Assessment and recommendations

Education and development in Romania

Romania is one of the fastest growing economies in the European Union (EU), but also one of the most unequal. Romania’s growth in gross domestic product (GDP) has been consistently higher than the EU average over the last decade, unemployment is low, and investment and productivity are on the rise. However, large parts of the population, especially in rural areas, risk being left behind in the country’s rapid transformation. One in four Romanians – and one in two Romanian children – is on the verge of poverty, with an income below the national threshold for an adequate standard of living. The income gap between the richest and poorest citizens is the highest in the EU. Developing a more inclusive economy is not only a matter of fairness, but will be essential to sustain national growth and competitiveness.

Ensuring that all young Romanians have equal access to high-quality education is critical for inclusive development. Romania currently enables only a minority of its students to excel. Those at the top demonstrate the same level of sophisticated knowledge and skills as their peers in other EU and OECD countries. But many more young Romanians do not master the basic competencies necessary for full participation in society. According to the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), nearly half (40%) of Romanian students lack the foundational cognitive skills required for lifelong learning and productive employment (OECD, 2016). Dropout rates are on the rise, especially in rural areas, and one in five students fail to make the transition to upper secondary education, which most countries recognise as the minimum level of attainment needed in a knowledge economy. Making sure that all Romanian students complete secondary school with strong foundation skills is central for the country’s continued transition towards higher levels of development and well-being.

The role of evaluation and assessment in educational improvement

Effective education systems combine both high quality and equity, supporting all students to succeed. A well-designed evaluation and assessment system can encourage learning and inclusion in a number of ways. Most importantly for Romania, it can communicate a vision that every student, teacher and school has the potential to do well. It can ensure that policies and practices promote equally high standards of education for all children, regardless of background or location. It can also give visibility to those who are struggling and help to understand why, so that no one is left behind and all students have the opportunity to achieve good outcomes.

Importantly, by establishing regular open dialogue, reflection and feedback, where weaknesses can be acknowledged and mistakes recognised as an opportunity to learn, evaluation and assessment can help to build trust. In Romania’s highly centralised education system, developing greater trust and belief in self-efficacy will be essential to
progressively move quality assurance away from government control and towards greater self-regulation and responsibility for teachers and schools. This is important to enable more autonomy and leadership for education among those who are closest to students and their learning needs.

The OECD has analysed policies and practices for evaluation and assessment in over 30 education systems to identify how they can best support student learning in different country contexts. This research shows how the different components of evaluation and assessment – student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation, school leader appraisal and system evaluation – can be developed in synergy to enhance student achievement in primary and secondary schools (Figure 0.1). It highlights three important hallmarks of a strong evaluation and assessment framework.

Figure 0.1. Interactions within the evaluation and assessment framework

The first of these is setting out clear standards for what is expected nationally of students, teachers, schools and the system overall. Countries that achieve high levels of quality and equity set ambitious goals for all, but are also responsive to different needs and contexts. The second is collecting data and information on current learning and education performance. This is important for accountability – so that objectives are followed through – but also for improvement, so that students, teachers, schools and policy makers receive the feedback they need to reflect critically on their own progress, and remain engaged and motivated to succeed.

Finally, a strong evaluation and assessment framework achieves coherence between its different components. This means, for example, that school evaluation values the types of teaching and assessment practices that effectively support student learning, and that teachers are appraised on the basis of the knowledge and skills that promote national education goals. This is critical to ensure that the whole education system is working in the same direction, and that resources are used effectively.

**Evaluation and assessment in Romania**

This report looks at policies for student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation in Romania. Each chapter considers how student learning is supported and how far the needs of all students are being met. It also examines how policies are translated into practice, looking at capacity, policy coherence and the use of assessment and evaluation data. It recommends how the evaluation and assessment framework can be further strengthened so that it supports the learning objectives of the new curriculum Romania is introducing, and the wider education goals of Romania’s fast-changing society.

Romania’s evaluation and assessment system has developed in many positive ways since the last OECD Review of Education in Romania in 2000 (OECD, 2000). The 2011 Education Law sets out an inclusive vision, where assessment supports an individualised approach to student learning and all students receive a quality education. This vision is reflected in the new curriculum, which is focused on student-led learning and the development of key competencies, and has the potential to catalyse a deeper transformation in what is valued and taught in Romania’s classrooms.

These aspirations are supported by strengthened institutional capacity. Romania now has an independent, external school evaluation body, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP) and an established National Center for Assessment and Examinations (NCAE) providing technical expertise for student assessment. Alongside the long-standing Institute of Educational Science (IES), these agencies are real assets for Romania, providing technical know-how and analysis. They have supported, and continue to support, educational improvement. At the same time, advances in the breadth and quality of data collection create strong foundations for system-monitoring.

But the overall framework for evaluation and assessment is not fully aligned with aspirations for a more student-focused, competency-based system where assessment serves to advance learning. The heavy weight of high-stakes national examinations leaves little space for teachers and students to develop more individualised approaches to learning. This is exacerbated by teacher appraisal and school evaluation processes that are heavily focused on accountability, and in which examination results play a significant role. Combined with the politicisation of local education leaders, and the centralisation of
the education system, this means that teachers and schools have little opportunity for open, constructive self-reflection or the resources and autonomy to lead improvements.

At present, Romania’s positive practices do not have the visibility and support that they need to propel improvement across the education system. The introduction of diagnostic assessments in Grades 2 and 6, of mentors to support new teachers, and of school self-evaluation reflect positive efforts to create more formative practices, focused on feedback and self-reflection. However, the assessments and school self-evaluation remain underdeveloped and mentorships exist largely on paper only. Moreover, these practices have been developed in the absence of a shared definition of national learning expectations, what good teaching means, or what a good school looks like. This has led to Romania creating a multiplicity of assessment and evaluation processes which coexist, and frequently pull in different directions. Strengthening national learning goals, developing teacher and principal standards and a common definition of school quality would consistently direct the system towards the kinds of learning and teaching envisaged in the new curriculum (Figure 0.2). It would also provide existing good practices with the recognition that they need to drive better outcomes for students.

Figure 0.2. Aligning evaluation and assessment in Romania to support student learning
Greater clarity of the assessment system’s goals and standards would also provide the basis for defining more clearly the roles and responsibilities of different actors. In particular, the mandates of the specialised bodies of IES, NCAE and ARACIP and the County School Inspectorates (CSIs) need to be reviewed, so that they can play to their strengths and work better together, in collaboration with a strengthened Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MNESR) that is able to provide strategic direction for system-wide change.

Positive change will also require adequate resourcing. Education in Romania is chronically underfunded, with spending per student in primary and lower secondary less than one-third of the EU average. This review’s recommendations – for strengthening teachers’ formative assessment skills, developing school capacity for improvement, and creating a culture of constructive feedback and supportive guidance – are among the most efficient and effective ways in which Romania can invest additional resources to improve learning. It is also clear that without changes to assessment and evaluation practices, and in particular without measures to mitigate the impact of national examinations on the system as whole, that the other investments that Romania is currently making to reduce dropout rates and low performance are less likely to have the desired impact.

**Student assessment in Romania: Putting student learning at the centre**

Student assessment supports and measures student learning. It can be summative – assessing learning that has already taken place – or formative – assessing learning as it is happening, to shape and deepen future learning. In both cases, effective assessment provides information for students, teachers and policy makers on students’ level of knowledge and skills, and helps to identify improvements for learning strategies, teaching or education policies.

The desire to perform well in assessments makes their design and content a strong determinant of teaching and learning practice. Aligning assessment with national goals for student learning is therefore critical. Ensuring the different types and purposes of assessment are in balance is equally important to create the constructive interaction between teachers and students that helps students to progress and be motivated to learn.

The importance of summative student assessment is well recognised in Romania. Students are encouraged to perform well in national examinations which determine their entry to upper secondary high school and university. This focus on high performance in examinations provides students and teachers with clear objectives. However it also creates an unhelpfully narrow definition of success. It crowds out space for a more broadly-based view of learning outcomes where students with different aptitudes and interests, beyond academic achievement, can succeed. It also limits the space for teachers to exercise their professional judgement through classroom-based assessments and feedback to students, which is the basis of formative assessment, and one of the most effective ways to support educational achievement.

Romania can support better student outcomes by putting student learning at the centre of its approach to assessment. Practically, this will mean clarifying the purpose of national examinations, national assessments and classroom assessment, and their role for student learning, and ensuring that their design is consistent with this purpose. Creating a system where assessment supports learning hinges on teachers’ assessment literacy,
which is currently underdeveloped in Romania. If assessment is to support learning, Romania’s teachers need to be supported to exercise their professional judgement, through better education, professional development and assessment resources, and given adequate space to do so.

Issue 2.1: Align student assessment with the learning goals of the new curriculum

Romania has recently adopted a new curriculum based on the eight key competencies for lifelong learning in the EU reference framework, with a view to developing students’ competencies for fulfilling employment and personal well-being in the modern economy (IES, 2015). This is a significant change in the country’s approach to learning, and one that many other EU and OECD countries have made in recent years. In Romania, as in most of these countries, ensuring that this change on paper leads to changes in teaching and learning has proved challenging. While Romania has embedded what students are expected to learn and be able to do in the curriculum, these expectations do not yet play the central role that they should. In particular, they do not yet seem to be understood and used by teachers when planning their teaching and assessing student learning in classrooms. The recently introduced national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 were intended to improve the reliability of teacher assessment practices in line with national standards, but they have not been accompanied by adequate supports to promote their effective use. These gaps create a significant impediment to achieving the changes that the new curriculum aspires to.

Recommendations

2.1.1. Strengthen the curriculum’s learning standards in the core domains of reading and writing, and mathematics so that they become the key reference for classroom and external assessment, supporting alignment with the curriculum (Figure 0.3). This should include providing marked examples of student work that demonstrate national expectations. Using the current scales for classroom marking to set out levels of performance within the national learning standards would also help teachers to relate the standards to their own classroom practices and establish a common language for describing performance.

2.1.2. Use the national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 to reinforce the learning standards. The national assessments focus on the new curriculum’s core competencies, potentially providing a valuable means to communicate expected standards and reliably benchmark individual student performance against them. For this to happen, however, the assessments need to be accompanied by guidance on how to interpret students’ work, in line with learning standards. The reporting of results also needs to be aligned with the learning standards, so that teachers, students and parents have a clear understanding of the extent to which a student has sufficiently mastered core competencies and of any potential gaps and difficulties in learning.

2.1.3. Clarify which part of the government will be responsible for the further development of learning standards, to ensure that this work is given sufficient priority. Whichever agency assumes responsibility, close co-operation between IES and NCAE will be essential, as will adequate funding.
**Issue 2.2: Mitigate the negative impact of national examinations on student learning and progression**

Romania’s two national examinations, and in particular the Grade 8 examination, carry high stakes for students, teachers and schools. While high-stakes examinations are common in many countries, the absence of measures to mitigate their limitations in Romania has negative consequences for student learning, motivation and progression. In the immediate term Romania should focus on improving the quality and equity of the Grade 8 examination so that it supports the positive changes in teaching and learning set out in the new curriculum. In the longer term, it should reconsider the use of the Grade 8 examination to track students into different school programmes, as part of the development of a more comprehensive model of secondary education.

**Figure 0.3. Using the learning standards to align the assessment system in Romania**

![Diagram showing the alignment of learning standards and assessment processes](image)

**Recommendations**

**2.2.1. Improve the quality and fairness of the Grade 8 examination as a first priority.** The range of competencies and domains assessed should be broadened to provide a more rounded assessment of student learning and help to encourage learning across the breadth of the curriculum. Reducing the classroom-based marks that contribute to the final mark to Grades 7 and 8 will help to avoid that stakes are associated with classroom work, and focus teachers and students on learning rather than demonstrating performance, in the early years of lower secondary. The accuracy and reliability of classroom-based marks for Grades 7 and 8 should be improved through “moderation” based on teacher discussions in schools on the standard of student work and appropriate marking and an overall effort to improve teachers’ assessment literacy (see Recommendation 2.3.2 and 2.3.3). As this improves, the classroom-based marks may account for a greater share of the overall Grade 8 mark.

**2.2.2. Review pathways and certification in secondary education** to ensure that all students benefit from equal education opportunities for longer and gain meaningful recognition for their achievements. This should involve a critical review of when and how students choose and are selected for different secondary school programmes, and give consideration to ending the Grade 8 examination for selection into upper secondary.
Issue 2.3: Develop teachers’ assessment literacy

Teachers are fundamental to ensuring that assessment supports student learning. This means that Romanian teachers’ limited assessment literacy is a major barrier to improving student outcomes. Teachers in Romania need to develop their understanding of national learning expectations, so that they can plan for effective teaching, provide consistent and accurate assessments of their students’ learning, and give students useful feedback on how to improve. In particular, they need support in developing their capacity to use assessment formatively and integrate it into their teaching practice. While Romania’s education system has modernised significantly in recent decades, classroom assessment is still often limited to pen-and-paper summative tests, with little use of formative assessment involving timely, individualised feedback and appropriate teaching interventions. Of all educational policy interventions, formative assessment is found to have among the most significant positive impact on student achievement. Currently, Romania’s teachers receive limited practical education on assessment, supports and guidance on how to use it, and the heavy weight of external examinations leaves little space for teachers to exercise, and develop confidence in, their professional judgement.

Recommendations

2.3.1. Develop a national policy statement on the value of formative assessment and why it matters for education in Romania, underpinned by a strategy to promote its use. This could be complemented by a national awareness raising campaign to help teachers and society fully appreciate its significance for learning.

2.3.2. Ensure that teachers’ initial and continuous education provides them with a stronger basis in assessment. The new Masters of Arts in teaching is an opportunity to ensure that initial teacher education provides new teachers with a strong grounding in the theory of assessment combined with sufficient opportunities to practice assessment, particularly formative methods. In-service training on assessment should be expanded, and professional development programmes on the new curriculum should systematically include support to help teachers assess competencies and use assessment to shape teaching and student learning. Romania could consider creating “assessment advisers” to work with schools to help them use formative assessment techniques, located in Romania’s new school improvement units in the CSIs (see Recommendation 4.4.4).

2.3.3. Make greater use of the national assessments in Grades 2 and 6 to develop teachers’ assessment skills and improve the quality of feedback. Giving teachers’ responsibility for designing the assessments will give them more space to exercise and develop confidence in their personal judgment and to give more detailed feedback to students on their performance. To enable this, teachers should be provided with central support such as a reporting template and a national item bank to ensure that they assess student learning in line with the curriculum’s expectations and are able to provide useful feedback to students on how to improve. This practice could initially be trialled in Grade 2, and later extended to Grade 6 if successful. Guidance on how to develop individual learning plans on the basis of student results would help teachers to use the assessments more effectively for formative purposes. Moving the assessments to the beginning of the school year would also reinforce their formative function.

2.3.4 Encourage schools and teachers to focus on formative assessment by increasing the value it has in teacher appraisal and school evaluation, while reducing the weight given to the results of high-stakes examinations in line with the measures recommended below (see Recommendations 3.2.2, 3.4.3, 4.1.1 and 4.2.3).
Issue 2.4: Strengthen central capacity for assessment

Romania’s extensive system of national assessments and examinations is not matched by the level of human and financial resources devoted to these tasks. While the NCAE’s responsibilities have increased in recent years, its funding has not grown proportionately. With its current resources, the NCAE cannot develop high-quality national assessments and examinations, and ensure their continued improvement in line with international standards. This is critical given the very high stakes that are attached to the national examinations in Romania. It is also important to ensure that the NCAE has adequate resources to help to build assessment literacy across the system.

Recommendations

2.4.1. Adequately resource the NCAE. Increase the NCAE’s resources so that it can invest in psychometricians proficient in modern test design, technology for better data management, results analysis and research capacity to improve the design and quality of national examinations, and provide the support and teacher guidance to accompany the national assessments as recommended in this review (see Recommendation 2.3.3). Consideration of the Centre’s resources should also be linked to a review of its role and responsibilities, to identify which activities it is well-placed to undertake and those which might be better conducted by other bodies or parts of the ministry, such as the textbook evaluation process.

2.4.2. Ensure that the NCAE has the analytical capacity and international exposure to lead continuous improvement. Making it an objective to conduct more extensive analysis of its examination and assessment results, and developing the capacity to do so, will be important to ensure the validity and reliability of national test items. Some form of continued involvement for the NCAE in international assessments would also help support ongoing modernisation in national assessment design.

2.4.3. Strengthen the NCAE’s voice as a centre of technical assessment expertise by creating a governing board. This should be composed of national experts, including a representative from the IES to ensure coherence and co-ordination in student assessment policy, and an international expert or experts so that the NCAE’s work is informed by international developments.

Teacher appraisal in Romania: Ensuring appraisal supports teachers’ professional development

Teacher appraisal refers to how teachers are assessed and given feedback on their performance. Well-designed appraisals can help to improve teaching, which can raise student achievement. Such appraisals combine different types of assessment and draw on multiple sources of evidence to support teachers in their professional development and hold them accountable for their practice.

While Romania uses different appraisal practices, it does not use teacher appraisal as a developmental tool. Appraisal processes are summative and have high-stakes consequences for teachers’ remuneration and careers. This may negatively influence teaching practices and inhibit the potential of appraisal to enhance student outcomes. Creating appraisals that are more focused on formative practices, such as professional dialogue and feedback, and grounded in classroom observation and evidence of performance rather than the demonstration of theoretical knowledge in examinations, will provide a stronger basis for improving teaching practices and, ultimately, student learning in Romania.
Issue 3.1: Develop common professional teaching standards

Romania lacks professional teaching standards, which provide a national definition of what teachers should know and be able to do. As a result, each teacher appraisal process uses different evaluation criteria, and relies heavily on other assessment material like job descriptions and tests, without evaluating the full range of knowledge, skills and aptitudes that are important to good teaching. Standards would clarify the different dimensions of high-quality teaching. In Romania, they would help to orient appraisals and all teacher policies towards the competencies that are central to effective teaching and delivery of the new curriculum. In particular, they would enable the development of more well-rounded, performance-based appraisals and reduce the reliance on teacher examinations at different stages of teachers’ career paths.

Recommendations

3.1.1. Develop national teaching standards that define good teaching in Romania and guide appraisal criteria and processes and other aspects of teaching policy such as initial teacher education and professional development. The teaching standards should be aligned to the strengthened learning standards that set out national goals for student learning (see Recommendation 2.1.1), so that appraisals support teachers to develop the teaching competencies that will enable achievement of the national learning goals.

3.1.2. Establish a consultative forum that involves all relevant stakeholders to reach agreement on the development of the teaching standards. Forum discussions could be led by a neutral facilitator and focused on agreement at a high level, and would help to encourage a debate about the types of competencies and attributes Romanian teachers should focus on developing.

3.1.3 Consider establishing a professional self-regulatory body for teachers that is responsible for promoting and maintaining the teaching standards, and which would help to strengthen the professional identity of the teaching workforce. Over time, as it becomes more established, this body could play a more direct role in shaping teaching policy and certification requirements.

Issue 3.2: Make regular teacher appraisal more developmental to support improvements to teaching

The developmental function of regular teacher appraisals in Romania is currently underdeveloped. The methodology does not include classroom observations or timely, formative feedback, which are essential for teachers’ development. In Romania, regular appraisal is also closely connected to high-stakes consequences such as salary bonuses and career progression, which puts pressure on teachers to demonstrate achievements rather than to treat appraisal as a learning opportunity. The developmental function of appraisal is also undermined by the involvement of the school board as an appraising body, given that a number of its members are external to the school and do not have educational experience; the lack of opportunities for one-to-one appraisals; and the limited role played by the principal.

Recommendations

3.2.1 End the high-stakes consequences of regular appraisal that hinder its developmental function. Regular appraisal results should not be used to determine salary
bonuses, and eligibility for career advancement should be based on a minimum threshold rather than requiring teachers to obtain the highest marks on their regular appraisals. These changes should be made as part of a broader reform to the career advancement appraisal (see recommendation 3.4.2). For those teachers who do not pursue career advancement, the regular developmental appraisal could be balanced by the externality of a periodic appraisal for recertification to provide adequate quality assurance and accountability.

3.2.2. Ensure that regular appraisals are conducted by appraisers familiar with a teachers’ classroom practice and who have the experience to be able to provide quality feedback. Principals and school-based appraisers should conduct the regular appraisals, as they are familiar with the teachers and their classroom practice. Appraisal should be focused on classroom observations and professional dialogue to identify and address teachers’ developmental needs.

3.2.3. Connect regular appraisal to teachers’ professional development. Add professional learning plans to the regular appraisal methodology to encourage teachers to identify their learning needs in consultation with their appraisers. In these plans teachers could outline a few techniques that they might employ in order to improve student engagement and learning, and the professional learning activities that will help them to make those changes. Providing greater opportunities for informal collaborative learning within schools and through peer networks will be important to support continuous professional development.

3.2.4. Develop a standard response for underperformance. The current lack of a standard process to address an unsatisfactory regular appraisal result means that weaknesses in teaching may not be addressed. Romania should set out a fair, step-by-step response to underperformance, which could include the development of an improvement plan, additional appraisals and ultimately dismissal if performance does not improve.

**Issue 3.3: Improve the probation period and initial assessment of teachers**

Appraisal at the beginning of a teacher’s career acts as an important gatekeeper to the profession and also offers new teachers the feedback and guidance they need to develop in their first years on the job. However, the initial assessment of new teachers in Romania, which is based on inspection by CSI inspectors and successful completion of a written exam, the definitivat, does not seem to fulfil either of these functions effectively. The inspectors that are based in the CSIs are not well equipped to conduct probation inspections, which do not always result in useful, constructive feedback for teachers. The definitivat carries significant weight in the appraisal process but may not meaningfully assess teaching competencies such as those required by the new curriculum. The appraisal of beginning teachers is particularly critical in Romania because entry requirements for initial teacher education are low and preparation to become a teacher is minimal.

**Recommendations**

3.3.1. Establish a cadre of experienced teachers to conduct the inspection of beginning teachers for full certification and focus the inspection on classroom practice. Experienced teachers would bring significant teaching expertise and knowledge to provide new teachers with useful feedback that is essential to their early professional development. They would also bring an independence and consistency to the inspection which CSIs cannot provide, and help resolve the conflict in roles that CSI inspectors
have, by allowing the latter to focus on school support as this review recommends (see Recommendation 4.4.4).

3.3.2. Revise the definitivat to assess the teaching competencies required by the new curriculum, and consider reducing its weight in the appraisal process. The new teacher standards (see Recommendation 3.1.1) should guide the revision of the definitivat exam to ensure that it assesses the competencies teachers need in the classroom. Romania might also consider adding more practice-oriented, open-ended questions to the exam so that it is a better measure of teachers’ competencies. In the future, Romania could reduce the weight of the exam in favour of a more authentic measure of teacher competencies, such as a performance-based inspection of new teachers in the classroom.

3.3.3. Ensure that new teachers receive more support to develop professionally. All new teachers should have a mentor, be closely monitored and receive regular feedback to develop their teaching competencies. The current teacher portfolio should be developed into a formative tool that includes evidence of new teachers’ work with students, to be discussed with their principals and mentors and to encourage self-reflection.

3.3.4. Improve initial teacher education so that new teachers are adequately prepared to teach. Raise the bar for entry to initial teacher education programmes by selecting candidates with the appropriate skills and strong motivation to teach. Ensure that programmes prepare teachers in the new learner-centred curriculum and provide them with sufficient practical preparation in instructional practice and assessment. Progressively introduce the new Masters of Arts in teaching programme, ensuring that institutions have the capacity to meet its quality requirements and that the impact on teacher preparedness is evaluated before it is made mandatory.

Issue 3.4: Reward and incentivise teachers’ development of higher competency levels

The teacher career path in Romania is not associated with new roles and responsibilities linked to higher-level competencies. This is a missed opportunity to use the career path strategically to motivate teachers to develop and to ensure that experienced and competent teachers share their expertise within and across schools. The merit grade assessment that rewards teachers with a salary bonus may promote competition rather than collaboration among teachers, and may disadvantage teachers who work in challenging school contexts. Although positive changes have recently been made to the assessment criteria to acknowledge teachers’ work with struggling students, the process still rewards teachers for having students that achieve high marks in examinations. This risks influencing teaching practice by focusing teachers’ attention on preparing students for tests and academic competitions, and high-achieving students.

Recommendations

3.4.1. Revise the teaching career path so that teachers are motivated to develop competencies and take on new roles and responsibilities throughout their career. The new career path should be guided by teacher standards that relate to the different stages of a teacher’s career (e.g. from beginning teacher to expert teacher), with each stage associated with new responsibilities. New salary levels should also be defined to reflect the different stages and responsibilities of the career path.
3.4.2. Revise appraisal for career advancement to focus on authentic measures of teaching practice rather than examinations and academic requirements. Base the appraisal for career advancement on authentic measures of teacher competency, including classroom observations, and incorporate input from in-school appraisers who conduct the regular appraisal process. Use the same cadre of experienced teachers who will conduct new teachers’ appraisals to conduct career advancement appraisals.

3.4.3. Revise and consider ending the merit grade salary bonus which does not provide a fair and equitable measure of teaching. Instead, a new teacher career path should be developed to recognise and reward teachers as they develop professionally and take on new roles and responsibilities, which offer higher remuneration. Romania should also consider instituting a general increase to teachers’ salaries to attract top candidates to the profession and sufficiently remunerate teachers.

School evaluation in Romania: From compliance to school improvement

School evaluation commonly serves two related purposes: improvement and accountability. School evaluations for improvement are generally formative and associated with self-evaluation. They can help to enhance teaching and learning by focusing attention on the structures and processes in schools that influence them, and informing the development of school goals and planning. School evaluations for accountability are generally summative and associated with external school evaluation. They aim to ensure national standards are being met, challenge schools to improve, and provide reliable information to the public – particularly parents – about the quality and characteristics of local schooling.

Countries need to balance accountability and improvement so that one does not outweigh the other. They must also ensure that external and internal school evaluations complement each other so that schools have a clear and consistent sense of what they need to do to improve and can take responsibility for their own development. In Romania, this balance has not been achieved so far. School evaluation is currently weighted more towards external accountability and compliance, rather than school development and improvement. While schools across Romania are required to do self-evaluations, they do not seem to view it as a meaningful improvement exercise and many lack the capacity to conduct it effectively. A lack of direct support to schools to follow-up on internal and external evaluation further limits the overall contribution that evaluation plays to school improvement.

Issue 4.1: Establish a common framework for school evaluation

Romania has external school evaluation procedures to ensure that all schools meet certain minimum standards, which is an important quality assurance measure. However, these procedures are carried out by several different external school evaluation bodies the long-standing CSIs which represent the ministry in each county, and ARACIP, created in 2005, both of which conduct external school evaluations in all schools. At the same time, the ministry’s Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate evaluates a sample of schools each year. These bodies duplicate each other’s efforts, creating inefficiencies in a resource-strained system. The CSIs and ARACIP also use different sets of criteria for their evaluations. These different standards puts schools in the difficult position of having to meet separate expectations rather than being able to focus on one set of standards to help guide their improvement efforts. Existing evaluation frameworks also reveal significant gaps in how they address teaching and learning, student outcomes, and school self-evaluation, undermining their effectiveness for both accountability and improvement.
Recommendations

4.1.1. Develop a common definition of a “good school” to ensure that all evaluators and schools are guided by the same expectations and focus on what matters most for school improvement. Use this definition to develop a single framework for school evaluation that addresses what is missing in the existing frameworks. The new framework should be based on a few high-quality standards and ensure that evaluation draws on multiple sources of evidence and that external evaluation reinforces self-evaluation.

4.1.2. Revise the mandates of the external evaluation bodies to reduce duplication and ensure that each organisation performs the role it is best qualified to fill (Figure 0.4). ARACIP should be established as the main external school evaluator, given its independence and expertise in external and internal school evaluation. The CSIs’ close relationship with schools means that they are well placed to become the main providers of county-level support for school improvement. Finally, the ministry’s Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate should shift its mandate from direct inspection to overseeing the CSIs’ work, monitoring national priorities and policies, and supporting delivery.

Figure 0.4. School evaluation: From compliance to improvement
Issue 4.2: Use evaluation results to better support school improvement

Romania’s current school evaluation system is oriented towards accountability. Both internal and external evaluations are primarily focused on completing the process of evaluation itself, with limited impact on school improvement. The developmental function of school evaluation, which is normally supported by detailed recommendations, follow-up and support for improvement planning, is currently far less developed in Romania.

Recommendations

4.2.1. Ensure that schools receive sufficient feedback and follow-up support to improve. ARACIP inspections should result in detailed feedback and actionable recommendations for schools. Romania should establish follow-up procedures so that CSIs provide schools with timely and specific support to improve on the basis of the results of ARACIP’s external evaluations.

4.2.2. Consider a differentiated approach to external school evaluation in the future. As schools’ capacity for self-evaluation develops, schools with more mature self-evaluation processes and culture may receive “lighter touch” external evaluations. Struggling schools can be supported by more in-depth external evaluations, focusing attention and support where it is most needed.

4.2.3. Ensure that public reporting is based on a fair measure of school performance. Make greater use of ARACIP’s efficiency index for public reporting. The efficiency index takes into account the contextual factors that may influence a school’s performance and compares the performance of different schools, in terms of student outcomes, with other schools operating in similar conditions with similar resources. As the index tries to account for school context, it provides a fairer measure of school performance than the ministry’s school ranking based on raw student examination results.

Issue 4.3: Strengthen school self-evaluation

Romania has made real efforts to establish self-evaluation in all schools. However, schools’ internal evaluations are not yet viewed as a useful school improvement process and seem to be completed primarily for external reporting purposes. Given the competitive nature of education in Romania, factors like pressure on schools to perform well, blame for poor results and a limited sense of community responsibility for education are likely to discourage schools from identifying what they consider to be weaknesses. Schools also lack capacity, support and funding, and have comparatively limited autonomy, which constrains their ability to implement improvements on the basis of their self-evaluations.

Recommendations

4.3.1. Raise the profile of self-evaluation within schools and integrate it into improvement activities. Principals are central to engaging the whole school in self-evaluation and ensuring that it links to school improvement. As such, they should have a central role in the self-evaluation process by serving as the head of their school’s Commission on Quality Assurance and Evaluation. At the same time, school self-evaluation should be integrated into schools’ management cycles so that schools use the new definition of a good school to set a single set of goals for their annual management plan, and use the self-evaluation process to review progress against these goals.
4.3.2. Develop schools’ capacity for self-evaluation. Provide training for school staff and CSIs on self-evaluation, and support networking among schools to encourage mutual capacity development.

4.3.3. Ensure that schools have the resources and autonomy to implement improvements. Provide schools with adequate, predictable funding so that they can plan and implement improvements. Providing targeted discretionary funds could also help to encourage schools to develop their own strategies for improvement. Consider progressively increasing schools’ authority over assessment and teacher recruitment, while using evaluation to build schools’ capacity to be able to use their existing autonomy over the curriculum, so that they are able to innovate and adapt teaching and learning practices to their specific needs and goals.

4.3.4. Ensure that school self-evaluation is grounded in schools’ actual work and needs. Give schools the flexibility to adjust or add some of their own locally relevant criteria to the standard template for self-evaluation so that they can adapt the self-evaluation process to their own needs.

Issue 4.4: Develop the principal and school inspector roles

Principals and inspectors are essential to the success of Romania’s education system. In order for the holders of these positions to be able to contribute effectively to school improvement, Romania will need to refocus their roles on improving teaching, learning and student outcomes, and away from administration and control.

After teaching, school leadership is the most important factor open to policy influence that affects student learning. As well as challenges around low pay and a lack of relevant professional development opportunities, principals’ ability to lead school improvement is also limited by systemic governance challenges in Romania. These include the large number of satellite schools, which were created as part of recent school restructuring efforts in response to demographic decline. Many principals are responsible for their own legally designated school as well as several satellite schools, which do not have their own on-site principal. At the same time, while the 2011 Education Law made the school board and principal responsible for school quality, the partial rollback of the law means that principals’ accountability to the school board and CSIs is unclear.

District leaders represent a critical mediating layer between schools and the government, providing support to both. In Romania, the CSIs’ close relationship with schools puts them in a potentially strong position to provide timely and targeted support. Moving CSIs towards a more supportive role will require significant changes to their structure and function within Romania’s governance framework, and to the practical preparation of CSI inspectors.

Recommendations

4.4.1. Ensure that the procedures for hiring principals and CSI inspectors are fair and transparent. This is essential for the stability, accountability and quality of these roles. The establishment of annual contests that are regulated according to transparent criteria and standardised examinations is a valuable step towards ensuring recruitment is fair and managed with integrity. As trust and capacity for this selection process grows, Romania should progressively develop performance-based recruitment procedures that are more effective in assessing candidates’ aptitude for the role.
4.4.2. Encourage and enable principals to be more effective drivers of school improvement. Develop standards that set out what a principal should know and be able to do, and use these standards to develop a consistent procedure for appraising principals. End the arbitrary dismissal of principals by creating a step-by-step procedure to address underperformance. Ensure that principals have opportunities to build capacity as effective pedagogical and administrative leaders through professional learning. Principals’ salaries, which are low by national and international standards, should be reviewed. Consideration should be given to involving schools in hiring decisions and creating succession planning procedures to ensure that the role is filled by the best candidates.

4.4.3. Resolve the systemic challenges of satellite schools and principals’ unclear accountability. Principals responsible for satellite schools are not adequately prepared or supported to lead improvements in this context. This should be addressed by, for example, allocating deputy principals to support school leaders’ administrative workload as appropriate, reducing the number of schools for which a principal may be responsible, or making broader changes to the school network so that all schools have an equal chance to improve. Resolving the lack of clarity around school governance by clarifying who the principal is accountable to, and ensuring that school boards have sufficient capacity to effectively exercise their responsibilities will also support school improvement.

4.4.4. Shift the CSI inspector role from control to support. This would be facilitated by a change in the CSIs’ structure, including the creation a dedicated school improvement unit within each CSI. CSI inspectors would also need to build capacity to focus more on school improvement, which could be provided through dedicated training, mentoring and networking.

System evaluation in Romania: Using information for system improvement

System evaluation collects evidence to provide accountability information to the public on how the education system is working, and to inform policy making for educational improvement (OECD, 2013). It draws on quantitative evidence, such as national education indicators and student assessment data, as well as qualitative evidence, such as policy analysis and evaluations.

In recent decades the Romanian education system has put in place many of the constituent parts needed for system evaluation. These include improved data collection and education indicators, qualitative information on schools through evaluations, and policy analysis and evaluations. Romania lacks however, a coherent approach to draw on this information systematically to monitor the education system and its progress.

The absence of a coherent approach to using system-level data means that some gaps remain. Notably this includes accurate data on student learning outcomes and background information on students and their schools to understand how student performance is shaped by socio-economic background and other contextual factors. Such information will be particularly critical as Romania implements its new curriculum, to see how it is affecting learning in classrooms.

Using information to provide feedback is an important part of system evaluation. This needs to be improved at both the central and local levels in Romania. It would help central government, counties and schools establish a more comprehensive understanding of current performance, and use this to inform better policies, school support and teaching.
practices in the classroom. Strengthening system evaluation in Romania would also provide valuable direction and support to ensure that national priorities are implemented and that their potential impact on the system is achieved.

**Issue 5.1: Strengthen strategic planning**

Romania’s 2011 Education Law brought significant changes to the education system, including introducing diagnostic national assessments, bringing the Preparatory Grade into compulsory education and decentralising some responsibilities to the school level. However, its implementation has been partial. This means that many of its positive practices have not fulfilled their potential. Romania is now considering a new national law on education, which is an important opportunity to address the gaps and inconsistencies created by the 2011 law’s partial implementation. Ensuring that the new law is underpinned by a national strategy, linked to national goals and transparent progress monitoring, will help to ensure that it becomes a strategic tool that supports the Romanian education system to improve its quality and equity.

**Recommendations**

5.1.1. Develop a long-term national strategy for education. The current discussion around a new education law and the Presidential initiative “Educated Romania”, which launched a national debate on education, create an opportunity to forge a long-term vision and strategy for education. It will be important for Romania to develop collective ownership of the new strategy, to create national support to prevent the policy reversals the 2011 law suffered. Linking the strategy and new law to wider national development objectives and engaging independent experts in their development could help to build political consensus. Finally setting a limited number of goals over the medium term would support monitoring and accountability, and provide evidence on key priorities to inform policy making.

5.1.2. Ensure the transparency and accessibility of progress reporting. Romania needs to develop measurable, time-specific indicators for monitoring progress towards any new national strategy’s goals so that the government can be held accountable for results and has the information it needs to design effective policies and allocate resources. Indicators should be carefully developed, with the involvement of statistical and educational experts to ensure that they are methodologically sound and, where they are focused on learning, that they reflect the breadth of student learning to avoid the use of a narrow measure focused solely on academic achievement. Developing the State of Education report so that it draws on a broader range of system-monitoring information will help it to become a more authoritative source of information on the education system’s performance, and better inform decision making.

5.1.3. Clarify the role of evaluation and assessment in supporting national learning. Romania’s evaluation and assessment system has many positive practices that support student learning, but these tend to be nascent and are undermined by the weight of national examinations and evaluation for compliance. Setting out clearly in the national strategy and new law how evaluation and assessment can support Romania’s learning goals would help to provide greater coherence to support its positive practices and ensure all aspects of the system are working together to support improvements in teaching and learning.
**Issue 5.2.: Align system-monitoring to educational priorities**

Romania has made significant improvements to system-monitoring, but some critical data gaps remain. It lacks a standardised national assessment to monitor student learning according to the expectations set out in the new curriculum and contextual information on the factors that are influencing learning outcomes. Reliable data on financial resource allocation and use are also missing; the MNESR does not have accurate information on schools budgets. This undermines the country’s ability to monitor the progress of its education system against national goals and direct support to where it is most needed. Improving data on the local funds that schools receive will help to establish a clearer picture of school resourcing and identify those schools with insufficient resources so that funds can be better targeted to where they are most needed.

**Recommendations**

5.2.1. **Standardise the Grade 4 national assessment and introduce background questionnaires to create a system-monitoring tool.** Romania currently lacks its own system-monitoring assessment which means that it does not have the means to reliably measure learning outcomes against national expectations or to judge the impact of policy changes on teaching and learning. Romania should standardise the marking procedures for the Grade 4 assessment so that it provides reliable system-wide data on students’ learning outcomes. Introducing a background questionnaire as part of the Grade 4 assessment will help Romania to better understand the impact of contextual factors on student learning. Finally, Romania should consider moving to a sample-based assessment to help avoid any stakes becoming attached to the assessment, in a high-stakes national examination culture. Sample-based assessments also make it possible to cover a broader range of subject domains, knowledge areas and competencies.

5.2.2. **Expand the data that is collected on student outcomes and background in the Integrated Information System for Education System in Romania (SIIIR).** Alongside the new background questionnaires for Grade 4, this would also provide the basis for a better understanding of how contextual factors are shaping student learning and more effective policy responses.

5.2.3. **Improve information on school resource allocation and use.** This is important to enhance the effectiveness of resourcing policies, and in particular to develop policies to reduce the wide disparities in funding available to schools (for example through a review of the per capita funding formula and introduction of additional targeted programmes for disadvantaged schools). Romania also needs better data on school resources to support further decentralisation and greater overall investment in education, both of which this review considers will be important to improvements in outcomes.

**Issue 5.3: Improve the use of results at central, county and school level**

Romania’s education system generates vast amounts of information from students, teachers and schools through testing, inspections and evaluations but makes limited use of it. The use of results is an essential part of system evaluation, since it provides feedback to better understand current performance and helps to identify where and how improvements might be made.
Recommendations

5.3.1. Invest in central government capacity for analysis of the education system. Expand the number of staff and analytical capacity in the ministry’s Public Policy Department and proceed with the creation of a research group in the ministry, as set out in the National Strategy for Reducing Early School Leaving. This will enhance central government’s analytical capacity to use the information produced by the evaluation and assessment system for system evaluation. Ensure that the IES has sufficient independence and resources to deliver its research programme so that it can devote itself to providing research and policy evaluations that provide evidence for policy making.

5.3.2. Improve the use of system-level information at county level to support improvement and accountability. Set the expectation that CSIs will adopt county-specific targets linked to national targets, with regular progress reporting to central government. Develop information management systems for CSIs so that they can better understand the statistical profile (e.g. school resources, student profile, teacher profile and learning environment) of the schools within their county and how this is affecting students’ learning outcomes so that CSIs can target their support to schools most in need.

5.3.3. Provide schools with more accessible information to support school self-evaluation and improvement planning. Provide schools with information on their statistical profile and students’ learning outcomes, so that they can analyse their own data and understand how the teaching and learning environment at their school is shaping students’ learning outcomes in comparison with other schools.

References


