Chapter 5

School evaluation

There are requirements for both external and self-evaluation for all Slovak schools. External evaluation is conducted by the Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (Štátna školská inšpekcia, ŠŠI) against a standard quality indicator framework. Schools must also complete an annual school reporting exercise, including a two-year development plan. There are also efforts to feedback information to schools on how their students perform in comparison to students in other schools. Feedback from complex school inspections appears to be valued by schools. However, other, more bureaucratic types of inspection are perceived as burdensome with little value. The chapter presents options to make external school evaluation more relevant for school improvement and to further stimulate school self-evaluation that engages stakeholders and uses a broad range of evidence.

This chapter analyses approaches to school evaluation within the Slovak evaluation and assessment framework. School evaluation refers to the evaluation of individual schools as organisations. This chapter covers internal school evaluation (school self-evaluation) and external school evaluation.

Context and features

Similar to experiences in other OECD countries, the topic of evaluating schools is becoming increasingly important in the Slovak Republic, particularly in response to perceived poor or declining performance in international assessments (see Chapter 1). In the past 15 years there has been renewed focus all over Europe on external school evaluation, in response to demands from citizens and politicians to hold schools accountable for their results and for improving student performance. This is further accentuated by policies to strengthen school autonomy in the context of the broader political imperative to build a civil society where citizens take responsibility for their own and others' wellbeing.[1] Development and improvement of schools is seen as a joint responsibility of the school leader, the school staff, but also of representatives of the school founder (a municipality, a region or a regional school authority for public schools; a state-approved church or religious community for church schools; or other approved legal entities or individuals for private schools) and of parents and other stakeholders in the school board (*Rada školy*).

This section presents the major aspects of school evaluation in the Slovak Republic: external evaluation by the Slovak Schools Inspectorate; school self-evaluation; the roles in school evaluation played by school boards, school founders and the local and regional school authorities; and the availability of school performance information.

External evaluation of schools by the Štátna školská inšpekcia (Slovak State Schools Inspectorate)

Governance and remit

The Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (*Štátna školská inšpekcia*, ŠŠI) is a central control and evaluating body which is part of the state administration, but independent in its methodology, actions and reporting. Its operations and legitimacy are laid down in the laws of 2000, 2003, 2005 (Act 137/2005 on school inspection) and 2008 (see also Chapter 1).[2] The ŠŠI is established as a state administration institution in education, with its headquarters in Bratislava and executive branches in eight regional centres. Although funded by the Slovak Ministry of Education (MŠVVaŠ SR), the ŠŠI is independent in its work and acts in accordance with laws and other generally valid legal norms, acts and decrees. The ŠŠI's main authority is the Senior Chief Inspector, who is appointed on a five-year contract by the Minister of Education. School inspections are conducted by school inspectors (there are currently around 180 inspectors). There are demanding requirements to become a school inspector (both in terms of qualification level and experience in and around school education) and a bureaucratic appointment procedure.

The ŠŠI is responsible for inspecting all Slovak schools and school facilities (note that the OECD review focuses on schools), it scrutinises the conditions schools set for education and results, the quality of management, the efficiency of funding use and their compliance with binding regulations. Its remit includes assessing how educational goals are met, the monitoring of innovation in delivering education programmes, and the assessment of the provisions for the professional development of teachers. ŠŠI also seeks

to monitor the level of competence of school leaders and teachers, their qualifications and options for career growth and professional development. It also has to deal with complaints from parents or teachers if these have not been solved by the school itself or by the school founder or regional authority.

Quality indicators in the Slovak inspection framework

The ŠŠI uses a quality indicator framework that reflects the school factors identified in research as having the strongest association with high quality and effective schools (for example, Scheerens et al., 2003). Table 5.1 presents the quality indicators used in the Slovak inspection framework. Comparative analysis of 18 European inspectorates revealed no important differences in the sets of quality indicators and standards used; the differences are more a matter of terminology, grouping in domains or areas, and in the level of specification (Bruggen van, 2010a). Indeed, the quality issues in the Slovak inspection framework are comparable with that of the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and other countries.

Table 5.1 Quality indicators in the Slovak inspection framework (2009)[3]

The quality of teaching and learning process, with as key aspects:
• quality of the teaching process and provision of the curriculum
• conditions for teaching, created by the teacher
• effectiveness of teaching
• quality of students´ learning
• education standards achievement (the level of students´ knowledge)
• students´ results
• personal and social development of students
• support for students
• school activities with significant impact on educational school performance
• preventive and multidisciplinary activities
The conditions of education:
• teachers' qualification
• school area facilities, conditions, school buildings
• material and technical equipment (including didactic tools)
• psycho-hygienic conditions
• health protection and safety in school
• security at school
Management and leadership:
• the development plan, the structure of the curriculum or school programme
• the main goals (aims) of education
• courses in the school programmes
• planning
• effectiveness of leadership
• control; the monitoring system
• information system
• pedagogical and school documentation
• school legislature and adherence to the norms and regulations
• school discipline and complaining procedures
• progress of achieving the targets and aims in the teaching plans and school programmes
• the quality of the teaching process and the applied methodology
• professional and pedagogical guidance
• qualification of a school leader required for the position and further professional development or in service training of teachers

Source: SICI (2009), *Profile of the State School Inspectorate of the Slovak Republic*, the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates, Brussels, www.sici-inspectorates.eu/Members/Inspection-Profiles/Slovak-Republic

The inspection framework and quality indicators were published on the ŠŠI's website in 2011, following some pressure from the public and the teacher union, with the aim to stimulate schools to use this in their self-evaluation activities.

Judgements about schools

All schools (public, private and church schools) are inspected in the same way against the same quality indicator framework. The ŠŠI uses a five-grade judgement scale and notes quality judgements for each quality indicator, for each quality domain and also for the school as a whole. To give an indication of the distribution of the ŠŠI judgements on this five-grade scale: overall 8% of schools were judged to be "very good"; 56% were "good"; 35.5% were "average"; 0.5% were "less satisfactory"; and 0.0% were "unsatisfactory" (SICI, 2009). (Although, these figures should be read with caution as they are averaged over different school sectors and the number of schools inspected differs per sector). The Annual Inspection Report (see below) presents the distribution of quality judgments for different school types and provides a comparison with earlier years.

Inspectorate-developed student tests

The ŠŠI has the legal possibility to design its own student tests and to administer these to samples of students in schools. In international comparison, this is a rather extraordinary right (there are no other inspectorates that have this right or, if they still have it, use it). In 2010/11, a small number of tests were administered to younger students on their knowledge in some topics of Biology and Physics. However, the number of inspectorate-developed student tests has diminished over recent years and the ŠŠI informed the OECD review team that in fact no new tests are being developed.

Different types of inspections conducted by the ŠŠI

The ŠŠI's annual report lists three different types of inspections that have been conducted in the given year (see Table 5.2). The fourth type of inspection is the follow-up inspection that can be conducted in schools where the inspectors have identified deficiencies during one of the other types of inspection. However, the OECD review revealed some confusion among schools on the different types of inspections conducted by the ŠŠI. In particular, schools do not perceive a big difference between informative and thematic inspections, particularly when these are coupled to a complex inspection. It seems that in practice there is not a clear distinction between the three types of inspections.

Table 5.2 Different types of inspection conducted in 2010/11

	Complex inspections	Information inspections	Thematic inspections
Basic schools	176	160	279
Academic (*Gymnázium*)	27	0	128
Other secondary schools	23		

Source: ŠŠI (*Štátna školská inšpekcia*) (2011), *Správa o stave a úrovni výchovy a vzdelávania v školách a školských zariadeniach v Slovenskej republike v školskom roku* 2010-2011 (Report on the status and level of upbringing and education in schools and educational facilities in the academic year 2010-2011), ŠŠI, www.ssiba.sk/admin/fckeditor/editor/userfiles/file/Dokumenty/sprava_2011.pdf.

Complex inspections

The general inspections that should be conducted in each school once every five years are known as complex or comprehensive inspections. In terms of their design, methodology, reporting and function, these are comparable with "whole" or "full" inspections in many European countries. They are typically conducted over a period of three to seven days by a group of two to seven inspectors, depending on the size of the school and are generally respected and appreciated by schools (NÚCEM, 2012; confirmed by OECD review interviews). In 2010/11, 464 complex inspections were conducted in: 176 basic schools (of which: 156 public schools, 6 private schools and 14 church schools); 27 *Gymnázium*; 23 other secondary schools and 42 other schools (mostly special education schools); plus in 196 preschools. In 2011/12, 369 complex inspections were conducted (ŠŠI, 2012). Each complex inspection results in a report (delivered to the school and founder within 21 days) with an evaluation of the quality of the school and with recommendations for improvement. The report is not published, only a summary is provided on the Inspectorate's website. The law stipulates that the school can choose whether or not to publish the report; many seem reluctant to do so.

Information inspections

"Information inspections" are essentially compliancy checks and are typically conducted in a single day. The Ministry orders the inspection of schools' compliancy with certain laws and regulations. The head of ŠŠI proposes such information inspections in the annual inspection plan which is approved by the Ministry. The 2008 law introduced a new task for ŠŠI to check and evaluate the school's education programme (SEP) against the published national education programmes (NEP). The law states that ŠŠI has to check whether there is enough coherence between the SEP and the NEP and in particular whether the curricula of the school for the subjects and grades respect adequately and sufficiently the educational standards set out in the respective sub-programme within the NEP. It is also clearly stated that the ŠŠI is the only agency that has the authority and power to state whether this is the case, which means that the ŠŠI has to deliver a license *ex-ante* on the school's execution of its SEP. Other examples of information inspections include a recent inspection of schools' policies for educating students against racism. Further, the 2010/11 Annual Inspection Report notes that two information inspections were conducted within the complex inspection procedure: schools' delivery of civic education in accordance with new decrees (e.g. the prescription that in all rooms a copy of the first article of the constitution about human rights for all people has to be fixed visibly for all students on a wall); and schools' delivery of Information and Communication Technology education.

Thematic inspections

In "thematic inspections", a sample of schools is inspected for only a specific topic or theme. These are typically conducted over a period of two to four days. Examples of different themes inspected include: the implementation of reading literacy skills in the educational process in school activities; the professionalism of teaching and teachers; classroom atmosphere; the use of teaching aids and methods; the prevention of drug addictions as part of the educational process; and the development of ICT competences of teachers. Some themes may be of high priority and be included also within the complex inspection procedure.

Follow-up inspections

In all types of inspection, inspectors may identify shortcomings, for example, the violation of a particular regulation, or poor quality on a particular quality indicator. Upon completion of the inspection, the ŠŠI may impose one of the following measures: recommendations; warnings; the requirement for the school to adopt certain measures within a given time-period; orders for the school to immediately conduct specific tasks in order to eliminate serious mistakes and failures (see NÚCEM, 2012, Chapter 4 for a list of possible actions that the ŠŠI can take). The ŠŠI conducts follow-up inspections to monitor a school's success in repairing or improving the identified shortcoming. These are typically conducted over a period of one to three days. If the follow-up inspection identifies that serious problems persist, the ŠŠI can pursue one of three possible and far-reaching measures: *(i)* issue a binding recommendation to the school founder to postpone the re-appointment of the school leader after the term of five years, or even to dismiss the leader; *(ii)* in case of serious quality problems, school inspection findings can result (especially with private schools) in financial budget restrictions; *(iii)* for public schools with very serious negative findings (significant failings in the process of management and leadership, in the process of teaching, etc.) and lack of improvement during the assigned time, the chief inspector (after negotiations with the school founder) submits the proposal to the MŠVVaŠ SR (the Ministry of Education) to close the school and exclude it from the national school network. These three measures are very rarely used.

Annual Inspection Report

The ŠŠI delivers an Annual Inspection Report with the analysis of all its inspection work (e.g. ŠŠI, 2011). The report gives a summary evaluation for the education system as a whole based on inspection analysis about all schools that have been inspected and evidence from other sources (see Chapter 6). The report lists the names and addresses of all schools that have been inspected and presents summary information on all quality indicators for each type of school (preschool, basic school, *gymnázium* and other secondary school types). These summaries can be used by schools as a benchmark for their own self-evaluation.

School self-evaluation

School self-evaluation has received increased policy focus over recent years, including the introduction of reporting requirements for schools, initiatives to support self-evaluation activities and training requirements and accountability measures for school leaders.

Reporting requirements

Since 2003, primary and secondary school leaders are obliged to submit a report on the school's educational activities, results and conditions (hereafter referred to as the annual school report) to the school founder for approval and to the school board for comment. In 2006 a decree further specified the structure and content of these annual school reports, and the Ministry published related guidelines that schools should follow in drawing them up. The guidelines specified that the report should include information on "the areas in which the school achieves good results; and the areas in which the school fails and where the level of its education must be improved, including the proposal of measures" (Eurypedia, 2012). School leaders also have to describe a "conceptual intention of school development elaborated at least for the period of the following two

years and its annual evaluation" (NÚCEM, 2012). This clearly implies that schools should have a cyclical self-evaluation and self-development process in place. The school leader must finish the report before 31 December of each year and publish it on the school's website with a physical copy accessible in a convenient place at the school.

Support for school self-evaluation

In April 2012 when the OECD review team visited the Slovak Republic, there were several new or planned initiatives to support school self-evaluation activities. The Ministry had set up a working group to refine the content requirements in annual school reports, by defining a more specific set of quality criteria on a more specific set of content items. The Ministry also intended to publish a new set of related guidelines and to create a set of benchmarks for schools in order to stimulate their use in self-evaluation activities (NÚCEM, 2012). Further, three agencies had secured European Social Funds for projects to improve self-evaluation activities in Slovak schools (about one million Euros for each project): the ŠŠI; the national Methodological Pedagogical Centre (MPC) with a pilot with 150 schools (this project was stopped by the new Minister later in Spring 2012); and the Bratislava Autonomous Region. However, there is no clear national programme of innovation or dissemination into which these projects fit and there are no clear signs of co-operation or co-ordination.

The ŠŠI project is developing a framework for schools for their self-evaluation processes and draws on international experience in other inspectorates (members of SICI). Progress on this development can be followed via the ŠŠI's website (www.ssiba.sk/projektyESF), e.g. research reports drawing on European inspection models and suggested sets of indicators. In March 2012 a conference was held with scientists and partners from other institutes about the making of a framework for SSE in connection with external inspections and the definition of a set of standards for "good self-evaluation". Reports from SICI's Effective School Self Evaluation project were also presented. The ŠŠI project aims to develop processes, frameworks and models of and for self-evaluation that are in line with methods of external school evaluation. The MPC had announced that it wanted to develop "good practice inspiring examples" of school self-evaluation approaches and use these in their courses for in-service training.

Training requirements and accountability for school leaders

The Acts of 2003 and 2009 detail the rights and duties for school leaders (see also Chapter 4). School leaders are awarded five-year contracts and are appointed by the school founder. The school board functions as the selection committee for applicants and since recently the ŠŠI has also had a voice in that selection. The chief inspector can issue a written note to the school founder to remove the school leader if serious deficiencies are found in inspection and have not been rectified after two follow-up inspections. However, this very rarely happens. School founders are responsible for the regular evaluation of school leaders and typically make heavy use of the annual school reports in undertaking this task.

School leaders must have acquired a higher education degree and have at least five years of experience as a teacher. They are required to take specialised training courses (160 to 200 hours to be taken within a period of two years) on school management within the first three years of their appointment. These courses are offered by the MPC or by university faculties. Every seven years, established school leaders must take in-service

training of some 60 lessons with a focus on managing the improvement of teachers' competences.

The role of school boards in school evaluation

The school acts of 2003 and later specify roles for the school boards in school evaluation. First, they act as the selection committee when founders are hiring new school leaders. This process is also an opportunity to define priorities for school development against an assessment of the current status of the school. Second, school boards have a role in establishing the school education programme. Although only an advisory role, this is an opportunity to express opinions based on evaluation, and the school board's advice can give direction to the further development of the school. Third and most explicitly, the school board must provide written comment on the annual school report and the school development plans that are submitted to the school founder for approval.

The role of school founders in school evaluation

As a complement to the ŠŠI inspections, school founders are responsible for monitoring: school compliance with legal regulations that are not monitored by the ŠŠI; the quality of food in school canteens, the management of school funds, and use of physical resources. In addition, school founders deal with complaints from parents and others that do not fall under the responsibility of the ŠŠI. School founders must approve the school's financial report (submitted in an annex to its annual school report) and submit it via a web application as part of a summary for all the schools they have founded. However, the school founders are also responsible for the regular evaluation, appointment and dismissal of school leaders (see above) and must approve the annual school report and the school development plan (for at least a two-year period).

The role of local and regional authorities in school evaluation

In general, the assessment and evaluation function of local and regional authorities is very limited, and they focus mainly on the administration of the regional part of the national school network, and the correct use of the school's budget. However, if the ŠŠI signals very serious problems in a school or the need to dismiss a school leader, the regional authority must act. Chapter 6 explores the role of local and regional authorities in system evaluation.

Availability of school performance information

Schools receive a full inspection report following an inspection and school founders may request a copy of this report. The public can read a summary (not the full report) of an inspection report for a given school on the ŠŠI's and school's websites, where they should also be able to access the annual school report. In addition, some information on school average results in major national tests and examinations are published on line. The National Institute of Certified Educational Measurement (NÚCEM) publishes the *Testovanie 9* results on its website in regional tables containing the percentage of correct marks for Slovak language and literature and mathematics over the past three years, and the placement in the national percentile for each school. Information is also provided showing how a school's performance relates to the national average. These results are also sent directly to schools six weeks after students have been tested. None of the results are adjusted for the school's socio-economic context or intake.

In addition, results and ranking for the top ten schools in the Slovak language and literature tests in *Testovanie 9* were published and promoted in the media in 2010/11. Similarly, the NÚCEM publishes an annual report on the results of the external part of the *Maturita* examination and individual subject results for individual schools in each subject, as well as the aggregate results by the type of school, region, gender etc. Information on student application and enrolment in university studies for individual secondary schools is not available, although aggregate information is posted on the website of the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education (UIPŠ).

A sign that there is emerging demand for more information about school performance in the public domain is that the Institute for Economic and Social Reform (INEKO), a non-governmental organisation, launched an internet portal in March 2011 with school results in *Testovanie 9* and *Maturita* examinations. The portal also includes information on the ŠŠI's inspection judgements for each school (although not the ŠŠI inspection summary report). This enables parents and others (including regional or local authorities and school boards) to use this information in their assessment and evaluation activities. INEKO's website also includes information on a school's socio-economic context, which allows users to better estimate the school's quality based on these results and its context, which is not provided by the ŠŠI or the NÚCEM. INEKO reported that the portal had been consulted more than 10000 times over the three months preceding the OECD review. The UIPŠ plans to develop a more comprehensive and statistically reliable link between students' performance and the social, cultural and economic context of the schools they attend by connecting the database of the UPSVaR (Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family) with its own databases.

Strengths

A well elaborated system of external school evaluation, notably the complex inspections

There is a well elaborated system of complex inspections, with an adequate quality framework for evaluating the various kinds of schools. The inspection framework includes different areas of school quality and related sets of indicators and these are in line with the internationally recognised quality aspects associated with effective schools. Although when compared internationally the inspection framework for school use was published rather late (in 2011), it is accessible and can be used by schools in their self-evaluation activities. There are adequate procedures and methods for evaluation, including paperwork in advance, meetings, classroom visits, feedback meetings and reports. The OECD review team formed the impression that schools and other stakeholders seem to be satisfied with these complex inspections and their usefulness for the further development of the school, in addition to their accountability purpose in keeping schools up to standards.

The ŠŠI's work meets international standards on validity, objectivity and reliability. The ŠŠI inspection reports on individual schools are published in summary form on its website, so parents and other stakeholders can access the main messages and recommendations from the school inspection. The ŠŠI has a system in place to deal with complaints from students, parents and teachers and has responded to growing concerns over the objectivity of teachers' administration and grading in high stakes student assessment by conducting unannounced visits in a sample of 150 schools, mainly schools where concerns have been raised. In principle, there is also the opportunity for school leaders to give feedback on the school inspection process by completing a questionnaire

at the end of the inspection. However, the last review and analysis of these questionnaires seems to be for the school year 2007/08.

The ŠŠI's Annual Inspection Report summarises the evidence on school quality collected via school inspections to provide information on the quality of the overall school system in the Slovak Republic and provides comparisons with previous years, which allows the identification of how various aspects of quality have progressed or declined in schools. It is a valuable starting point for further evaluative activities and for focused actions by schools, the MPC, pedagogical higher education institutes and the ministry. It also provides data on the number of complex inspections and thematic inspections etc.

The ŠŠI has systems in place to improve its own service and capacity, and works towards the further and continued professional development of inspectors as an essential aspect of ensuring reliable and professional inspection judgements. Further, the ŠŠI has a good international outlook and some good international co-operation, for example, it is active in the international association SICI (Standing International Conference of Inspectorates of Education).

A system to follow up the results of external school evaluation is in place

The inspectorate has a system of follow up inspections, depending on how a school has been judged. For example, schools may be required to immediately correct any non-compliance with regulations, or may be given a short period of time to address unsatisfactory quality issues. The ŠŠI will return for a follow up inspection to check that the necessary improvements have been made.

Schools are able to ask for help in their improvement work. However, not many agencies offer schools support and for many schools there is no faculty or guidance institute or methodological pedagogical centre (one of the three branches of the MPC) in the area.

Complex and thematic inspections include classroom visits and feedback to teachers

In complex and thematic inspections, inspectors conduct classroom observations using a stable analytical observation and judgment instrument. These instruments and procedures are comparable with other European inspectorates. The OECD review team formed the impression that teachers see these classroom visits not as a threat, but rather as an opportunity for their work with students to be recognised (see Chapter 4), and that having an expert in their classroom was appreciated, providing that the expert demonstrated teaching expertise by giving feedback and entering discussions. Inspectors also provoke a self-evaluation exercise, by asking teachers to give their own account on the observed lesson, before giving feedback to teachers.

In Slovak schools there is a long tradition that school leaders and other management conduct classroom visits, and inspectors can build on that tradition. Inspections are a good opportunity to give direct feedback to teachers and to link inspection to guidance and to discussions on school development. However, this depends on the frequency and intensity of classroom visits, and on the availability of inspectors for feedback.

The importance of school self-evaluation is recognised and has some legal underpinning

There is a general understanding that school self-evaluation helps schools to identify their own strengths and weaknesses so that they can focus on issues that will improve quality. This is recognised in education policy and has been formulated in governmental papers, laws and measures and elaborated in national guidance and school support schemes. The OECD review revealed that self-evaluation is widely supported by agencies such as the ŠŠI, the Teacher Unions and Associations, as well as teachers and leaders within schools.

There are regulations in place to help stimulate school self-evaluation. Notably, all schools must write an annual school report that includes school results, along with other relevant information. The School Board (with representatives from the parents, teachers and the founder) must comment on this report, the process of which helps empower teachers, parents and other stakeholders of the school to understand and form opinions on school issues. This binds the school and its work more closely to society in a "small" (local) and "large" (national, regional) sense.

Schools must also develop a specific school education programme in line with the National Framework for the Curriculum (in the future also with the new curriculum standards under development), which is checked by the ŠŠI. This again empowers those connected to the school and allows the school to set its own profile, priorities and pedagogical focuses. This encourages an annual school self-evaluation cycle in the style of the well-known Deming Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle (see Tague, 2004 and for an overview of self-evaluation, Burkard and Eikenbusch, 2006). Other measures supporting school self-evaluation are the regulations around teacher appraisal and the appraisal of school leaders (see Chapter 4).

The culture of classroom visits by school leadership allows opportunity for school improvement

There is an accepted culture and practice of classroom visits executed by head teachers or heads of subject departments (see also Chapter 4). These classroom visits are focused on professional feedback for teachers, which is a major aspect of school quality. This established culture may give Slovak schools a major advantage in building good self-evaluation practices and encouraging school improvement (compared with schools in other countries) if classroom visits by school leadership are coupled with school self-evaluation processes in a smart way. These visits and feedback may also be linked to a more general framework of indicators for good teaching and learning as one dimension of the school quality, and by this contribute considerably to school self-evaluation and a culture of permanent assessment (where are we?), evaluation (is that good enough?) and planning and improvement (what can you do and what are we going to do together?). The involvement of school heads as pedagogical leaders in direct work with teachers and their students is a vital factor for school improvement (e.g. Sammons et al., 2011). However, the OECD review team noted the need to further strengthen pedagogical leadership (see Chapter 4).

Emerging practices of teacher peer evaluation among schools

There seem to be developments towards more peer-evaluation among teachers; by classroom visits in their own school and by discussions in teams within schools about the

planning of lessons and projects and the assessment of students. The OECD review team learned of emerging practice among subject groups of teachers across several schools in one town or region, or among teachers within a school founder network. Peer evaluation is a very valuable asset for further building school self-evaluation and school improvement processes. Seeking external ideas and support from other schools is a feature of effective professional learning communities (Bolam et al., 2005). There is considerable evidence, for example from England, Finland and Sweden in the United Kingdom, that school-school partnerships, clusters and networks can provide mechanisms for sharing effective leadership as well as effective practice in a way that contributes to raising the performance of the member schools (Pont et al., 2008).

Three major projects to support the further development of school self-evaluation

The large school self-evaluation projects (co-ordinated by the ŠŠI, the NÚCEM and the Bratislava Regional Authority) funded by the European Social Fund are in various stages of development and provide financial and capacity building potential for broad and powerful further development of school self-evaluation in the Slovak Republic. The OECD review team did not learn specifically about the NÚCEM and Bratislava projects, but the ŠŠI obtained a grant of almost one million euros for a project aimed at linking school self-evaluation to external evaluation. The project started in 2009 with a preparation phase, and now is in the phase of designing models and frameworks for action. This project is in line with a priority of the government: strengthening school self-evaluation in and around schools. A major strength of the ŠŠI's approach is its strong international outlook from the outset, including a large conference in early 2012. The ŠŠI has analysed efforts and approaches in other inspectorates (in the network of SICI) and therefore avoids "reinventing the wheel". Following a critical analysis and careful reflection about how to adapt to the specific circumstances in the Slovak Republic, the ŠŠI adapts frameworks and approaches from countries such as Scotland, the Netherlands, and draws on SICI's Effective School Self-Evaluation project.

Availability for schools of objective and comparative data about student assessment

Results from national assessments are fed back to schools with information allowing them to compare their overall student performance with national benchmarks. Schools receive their school results digitally within three weeks of the *Testovanie* 9, and a few days later in print. They also receive a comparison of the school's ranking per region and nationally. It is possible for schools to analyse their development on these measures over the past three years (since the start of the *Testovanie 9*) for a deeper analysis in alignment with their SEP, teacher appraisal results and specific school self-evaluation actions. *Gymnázium* and secondary vocational schools have a similar possibility to compare their performance nationally using the *Maturita* results. Further, the OECD review revealed the wide use of student assessments developed by private companies that are purchased from schools' lump sum budget. Schools reported appreciation of the availability of assessments in different subjects and grades to complement the *Testovanie 9*, and the feedback of results allowing a comparison of their performance with other schools.

Challenges

A perception that there is a reduced focus on complex inspections poses risks to the ŠŠI's credibility

The OECD review team formed the impression that the volume of thematic and information inspections puts the regular 5-year cycle of complex inspections at risk. Interviews with schools and other stakeholders identified examples of schools that had not had a complex inspection carried out in over seven years. Further, schools and other stakeholders reported that the thematic and/or information inspections (as explained above there seems to be some lack of clarity in terminology among schools and some officials) had been experienced as bureaucratic exercises placing demands on school time, but not providing useful feedback for the school. In particular, the OECD review team heard examples of recent ŠŠI visits to check whether the SEP is in line with the NEP and whether the school has an anti-racism policy. Reportedly, the ŠŠI is only checking documentation and is not inspecting classrooms to check whether the documented issues are put into practice. Schools experience this as a shift "backwards" towards a more bureaucratic inspectorate. In stark contrast, all stakeholders during the OECD review expressed strong support for complex inspections and many expressed concern about the perceived shift away from these.

The OECD review team notes that this perception that the ŠŠI is moving towards a more bureaucratic style of inspection, coupled with the concern that school inspections lack concrete connection with school improvement (see below), poses serious risks to the ŠŠI's reputation and image. The need to keep, or in some cases regain, its positive image by restoring the 5-year cycle of complex inspections is a real strategic problem for the ŠŠI's management. To keep validity and credibility for the ŠŠI's accountability function (i.e. reporting to the public on the quality of Slovak schools), the complex inspections need to be executed with a good level of intensity and coverage of the school as a whole. But complex inspections also need to stimulate improvements in the inspected schools. Increased demands on the ŠŠI to conduct other types of inspections, but without additional resources, necessarily reduces the ŠŠI's capacity to conduct complex inspections. The ŠŠI's management would need to build political recognition and support to intensify and restore a solid system of complex inspections.

School inspections have too little significance for school improvement

The OECD review team has noted that the complex inspections could have a great deal of impact on real school improvement. However, for this to be the case, there would need to be a full system of follow-up inspections for all schools, expanded feedback to teachers after classroom visits, and the inspection outcomes would need to be connected more firmly with external support and improvement work of school leaders. Currently, this potential impact is not fully realised.

Limited follow up after school inspections

Follow-up inspections are only conducted in schools where the ŠŠI has identified that minimum legal standards have not been met. Importantly, these follow-up inspections do not primarily focus on strategies for promoting improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and better outcomes for students, but rather on compliance. Currently, there is no special supervision over schools where student results are poor and/or deteriorating, and this leads to a further deterioration in their quality (NÚCEM, 2012). Further, the

OECD review team notes a lack of clarity on the procedures and function of the follow-up inspections. For example: deciding which schools require a follow-up inspection, the nature of recommendations in complex and other inspections and whether these are mandatory, the time period between a complex inspection and a follow-up inspection, and in which situation and how often the potential sanctions are imposed on schools. The OECD review team formed the impression that follow-up inspections are not very sharp or functional and that in most cases inspectors give rather general recommendations. Emerging evidence from international research on the impact of school inspections indicates that only specific and pinpointed recommendations have influence (e.g. Luginbuhl et al., 2009; Ehren, 2010).[4] There is, therefore, a challenge for the ŠŠI to improve its impact by the better use of follow-up inspections, and sharper and more specific feedback to schools.

Support systems for school improvement are inadequate and not sufficiently connected to inspection results

There is no problem for follow-up inspections to focus on aspects of school compliance (this is the case in some other inspectorates in Europe), however, this needs to be accompanied by a system of help, advice and guidance for all schools in drawing up a plan for improvement after inspection (also for schools without major quality concerns). This requires an extensive support system with local or regional centres for school guidance and an adequate and targeted offer of in-service training. However, the OECD review team formed the impression that in-service training is currently not "client driven" and is based on what experts identify as important and not on the real problems faced in schools. Following an inspection, if a school is motivated to start the improvement process, it cannot easily find enough targeted support. Also, the OECD review team formed the opinion that pedagogical leadership was not yet sufficiently developed in many Slovak schools and that there is little pressure or incentive for schools with identified concerns to work on improvement.

There is limited information from school inspections available to schools about other schools, and the inspection framework appears to remain quite remote. Although the Ministry of Education informed the OECD review team of a new publication promoting practices in selected schools, this was not known to schools visited during the OECD review. However, during the OECD review, interviews with teachers indicated a demand for information on successful practices for school improvement. Individual teachers may research independently, but there is no major resource that they can refer to. Similarly, the OECD review team formed the impression that there was limited communication among local schools.

Forming judgements and giving feedback on the quality of teaching and learning

During the OECD review, discussions with different stakeholders revealed concerns about the indicators used by inspectors to judge the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. The general impression was that these were too vague. Further, it was not clear whether teachers really receive some substantive form of feedback from inspectors. This is a sensitive issue in most European inspectorates (Bruggen van, 2010). It is always important that teachers feel that their teaching is judged objectively and fairly and with a good pedagogical competence. The OECD review team was unable to investigate this thoroughly, but gained the impression that some teachers may question the expertise of inspectors in this area.

A lack of research into the impact of the ŠŠI's inspections

While the OECD review team gained a strong impression that the complex inspections are appreciated by schools and have some impact on school improvement and change, no explicit research was found about the impact of the ŠŠI's work in schools on teachers, on local or regional authorities, on the MPC's work and the pedagogical faculties, or on the ministry. During the OECD review, schools typically gave only limited examples of how they had used conclusions and recommendations from an inspection, and local or regional authorities did not appear to make extensive use of thematic inspection reports or an analysis of inspection reports for schools in their area. The impact of the ŠŠI's work does not seem to be the subject of research.

School performance data do not allow for the school's context

There are no national data about the socio-economic intake of students in schools. The NÚCEM publishes school average results on national assessments and ranks schools on these results in static tables on its website. The publication of such "raw scores" of school performance without any adjustment for the school's context and socio-economic and educational intake can lead to users of the information making unfair comparisons and judgements on school quality. For this reason, any attempt to use the results of *Testovanie* 9 and the *Maturita* to rank schools as an indication of the quality of the education they provide should be approached with extreme caution. Rather than simply being objective measures of school effectiveness, students' performance in these assessments is affected by factors that are beyond the control of the school, such as prior attainment and social background. While these should not be seen as excuses for having low expectations of disadvantaged students, it would be quite possible for a school with relatively poor results at the end of a phase to be providing a better education for their students given the factors it can control, than one that superficially performs much better. Furthermore, another important contextual factor in comparing *Testovanie 9* results is the academic selection of students. There is a clear inequity in attempting to compare *Testovanie 9* results, as in some primary schools many of the best students leave for Gymnasia in Year 6, with other more academic students going to bi-lingual schools in Year 8. This leaves only the relatively less academic students in that school to be tested in Year 9.

The lack of contextual information on schools also has consequences for the ŠŠI. Inspectors are not able to connect, in a nationally standardised and fair way, the findings about student outcomes with key facts on the school's intake, in order to form a fair judgment about the real contribution the school has made to the observed student outcomes. It is not clear to what extent inspectors analyse the *Testovanie 9* results and whether they attempt to gather contextual information about the school in order to form a more balanced judgment on school quality. In the absence of national data and central guidelines from the ŠŠI, each inspector's interpretation of these results as an indicator of school performance is highly subjective.

Lack of clarity on inspection procedures to evaluate teacher appraisal systems as part of school quality

The law specifies that the ŠŠI should check whether the school has a system for teacher appraisal and whether this system works adequately. In undertaking this task, it is not clear whether the ŠŠI also connects the state of teacher competencies and teacher quality with the inspection of the teaching. This is a sensitive issue in almost all

inspectorates as for whole-school evaluations it is stated that the inspectors "only" evaluate the teaching in general, and not the individual teacher with potential consequences for his/her salary or career. However, the teacher appraisal system in the Slovak Republic has been developed based on the deeply-rooted knowledge that a school's quality is firmly linked to the quality of its individual teachers (see Chapter 4). Schools know that the inspectors use a list of "teacher competencies" or "elements of good teaching", but during the OECD review, school leaders and teachers expressed the perception that this was a "secret list" and that they were not certain whether it was systematically used. The OECD review also revealed sensitivity from teachers over concerns that inspectors may communicate to school leaders their appraisal of individual teachers, or even that school leaders may show individual teacher appraisal information to inspectors.

Building a culture in schools of ongoing self-evaluation and improvement

While the OECD review team notes that there are good initiatives to stimulate a culture of self-evaluation in schools, self-evaluation practices are just starting to be introduced and are not yet well connected to the overall framework of assessment and evaluation in the Slovak Republic. A general acceptance of the principle of school self-evaluation is not sufficient to implement a culture of the "planning-development-check-act" cycle to ensure the evaluation and planning of new measures or actions, the execution of plans, and the evaluation of their impact. This is a significant challenge that the OECD has seen in several review countries. While the Slovak Republic has secured funding for national and regional level projects to help further stimulate a culture of self-evaluation in schools, these are not linked to a national strategic plan and lack co-ordination. This runs the risk of compromising efforts in terms of energy and money invested in the individual projects against their potential impact, and importantly, may damage the willingness of schools to participate in these efforts if they perceive conflicting messages and approaches being promoted by the different projects.

An urgent need to introduce more harmony and direction in schools' approach to self-evaluation

More unity in the approaches of Slovak schools to self-evaluation is required as soon as possible. There is still a lack of general acceptance of the ŠŠI's framework for assessing school quality, which could also be used as a general framework for school self-evaluation, as well as for teacher appraisal and the external school evaluation by other stakeholders. This lack of standing for the ŠŠI's school evaluation framework results in misunderstandings and too much time invested in terminological or epistemological discussions, and hampers a broader discussion about the quality of schools by society.

While the three major self-evaluation projects funded by the European Social Fund provide an opportunity to develop national support to self-evaluation, it appears that these are not linked in a co-ordinated way. The challenge for the Ministry is to avoid a confusing number of different approaches and frameworks being developed for school self-evaluation. During the OECD review, discussions in schools revealed some concerns that three different self-evaluation frameworks with quality indicators would be developed and published for general use. This could lead to confusion in schools and to an investment of the scarce energy and resources in more theoretical discussions about "better frameworks", as was the case in other countries such as the Netherlands and England during the 1990s. Although there is no generally accepted theory about a school self-evaluation framework and approach, and academic discussion is natural, it is

important to avoid too much focus on academic discussion that may hinder school self-evaluation development in schools.

Discussions during the OECD review revealed a challenge to develop more unity in a framework for teacher appraisal (see Chapter 4). Currently, there are several different ideas and indicators used to evaluate "good teaching". The MPC is revising the existing national teaching standards, but will need to conduct this work both quickly and in a way that ensures adequate national and regional discussion. The OECD review team noted much uncertainty and many stakeholders lacking knowledge about this work.

Annual school reports do not sufficiently address the quality of teaching and learning

The OECD review revealed that schools perceive the production of an annual school report as a bureaucratic exercise that does not have value for school development or improvement. Most annual school reports seem to be restricted to only financial, statistical and administrative issues and do not report about students' educational results and outcomes – except rather generally about national examination (*Maturita*) or assessment (*Testovanie* 9) results (without detailed analysis and without a link to the school's educational planning). Typically, schools do not report results from planned developments and innovations of teaching and learning and school organisation. The challenge is for schools to produce their annual school report with a broader view on reporting and accountability about quality. The OECD review team learned that the national culture promoted during the former communist period meant that schools still struggle with the idea of openly publishing a list of their strengths and weaknesses in an annual school report. The former government aimed to address this cultural resistance by allowing schools to keep the more analytical part of their annual school report for internal purposes only. It is not clear to the OECD review team how this issue has developed.

A need to strengthen school use of data in self-evaluation

It is not very clear whether schools have the capacity to use the results of tests (*Testovanie 9*, *Maturita* and private tests) in an adequate way for analysis and as a basis for well focused improvement work. During the OECD review, several stakeholders expressed doubts regarding school leadership and teacher capacity to interpret data results. The OECD review also revealed a strong demand from schools for more training and that the MPC did not have an adequate offer to meet this demand (see also Chapter 4).

A need to strengthen the role of school leaders as pedagogical leaders

The Slovak Republic has clear professional development rights and requirements for school leaders. However, the OECD review revealed both concerns about the quality of some of the professional development offered and a need to improve school leaders' competencies in conducting teacher appraisal (Chapter 4) and other evaluative tasks. The dominance of general management, administrative and financial matters appears to overshadow the pedagogical leadership role. The ŠŠI has noted a lack of pedagogical leadership, inadequate teacher appraisal and subsequent follow up with improvement plans and in-service training (ŠŠI, 2011, p. 18).

A need to strengthen the evaluative role and function of the school boards

The OECD review team gained the impression that in general school boards do not yet capitalise on the legal framework to fully contribute to school evaluation and improvement, but rather only act where there are major concerns or on superficial issues. Notably, there is room to strengthen the role of the school boards in their discussions about the draft of the annual school report that is presented to them for comment. This process of discussion and review can help schools to be more aware of main points in their development and is important for strengthening the idea of a civil society that expresses itself about important school issues.

A need to rethink the role of inspections in light of an emerging culture of self-evaluation in schools

The OECD review team gained the impression that as yet there is no clear strategic thinking on how to relate the emerging culture of school self-evaluation (that is hoped to expand in numbers and thoroughness in coming years) with the external inspections conducted by the ŠŠI. The ŠŠI's focus on strengthening the capacity of schools to undertake self-evaluations fits well into the general political lines of self-governance and schools taking more responsibility while being held accountable. It is hoped that this focus will lead to improved school self-evaluation capacity and this would require a re-examination of the inspection approach, so as not to duplicate evaluation activities.

Policy recommendations

On the basis of the analysis of strengths and challenges in this chapter, the OECD review team proposes the following general directions for policy development for consideration by the Slovak experts:

- Prioritise complex inspections and reinforce their impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

- Increase transparency of school inspection results and follow up.

- Develop a strategy for the future integration of school inspection with school self-evaluation.

- Ensure that adequate attention is paid to the school's context in school evaluation.

- Broaden the range of data used to evaluate schools.

- Drive forward the development of self-evaluation in schools and strengthen support.

- Further stimulate evaluative responsibilities for school boards.

Prioritise complex inspections and reinforce their impact on the quality of teaching and learning

Schools perceive complex inspections as useful in indicating points for action and improvement, not only in legal aspects or administrative regulations, but also in matters of pedagogy and teaching. In this context, the OECD review team has noted the significant challenge that the perceived diminished frequency and status of complex inspections poses to both the ŠŠI's reputation and potential impact on school improvement. We recommend a serious reflection on how to heighten the relevance of

the external school evaluation system for school improvement. In particular, we strongly recommend keeping the system of complex inspections in place for the coming five to eight years, because it is clear that it will take a substantial period of time for schools to develop effective systems of self-evaluation. At the same time, the ŠŠI should develop a strategy to change the inspection approach once school self-evaluation practices are well established (see below). The system of complex inspections allows for a healthy external pressure on schools, an objective evaluation by experts, and it could even be discussed whether the frequency of complex inspections could be increased from five to three years.

The real value to school improvement that complex inspections offer is their feedback on a number of teaching and learning issues that could be improved, and not necessarily or predominantly a list of issues of non-compliance to be addressed by schools. With such inspections, the ŠŠI can communicate that an "acceptable" or "sufficient" level of teaching and learning is not enough and that all Slovak schools should strive for improvement, not just those with serious deficiencies. Robust and informed objective feedback from inspectors on areas for improvement and possible actions can help schools move towards excellence. Inspectors are not in a position to become school advisors, but they can indicate where there are possibilities for improvement and this is reportedly appreciated by Slovak schools.

There is a need, therefore, to ensure that inspectors have the capacity to provide objective feedback at a general level on teaching. One way to improve the ŠŠI's capacity here is to compile examples of how teaching practice has been improved at a general level from different school inspections. Such a resource can be used by inspectors in their meetings to give general feedback to teachers after a complex inspection. This and other creative ways to pool the collective expertise of inspectors will help inspectors to reinforce their role as "connoisseurs" of good teaching (the term comes from Elliott Eisner – Eisner, 1985), so that teachers' receive feedback that is helpful and sheds light on ways to work with students.

If the ŠŠI needs to integrate either a thematic or information inspection within a complex inspection in order to ensure implementation of complex inspections on a five-year cycle, there may be a need to limit the complex inspection to part of the school (e.g. in selected school years or in selected school subjects). In this case, it would be important for inspectors to stimulate schools to complete the complex inspection themselves in other parts of the school. For example, by promoting the inspection framework, by holding a conference during or shortly after the inspection, and by stimulating peer reviews among schools.

Increase transparency of school inspection results and follow up

The OECD review team recommends that the ŠŠI publishes on its website all inspection reports (with the exception of those of a confidential nature), so that they are easily accessible to the public. There is also more room for transparency in how the findings and/or recommendations in the inspection reports will be followed up. First, the ministry could stimulate school accountability and the involvement of parents and other stakeholders by requiring schools to publish a written comment on how they will act on the analysis and conclusions within the inspection report. It could also be specified that such written comment should be published in an accessible manner within a given time period, e.g. within six weeks after the inspection report is published. Second, a year after the complex inspection, a school would be expected to report on what it has done to address issues raised by the inspectors and the school's self-evaluation of how well it has

progressed in each area. The ŠŠI could use these school follow-up reports in tandem with the annual school reports to analyse school improvement and quality. Such analysis would determine the need for further follow-up inspections and would form an important part of a risk-based inspection approach. It could also be useful for the ŠŠI to implement a more restricted system of unannounced follow-up inspections in a random sample of the schools inspected in the previous year. Third, based on analysis in this follow-up inspection approach, the ŠŠI would collect and compile good practice examples of schools that have implemented successful development plans and improvement strategies following a complex inspection. These good practices can be published and shared with all schools.

Develop a strategy for the future integration of school inspection with school self-evaluation

The OECD review team recommends that the Ministry of Education and the ŠŠI develop a strategy for the evolution of school inspection in light of the positive development of an emerging culture of self-evaluation in Slovak schools. In particular, strategic reflection is required on how the complex inspection procedure will be adjusted and integrated with effective school self-evaluation. This discussion about the relation between external and internal school evaluation is important in many inspectorates (see the analysis of Bruggen van, 2010a and some SICI–workshops on www.sici-inspectorates.eu). For example, SICI's Effective School Self-Evaluation project examined the use of "proportional" external inspections. A "proportional approach" would mean that the ŠŠI would abandon the idea of conducting complete complex inspections, but rather check the validity and reliability of school self-evaluation by conducting small sample inspections in classrooms and verifying documentation. A second possibility would be for the ŠŠI to adopt a "risk-based approach" to complex inspections. In this case, the ŠŠI would only conduct complex inspections in schools in which weak or deteriorating student performance results (on the *Testovanie 9* or on the external part of the *Maturita*) are identified and/or other factors that raise concerns about the school's quality (e.g. a sharp drop in student intake or a number of parental complaints). Such signals of quality concerns in a school could lead to a quick or even unannounced complex inspection, such as the risk-based inspection that has been developed in the Netherlands and, to some extent, in other countries. A third possibility would be for the ŠŠI to develop a combination of both the proportional and risk-based approaches, such as the "differentiated system of inspection" that has been developed in the Flemish Community of Belgium (see Shewbridge et al. 2011). Further information on this can be found in presentations about possible combinations of external and internal school evaluation from a SICI workshop in Portugal (Grenho, 2009) and also the coupling of internal and external school reviews in New Zealand (see Nusche et al., 2012).

In the short term, the ŠŠI, as part of its complex inspections, can inspect the school's systems for self-evaluation and assess what can be done to expand and improve those systems. This would form part of the professional evaluation of the school's management and development systems and is not a type of proportional inspection where the external inspection is done in a more complex or deeper way in proportion with the outcomes of the internal evaluations (see above). In this way, the ŠŠI can build up evidence on the evolution of the self-evaluation culture in Slovak schools, which can feed into strategic decisions on how to better integrate inspection with school self-evaluation in the future.

Ensure that adequate attention is paid to the school's context in school evaluation

The OECD review team notes the importance of providing adequate contextual information on schools in order to ensure better interpretation of school performance information, notably the publication of school average results in *Testovanie 9* and *Maturita*. In this context, it will be important to adequately support and prioritise the Institute for Information and Prognoses of Education (UIPŠ) work on developing information on school socio-economic context. In the short term the UIPŠ plans to link school performance information with student background data included in social security databases. This will be an important step forward, but should be followed by a review of the coverage and quality of that data and, if necessary, strategic planning as to how it can be improved (see Chapter 6).

This contextual information will be an important information source for the ŠŠI. In the short term, inspectors can ensure that they collect facts on schools' socio-economic context and intake and investigate these as part of the inspection process. The ŠŠI can compile this information and use it to compare schools in the local area. This should considerably raise the fairness of inspection judgements and therefore also raise the impact of these judgements on school improvement. Working within these important contextual parameters will allow inspectors and schools to more accurately evaluate a school's achievements and where it needs to improve.

Broaden the range of data used to evaluate schools

While results from external testing can provide useful, objective information for evaluating school performance and driving improvement, there is strong international evidence, particularly from the United States, to suggest that where the results of high stakes external assessment (such as *Testovanie 9* and *Maturita*) are the main means of evaluating school effectiveness, there can be significant negative effects (Au, 2007, p. 258-267). Chapter 4 discusses the potential risk that this poses to student learning and curriculum coverage. To mitigate these risks, the OECD review team recommends that a wider range of information also be taken into account to build a more fully rounded picture of the education provided by a school. For example, in addition to comparative data based on external testing, the state of New York measures school performance in a "report card" that includes a range of information including:

- numbers of student on roll

- average class size

- demographic factors such as the number of students receiving free school meals

- attendance and suspension information

- teacher qualification information (for example, percentage with a master's degree).

(https://reportcards.nysed.gov/)

Where relevant, information is included for the previous two years to show trends, for example if the number of students suspended is increasing or decreasing over time. While school performance in external assessment still forms a significant part of the report, this model has the advantage of providing contextual information to inform the analysis of

results and judgement of the quality of education the school provides. Other indicators that could be considered for the Slovak Republic might include:

- "value added" scores for basic schools showing student progress between the T5 and T9 tests once the former has been introduced

- information on what percentage of gymnasia students graduate from university

- the results of satisfaction questionnaires taken by students and parents.

The NGO INEKO has provided a possible model for this system, having recently launched a website comparing schools by a range of different measures with a view to helping parents compare and choose schools.

Drive forward the development of self-evaluation in schools and strengthen support

The Ministry of Education has already undertaken initiatives to stimulate and support the development of an effective self-evaluation culture in Slovak schools, for example with the requirements for schools to publish an annual school report; the legal possibilities for school boards to comment on these and for school founders to approve these; the MPC's supply of in-service training courses, conferences and publications; the recognition of the key role that the school leader plays in this and tougher accountability arrangements. The education community has also promoted self-evaluation activities. However, experience in other countries indicates that the development of an effective self-evaluation system is a difficult task for schools and that it takes time and energy before the majority of schools have good systems of self-evaluation in place. As such, it is essential to communicate a strong, clear policy message on the importance of an effective self-evaluation system to school improvement. This message can be disseminated by the Minister and other officials at all levels of policy making and across different national bodies. There is also a need for a cocktail of different measures. As noted above, the OECD review team recommends that the ŠŠI inspect a school's self-evaluation system as part of the complex inspection. Other suggestions are provided below.

Ensure coherence in the development of self-evaluation approaches

Along with a clear policy message on school self-evaluation, the OECD review team recommends that there is more coherence among the major self-evaluation projects and initiatives in the Slovak Republic. The Ministry should do everything possible to avoid a situation where schools are confronted with a confusing mixture of self-evaluation frameworks and approaches. Notably, the Ministry should ensure co-ordination and co-operation among the major European Social Funding projects on school self-evaluation.

An obvious way to bring more coherence to self-evaluation development is for the ŠŠI to improve the standing and acceptance of its inspection framework. First, the ŠŠI should regularly review its framework to ensure that it adequately reflects emerging research and evidence on school improvement and effectiveness, plus continue to collaborate internationally with other inspectorates to ensure that it is on top of cutting-edge research in these areas. Second, the ŠŠI should to promote its framework. A first step was the publication of this on the ŠŠI's website, but the ŠŠI needs to more actively connect this to schools' realities, for example, via a series of small publications or videos

with clear explanations of why certain aspects are included in the inspection framework and how they are linked to school improvement (citing research evidence and – increasingly – concrete examples from Slovak schools). An example of this is seen from the national inspectorate in England (Ofsted) that published a report highlighting case studies of twelve outstanding schools that had demonstrated school improvement within the inspection process (Matthews, 2009).[5] Schools could also benefit from learning more about the scoring instruments that inspectors use to evaluate a school against the inspection framework. The ŠŠI could even publish some sample observation scales for schools to use in their self-evaluation.

Similarly, the Ministry should engage the ŠŠI, the MPC, and parent and school representatives in a quick joint commission to develop some sample self-evaluation instruments for schools. This could result in the provision of on line questionnaires for schools to use to collect feedback from students and parents on their level of satisfaction with the school and, for secondary schools, feedback from employers and further education institutions (e.g. vocational schools and universities). The commission can benefit from existing work, including the ŠŠI's scoring instruments in these areas, plus several instruments that have been developed in other European countries. For example, the Bertelsmann Foundation's international project that developed the self-evaluation lists used in the *Selbst Evaluation in Schulen* (SEIS) project in a number of German states (see www.seis-deutschland.de and Stern et al., 2006).

Identify and promote examples of Slovak schools with effective school self-evaluation processes

The OECD review team recommends the publication and promotion of good practice examples of school self-evaluation systems. These can take the form of small brochures or even internet posts, but could also form a specific thematic report from the ŠŠI. In addition to the ŠŠI's identification of good examples of self-evaluation systems during complex inspections (see above), the Ministry, in collaboration with other stakeholders, could organise an open contest in which schools submit examples of their self-evaluation systems and are selected to promote their experience in national or regional conferences. The Ministry could even specify a small reward for selected schools as a stimulus. Such an approach would be a quick way to capitalise on the energy and enthusiasm at the school level. Published descriptions of good practice should be accompanied by the ŠŠI's analysis of the underlying success factors and how these relate to its inspection framework and school improvement. These descriptions and accompanying analysis can be taken up by the MPC and other training providers as part of their in-service courses. Schools can directly consult these examples and reflect on how these could improve their own self-evaluation systems. Further, schools could contact other schools to arrange peer reviews as part of their self-evaluation process. Finally, these publications could be used in regional or local courses and conferences in schools, as part of a national campaign.

Build school leadership and teacher capacity to undertake evidence-based self-evaluation

Self-evaluation should be firmly linked to improving the quality of teaching and learning. In turn, evaluations should be based on evidence that is collected, for example, via the use of standardised tests and observation tools (both school developed and national). This requires capacity at the school level to both design and develop suitable self-evaluation instruments and, importantly, to be able to analyse and interpret the results

collected. The OECD review team recommends that in all schools, one of the leadership team or a designated member of staff has clear responsibility for the development and implementation of a plan for designing and developing self-evaluation instruments. The availability of more information about student learning and progress will allow teachers to better differentiate their teaching to different students in their classes. At the national level, support can be provided by the development of self-evaluation instruments (see above) and the timely and clear feedback of results from both school inspections and national assessments. The use of, where possible, standardised tests and observation instruments for specific groups of students (e.g. in a given school year or subject) combined with focused teaching arrangements and using the best practical and theoretical knowledge has proven effective in many schools and school systems (e.g. Fullan, 2012; Hattie, 2009).

It is critical to develop teacher and leadership capacity to collect, analyse, interpret and act on evidence. Examples of schools making good use of evidence in their self-evaluation processes, as well as targeted in-service training, will help to promote the correct use of evidence in the cycles of school-assessment and school improvement. School leadership, staff with specific evaluation responsibilities, and teachers require the analytical skills to use the information from student assessments to inform the improvement of teaching and learning.

Further develop school leader capacity for pedagogical leadership

A clear strength when comparing Slovak schools internationally is the tradition of classroom visits by school leaders or other members of staff with evaluation responsibilities. This is an important element in a culture of permanent professional assessment and evaluation in schools and the feedback that is given in these classroom visits is an important instrument in pedagogical leadership. The OECD review team sees ways to further strengthen the impact that pedagogical leadership has on school improvement. First, classroom observations should be based on a consolidated set of teaching standards, which should be refined and further developed through a thematic inspection by the ŠŠI of a sample of schools' teacher appraisal criteria and methodologies (see Chapter 4). Second, targeted in-service training for school leaders and leadership teams should focus on the priority topic of how pedagogical leadership can stimulate effective self-evaluation processes to improve teaching and learning. Third, there is room to stimulate peer learning among school leadership in different schools to promote the further development of pedagogical leadership competencies, for example via peer observation, reflection and feedback on pedagogical leadership practices. These and other techniques are listed in resources on school leadership competencies (e.g. Buchen and Rolff, 2007; Fullan, 2012 for a recent overview).

Clarify the expectation that annual school reports should focus on the quality of teaching and learning

The OECD review team has noted that annual school reports currently have limited use for school improvement as they are "statistical in nature" and perceived by many schools to be simply a bureaucratic process (NÚCEM, 2012). In this context, the challenge is to help schools improve the relevance of the annual school report in a way that aids their further development, without strengthening their perception that it is simply a bureaucratic exercise. The MPC plans to elaborate a list of suggested content for the annual school reports and this could be of significant help to schools if it: speaks significantly to the teaching and learning process (and not simply the easily reported

financial and summative assessment aspects); is open enough for schools to elaborate and develop these aspects autonomously to best fit their development needs and strategy; and, critically, is connected to a clear concept and framework for self-evaluation (see above). The OECD review team suggests that the ŠŠI's inspection framework could serve as a strong basis for this self-evaluation framework, which can be strengthened by input from the MPC and other teacher education providers, regional authorities, and schools that have been identified as having developed effective self-evaluation systems (see above).

Further stimulate evaluative responsibility for school boards

Discussions during the OECD review with a number of representatives of school boards indicated a strong commitment to their evaluative roles. Various ideas for further developing their responsibilities in evaluation and assessment included: discussions with the school leader about the annual school report and the school education programme, exchanging ideas on the content of different subjects and how to motivate children to learn, and involving parents and others in extra-curricular activities. As such, the OECD review team formed the impression that many school boards seem ready to take more responsibility for the assessment and evaluation of their school and for expressing sharper opinions about what could be done for improvement or change. In this context, consideration could be given to promoting (or perhaps introducing a requirement) for school boards to publish a written statement about the annual school report on the school´s website or on paper. In such a statement the school board can outline its own priorities for the school's further development, independent from priorities stated by the school leadership. In future reports, the school board can reflect on how and to what extent the school leadership has addressed its stated priorities for school development.

Notes

1. For information on: the political and ideological background of the growing importance of internal and external school evaluation see Bruggen van (2010) and Brockmann (2007); the history of modern school inspectorates see Bruggen van (2012) and sources mentioned there.

2. For further details, see: SICI (Standing International Conference of Inspectorates of Education in Europe) profile of the Slovak School Inspectorate at www.sici-inspectorates.eu/en/members/inspection_profiles; and the Eurydice site https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Slovakia.

3. The grouping of these indicators and some of the terminology is slightly different from what is published in the Country Background Report. But the content is the same.

4. Some papers, presentations and the final report of a SICI workshop about impact of inspection in November 2011 in Stockholm may be found on www.sici-inspectorates.eu/activities/workshops.

5. Although not connected to inspection processes, there is a competition in Germany for the best schools (*Deutscher Schulpreis*) and publications analyse and present the successful factors in the winning schools (see Fauser et al., 2010 and www.schulpreis.bosch-stiftung.de). There is also an online "School Development Academy" connected to the work promoting conferences, workshops, chats and network building.

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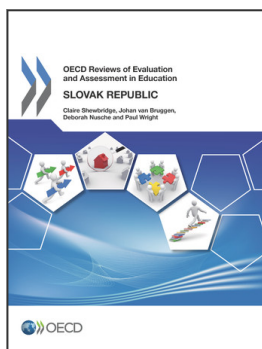
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