Inspection in Estonia

1. General background

In Estonia, external supervision of educational institutions is exercised by the officials of the Ministry of Education and Research on the order of the Minister of Education and Research. Inspection exercises control over education and schooling activities.

All external school inspection is carried out by the External Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Education and Research. There is no separate school inspectorate. The External Evaluation Department is responsible for the development and implementation of a quality system in general, but also in vocational and higher education as well as for monitoring and analysis of the results in the area of government of the Ministry.

The organisation and management of governmental supervision and the issuing of education licenses in general education is regulated by the Pre-school Child Care Institutions Act, Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act and Private Schools Act.

In addition to the school inspection that is carried out by the External Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, supervision over actions in an educational institution can also be exercised by the owner of the educational institution. This is an internal process where the owner of an educational institution, e.g. local municipality or a private company exercises supervision over its own educational institutions. First and foremost, such supervision usually focuses on administration and economic activities, but the owner of an educational institution has the right to supervise its school’s activities in all possible fields. In contrast, the Ministry of Education and Research as an external evaluator only exercises supervision over the lawfulness of the activities of schools and their owners with the aim of ensuring the availability of basic and general secondary education and accessibility thereto on equal grounds, the organization of teaching and education, and the quality and effectiveness thereof.

The supervision carried out by the Ministry of Education and Research as an external evaluator is strictly limited to only the lawfulness of the activities of schools and their owners. This means that the Ministry of Education and Research has no power to prescribe anything to schools and their owners if their activities are lawful, but for example, ineffective. However, it is possible to make recommendations.

The Ministry of Education and Research closely co-operates with school owners. The majority of schools are owned by local municipalities. School owners are expected to monitor the activities and (academic) results of their schools and if necessary, take action to improve the situation.

1. Selecting schools that are to be supervised

There is no regular school inspection in Estonia.

The Ministry of Education and Research establishes the priorities of inspection based on ample data about previous school years. Some of the data that is collected from schools can be found here: <https://www.haridussilm.ee/ee>. With this process, Estonia is moving towards a risk-based inspection model. It is a trust-based model – some schools may not be inspected for decades if data does not indicate the need for inspection.

In addition to this, all new schools are inspected to make sure that they fulfill all legal requirements. This is not a risk-based or data-based selection. All new schools are inspected at least once.

Thirdly, the ministry also carries out inspection in individual matters, when specific problems and issues arise, for example, in case of problems (complaints). Such inspection is carried out as a reaction to some specific problem.

1. Self-evaluation

In 2006, the self-evaluation of educational institutions was made mandatory and educational institutions were provided with advisory services on internal evaluation. Since 2009, the advisory services were optional. Since 2013 only pre-school child care institutions are provided with advisory services. However, all schools are still expected to carry out self-evaluation and plan their development on the basis of its results.

Self-evaluation is considered to be a crucial element for school development. During external evaluation (inspection) it is usually always monitored if and how the school has carried out self-evaluation and whether it has taken its results into account when planning its development.

1. Inspection in different types of schools

Inspection is conducted in private, municipal and state schools on very similar grounds. Mainly whole-school inspections are practiced. Obviously, it is not possible to monitor absolutely everything during the inspection, so each schoolyear certain topics are selected that are to be monitored during supervision, e.g. qualification of teachers and providing support to students are areas that have always been monitored. These topics tend to stay the same throughout years.

However, in Estonia, school inspection is flexible and it is possible to adjust the inspection manual to each and every specific situation.