

Abstract

According to the Court of Audit, school inspection needs valid pupils' results

School inspection plays a crucial role in the external control of the quality of teaching, alongside surveys and international comparative studies. The Court of Audit considers that the Flemish school inspection performs its tasks in a professional, independent and efficient way. However, its work is hampered by the fact that it doesn't have sufficient valid pupils' results at its disposal. Moreover, it is difficult to determine whether the standards it has to apply are the final attainment levels or the study programmes. The school inspection also lacks criteria for evaluating the internal control of the teaching quality inside schools. There is a risk that inspection reports might not give a correct picture of the quality of the education provided in a school.

Regulatory framework

The Flemish authorities have successfully converted their vision of quality control in the 2009 decree on the quality of education. Some principles of this vision were however less developed, which complicates the task of the school inspection. Under the decree, every school is responsible for assessing and checking systematically the quality of teaching, but there is no standard of internal quality control in schools. Besides, the decree provides that the school inspection must use a reference framework resting on the output (performance data), among other things, but the authorities have hardly developed any tools or criteria guaranteeing the validity of a school's output data. It is also unclear whether the school inspection must assess the teaching against the final attainment levels and development objectives or the study programmes. The decree also lacks provisions on the accountability of schools.

Organizational framework

The organizational framework enables the school inspection to perform its tasks in a professional, independent and efficient way. Its autonomy should be maintained. It should also improve its internal quality control by focussing on the issue of equal treatment of schools.

Elaboration of the inspection

The school inspection has worked out its inspection method in a thorough, but also complex way. It appropriately examines the teaching provided against the learning objectives, but its focus is limited compared to the decree on the quality of education, under which it must also check whether the school complies with education regulations. There is a general lack of clear criteria, e.g. for determining the scope of the inspection, the evaluations and judgments.

Inspection in practice

As the school inspection doesn't have a sufficient number of well-established performance data, there is a risk that the inspection focus may not be representative. There is not always evidence that the inspectors found their judgments on performance data. Because of the limited possibility of making an evaluation based on output, the school inspection might focus its efforts on process control, in spite of the lack of norms resulting from the schools' autonomy. The inspection reports do not give a full view of the schools' output or efficiency. They are not always written in accessible language, which reduces their usefulness for parents and pupils.

How do the authorities follow up on inspection reports?

An unfavourable judgment from the school inspection theoretically entails the withdrawal of the school's validation. This has never happened so far, as the authorities' foremost aim is to encourage schools to improve their functioning. Besides the inspection reports, annual reports called « education mirrors » (*onderwijsspiegels*) provide an image of the teaching quality, but they are also limited by the lack of pupils' results. Surveys and international studies, however, manage to provide such an image in spite of the incomplete data. The authorities could resort more to the school inspection's expertise when preparing the policy.

Minister's response

Apart from a few reservations, the minister has generally declared himself in agreement with most of the Court's findings and recommendations.

The audit report on “Inspecting the quality of education” has been sent to the Flemish Parliament.

The full version can be found on the Court's website (www.ccrek.be).

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