

4. THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

How are schools held accountable?

- Most countries use a combination of mechanisms to hold schools accountable, including performance and regulatory accountability.
- National examinations – a prominent component of performance accountability – are used in 23 of 35 countries at the upper secondary level, while national assessments are more commonly used at the primary and lower-secondary levels.
- School inspections – a prominent component of regulatory accountability – are more common than required self-evaluations; however, practices vary considerably across countries, particularly in terms of the frequency in which schools are inspected.

Significance

Accountability functions when those who are delegated authority have to account for what they are doing with this authority or responsibility. In education, elected or appointed government officials are legally responsible for ensuring that a nation's children and youth receive a quality education. Accountability thus often takes the form of collecting and sharing data, providing feedback, and making decisions based on the evidence received. School administrators demonstrate accountability to more senior education and political authorities, who in turn delegate responsibility to them to provide instruction.

Findings

Performance accountability focuses on school outcomes rather than processes. It has grown in importance over time partly due to growing interest in outcomes, as well as to the technological advances that have made it easier to test large populations of students.

National examinations are standardised tests that have formal consequences for students, such as an impact upon a student's eligibility to progress to a higher level of education or attainment of an officially recognised degree. National examinations are most prevalent at the upper secondary level and least prevalent at the primary level, where only 4 of 35 countries reported the existence of a national exam at that level. At the lower secondary level, 15 of 34 countries reported conducting national examinations.

The two subjects that are most commonly covered in national examinations include math, and the national language or language-of-instruction (reading, writing and literature). To a slightly lesser extent, modern foreign language,

science and social studies are also common subjects covered in national examinations (see Tables D5.6a, D5.6b and D5.6c, available only online in *Education at a Glance 2011*).

The key purposes of national assessments are to provide feedback to improve instruction and to show the relative performance of students. Some 22 of 34 countries reported using national assessments at the lower secondary level. Some 30 of 35 countries reported using national assessments in at least one subject at the primary level. Only 11 of 35 countries reported using national assessments at the upper secondary level.

A large portion of regulatory accountability, which focuses on compliance with relevant laws and regulations, focuses on inputs and processes within the school. Formal school inspection involves one or more trained inspectors to evaluate quality based on a standard procedure. The results of a school inspection are given to the school in a formal report and are used to identify strengths and weaknesses, as well as to justify rewards or sanctions. The reports are also made available to education authorities, parents, and the public. The topics or areas covered by school inspections are compliance with rules and regulations, quality of instruction and student performance. School inspections at the lower secondary level are required as a part of the accountability systems in 24 of 31 countries.

Definitions

Data are from the 2010 OECD-INES Survey on School Accountability and refer to the school year 2008-09.

Information on data for Israel:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

Going further

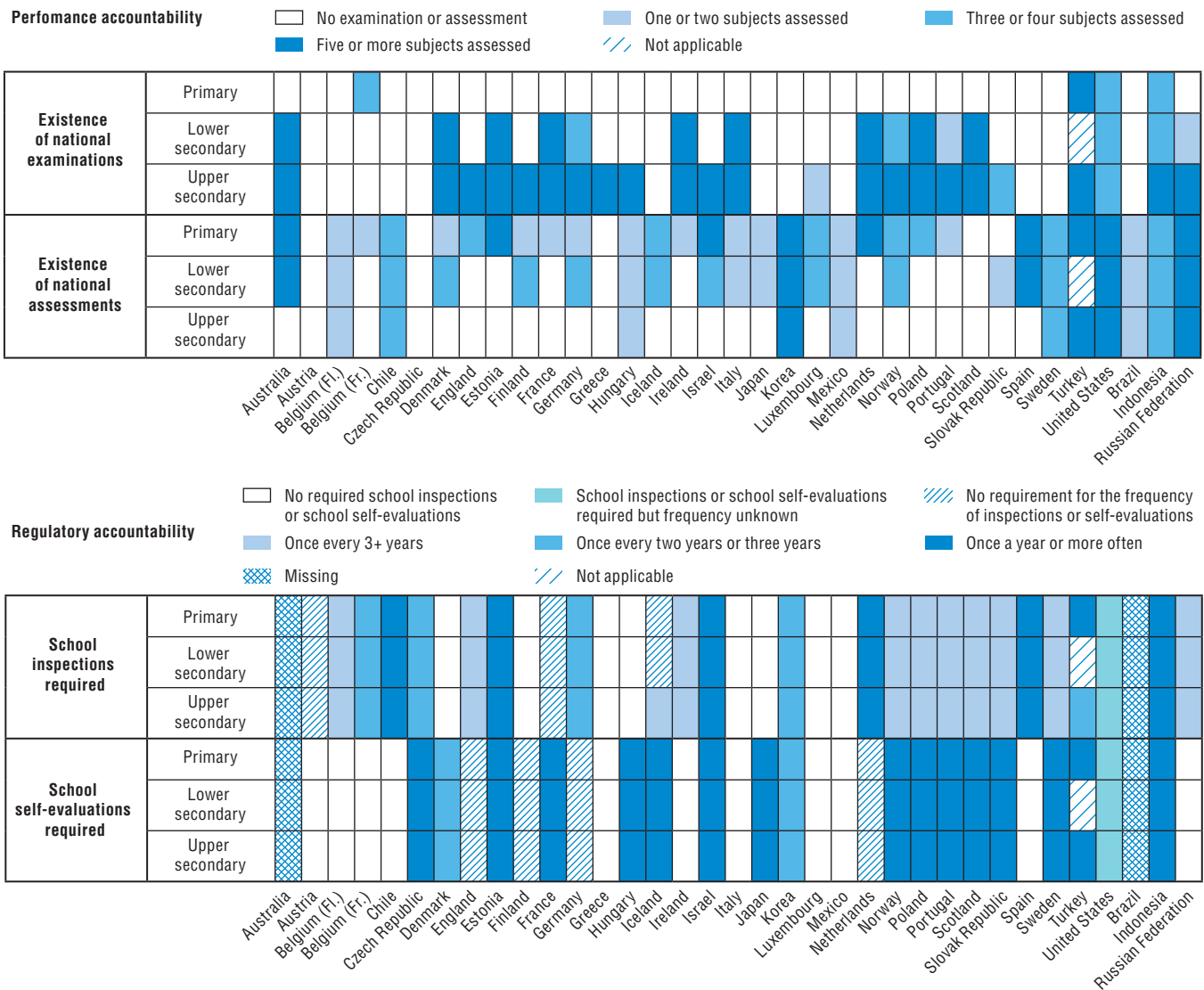
For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2011* (Indicator D5).

Areas covered include:

- National examinations and assessments.
- School inspections and self-evaluations.
- Market accountability.

Figure 4.9. Performance and regulatory accountability in public schools, 2009

This figure outlines the various mechanisms used by public schools to ensure performance accountability (national examinations, national assessments) and regulatory accountability (school inspections, school self-evaluations), by education level.



Source: OECD (2011), *Education at a Glance 2011*, Tables D5.4a, D5.4b, D5.4c, D5.6a, D5.6b, D5.6c, D5.7a, D5.7b, D5.7c, D5.10a, D5.10b, and D5.10c, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465626>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465645>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465664>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465702>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465721>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465740>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465759>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465778>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465797>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465892>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465911>; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932465930>.



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