

Inspectorate Profile

Externe Evaluation in Eastern Belgium, Belgium

November 2024

1. Overview of the Inspectorate

Age of inspectorate

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.

Structure of inspectorate

The External Evaluation Department is responsible for evaluating all schools in Eastern Belgium. In Belgium, the three communities (German-speaking community, French-speaking community and Flemish-speaking community) organize their own school system.

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:

- help schools with a view from the outside to drive their own school development in self-responsibility
- encourage school improvement and teaching development
- establish comparability based on quality standards
- facilitate accountability among independent schools.

Size

The two people currently involved in carrying out external evaluation of 67 schools are full-time employees of the higher education institution 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 third position of evaluator is currently vacant.

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 both of which have a role in supporting schools implement improvements following external evaluation. 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 the Ministry of Education and Training of North Rhine-Westphalia. This eight 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 results in regular refresher training for the external evaluators.

It is important to understand the difference between External Evaluation, School Development Advice and School Inspection in Eastern Belgium: The External Evaluation Department evaluates the school as a system, the School Inspection evaluates individual persons, and the School Development Advice service advises school principals and groups of teachers.

Remits

All schools from kindergarten to primary, secondary schools and schools for special education are regularly (every 5 years) evaluated. It is essential that an evaluator of the evaluation team has formerly taught in the school system under evaluation.

Unit of inspection

Both individual schools and school centres are evaluated. In the case of larger school centres, it is agreed with the school management whether the external evaluation gives global feedback or whether each school community receives its own feedback. This is particularly important in school centres where the different communities work very differently.

Purpose of inspectorate

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The purposes of external school evaluation are to:

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What is your strapline/motto?

Help schools to help themselves for effective and sustainable school development to improve learning processes.

Relationship with government

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, the tasks of which are described in a

decree¹, falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Education, with whom we have regular meetings to discuss the procedure.

The External Evaluation Department produces an activity report every 3 years, which is presented to the Parliament of the German-speaking Community.

Accountability

The Autonomous School for Higher Education in the German-speaking Community is responsible for external evaluation of schools.

The objective of the external evaluation is to check whether and to what extent the schools are fulfilling the mission of the Ministry as defined in this decree.

The government, the school administrators and the department for education and training in the ministry of the German-speaking community submit an overall report on the strengths and weaknesses of schools every three years based on the individual reports of the schools evaluated.

The external evaluators prepare a report based on an internationally recognised quality framework approved by the government, which is submitted to the government, the school authority and the school being evaluated.

If the external evaluation shows that the quality of training activities at a school is not adequate, the external evaluators determine a time frame within which the school concerned will present a detailed plan to remedy these quality defects. In the course of a time-bound follow-up evaluation, external evaluators check the effectiveness of these measures.

The external evaluators then prepare a report on the results of the post-evaluation, which is submitted to the government, the school administration and the school being evaluated.²

Impact of inspections

6 months after the evaluation report, the school must develop a prioritised school development plan on its own responsibility and submit it to the school inspection. If necessary, the External Evaluation Department can also hold a handover meeting during which it will relate the school's development goals to the report's development potential. The school inspection and, if necessary, the school development advice and/or specialist advice help the school to achieve the school development goals until the next external evaluation.

An evaluation of the impact as such is not available but the schools will be further accompanied.

Quality assurance of inspections

¹ 31 August 1998 - Decree on the mandate to the school authorities and the school staff as well as on the general pedagogical and organizational provisions for [regular and support schools]

² 31 August 1998 - Decree on the mandate to the school administration and staff as well as on the general pedagogical and organizational provisions for [regular and support schools]

The External Evaluation Department ensures the highest possible quality, validity, objectivity and reliability by:

- comprehensive training of evaluators in all parts of the evaluation process
- a school-fit selection of highly competent evaluators
- the use of scientifically proven models and tools which are regularly adapted to changing circumstances
- highly standardised instruments of evaluation and procedures
- use of IQES online surveys for a broad participation of school actors
- cross-check the criteria-based assessment of school documents, interviews, teaching observations, IQES surveys, school visits
- evaluation in small, consistent teams that calibrate again and again
- network with other evaluators nationally and internationally and get feedback
- constant training and mentoring programmes to develop and maintain evaluation expertise
- being in constant contact with the schools and school inspection and school development advice
- collaboration with school inspection, school development advice and specialists in terms of providing support to schools and teachers
- answer questions of newly formed teachers
- getting feedback from the evaluated schools regarding the evaluation process and the evaluation report and include these incentives for improvement
- developing a digital tool for evaluation to accelerate and standardize the reports
- reporting regularly to the Minister of Education and integrate the focus of its policy
- report improvements on our next visit
- close collaboration and observation of evaluation processes with North Rhine-Westphalia
- collaborate with national and international inspectorates to see the evolution otherwise and collect new input from experts.

2. Evaluation process

Self-evaluation

We encourage schools to self-evaluate on their different developmental steps and we see these self-evaluations. The online evaluation portal IQES was made available to all schools in Eastern Belgium, making it very easy to create and evaluate surveys.

As participation and the pursuit of smart goals is an important feature of our evaluation, the school must involve its contributors and check the achievement of their goals.

Focus of inspection

As all schools are evaluated on a 5-year basis, the framework is the same for all. The evaluation takes 45 mandatory criteria from the quality grid into account and additionally evaluates the teaching by carrying out a criterion-based lesson observation with at least 50% of teachers.

The school groups (students, teachers, parents, non-teaching personal, school management...) can choose additional criteria from the table, to which they want feedback from the External Evaluation Team.

Inspection framework

The quality grid for school quality³ was first published in 2009 in the German Speaking Community of Belgium, and has been constantly adapted since then. It 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 reference framework, based on scientific evidence, on which the grid is based will be adapted soon.

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

- a preliminary analysis of various documents (School curriculum and its relation to the legal requirements (framework plans); 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 non-teaching staff including secretaries and caretaker, teachers, parents, students, school management and school board 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 board is invited by the school headmaster;
- 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);

This information, which we have read, seen and heard, allows us to assess the criteria of the quality grid.

The grid identifies currently four quality areas:

1. Teaching and Learning
2. School culture
3. Professionalization
4. Leadership and school management.

These four areas are further subdivided into 25 quality aspects. These quality aspects are associated with 45 compulsory standards of quality (criteria) combined with 28 criteria selectable by the school members, including 9 focusing on classroom observation. The Minister of Education can set his priorities in teaching policy by means of the mandatory criteria.

The external evaluators use the quality criteria to give the school a score between A and E, for each of the standards of quality of the evaluation framework except those focusing on classroom observation. The five levels are described as:

- not yet in view of the school development processes.
- implementation has been started.
- sustainable development status has been achieved.
- guaranteed implementation.

³ <https://static.ahs-ostbelgien.be/wp-content/uploads/2002orientierungsrahmen-schulqualitt.pdf>

- comprehensively and sustainably established.

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

Inspection time and resources

The school management and the school board receive three months notification of the planned external evaluation (excluding school holidays). The evaluation team (2-3 evaluators) decides with the school management the duration of the school visit (at least one week) and the procedures to be included considering the number of students, the size of school and whether there is a German- and French-speaking department.

The initial verbal feedback to school management and teachers on the last day of the school visit is followed by written feedback.

About five weeks after the school visit, the school head and the school board 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 council⁴ or a representative of the teaching staff, the school board and possibly the school development council. The evaluation team may consider the comments of the school.

The evaluation report is sent to the school, the school board and the minister of education 9 weeks at the latest after the school visit. The school can formulate a written reply within five working days of the receipt of the evaluation report. It will be added to the report.

The two people currently involved in carrying out an 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 third position of evaluator is currently vacant.

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Candidates for external evaluator roles must undertake intensive training provided by the Ministry of Education and Training of North Rhine-Westphalia. This eight months' training addresses various aspects of the evaluation process, including the evaluation framework

⁴The pedagogical council is composed of the school head, representatives of the school board, as well as at least five members of staff including teaching, education assistance, paramedical and social and sometimes students.

(parameters and standards); evaluation techniques; principles of communication, conflict management and teamwork; as well as methods for producing evaluation reports and their skills must be certified⁵. This close cooperation with North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany results in regular refresher training for the external evaluators.

Frequency of inspections

External evaluation is carried out at all schools in a five-year cycle. The school management and the school board receive three months notification of the planned external evaluation (excluding school holidays).

Non-inspection activities

The External Evaluation Department has a variety of tasks such as:

- Participation in various bodies such as the Continuing Education Commission, the Academic Council of the Higher Education in Eastern Belgium etc.
- Advice on the new orientation of teacher education
- Participation in the preparation of framework plans for primary and secondary schools
- Participation in the House Education Committee
- Participation in school directors' meetings
- Information events for new teachers.

3. Consequences of inspection

Reporting

The evaluation report including the written reply of the school if available and any observations is sent to the school administration, the school board and the Minister for Education, Training and Employment.

The head of school is responsible within 20 working days of receipt, for distributing the report to the school groups and decides autonomously whether to publish it. He is responsible for adapting the school development goals and communicating them to the school inspection.

The External Evaluation Department produces a report on the activity report every 3 years, which is publicly discussed in the Parliament of the German-speaking Community

Grading

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:

⁵ June 27, 2005 - Decree on the creation of an autonomous university

- help schools with a view from the outside to drive their own school development in self-responsibility
- encourage school improvement and teaching development
- establish comparability based on quality standards
- facilitate accountability among independent schools.

Therefore, we don't believe in grading schools. Each one of them does its best and should be supported in their improvement at their stage of development.

Sharing inspection findings

All our findings and instruments are published on our webpage.⁶

What happens following an inspection?

After the external evaluation, the school analyses the evaluation report and other available data (average results for the German speaking Community in standardized tests such as DELF (French language proficiency tests), PISA, etc., as well as performance studies and internal evaluation results). The school then develops autonomously 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 specialists of the higher education institution for primary schools or specialist specialists from the Ministry for secondary schools or even 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 (at the Ministry) 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 <https://www.ahs-ostbelgien.be/forschung-und-entwicklung/externe-evaluation/>