

Belgium – German speaking Community

External evaluation of schools

1. Purpose of external evaluation and responsible bodies

External evaluation has been compulsory since January 2009. It is carried out by a department for external evaluation established within the only higher education institution in the German speaking Community. This department falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Education.

The German-speaking Community sees evaluation as an important tool for quality assurance and ensuring the improvement of schools and teaching.

The purposes of external school evaluation are to:

- encourage school improvement and teaching development
- establish comparability based on quality standards
- facilitate accountability among independent schools
- provide an evidence base for monitoring the education system in the German speaking Community of Belgium

2. Evaluators

The three people currently involved in carrying out external evaluation of schools are full-time employees of the higher education institution department which carries out the external evaluation. Evaluators must have a teaching qualification for one of the levels of education being evaluated (primary, lower or upper secondary education). When a school is being evaluated, at least one of the evaluators must be qualified for the level of education provided by the school. Evaluators must have at least five years' teaching experience.

The persons responsible for the external evaluation must not have any involvement in the school development council (a department of the ministry of education) or the school inspection services which both have a role in supporting schools implement improvements following external evaluation (see point 5 below). There is thus a clear separation of functions between external evaluation and school improvement support services.

Candidates for external evaluator roles must undertake intensive training provided by Ministry of Education and Training of North Rhine-Westphalia. This several months' training addresses various aspects of the evaluation process, including the evaluation framework (parameters and standards); evaluation techniques; principles

of communication; conflict management and team work; as well as methods for producing evaluation reports. This close cooperation with North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany and – additionally – the Flemish Community of Belgium, results in regular refresher training for the external evaluators.

3. Evaluation framework

The guiding framework for school quality¹ first published in 2009, and constantly adapted since then is the first document published by the German-speaking Community of Belgium which systematically describes a set of core characteristics and standards for good schools.

The framework identifies currently three quality areas:

1. Learning and teaching
2. School culture
3. Leadership and school management

These three areas are further subdivided into 23 quality aspects. These quality aspects are associated with 48 compulsory standards of quality combined with 21 standards selectable by the school members, including 8 focusing on classroom observation. The external evaluators use the quality standards to give the school a score between one and four, for each of the standards of quality of the evaluation framework except those focusing on classroom observation. The four levels are described as 'exemplary', 'more strengths than weaknesses', 'more weaknesses than strengths', and 'greatly in need of improvement'.

The standards focusing on classroom observation are reported as percentaged value of observed standard to the entirety of observations made.

4. Procedures

External evaluation is carried out at all schools in a five-year cycle.

The school management and the school 'organizing body' receive three months notification of the planned external evaluation (excluding school holidays).

¹ <https://static.ahs-ostbelgien.be/wp-content/uploads/2002orientierungsrahmen-schulqualitt.pdf>

The evaluation team decides the length of the school visit and the procedures to be included taking into account: the number of students, the size of school and whether there is a German- and French-speaking department.

Each external evaluation is based on a standardized method and uses standardized instruments, which include:

- a preliminary analysis of various documents (School policy documents in educational and organizational areas, student performance data, self-evaluation documents, school prospectus, factual data on staff, information on resources and buildings);
- online questionnaires for not teaching staff including secretaries and caretaker, teachers, parents, students, school management and school 'organizing body' covering. life at school, teaching in the school, information provided about teaching and learning, parental involvement and satisfaction levels, management and infrastructure;
- a school visit, concerning the infrastructure (Building and schoolyard) to which the school 'organizing body' is invited by the school head;
- observations of lessons of at least 50% of teachers (except classes in philosophical subjects and ethics);
- individual and group interviews with school management, teachers, pupil representatives, parents and non-teaching staff addressing the various topics included in the guiding framework for school quality (see point 3);
- initial verbal feedback to school management and teachers followed by written feedback.

About five weeks after the school visit, the school head and the school 'organising body' receive a draft of the evaluation report. The school management is obliged to inform the school members about this draft and, together with staff, follow the 'feedback protocol to the draft report'. At this stage, schools may ask for an additional optional feedback conference.

During the feedback conference, the draft report is discussed by the evaluation team with the school management, the pedagogical council² or a representative of the teaching staff, the school 'organising body' and possibly the school development

² The pedagogical council is composed of the school head, representatives of the school 'organising body', as well as at least five members of staff including teaching, education assistance, paramedical and social and sometimes students.

council (see Section II). The evaluation team may consider the comments of the school in the evaluation report.

The evaluation report is sent to the school and the school 'organising body' 9 weeks at the latest after the school visit. The school has the opportunity to formulate a written reply within five working days of the receipt of the evaluation report. It will be added to the report.

5. Outcomes of external evaluation

After the external evaluation, the school analyses the evaluation report and other available data (average results for the German speaking Community in standardised tests such as DELF (French language proficiency tests), PISA, etc., as well as performance studies and internal evaluation results). The school then develops its own goals and measures for quality assurance and school improvement.

The school decides whether to ask for support in this process and who to approach, for example, the school development council in the pedagogical department of the ministry of education, subject councils of the higher education institution or external experts (see Section II). The school head is responsible for this school process and, using a standard form, must inform the school inspection service within six months of receipt of the evaluation report of the school's new goals for quality assurance and development. After setting its goals, the school carries out its planned improvement measures. In cooperation with the school, the school inspection service normally monitors a school's progress towards the goals it has set for quality assurance and improvement, and checks are carried out at least every two years. However, in cases of serious deficiencies, the evaluation team may decide that a re-evaluation is necessary. This re-evaluation takes place 16 months after the receipt of the evaluation report and refers only to the quality assurance goals set by the school in response to the report.

6. Reporting of external evaluation findings

The evaluation team sends the school evaluation report including the written reply of the school if available and any observations to the Minister of Education, Research and Child Care. Within 20 working days of receipt, the school head provides the evaluation report to all groups involved in the external evaluation (teachers, school 'organizing body', etc.) and the Department of Education in the Ministry for information.