systems in other countries increasingly use a range of different inspection methods.

Plans are currently being made to redefine the role of inspectors in the French education system by transferring part of their powers to headteachers (particularly in the area of pedagogical assessment). The aim is to align the French inspection system with prevailing practices in other countries.

This study is a comparative assessment of national inspection systems, providing an overview of recent trends and developments in this area.



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### IS A COMMON DEFINITION OF INSPECTION POSSIBLE ?

Comparative studies of inspectorates of education are few and far between. In 1990, a 'blue book' entitled *Inspectorates of Education in Europe: a descriptive study* was published on the occasion of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) ●. A second assessment carried by Van Bruggen in 2010 currently serves as a basis for the information published and updated on the SICI website.

Inspection bodies have remained largely unchanged since the end of the eighteenth century. School inspections continue to play a key role in overseeing educational quality: *'the role of inspectors has always been to control teachers and, above all, to regulate how*

● ● Standing International Conference of Inspectorates of Education in Europe



*The role of inspectors is to ensure that teaching complies with institutional expectations and to provide support to teachers (...) To what extent can inspectors achieve these seemingly incompatible goals? Are teachers able to carry out their own self-assessment, and to make it their own? Are they able to turn a constraint (control and regulation) into a resource (support and accompaniment)?'*

Albanel, 2009

they implement the ministry's instructions'. It was not until the 1990s that a major re-  
definition of the roles of inspection bodies  
was carried out. However, support and ad-  
vice for teachers has always been part of  
the role of inspection (albeit a secondary  
role). The third role of inspectorates (in ad-  
dition to oversight and advice) is to act as  
a link between schools and the authorities  
(De Grauwe, 2008).

National inspection systems focus either  
on individual teachers or on schools.  
According to Standaert (2001), this  
distinction reflects a strong ideological  
bias. Some countries (such as the United  
Kingdom) operate on the assumption  
that the quality of the education system  
is primarily dependent on what happens  
in schools. In these countries, schools  
are the main focus of inspections. By  
contrast, other countries (such as France)  
believe that the quality of the educational  
system primarily depends on the quality of  
teachers. In these countries, the emphasis  
is on individual inspections (Standaert,  
2001). However, it is important to note  
that there were no individual inspections  
in France before 1830, and it was not until  
the end of the nineteenth century that  
these became the norm.

European inspection systems have few  
common features. The title of this study  
is designed to emphasize both the sheer

diversity of inspection systems and the  
changing role of school inspections. How-  
ever, although the history and structure of  
inspectorates vary widely, there are some  
common features. Despite the fact that  
the assessment of the French education  
system has been widely discussed and  
debated, the French Ministry of Education  
has never officially defined the concept of  
assessment. Pons (2010) noted that there  
has never been any political demand for  
a clear and stable assessment system.  
From a sociological point of view, assess-  
ment is mostly shaped by the increasing  
competition between assessors such as  
the DEPP (Direction de l'Evaluation, de  
la Prospective et de la Performance) and  
the IGEN (Inspection Générale de l'Edu-  
cation Nationale) (Pons, 2010).

A report by Eurydice published in 2004  
(*'Evaluation of Schools Providing Com-  
pulsory Education in Europe'*) noted that  
schools are at the heart of assessments  
and inspections in most countries (23  
out of 30) and that inspectors generally  
avoid passing judgment on teaching or  
teachers. In other countries, inspections  
focus on teachers, assessed either by in-  
spectors or by local authorities in charge  
of educational matters at a local level  
(Northern countries). Yet even in these  
countries, there is an increasing tendency  
to focus on whole school inspections.

In France, teachers are assessed on an  
individual basis. In secondary education,  
teachers are also assessed by the  
headteacher. The two assessments have  
different objectives: the former is mainly  
pedagogical, while the latter is primarily  
administrative. As it is practiced in France,  
individual inspection has no equivalent  
anywhere in the world. In other countries,  
when inspectors assess teachers in  
the classroom, the aim is to provide  
an overall assessment of the school.  
School inspections are a major trend in  
all countries since the assumption is that  
schools are at the heart of the challenges  
of the new decentralized systems.  
Decentralization is often accompanied by  
centrally defined standards that schools  
must comply with.

## STRUCTURE OF THE FIELD

The structure and organization of European inspection systems varies from one country to another and is shaped by national histories and particular conceptions of education. Most inspectorates are independent of the ministry of education, although they are not always financially or structurally independent. 'Inspectors' are sometimes entirely external to the education system. In such cases, school inspectors respond to calls for tenders, as is the case in England with Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education).

The tasks entrusted to inspectorates are relatively diverse. Van Bruggen (2010) provided a useful overview of the duties and responsibilities of inspection systems. The following roles are performed in all inspection systems (albeit to varying degrees):

- Whole school inspections;
- Thematic inspections;
- Reports on the state of education in the country;
- Complaint management;
- Task management (gradually disappearing in favor of school inspections);
- Inspections focusing on exams;
- Advice to schools;
- Advice to the authorities;
- Participation in public debates (limited), publications.

At a European level, inspectorates are part of the [SICI](#), founded in 1995. Today, 29 entities are members of the SICI (note that there can be several entities in countries where the system is highly decentralized, such as in Germany, where the different Länder are highly autonomous). The SICI is designed to act as a forum of discussion and exchange and aims to improve teaching and learning through more effective inspections. France is not a member of the SICI.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF INSPECTION IN FRANCE

There are two co-existing hierarchies in French education: an administrative hierarchy (headteachers, *recteurs*) and a pedagogical hierarchy (IGEN, IA-IPR and IEN) ●. Because of this distinction, the separation between administration and pedagogy is more pronounced than in other countries. This distinction also partly accounts for the 'mistrust' of the teaching body toward administration (Van-Zanten, 2004) – a mistrust made greater by the redefinition of the powers of headteachers in the pedagogical field (Hassani, 2007).

### INSPECTION

In France, the inspection system is divided in two, with a clear distinction between 'territorial inspectors', responsible for assessing teachers in the classroom and evaluating their work with students (IA-IPR in the case of *collèges* and *lycées généraux*, IEN in the case of primary education and teachers in *lycées professionnels*), and 'general inspectors' (IGEN – IGAEN), responsible for carrying out field studies in schools. General inspectors are the superiors of territorial inspectors.

The IGEN was created by Napoleon in 1802 and is under the direct authority of the Ministry of Education. Among its various roles (as defined on the Ministry website; see [site du ministère](#)), the IGEN is responsible for 'controlling and assessing education and providing advice and recommendations about the organization and effectiveness of the education system'. Its role is to supervise 'teaching, education policies, services and schools' and to carry out 'thematic assessments and studies in the various areas of education', producing reports submitted to the ministry. The IGEN 'coordinates the activities of pedagogical inspection bodies in collaboration with local education authorities'. The IGEN includes ten subject-specific groups and two specialty groups ('primary education' and 'schools and school life'). The 1980s were the golden age of the IGEN, with field visits and discussions with key education

IEN : Inspecteur de l'Éducation nationale

IA-IPR : Inspecteur d'académie – inspecteur pédagogique régional

IGEN : Inspection générale de l'Éducation nationale

IGAENR : Inspection générale de l'administration de l'Éducation nationale et de la recherche



partners. The mission of inspection bodies was redefined by the 1989 *loi d'orientation* (Pair, 2007).

The body of territorial inspectors was created in 1964 in response to the challenges of mass education. The assumption was that general inspectors were no longer able to inspect the ever increasing numbers of teachers. After initially operating under the authority of the IGEN, the IA-IPRs have been under the authority of the Recteur d'Académie since 1990, thus losing some of their independence. The IA-IPRs and the IENs perform essentially the same duties (see [mêmes missions](#)). IENs are responsible for primary education (at a local or district level), vocational education and counseling, while the IA-IPRs are responsible for secondary education.

As part of their duties, IA-IPRs 'contribute to managing the education system at a regional level, oversee the implementation of education policy in classes and schools, assess teachers and schools, inspect and advise teaching staff at secondary level, contribute to the management of teaching staff as part of their career development, and design, lead or assess the continuing training system for teaching and education staff, in close collaboration with universities'

Source : <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid1139/inspecteur-d-academie-inspecteur-pedagogique-regional.html>

After 1990, the oversight role of inspectorates increasingly gave way to dialogue with teachers and has focused increasingly on support, advice and remediation, although this shift has never been officially recognized.

In France, school inspections are viewed

as a human resource management tool, an instrument of control and a support system. However, 'neither one of the three official objectives [...] is ever met. The form of the assessment procedure is widely seen as a factor of failure. The length and frequency of inspections, and the fact that the grading system is fixed and monitoring almost nonexistent, mean that control and regulation are futile and the management of personnel marginal and support and accompaniment inadequate' (Albanel, 2009). According to Albanel (2009), the system has remained unchanged simply because it suits everyone involved (teachers and institutions). The assumption is that in order to maintain social peace, nothing must change. The current assessment system protects the institution from its environment, in addition to protecting teachers and their professional status and identity.

Despite requiring significant efforts and resources, the impact of staff assessments is very limited. According to Pair (2007), 'the aim is essentially to manage promotions using a grading system, in a largely automated system. As a result, [staff assessments] have very little impact on progress, particularly in secondary education, where there is no regulation or consultation in this area' (Pair, 2007). Inspections are often negative experiences for teachers. In 1982, the Education Minister Alain Savary adopted a moratorium on individual inspections in order to experiment with school inspections. However, despite various attempts (and in spite of the emergence of anti-inspection or anti-hierarchy groups), 'micro-assessments' remain the most common form of assessment in France, while 'macro-assessments' (i.e. school or *Académie* inspections) are less common and vary in different periods and regions.

## ASSESSMENT

Inspectors contribute to the assessment of educational quality. Other more or less independent actors also play a key role. In 2007, the Education Minister Xavier Darcos was entrusted with the responsibility of introducing a system for assessing the

educational system based around 'four components: systematic assessments of students of all ages [...]; regular assessments of teachers based on student progress and results, rather than teaching methods [...]; in-depth assessments of schools, made available to all families; and finally regular and independent assessments of the education system as a whole' (Pons, 2010). The aim is to assess teachers based on student results rather than their teaching and learning practices. The implementation of the LOLF (Loi Organique Relative aux Lois de Finance) in 2001 signaled the 'birth of a new regulation system based on the results of national and local education policies' (Merlin, 2008).

With its 'science of quantified findings', the DEP(P) (Direction de l'Evaluation et de la Prospective) began to prevail over the IGEN in 1992, providing detailed statistics and reports. However, are these studies assessments or assessment tools? According to Thélot (in charge of the DEPP), the figures and statistics produced by the DEPP act as a mirror for teachers, enabling them to change and improve their practices (Mons & Pons, 2006). In 1997 (and under Education Minister Claude Allègre), the DEPP began to lose its influence, and assessments were increasingly externalized (or 'outsourced'), resulting in the creation of the HCEE in 2000, and, subsequently, the HCE in 2005. The HCE aims to promote the application of the common core of knowledge and skills, and also plays a role (albeit a limited one) in the assessment of the educational system.

Besides these statisticians, there are other 'latent' assessors, to quote the term used by Pons, such as academics contributing to the assessment of the system through research, the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement), the OECD (Rey, 2010; Rey, 2011) and, more recently, the Cour des Comptes. Some commentators (such as Etienne and Gauthier, 2004) have argued that assessment is a major weakness of the French education system and that it has a limited impact outside senior management staff. It is also important to note that unlike in many other countries, the assessment of educational quality is not designed for the

users of schools (i.e. students, parents, etc.) (Etienne and Gauthier, 2004).

According to Pons, France is one of the countries where assessment has been most heavily institutionalized. External assessments have always been highly limited in time and space (consider the experiments carried out by the Académie de Lille between 1990 and 1997 or the three assessment waves in 100 schools between 1989 and 1991). However, these experiments have never been implemented on a wide scale. The term 'assessment' is often used to show that reforms are being implemented despite the fact that there is no major impact on the education system (Pons, 2011). While Pons expressed doubts about France, Costa and Pires (2011) argued that France has shifted from an educating state to an evaluating state, a trend also found in most countries around the world, and most notably the United Kingdom (see part 2). Broadfoot (2000) reached similar conclusions in a study examining France and the UK. His study found that assessment is invariably a way of controlling education systems based on the concept of 'accountability' (results-based regulation) – a concept which, according to Buisson-Fenet and Pons, raises issues in France since it is heavily inspired from the Anglo-American model. The aim of these assessments is twofold: to obtain reliable information for assessment purposes and to ensure and demonstrate that public funds are being used wisely. In short, assessment is perceived as the 'essential mechanism for both controlling and improving the quality of the system at all levels' (Broadfoot, 2000).

Merlin (2008) called for the IGEN to be given a new role to involve it in the assessment process, recommending 'a redefinition of the general inspection service as a body of assessors performing systematic audits (...), [and] helping to design indicators and tables applicable at a local level (...) and at a national level'. The point is particularly important, according to Merlin, since the general inspection service is the only body with the capacity to carry out an assessment of what happens in schools or at a local level in *communes*. As yet, there is no 'local oversight' (Merlin, 2008).



## SOME EUROPEAN COMPARISONS

The IA-IPR body is a relatively young service (1964) and, for many years, had no professional representation. It only acquired an official status following a decree in 1990, which also required it to set up its own trade union representation (based on an existing association of inspectors) (Albanel, 2009). However, the IA-IPR profession currently has no major independent representation, as can be seen at an international level, where the French inspectorate is not represented.

Another reason for this under-representation is the fact that the powers and prerogatives of inspectorates in other European countries have little in common with current practices in France (Mallet, 2008). However, since 2010, partnerships have been developed between the SICI and the ESEN (Ecole Supérieure de l'Education Nationale), responsible for training national leaders and managers.

## CURRENT TRENDS

### SIMILAR TRENDS IN MOST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES...

In the United States, student test results are the main indicator used to assess the quality of teaching (Ladd, 2011). By contrast, in Europe, the situation is less clear-cut. De Grauwe (2008) distinguished between four recent trends in European reforms:

- Reforms aimed at improving the effectiveness of inspections by promoting greater local autonomy based on a more systematic monitoring and oversight system;
- Reforms aimed at promoting internal school assessments (self-assessments);
- Reforms aimed at redirecting the focus toward assessments of schools and the education system as a whole rather than individual teachers;

Recent trends throughout Europe have largely followed the lead of developments in England (New Public Management) and Scotland since the 1980s (results-based policy-making, decentralization, etc.). NPM practices were subsequently adopted in Spain and Portugal, and a later stage in Scandinavian countries, before eventually reaching Eastern European countries (Mallet, 2008; Merlin, 2008; Mons, 2009). The French education system timidly began to adopt the NPM paradigm in 2003, although the strong centralizing and Jacobean tradition in France has limited the impact of new public management, which explains why the changes have been slower, especially when compared to former communist countries.

An educating state ● holds a monopoly over education and has a direct influence on the official curriculum and the creation of administrative bodies in charge of running, managing and controlling education (Buisson-Fenet & Pons, 2011). In France, the educating state model was at its height under the Third Republic and the Education Minister Jules Ferry. Today, the educating state model has given way to the evaluating state model in all countries, though to varying degrees. The influence of the educating state model began to decline in the 1980s as a result of a range of measures, including the development of school autonomy, decentralization, the rise of external assessments, the diversification of educational provision, the increasingly wide range of teacher assessment methods, and the emphasis on giving parents the right to choose their child's school.

*'The state would lose its educating role to the benefit of other actors (families, independent schools, private funders, etc.) driven by the need to satisfy multiple interests' (Buisson-Fenet & Pons, 2011, p.9).*

These are 'forms of regulation in which state organizations (departments and ministries, state administrations and bodies, government agencies, mandated organizations, etc.) intend to control as far as possible (we assume they are unable to do so) the structure, content and objectives of education based on a range of instruments (development of standards, education curricula, provision of management resources, etc)' (Buisson-Fenet & Pons, 2011).

Whether countries have general inspectors (under the authority of the Ministry of Education) or external assessors, the duties assigned to them invariably involve school inspections (and not teacher assessments on a subject-specific basis) carried out by external assessors (inspectors under the authority of the Ministry or external assessors), in conjunction with self-assessments. The prevailing assumption is that educational quality is primarily the responsibility of schools, which explains why schools have significant budgetary and pedagogical autonomy. The role of inspections is to ensure the quality of the service provided to users, in a system in which users (especially parents) have a say and can have access to assessment reports. In this sense, there is a degree of convergence in inspection policies, although not one 'based on the French model' (Mallet, [2008](#)).

De Grauwe revisited the framework developed by Van Bruggen in 2000 listing the eight tasks of inspectors in different European countries (De Grauwe, [2008](#)):

- Ensuring compliance with rules and regulations;
- Promoting innovations;
- Performing administrative duties;
- Advising teachers and headteachers;
- Assessing or developing national projects;
- Reporting to the Ministry, Parliament and the general public;
- Assessing individual schools;
- Advising the authorities.

According to the most recent report by the OECD, entitled 'Education at a Glance 2011', the global trend is the increasing empowerment (or responsabilization ●) of schools, based on a range of mechanisms (OECD, [2011](#)):

- Performance: the focus is on school results, and not the implemented methods or processes. Assessments

based on national tests and exams have become increasingly prevalent in recent years.

- Regulation: self-assessments by schools and external assessments (by inspectors and/or external assessors). The impact of these inspections relates in particular to the management of the school and teacher assessments. However, inspections have little impact on school finances and staff pay.
- The market: financial incentives (school vouchers, tax credits, etc.) are used to give parents the right to choose where to send their child to school. The budget 'follows' students when they change schools.

### ...BUT ALSO DISPARITIES

Today, the major differences between national inspection systems are essentially linked to the degree of decentralization of the education system. Some countries have a highly centralized inspection service (England, New Zealand) primarily aimed at regulating schools, while others have a highly decentralized system (Chile) in which inspections are designed to provide support to struggling schools. According to De Grauwe ([2008](#)), many countries have not implemented any radical reforms of the inspection system, preferring instead to opt for more minor innovations. In France, one such innovation is the increased role of the IG in the assessment of educational policies. Finland stands out by virtue of having done away with external assessments in favor of exclusively internal assessments.

Buisson-Fenet & Pons ([2011](#)) compared France, England, Scotland and Switzerland, four countries with specific characteristics:

- France remains a centralized state 'that has become more decentralized, though without supplementing this transfer of responsibility with new tools...'. Inspections remain highly unequal in time and space. France is 'a neo-corporatist state that delegates the design and implementation of public policies to the professional groups composing it';

The term "responsibilization" (or empowerment) is used when those who have been assigned a power or authority are accountable for the actions they take by virtue of their power or authority' (OECD, 2011)



- With its decentralized education system, the English education system is based on central regulation involving periodic and codified school assessments (emerging central educating state). School inspections are carried out on a regular basis and have a structuring power: the English model is an '*educating state responsible for ensuring the quality of the public education service and the effectiveness and coherence of the national education policy*';
- Scotland leaves more room for self-assessment and dialogue. School inspections are highly formalized and headteachers are responsible for monitoring and assessing teachers;
- Since the 2000s, assessment has been the priority in Switzerland, a monitoring state or a minimal educating state.

education system, a key role is given to local authorities (in a highly decentralized system) and schools. Local authorities (municipalities) are in charge of addressing issues encountered in public schools. Inspections only intervene in private schools in the event of a specific issue.

Inspection systems involve one or several external assessors (Eurydice, [2004](#)). In countries that use several external assessors, assessors may intervene in the same areas (examples include the United Kingdom, with Ofsted in England, Estyn in Wales and HMIE in Scotland, working alongside local authorities). However, assessors generally intervene in different areas. In countries with a single external assessor, assessments are generally carried out by school inspectors, except in Belgium, Germany, Greece and Luxembourg.

## ASSESSMENTS

There are two main types of assessments: external assessments (also known as school inspections or full inspections) and self-assessments. Some countries use one or the other, although most countries use a combination of both methods.

Most countries have adopted external assessment methods. Examples include Portugal (Costa & Pires, [2011](#)), Ireland (where an increasing emphasis is given to self-assessments), the Netherlands (where inspections are carried out on the basis of schools' capacity for innovation) and France.

Some countries (including Ireland, Scotland and Belgium) use self-assessments while combining them with external assessments. The significance of the link between the two types of assessment (self-assessments and external assessments) will be examined in greater detail below.

Not all countries have chosen to go down this road. For example, Denmark and Norway have no full inspection system. Likewise, Estonia opted to do away with full inspections on the grounds that they failed to yield the expected results. In the Danish

When several assessment methods are used, **it always corresponds to a 'situation in which evaluation of the various kinds of school activity is relatively compartmentalised'** (Eurydice, [2004](#)). Inspectors generally assess teaching and some aspects of school management, while other bodies are responsible for monitoring more specific areas (financial management, safety, archives, etc.). In French school assessments, the IA-IPR and the IEN assess school projects (not to be confused with assessments carried out when teachers are inspected), while the 'academic' authorities (rectors and inspectors) assess headteachers and the full range of activities carried out in schools. The regional Cour des Comptes is responsible for assessing the use of capital and operating resources.

## SCHOOL INSPECTIONS: A MAJOR TREND

School inspections have become standard practice in the vast majority of countries. Inspections involve external inspections carried out by inspectors operating to a greater or lesser extent under the authority of the Ministry of Education or by external assessors.



A distinction can be drawn between two generations of inspectorates. The first generation began carrying out school inspections between 1991 and 1998. When they completed their inspections, they raised the question as to whether they should use the same method again, as in England (Ofsted), Northern Ireland, the Netherlands, Flanders, Wales, Portugal, the Republic of Ireland and the Czech Republic.

The second generation benefited from the experience of the first generation and started carrying out full inspections in 2003. Countries in this group include Sweden, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Germany, Estonia, German-Speaking Switzerland and France.

A school inspection is generally conducted as follows (Van Bruggen, 2010):

- Inspectors visit a school to get a general idea of existing practices and to assess the school's results;
- The inspection is then carried out in small groups;
- The inspection lasts between 2 and 5 days according to the size of the school.

Before the inspection, the inspectors analyze the available data (projects, timetables, self-assessment reports, results, etc), before carrying out lesson observations and assessing other areas of learning or focusing on staff meetings or student work (among other things).

The assessment report indicates whether the school has quality issues. The methods used to support schools vary from one country to another. While some refrain from making recommendations (to avoid overstepping their role), others may encourage (or even request) schools to implement specific remedial measures. There may also be financial sanctions if no remedial action is taken. A second inspection is often carried out several months after the first inspection to ensure that appropriate remedial measures have been implemented. The frequency of inspections generally varies between three and six years.

School inspections generate full inspection reports that can serve two purposes.

Inspection reports may be designed to improve the quality of education ('*stimulating function*') or to ensure that the school manages its duties and responsibilities efficiently ('*accountability function*'). Van Bruggen distinguished between two types of governance presiding over full inspections:

- The government is responsible for the educational system and the quality of education in all schools across the national territory. This responsibility can be shared with local authorities. In a decentralized system, school inspections are not governed by the state but managed at a local level, sometimes with the involvement of parents;
- The government wants the best possible schools (for example, the Netherlands) and publishes examples of good practices. Inspectors analyze and identify problems, but provide no recommendations. This system requires close links between the authorities and the various actors supporting teachers (training, development of tools, etc.).

Van Bruggen listed a number of conditions that need to be met in order for full inspections to be effective:

- Inspectorates must have access to all schools and all data;
- A standardized national framework defining educational quality is required;
- Assessment reports must be clear and concise (with references to the strengths and weaknesses of schools);
- The findings must be addressed and followed up by effective action. According to Van Bruggen, it may be appropriate to impose sanctions on staff or financial sanctions.

School inspections can promote change if, in addition to the four conditions noted above, all stakeholders are willing to play their part – i.e. the school, external partners, the local authorities, parents and the government. Progress is dependent on the relationships between these partners.



## OTHER TYPES OF INSPECTIONS

A full inspection requires a significant amount of time and resources and involves many people. If schools need to be inspected on a regular and frequent basis (the ideal being every three to four years), inspectorates will inevitably be overstretched. This is why other types of inspections have been introduced, including self-assessments, risk-based inspections, and theme-based inspections.

In the literature on school inspections, the general view is that individual inspections remain marginal. In most systems, teachers are not assessed on an individual basis. For example, individual teacher assessments are never carried out in Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Spain, Italy or Romania. When teachers are assessed, the assessment is made by internal bodies (such as the headteacher) and is independent of internal assessments, as is the case in the Flemish Region of Belgium, Luxemburg, Austria, Lithuania and Hungary. In some countries, teachers are assessed by the headteacher and an external assessor. Examples include French and German-speaking Belgium, Greece, Malta, and France (Costa & Pires, [2011](#)).

### Self-assessments or internal assessments

Since the 1990s, internal assessments, traditionally carried out by headteachers or senior management, have included other key actors (teachers, administrators, students, parents, local community members, etc.). Internal assessments are compulsory in most countries and are carried out by the governing board (or *conseil d'administration* in French secondary education), specifically created groups, or assemblies of teachers (*conseil des maîtres* in French primary education) (Eurydice, [2004](#)).

Self-assessments raise a number of issues. In order for them to be effective, schools need to develop a culture of

self-assessment. Self-assessment requires training professionals and defining guidelines. How can the relevance and utility of a self-assessment be guaranteed? Does a school have the capacity to see what may be wrong? While they recognize that self-assessment can help to improve the performance of schools, some experts have expressed doubts about the role that inspectorates can perform in this process (Costa and Pires, [2011](#)).

Self-assessments are often used alongside full inspections. Some inspectorates require that self-assessments be carried out before the inspectors visit the school and use the results of the self-assessment as a guide. In some cases, the fact of making self-assessments compulsory has resulted in more restricted full inspections according to the results of the self-assessment (Czech Republic, Northern Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Scotland, Wales). In some countries, self-assessments are used as an indicator of good school management (Flanders, Spain, Ireland, England, Sweden, Slovakia, Estonia and some German Länder).

Ryan & Telfer ([2011](#)) distinguished between two types of self-assessment: self-assessments that are externally imposed based on predefined criteria (self-evaluation) and self-assessments carried out by members of the team who defined the criteria (self-assessment). The second option appears to be more effective for improving the quality of education from a results-based perspective (accountability, translated into French as '*reddition de comptes*' by Dumay, [2009](#)) (Ryan & Telfer, [2011](#)).

### Self-assessment and external assessment: the winning combination?

A consensus has emerged on the importance of combining external assessments with internal assessments. However, the reality of school inspections varies widely in different countries. The Eurydice report ([2004](#)) found that external and internal assessments are sometimes completely independent of one another (as is the case in eight countries) or

interdependent (as is the case in 16 of the countries examined in the study). Most countries (10, including France) use internal assessments to conduct external assessments. In four countries, internal and external assessments feed into each other, while in two countries, external assessments are used to guide and oversee internal assessments.

In Switzerland, self-assessments, though encouraged, must be supplemented by external assessments offering an independent and impartial perspective to facilitate change (Claude & Rhyn, [2008](#)).

### Risk-based inspections

A risk-based inspection can be defined as an inspection carried out in critical situations. The Netherlands has gone the furthest down this route.

The aim of risk-based inspections is to determine the degree of risk that the expected level of quality will not be reached, based on a range of criteria (which may vary). A risk analysis is performed every year and takes into account the results and the environment of the school, in addition to reported problems, complaints, and other issues. If the school is found to perform as expected based on predefined criteria, it is not considered to be at risk. However, if the school fails to perform as expected, it is said to be 'at risk' (although there are different levels of failure) and a full inspection is put in motion in order to remedy the situation. In the Netherlands, many schools are not subject to full inspections, although all schools undergo regular thematic or random inspections. The law stipulates that every school must be inspected every four or five years. The term 'proportionate inspection' is also used to refer to inspections carried out on an irregular basis according to school performance levels.

Risk-based inspections, which allow for a more flexible approach, are found in some regions of Spain and in Portugal, Flanders and the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent in Scotland, Wales and some regions of Germany.

Some countries have been reluctant to

adopt this type of inspection since the effect is to overlook full inspections aimed at ensuring quality. However, the increasing workload of inspectors often means that other systems need to be considered (Van Bruggen, [2010](#)).

## INTERVAL BETWEEN INSPECTIONS

According to Van Bruggen, the optimal interval between two inspections is 3 to 4 years. In the case of full inspections, it is difficult to inspect the same school without significantly increasing the workload of inspectors. Therefore, different types of inspection are generally carried out: a full inspection, followed by a thematic inspection, a risk-based inspection, or inspections aimed at assessing the state of education at a national level based on representative samples. The alternate use of different inspection methods serves to ensure that every school is inspected regularly.

In short, the point is not to conduct school inspections every year so much as to combine different types of inspections. The combined use of different inspection methods allows for close, regular monitoring and helps to ensure the quality of secondary education.

## THE IMPACT OF INSPECTIONS

### VERY LIMITED IMPACT

School inspections have changed significantly over the last twenty years as a result of their lack of effectiveness. What is the current state of affairs after two decades of change? Based on recent research, the positive impact of inspections on the quality of education has yet to be clearly demonstrated. While there has been no evidence of a negative impact, a number of conditions must be met to ensure that inspections have a positive impact. The results of a study conducted in Dutch primary schools showed that inspections have very little impact on student results (Luginbuhl et al., [2009](#)).



A larger study carried out in several countries (de Wolf & Janssens, 2007) yielded similar results. The study found that teachers and headteachers generally have a positive view of inspections, and that there is evidence of changes in attitude following inspections. However, there appears to be no positive impact on student success, with some cases of a decline in performance. Research also indicates that in some countries, the publication of school performance indicators has had little impact on the choice of school.

However, inspections have been shown to have various side effects (falsification of reality, fraud, cramming, stress, etc.) that can impede innovation and pedagogical diversity (de Wolf and Janssens, 2007).

### **CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR INSPECTIONS TO HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT**

According to Van Bruggen, improvement is the result of the combined effect of several factors. The implication is that inspections are only a part of the equation, in addition to continuing training, leadership, the support of local authorities, self-assessment, etc. This is consistent with the findings of the IGAENR report (Cuisinier & Berthé, 2005), which emphasized the effect of 'school policy' on the improvement of results (the report also highlighted the impact of the socio-economic environment).

One of the conditions for a successful inspection is the quality of the inspection report, but also the school's response to the report. Therefore, the quality of the inspection procedure will depend on the relationship between the inspection, management, external partners and the education authorities (local and other). In order for an assessment to be effective, the assessed entity must be receptive to the findings and the assessor needs to listen to the assessed entity (Faubert, 2009).

The report must be clear and concise and must identify the strengths and weaknesses of the assessed entity. The findings must be clearly explained and guidelines must

be provided, after which the inspectorate will need to monitor the situation (Ehren & Visscher, 2008).

*'Inspecting schools without follow-up and monitoring activities is probably not very effective'. (Ehren & Visscher, 2008)*

The ideal frequency of inspections appears to be between three and four years, which does not exclude smaller or more targeted inspections in the meantime.

A consensus has emerged on the need to extend inspections to other actors (partners, associations, parents, local environment, etc.). Other types of assessment may also be carried out, including visits from peers and associations of partners.

The Flemish case is a promising example of an effective inspection system. Every school is inspected over the course of a day. A risk assessment is carried out, and if the school is deemed to be at risk, an in-depth inspection is carried out. If the risk is relatively low, two or three issues are selected and another inspection is carried out several months later.

Although the prevailing trend is not toward individual inspections, according to Van Bruggen it is important not to overlook the issue of teachers identified as poor or unsatisfactory, in order for inspections to tackle head-on the problem of struggling teachers. This would mean allowing inspectors to make individual judgments about teachers and headteachers, not unlike what happens in Ireland and Wales (including in the case of whole school inspections).

In any case, the evidence suggests that support and counseling (for example through further training) are required to ensure that assessments are taken into account and reflected upon by all involved parties.

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