

Chapter 5

School evaluation

There are two main forms of school evaluation in Portugal: school self-evaluation and school external inspection. The latter is the responsibility of the General Inspectorate of Education and Science. A first cycle of external school evaluations was conducted from 2006 to early 2011. It involved, for each school in the system, a sequence of activities comprising a self-reflection by the school, a visit by a team with inspectors and an external member, the publication of the team's report and, in some cases, an improvement plan for the school. A second cycle of external school evaluations was launched in the 2011/12 school year following a similar approach but with the introduction of the requirement of an improvement plan for each school inspected. A distinguishing feature of external school evaluation is that it does not involve the observation of teaching and learning in the classroom. The precise nature of school self-evaluation varies across schools as the legal requirement to undertake it does not come with a prescribed approach. Particularly positive features of school evaluation include the good establishment of external school evaluation; the features of best practice embodied in the external evaluation model; the transparency of the approach; the relationship established between self and external evaluation; the promotion of school leadership in school evaluation; and the evaluation of the inspections themselves. However, the development of school evaluation is faced with a number of challenges. These include the incipient culture of evaluation and improvement; the insufficient focus on learning and teaching; the incipient development of school self-evaluation; the need to build competence in the techniques of evaluation; and the limited impact of school evaluation.

This chapter analyses approaches to school evaluation within an overall approach to developing an evaluation culture in Portugal. School evaluation refers to the evaluation of individual schools as organisations. This chapter covers both internal school evaluation (school self-evaluation) and external school evaluation (inspection).

It should be noted that, in late 2011, the General Inspectorate of Education (IGE) was merged with the General Inspectorate of Science and Higher Education to become the General Inspectorate of Education and Science (IGEC). However, in this chapter, we will mostly refer to IGE, which in the present situation should be interpreted as the part of IGEC with responsibilities for inspection in school education. The analysis in this chapter concentrates on the practices used around the time of the review visit, which were then led by IGE.

Context and features

The need to establish a strong evaluation culture is seen by the Portuguese government as critical to its broader agenda of school reform. It recognises that raising standards, increasing staying-on rates, reducing grade repetition, improving equity and increasing overall efficiency will all be both stimulated and sustained if schools and teachers are constantly reflecting on their goals, approaches and levels of success. School evaluation, encompassing both self-evaluation and external evaluation of schools, has therefore become a key point of focus for education policy in recent years.

The development of school evaluation in Portugal

Throughout the 1990s various projects were set in train in relation to school evaluation. The General Inspectorate of Education (IGE) undertook a programme of external evaluation of schools between 1999 and 2002 and the principle of school evaluation has, since then, become an increasingly important part of the educational landscape. Over the last decade, and particularly following the law of 2002 (Law No. 31/2002) which established the system for evaluating schools and measures introduced by government since 2005, clear requirements for both internal and external school evaluation have been established. However, the role and nature of external evaluation and its relationship to self-evaluation remain a very live area of political and professional debate.

The Inspectorate is part of the Ministry of Education and Science and has a range of responsibilities associated with audit, control, monitoring and evaluation. It has around 200 inspectors, most but not all of whom have a background in education. The 2002 legislation was ultimately taken forward by a working group set up by the Ministry in 2005 to devise evaluation methodology. Thereafter, IGE was charged with undertaking a first cycle of school evaluations to be started in 2006 and completed by early 2011. Initially 500 schools responded to an invitation to participate in the process and criteria were established to ensure that all public schools would be brought in successively over the next five years. Private schools are not subject to external evaluation by the Inspectorate although consideration is being given to their future inclusion in some form. A second cycle of external evaluation began in 2011, thus establishing a four-year inspection cycle.¹

The external school evaluation model which began in 2006 drew on a number of influences, both national and international. Account was taken of the accumulated experience of recent IGE work, including its “Integrated School Assessments” undertaken

between 1999 and 2002 and its own evaluation of school self-assessment in the period 2004-06. The approach also drew from the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) approach, the work of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) in Scotland, and a variety of information produced by the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI). Among other features, these influences encouraged a focus on outcomes, the need for contextualised evaluations, the importance of transparency and the promotion of self-evaluation.

Purposes of school evaluation

The school evaluation model implemented during 2006-11 had the following declared purposes:

- to stimulate improvement in the quality of the public education service and students’ learning by fostering a systematic questioning in schools of the quality of their practices and outcomes;
- to strengthen schools’ capacity to develop within a framework of autonomy and accountability including by the articulation of external evaluation with self-evaluation;
- to make schools accountable for the use of public resources;
- to establish clear consequences arising from the inspection in relation to eligibility for autonomy contracts and the size of quotas for career progression associated with teacher evaluation; and
- to contribute to the regulation of the education system.

The new school evaluation model, implemented as of the 2011/12 school year by the Inspectorate, has the following purposes:

- to promote student results and learning progressions, identifying strengths and priority areas for improvement in the work of schools;
- to increment accountability at all levels, validating self-evaluation practices of schools;
- to foster the participation of the educational community and local society in school activities, offering better public information on the quality of the work of schools; and
- to contribute to the regulation of education, providing policy makers and school administrators with relevant information.

External evaluation through inspection

External school evaluation through inspection involves a team of three or four individuals, comprising two or three IGE inspectors and an external member who is chosen by the Ministry and is usually drawn from a higher education institution. Inspection visits last two or three days depending on the scale of the task, principally whether the focus is a cluster or a single, non-grouped school. Inspections examine how schools monitor their own performance and the steps they take to “guarantee” quality. They look at how schools are managed and led and how they evaluate themselves and seek to bring about improvement.

There is a structured framework for school evaluation. For the 2006-11 cycle, it covered five domains (results; provision of the education service; school organisation and management; leadership; and the capacity to self-regulate and improve the school). Each domain had a number of associated factors totalling 19 in all. In the “leadership” domain for example, the factors covered: vision and strategy; human resource management; openness to innovation; partnerships, protocols and projects. The overall framework was underpinned by a set of 81 questions designed to promote greater consistency in the interpretation of the factors. For example, some of the questions in the “results” domain were: How have school results varied over the last few years? How do the school’s results compare to those of other schools? Are risks that students will leave early detected in advance?

The new model introduced in late 2011 covers three domains: results; provision of the education service; and leadership and management. Each domain has a small number of fields for analysis (totalling nine in all) each of which contains a few areas. These are shown in Table 5.1.

Inspection methods focus on a range of instruments. The school provides a view of itself through the “presentation” document, which is supposed to establish linkages to its self-evaluation and cover the domains and fields for analysis used by external school evaluation. In order to establish a context for the inspection and allow a stronger focus on outcomes, inspection teams are given a statistical profile of the school by the Ministry. This profile covers performance data from educational progress national tests and national examinations, statistics on grade repetition, and background data about the demographic and social characteristics of the student population. In addition to the review of the school’s “presentation”, there is also extensive analysis of documents such as the educational project, the curricular project, the plan of activities, the internal regulations, and the self-evaluation report. Another major instrument are panel interviews with the representatives of the educational community: school management, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, students, parents/guardians, and the municipality, selected according to pre-specified criteria. Triangulation across different sources of evidence is used to promote reliability. A novelty of the new second cycle of inspections is the introduction of questionnaires to students, parents/guardians, teachers, and non-teaching staff on their satisfaction and analysis of the school results. There is also the observation of the school facilities, including the areas for instruction, but there is no direct observation of learning and teaching by the inspection team.

Table 5.1 Domains for school inspection

| Domains | Fields for analysis | Areas |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Results | Academic results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Progress of contextualised internal student results ▪ Progress of contextualised external student results ▪ Quality of success ▪ Dropouts |
| | Social results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participation in school activities and acquisition of responsibilities ▪ Compliance with rules and discipline ▪ Forms of solidarity ▪ Impact of schooling on student pathways |
| | Community's recognition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree of satisfaction of the educational community ▪ Forms of appreciation of student success ▪ Contribution of school to the development of the surrounding community |
| Provision of the education service | Planning and articulation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Articulated management of the curriculum ▪ Contextualisation of the curriculum and openness to the environment ▪ Use of the information on the students' school career ▪ Coherence between teaching and assessment ▪ Co-operative work among teachers |
| | Teaching practices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extent to which the teaching meets students' capacities and learning rhythms ▪ Extent to which the needs of students with special needs are met ▪ Level of requirements and incentives for the improvement of performance ▪ Active and experimental methodologies in teaching and learning ▪ Appreciation of the artistic dimension ▪ Efficiency of the use of educational resources and time dedicated to learning ▪ Supervision of the teaching |
| | Monitoring and assessment of learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diversification of approaches to assessment ▪ Evaluation of criteria and instruments for assessment ▪ Internal monitoring of the development of the curriculum ▪ Effectiveness of measures to provide educational support ▪ Prevention of dropouts |
| Leadership and management | Leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic vision and fostering a sense of belonging to and identification with the school ▪ Appreciation of intermediate leadership ▪ Development of projects, partnerships and innovative solutions ▪ Motivation of people and conflict management ▪ Mobilisation of the resources of the educational community |
| | Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Criteria and practices of organisation and resource allocation ▪ Criteria for the formation of groups and classes, the preparation of teacher timetables and the distribution of service ▪ Evaluation of the performance of teachers and management of their competencies ▪ Promotion of professional development ▪ Effectiveness of internal and external information and communication channels |
| | Self-evaluation and improvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coherence between self-evaluation and action for improvement ▪ Use of the results of the external evaluation in the preparation of improvement plans ▪ Involvement and participation of the educational community in the self-evaluation ▪ Continuity and scope of self-evaluation ▪ Impact of self-evaluation in planning, organisation and professional practices |

Source: Documentation available on the website of the General Inspectorate of Education (IGE), www.ige.min-edu.pt.

In the first cycle of school inspections (2006-11), evaluations were reported on a four-point scale covering “insufficient”, “sufficient”, “good”, and “very good”, for each of the five evaluated domains. The new cycle of inspections launched in 2011/12 uses a five-point scale for each of the three evaluated domains, which results from the addition of the category “excellent” to the previous scale. As part of the drive for greater accountability and transparency, the reports of the Inspectorate are made publicly available on the Internet. The model used for the first cycle of inspections divided the reports into five chapters covering an introduction, description of provision, evaluation of outcomes, consideration of key factors, and conclusions. Schools are provided with a draft in advance of publication and have 15 days within which to correct factual errors and to raise any issues or concerns. The report is published on the Internet together with any comments made by the school as part of their “right of reply”. In addition, all inspection and self-evaluation (or presentation) instruments are publicly available on the Internet and schools are encouraged to consult them in preparation for inspection. In the first cycle of inspections, schools were also encouraged but not required to establish improvement plans following an inspection. This is one of the major adjustments brought by the new cycle of inspections: as of 2011/12, schools are required to develop an improvement plan to respond to the major challenges identified by school inspection. The improvement plan is to be submitted to educational authorities within the two months which follow the publication of the inspection report. The improvement plan is to contain the actions the school will develop to respond to the priority areas identified by the inspection and is to be published on the website of the school.

The outcomes of inspections have been given added weight by linking evaluation results directly to eligibility for autonomy contracts and to teacher performance quotas (see Chapter 4). Individual autonomy contracts specify the degree of autonomy given to a school, negotiated with the Ministry and influenced by the findings of the external evaluation. Similarly, since 2008, the proportion of “excellent” or “very good” marks that can be given to teachers in a school as part of teacher appraisal can be increased by strong results in the external school evaluation.

Inspections are themselves evaluated and schools complete a questionnaire at the end of the process. Results of these questionnaires suggest a generally positive view of the process although the fact that the exercise is conducted by the Inspectorate itself allows a degree of unreliability in the findings. The 2009 IGE Report, for example, indicates that 86% of schools say that the external evaluation report contributes to their improvement process while 27% of schools do not agree that the evaluations made in the reports are fair.

Role of self-evaluation

Self-evaluation by schools has been a legal requirement since 2002 and an explicit link between external and self-evaluation is integral to the inspection process. The government has decided not to promote or impose any particular approach to self-evaluation, preferring an approach which is based on diversity and organic growth. Some schools bring an external element into their own self-evaluation process by appointing “critical friends” but this remains the exception.

At the start of the inspection, the school is provided with an instrument and asked to provide a document and to make a presentation about itself to a prescribed format. This approach is designed to incentivise and strengthen the link to self-evaluation and provides the inspection team with an early view of such things as the school’s development

priorities, its strategic plans and the strength and quality of the evidence which has underpinned its improvement process. A strengthened school evaluation culture is seen as one of the important outcomes of the inspection process.

Wider use of the results of school evaluation

The prime purposes of school evaluation relate to the schools themselves. However, the Inspectorate also publishes an annual overview of the patterns of evaluation findings arising from the sample of schools inspected. These overviews cover the domains in the external evaluation framework and are designed to provide decision makers at different levels with information relevant to policy and management of the system (see Chapter 6).

The evaluation of school leaders

The evaluation of school leadership is given considerable importance in the external evaluation of schools in Portugal. As mentioned above, “leadership and management” is one of the three key domains covered by school inspections under the 2011 model. As a consequence, the quality of leadership and management is one of the elements that are being rated by the Inspectorate and that influences the quotas of merit classifications (very good and excellent) that can be awarded to teachers.

In addition to the evaluation of leadership by the Inspectorate, a new appraisal model for individual school directors has been introduced recently. A transitional regime for the performance appraisal of school directors was introduced in October 2009 and slightly revised in the 2010/11 academic year.² With the introduction of the 2009 model, the responsibility for the appraisal of school directors was given to the Regional Directors of Education (as explained earlier, the major rationalisation of Ministry services, which followed the change of government in June 2011, will remove Regional Directorates as of January 2013 and the respective services will be taken up by the Directorate General for School Administration, including the appraisal of school directors). The Regional Directors typically evaluate school directors at the end of the academic year on whether they fulfilled a range of pre-defined objectives. As part of the process, each Regional Director forms an evaluation co-ordination council whose members include three school directors. These councils are in charge of ensuring that the appraisal system is rigorously implemented. They can also issue formal opinions on any challenges faced by the school director being evaluated. The appraisal has a summative function; according to the Ministry of Education (forthcoming), the “only effect of the evaluation of a director’s performance should be on his/her advancement in the teaching career”.

The introduction of school director appraisal needs to be seen in the context of recent reforms of school leadership in Portugal. As explained earlier, the position of school director did not exist in its current form prior to 2008. Traditionally, school management was developed in a collegial way and there was no one single leader responsible for the school. The majority of schools used to have an executive board rather than a director and the members of a school’s executive board were teachers elected by the school’s staff and student and parent representatives. The 2008 reform of school autonomy, administration and management introduced the post of school director along with a competitive procedure for recruitment. Also, directors are dispensed from teaching and receive a salary supplement in addition to their basic salary as teachers and may receive an additional performance bonus. They were also given greater responsibility to appoint their staff, in particular the heads of the curricular departments. In this context, the new

appraisal process appears to be a way to balance the greater autonomy of school directors with greater accountability and to ensure individual directors are monitored externally.

Strengths

External school evaluation is becoming well established

There has been, at least since the start of the millennium, a clear commitment on the part of the central government to establish a powerful role for external school evaluation within its overall strategy for quality improvement in education. The approach is one which draws appropriately on international good practice, combining self and external evaluation in ways which both reinforce accountability and stimulate improvement.

The government has been cautious in its approach, seeking to build confidence and consensus rather than being seen as imposing an approach without sufficient preparation. Initial approaches to external evaluation and school self-evaluation were undertaken and analysed before the first formal four-year inspection cycle was initiated in 2006. That cycle is now completed and the second, overlapping cycle has begun. The successful completion of over 2 000 external evaluations using a new inspection model over a four-year period is in itself a significant achievement.

The lack of opposition to the inspection cycle despite the novelty of such an approach is also significant. Indeed, evidence gathered by IGE about the reaction of schools to inspection suggests general acceptance of the approach and interviews undertaken during this Review would also suggest broad acceptance of the utility of external evaluation. None of those interviewed, in schools and more widely, expressed any strong opposition to the principle of external evaluation and comments invariably focused on how it might be improved or linked more directly to other areas of policy.

The external evaluation model embodies a number of features of best practice

The process of evaluation undertaken by the Inspectorate is well structured and systematic. Each stage in the process is clear and the approach builds logically towards the ultimate evaluations. Outcomes for young people figure in the conceptual model of evaluation and are reported on in the evaluation report.

The importance of communicating clearly the basis upon which evaluation judgements will be made has been recognised and built into the model. A set of publicly-available criteria for external inspection has been drawn up with an extensive framework of areas for analysis. Evaluations are made on a straightforward five-point word scale which helps to promote consistency both of judgement and of interpretation by readers. Such an approach allows schools, teachers and other stakeholders to understand what it is inspectors are looking for, thus helping to minimise misunderstanding while at the same time reinforcing the need to focus on areas which are central to school effectiveness. Such clarity also allows schools to prepare in advance evidence for inspection teams which, if taken advantage of, avoids possible suspicion arising from unnecessary misunderstanding and allows the time available for inspection to be used to best effect.

Inspection teams combine full-time inspectors with “outsiders”. Combinations of this kind can provide reassurance to those being inspected about the competence and objectivity of teams by bringing different expertise and perspectives to bear during the inspection process. Full-time inspectors develop techniques of evaluation which are specific to this type of work while the non-inspector member of a team can be selected

for his/her own particular expertise and credibility. Such an approach also develops the skills of the “outside” members who can be used outside the inspection process itself as a wider resource for self-evaluation and as informed points of reference who can spread understanding of the purposes and practices of inspection more generally.

Credible inspection should be based on reliable and relevant evidence rather than opinion. There is an almost inevitable degree of contention about the results of inspection and disagreement can be mitigated through systematic gathering, analysis of and reference to relevant evidence. Commendably, the approach to external evaluation in Portugal is designed to be evidence driven. The provision of a data profile for an inspection team provides outcome information, aids efficiency by allowing the team to focus its attention on key issues and can help to benchmark and contextualise judgements. Similarly, documentation is sought and analysed as a key part of evidence gathering and a sample of stakeholders is interviewed in the course of the inspection. As a result, inspection teams have a wide body of evidence upon which to base their judgements.

Transparency is a feature of the approach

Increasingly, as can be seen from the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) website, inspectorates across Europe are embracing transparency as integral to effective external evaluation. Such transparency is seen as fairer to those inspected as well as promoting the integrity, rigour and impact of external evaluation. The approach, procedures and instruments used in inspection are now routinely available on the web and inspection reports themselves are published either in paper form or digitally. Portugal has adopted much of this thinking. The inclusion of outside members of the team is in itself part of an open approach to inspection. The criteria for evaluation and the inspection instruments are publicly available and the inspection team actively encourages the school to examine this documentation in advance. School evaluation reports are published on the web, having first been given to the school in draft form to allow the correction of factual errors and challenge to findings. In addition, schools have a “right of reply” published with the inspection report, a feature of transparency which is much less common in other inspection regimes. This fair and open approach is a real strength of external evaluation in Portugal and is likely to have influenced the generally positive response by schools to the process as a whole.

A relationship has been established between self and external evaluation

A reliance on external evaluation alone can promote a culture of compliance or “gaming” within which schools seek to satisfy the demands of inspection but do not themselves take ownership of or accept responsibility for improvement. Self-evaluation is integral to continuous improvement which is not solely reliant on the impact of external evaluation. However, self-evaluation can also be subject to self delusion where assumptions are not challenged and power relationships in the school community have an undue influence on what is evaluated and the nature of the judgements themselves. A combination of self and external evaluation, as used in Portugal, is an approach which can maximise the benefits of both while counteracting the limitations arising from an over-reliance on the use of only one.

Commendably, Portugal has seen the importance of establishing an evaluation culture within which self-evaluation is a legal expectation and is also promoted by the external evaluation process itself. Self-evaluation existed in some form in all of the schools visited by the review team. It is also a precondition of autonomy contracts. Inspections start with

a presentation by the school which should be a reflection of its evaluation of its own strengths and weaknesses. Evaluation criteria also promote self-evaluation and include a specific field for analysis dedicated to “self-evaluation and improvement”, among the nine fields for analysis. In addition, although no single approach to self-evaluation is required, IGE has developed and promoted instruments to help schools to evaluate themselves. Such instruments include associated reading and links to useful international examples of relevant approaches and good practice.

An upper secondary school visited during the Review illustrated a number of positive features of self-evaluation. The school’s General Council and the director took clear ownership of the evaluation process and had established a self-evaluation team within the school. A set of criteria had been drawn up, broadly reflecting that used by IGE in external evaluation. An annual focus for evaluation was determined and a report prepared for the school’s Pedagogic Council which was designed to guide improvement rather than pass judgement. Although observation of learning and teaching was not undertaken, class-by-class investigations were included but the evidence was not attributed. Conclusions were reached through conventional triangulation methods. There was a strong feeling across the school that this process was effective in helping to drive continuous improvement.

School leadership is promoted in school evaluation

The central importance of high quality leadership is recognised internationally as a key factor in school effectiveness (McKinsey & Company, 2010; OECD, 2009). Recent developments in Portugal have seen the creation of school or cluster directors charged with the pedagogical leadership of a school or a number of schools in a cluster. There is an explicit recognition that the process of self-evaluation is hugely dependent on a director’s capacity to stimulate engagement, to mobilise resources and to ensure appropriate training and support. The approach to inspection has, in turn, reinforced the importance of such leadership. Directors are seen as important actors in the course of an inspection, have direct accountability during the self-evaluation and external evaluation processes and have the main responsibility for ensuring that the results of the inspection are communicated and its recommendations taken forward. Inspection criteria relate specifically to leadership with one of the three domains covering “leadership and management”, which is divided in three fields for analysis: leadership, management, and self-evaluation and improvement.

Schools benefit from some follow-up

A key test of the impact of external evaluation is what happens next. How far does the process lead to real changes in practice which in turn improve the quality of children’s learning and the standards they achieve? In Portugal, at the time of the review visit, there was an expectation that schools which received the lowest marks would be followed up. This was not the responsibility of IGE but the Regional Directors had the responsibility for working with such schools to ensure that an appropriate improvement plan was developed (services provided by the Regional Directorates will be integrated in the Directorate General for School Administration as of 2013). With the implementation of the second cycle model of external evaluations, as of 2011/12, the requirement for each school inspected to prepare an improvement plan to respond to the challenges identified by the inspection has been introduced. The expectation is that each inspected school will be followed up by educational authorities to assess the extent to which its improvement plan is effectively overcoming the shortcomings identified by inspection.

Inspections are themselves evaluated

There has been increasing international recognition that inspection itself should embody the principles of self-evaluation and improvement. Inspectors should “practise what they preach”. Again in Portugal this principle has been accepted and put into practice. In addition to being given the published “right of reply” referred to earlier in this chapter, schools are asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of an inspection giving their views on how it was conducted. These evaluations are then collated and published in IGE’s annual reports.

A good basis for further development

Taken as a whole, the approach to external and self-evaluation in Portugal has many positive features. The policy direction is clear and explicit expectations have been set for the Inspectorate, for schools and for directors. The processes employed in the evaluation process reflect, at least in part, much of developing international best practice in inspection. As a result, a strong platform has been established upon which future policy and practice can build.

Challenges

There is a need to strengthen a culture of evaluation and improvement

A recurrent theme in the Review was the need to establish a much stronger and more pervasive evaluation culture in Portuguese education. Reactions to practices pre-1974 are seen as having contributed to resistance to anything that can be portrayed as top-down imposition, whether from the national, local or in-school levels. Collegiality is a strong and positive feature of Portuguese schools but needs to be set within a more dynamic climate of leadership, evaluation and accountability. At the same time, long-established traditions of professional autonomy have resulted in attitudes which inhibit challenge or professional learning in relation to teaching practices and student outcomes. Recent moves to strengthen leadership allied to external evaluation, self-evaluation and accountability therefore face considerable challenges in establishing themselves within a culture which apparently places such high value on a teacher’s classroom autonomy.

Perhaps the greatest single challenge facing school education in Portugal, therefore, is to establish a powerful and persuasive narrative which aligns policy, strategy and practice around these big strategic issues of leadership, evaluation and improvement. Although policy in Portuguese education has recognised the importance of this more rounded culture, it was clear during the Review that this “big picture” was not commonly understood and the potential of school evaluation, external and internal, to help achieve necessary alignment, was not perceived widely across the system. Policy was too often seen as a set of initiatives which operated in compartments and, partly as a result, necessary synergies were not being realised. The Education Programme 2015 provides an opportunity to re-emphasise the agenda built around a broad and imaginative set of outcomes.

There is an insufficient focus on learning and teaching

Arguably, the most important area for inspection and self-evaluation is what happens at the points where learning itself takes place. Failure to place learning and teaching at the heart of the evaluation process sends ambiguous signals about what matters and means that evaluation judgements can only be based on proxy indicators, the evidence for which

is open to manipulation and misrepresentation. No matter how superficially impressive documentation or reported teaching practices may be, they need to be able to stand the test of direct observation of the quality of teaching and of relationships during the learning process. Similarly, self-evaluation should also consider the quality of learning and teaching and its relationship to learning outcomes as its core activity.

Although the Portuguese approach to inspection has many features of good practice, it focuses too much on documentation and administrative and management processes rather than on the quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching. According to TALIS, in the 2007/08 school year, only 40.8% of teachers of lower secondary education worked in schools where the school principal reported that the direct appraisal of classroom teaching was considered with high or moderate importance in school self-evaluation or external evaluation (the second lowest figure among the TALIS countries surveyed, against a TALIS average of 71.1%, see Annex D). As a result, there is not enough emphasis on pedagogical aspects particularly on identifying the main features of effective or high quality teaching using evidence from international studies and research. For example collaborative research by the Dutch and English inspectorates has been used to develop and test observation protocols to study and measure the quality of teaching in a number of European countries (van de Grift, 2007). Issues of teacher autonomy have made direct observation of teaching a particularly sensitive matter for inspectorates and school leaders. Establishing the importance of such a focus and the accessibility of classrooms to external involvement raises important questions of governance as well as technical issues associated with the criteria for judgement and the transparency of judgements.

The model of inspection which IGE put into practice around the turn of the century included direct observation of classroom practice but, partly as a reaction to difficulties with that approach, that was not included as a feature of the later cycle of inspection which began in 2006. The difficulties associated with such a move should not be underestimated given the strong tradition of teacher autonomy in the classroom which exists in Portugal. These certainly contributed to the inability of including the direct observation of classroom practice in the methodology used by the new cycle of external evaluation, launched in 2011/12. While it was clear from the schools visited in the Review that external access to classrooms remains an issue of contention, a not infrequent criticism of current approaches was the failure to look directly at learning and teaching. It was clear from the visits made to schools during the Review that, with effective leadership, a culture of trust can be established within which the need to ensure consistently high quality learning and teaching is given primacy. It is encouraging, for example, that at the time of the review team visit around 40% of teachers had asked for classroom observation as part of the teacher performance appraisal process which was in place at the time.

School self-evaluation requires to be strengthened

Although the importance of school self-evaluation has been recognised as a policy imperative over at least the last decade, its penetration across the school system remains at an early stage of development. The policy decision not to promote any particular model was designed at least in part to encourage creativity and local ownership but the lack of specificity can also be interpreted as indicating a lower priority to this aspect of school reform. It is clear that schools have only a limited understanding of the contribution which self-evaluation can and should make to improving practice and no clear models have emerged generally. School leaders and key staff lack the confidence and competence to develop bottom-up approaches and as a result, although some form of self-evaluation

can be identified generally, its rigour and impact on practice remains at best very rudimentary. The absence of an evaluation tradition and culture which encourages openness and reflection means that, as with external evaluation, the focus is more on administrative processes rather than the quality of learning and teaching and its impact on outcomes for learners.

The attempt to use external evaluation to promote self-evaluation is well targeted but has not, as yet, proved a sufficient catalyst for adoption of self-evaluation as an integral part of school life. The open promotion of a variety of instruments and approaches requires an initial level of competence and commitment if it is to have real impact. Similarly, the variety of approach makes it difficult to target training and resources in ways which optimise uptake and implementation.

It is also difficult for self-evaluation to flourish in an environment within which leadership is a relatively new concept and processes of strategic planning and outcome analysis are not very systematic. The post of school director is very new in Portugal and it would not be surprising if those appointed were still coming to terms with the implications of their role and have not yet grasped the potential significance of self-evaluation in establishing the kind of culture which will aid them in that role. Although data are available, they tend to be used descriptively and there is insufficient analysis of what the data can say about outcomes and the factors which are of greatest importance locally.

The outcomes of self-evaluation are also very diffuse and lack traction on practice. The extent to which action may or may not be taken is very much at the discretion of individuals, particularly the school director. There is no requirement for a school to give its own account to its community of where it stands currently and what its priorities are for improvement (even if this will partially change in the new cycle of external school evaluation with the requirement for schools to publicise on their website the improvement plan prepared as a response to the latest inspection). The potential of such self-evaluation reporting to engage parents in the work of the school has also not been sufficiently exploited.

There is a need to build competence in the techniques of evaluation

Whether external or internal, good evaluation requires the presence of key technical skills in those involved. There remains a significant challenge in Portugal to establish such skills to the required level both in the Inspectorate and across directors and school staff more generally. As a result, there was little evidence of schools engaging in deep analysis of student outcomes. Those involved need to understand the nature of valid and reliable evidence and to have the capacity to gather that evidence in ways which do not dominate or supplant existing activities of management and teaching. In particular, knowing what data are of greatest value and how to gather and analyse them contrasts with approaches which harvest large quantities of information without being clear about its purpose or priority. The questions which are asked in any evaluation are critical, both in guiding the activity and in signalling what is seen to matter. Again evaluators, in whatever role, need to understand how to generate and pose the right questions for the task in hand. Training for self-evaluation has to date been very limited but should form part of the development programmes for every director.

The impact of external evaluation is limited

Evidence available to the review team suggested that IGE inspection reports are not widely read. In one school, the view was expressed that they were only really for the director and there was a general unfamiliarity with the findings of past inspections. According to TALIS, in the 2007/08 school year, only 55.1% of teachers of lower secondary education worked in schools where the school principal reported that school evaluations had a high or moderate level of influence on the assistance provided to teachers to improve their teaching (the fifth lowest figure among the TALIS countries surveyed, against a TALIS average of 70.3%, see Annex D). Parental groups were generally positive about reports but unsure about their impact. Part of the reason for this lack of impact may have lied in the absence of any clear follow-up by IGE to its inspection findings, except in the most critical cases where the Regional Director ensured that there was an improvement plan, as was characteristic of the first cycle of external evaluation (2006-11). As a result there was a general perception that, while there was no strong antipathy towards inspections, they were not seen as being of great significance. As described earlier, the new inspection cycle launched in 2011/12 introduces the requirement for each school to establish an improvement plan subsequently to an inspection.

At the same time, there are high-stakes consequences arising from their direct implications for teacher appraisal quotas and eligibility for autonomy contracts. There is therefore a degree of ambiguity about the role and purpose of inspections – as an important element in control, on the one hand, and as an encouragement to the school to self-evaluate and take ownership of improvement, on the other. Where evaluation, internal or external, is perceived almost as ritualistic or simply as compliance with external prescription, it is unlikely that it will have any widespread or sustained impact on practice.

There are some issues about the credibility of external evaluators

There were mixed messages about the credibility of IGE inspectors. Some schools were highly positive about their work, while others saw them as remote figures, too distant from the realities of the classroom. Similar dichotomous views exist in many other jurisdictions but, nonetheless, the challenge remains to ensure that those who are engaging in external evaluation are themselves highly credible. That credibility can derive both from personal characteristics and the way in which they carry out the difficult task of inspection but must also derive from perceptions about their closeness to school life and to learning and teaching in modern schools.

There are concerns related to the implementation of school director appraisal

School leadership appraisal, if it is well implemented, holds the potential to make an important contribution to the improvement of school leadership practices and school organisation as a whole (Radinger, forthcoming). The central place given to “leadership and management” in the revised school inspection model as well as the introduction of school director appraisal in Portugal are positive steps towards ensuring that school leaders receive the feedback and support they need to adequately fulfil their new role.

However, there appear to be a number of challenges in the implementation of school director appraisal processes. First, the clear intention that appraisal results shall be used only for summative purposes, namely advancement on the career scale, limits the potential for school leaders to learn from the process and use the results to improve their

own practice. It reduces the focus on identifying strengths they can build on and weaknesses that need to be addressed by suitable professional development. Hence, individual school directors appear to have little opportunity for professional feedback that provides guidance on how they can improve.

Second, given that the post of school director was created only recently, the Portuguese system does not yet have a framework or professional standards for effective educational leadership. Hence, there is no system-wide statement or profile of what school directors are expected to know and be able to do and no uniform performance criteria against which they could be appraised. Currently, the objectives to be reached in a given year are suggested by individual school directors and then negotiated with the responsible Regional Director (and, as of 2013, with DGAE). As a result, it is likely that there is variation in the focus of school director appraisals across schools. While it is important to adapt appraisal processes to local contexts (Ginsberg and Thompson, 1992; Murphy, 2005), for school director appraisal to be effective across the system it would be important that there is a shared understanding of high quality leadership and the level of performance that can be achieved by the most effective school leaders.

Third, the systematic implementation of school director appraisal in all schools was perceived as challenging for the Regional Directorates in terms of logistics and human resources. Each of the five Regional Directors is responsible for a large number of schools and, in addition, also has to appraise the staff at the Regional Directorate and the directors of Regional Training Centres. While the Regional Directors are ultimately responsible for school director appraisal, the actual appraisal process is delegated to local teams. A representative interviewed by the OECD review team described the task of school leadership appraisal as “daunting”, especially because Regional Directorates are quite remote from what happens on a daily basis at the school level. Also, appraising school directors is a complex and difficult task that requires competencies the Regional Directorate staff in charge of the process does not necessarily have through prior training. Possibly as a result of both limited time and limited preparation for the task, based on the information gathered through the OECD review team interviews, school director appraisal appeared to rely primarily on the checking of documents and assessment results, and much less on other tools such as observation of school leaders in their daily work, interviews or surveys with stakeholders, peer evaluation or self-evaluation performed by school leaders.

Finally, there were no indications that the appraisal of individual school leaders by the Regional Directorates was connected to the evaluation of school “leadership and management” by the Inspectorate. As a result, there might be a risk that the two processes send conflicting messages regarding effective practice and expected improvement.

Policy recommendations

Evidence about strengths and challenges of school evaluation in Portugal suggests that there is in place an emerging approach to evaluation upon which future policy can build. In most cases, the need is to refine and extend practices which are already in place rather than to seek to establish an entirely fresh direction of travel.

Establish the focus for evaluation as being to improve learning and teaching and student outcomes

Evaluation frameworks, the criteria and questions governing judgements and the methods employed should all focus much more directly on the quality of learning and teaching and their relationship to student outcomes. That will require significant alterations to existing models and instruments and a determined effort to build a culture of openness and reflection around what happens during the learning and teaching process.

Leadership at the level of the Ministry will be essential if an open evaluation culture is to be established. Government policy should articulate much more clearly the legitimacy of a focus on learning and teaching and student outcomes for both external evaluation and self-evaluation and that such a focus will be the key concern of wider accountabilities.

- The Inspectorate, drawing on its previous experience with the “Integrated School Assessments” model, should be asked to revise its inspection framework to ensure that the quality of learning lies at the heart of external evaluation, including with direct classroom observation as an evaluation instrument. New criteria should be developed, engaging leading practitioners from schools and higher education institutions in shaping the factors to be taken into account.
- Current approaches to data gathering and the content of inspection profiles should be reviewed to create a sharper focus on the most important factors, particularly in relation to student outcomes.
- Inspectors should be trained in the evaluation of these new criteria.

Improve the alignment between external and self-evaluation and raise the profile of self-evaluation

Better alignment is needed between policy and practice in both external evaluation and self-evaluation. In particular, there is a need to ensure that the criteria used in both spheres are sufficiently similar as to create a common language about priorities and about the key factors which influence high quality learning and teaching. Lack of clarity about what matters is likely to reinforce current confusion and continue to relegate self-evaluation to something which serves inspection rather than creating a platform for an exchange based on reliable and comparable evidence.

Better alignment between external and self-evaluation would be promoted by:

- recommending the use of the same set of criteria in both external and self-evaluation;
- stressing the importance of learning and teaching and student outcomes for self-evaluation leading to more open discussion of teachers’ practice;
- creating a framework for the school presentation during inspection which starts with their evaluation of teaching quality, student outcomes and the steps they are taking to optimise the relationship between the two;
- having a stronger focus on how the school is going about its own self-evaluation and using the results to improve learning;
- using criteria about the quality of teaching to inform discussions in teacher appraisals; and

- requiring schools to publish annual self-evaluation reports showing how they are currently performing and the steps they are taking to bring about improvement.

Improve the acceptability and impact of external inspection

Creating a stronger focus on learning and teaching is likely of itself to improve the impact of inspection. However, a number of other steps need to be taken to reinforce the significance of inspection for the improvement of the school. In particular, the credibility of teams needs to be improved and transparency of reporting used more directly as a driver of improvement.

- The criteria used to select inspectors should be reviewed to ensure that those recruited have the skills and attributes necessary for the strengthened approach to inspection. Thereafter, training of inspectors should also be reviewed to ensure that the appropriate skills and behaviours are being reinforced and developed throughout careers.
- The range of individuals who provide the additional element in inspection teams should be extended. The use of highly credible school directors and leading practitioners in inspection would both heighten the credibility of the team and build capacity in the education system as a whole. Experience elsewhere would suggest that engaging people directly from the field in inspection is a powerful form of professional development both for the individuals and as a resource more widely.
- Consideration should also be given to asking the school to nominate someone to work with the inspection team as already happens successfully in ESTYN, the Welsh Inspectorate. Direct involvement of this nature can help to generate ownership, address misconceptions and ease the process of accessing relevant information quickly and easily.
- Improve the nature of reporting by making reports less technical and more readable to a non-specialist audience. Schools should also be required to be proactive in publicising reports with staff and parents. Local media and elected representatives should be provided with links to reports.
- Introduce more systematic follow-up by the Inspectorate to its inspections. Routine follow-up is a feature of inspection in many inspectorates across Europe and is seen as a means of maintaining momentum for improvement. The Inspectorate has already taken recent steps in this direction through a small programme of monitoring visits to look at self-evaluation and improvement following an external evaluation; and through the requirement for each school to submit an improvement plan to the educational authority following an inspection, which was introduced in the new 2011/12 inspection model. However, a programme of follow-up visits, suitably differentiated on the basis of the original report, would give added impetus and credibility to the overall evaluation process. Sweden offers a good model. After each evaluation all schools are given a “to do” list which is monitored through follow-up evaluations. Furthermore, the schools are provided with rich qualitative and quantitative feedback on a range of aspects (Nusche *et al.*, 2011).

- Inspectors need to be careful about how they frame their recommendations; over-specificity can lead to a cycle of compliance and it is therefore important that they focus on capacity and direction of travel rather than highly specific actions. Analysis of these submissions would allow a programme of follow-up visits to be mounted formally by inspectors between cycles and the results of these visits should also be published.
- An important aspect of providing advice to schools consists of identifying good practice in the school system. Systematic analysis of key features and sharing examples of good practice would be useful, especially for those schools which are identified as facing greater challenges and could support the school self-evaluation process. Overall, it seems that the identification and sharing of good practice is still fairly uncommon in Portugal and the Inspectorate should reinforce its role in this function.

Consider changes to the length of inspections and of the cycle

The greater depth which will come from creating a stronger focus on learning and teaching has implications for the length of inspections. The current two or three days are likely to prove insufficient if the sample of lessons observed is to be meaningful. Moving to a five-year cycle of inspection would release additional resources for greater depth and longer inspections and allow inspection teams to explore learning and teaching more directly. At the same time, more developed follow-up arrangements would have implications for the length of the inspection cycle. Proportionate follow-up visits and short reports on progress would offset any extension to the length of the cycle.

Inspection approaches across Europe are changing with a strengthened emphasis on risk in a number of countries. Moving to differentiated inspection models requires a high level of intelligence about school characteristics and performance. The evaluation culture in Portugal is still developing and inspection has an important role to play in reinforcing that culture and building capacity in all schools. However, at the end of the second cycle of inspection and assuming improved data gathering and analysis it should be possible to look at a less uniform approach.

Improve the articulation between school evaluation and other policy developments

In addition to promoting and building capacity for self-evaluation, external school evaluation has the potential to enhance the policy agenda in a variety of other ways. The proposed stronger focus within external school evaluation on teacher performance is a positive next step. If the standards for teacher appraisal are articulated with the school evaluation framework, then stronger synergies can be created between the two. This approach should be complemented by the use of evaluation evidence in the appraisal of the leadership of school directors which would be significantly enhanced by a stronger link to evidence from external evaluation.

Ensure school leaders receive appropriate feedback on their performance

Strong school leadership capacity is key to effective school self-evaluation and school improvement. Further enhancing the performance appraisal of school directors is one way to contribute to building and enhancing the new role of school directors as educational leaders. Effective school director appraisal should help provide constructive external feedback, identify areas of needed improvement and offer targeted support to improve practice.

In order to strengthen school leadership appraisal, the OECD review team recommends the development of a school leadership framework or standards to provide a credible reference for the appraisal of school directors. Such a framework can help enhance the objectivity and fairness of the appraisal process and avoid complacency among leaders that may perform well but still can improve their practice (Reeves, 2009). Such standards need to be informed by research and express the complexity of what effective school leaders are expected to know and be able to do. At the same time, it is important to recognise the situational nature of school leaders' tasks and allow for standards to be balanced with local ideas (Pashiardis and Brauckmann, 2008; Kimball *et al.*, 2009). The national framework or standards for school leadership should not be seen as a template or checklist against which directors are to be appraised. Rather, they should be a point of departure for reflection on locally relevant criteria in relation to national reference points (for more detail, see Radinger, forthcoming). For school leadership standards to be relevant and “owned” by school directors in Portugal, it is also important that school leadership professionals take the lead or strongly participate in developing them.

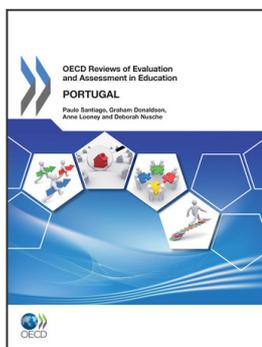
Another key element to make school director appraisal effective and useful is to ensure that both evaluators and evaluatees have the necessary competencies. For evaluators at the level of the Regional Directorate (and, as of 2013, DGES), training regarding effective leadership appraisal is important to avoid substantial differences between evaluators in the application of the appraisal system (Kimball *et al.*, 2009), as well as to ensure that they can provide constructive feedback and support for improvement based on shared appraisal criteria. In order to ensure consistency in the evaluation of school leadership across Portugal, it would also be helpful to develop co-operation regarding school leadership evaluation between the Regional Directorates (and, as of 2013, the Directorate General for School Administration) and the national Inspectorate. Moreover, school directors themselves also need to be prepared to use appraisal results for their own professional learning. In particular, it is important for school directors to be knowledgeable about the appraisal process and the expectations they are evaluated against (Radinger, forthcoming). As suggested in Chapter 4, Portugal should consider introducing a training programme for school leaders as part of a broader national strategy to build the capacity and credibility of school directors. Preparation for their own appraisal and effective use of appraisal results should be part of such training.

Notes

1. The implementation of the second cycle of external evaluation had not started by the time the review visit was organised. As a result, the analysis in this chapter concentrates on the practices used during the completed first cycle of school inspections (2006-11). However, the major features of the second cycle are highlighted throughout the chapter.
2. Since the 2010/11 revision, school directors are appraised in relation to the specific system for evaluating middle managers in public administration, but the evaluation continues to be compatible with the statute governing the teaching career. Other than that, the revised model retains the key features and objectives as established in 2009.

References

- Ginsberg, R. and T. Thompson (1992), “Dilemmas and Solutions Regarding Principal Evaluation”, *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 68 (1), pp. 58-74.
- Grift, W. van de (2007), “Quality of Teaching in Four European Countries: A Review of the Literature and Application of an Assessment Instrument”, *Educational Research*, 49:2, 127-152.
- Kimball, S.M., A. Milanowski and S.A. McKinney (2009), “Assessing the Promise of Standards-Based Performance Evaluation for Principals: Results from a Randomized Trial”, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, Vol. 8 (3), pp. 233-263.
- McKinsey & Company (2010), *Capturing the Leadership Premium: How the World’s Top School Systems are Building Leadership Capacity for the Future*, McKinsey & Company.
- Ministry of Education (forthcoming), *Country Background Report for Portugal*, prepared for the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes, www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy.
- Nusche, D., G. Hálasz, J. Looney, P. Santiago and C. Shewbridge (2011), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Sweden 2011*, OECD, Paris, available from www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy.
- OECD (2009), *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS*, OECD, Paris.
- Pashiardis, P. and S. Brauckmann (2008), “Evaluation of School Principals”, in J. Lumby, G. Crow and P. Pashiardis (eds.), *International Handbook on the Preparation and Development of School Leaders*, Routledge, New York, London, pp. 263-280.
- Radinger, T. (forthcoming), *School Leadership Appraisal: Current Practices and a Literature Review*, OECD, Paris.
- Reeves, D.B. (2009), *Assessing Educational Leaders: Evaluating Performance for Improved Individual and Organizational Results*, 2nd Edition, Thousand Oaks, California.



From:
**OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in
Education: Portugal 2012**

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264117020-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

Santiago, Paulo, *et al.* (2012), "School evaluation", in *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Portugal 2012*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264117020-8-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.