



External advice to inspire and support schools in developing students' broad competences

**ET2020 Working Group Schools
Peer Learning Activity
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Executive summary

The **ET2020 Working Group on Schools** is contributing to high quality inclusive education across the **European Education Area** through its analysis of how quality assurance policies can support school- and teacher-led cultures of quality enhancement.

Increasingly, education systems in Europe aim to **support all learners to develop a broad range of competences** that they will need to thrive throughout life in rapidly changing societies. **External advice by inspectorates and other external partners** – such as teachers and principals from other schools, representatives of local authorities, researchers, non-governmental organisations, etc. – plays an important role in supporting schools in developing students' competences.

In February 2020, the Working Group held a **peer learning activity in Dublin**, to explore how external advice can inspire and support schools in developing students' broad competences. During the activity, participants identified **key considerations for policy makers**. Recognising that each system is different, participants sought to ensure that the key considerations be relevant to and easily adapted by all education systems. **Country examples** in this report provide inspiration for how the key considerations can be put into practice.

Key considerations for policy makers:

❖ **Establish a strong foundation and build new approaches to external advice and broad competence development:**

- **Engage education stakeholders in setting out a vision and aims** for student learning and broad competence development.
- Ensure that the **vision for broad competence development is reflected across the whole education system**, including curriculum, standards, student assessment, school self-evaluation, external evaluation, teachers' initial training and continuing professional development.
- **Build trust in external advice** by ensuring that school evaluation is not about 'control' but about **supporting schools to improve**. External advisors and school leaders need to work together to establish **shared aims, clear expectations**, and to **engage in dialogue**.
- Promote positive public discourse and **support for teacher professionalism, as well as positive working conditions** to improve school-level motivation.
- Provide **sufficient autonomy to schools** to decide how to improve.

❖ **Invest in capacity building for school evaluation and development throughout the school system:**

- **External advisor teams should include persons with diverse areas of expertise** in education and the competences to work collaboratively with schools. National level policy makers may **set expectations regarding the qualifications and experience of external advisors**.
- **Guidelines, exemplars and professional development focused on effective professional collaboration** can support structured collaborative processes such as observation of the school climate and classroom teaching, the ability to challenge assumptions and to inspire school

development and to share evidence of effective practices to support students' broad competence development.

- **Adequate resources should be made available** to support collaboration between external advisors and schools.
 - **Policies to support school leaders are also important**, as they play a crucial role in motivating teachers and other school staff, as well as motivating students and parents to shift from a focus on academic achievement to broad competence development for every student.
 - Support for **schools to develop as learning organisations**, and to adopt models of **distributed school leadership** can enhance motivation of teachers and further reinforce school-level capacity building. School leaders and teachers need to be supported to develop the **necessary competences to implement school development plans**.
 - The feedback by external advisors needs to **include clear and specific recommendations appropriate for the school's context**. School level stakeholders need to be allowed **time to reflect on external advice**, and to consider how to translate it into **a concrete, focused and realistic action plan**.
 - National and regional policy makers may **stimulate networking between schools and municipalities** to enhance local cooperation and capacity. Stronger **links between practice, research and teacher professional development** should be actively supported.
- ❖ **Plan for and sustain improvement over time and maximise the positive impact of external advice across the whole school system:**
- **Policy makers should consider and plan for potential unintended consequences of new approaches**. New initiatives should be piloted before they are disseminated more broadly.
 - National ministries need to consider how to **identify schools most in need of advice and support** in order to ensure inclusiveness and effective use of resources.
 - For effective future action, **everyone's voice needs to be heard and valued**, including of the most disadvantaged students and parents.
 - In countries where **external advice** is available through different public, private and semi-public providers, national ministries can establish central guidelines to **support greater coherence and synergies**.
 - External advisors may help schools to **develop and sustain their capacity for self-evaluation and improvement** by fostering cultures of reflection, collaboration and continuing professional development, as well as with organisational models such as distributed leadership and schools as learning organisations.
 - The **effectiveness of external advice approaches should be evaluated**, and plans for further development and improvement made as part of a **cycle of continuous improvement**. Lessons learned should also support strategies for maximising the positive impact of external advice across the whole school system.

1. About this report

Under its 2018-20 mandate, the Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Schools is exploring the governance of school education systems to support high quality inclusive education across a **European Education Area**. The work focuses on two interlinked topics: quality assurance, and teacher and school leader careers.

In relation to **quality assurance**, the Working Group is exploring how quality assurance policies at the system level can support a school- and teacher-led culture of quality enhancement.

A **culture of quality enhancement in school education** places an emphasis on continuous improvement, with the overall objective of improving all children's and young people's learning and wellbeing. It is a collaborative culture based on trust and a sense of ownership, with all relevant stakeholders engaged. A culture of quality enhancement operates at all levels of the school education system. It highlights the importance of appropriate transparency while avoiding the counter-productive pressures of high-stakes accountability approaches. There is an openness to new ideas, including from outside the school education system. In a culture of quality enhancement, all stakeholders have a responsibility to contribute to achieving a shared vision and objectives for young people's learning and wellbeing.

Within this overarching theme, the Working Group has analysed **how external advice can inspire and support schools in developing students' broad competences**.

A **Peer Learning Activity** took place on 5-7 February 2020 in Dublin. It brought together ministry representatives and school education stakeholders from 11 education systems – the Flemish and French Communities of Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal, plus representatives from the Association for Teacher Education in Europe, European Trade Union Committee for Education, and the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education.

This report is aimed at policy makers but may also be useful to any school education stakeholder concerned with supporting students' broad competence development. It sets out **key considerations for policy makers** and illustrates them with **country and stakeholder examples**.

The Peer Learning Activity was hosted by the Irish Department of Education and Skills.

This report was edited by Janet Looney (European Institute of Education and Social Policy) and Dita Kudelova (European Commission) in April 2020.

2. External advice to inspire and support schools in developing students' broad competences: why and how?

A focus on broad competence development for every student

Increasingly, education systems in Europe aim to **support all learners to develop a broad range of competences that they will need to thrive throughout life in rapidly changing societies.**

The 2018 Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning¹ defines key competences as those competences all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, employment, social inclusion, sustainable lifestyle, and active citizenship². The Recommendation highlights that key competences include a range of knowledge, skills and attitudes which go well beyond what might be considered a traditional notion of only 'academic' knowledge as the dominant focus of school systems. While countries across Europe may use different classifications of competences reflecting their own culture and aims for education, they increasingly seek to develop a broad future-oriented view.

At the classroom-level, the focus on **broad competence development for every student** supports student-centered approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, including formative assessment of student understanding and individualisation to meet student needs better. At the school level, school climate – that is, a supportive and positive environment both within and outside of the classroom – supports student learning and wellbeing. Student voice – that is, students' values, beliefs, opinion and perspectives -- is valued and supported. Students from disadvantaged families, students with migrant and/or minority backgrounds, students with special needs, and others are supported to achieve their full potential.

External advice by inspectorates and other external partners – such as teachers and principals from other schools, representatives of local authorities, researchers, non-governmental organisations, etc. – plays an important role in inspiring and supporting schools in developing students' broad competences.

Inspectorates and other external advisors can, through close engagement with a school, come to more rounded judgements about the quality of provision and outcomes in schools. They can strike a balance between evaluating the quality of students' outcomes, evaluating the quality of the processes that lead to these outcomes and evaluating the governance arrangements that the school has in place to drive continuous improvement in both processes and outcomes.³ Inspectorates and other external advisors such as principals and teachers from other schools or researchers can also play an important role in supporting schools in their self-evaluation processes.

School inspectors and other external advisors bring additional viewpoints to schools and are in a position to evaluate or comment on school climate, support for students' broad competence development, teaching and learning, and the quality of school development strategies to make recommendations for improvement. As external advisors visit a range of schools, they also have the unique opportunity to share ideas on effective practice.

Dialogue-based approaches to providing advice can build trust, engagement and ownership of all school stakeholders. These discussions provide opportunities for external advisors to provide informative feedback, and model effective collaborative working. This approach, when effectively done, can also help strengthen the motivation and capacity of all school stakeholders to conduct an effective school self-evaluation process.

Schools may also find inspiration and support for broad competence development of all their students thanks to networks with other schools or with local and wider communities. Networks are a way for different actors and levels of school education systems – policy makers, schools, school education leaders,

¹ [Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning \(2018/C 189/01\)](#).

² Ibid.

³ Maxwell, B. and Staring, F. (2018), Better learning for Europe's young people: developing coherent quality assurance strategies for school education.

teachers and a range of stakeholders - to promote and support school development. They can help stakeholders address and potentially solve problems concerning the education of young people in collaborative and flexible ways. They are important sites of co-responsibility and shared accountability.⁴

Research on the impact of external advice on broad competence development in schools

Research on the impact of external evaluation and advice on broad competence development in schools is limited. Existing literature indicates that external evaluation and advice can have a positive effect when schools take into account feedback on school improvement efforts, and when the advice leads to changes in the school environment and/or to approaches in teaching and learning, and student achievement⁵. Ehren et al.⁶ have found that **clarity of expectations in external evaluation/advice frameworks** (particularly on broader competence development), and the **knowledge and engagement of school stakeholders with this process** have a significant impact on its effectiveness. External advice is also more likely to be effective when the approach is **collaborative and focused on school improvement** (rather than high-stakes accountability).⁷

The **quality and acceptance of feedback** is also important to the effectiveness of external evaluation and advice. **Effective feedback includes clear and specific recommendations** that are linked to external standards and clear indicators of broad competences. Effective feedback also needs to be **responsive to the school's situation**, and to priorities included in school improvement plans. **Follow-up visits** by external advisors are also important.⁸

At the school level, there is some evidence that strong **teacher-to-teacher trust, strong cultures of peer collaboration** and **collective responsibility for student achievement** are associated with higher levels of student achievement.^{9 10}

⁴ ET2020 Working Group Schools (2018), European ideas for better learning: the governance of school education systems, Brussels.

⁵ Ehren, M. and Dijkstra, A.B. (2015) "Evaluation of social outcomes through school inspections" in Social outcomes of Education: The assessment of social outcomes and school improvement through inspections (Dijkstra and de la Motte, eds), pp. 51 – 72.

⁶ Ehren, M.C.M., H. Altrichter, G. McNamara and J. O'Hara (2013), "School inspections and school improvement: Testing assumptions on causal mechanisms", Oxford Review of Education.

⁷ See also Whitby, K. (2010). School inspections: Recent experiences in high performing education systems. Reading, England: CfBT Education Trust.

⁸ Ehren, M. and Dijkstra, A.B., op cit.

⁹ Gwynne, J., & Easton, J. Q. (2001, April). Probation, organizational capacity, and student achievement in Chicago elementary schools. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle.

¹⁰ O'Day, J. (2002), "Complexity, Accountability and School Improvement", Harvard Education Review, Vol 72, No. 3, <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hepg/oday.html>.

3. Challenges and key questions

The lead question for this Peer Learning Activity was:

How can external advice inspire and support schools in developing broad competences of every student?

To explore this overarching question, Working Group members proposed key questions for the Peer Learning Activity:

- 1 How can a common understanding of the broad nature of student development be built while recognising that there are diverse school approaches to achieving this?
- 2 How can collaborative processes between external advisors and schools effectively identify strengths in terms of broad competence development and areas for improvement?
- 3 How can dialogue and collective reflection within schools and between schools and external advisors bring about processes for effective future action towards broad competence development of every student?

In formulating these questions, Working Group members observed that external advice focused on developing broad competences of every student is a significant shift from 'traditional' top-down inspection models focused on school accountability and student academic achievement. Newer models for external advice emphasise that inspectors and/or other external evaluators may be more effective in **supporting school improvement through collaboration with school staff and stakeholders**, rather than through 'control'. **Schools take ownership** of improvement processes, while benefiting from advice and feedback. External advisors support schools to integrate new approaches to developing students' broad competences, appropriate to the specific context. Dialogue based on frank and open exchanges between external advisors and schools, with the aim of supporting all students, is vital for effective work, and requires trust.

Participants also identified a number of shared challenges, including the need to:

- build a common understanding within and across schools of the broad nature of learner development, and how schools working in different contexts can create the conditions and shift school cultures to support a more holistic approach to learning;
- build trust within schools and between schools and external advisors;
- set up effective collaborative processes with external advisors;
- turn external advice into action for improvement;
- support broad competence development of students from disadvantaged families, students with migrant/minority background, students with special needs etc.;
- use a broad range of qualitative and quantitative data effectively as a part of such collaborative processes;
- build capacity of all key actors;
- ensure availability of sufficient resources (human and financial);
- sustain improvement after external advisors have completed their work.

4. Key considerations for policy makers

Countries participating in the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) were invited to share one aspect of their own system's approach to external advice to inspire and support schools in developing students' broad competences. Ireland, as the host country, shared a full case study, highlighting their system for external advice and support to schools, ongoing challenges, and opportunities for future development. Two school visits allowed participants to explore concrete examples of how the inspectorate collaborates with and supports these schools to support students' broad competence development.

This section sets out the results of the PLA discussion of how to address the shared challenges. In addition to the three key questions, all participants considered the need to create conditions for effective collaboration between external advisors and schools at both the policy and school levels.

Common themes emerging from discussion of the different cases highlighted the need to:

- Establish a strong foundation and build new approaches to external advice and students' broad competence development;
- Invest in capacity building for school evaluation and development throughout the school system;
- Plan for and sustain improvement over time and maximise the positive impact of external advice across the whole school system.

Below, key considerations for policy development within each of these three broad areas are set out. These seek to be relevant to and adaptable by all education systems while recognising that each system is different. The key considerations are illustrated by brief examples from the country case studies and stakeholder organisations' presentations. Highlights from the school visits show the impact of new approaches at the school level. These different examples show how countries are adapting new models for external advice to support broad competence development and inclusion for their own contexts and needs. Countries and regions are taking very different approaches to strengthening external advice, and are at very different stages in integrating a focus on students' broad competence development as a priority.

Establish a strong foundation and build new approaches to external advice and students' broad competence development

Key considerations for policy makers:

- **Engage education stakeholders in setting out a vision and aims for student learning and broad competence development.** Education stakeholders include students, parents, school principals, teachers and other school staff, inspectors and other external advisors, researchers, local authorities and regional and national policy makers. **Co-creation with stakeholders can support a common understanding of the aims of education, ownership and shared responsibility, and ensure greater sustainability of policies.**
- Ensure that the **vision for broad competence development is reflected across the whole education system**, including curriculum, standards, student assessment, school self-evaluation, external evaluation, teachers' initial training and continuing professional development. At the national level, policy makers may need to introduce new legal, regulatory frameworks and/or guidelines.

- **Build trust in external advice** by ensuring that school evaluation is not about ‘control’ but about **supporting schools to improve**. External advisors and school leaders need to work together to establish **shared aims, clear expectations**, and to **engage in dialogue** regarding the school’s progress in supporting students’ broad competences.
- Promote positive public discourse and **support for teacher professionalism, as well as positive working conditions** to improve school-level motivation.
- Provide **sufficient autonomy to schools to decide how to improve**.

Among the participants, the diversity of approaches to external advice to inspire and support schools in students’ broad competence development was readily apparent. In introducing new models for external advice, participants noted the importance of establishing a strong foundation for change. This includes the quality of engagement with stakeholders; the quality of relationships between external advisors and schools; teacher professionalism; and sufficient school autonomy. Strategies for the introduction of new approaches should **take into account and build on the existing education and quality assurance culture of the country**. This may involve steps to build trust between external advisors and schools. Affirmation of school strengths and support for teacher professionalism are also important first steps.

New approaches to external advice are most likely to be successful when they are part of a coherent strategy. Participants noted the importance of **alignment of curriculum**, which defines the content and broad competences students are expected to attain, **and student assessments and school evaluations**, which measure actual student attainment. Where external advice is available through diverse providers, there is a need to balance alignment and common understanding of education priorities, and responsiveness to school choices, as for example in the Netherlands.

These key considerations are apparent in **Ireland’s** approach to external advice to inspire and support students’ broad competence development. For example, curriculum development is done in consultation with a broad set of stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders, parents, students, business and community groups, the Ministry and others. This stakeholder engagement and representation of school-level experiences helps to ensure that aims for education are widely shared and understood. The [Inspectorate](#) contributes to this process, sharing views informed by its field work with teachers, school leaders and students.

The Irish Inspectorate has also developed a set of standards --*Looking at Our School*¹¹ – to support a shared understanding of learning aims. Schools are supported to evaluate their progress, set realistic targets and monitor implementation.

The **Netherlands** is currently engaged in curriculum renewal for primary and secondary education. The curriculum introduces broad learning competences in core subject areas and through transversal skills for critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and entrepreneurship. The Ministry seeks to involve a broad set of stakeholders more closely in the subsequent stages of curriculum development, including teachers, school leaders, curriculum experts, researchers, learning networks of schools, and with the support of semi-public and private organisations. This may help support teachers to take up new skills and innovations. There are

¹¹ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Our-School-2016-A-Quality-Framework-for-Primary-Schools.pdf>;
<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Our-School-2016-A-Quality-Framework-for-Post-Primary-schools.pdf>.

also initiatives to build strong links between research, teacher training and teacher practice; to strengthen collaboration between teacher training and schools (the [‘Educating Together’ initiative](#)) and to strengthen school-level professional learning. While there is an open market (i.e. through private and non-profit providers) for external advice in the Netherlands, this advice also tends to be fragmented. Greater alignment of provision with renewal aims is needed.

PLA participants consistently highlighted the importance of building trust-based relationships between external advisors and schools. The **European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE)** noted that in many education systems, there are tensions between new 21st century competence-based curricula and more traditional academic, subject-based teaching and examinations. External advisors can support teachers to innovate as they adopt new approaches to teaching and assessment. Researchers, in particular, may act as ‘critical friends’, challenging teachers’ beliefs and assumptions. Because the researcher does not have a formal role of ‘school control’, it is easier to develop trust.

In **Italy**, inspectors provide schools with an evaluation report following a first visit. The report, which follows a similar structure to school self-evaluation reports, uses a rubric to structure feedback. The report provides suggestions for the school regarding priorities and improvement objectives, and the reasons the team considers these as important. The lead evaluator then visits the school to discuss the report. The aim is to create opportunities for dialogue with the school staff, and for reflection among the staff. In the final phase, the results of the evaluation are shared with internal and external stakeholders (since 2019), which may help to improve the foundation for school evaluation and to increase accountability of schools for follow through on priorities for improvement.

In **Estonia**, schools are expected to evaluate their own progress in developing students’ broad competences. The Ministry of Education and Research, together with the Innove Foundation, has developed tools and guidelines to support schools in monitoring their actions. For example, they offer digital tools that schools can use to assess broad competences of all students. This allows identification of school-level strengths and weaknesses. The student assessments cover communication and self-efficacy, learning to learn, literacy and numeracy, and digital competences. The assessments are optional for schools, and results are available to and used only by schools themselves for purposes of self-evaluation and improvement; they are not used by the state or any external body. Schools which choose to use these assessments are expected to reflect the results in their development plan.

Participants at the PLA also suggested that improvements in teacher status would increase teacher motivation to support reforms to curriculum and quality assurance. For example, **Cyprus** has introduced [new subject indicators](#) to track teacher instruction and student achievement of learning objectives. The indicators have helped develop understanding of curriculum targets. Next steps are to support teachers in adopting new teaching methodologies, and to integrate classroom-based formative assessment of student learning (important for identifying individual student needs and adapting teaching to support every student to succeed).

The **Czech Republic** is also taking steps to improve teacher status and motivation. Teachers have received a significant salary increase. Further reforms to curriculum, introduction of more holistic approaches to student learning, support for teacher development, recruitment of new teachers, and reduction of teacher workload are planned. All these actions may improve teacher trust and support collaboration with external advisors.

In recent years, **Greece** has twice introduced legislation for school improvement and evaluation based on a ‘critical friends’ model (e.g. school advisors). Legislation passed in 2013 coincided with the national economic crisis, and was abandoned following teacher protests. While the need to support schools and teachers to develop students’ broad competences is widely recognised, a stronger foundation of trust will be needed to introduce new quality assurance requirements. Legislation passed in 2018 (Law 4547/2018, article 47 and Ministerial Decision 1816/GD4/2019 “School Units’ Educational Work Planning and Assessment) was not implemented. A new bill is to be submitted for public consultation in April 2020.

The **European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (ECSWE)** emphasised the need for coherence across school evaluation and student assessment. Schools with alternative pedagogical approaches need sufficient autonomy and flexibility in tailoring school evaluation and student assessment to their specific needs and curricula. As a part of delivering the [New Zealand Certificate of Steiner Education](#), several Steiner Waldorf schools in Europe follow a process of external moderation of school-based teacher assessments of student competences. Teachers are able to rate student competence development more effectively than through standardised assessments. However, because teachers may interpret rating scales differently, external moderators and an internal moderation procedure ensure that teachers' marks are consistent within and across schools. This process supports teacher professional learning, and also supports better alignment of curriculum, assessment and teaching methods to support broad competence development.

Invest in capacity building for school evaluation and development throughout the school system

Key considerations for policy makers:

- **External advisor teams should include persons with diverse areas of expertise in education and the competences to work collaboratively with schools.** National level policy makers may **set expectations regarding the qualifications and experience of external advisors**, as their credibility is essential.
- **Guidelines, exemplars and professional development focused on effective professional collaboration** can support structured collaborative processes. These processes include **observation** of the school climate and classroom teaching focused on broad competence development, the ability to **challenge** assumptions and to **inspire school development** and to share **evidence** of effective practices to support students' broad competence development.
- **Adequate resources should be made available** to support collaboration between external advisors and schools. Where needed, **investments in building school-level capacity to engage in evaluation processes and school development should also be made.**
- **Policies to support school leaders are also important, as they play a crucial role in motivating** teachers and other school staff, as well as motivating students and parents to shift from a focus on academic achievement to broad competence development for every student.
- Support for **schools to develop as learning organisations**, and to adopt models of **distributed school leadership** can enhance motivation of teachers and further reinforce school-level capacity building. School leaders and teachers need to be supported to develop the **necessary competences to implement school development plans**. This includes preparing school leaders and teachers to expect the unexpected and to embrace and respond to changes.
- The feedback by external advisors needs to **include clear and specific recommendations appropriate for the school's context**. School level stakeholders need to be allowed **time to reflect on external advice**, as well as follow-up on progress toward the school's goals to support broad competence development, and to consider how to translate it into **a concrete, focused and realistic action plan**. These processes also support development of new capacities.
- National and regional policy makers may **stimulate networking between schools and municipalities to enhance local cooperation and capacity**. Stronger **links between practice, research and teacher professional development** should be actively supported.

New models for external advice, new competence-based curricula and inclusive teaching practices will require investments in capacity development for all actors. For example, external advisors may need training on how to structure consultations, how to engage in constructive dialogues, and how they may in turn support school capacity to develop priorities and lead change at school and classroom levels. This is particularly important as schools focus on supporting students' broad competence development, which may require new student-centred approaches to teaching and learning, and shifts in educators' mindsets and in school cultures. School leaders will need support to develop competences to lead 'schools as learning organisations', and to share leadership with teaching staff. In systems where municipalities are owners of schools, it is important to build capacity of local officials to work with schools on school self-evaluation and improvement.

PLA participants noted that capacity building in their contexts included guidelines and tools as well as support and investments in collaborative practice and professional development. They also noted that ongoing collaboration at school levels leads to more effective collaboration with external advisors.

In **Ireland**, external advisors support schools to strengthen their capacity for self-evaluation by providing guidelines, materials and online support on effective school self-evaluation and through advisory visits focused on the quality of self-evaluation. The Inspectorate collaborates with key stakeholders in the development of inspection frameworks, working methods, and research, and is now considering a model for engaging jointly in school-led self-evaluation processes. The focus is on co-creating conditions for schools to develop innovative learning environments and cultures focused on improvement. Recognising that teachers develop their own competences through challenging professional conversations, the Irish Inspectorate also encourages schools and school clusters to develop collaborative professional practices and peer review. Student collaboration in school self-evaluation processes is also encouraged.

The Irish Inspectorate was closely involved in the design of the [Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools \(DEIS\) programme](#) to support inclusion, and is now involved in its implementation. DEIS was first launched in 2005 and then revised in 2017. The programme provides additional resources to schools in the most disadvantaged areas (identified through the latest census data). Schools that are part of this programme work intensively with the Inspectorate and other external advisors, including providers of continuing professional development, practitioners from other schools and a range of support networks. Schools may receive additional funds for professional development (including programmes tailored to their specific needs), teaching and specialised school staff, and so on.

The [School Excellence Fund \(SEF\)](#), a recent initiative in Ireland, provides funding to a number of DEIS schools for innovative projects to support improved outcomes for every student. This initiative emphasises collaboration among teachers, school leaders, and school clusters. Inspectors play the role of 'critical friends' to school clusters. The Fund is now supporting a wide range of projects, including projects involving cooperation between different school levels, and teaching to supporting individual learners in different school contexts.

Balbriggan Educate Together National School

Balbriggan Educate Together National School is a primary school located in a disadvantaged area north of Dublin. This DEIS-designated (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools programme) school collaborates with another primary and a secondary school in the 'Higher order language skills involved in critical thinking' project, which is funded by the School Excellence Fund. The Inspectorate cooperates closely with the school, providing advice and support on the design and implementation of this project.

The project defines 'higher order' language skills associated with critical thinking, and has mapped these to existing learning outcomes in subjects across the curriculum and identified key pedagogies and innovative programmes to support these learning objectives. Interested teachers are supported to develop pedagogical skills aligned with the project goals, including inquiry-based science teaching, philosophy for children, visual thinking strategy, critical book talk using picture books, critical thinking in maths, and drama and critical thinking (all based on research and evidence). These teachers then mentor other teachers to support school-wide changes to teaching, learning and assessment practices.

The focus on using language skills to support critical thinking is clearly evident at the school. PLA participants observed that students as young as six years of age were already developing competences for critical thinking, and were engaged in dialogue and debate about what they were learning.

A project evaluation found that success factors included:

- motivation of the school principal and teachers;
- enhanced professional development and teacher mentorship (both mentors and mentees);
- critical reflection on pedagogy and whether teaching genuinely engages students in critical thinking and development of higher order language skills in all curricular areas;
- development of a culture of self-reflection and self-evaluation in the school;
- close links between evidence-based programmes, practice and research;
- improved long-term links, collaboration and opportunities for future engagement with the two cluster schools;
- distributed leadership;
- opportunities to improve student motivation and attainment for all students;
- positive engagement with the Inspectorate and sufficient resources.

PLA participants observed that this school is clearly focused on students' broad competence development. The school leader's philosophy regarding competence development and a model distributed school leadership were driving forces for change. The involvement of external advisors, including the inspectorate, and of very diverse stakeholders (who may act as informal external advisors), also appeared to be key elements in supporting the school's reflections related to supporting every student's broad competence development.

Participants also shared examples of collaboration, distributed leadership and networking to improve capacity. **Portugal** has developed the [Priority Intervention Educational Territories Programme \(TEIP\)](#) to promote inclusion through the support of schools and school clusters located in the most disadvantaged regions. School clusters are encouraged to strengthen relationships with local communities to better support disadvantaged students. This networking approach extends to national, regional and local meetings that include teachers, experts, school leaders, parents, and university researchers who serve as critical friends. In addition, there are initiatives, such as the one at the Institute of Education of University of Lisbon network -

[REDESCOLA \(School-network\)](#). REDESCOLA involves professionals in the area of education (teachers, school principals, teacher training centers, municipalities, central administration and other education actors) and researchers in promoting research-informed debate and joint reflection upon issues linked to the present education reality. This type of networking supports research-informed debate and joint reflection, mutual exchange of experiences, and opportunities to develop research projects and partnerships based on shared interests (e.g. [Peer Learning Activities with TEIP actors](#)).

Another example is **Portugal's** [Curricular Flexibility Policy](#), which aims to provide schools with additional freedom to work collaboratively to develop local solutions. Support teams involving different education directorates and the Inspectorate, promote networking among teachers, experts, mid- and top-level leaders, families, critical friends and institutions of higher education. The aim is to help to improve teaching and to encourage self-evaluation practices.

In the **French Community of Belgium**, the Government has introduced the *Pact for Excellence in Teaching* (*'Pacte pour un Enseignement d'Excellence'*). Schools are required to set out aims for school development (the 'school steering plan'); external advisors collaborate to review the quality of school steering plans and identify support needs. There is also an emphasis on building competences for collaboration and distributed leadership to support ongoing improvement after the initial two-year project. The Pact has recently introduced a new student portfolio (accompaniment file), kept by the individual student throughout his/her school career. This file will potentially support a student-centred focus and smoother transitions across school years and levels.

Norway places a particular emphasis on building local capacity. The national Directorate of Education and Training introduced the [Advisory Team programme](#) in 2009 to support municipalities and schools to conduct effective school self-evaluation and improvement. Advisory teams of three to five experienced school leaders and municipal-level school administrators (school owners), who are recruited nationally, work with municipalities over a period of two years to address quality issues. The Teams aim to build organisational capacity and competences at municipal and school levels so that they will be ready to work independently at the end of the two-year period. Beyond this direct work with local areas, the Advisory Team Programme also disseminates up-to-date research and theory on effective evaluation and development to support schools throughout the country.

Plan for and sustain improvement over time and maximise the positive impact of external advice across the whole school system

Key considerations for policy makers:

- Changes in curriculum and in approaches to external advice to support schools in students' broad competence development will take time. **Policy makers should consider and plan for potential unintended consequences of new approaches.** New initiatives should be piloted before they are disseminated more broadly.
- National ministries need to consider how to **identify schools most in need of advice and support** in order to ensure inclusiveness and effective use of resources.
- For effective future action, **everyone's voice needs to be heard and valued.** School development plans and any other **future action should respond to the needs of all students, including the most disadvantaged.**

- In countries **where external advice is available through different public, private and semi-public providers**, national ministries can establish central guidelines to **support greater coherence and synergies** while allowing schools the freedom of choice.
- External advisors may help schools to **develop and sustain their capacity for self-evaluation and improvement** by fostering cultures of reflection, collaboration and continuing professional development, as well as with organisational models such as distributed leadership and schools as learning organisations.
- The **effectiveness of external advice approaches should be evaluated**, and plans for further development and improvement made as part of a **cycle of continuous improvement**. Lessons learned should also support strategies for maximising the positive impact of external advice across the whole school system.

Participants noted the importance of allowing time for changes to take hold. The focus on students' broad competence development is new in many countries and will require a shift in school cultures. External advice to support school self-evaluation is an opportunity to reflect on how best to support new approaches to pedagogies, teaching and assessment and school organisation for students' broad competence development, and to evaluate their impact. Monitoring and evaluation of external advice models – including how the external advice processes themselves impact on competence development for every student – will allow identification of what is working well, where there are opportunities to introduce innovative new approaches, and where there are ongoing challenges. As resources for external advice may be limited, criteria to identify schools most in need of advice and support should be developed.

Participants also emphasised the importance of ensuring that in planning for future action, all voices need to be heard and valued. Students may need to build their capacity to contribute to school evaluation, to have a clear sense of when and how they contribute, and that they will be heard. Students' participation in school evaluation is also a way to support their broad competence development.

In countries where external advice is available through different public, private and semi-public providers, a central framework for school evaluation may be needed.

At the school level, organisational models such as distributed school leadership and schools as learning organisations may help to structure school-wide reflection, collaboration and professional development, and can increase school capacity to improve over time.

In **Ireland**, important steps toward more collaborative models of external advice and school-level teacher peer working have been made. Over the longer-term, the Inspectorate hopes to engage jointly with schools in school-led self-evaluation processes. This would enable both inspectors and school leaders to develop their skills together, provide a means of building on the collaboration between schools and the Inspectorate and allow for the implementation of change in teaching, learning and assessment that is prioritised by the school. Effective processes would also include student voice.

St Joseph's Secondary School

St Joseph's Secondary School was designated as a 'DEIS School' (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools programme) in 2007. The DEIS designation has led to a closer working relationship with the Inspectorate, including support in the development of the school's strategy to improve student learning and wellbeing. The school leadership team sees the relationship with the Inspectorate as being very positive, and observes that this relationship is reciprocal: the school and the Ministry each learn from each other.

The 2008 financial crisis affected many families in the local area. The school responded by developing a stronger focus on students' broad competence development as a way to support resilience. The school leader has supported distributed leadership throughout the school (i.e. the school leader shares leadership roles with teachers who take responsibility for the different initiatives and school development priorities), and teachers have been very active in developing new programmes to support student learning.

The school leaders at St Joseph's noted that the Inspectorate's *Looking at Our Schools* quality framework (2016), which requires schools to set SMART targets¹² in eight key areas, has served as a roadmap for school development.

School leaders said that they now take a coherent, whole-school approach to planning. This helps to ensure that the range of school initiatives to support student inclusion, achievement and well-being are aligned with the overall school mission and with each other. Examples of initiatives are teacher professional development to support 'excellence in teaching and learning' for every student, the College for Every Student programme to ensure students are college and career ready, student mentoring for every student, student-parent forums, links with the community, and so on. As in most DEIS schools, the home-school-community liaison teacher is a vital support to parents/carers and young people. The Transition Year programme, which is common to almost all schools in Ireland, allows students to explore different subjects and projects as a bridge between their studies for the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate.

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Transition-Year-/Transition-Year.html>

The school recently established the Wellbeing team and the Student Voice team to support student agency and participation. Students shared with PLA participants that these new teams have allowed them to get more actively involved in issues that concern them, and to propose new initiatives to improve daily life at the school. In this way, they are evaluating the needs of their community and developing broader competences.

PLA participants observed that the students they met were enthusiastic about their school and engaged in many different activities. Project displays in the school hallways also celebrated students' involvement in community and international projects, in peer mentoring, and in getting college ready.

In **Belgium (Flemish community)**, schools can make use of a wide range of external advisors. One of the options is in relation to continuing professional development of teachers and school leaders. The Minister identifies themes for educational innovation and training, and determines strategic goals over time and selects quality projects of organisations, which play the role of external advisor. The participating schools work with external advisors to develop and improve their school vision, distributed school leadership, teacher teamwork and collaborative learning, and teacher practice. Projects, to the extent possible, are tailored to individual school needs and goals.¹³ Most external advisors act as 'critical friends', stimulating reflection and collaboration in the school. The [Quality in Education reference framework](#) may be used to stimulate school improvement. The Inspectorate also uses this framework during school audits.

¹² SMART targets are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-based

¹³ More information in Dutch is available at: <https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/nascholing-op-initiatief-van-de-vlaamse-regering-algemene-en-praktische-informatie>

In the **Netherlands**, schools have high levels of autonomy and since the early 2000s have been free to choose from a wide range of external advisors in the private and semi-public sectors. At the same time, this open market for external advice has led to fragmentation. While the Inspectorate guarantees a minimum level of education quality, by visiting boards and schools regularly, and supervising weak schools, it notes a need for greater coherence and synergies among providers of external advice in order to support and sustain system-level learning and improvement.

The Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) stresses the importance of preparing teachers to adapt to changes. Teachers work in a context of complexity (e.g. information overload), and super-complexity (e.g. fundamental frameworks and frames of reference are constantly under challenge). To thrive under these conditions, teachers need transformative opportunities. It is important to nurture teachers' readiness to expect the unexpected, and to embrace and respond to changes.

5. Country perspectives

Ireland (host country)

Recent developments

In Ireland, the [Inspectorate](#)'s evaluation and advisory work contributes to supporting and embedding the development of competences among children and young people in a range of ways:

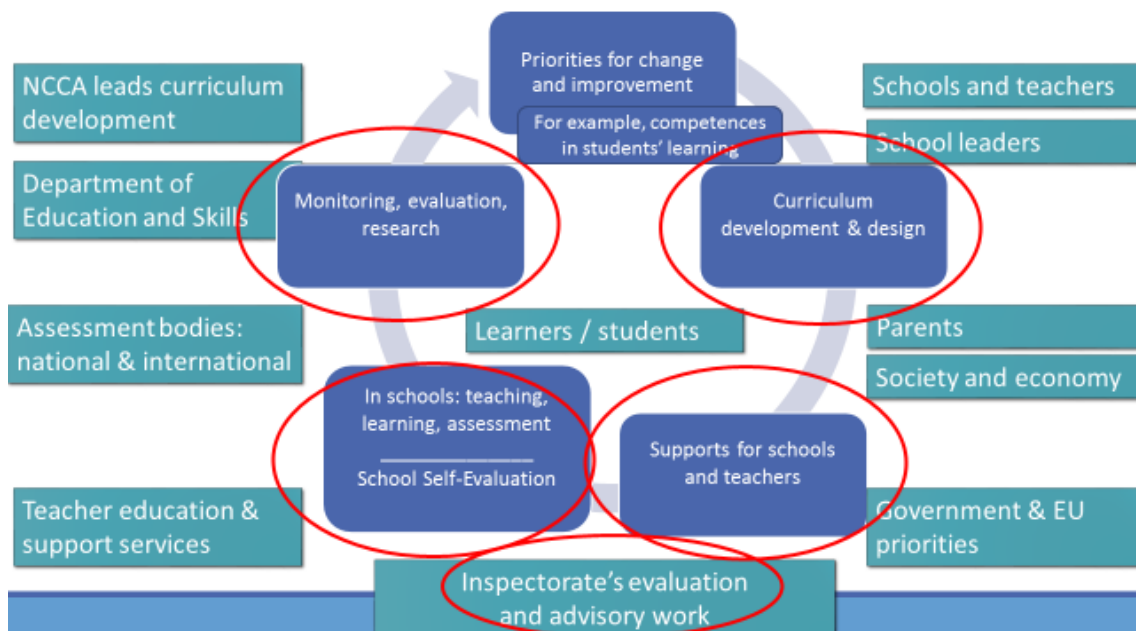
Embedding competences in curriculum design

The curriculum for primary and post-primary schools is determined by the Minister for Education and Skills who is advised by the [National Council for Curriculum and Assessment](#) (NCCA). The role of the NCCA is to lead developments in curriculum and assessment and to support the implementation of changes resulting from this work. The NCCA works in a spirit of consensus and partnership in terms of embedding competences in curricula and consults with teachers, school leaders, parents, business and community groups, the Ministry and others. The Inspectorate contributes views at NCCA working groups and at the NCCA Council that are informed by its work in schools.

Supporting teachers and schools to embed competences in schools

A number of support services provide professional development programmes for teachers and school leaders using a range of delivery modes. Drawing on its knowledge of and work in schools, the Inspectorate provides advice to the support services about their programmes when the programmes are being designed, and provides feedback to support services about the extent to which programmes are helping teachers.

Using self-evaluation and external inspection to help implement curriculum change and embed competences



The Inspectorate helps schools use self-evaluation to support and embed competences by providing guidelines, materials and online support on the school self-evaluation process and by developing and

publishing signposts of good practice for subjects and areas of learning. The Inspectorate also provides frequent advisory visits to schools to support self-evaluation.

Building on this work, the Inspectorate is very involved in the recently introduced [School Excellence Fund](#) where funding is provided to schools for innovative projects that would lead to better student outcomes. The Inspectorate advised on criteria for admission to the scheme with the criteria placing a strong emphasis on learning, collaborative working among teachers, leaders and school clusters, and development of targets. Inspectors act as critical friends to these cluster groups of schools.

The Inspectorate has also developed a set of standards - [Looking at Our School](#) - for use in their evaluation of schools and for schools to use in their own self-evaluation. Some inspection models focus on specific subjects or areas of learning and involve an inspector's observation of learners' skills and competences as well as teachers' practice to support competence development. The Inspectorate is currently working with students and parents to develop their voices during inspection.

The Inspectorate also recognises that challenging professional conversations are a really effective form of continuing professional development and has sought to develop inspection in ways that support collaborative professional practice.

Future challenges and opportunities

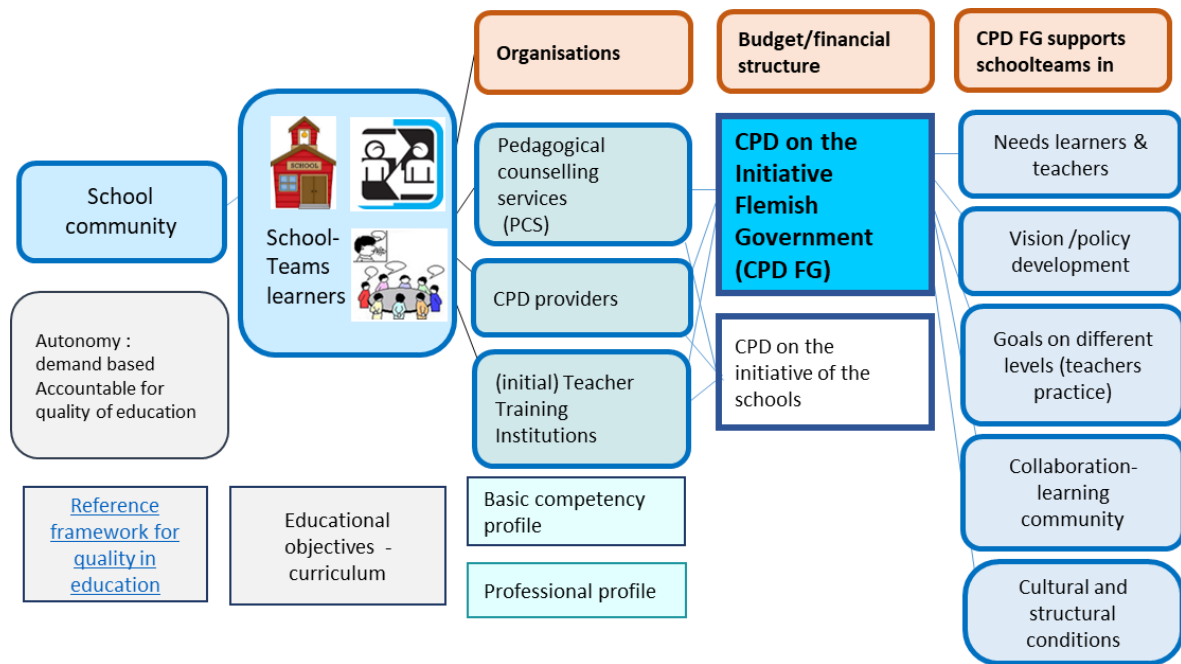
Despite this range of supports, schools still find setting realistic targets and monitoring implementation difficult, especially concerning curricular change. Although a culture of peer review is beginning to be developed, peer review between teachers is relatively weak and school leaders are somewhat reluctant to provide feedback to teachers. In addition, inspectors, particularly at post-primary level, were not all school leaders themselves but still are tasked with the evaluation of school leadership. Therefore, the Inspectorate is considering building a model of evaluation in which inspectors and school leaders engage jointly in a school-led self-evaluation process. This will enable both inspectors and school leaders to develop their skills together, provide a means of building on the collaboration between schools and the Inspectorate and allow for the implementation of change in teaching, learning and assessment that is prioritised by the school.

Belgium (Flemish Community)

Recent developments

The focus of this case study was on [continuing professional development as one of the options for external advice](#).

External organisations, such as Pedagogical counselling services, continuing professional development (CPD) providers or University colleges, develop 2-year, evidence-based CPD-projects. Only those projects which meet strategic goals and criteria as set by the Minister are selected for implementation. Schools are widely informed about the different CPD-projects and subscribe voluntarily to one of them. The capacity for participation is limited to about 20 schools per CPD-theme, but they are cost free. School teams are supported on different levels: policy at school level (vision and policy plans), working in teams (collaborative learning) and teachers' practice. The projects are largely tailored to school needs and opportunities.



Future challenges and opportunities

Needs and goals

- *Getting it right for every child and getting it right for every teacher* supports identification of needs of children and of teachers' professional learning. Analysis of strengths and weaknesses is the starting point for formulating realistic goals for improvement. These goals can relate to existing frameworks ([Reference framework for quality in education](#), competence profiles). The goals are the roadmap throughout the process.
- Schools make short- and long-term development plans. As schools are often overwhelmed, "planned abandonment" of some actions may bring some relief.
- The role of external support/advice (critical friends) is clarified.

Collaborative learning

- Hidden stakeholders and resources within a school team are identified. Types of teacher collaboration, including feedback and reflection are facilitated.
- Mentoring by expert teachers is a powerful method for supporting innovation. (Informal) networks between teachers support sustainable improvement.

Monitoring and evaluation

- The WHY of an innovation as well as tracking of implementation are important.
- Well-designed evaluation methodologies and accurate quantitative and qualitative indicators are important. Evaluation of changes in mindset is key. Basic questions for teacher reflection are: "What has changed in your thinking and practice? How do students evaluate this change?"
- Dialogue regarding the impact of the change on the teacher's professional identity is also important.
- Distributed school leadership is key to supporting all of these steps.

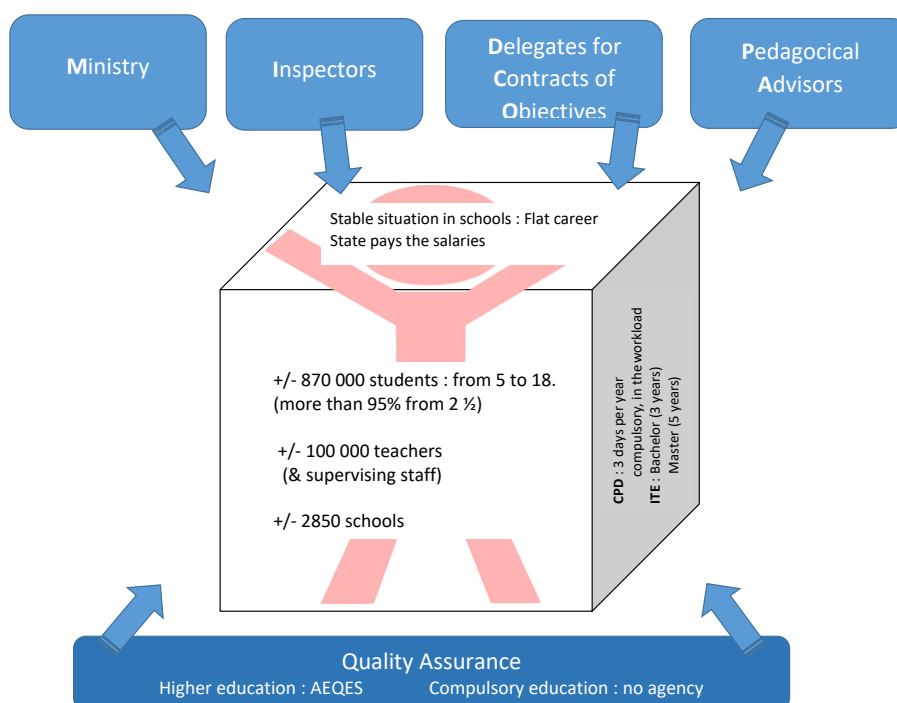
Belgium (French Community)

Recent developments

The *Pact for Excellence in Teaching* ("*Pacte pour un Enseignement d'Excellence*") is a major reform introduced in the last two years. One of its main goals is to guide every child to become an autonomous and responsible citizen, able to learn throughout life. Additional objectives are to improve teacher professionalism as members of a school team and expand the common core.

Reforms rely on teacher collaboration to implement school-level change. Distributed school leadership may enhance teacher professionalism. It is hoped that staff engagement will be improved by requiring a school steering plan with joint objectives.

As part of the reform, the common core is also increased to age 15, resulting in the rewriting of the reference guides to extend and redefine the knowledge and skills to be mastered. The aim is to improve the quality of education for students aged 2.5 to 15 years of age.



Future challenges and opportunities

Following the launch of the *Pact for Excellence in Teaching* reform, a new decree on the inspection service was approved. Inspections now take the form of audits. New inspection functions were also created. Specifically, inspectors will provide external advice on the steering plans written by schools and help them to achieve their objectives.

In addition, a pupil accompaniment file will be developed. This portfolio will follow each pupil throughout his/her school career.

New reference guides are also being rewritten. Moreover, the new steering plans for schools are intended to provide better opportunities to address individual teachers' and the school's continuing professional needs, and improve support by school leaders and pedagogical advisors.

Cyprus

Recent developments

School education in Cyprus is highly centralised, with school autonomy limited to areas such as teachers' choice of teaching methods and the head-teachers' right to manage a small budget for extra expenses of the school unit.

Overall responsibility for quality assurance rests with the Directorates of Primary, Secondary and Technical-Vocational Education of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. The Directorates are responsible both for supervising the public schools and appraising their teaching and management staff. School inspectors from each Directorate carry out school and teacher inspections. At the same time school inspectors, in cooperation with the Pedagogical Institute, support teachers to improve and develop their teaching practices, and support schools to develop their action plan.

Following the school inspection, the Inspector General prepares a comprehensive report covering all aspects of the school and submits it to the school authorities. The report follows predetermined guidelines, but it may also include additional comments. Achievements as well as weaknesses and limitations are recognised and suggestions are made for measures to be taken to address problem areas.

As part of the on-going dialogue on education reform, the current evaluation system of schools and teachers is under consideration. Major reforms restructuring the education system are usually based on views and suggestions of ad-hoc experts' committees. Public consultation with the various stakeholders is a common practice in the reform process. The teachers' and parents' organisations are considered as the main stakeholders in the process.

Future challenges and opportunities

Although a lot has been done, including reforms to continuing professional development and teacher recruitment, consensus on the reform concerning assessment and evaluation of schools and teachers has not been reached. The processes for effective cooperation, dialogue and engagement of all stakeholders need to be addressed again. An effective evaluation system can provide the feedback necessary for improvement through recognition of the teachers' and school leaders' work. Opportunities for progression to new career paths may further motivate teachers.

Czech Republic

Recent developments

The Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) has recently begun to work intensively to link external and internal school evaluation processes more effectively. The aim is to better support school and student development. This is done by sharing evaluation and assessment tools, teacher-specific feedback down to the student level, and methodological assistance. Inspectors collaborate to find ways to improve quality. The CSI inspection activities, along with national student testing, provide specific information about the school's work on student competences and learning outcomes.

The CSI organises school workshops on selected testing tasks (e.g. literacy/numeracy support). School founders/providers help to disseminate examples of good practice among schools, including support for special education needs, support for building individual competencies of students etc.

Future challenges and opportunities

Schools and their students benefit from teachers' professionalism, job satisfaction and the example they provide. Moreover, teachers who themselves have broad competences can better support students to develop their broad competences.

External evaluation should provide useful feedback and support to enhance quality improvement. This may include advice on how to streamline time-consuming administrative processes that overwhelm teaching; support to teachers dealing with students who are not so motivated; provision of continuing professional development opportunities aligned with needs. The CSI currently provides such feedback and is also prepared to provide more intensive support to school founders. In addition, the inspectors' role is to support schools in their self-evaluation processes, with particular attention to areas that strengthen teaching (i.e. the overall atmosphere of the school, conditions for teacher satisfaction, pupil well-being and parents' satisfaction).

It is the schools' responsibility to invite and listen to the voices of their students and parents, to create a culture of quality in the school with common understanding of what is perceived as quality (this may slightly vary from region to region), and to support students' broad competence development.

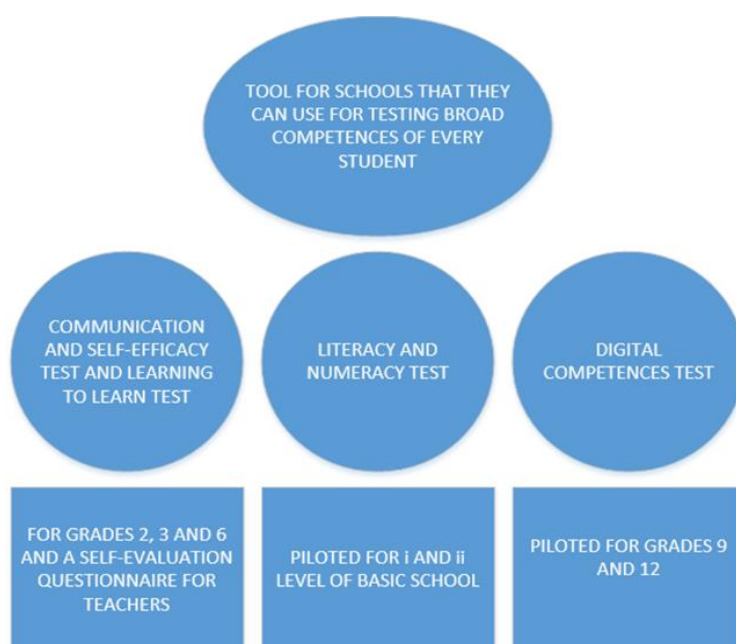
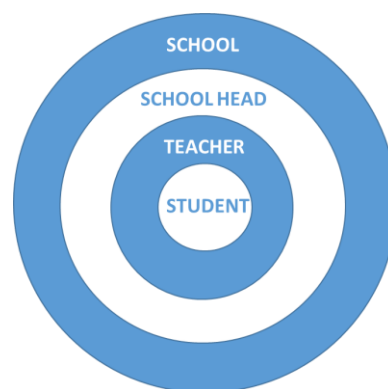
Estonia

Recent developments

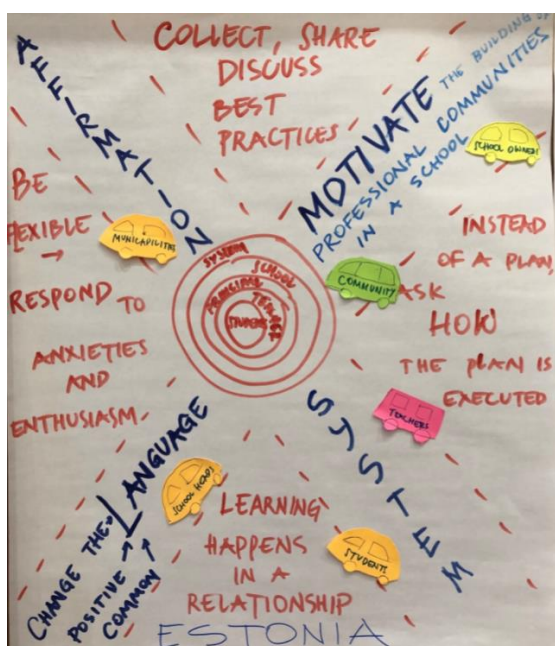
In Estonia, the Ministry of Education and Research supervises the legality of the activities of schools and their owners. Inspections focus on whether the necessary systems and policies are in place and implemented at the school and school owner level and whether the school has evaluated its activities and the impact of its work. Schools are required to carry out self-evaluation as an ongoing process to ensure the conditions to support student and school development.

The teachers' role is to observe how students develop and cope and, where necessary, adjust studies according to the needs and abilities of individual students. The owner of the school creates, and the head of school organises, opportunities for services of support specialists for all students who need it.

The state provides tools, guidelines, and data to support school self-evaluation. For example, tools that schools can use for testing broad competences of every student have been created centrally. These are digital tests banks. The test results are only seen by schools, and not used e.g. by the state.



Future challenges and opportunities



The main role of inspectors in the Estonia's decentralised school system is to evaluate strengths and areas for improvement across the school system. Schools evaluate their own strengths and areas for improvement in terms of broad competence development of every student (using appropriate tools) and ensure that every student is supported and his/her individual needs are considered. Inspectors monitor the adequacy of school self-evaluation, whether schools have offered support to all students, and have developed plans for future improvements.

Schools may have all necessary policies and systems in place and implemented, but this does not always ensure that all students get all necessary support. Therefore, it is important to inspire teachers and school principals. For that, it is important to be flexible and respond to anxieties and interests and to acknowledge that learning happens within the context of relationships.

It is important to discuss with schools what actions have been carried out to implement their development plans.

In addition, collecting and sharing best practices at each level of the school system should be encouraged and supported. Affirmation and motivation should be the leading forces in creating a common professional community.

Greece

The Greek education system does not have a culture of external advice or external intervention at the school level (general education). Attempts to establish a system of school improvement based on self-evaluation with the help of 'critical friends' (e.g. regional school advisors) coincided with the outbreak of the economic crisis and provoked strong protest on the part of teachers, who refused to participate in the process. The relevant reform was not implemented. The latest attempt to introduce a school improvement process was initiated by Law 4547/18, article 47 and ministerial decision no. 1816/GD4 (Official Gazette No 16/vol.2/11.01.2019) which specified the procedure for planning and evaluation of the school units' educational work. As with the 2013 law, implementation was suspended for the school year 2018-19. School self-evaluation is a high priority for the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, and the current framework is being pursued.

On 6 May 2020, the Government completed a public consultation on proposal for school improvements, including through the introduction of school evaluation. Further information is available on the [website](#).

Greece is thus an example of a culture of strong resistance to school accountability, and improvement. Resistance reflects a lack of trust. However, everyone admits that there is an urgent need to support schools and teachers to develop the broad competences needed by students and future graduates.

Italy

Recent developments

Following a school review, the external evaluation team completes a report. The structure of this report is similar to that of the school's own self-evaluation report, and follows the same theoretical framework. The report is in the form of rubrics, and includes the team's conclusions in each area evaluated; the reasons for the findings; and suggestions on priorities and improvement objectives to be reconsidered.

The coordinator of the Evaluation Team – an inspector – visits the school after there has been an opportunity to review and comment the external report. During the meeting between the inspector and the school, participants can share opinions in an open atmosphere, which facilitates dialogue and reflection on areas for improvement identified in the evaluation report.

Social reporting is the final phase of the cycle of school evaluation (the first round of which was completed at the end of 2019). Schools give an account of aims, activities and results, actions and aims set out in the evaluation process, steps taken and results.



Future challenges and opportunities

Social reporting is intended to support school autonomy. Schools need to reflect on their work in order to pursue continuous improvement. They may need to reformulate educational and organisational priorities, targets, and practices in order to improve results.

The dissemination of social reports to internal and external stakeholders should facilitate stakeholders' sense of belonging and support collaboration both inside and outside the school. It also should enhance the work done by the various professionals.

Schools need support to ensure that social reporting nurtures responsibility and broad stakeholder involvement in identifying needs, reaching consensus on priorities, and monitoring and results.

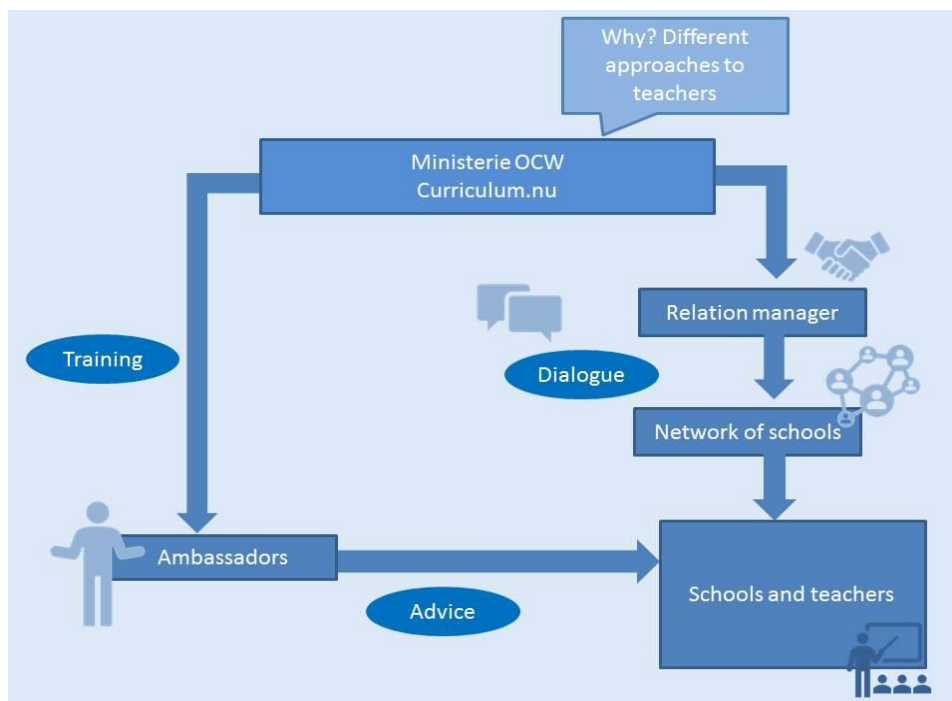
The Netherlands

Recent developments

The Dutch education system is highly decentralised, with school boards as the main providers of education. School boards select and hire teachers, design a school-specific curriculum (to complement the core curriculum), and choose learning materials and assessment tools (with the exception of the 'matura' examination). Since the early 2000's, school boards and school leaders have been free to choose from a wide range of external advisors, both private and semi-public training and consultancy providers. At the

same time, a strong Inspectorate guarantees a minimum level of education quality. Inspectors visit boards and schools regularly, and supervise schools that perform less well.

In 2014, the education ministry initiated a curriculum renewal process. To prepare for a new curriculum, 9 'building blocks' were developed, primarily subject-centred, and integrating cross-curricular skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, entrepreneurship and self-regulation.)



Future challenges and opportunities

Following parliamentary deliberations in March 2020, the curriculum building blocks will be translated to attainment targets, and laid down in law. The attainment targets will be developed by teams of teachers, school leaders and experts, and will be simultaneously piloted.

The Ministry is also developing a comprehensive strategy to keep school leaders, teachers and students informed. One of the big challenges is to develop a common understanding of the skills needed for the current and future society, in a diversified field of schools, teachers, teacher training institutes and external advisers.

Another big challenge is building capacity among teachers and school leaders. A support structure that is aligned to the aims and rationale of the renewed curriculum and responsive to school choice is needed. In the diversified field of external advice, this alignment will be challenging.

Norway

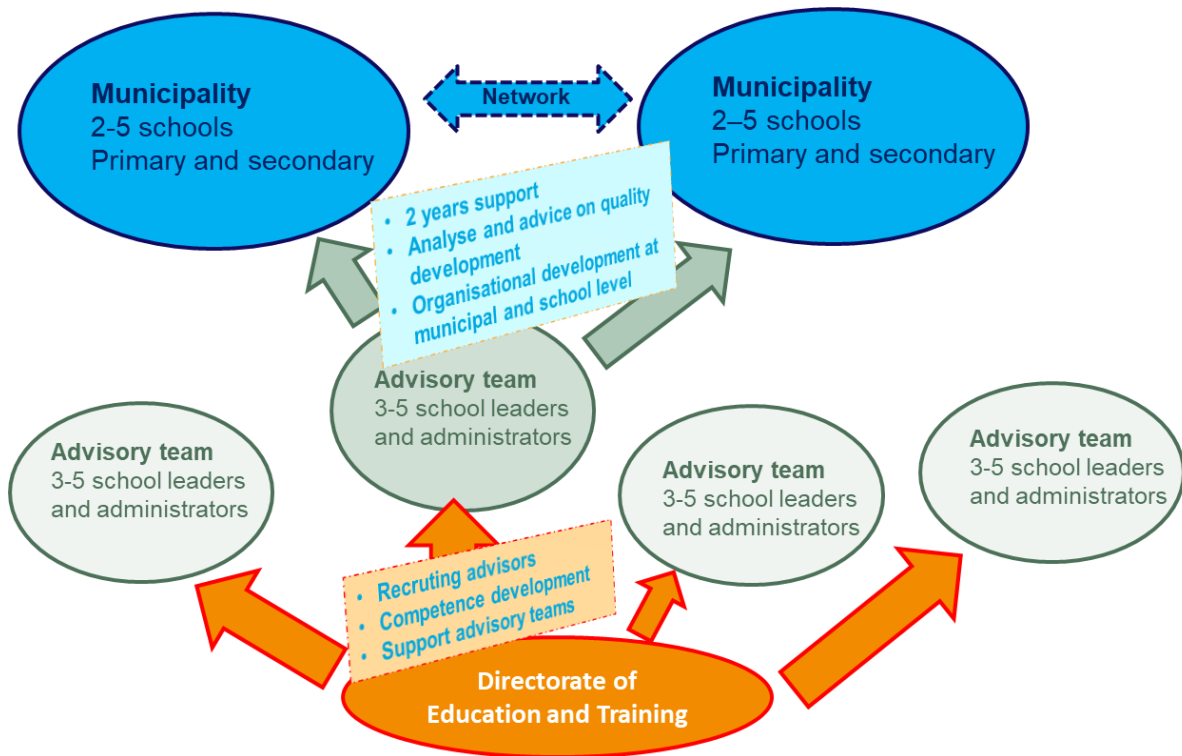
Recent developments

The Advisory Team programme was established in 2009, and since then more than 130 – about one third of all municipalities – have participated in the programme. The Advisory Team supports evaluation and analysis of local challenges, and advises on quality improvement programmes in local organisations.

Experienced school-leaders and municipal-level school-administrators (i.e. school owners) are recruited nationally and organised in teams of 3-5 members with broad competences for quality assessment and

development. Over two years, advisory teams offer their support to municipalities where primary and/or secondary schools have demonstrated low quality over a period of time.

The main focus has been to support organisational development both at municipal and school level, to ensure that schools and municipalities have the capacity and competence to take responsibility for continuous development in their organisations, also after the Advisory Team programme ends. The Directorate of Education and Training, an agency under the Ministry of Education and Research, administers the programme and provides training and support.



Future challenges and opportunities

Over the past decade, the Advisory Team programme, along with several other national initiatives, has helped to establish national awareness of the latest research and theories on quality school evaluation and development. It has also been an important tool to stimulate local competence and capacity for quality development, and not only in the municipalities that have received support from the Advisory Teams but also in the advisors' home municipalities. One of the biggest ongoing challenges is how to ensure that all municipalities are capable of maintaining quality development.

Portugal

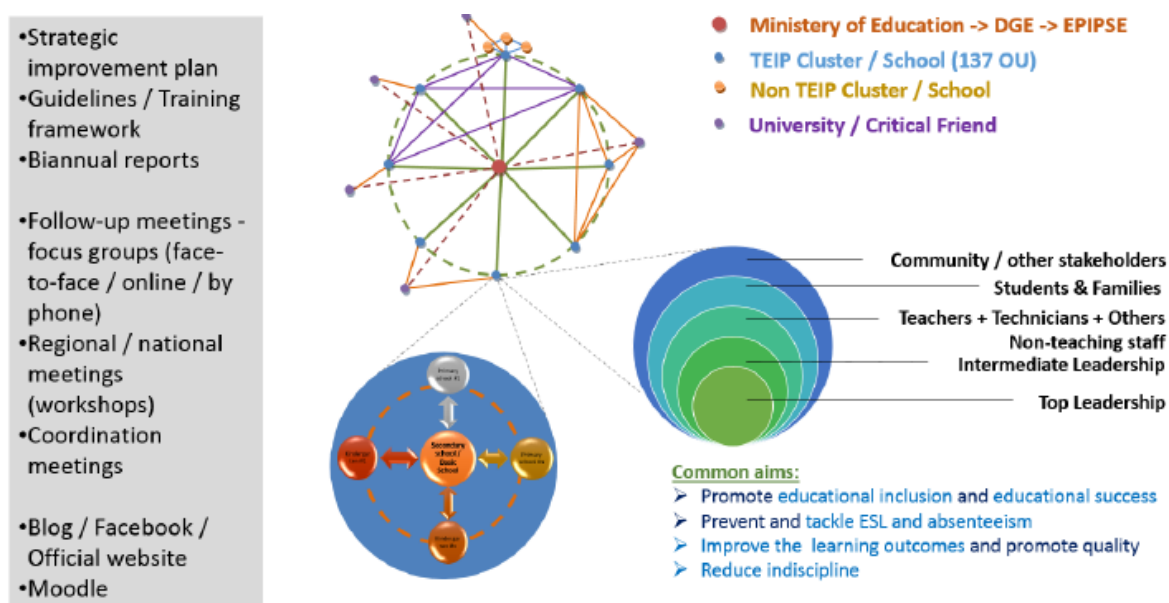
Recent developments

Within the strategic framework for European cooperation in education, Portugal has developed several measures to raise school quality and thus to promote equity and social inclusion. The 'Student Profile' with aims for student achievement at the end of compulsory school, underpins the National Pedagogical Innovation and Curricular Flexibility Policy, the Inclusive Education and a National Strategy for Education for Citizenship.

The [Curricular Flexibility Policy](#) allows school clusters to collaborate to develop localised solutions. Regional teams promote networking between teachers, technicians, middle and top leaders, families, critical friends and institutions of higher education. Inspectors also support teaching and learning and student achievement, and encourage school self-evaluation.

The [Priority Intervention Educational Territories Programme \(TEIP\)](#) supports inclusion in schools and school clusters located in the most disadvantaged regions. This programme calls for networking with the community. It is supported by wider networks. The Directorate-General for Education is in charge of monitoring and evaluating the programme.

Lisbon University network, [REDESCOLA](#) (School-network) is an initiative of IE-ULisboa, with inter-institutional links in the field of teacher education and research. It promotes research-informed debate and joint reflection on current issues, and opportunities for research projects and partnerships based on shared interests.



Future challenges and opportunities

Network support teams have developed their know-how through experience. However, constant reflection is necessary for effective and sustainable support policies.

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Annex – list of participants

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| Estonia | Margit TIMAKOV | President, Estonian Association of Teachers |
| Greece | Evangelia PANTA | Policy officer, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs |
| Ireland | Harold HISLOP | Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Skills |
| Ireland | Mary GILBRIDE* | Assistant Chief Inspector, Department of Education and Skills |
| Italy | Diana SACCARDO* | Inspector |
| Italy | Marina IMPERATO | School Principal |
| The Netherlands | Rien ROUW | Strategic Advisor, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science |
| The Netherlands | Fleur RENIRIE | Advisor, Curriculum.nu |
| Norway | Håvard LUNNAN | Senior Adviser, Ministry of Education and Research, Department of Kindergartens and Schools |
| Norway | Are SOLSTAD | Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training |
| Portugal | Elsa BELO* | Teacher on secondment |
| Portugal | Estela COSTA | Deputy Director, Institute of Education, University of Lisbon |
| ATEE | Kay LIVINGSTON* | Research and Development; also Professor of Educational Research, University of Glasgow |
| ECSWE | Georg JÜRGENS* | Managing Director, ECSWE |
| ETUCE | Hans LAUGESEN | Senior Education Policy Officer, Denmark, representing ETUCE |
| European Commission | Dita KUDELOVÁ* | Policy Officer – Quality assurance |
| European Commission | Janet LOONEY* | Consultant |

