

Inspectorate Profile

Estonian Ministry of Education and Research September 2024

1. Overview of the Inspectorate

Age of inspectorate

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the provision of education is inspected by the national government. The inspection of educational institutions and their actions' legality is carried out by the Ministry of Education and Research. There is no separate inspectorate in Estonia.

Structure of inspectorate

The inspection of educational institutions and their actions' legality is carried out by the Ministry of Education and Research. The main goal of inspection is to ensure the accessibility of education, also the organisation of education and schooling, its quality and efficiency on equal bases. The special character of the Estonian system is the emphasis on the legal aspects of quality assurance. Inspectors examine whether the legal requirements found in the legislature concerning the administration of schools, as well as the attainment of minimum requirements set out by the national curriculum (established by a governmental decree) are followed by the school owner, director and staff. In this way, the Estonian model is a unique one compared to the practice of most EU member states, which emphasise pedagogical evaluation.

For cases in the area of administrative inspection (primarily administrative and economic activities), applications for exercising administrative inspection may be submitted to the owner of an educational institution. Administrative inspection controls the legality and purposefulness of administration and activities.

The administrative inspection in local governments is conducted by the local municipality or city government. Therefore, the inspection of state schools is exercised by the Ministry of Education and Research.

Thematic inspection is carried out to evaluate a relevant, albeit more narrow subject within educational institutions. The latest example of thematic inspections (currently ongoing) are related to the transition to Estonian language-only teaching in public schools.

Size

There are 13 officials in the unit of supervision within the department of legal and personnel policy of the Ministry of Education and Research. The primary task of eight officials is to organise the conduct of inspection in preschools and schools of general education, and to participate in inspection visits. The teams that exercise inspections usually consist of 2–3 officials. An inspection official may include experts, for example officials from the Estonian Language Inspection.

Remits

Inspection is conducted in private, municipal and state schools. All pre-schools, primary schools, general secondary education schools, vocational education schools, higher education institutions, schools providing after school activities and adult training institutions are subject to inspection.

Unit of inspection

The Ministry carries out supervision over both educational institutions and their owners. As a rule, lessons and activities of individual teachers are not inspected in Estonia. In general, lessons are only inspected in case of complaints about a teacher or the teaching process. During inspection, the administration of an educational institution is interviewed as well as other stakeholders, such as the board of trustees, the owner, pedagogical and support staff – this is subject to change depending on necessity. During thematic supervision, lessons are also observed. The legal validity of all relevant school documents is verified.

Purpose of inspectorate

The main goal of inspection is to ensure the accessibility of education, and also the organisation of education and schooling, its quality and efficiency on equal bases. Inspection exercises control over education and schooling activities. Inspection arises from the constitutional duty to supervise the provision of education.

Accountability

By the end of each calendar year, the Ministry of Education and Research publishes an overview of the functioning of the education system which also includes conclusions and analysis of the results of inspections.

Impact of inspections

During the inspection, an overview of the effectiveness of educational institutions is obtained (since the education policy took effect). Summaries of the results of the inspectorate are prepared each academic year at the state level. The report is used for the determination of the best practices in educational institutions; for the training of directors and teachers of educational institutions; for the introduction of necessary changes to legislation; and for making decisions concerning education policy.

Quality assurance of inspections

The Ministry of Education and Research has conducted surveys in inspected schools in order to receive feedback concerning the effectiveness of the inspections. The design of the monitoring can also be evaluated by the National Audit Office, Chancellor of Justice or an auditor.

Feedback is necessary for the rearrangement of the system and the self-development of each official. According to the results, the procedures are reviewed.

2. Evaluation process

Self-evaluation

In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Research established a mandatory requirement for internal evaluation in pre-primary institutions, general education institutions and vocational schools.

The objective of internal evaluation is to ensure conditions for child development and consistent development of the educational institution itself. This is done by identifying the strengths and areas for improvement for the institution. Based on that, an action plan for

implementation of the development plan is established. During the internal evaluation, the educational activities and administration are analysed and their effectiveness is evaluated. Internal evaluation is linked to the development plan of the institution, which is one of the mandatory basic documents for any educational institution operating in Estonia. Firstly, they will analyse their performance and then prepare a development plan.

The criteria of internal evaluation (leadership and administration, management of personnel, cooperation with interest groups, resource management, the education and schooling process; results related to a child/student, personnel and interest groups and statistics of the educational institution) are advisory to the educational institutions.

The methods for carrying out internal evaluation are chosen by the educational institutions. The national inspectorate will assess the methods of internal evaluation when conducting an inspection at an educational institution and make recommendations, where necessary.

Focus of inspection

Inspection exercises control over education and schooling activities. The main goal of inspection is to ensure the accessibility of education, and also the organisation of education and schooling, its quality and efficiency on equal bases. The fulfilment and implementation of legislation are inspected as well.

Inspection framework

Supervision is regulated by law, e.g. Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/504092024001/consolide>.

The following methods are used during the conduct of inspection:

- 1) analysis of statistical and financial reports, study results and other collected information, including analysis and verification of data in the Estonian Education Information System;
- 2) review of the educational institution's documentation and analysis of its content;
- 3) interviews with employees, members of the board of trustees (council), parents, students (children) and the owner of the educational institution; in the case of a state and private educational institution, with the representative of the local government in the location of the educational institution;
- 4) review of the learning and developmental environment of the educational institution, including education and schooling activities and its analysis.

Inspection time and resources

The inspection takes from 3 to 4 working days. The team that carries out an inspection usually consists of 2–3 officials. An inspection team may include experts. Inspectors exercising inspection are public servants and their positions are filled by public competition. The chief expert (inspector) of the Ministry of Education and Research proceeds in their activities from legislation regulating the activities of the ministry, the statutes of the external evaluation department and the job description. The job description also establishes requirements related to the education level, experience, knowledge and skills and personal qualities of the chief expert.

Frequency of inspections

Inspection is carried out on the basis of a yearly inspection plan. On average, the inspectorate carries out 20-40 inspections per academic year. The tendency of inspection is transitioning to risk-based evaluation. In order to collect information for organising and purposefully administering the education system, the official register "The Estonian Education Information System". The Estonian Education Information System (www.ehis.ee) provides everyone with an opportunity to review the performance indicators of educational institutions. Data

established by the minister's regulation are available for each educational institution. The goal of performance indicators is to provide educational institutions with an opportunity to monitor their indicators as a trend, e.g. compare the indicators of the last three years as well as compare them with average indicators of educational institutions of the same type. As performance indicators of educational institutions are publicly available, they also provide information about educational institutions to students, parents, owners of educational institutions and other interest groups. Performance indicators published in the Estonian Education Information System are also used in the preparation and carrying out of inspections. The performance indicators provide inspectors carrying out inspection with information to evaluate the performance of an educational institution.

Non-inspection activities

The Ministry of Education and Research handles individual queries related to the legality of education and schooling activities.

3. Consequences of inspection

Reporting

The reports of the inspections carried out by the Ministry of Education and Research are available on the ministry's website.

Grading

See below: (What happens following an inspection?)

Sharing inspection findings

Summaries of the results of inspectorate are published each academic year at the state level.

What happens following an inspection?

A report of inspection may include advisory proposals or compulsory requirements for the head or owner of an educational institution. In case of non-compliance with requirements, the sanctions are either a penalty payment or revoking of the education licence of the educational institution.