

## Chapter 4

### School evaluation in Romania: From compliance to school improvement

*In most countries, school evaluation is associated with accountability and improvement. However, in Romania, it is heavily weighted towards external accountability and compliance. This chapter sets out how school evaluation can be re-balanced to support school improvement. First, Romania needs a coherent system for school evaluation, with a single primary external evaluator and a single set of criteria for evaluations. Second, external evaluations should result in detailed feedback and follow-up support that schools can use to lead improvements. Third, school self-evaluation needs to be reinforced and given greater prominence so that it is seen as a useful improvement tool and not a compliance check. Finally, school leaders need to be supported to become pedagogical leaders so that they can lead improvements to teaching and learning in their schools.*

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

## Introduction

The quality of a country's education system depends on what happens in its schools. In Romania, while learning standards have improved in recent years, a large share of students continue to have difficulty mastering basic skills, and an increasing share leave school early. School evaluation can help to address these challenges by focusing attention on the structures and processes in schools that influence student learning and how they can be improved.

Internationally, there has been a discernible shift in recent years in the nature and focus of school evaluation practices. In many OECD countries, this has entailed a move away from an emphasis on evaluating school compliance with national policies and procedures towards a greater focus on the quality of the teaching and learning process. In parallel, countries have placed much greater focus on the need for schools to evaluate themselves as part of efforts to strengthen school leadership for improvement, while retaining external controls to provide important quality assurance and support for schools' internal processes (OECD, 2013b). Quality standards and performance measures have evolved too, to address more directly the central importance of teaching and learning practices to student outcomes. While evaluation practices continue to vary considerably across countries, depending on the maturity of the evaluation system and the wider political-cultural context, a strong focus on enabling school-led improvement is increasingly seen as the hallmark of a strong school evaluation system.

Romania has taken steps to reorient school evaluation away from a focus on compliance towards improvement. Several features of the current evaluation system, however, stand in the way of progress. First, Romania lacks a shared definition of school quality to guide evaluation and improvement efforts. Second, responsibility for external evaluation is fragmented, which means that schools in Romania are subject to multiple evaluations. Third is the lack of feedback, particularly for struggling schools, which may not receive the feedback they need to improve. Fourth, despite recent efforts, school self-evaluation has not taken root as a meaningful developmental process, in part because of limited capacity and understanding, but also because of schools' weak autonomy in a system that remains highly centralised and focused on control. Finally, a number of factors prevent principals and inspectors from serving as the strong agents of improvement that they could be. Addressing these issues will be critical to establish a modern evaluation system in Romania that drives change in schools and improves outcomes for all students.

## Context and main features of school evaluation in Romania

### *The framework for school evaluation*

The 2005 Quality Assurance Law provides the basis for the current school evaluation system in Romania. It sets out the responsibilities of external and internal school evaluators for the pre-university and tertiary education systems. The law was intended to reinforce previous efforts to develop school evaluation which had begun in the late 1990s as Romania moved to decentralise its education system. Notably, it created the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), a permanent external school evaluation body separate from the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MNESR), with its own legal status and budget. ARACIP replaced a

previous temporary national commission for evaluation in the ministry which only covered private schools. The creation of ARACIP was a positive move. Internationally, establishing an inspectorate of this type is a common approach to focusing efforts on school evaluation within a single independent organisation and developing expertise in that area (OECD, 2013b).

The Quality Assurance Law was a step forward for Romania in other ways as well. It introduced new external and internal school evaluation requirements, formalising processes that had only been piloted previously. The law aims to ensure that all schools meet a minimum level of quality by requiring them to be regularly evaluated, first for accreditation and then every five years after that. It also encouraged schools to continuously improve and be accountable to their local communities by requiring them to conduct annual self-evaluations and report publicly on their results. However, the law was drafted and put in place quickly, with limited communication across the education system about the purpose and benefits of ARACIP and school evaluations (Kiss and Fejes, 2010).

The 2005 Law does mention the two other external school evaluation bodies - the County School Inspectorates (CSIs) and MNESR. However, it only states that these bodies exert “quality control in pre-university education” according to methodologies specified elsewhere, and that MNESR, in particular, controls and implements measures to improve education quality as recommended by ARACIP (MNESR, 2006). At the same time, the CSIs and MNESR Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate continue to be governed by a large number of other laws, ministerial orders and decisions. The presence of these different legal frameworks, without any clear attempt to set out how the different external evaluation bodies relate to each other, has created overlap in their duties, which has not been resolved.

### ***Responsibilities for school evaluation***

Romania is distinguished by the number of organisations involved in school evaluation. In addition to ARACIP, the MNESR evaluates schools through its local representatives, the CSIs, and through its own Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate. The different organisations’ responsibilities duplicate each other in places.

#### *The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education*

ARACIP is responsible for developing national quality standards and performance indicators for all schools, and evaluating schools against these standards. Some of ARACIP’s responsibilities also have a developmental function. These include providing guidelines and a template for school self-evaluation, as well as recommending quality improvements to the government based on its regular analysis of the education system (MNESR, 2006).

Like inspectorates in some other European countries, ARACIP contracts out its external school evaluations to evaluators with teaching experience (European Commission, 2015a). Evaluators must be qualified teachers with experience in evaluation and, once selected, they follow an 89-hour training programme. ARACIP was originally granted 50 staff positions by MNESR in 2005, but this has been reduced to 20. Today, it employs only 14 staff members, with just 6 working on accreditation and external evaluation, and lacks financial resources (ARACIP, 2014a).

### *County School Inspectorates*

The CSIs in Bucharest and Romania's 41 counties are deconcentrated arms of the MNESR, with responsibility for controlling quality in the school system. They are expected to apply and control the implementation of education policies in schools and monitor the quality of schools' teaching and learning activities. Each inspectorate is led by a general and a deputy general school inspector. In addition to these positions, the CSIs employ individuals responsible for the economic and technical administration of the inspectorate (e.g. accounting, payroll, IT, law), and two types of inspectors:

- **Inspectors responsible for curriculum and school inspection.** These inspectors conduct school inspections and specialty inspections of teachers (see Chapter 3). They inspect teaching and learning and focus their inspection efforts on specific areas related to their own teaching background in a particular education level (e.g. pre-school; primary) or curriculum subject. Their responsibilities include monitoring and controlling teachers' activities to ensure they comply with requirements, providing advice to teachers, and overseeing the implementation of exams and school competitions (MNESR, 2015).
- **Inspectors responsible for management.** These roles include institutional management inspectors, who appraise and advise principals and conduct school inspections, focusing their inspection efforts on the management of the school. They also include inspectors who do not necessarily conduct school inspections but instead plan and monitor activities related to particular portfolios, like human resource management and development, national minorities, continuing education, education projects and extracurricular activities (MNESR, 2015).

There were approximately 1 100 CSI inspectors overall nationally in 2011. A brief review of the organisational structure of the CSI inspectorate in two counties suggests that the distribution of inspectors is heavily weighted towards the curriculum and school inspection area. Inspectors are not necessarily distributed in proportion to the number of schools, teachers or school support required - a larger county like Binar might have only slightly more CSI staff (42) than smaller counties like Alba (39) (World Bank, 2011).

Romania has made efforts to transfer some responsibilities from the CSIs to schools, most notably with the 2011 Education Law, which granted authority for the hiring of teachers and principals to schools. However, over the years, these responsibilities have been recentralised. As a result, CSIs have considerable authority over the schools in their county.

All inspectors who work within a CSI are qualified teachers with at least eight years of teaching experience, positive annual appraisal results and didactic grade qualifications, signifying teaching excellence (see Chapter 3) (Eurydice, 2012). They must complete 60 credits of educational management courses (roughly 170 hours of study) to be eligible for a position as an inspector, but once in the role, they have limited professional development opportunities to allow them to build capacity (MNESR, 2016a).

The inspectorates have historically been influenced by politics, which has implications for their ability to fairly and consistently fulfil their tasks. The ministry appoints the CSI heads, the general and deputy general school inspectors. Political changes at the national level have resulted in high turnover in these roles; turnover for political reasons is also an issue among inspectors who work below the management level (World Bank, 2010). To address this, the 2011 Education Law established new transparent hiring procedures for inspectors. It was reported to the OECD Review Team during interviews that a significant proportion of Romania's counties boycotted these new

procedures when contests for general and deputy inspector positions were organised in 2015. However in autumn 2016, open contests were held in all counties for the first time.

CSIs are expected to support schools, but the majority of their legislated tasks relate to monitoring and controlling their activity (MNESR, 2011a). The lack of clarity in legislation and the volume of Minister's Orders and legislative items relating to the CSI inspectors may also make their role in terms of support to schools unclear. In practice, the activities of inspectors are weighted towards ensuring schools' compliance with rules and regulations, responding to requests for information from the ministry and inspecting teachers during their probation and for career progression (World Bank, 2010). CSIs are also constrained by a lack of finances and insufficient staff numbers to conduct all the school and teacher inspections that they are required to perform (World Bank, 2010).

### *Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate*

The Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate of the MNESR conducts direct inspections of schools. These inspections reportedly provide a means for the ministry to quickly investigate issues that arise in the education system, such as recent lower than average baccalaureate results, and to maintain a connection with the delivery of education on the ground. For a brief period, from the mid-2000s to 2011, it stopped conducting these inspections, but this responsibility has since been reinstated. The reasons for this change in the ministry's role were reportedly complex, and likely reflected changes in successive governments' attitudes towards the decentralisation of the education system and the role different actors should play in monitoring the country's schools. MNESR inspectors have similar teaching backgrounds to their CSI counterparts. Each inspector is focused on particular areas of the curriculum or level of the school education system (Eurydice, 2012).

The directorate also maintains a relationship with the CSIs. It organises meetings with CSI inspectors before the start of each school year, and each CSI is required to submit an annual report on their activities and respond to requests for information from the ministry (MNESR, 2016a). However, a general lack of oversight and accountability are evident in the relationship between the central ministry and its decentralised arms. For example, the ministry is supposed to conduct regular appraisals of general school inspectors, but it was indicated to the OECD Review Team during interviews that this is reportedly not happening. In addition, recent research (World Bank, 2010) points to disparities in how different CSIs envision and implement their roles across the country, which suggests that they are provided with limited guidance and direction.

### *Schools*

The Quality Assurance Law made school self-evaluation compulsory for the first time. Schools are required to form a Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation, which evaluates the school annually using ARACIP's standards and produces an annual improvement report, the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation. Each commission has between six to eight members, with representatives from the teaching staff, the teachers' union, parents, students at the upper secondary level, the local council and national minorities (MNESR, 2006). Commission members are not required to do any training, and their participation in this is left to the discretion of the school. Although the commission is responsible for implementing school improvement measures, in addition to conducting internal reviews, in reality, schools in Romania lack the autonomy and finances to effect change. The commission operates alongside a large number of other governance bodies that exist within Romania's schools ( Box 4.1).

### Box 4.1. School governance in Romania

The 2011 Education Law made schools publicly responsible for their performance, as embodied in the form of the board of directors (school board) and the principal.

The **school board** is responsible for the management of the school. It includes teaching staff, including the principal and deputy principal(s); representatives of the mayor and the local council; and parent representatives. It validates the school's self-evaluation report, the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation, promotes improvement measures, and approves the school's strategic planning documents, budget plans and curriculum.

The **principal** ensures the executive management of the school, and as such, legally represents the school and manages its budget. Principals develop the organisational, operational and budgetary plans for their schools, and submit them to the school board for approval. They are also responsible for assessing, training and motivating staff. They may be supported by one or more deputy principals.

Schools are legally required to maintain seven compulsory commissions. This includes the **Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation**, that conducts annual self-evaluation according to ARACIP's standards and produces the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation, as well as other commissions with specific mandates for the curriculum, continuous training and professional development, and combating school violence, absenteeism and school dropout.

In addition to these seven commissions, each school is also required to maintain :

- The **Teachers' Council** - led by the principal and including all teaching staff. It is responsible for the quality of teaching, proposes professional development plans and validates teachers' self-evaluations; and
- **Methodical commissions** - include all teachers of a particular curriculum subject or group of classes, and deal with a range of teaching and learning matters

The 2011 Education Law requires the school board and the principal to cooperate with the Teachers' Council, Parents' Committee and local government.

*Source:* MNESR (2016b), "Ordin privind aprobarea Regulamentului-cadru de organizare și funcționare a unităților de învățământ preuniversitar" [Order approving the Regulation for organising and functioning of pre-university institutions], Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, Bucharest; MNESR (2011a), "Legea educației naționale" [Law of National Education], Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, Bucharest.

Principals in Romania are considered to be directly responsible for the quality of education in the school, yet they do not have a designated role in the Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation and they do not co-ordinate the self-evaluation process (MNESR, 2006). Overall, the school leadership role is under developed in Romania, with a lack of clarity on the main functions and accountability, limited relevant preparation and professional development opportunities, and no clear system for performance management (see Policy Issue 4.4). In addition, the lack of fair and transparent appointment procedures for principals have only recently been tackled; while this is a very positive step in terms of the transparency and stability of the post, the selection process does not yet seem to be well-designed to identify the aptitudes that are essential for school leadership. These conditions have not helped school leaders to play a meaningful role in school improvement.

Moreover, some principals in Romania are responsible for multiple schools, posing challenges for administration and school improvement. School optimisation efforts in the mid-2000s, which were intended to address a shrinking student population and reduce

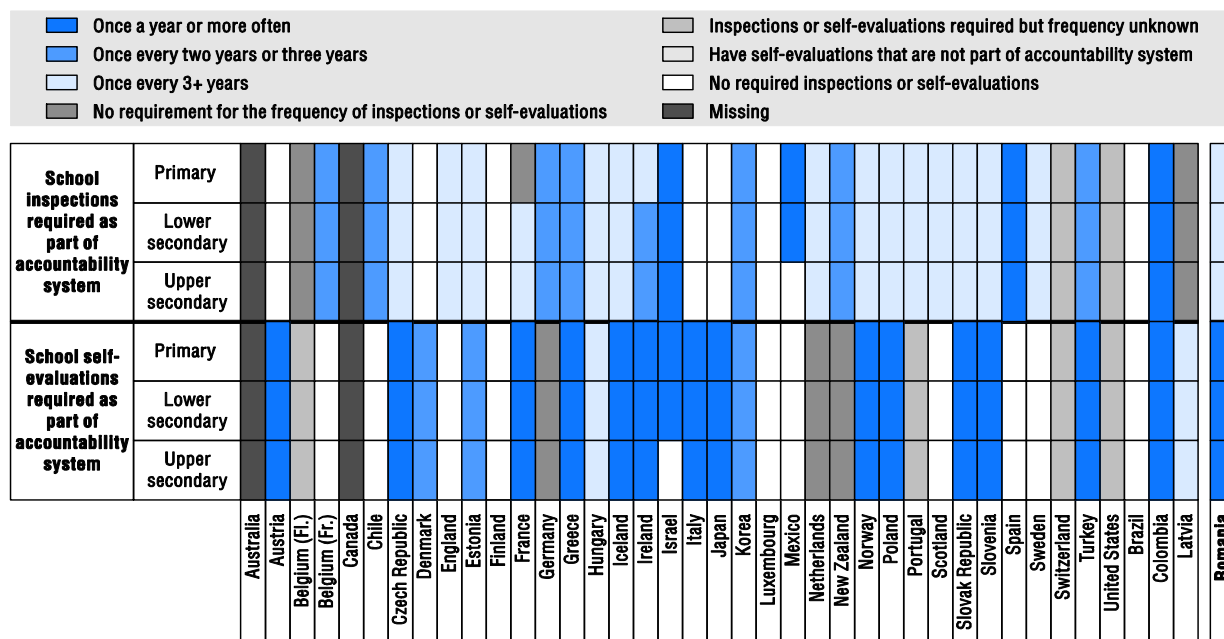
costs, led to schools with low student-teacher ratios being closed or becoming satellites (UNICEF/IES, 2014). Satellite schools lost their status as independent institutions, and instead now fall under the responsibility of a co-ordinating school and its principal. In the mid-1990s, there were 30 000 schools in Romania (Mediafax, 2013). By 2011, there were 7 000 schools which are independent legal entities, with approximately the same number of principals, and 14 000 satellite schools (World Bank, 2011). The needs of the satellite schools are not well understood, and they are more likely to lack funds (UNICEF/IES, 2014). As such, principals may lack the time, capacity and resources to contribute to effective improvement in satellite schools.

### *Types of school evaluation in Romania*

School evaluations commonly serve two related purposes: improvement and accountability (Faubert, 2009). School evaluations for improvement are generally formative and associated with self-evaluation. They aim to improve the teaching and learning in a school in order to bring about better student outcomes. School evaluations for accountability are generally summative and associated with external school evaluation. They aim to confirm compliance with rules and regulations and provide information to the public about whether or not a school meets quality standards. 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.

Romania uses both external inspections and school self-evaluations, which are conducted with similar regularity as in 6 other OECD and partner countries (see Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1. School evaluations in public schools**



Source: Adapted from OECD (2015), *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en>. The information for Romania was provided through official documents and information through the country visits.

Romania's school evaluation processes are currently weighted more towards external accountability and compliance than development and improvement. Romania has multiple types of external school evaluation conducted by multiple evaluators, using different approaches and standards. While school self-evaluation is required across Romania to support improvements in the learning and teaching environment, it does not seem to be viewed as a meaningful improvement exercise by schools.

### *ARACIP evaluations*

ARACIP evaluates schools using the quality standards it has developed. Following its evaluation ARACIP recommends to the ministry whether a school should be granted provisional authorisation, initial accreditation or recurrent evaluation:

- **Provisional authorisation:** grants new schools or schools with new programmes of study the right to begin hiring staff, accepting students and delivering education. This status lasts for two to four years.
- **Initial accreditation:** allows schools to issue diplomas or certificates, and to have all the rights of other pre-university education providers. This status lasts for five years.
- **Recurrent evaluation:** signifies that a school has met the standards to continue operating for a period of five years.

Schools that do not meet the standards cannot open or begin delivering a new programme. In the case of recurrent accreditation they may be closed, after receiving warnings and being subject to additional evaluations.

When ARACIP was first established, all schools legally operating at that time were automatically accredited (MNESR, 2006), with the obligation to undergo an evaluation for recurrent accreditation against ARACIP's standards in the future. These evaluations began in 2011/12 (Table 4.1). By 2017, ARACIP plans to conduct recurrent evaluations of all the remaining 4 000 public and private schools in the country. As such, recurrent evaluations now constitute the majority of the agency's school evaluations.

**Table 4.1. ARACIP's recurrent evaluations**

Year	Number of schools evaluated
2011/12	1 023
2012/13	20
2013/14	132
2014/15	1 785

*Source:* Communications with ARACIP, 2016

ARACIP uses general (minimum) standards to evaluate schools for initial accreditation. For recurrent accreditation it uses both the general standards and reference (higher-quality) standards to evaluate schools. The standards include 43 performance indicators, each associated with multiple descriptor statements describing what the school needs to demonstrate. The performance indicators are the same for both the general and reference standards, but the descriptor statements are different and those for recurrent accreditation provide higher expectations of quality for schools. The standards fall under three broad domains: institutional capacity, educational efficiency and quality management (Table 4.2).



ARACIP's recurrent evaluations involve a review of the school's documents, notably its self-evaluation report, followed by a two to five day school visit by two to four evaluators. The visit includes reviews of additional documents, classroom observations, interviews with teachers and the principal, and interviews or questionnaires with the student and parent committees. At the conclusion of the visit, the inspectors write a note in the school's Special Register for Inspection, identifying any problems, and a deadline for improvement. The school's demonstration of each descriptor is rated on a scale from unsatisfactory to excellent. The full evaluation reports are made publicly available on the ARACIP website. If the recurrent evaluation found that the required standards have been met, ARACIP issues a "quality certificate" to the school (MNESR, 2016a).

When ARACIP's evaluations were first developed, the primary aim was to ensure that schools met minimum standards of institutional capacity, including their facilities and compliance with legislation. To date, ARACIP's evaluations have not included lengthy school visits, nor have they been considered developmental. They do not result in detailed feedback (e.g. recommendations) intended to support school improvement, and follow-up with schools to assess their progress has not been a standard part of the process.

ARACIP is currently revising its standards to address some of these limitations. The new standards are intended to focus equally on institutional capacity, quality management (i.e. the school's self-evaluation procedures) and educational effectiveness. They will encompass certain areas that ARACIP has identified as essential, such as the extent to which schools address and improve the learning outcomes of all students, students with special education needs and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (ARACIP, 2016). The revised standards are also intended to be more stringent by increasing the number of descriptors a school must fulfil in order to receive "good" or "excellent" ratings. ARACIP has also revised the methodology of its school evaluations to ensure that evaluators spend more time visiting schools and observing classes and less time reviewing paperwork. These revisions suggest that ARACIP's evaluations are moving in a more developmental direction to better support school improvement but it will be important to ensure that the number of indicators and descriptors schools are required to meet are feasible and effective for school improvement. ARACIP is planning to release the new standards in 2018.

### *CSI inspections*

The CSIs conduct two different types of school inspections:

- **general school inspections:** to evaluate a school's overall performance
- **thematic inspections:** brief reviews of one or more areas of a school's activity, including special thematic inspections, which review teaching activity

CSIs also continually monitor schools and may intervene to provide guidance in response to complaints from parents or concerns (for example in response to the ministry's national ranking of schools based on student results). CSIs also visit schools to conduct specialty inspections of teachers (see Chapter 3).

### *General school inspections*

CSI inspections are conducted at least every four to five years, as resources allow. Each CSI determines when a school should be inspected based on factors such as the time since the last inspection and whether there are any concerns about the school. As such, school

inspection schedules are not based on consistent criteria, and schools within a county may not be inspected on a regular basis. The inspection lasts one to two weeks. It is conducted by a team of two to eight CSI inspectors, including curriculum and school inspectors, who have expertise in a particular curriculum subject or level of schooling, and educational management inspectors, who focus on school leadership (MNESR, 2011b). Inspectors review documentation provided by the school and then conduct a school visit. Sixty percent of the visit is spent on classroom observations, 20% on discussions with teachers, and 20% on discussions with school management, meetings with students and parents, and analysing additional documents.

Schools are inspected in seven theme areas, which overlap with some of the ARACIP evaluation domains (Table 4.2). The current frameworks have some important gaps. For example, although they reference the need for schools to take inclusive education principles and equity into account in their practices, there is no established practice across the counties to do so. At the same time, the outcomes of disadvantaged or minority students or students with special education needs, measured in terms of their performance in national examinations and assessments, and classroom assessments, dropout and repetition rates are not systematically taken into account. Finally, neither framework analyses contextual factors that affect student outcomes, which would provide a more comprehensive and accurate picture of school quality (see Policy Issue 4.1).

**Table 4.2. Areas evaluated in Romania’s school evaluations**

ARACIP and school self-evaluations	Ministry and CSI general school inspections
<p><b>Institutional capacity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• institutional, administrative and managerial structures (including communication with parents and the community)</li> <li>• physical resources (logistics and infrastructure)</li> <li>• human resources</li> </ul> <p><b>Educational efficiency (or effectiveness)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the content of the study programmes</li> <li>• students’ learning outcomes</li> <li>• teachers’ scientific research or methodological activity</li> <li>• the financial activity of the organisation</li> </ul> <p><b>Quality management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• quality assurance strategies and procedures</li> <li>• procedures for initiating, monitoring and periodically reviewing achieved programmes and activities</li> <li>• objective and transparent procedures for assessing students’ learning outcomes</li> <li>• procedures for the periodic evaluation of teaching staff</li> <li>• availability of adequate learning resources</li> <li>• regular updating of the database regarding internal quality assurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school management, quality management, development of the institution, efficient usage of (human, financial, material and information) resources, compliance with legislation and regulations</li> <li>• the relationship of the school with parents and the local community</li> <li>• the application of national/specific curriculum, and the quality of extracurricular activities</li> <li>• teachers’ activities (i.e. planning; teaching-learning-assessing; using a differentiated approach)</li> <li>• students’ performance compared to national standards</li> <li>• how the school supports and encourages students’ personal development and motivation to learn (counselling, educational guidance, individualised assistance), respecting the principles of inclusive education and providing equal opportunities</li> <li>• students’ attitude towards the education provided by the school</li> </ul>

*Sources:* MNESR(2006), “Legea 87/2006 pentru aprobarea Ordonanței de urgență a Guvernului nr. 75/2005 privind asigurarea calității în învățământ” [Law 87/2006 for the Endorsement of the Government’s Emergency Ordinance 75/2005 Concerning Quality Assurance in Education]; MNESR (2007), “H.G. nr. 22 din 10/01/2007 pentru aprobarea Metodologiei de evaluare instituțională în vederea autorizării, acreditării și evaluării periodice a organizațiilor furnizoare de educație, publicată în M.O., Partea I nr. 59 din 25/01/2007” [Minister’s Decision 22 / 2007 approving the Methodology of institutional evaluation for authorisation, accreditation and evaluation of providers of education], Ministry of National Education and Research, Bucharest; MNESR (2011b), “Ordinul 5547 din 6 octombrie 2011 privind aprobarea Regulamentului de inspecție a unitatilor de invatamant preuniversitar” [Minister’s Order 5547 / 2011, Methodology and Regulation for Pre-university School Inspections], Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, Bucharest.

Inspectors produce a final report with their observations, recommendations and a grade (poor, acceptable, good) for each area inspected and for each group of teachers, by subject area. The principal presents the summary of the important information to the teachers' council and parent and student representatives. It is provided to the local government only upon request. In most OECD countries, school inspection reports are either automatically shared with education authorities or posted publicly to ensure accountability (OECD, 2015a). Adopting a similarly transparent approach in Romania would help to strengthen integrity in the education system.

All schools are required to produce an improvement plan in response to the CSI inspection. Schools where problems are evident are subject to a follow-up inspection. If the CSI determines that the school cannot meet the objectives in their improvement plan, it may ask ARACIP to conduct an evaluation.

### *Thematic inspections*

CSIs also conduct thematic inspections, which are brief reviews of documents or observations of the activity of school staff based on themes set out in the relevant minister's order or themes they deem important, such as compliance with legislation and the work of school commissions. Thematic inspections of some documents, such as the school's annual management plan, appear to be conducted annually. The CSI report following the inspection sets out findings and areas that require improvement. The findings may be shared with the ministry but they are otherwise not disseminated.

### *Ministry inspections*

The MNESR's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate conducts general school inspections and thematic inspections of a sample of schools each year. These inspections follow the same methodology used by the CSIs, with a few notable differences. These include the fact that the directorate's inspections result in recommendations for both schools and the ministry, and its general school inspections lead to post-inspection follow-up with all evaluated schools, rather than just those where problems were evident. Otherwise, the directorate appears to duplicate the inspection efforts of the CSIs.

The directorate may decide to conduct general inspections of schools that meet certain criteria (e.g. schools with results above or below the national average). Given that these inspections are more time consuming than thematic inspections, the directorate tends to conduct fewer of them. For example, in 2013/14, it inspected 266 schools in 22 counties, of which the vast majority were speciality and thematic inspections, with only two general school inspections (MNESR, 2014). A recent round of thematic inspections evaluated how schools were preparing for students' mock examinations.

### *School self-evaluation*

The 2005 Quality Assurance Law broadly describes schools' responsibilities for self-evaluation. Each school's Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation assess their school based on the same standards that ARACIP use for their external evaluations. The school commission is required to gather information from staff and stakeholders (e.g. questionnaires of parents and students) and to address any descriptors identified by an external ARACIP evaluation as being "unsatisfactory" or unfulfilled (European Commission, 2015a).

Based on this assessment, the commission develops proposals for school improvement activities, and completes the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation presenting the self-evaluation results. The teachers' council, parents' association and student council debate the report, which is validated by the school board and then submitted to ARACIP. Reports are made publicly available on ARACIP's website which also provides information about all external school evaluations and ARACIP's periodic reports to the government on the quality of education.

### *Use of results*

In Romania, perceptions of school performance are influenced more by students' results on examinations or competitions than school evaluations. ARACIP's external school evaluations determine whether a school can continue to operate. Otherwise, the extent to which external and internal school evaluations are used varies but appears to be limited.

### *Policy making by the ministry*

There is no evidence that the results of school evaluations inform national policies or the ministry's decisions about funding and support to schools (MNESR, 2016a). ARACIP reviews the results of its school evaluations and school self-evaluations to make recommendations for policies or practices at the national, regional and school level, but they do not appear to have an impact on policy development or decision making.

### *Public reporting on the performance of the school system*

The results from school evaluations are not reflected in ministry's public reporting on the performance of the school system. The Ministry publishes a ranking of high schools nationally based on students' results when they entered the school in the national examination in Grade 8 (*Admitere*, 2016). In 2009, ARACIP began developing a contextualised attainment model it calls an "efficiency index", which is intended to provide a fairer picture of student (and school) performance than the national ranking by indicating whether a school is achieving better results than other schools functioning under similar conditions with similar resources (see Box 5.2, Chapter 5). The index calculates a school's performance based on its resources, risk factors (e.g. the socio-economic status of the school area; the percentage of qualified teachers) and outcomes (e.g. the distribution of average marks at the end of the school year; student results on standardised exams) (ARACIP, 2016). At present an index has been calculated for a sample of schools at all levels - kindergartens, primary, gymnasium and high school. These schools receive a form showing their performance against the index's criteria, but the index currently plays no formal role in the school evaluation process.

### *Performance management by the County School Inspectorates*

The CSIs' monitoring of schools' performance, including sanctions imposed on schools, appears to be influenced by raw national exam results rather than the results of school evaluations. The CSIs do not appear to take ARACIP's external school evaluation findings into account, and it is not clear how far they make use of schools' own self-evaluation results.

### *School improvement*

Schools are required to develop improvement plans based on the results of CSI and ministry inspections, and ARACIP research has found encouraging evidence that schools subject to its external evaluations improved their performance (ARACIP, 2014b). However, in general, external and internal school evaluations are perceived to have minimal impact on teaching and learning practices in schools (MNESR, 2016a).

One reason for this seems to be the limited connection between the internal and external evaluation processes and schools' improvement plans and activities. In one school, it was reported to the OECD Review Team during interviews that the self-evaluation results had informed the development of school improvement activities. However, the Review Team's discussions with other stakeholders suggested that schools view the main purpose of self-evaluation to be to complete the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluations, rather than to improve the school.

### **Policy issues**

Romania has made significant investments in school evaluation since the late 1990s. The country now has an independent school evaluation body, clear and transparent external evaluation procedures, and self-evaluation is a requirement in all schools. Romania is now in a position to review and revise its school evaluation system to make it a more effective tool for school and system-wide improvement. This will mean aligning its external evaluation processes and strengthening the capacity of schools to conduct self-evaluations and respond to their evaluation results with effective development measures, paying particular attention to the schools that need the most support to improve. It will also mean ensuring that the best candidates become principals and school inspectors at the county level, and that their roles are further developed to support school improvement. These changes will help external and internal school evaluations to focus on the areas that matter for improving the quality and equity of an education system: the teaching and learning practices in the school and the outcomes for all students.

#### **Policy Issue 4.1: Establishing a common framework for school evaluation**

Romania now has in place external school evaluation procedures to ensure all schools in the country meet certain minimum standards, which is an important quality assurance measure. However, it has three different external school evaluation bodies using different criteria to conduct their own evaluations which is inefficient and undermines their effectiveness. Developing a common definition of a good school would help Romania to integrate the efforts of these bodies so that they are all working together to support schools to reach higher standards, and ensure that everyone shares a common understanding of what these are.

#### ***Developing a shared definition of a “good school”***

School evaluation is most effective when informed by a nationally recognised definition of a “good school” (OECD, 2013b; Box 4.2). A common definition promotes consistency among evaluators, ensures all schools understand what they will be measured against and provides a model to which schools can aspire. It can also reinforce the government's education priorities, by highlighting the implications of national goals at the school level. The definition and related criteria should be based on national evidence, data and research, and be reviewed periodically.

At present, Romania has two legislated school evaluation frameworks, which present different but overlapping criteria for school quality. This 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. Both evaluation frameworks also reveal significant gaps, with the result that important dimensions of teaching and learning might receive insufficient attention, undermining the fairness and reliability of any assessment of school performance. Creating a single, common definition of a “good school” would not only bring coherence to Romania’s school evaluation system, but also ensure external and internal evaluation processes pay adequate attention to the full range of elements that contribute to and comprise good schooling.

### *Gaps and inconsistencies in the school evaluation frameworks*

Romania has two frameworks for school evaluation: 1) the general and reference standards used for ARACIP evaluations and school self-evaluations; and 2) the evaluation criteria used for the CSI and the MNESR's general school inspections. While the two frameworks seem to overlap (see Table 4.2), in practice the ARACIP and CSI evaluations focus on different dimensions of school quality, and both neglect important factors that are recommended for effective school evaluation: student outcomes and contextual factors, school self-evaluation (CSI/MNESR), and teaching and learning processes (ARACIP).

#### **Box 4.2. What is a “good school”?**

Internationally, definitions of a good or effective school tend to cover the following elements:

- the quality of teaching and learning
- the rate of students’ progress and outcomes, and the equity of their results, given contextual factors like students’ social background
- how teachers are developed to become more effective throughout their careers
- the application of the curriculum
- the use of assessment for learning (i.e. formative assessment to inform adjustments to teaching and learning strategies)
- the quality of the instructional leadership in the school
- the school’s vision and expectations
- the school’s self-evaluation practices and the extent to which they focus on teaching and learning.

*Source:* OECD (2013b), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en>.

The first important gap in both frameworks concerns student outcomes. To support school improvement, it is important to have measurable performance indicators on the quality of a school’s teaching and learning and their impact on student outcomes (Faubert, 2009). Measurement of student outcomes should go beyond their results on standardised tests to include such outcomes as well-being and acquisition of higher-order thinking skills (Faubert, 2009). In Romania, neither framework effectively addresses a range of both cognitive and non-cognitive quantitative and qualitative student outcomes.

In addition, neither takes into account contextual factors that affect student outcomes such as socio-economic status or parental education levels. Omitting these risks measuring the quality of a school's student intake rather than meaningfully evaluating the quality of the school (OECD, 2013b). It increases the likelihood that schools in advantaged areas will be evaluated as performing well and those in disadvantaged areas will not. The frameworks do not include outcomes for particular minority student groups, which would allow the system to better assess equity and inclusiveness.

An important gap in the CSI/MNESR inspection framework is any consideration of schools' self-evaluation processes, which is notable given that the ministry and the CSIs have a mandate to support school improvement. Conversely, the ARACIP's evaluation framework does not focus adequately on assessing the quality of teaching and learning processes. This is in line with the view of some educators in Romania who expressed concerns that the ARACIP evaluations are mainly compliance checks, with reviews of documentation taking precedence over classroom observations. The new ARACIP standards are currently being revised to focus more on teaching and learning.

### *Developing a common definition, new criteria and methodology*

There is a clear need for a single and holistic vision of a good school in Romania, to guide evaluation and improvement efforts. The ARACIP review presents an opportunity to do this, as ARACIP has the mandate, independence and expertise to develop a robust set of standards and indicators. In developing this, the following aspects should be taken into account:

- **ARACIP should lead an inclusive review process.** This will help to develop collective ownership for the new definition, standards and school evaluation itself. This is especially important given the weak support for the current ARACIP framework among many educators in Romania. The development of a common definition of a good school and associated standards for evaluation could form part of the national, public consultation on education, “Educated Romania” (see Chapter 5). Communicating and promoting the new definition and standards among Romania's educators will also be critical to ensure that it is used, and contributes positively to school improvement (see Policy Issues 4.2 and 4.3).
- **The new definition of a good school should link to national priorities.** These include priorities around quality and equity, and addressing the current gaps in the framework. Particular attention should be paid to the quality of teaching and learning processes and their relationship to student outcomes, taking the school's context into account to provide a fair and accurate picture of students' development (OECD, 2013b). ARACIP's membership of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates could provide valuable opportunities to draw on international experience and research on effective schools to inform this work.
- **School evaluation should be guided by a small set of high-quality standards and associated indicators.** Too many, complicated standards risk generating confusion and a heavy administrative burden for both schools and evaluators. As such, it will be of paramount importance to ensure that standards and indicators are not lengthy and complicated and, instead, help schools focus on the key issues for school improvement (see above). The Scottish framework for school evaluation uses just three main questions and associated indicators, focused on the simple question “how good is our school?” (Box 4.3).

### Box 4.3. Evaluating schools in Scotland (United Kingdom)

In the early 1990s, Scotland began developing indicators for school evaluation. Over the course of two decades, based on feedback and examinations of how the most effective schools were evaluating themselves, these indicators were pared down to the most essential.

The current school evaluation framework of Education Scotland, the government agency responsible for conducting school inspections, is used for both external and internal school evaluations and is intended to help evaluators answer the question: how good is our school? The framework focuses on three key questions and associated indicators, and for each indicator, identifies school practices that are considered highly effective:

1. How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?
2. Performance indicators include: the school's capacity for self-evaluation for self-improvement; school leadership and management of staff; management of resources to promote equity.
3. How good is the quality of care and education we offer?
4. Performance indicators include: learning, teaching and assessment; the curriculum; personalised support for students; and engaging families in learning.
5. How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our learners?
6. Performance indicators include: improving well-being, equality and inclusion; raising attainment and achievement; and increasing creativity and employability.

Sources: Nusche, D. et al. (2011a), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand 2011*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116917-en>; Education Scotland (2015), *How Good is Our School?* 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Education Scotland, Livingston, [https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Frameworks\\_SelfEvaluation/FRWK2\\_NIHeditHGIOS/FRWK2\\_HGIOS4.pdf](https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Frameworks_SelfEvaluation/FRWK2_NIHeditHGIOS/FRWK2_HGIOS4.pdf).

- **Fair and credible school evaluation should draw on multiple sources.** Evaluations should draw on multiple sources of evidence that combine data on school quality, document reviews, and feedback collected via stakeholder surveys and interviews, and classroom observation of teaching and learning (OECD, 2013b). While school evaluation in Romania does use these sources, classroom observations play a limited role in ARACIP evaluations. Strengthening this aspect will be important to ensure that its evaluations provide an accurate measure of the quality of teaching and learning in schools, and to enhance the evaluations' legitimacy among Romania's teachers.
- **Consider how school self-evaluation can be reinforced.** Other countries do this by ensuring that external evaluation interacts directly with self-evaluation, for example by including a review of the school's self-assessment reports and an assessment of its internal evaluation practices as part of external evaluations (OECD, 2013b).

Finally, the test of good school evaluation is that it guides and supports schools to improve. Gathering ongoing feedback from schools on the evaluation processes and the quality of support provided to them will provide insights into the effectiveness of the current evaluation process, and help to identify appropriate adjustments.



### ***Revising and aligning the mandates of the external evaluation bodies***

The three external school evaluation bodies in Romania – the Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate, the CSIs and ARACIP – currently operate in parallel, duplicating rather than building upon each other’s efforts. The findings of the different bodies do not seem to inform each other’s work. For example, there is no expectation that the CSIs will use the results of ARACIP evaluations in their county to inform their ongoing monitoring and support of schools. Romania will need to clarify the mandates of each body to eliminate inefficiencies and ensure that their work, individually and collectively, meaningfully supports school improvement.

### ***Establishing ARACIP as the main external school evaluator***

Several factors point to the value of giving ARACIP the primary role in setting standards and performing external school evaluations. It is a largely autonomous agency that focuses exclusively on school evaluation and has specialised expertise in both external and internal school evaluation. By recruiting and training all its evaluators to the same standard, it can ensure a level of consistency in evaluations across the education system. As a central body, it can maintain an objective distance from the schools it evaluates. It can also provide strong support from the centre by conducting system-wide research and disseminating effective school self-evaluation practices, tools and guidelines across the country.

To be effective as the primary external school evaluator, ARACIP will need to be sufficiently financed and staffed. Funding for the organisation has been inconsistent and has fallen in recent years, which ARACIP attributes to changes in the government (ARACIP, 2014a). ARACIP relies to a large extent on fees paid by local authorities for school evaluations, in addition to government grants and resources from international projects (ARACIP, 2014a). This is a problematic arrangement for both ARACIP and the local authorities, some of whom have difficulty paying the fee (Kiss and Fees, 2010).

Instead, providing ARACIP with government funding that is commensurate with its workload, and eliminating the need for it to charge a fee to local authorities, would be consistent with the way inspectorates are commonly funded in other European countries (van Bruges, 2010). This could also support equity by allowing ARACIP to prioritise evaluations of schools in areas of low socio-economic status, which are reportedly rarely visited, without having to wait for fees to be paid by the local authorities.

Given the recent decrease in ARACIP’s internal staffing levels and the need to evaluate all public and private schools by 2017, an increase in ARACIP’s staff allotment, which is determined by the government, would appear to be necessary. This should take place in conjunction with a review of the profile of the external evaluators that are contracted to ARACIP, which at present may not sufficiently reflect the backgrounds required to evaluate teaching and learning practices. Some stakeholders reported to the OECD Review Team in interviews that ARACIP external contracted evaluators’ do not always have experience in the education level of the school they are evaluating. Internationally, candidates for school evaluator roles are generally required to have a teaching qualification in the school level they will be evaluating (Flaubert, 2009). Romania should consider implementing similar requirements and increasing the size of its evaluation teams to allow for more comprehensive evaluations, particularly in larger schools.

### *Focusing CSIs on school improvement*

There have been suggestions that Romania close the CSIs and delegate their responsibilities to ARACIP, in part, because of the overlap in their school evaluation practices. This review recommends that the CSIs should lose their current school evaluation role. External school evaluation requires that the evaluators have sufficient objectivity and distance from responsibility for a school's performance to avoid conflicts of interest and bias (OECD, 2013b). The current arrangements for CSIs in Romania mean that this cannot always be the case. CSIs work regularly with the teachers and schools in their counties, sometimes over a long period of time, enabling local relationships to develop. CSIs conduct some aspects of teacher appraisal in the schools in their counties, they are the employers of the teachers and principals, and they are ultimately responsible for ensuring the quality of education in their county. All these features undermine their ability to consistently maintain the appropriate distance for external school evaluations.

Yet the closeness of CSIs to schools does make them well positioned to provide targeted, hands-on support to schools, which Romania clearly needs to raise the quality of teaching and learning. The presence of a strong supportive “mediating layer” between the government and schools is a key feature of education systems around the world that have experienced sustained improvements (Mushed et al., 2010). As such, it would be beneficial for the CSIs to be integrated into a new school evaluation paradigm in ways that make the best use of their supportive role, while ARACIP becomes the primary external evaluator.

In this role, CSIs would still have a supportive function in evaluation by continuing to monitor schools, but these activities would be informed by common standards, connected to the ARACIP evaluations and designed to support school self-evaluation. The ministry, the CSIs and ARACIP should work together and solicit input from schools to determine what format that monitoring should take; giving consideration to activities that would be necessary or add value for information gathering and guidance purposes. For example, it would probably be worthwhile for the CSIs to continue to conduct some form of thematic review to quickly collect information about schools' activities. Optimising the capacity of the CSIs to provide support to schools in this way will require redefining the inspector role (see Policy Issue 4.4).

### *Shifting the Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate's role to delivery support*

There are inefficiencies inherent in a system where a central body maintains responsibility for directly inspecting schools if those inspections fall within the mandate of other organisations. Governments generally play a much more powerful, system-wide role in school improvement by establishing overall education priorities and developing policies to ensure their implementation (see for example, Box 4.4).

As such, rather than conducting direct inspections of schools, the MNESR's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate could change its role to proactively monitor and drive implementation of education policy, as research suggests that this is currently not happening (World Bank, 2010). The patchy implementation of education policy across the country, such as variation in teachers' preparedness to teach the new curriculum or in the use of tools such as education portfolios, suggest that there is an acute need for this kind of delivery support in Romania.

The reformed directorate would play a key role by working closely with CSIs to monitor national priorities and policies, and working with counties to develop appropriate interventions where delivery encounters challenges. This national perspective may also support peer learning across different counties, with the directorate having the perspective to identify what is working well in one county and help others to learn from its successes.

#### Box 4.4. Working with subnational education bodies

Internationally, governments have different methods for co-ordinating, supporting and overseeing the work of education bodies at the regional or local level:

- Holding regular meetings with the heads of the subnational bodies throughout the year to discuss progress against goals, share information and identify factors that are enabling or impeding school improvement.
- Requiring that education bodies conduct self-evaluations, setting a vision and school improvement goals for their district connected to national education priorities, and using regular reports to the government as the means to report on the results of their efforts (see Chapter 5).
- Establishing a system for the periodic external evaluation of the subnational education bodies, including the provision of recommendations and follow-up as needed, as is done by the Ministry of Education or the school inspectorate in Sweden, Korea, Scotland and Wales (United Kingdom).
- Providing standardised tools and templates to support the subnational education bodies in their work with schools.
- Encouraging networking between authorities with greater capacity and those that need more support in order to strengthen management across the sector.

*Sources:* Kim, K. et al. (2010), *OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes: Country Background Report for Korea*, Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), Seoul, [www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy](http://www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy); Nusche, D. et al. (2011b), *OECD Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Sweden*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116610-en>; OECD (2013b), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en>; Mazurkiewicz et al. (2014), 'Implementation of a new school supervision system in Poland', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 111, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jxrlxrgc6b-en>; Estyn (2015), *Improving Schools through Regional Education Consortia*, Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training (Estyn), Cardiff, [www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/Related-Documents/Performance-Improvement/Regulatory-and-Inspection-Work/Improving-schools-through-regional-education-consortia-National-Report.pdf](http://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/Related-Documents/Performance-Improvement/Regulatory-and-Inspection-Work/Improving-schools-through-regional-education-consortia-National-Report.pdf).

#### Policy Issue 4.2: Using evaluation results to better support school improvement

In order to bring about school improvement, Romania will need to ensure that the results of external school evaluations support not only external accountability but also school development. Evaluations for external accountability are associated with public reporting, rewards and sanctions while those for development are associated with feedback, follow-up and improvement planning (Faubert, 2009). By providing follow-up support that builds schools' self-evaluation capacity, Romania will ultimately be able to rely more heavily on schools to improve themselves.

### ***Ensuring that external evaluations provide detailed feedback and actionable recommendations***

It is important that external school evaluations provide detailed feedback and recommendations to ensure that schools have a thorough understanding of what they need to do to improve (OECD, 2013b). In Romania, schools are required to address areas where ARACIP identifies that they have not fulfilled the necessary requirements in their external evaluations, which is a positive example of evaluation leading to action. However, ARACIP's evaluations do not provide detailed feedback or actionable recommendations for improvement across the domains assessed. This has traditionally been provided by the CSI and MNESR inspections.

Given the proposed changes to the school evaluation bodies described above, ARACIP, as the main external school evaluator, would need to provide all schools with feedback and recommendations that could inform their improvement efforts. This would be consistent with practices in countries like Sweden, where the national inspectorate provides all schools with very detailed and specific written feedback, including lengthy descriptions of areas where improvement is needed and a “to-do list” of actions (Nusche et al., 2011b). In England (United Kingdom), external school inspectors conclude their inspections with a feedback meeting with the principal, other members of the leadership team and the school board chair, in addition to providing a written report with recommendations (Ofsted, 2016).

### ***Reinforcing follow-up for weaker schools and moving towards a differentiated approach to evaluation***

In addition to providing feedback, evaluators need to follow up with schools to ensure not only that evaluation results lead to action but also that schools have the capacity to improve. In Romania, follow-up activities after ARACIP evaluations are very rare. Internationally, some countries provide widespread follow-up, such as Poland and some regions of Spain, but this is a demanding practice; others focus their follow-up efforts on weaker schools, including the Flemish community of Belgium, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Scotland (United Kingdom) (OECD, 2013b).

### ***Establishing follow-up procedures linked to external evaluation results***

Romania could consider establishing a system of clear follow-up procedures depending on the results of ARACIP's external school evaluations. Under this model, the CSIs would provide support to schools by meeting with and guiding educators in their efforts to improve their teaching, learning and school self-evaluation practices. Support should aim to be timely, flexible and adapted to schools' local needs (OECD, 2013b). Scotland (United Kingdom) provides an example of this type of follow-up system (Box 4.5).

These efforts would need to be underpinned by central support and financial investment from the government. An increasing number of European countries with external school evaluations have policies in place to provide remedial supports to schools, in the form of additional training or resources, if evaluations determine that these are needed in order to bring about required improvements (European Commission, 2015a). Romania should consider providing these kinds of supports to schools.

### *Combining lighter touch and more in-depth evaluations of schools most in need of improvement*

Once Romania's schools are better able to conduct self-evaluations (see Policy Issue 4.3), the country could consider adopting a differentiated approach to external school evaluation that combines “lighter touch” evaluations with more in-depth reviews of schools that need to improve the most. A differentiated approach would be particularly beneficial in Romania because it would work to reduce inequities in the education system by focusing attention on struggling schools, which have reportedly been neglected in the past.

Internationally, a differentiated approach can take different forms and often relies to a considerable extent on the results of schools' self-evaluations. For example, the Netherlands conducts external evaluations of all schools on a regular basis but conducts more frequent inspections if risk factors (e.g. poor student outcomes) are evident in schools' self-evaluation reports (Shewbridge et al, 2014). In New Zealand's differentiated school evaluation system, close collaboration between internal and external evaluators leads to decisions about the frequency of future evaluations (Box 4.5).

#### **Box 4.5. Following up with weaker schools and differentiating school evaluation**

In Scotland (United Kingdom), external school evaluations conducted by Education Scotland can have three different outcomes:

- **No continuing engagement:** external school evaluation results are satisfactory and indicate that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvement. No follow-up visits are necessary.
- **Additional support:** external school evaluation results determine that a school would benefit from support. This is provided by Education Scotland staff in partnership with the local authority.
- **Further inspection:** external school evaluation results indicate that the school needs support and time to make necessary improvements. Education Scotland staff work with the local authority to determine the most appropriate support to help the school build capacity to improve and returns to assess improvements within a set period of time.

New Zealand has a differentiated approach to external school evaluation in which evaluations are tailored to support the schools that need it most. During external evaluations, New Zealand's Education Review Office (ERO) and the school work closely to mutually determine strengths and areas where development is needed, focusing on the results of the school's self-evaluation. The ERO decides on the timing of a school's next external evaluation based on the results of its current evaluation. External evaluations may be conducted within one to two years, in three years, or in four to five years. Most schools are reviewed every three years. The ERO will evaluate a school more frequently if it is concerned about the education and safety of students, and less frequently if the school exhibits high performance in relation to the dimensions of a successful school.

*Sources:* Nusche, D. et al. (2011a), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand 2011*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116917-en>; ERO (2016), “Return times for school reviews”, Education Review Office website, [www.ero.govt.nz/how-ero-reviews/ero-reviews-of-schools-and-kura/return-times-for-school-reviews/](http://www.ero.govt.nz/how-ero-reviews/ero-reviews-of-schools-and-kura/return-times-for-school-reviews/http://www.ero.govt.nz/how-ero-reviews/ero-reviews-of-schools-and-kura/return-times-for-school-reviews/); European Commission (2015a), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe*, Eurydice Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

## ***Ensuring school comparisons are fair and meaningful***

### *Ending the unfair ranking of schools*

The ministry's ranking of schools based on raw student results strongly influences the public perception of school performance in Romania. Using a Ministry website, users can find a list of national high schools ranked by the marks that students received in their Grade 8 national examination when they entered the school (Admitere, 2016). This type of ranking offers a poor measure of the quality of education in a school as it reflects factors affecting student performance that are beyond the school's control (OECD, 2013b). Schools suffer very real negative consequences from poor rankings in Romania, beyond parents opting against sending their children to certain schools. It was reported to the OECD Review Team during interviews that CSIs may investigate schools with poor results on the national school ranking, and in some cases a poor ranking may lead to sanctions, such as the removal of the school management. Given the above factors, this ranking should stop.

Instead, the Ministry should think about how it could provide the public with more descriptive information about the school, like the socio-economic status of the school community and other factors that impact student learning, and the school's ARACIP efficiency index, alongside examination results. This information could be presented online in clear, plain language that is relatively easy for parents to understand.

### *Making better use of the ARACIP efficiency index*

ARACIP's efficiency index provides a fairer picture of school performance, and a more helpful benchmark for school improvement purposes. While the index is made public, and a school at top of the index recently received an award from the President, it is not currently used in any systematic way. In particular, those who could make greatest use of it – schools, CSIs and the ministry – seem to be largely unaware of its availability and potential value. This should be improved by a ministerial decision in 2016 to extend the index to all schools. Romania might also consider how to make the index more visible, for example by including some of its findings in the national State of Education report (see Chapter 5) and in public reporting on schools (see above).

Nationally and at the county level, the efficiency index could be used to recognise and share the effective practices of schools that are doing better than expected, given their circumstances. Schools could be encouraged to use it as evidence and areas for discussion, to inform their self-evaluation and to identify neighbours with similar profiles to build networks. The CSIs could use it for ongoing monitoring purposes. Given its potential to present an alternative view of the country's schools, possibly revealing weaknesses among schools that would normally be considered higher performers, the government will need to support its use.

## **Policy Issue 4.3: Strengthening school self-evaluation**

School self-evaluation benefits individual schools and education systems as a whole. Establishing a self-evaluation system that supports both school development and accountability, accompanied by appropriate external support and challenge, is one of the most effective ways for a country to improve the quality of its education system (SICI, 2003). It puts schools in a position to drive their own development, continuously reflecting on their own practices, and planning and implementing changes (OECD, 2013b).

In Romania, real efforts have been made to establish self-evaluation in all schools. However, the education system seems to be experiencing an “imbalance in self-evaluation”, where schools’ internal evaluations are being completed primarily for an external evaluating body and are not yet viewed as a useful school improvement process (Janssens and van Amelsvoort, 2008). This may reflect a limited understanding of the purposes and benefits of school self-evaluation. Given the competitive nature of education in Romania, factors such as the pressure on schools to perform well, the blame they face for poor results and a limited sense of community responsibility for education are all likely to discourage schools from identifying what they consider to be weaknesses or mistakes (Kiss and Fejes, 2010). Schools may not feel that they are in a position to improve, whether due to a lack of capacity, support or funding. To address this, Romania will need to ensure that schools understand the benefits of self-evaluation, have the capacity to conduct it and can effectively respond to the results with improvement measures.

### ***Making self-evaluation meaningful for schools***

According to the 2005 Quality Assurance Law, school self-evaluation should support both school improvement and improve accountability in Romania. But there is evidence that it is not yet treated as a developmental process. In 2009, ARACIP found that, out of approximately 1 020 schools, 90% were giving themselves “good” to “excellent” ratings on all evaluation indicators and were leaving sections of the yearly report blank (Kiss and Fejes, 2010). This was the case with the yearly report the OECD Review Team examined, which did not describe any improvement activities the school had conducted. A 2010 study in two Romanian counties found few examples of schools reflecting on their practices and making changes to their activities as a result (Kiss and Fejes, 2010). Likewise, ARACIP has found that schools’ self-evaluation commissions tend to focus more on the administrative aspects of evaluation, producing and completing documents rather than focusing on quality improvements (ARACIP, 2014b).

To support a shift in mindset, and to ensure school self-evaluation practices actually support improvement efforts, Romania would benefit from reviewing its school self-evaluation system, including the role of the principal, the relationship between self-evaluation and the school management cycle, and self-evaluation reporting requirements.

### ***Giving principals a central role in school self-evaluation***

Principals in Romania should be much more involved in school self-evaluation, coordinating the process and encouraging school staff to invest in self-evaluation as a worthwhile improvement activity. Currently, principals in Romania help to set school’s improvement priorities and approve the work of their school’s Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation, but they are not required to sit on the commission. In contrast, in most OECD countries, principals lead their schools’ self-evaluation efforts (Faubert, 2009).

There are a number of reasons why school leaders are appropriate for this role. Principals are generally expected to take ownership of their school’s performance. They lead practices that can improve outcomes, such as setting goals for the school, coordinating the curriculum, monitoring and evaluating teaching practice, and promoting teachers’ professional development (Schleicher, 2012). Principals are also commonly responsible for reaching out to parents and other members of the community, whose

involvement in the school self-evaluation process promotes a shared sense of responsibility for children’s education and well-being (Pont et al., 2008).

School improvement and pedagogical leadership should be viewed as key components of the principal role in Romania (see Policy Issue 4.4). As part of this, they should be required to serve as the heads of their schools’ Commission on Quality Assurance and Evaluation. It will also be important for the ministry to work with ARACIP and the CSIs to review the circumstances of the country’s approximately 14 000 satellite schools (as of 2011), which do not have on-site principals, to determine what particular support they may need in order to conduct effective self-evaluations (World Bank, 2010).

### *Integrating school self-evaluation into the management cycle*

Self-evaluation in Romania currently operates in addition to both external evaluation and internal school management processes. This weakens the feedback loop between evaluation and improvement. Creating a meaningful self-evaluation process that contributes effectively to school improvement, will require integrating it into the way schools operate.

Internally, schools in Romania seem to operate two separate improvement planning tracks. On the one hand, the principal and school board lead the development of, and report against, the annual management plan which sets out how the school is doing in relation to the CSI’s general school inspection criteria. On the other hand, the school’s Commission for Quality Assurance and Evaluation lead the self-evaluation process according to the ARACIP standards (Colegiul National Unirea, 2015).

An integrated approach would help to ensure that school evaluation is more focused on school improvement and leads to specific actions, while making self-evaluation an integral part of school self-management. Ensuring that the principal sits on the commission and takes an active role in the self-evaluation process will help, as will simplifying the self-evaluation model and orienting it more towards the outcomes associated with the agreed definition of a good school. Each school could use this definition to integrate their own set of goals into their annual management plans. They could then use the Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation to critically review progress against these goals as part of their self-evaluation.

### *Reviewing self-evaluation reporting requirements*

Romania should consider introducing new reporting requirements that foster a sense of ownership rather than compliance, to encourage schools to engage more fully in their own review and improvement efforts. Currently, schools in Romania are required to complete a centrally developed annual improvement report template that asks them to provide a range of statistical information, rate themselves against the ARACIP school self-evaluation standards, and report on what activities they have conducted or plan to implement in two areas that are broad and general: quality improvement and internal evaluation. As a process for self-evaluation, this could be improved.

A new report template might include specific prompts that encourage the school to consider how the learning of students found to be struggling in the diagnostic assessments or other classroom-based assessments has improved over grades, or how the share of students with learning below national expectations has changed in the school over time. The Yearly Report template could also encourage schools to think creatively about what



aspects of the teaching and learning environment are especially relevant for their own local needs and community. Schools could be given the flexibility to adjust or add some of their own locally relevant criteria to the standard template. At the same time, the template could ask pointed questions about what schools are doing or planning to do to improve teaching and learning, specifically. This would fit well within a new, streamlined school evaluation framework (see Policy Issue 4.1), by giving schools the room to identify evaluation criteria that are relevant to them. It would also help to ensure that school evaluation is grounded in the actual work that schools do.

### ***Providing schools with support and tools for self-evaluation***

In Romania, where school self-evaluation is still a relatively new practice, schools require meaningful support to build their internal review capacity and act upon the results of their evaluations. Providing training and guidance that meet the needs of school staff will be key to the effectiveness of schools' improvement efforts.

### ***Working with schools to develop new self-evaluation support material***

In 2005, when the Quality Assurance Law first introduced the requirement for school self-evaluation, schools in Romania were initially not provided with support or training to help them implement it (Kiss and Fejes, 2010). Since then, ARACIP has taken the lead in developing these tools, relying primarily on funds from the European Union (EU). Between 2009 and 2015, ARACIP trained approximately 20 000 teachers, principals and inspectors on quality assurance and evaluation. ARACIP has also released video tutorials, conducted regional workshops and, in 2013, issued a self-evaluation manual and an effective practice guide. The agency reviews internal and external school evaluation reports annually to determine the areas in which schools may need more support.

Despite these efforts, multiple stakeholders reported to the OECD Review Team that school staff are not using the material ARACIP has developed. This may reflect, as discussed above, that schools do not yet feel engaged or see value in the self-evaluation process. It may also indicate that schools have not fully accepted the legitimacy of ARACIP's role or the benefits the agency can provide in supporting schools' internal review and improvement efforts. For these reasons, it will be important for ARACIP to engage schools in assessing their needs to ensure that future support material addresses the areas of greatest need and also to demonstrate that the agency is a partner in schools' self-evaluation efforts. This work could be undertaken in conjunction with the stakeholder engagement that will lead to the development of a new school evaluation framework (see Policy Issue 4.1).

In Romania, members of schools' Commissions for Quality Assurance and Evaluation do not currently need to participate in any training to prepare them for their self-evaluation role. To address this, online training and support material could be gradually developed for commission members, as well as principals and CSI inspectors. An example that could be of interest is the online National Improvement Hub of Scotland (United Kingdom), which provides improvement guides on topics such as working with community partners and effective practices to help schools improve (Education Scotland, 2017).

Members of the commissions also maintain a full teaching load and have little support for their additional evaluation work, in part because of a lack of administrative staff in schools. To support these teachers, the ministry could consider creating a distinct position within schools for teachers who have significant school self-evaluation responsibilities, as

Sweden currently does (Nusche et al., 2011b). This would align with the recommendation in Chapter 3 that Romania create teacher career paths with more diverse roles and responsibilities connected to higher remuneration.

### *Providing support for networking*

One particularly powerful support for self-evaluation and school improvement is school networking, which provides a forum for collegial sharing and learning (OECD, 2013b). Matching low-performing schools with high performers or past improvers can be particularly beneficial. Networks should be encouraged as spaces for collaboration rather than judgement, which can be a challenge in competitive education systems like Romania's (Looney, 2011). Scotland's "validated self-evaluation process" provides an international example of school networking specifically devoted to internal evaluation (OECD, 2015c). This process is led by local authorities with support from the centre, and provides clusters of schools with opportunities to share self-evaluation practices with each other.

There is some evidence that networking is happening in Romania. CSIs arrange "inter-assistance" networks for schools in their county, and schools take it upon themselves to establish connections with their peers. The government should provide funding to support this important practice to ensure it happens consistently in every county. Supporting both school and CSI networking could be among the new tasks undertaken by the ministry's Monitoring and School Inspection Directorate.

### *Building data literacy*

According to ARACIP, in 2013/14 one of the reasons behind schools not meeting national standards was that institutional development decisions were not grounded in data (ARACIP, 2014a). In order to take ownership of their self-evaluation and improvement efforts, Romania's schools will need to become more adept at using data to set and measure progress towards improvement goals. To improve teaching and learning, it will be particularly important for schools to be able to set and work towards goals that relate to student outcomes, including outcomes for students' attitudes, competencies and knowledge in relation to the learning standards set out in Romania's new school curriculum (OECD, 2015b). Setting goals for institutional change, such as changes to teachers' behaviour or to the use of learning materials, will also be important (OECD, 2015b). In Romania, this could mean, for example, schools setting goals related to student motivation, and using their questionnaires of students to gather data to establish a target and monitor whether the improvement activities they implement are having an impact in reaching that target.

Schools in Romania will need external support to set goals and measure progress against them. This should involve the provision of data by central bodies, like ARACIP and the ministry (see Chapter 5). These data can serve as benchmarks to support both schools and counties with their improvement efforts.

### *Progressively increasing school autonomy*

Ultimately self-evaluation is a tool for schools to lead change. To do this, schools need leadership capacity, but also the autonomy to take decisions on the factors that influence student learning. Romania now has in place most of the accountability measures that are characteristic of countries with greater school autonomy, including the existence of an independent external school evaluation body and the requirement that schools

publish their own self-evaluation results (Santiago et al., 2012). However, the country's schools lack decision-making authority in areas essential to improving teaching and learning, and are limited by a lack of funding. To bring about real change, Romania will need to encourage schools to assume greater leadership for teaching and learning practices, and ensure that schools have the resources to enact improvements. The country's political history and its legacy of centralised decision making means that increasing schools' agency will be as important as creating the space to do so, calling for policies that both enable and incentivise schools to lead change.

### *Increasing schools' decision-making authority over the curriculum and assessment*

Evidence suggests that schools with more autonomy over curriculum and assessment tend to perform better overall (OECD, 2013c). The OECD PISA 2015 assessment found that a lower percentage of students in Romania than the OECD average were in schools whose principal reported that the school (i.e. the principal and/or teachers) had considerable responsibility to make decisions in these areas (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3. School autonomy over curriculum and assessment**

Percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that the school had decision-making authority for the following curriculum and assessment tasks

Task	Romania (%)	OECD average (%)
Establishing student assessment policies	40	61
Choosing which textbooks are used	23	32
Determining course content	13	27
Deciding which courses are offered	34	64

Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>.

These factors are closely related in Romania. Since changes to the curriculum in 1998, schools have had the autonomy to determine part of the overall curriculum, but this has barely been used. In part this is because the pressure of high-stakes national examinations has crowded out space for teachers to develop alternative lesson plans and classroom activities. Scaling back examinations, encouraging teachers to collaborate more within the school and providing teachers with more preparation in formative student assessment (see Chapters 2 and 3) will be important to enable schools to take on greater authority for decisions related to teaching and learning.

### *Providing schools with the resources to support their improvement efforts*

Romania's schools also have less authority to make decisions about resource allocations, such as teacher hiring or budget allocation within the school, than the average among countries participating in PISA 2015 (OECD, 2016). They are further inhibited from assuming leadership to improve teaching and learning by chronic under-resourcing. Schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, in particular, lack the funds to cover more than teachers' salaries and administrative costs (European Commission, 2015b). It was indicated to the OECD Review Team during interviews that funding is also unpredictable and can be affected by a school's relationship to the local authority. Providing adequate, predictable funding to schools will be important to enable schools to

take on greater autonomy so they can use school self-evaluation as a lever for improvement.

One approach that other countries have employed, and Romania might consider, is the use of targeted discretionary funds to encourage schools to develop their own strategies to raise quality. For example, in 2011 England (United Kingdom) introduced the pupil premium which provides schools with an additional EUR 1 538 for each socio-economically disadvantaged student at the school<sup>1</sup>. Schools can use the funds in any way that they wish, but must provide detailed explanations of their spending to parents and communities, encouraging accountability. Schools then compete in a national competition for public recognition of the measures that they have put in place with the pupil premium. As Romania seeks to improve the effectiveness of its resource allocation, it might consider how it provides funding for specified purpose i.e. providing enveloped funding to encourage schools, in particular disadvantaged schools, to take the lead in improvement.

#### **Policy Issue 4.4: Developing the principal and school inspector roles**

The fairer and de-politicised hiring procedures that Romania has begun to implement for principals, general inspectors and deputies are an important step towards increased stability and accountability in these roles, which are essential for sustained improvement in schools and across regions. However, given that these roles are so essential to the success of Romania's education system, the country cannot stop there. After teaching, school leadership is the most important factor affecting student learning that is open to policy influence. District leaders represent a critical mediating layer between schools and the government, providing support to both. Romania will need to redefine these roles away from administration and towards improving teaching, learning and student outcomes.

##### ***Supporting and developing principals' pedagogical leadership roles***

Romania needs to re-evaluate the school leadership role to make school principals more effective drivers of improvement and broader system-wide reform. This will require focusing the role more on responsibilities related to pedagogical leadership, including setting goals for student outcomes and supporting, advising and motivating teachers as they work towards them, conducting classroom observations, providing feedback and ensuring teachers are engaging in the professional development they need (Schleicher, 2012).

Currently, school leaders in Romania focus on administration rather than pedagogical leadership. The 2011 Education Law describes the principal's role as one of executive management. It lists only one task related to the quality of teaching and learning: being in charge of the periodical assessment, training and motivation of school staff.

##### ***Ensuring that the most qualified and able candidates are selected as principals***

Re-evaluating the principal's role will mean looking at their professional duties, and the procedures used to recruit, prepare, support and appraise them. It will also mean addressing systemic factors that hinder effective school leadership in Romania, including principals' reportedly high administrative workload and low salaries.

- **Developing standards for principals.** The development of standards or competency profiles setting out what a principal should know and be able to do

would be an important component of this work. A number of countries have developed such standards to inform job descriptions, selection procedures, pre-service training, continuing professional development, support and appraisal for the role (OECD, 2013a). The standards could highlight the school improvement responsibilities of the position and encourage capacity building in those areas (OECD, 2013a).

Romania's Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) could be involved in developing these standards. While the IES has been engaged in school leadership research and training in the past, its educational management area is currently heavily understaffed. Romania would benefit from investing in this part of the IES, as well as dedicating staff within the ministry to work on policies to develop and support the school leadership role. As with the development of professional standards for teachers (see Chapter 3), principals will need to be involved in this work so that they feel ownership of the standards and the procedures they inform.

- **Ensuring that the selection of principals is an open, fair and authentic measure of their school leadership competencies.** Until autumn 2016 formal competitions for the principal role had not been held since 2007. Instead positions were filled for renewable six-month terms by CSI appointment. This appointment practice lacked transparency and created instability in the role. The 2011 Education Law introduced merit-based competitions for principals based on an examination of their managerial and psychological competencies, but this was reportedly met with political resistance in the majority of Romania's counties. In autumn 2016 an open contest for principal and deputy candidates was organised in all counties, with successful candidates receiving four-year contracts. This is a very important step forward and every effort should be made to ensure that these competitions continue to be conducted as the sole means of selection for new principals and their deputies.

It is also important that principals are selected according to an authentic assessment of the competencies that are necessary for effective school leadership. Currently, the open contest for the school leadership role consists of a multiple-choice exam of the candidate's cognitive and school management skills, an analysis of their curriculum vitae (CV), and an interview that includes an assessment of the candidate's management vision and one-year operational plan. Going forward, the new standards for school leadership should inform the criteria for selecting principals, including the contents of the written examination, to ensure that candidates are assessed for the competencies needed to be effective in administrative and pedagogical leadership.

In the long-term, Romania should consider moving away from the use of a written examination as part of the job competition towards more authentic measures of school leadership competencies. Internationally, it is common for countries to base their evaluation of school leadership candidates on their interview performance and work proposals for the school (Pont et al., 2008). Some countries, like England (United Kingdom), have advised recruitment panels to use additional performance-based methods of assessing candidates' competencies and suitability for the role, like observations of their interactions with students, presentations and role-playing exercises (National College for School Leadership, 2012).

- **Involving schools in appointing principals.** The 2011 Education Law gave school boards the authority to hire principals, but this responsibility has since been given back to the CSIs. As school boards are in the best position to understand their schools' needs and challenges, Romania should consider involving them in hiring decisions again and provide guidelines on recruitment procedures to ensure they have the capacity to fulfil this responsibility (Pont et al., 2008). Teaching staff could also be solicited for their input in these decisions. Across Europe, school staff commonly provide input into the selection of the principal (European Commission, 2011).
- **Reviewing principals' salaries.** It is important to make school leadership an attractive career option for potential candidates. One factor that can influence the attractiveness of the leadership role is remuneration (Pont et al., 2008). In most European countries, the minimum starting salary for principals exceeds GDP per capita (European Commission, 2015c), but this is not the case in Romania. As of 2014/15, the minimum starting salary for principals is EUR 3 374 at primary level and EUR 3 903 at secondary level, both lower than Romania's per capita GDP of around EUR 8 000 (European Commission, 2015c). It was also the lowest minimum starting salary for principals of all European countries. Romania would benefit from reviewing the remuneration of its school and system leaders, particularly if it is experiencing difficulty finding qualified candidates.
- **Developing succession planning policies.** Countries should go beyond relying solely on candidates to select themselves forward for consideration for the principal role, and instead develop succession-planning policies to proactively identify and foster future leaders (Schleicher, 2012). One approach to such succession planning is to distribute leadership responsibilities within a school so that teachers gain experience. Romania already does this by allowing teachers to hold responsibilities on a number of different school commissions (MNESR, 2016b). However, this practice is seemingly not part of an intentional succession-planning policy.

### *Providing principals with professional learning opportunities targeted to their roles*

Principals in Romania need to be better prepared to address the demands of their role. Prospective principals need to be permanent teachers with five years of seniority, positive annual appraisal results and didactic grade qualifications signifying teaching excellence (see Chapter 3). On top of this, they must complete pre-service courses on educational management. However, it appears that these courses are intended to prepare teachers for any management or guidance and control position, whether as a school leader or an inspector. As such, they do not seem to target the learning needs of future principals. It is important that Romania develop pre-service education for school leaders which concentrates specifically on the requirements of the role, covering both administrative responsibilities and responsibilities related to improving teaching and learning.

Once appointed, principals, like all teachers, are required to accumulate 90 credits of continuing professional development every 5 years. The IES, ministry and the Teachers' Training Houses affiliated to each CSI deliver some in-service training targeted specifically at principals. Each CSI also employs institutional management inspectors to provide advice to principals and oversee their work. However, it was repeatedly indicated to the OECD Review Team during interviews that principals do not feel adequately

supported to address administrative problems, legal issues and the needs of the struggling satellite schools that fall under their responsibility. They reportedly lack training in areas important to pedagogy, like implementing the new school curriculum and supporting teachers in the changes that it requires in terms of teaching and learning.

It is important that the ministry, IES and ARACIP, in consultation with principals and representatives of the CSIs, including the Teachers' Training Houses, consider developing professional learning opportunities that will allow school leaders to build capacity in the competencies they will need to be effective instructional and administrative leaders. Like New Zealand (Box 4.6), Romania could use school leadership standards as the basis for the development of these opportunities. It should also ensure that principals have access to mentoring, networking and other collaborative activities proven to be particularly beneficial in developing their competencies (Pont et al., 2008). The school leaders who spoke to the Review Team particularly expressed a need for this type of on-the-job learning. As discussed earlier, ARACIP will be instrumental in developing professional learning opportunities that build principals' capacity in school self-evaluation and school improvement. The role of the CSI institutional management inspector will also need to be strengthened to provide more support to principals in their efforts to evaluate and improve their schools (see below).

#### **Box 4.6. New Zealand's Professional Leadership Plan**

New Zealand's Professional Leadership Plan was introduced in 2009-10 to provide a range of professional learning opportunities to aspiring, new and experienced principals. It was developed by the New Zealand principals' associations, the Ministry of Education and leadership researchers based on the country's standards for principals, *Kiwi Leadership for Principals*. The plan was intended to develop leadership practices identified by the research literature as important for improving student outcomes, as well as to attract school leaders to harder-to-staff schools and retain effective principals. The plan included the following elements:

- for new principals, an induction programme, improved regional support and resources on topics like managing schools and relationships and leading effective teaching and learning
- for experienced principals, resources on teacher appraisal, leading effective curriculum delivery and leading change to improve student outcomes.

*Sources:* New Zealand Ministry of Education (2008), *Professional Leadership Plan 2009-2010*, New Zealand Ministry of Education; New Zealand Education Gazette (2009), *Plan Ahead for Educational Leadership*, New Zealand Ministry of Education, [www.edgazette.govt.nz/articles/Article.aspx?ArticleId=7867](http://www.edgazette.govt.nz/articles/Article.aspx?ArticleId=7867); Nusche, D. et al. (2011a), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand (2011)*, OECD Publishing, Paris <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116917-en>.

#### *Establishing clear criteria for appraising principals and ending arbitrary dismissal*

The CSIs are responsible for appraising principals in Romania. The CSI's institutional management inspectors appraise principals on the basis of their school's annual management plan. It appears that each CSI is responsible for establishing the criteria against which principals are assessed. If so, this presents a concern, as a lack of common criteria for appraisal can hinder consistency and transparency. Principal appraisals should instead be guided by common, system-wide standards of good school leadership (Pont et al., 2008). Appraisal should also be connected to appropriate support

and continuing professional development (Pont et al., 2008). This can be accomplished by requiring principals to maintain an annual learning plan setting out strategies for growth and development.

In addition, any appraisal process should include procedures to address underperformance, including a clearly articulated process of follow-up appraisals, remedial support and, ultimately, dismissal if appraisal results are unsatisfactory. The 2011 Education Law gave school boards the authority to dismiss principals, but this responsibility appears to have been recentralised to the CSIs. It was reported to the OECD Review Team during interviews that the CSIs may remove school managements if students underperform on national exams for a certain number of years. It is essential for any sanctions, including dismissal, to be based on a clearly articulated, step-by-step process. Decisions to dismiss principals will need to be fair and defensible, acknowledging the contexts in which their schools operate rather than focusing solely on raw student results.

#### *Addressing the challenges of satellite schools*

Several systemic factors in Romania appear to be making principals' jobs particularly challenging. This includes a school restructuring process that has left some principals responsible for multiple schools and a system-wide reduction in the number of administrative staff. As of 2011, there were approximately 7 000 principals in Romania responsible for 21 000 schools, including legally designated schools and satellite schools, which do not have an on-site principal (World Bank, 2010). In one county the Review Team visited, over one-third of the schools were considered satellite schools. As mentioned above, this has left principals with responsibilities for which they have not been prepared. Deputy principals are supposed to support principals with their administrative workload, but it was reported to the Review Team in interviews that they are not always allocated to the schools that need them.

#### *Resolving principals' unclear accountability*

There are also challenges associated with a lack of clarity around school governance in Romania. According to the 2011 Education Law, the school board, in addition to the principal, is responsible for the quality of education in the school. This legislation was intended to provide the local community, through their representatives on the school board, with a greater role in the provision of education and to make the principal more accountable to the community. However, it was reported to the OECD Review Team in interviews that, in practice, school principals have remained primarily accountable to and report to the CSI. In addition, school board members who represent the community have reportedly struggled because they lack familiarity with education matters. It will be essential for the ministry to address these challenges, including clarifying the relationship between the school board and the principal and ensuring that school board members have the capacity to contribute to school governance, in order to ensure all schools have clear leadership. This will be important for both improvement and accountability.

#### *Changing the role of inspector from control to support*

Romania's schools need more support, particularly with their self-evaluation and improvement efforts, and the CSI inspectors are well positioned to provide it. To do so effectively, Romania will need to address factors that are currently impeding inspectors' ability to play a more supportive role. These encompass the organisational structure of the CSIs, including the roles and responsibilities of inspectors, workload and staffing



challenges, and a lack of capacity-building opportunities. Addressing these factors could fall within the scope of work to revise the mandates of the different external school evaluation bodies, as recommended in Policy Issue 4.1.

These efforts will take time and will require the altering of long-held perceptions of the CSIs as controllers rather than supporters of schools. Box 4.7 provides examples of countries that have made efforts to strengthen their subnational education bodies in order to better support school self-evaluation and improvement. Educators, ARACIP, key stakeholders and experts in school improvement will be valuable sources of input at the outset of this work and as changes are implemented. Although beyond the scope of this report, reinforcing the support function of CSIs will also involve reviewing their relationship to local governments. The almost total absence of local government involvement in efforts to improve the quality of schooling in Romania has important implications for public accountability and responsibility for education.

#### **Box 4.7. Supporting school self-evaluation and improvement at the subnational level**

In England, Scotland and Wales (United Kingdom), subnational bodies called local education authorities monitor and support school improvement within the context of a school evaluation system that includes school self-evaluation and external school evaluation conducted by a central government body or inspectorate. District school boards in some parts of Canada and the United States also have similar subnational bodies, although their school evaluation systems vary.

In England (United Kingdom), the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted), a government department, conducts comprehensive inspections of all schools every six years. Local education authorities (LEAs) do not have a specific school evaluation mandate, but they are expected to monitor schools. LEAs visit the schools in their area once a year to help set targets for improvement and to identify schools that are experiencing difficulties.

In Scotland (United Kingdom), local authorities are required by law to support schools in using their self-evaluation results to produce an annual report and to plan improvements. Although the main external school evaluations are conducted by Education Scotland, the central government agency, local authorities have autonomy to conduct their own school evaluations to help improve schools. All bodies use the same school evaluation framework.

In Wales (United Kingdom), the Office of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training (Estyn) is the main body responsible for external school evaluations, and 22 local authorities, support schools to improve. The local authorities are accountable by law for school performance and have the authority to intervene and organise schools. They monitor schools on an ongoing basis. In 2013, Wales established four regional education consortia as a layer above the local authority level as part of a shift towards supporting schools to build their own capacity and sustain their own improvement. The consortia provide a range of supports to both local authorities and schools.

*Sources:* Faubert V., (2009), “School evaluation: Current practices in OECD countries and a literature review”, *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 42, PECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/218816547156>; Mourshed, M. et al. (2010), *How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, McKinsey & Company, London; Estyn (2015), *Improving Schools through Regional Education Consortia*, Office of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training (Estyn), Cardiff, [www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/Related-Documents/Performance-Improvement/Regulatory-and-Inspection-Work/Improving-schools-through-regional-education-consortia-National-Report.pdf](http://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/Related-Documents/Performance-Improvement/Regulatory-and-Inspection-Work/Improving-schools-through-regional-education-consortia-National-Report.pdf); European Commission (2015a), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe*, Eurydice Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

### *The organisational structure and responsibilities of the CSIs*

Changing the function of CSIs towards a more explicitly supportive role will require structural changes in their organisation and responsibilities. Other countries have developed specific positions to support school improvement in their sub-national educational bodies (see Box 4.8). Romania could do this by creating a dedicated school improvement unit within each CSI that provides support to local schools, and is separate from any continuing monitoring or compliance function within the CSIs. This change will require a significant shift in the functions and competencies of the CSI inspectors who currently conduct school inspections. In the short term, the role of existing school inspectors might be re-oriented towards school improvement to staff the new school improvement unit. It will be important that these inspectors receive training to help them build capacity for their new role (see below). Progressively, existing staff might be complemented by new staff recruited for the school improvement unit based on their competencies and experience in supporting school improvement.

#### **Box 4.8. Key school improvement positions within subnational education bodies**

In Wales (United Kingdom), regional education consortia employ several different types of staff, including specialists in different teaching and learning areas, and a large number of challenge advisers. The challenge adviser positions were created specifically to support principals to build school capacity to meet standards. There are four main aspects to their role, set out in the *National Standards for Challenge Advisers*:

1. supporting school evaluation and improvement (e.g. supporting school leaders to conduct classroom observations and improve the quality of teaching; supporting effective target setting as part of strategic planning)
2. arranging effective support and intervention (e.g. identify resources to address school needs; facilitating school-to-school networking)
3. developing school leadership (e.g. mentoring, coaching and using evidence to review performance and impact)
4. building school-to-school capacity (e.g. determining ways in which good schools can support others).

In the early 2000s, the Ministry of Education in Ontario, Canada, introduced a system-wide reform initiative to improve students' competencies in literacy and numeracy. The most successful district school boards responded to this initiative by reorganising their offices to ensure that their structure, staffing and roles and responsibilities aligned with the focus on literacy and numeracy. Supervisory officers with literacy and numeracy expertise were appointed to drive forward the initiative across the district. As the government's education agenda evolved over time, district school boards continued to include among their staff superintendents responsible for each of the government's key reform programmes. District staff work collaboratively with schools, as well as horizontally, building networks across the education system.

*Sources:* Campbell, C. and M. Fullan (2006), *Unlocking Potential for Learning: Effective District-Wide Strategies to Raise Student Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Ontario, [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/ProjectReport\\_full.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/ProjectReport_full.pdf).  
Welsh Government (2014), *National Standards for Challenge Advisers*, Welsh Government, Cardiff, <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/141009-challenge-advisers-en.pdf>.  
European Commission (2015a), *Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe*, Eurydice Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Romania will need to review inspectors' workloads to determine where changes are necessary to enable CSIs to focus more on support. Inspectors are particularly burdened by the large number of specialty inspections they are required to conduct to support teachers' completion of their probation period and career progression. They reportedly spend 41.9% of their time monitoring, controlling and reporting to the ministry and doing other work not related to supporting teachers and principals (World Bank, 2010). It has already been suggested that the CSIs' responsibility for conducting specialty inspections should be shifted to a cadre of experienced teachers. This would enable inspectors to move away from their role as appraisers, which is incompatible with school support, and enable them to devote more time to supporting schools (see Chapter 3).

There is also scope to improve the resourcing of the CSIs. In 2010, the World Bank found that the number of inspectors within each county did not relate to size of the county nor the county's particular needs. Since then, the disproportionate allocation of CSI staff has reportedly developed into a general understaffing problem affecting inspectorates across the country. However, it is also evident that the staff resources that are available could be used more effectively. Given the demands of the inspector role, consideration might also be given to making the positions full-time and eliminating the requirement that staff maintain teaching responsibilities. Most CSI staff do not work full-time for the inspectorate, even if they have management positions (World Bank, 2011). Romania will need to address these issues if the CSIs are to provide effective support to schools.

### *Selecting inspectors*

As with the principal role, Romania needs to continue to support the new open and competitive process for recruiting general school inspectors to eliminate political interference. Inspectors are supposed to be appointed for four-year terms, but changes in government in the past at the national level have resulted in high turnover in the role. Turnover is lower but still high among inspectors below the management level (World Bank, 2010). The 2011 Education Law set out new merit-based hiring procedures, including the requirement that prospective inspectors pass an exam but, like the similar requirement for principals, this was not implemented across the country until autumn 2016. It is essential that Romania ensure that the new open, transparent and merit-based competitions for these positions continue and become the established practice for recruiting all inspector positions.

In addition to more transparent and open recruitment procedures, it will also be important to establish clear selection criteria that relate to the competencies and responsibilities needed for the inspector role. This should include selection criteria for candidates in the CSIs' new school improvement unit, who should be required to demonstrate that they have experience with school self-evaluation and school improvement. In Wales (United Kingdom), for example, individuals competing for a "challenge adviser" position to support school self-evaluation are expected to have: experience leading in a successful school; expertise in analysing and using school improvement data; an understanding of how to implement school improvement; and strong interpersonal skills (Welsh government, 2014).

### *Building inspectors' capacity*

Capacity building will be essential to ensure that inspectors are able to make the fundamental shift in their functions to be able to better support school improvement. It will also be important to ensure that capacity levels are consistent across the country so

that all schools receive sufficient support to meet their needs. ARACIP (2014b) found differences in schools' performance across counties that could not be explained by geographic, demographic, economic, social or cultural differences, and concluded that the quality of education in schools was largely dependent on the managerial and institutional capacity at the county level. The ministry provides once yearly information and training activities to inspectors; otherwise, in-service training opportunities specific to the inspector role are reportedly very limited.

To help CSI inspectors develop the skills and knowledge to support teachers and principals, Romania might focus initially on developing pre-service training that prepares them for their new role. The Teachers' Training Houses would be instrumental in these efforts. CSI inspectors should also benefit from the training on school self-evaluation and improvement developed by ARACIP discussed earlier. As the inspector role evolves, the mentoring of new inspectors by more experienced inspectors will allow the inspectorates to build capacity in ways that are embedded in their work.

Finally, to ensure coherence with national goals, each CSI should set county-relevant goals, linked to national education priorities (see Chapter 5). To encourage accountability, the appraisal of both the general school inspectors and individual inspectors could be linked to progress in attaining those goals. The development of an annual learning plan as part of the CSI appraisal process would encourage career-long capacity development.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Revising school evaluation in Romania to support greater focus on teaching and learning practices and outcomes for all students will be an essential component of broader education reform to raise student achievement and increase equity. Aligning and integrating the efforts of the different bodies responsible for school evaluation and improvement will create greater efficiency and ensure that all levels of the education system are working towards common goals. Supporting schools to evaluate and develop themselves will be an effective way to promote sustained improvement across the education system. Strengthening the roles of Romania's school and system leaders will put them in a position to drive the reform.

### *Recommendations*

#### *4.1: Establish a common framework for school evaluation*

**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** (see Figure 0.4 in the Assessment and Recommendations). 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.

#### *4.2: Use evaluation results to better support school improvement*

**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.

#### *4.3: Strengthen school self-evaluation*

**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 cycle 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.

#### *4.4: Develop the principal and school inspector roles*

**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.

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**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 of 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.

### Note

1. Calculated based on British Pound to Euro exchange rate as of 12 December, 2011. The original value in British pound was GBP 1 300.

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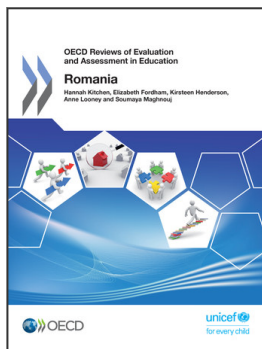
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