

New inspection regime for schools and governing bodies

Information for the governing bodies of schools to be subject to quadrennial inspection under the proposed new regime in the 2016/2017 school year.

Situation as of 22 June 2016

As the governing body of one or more Dutch primary, secondary or special schools, you and your school(s) are due to undergo your quadrennial inspection in the 2016/2017 school year. The Inspectorate of Education intends to use this year to gain experience with the proposed new inspection regime. This guide describes what we expect of you with regard to that inspection, and what you can expect of us. We also describe what the inspection involves for the schools concerned, so that you and they can prepare for it.¹

NB. The enabling legislation for the new inspection regime is still before Parliament. Its passage is not expected to be completed until the autumn of 2016. For this reason, all information contained in the present document is subject to confirmation. It is intended solely as a provisional guide for the governing bodies of schools due to undergo inspection under the new regime.

About the new inspection regime

“What is being done right? What could be done better? And what *needs* to be done better?” This is perhaps the best way to sum up the new regime of school inspections, scheduled to take full effect from August 2017. For the background to the changes and the latest information about them, please see the dedicated page on our website: www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/toezicht/vernieuwing-in-het-toezicht (in Dutch only). Here you will also find the 2017 draft Inspection Frameworks for each sector, describing our new way of working and what factors we will be assessing (the assessment framework).

Essentially, the basic principles of the new regime are as follows:

1. *Basic quality guarantee.* As we do now, the Inspectorate will continue to assure the quality of educational provision in the Netherlands. Governing bodies and their schools are required to comply with the prescribed statutory standards for quality of education, quality assurance and financial management.
2. *Encouraging improvement.* We wish to actively promote a culture of improvement at schools and in their governing bodies, encouraging them to raise the quality of all aspects of their provision.
3. *Straightforward, bespoke regulation.* As far as possible, we want our regulation of schools and governing bodies to facilitate their own ambitions. The school plan plays a key role in achieving this. Common and largely identical assessment frameworks have been compiled for the primary (PO), secondary (SO), special education (SO/VSO) and vocational further education (MBO) sectors, suitable for the very wide range of schools and governing bodies we find ourselves dealing with in practice. This approach simplifies the inspection and regulatory regimes for all sectors, whilst also allowing us to respond effectively to the trend towards multi-sectoral governance in education.

¹ We have compiled a separate guide for governing bodies in the vocational further education (MBO) sector.

4. *Governor responsibility.* Ultimately, the governing body is responsible for the quality and continuity of the education provided by the school(s) operating under its auspices. For this reason, under the new regime we will be inspecting governing bodies as well as schools. Each governing body has its own process for maintaining and improving the quality of educational provision, which we take as our starting point in regulating it. Governing bodies and schools with better processes provide more reliable information about the quality of their education. Having earned our trust in that way, we as an inspectorate can permit them greater freedom of movement. This allows us to regulate with a lighter touch where possible, but a heavier one where necessary.

A new assessment framework

In the 2017 draft assessment framework, we define five quality areas: (i) educational process; (ii) school climate; (iii) learning outcomes; (iv) quality assurance and ambition; and (v) financial management. This breakdown allows us to answer three fundamental questions about the schooling pupils are receiving: (a) are they learning enough (learning outcomes)?; (b) are they being taught well (educational process)?; and (c) are they safe (school climate)? Together, our findings in these three areas reveal the overall standard of education the school is providing in the classroom. The other two areas, quality assurance (coupled with ambition) and financial management, reflect quality of provision – by which we mean the school’s performance in these domains combined – and its continuity. We define the overall quality of a school’s educational provision as the aggregate of its performance in all these areas.

Each standard is operationalized. The statutory criteria determine whether a school is judged “Adequate” (Voldoende) or “Inadequate” (Onvoldoende), whilst fulfilment of its own self-defined quality factors – those displayed or aspired to by the governing body – makes the difference between “Adequate” and “Good”. In assessing each of these latter factors, which we classify using a non-exhaustive list of topics, there is room for dialogue about the school’s performance. See chapter 3 of the 2017 draft Inspection Framework, available on our website, for the complete assessment framework and chapter 4 for full details of judgements and standards.

What does the quadrennial inspection cover?

Our quadrennial inspections of schools and their governing bodies result in official judgements concerning the quality of their educational provision, their governance and their financial management.

We conduct four types of inspection. One of these examines governing bodies, the other three schools themselves.

When we inspect a governing body, we focus on:

- quality assurance and financial management.

The three types of school inspections are:

- verification inspections;
- quality inspections of “risk-affected” schools; and,
- voluntary inspections of good schools.

See the box below, “Three types of school inspection”, for an explanation of each of these.

At the heart of the quadrennial inspection procedure are the following questions:

1. Has the governing body agreed objectives with its schools, does it have sufficient

insight into the quality of the education they provide and is it endeavouring to improve that quality?

2. Does the governing body have a professional quality culture and does it operate transparently and conscientiously?
3. Does the governing body communicate actively about its own progress and achievements, and those of its schools.
4. Is the financial management sound?

What will your quadrennial inspection be like?

Our inspection process is divided into eight phases: (a) expert analysis; (b) governors' meeting; (c) inspection plan; (d) governing body inspection; (e) school inspection; (f) final meeting and report; (g) feedback meeting; and (h) follow-up decision.

a. Expert analysis

Every inspection begins with an expert analysis of the information available to the inspector about your governing body and schools. For example, we look at your school plan (except in vocational FE), policy documents, annual report and other relevant material. We also consider external and internal signals, your inspection history, examination results and other key data. You do not need to supply us with any new information at this stage.

b. Governors' meeting

At this initial meeting, we ask you as their governing body to present your analysis of your schools' performance and development. We then compare this with our own expert analysis and, based on the input from both sides, discuss which schools will in principle undergo verification inspections. If the expert analysis identifies one or more of your schools as "risk-affected", we will subject them to quality inspections. In your capacity as governing body, you can also request that we conduct a voluntary inspection of a "good" school based on a self-evaluation.

Three types of school inspection

There are three types of school inspection. Our inspection plan sets out which schools are to be inspected and what type of inspection they will undergo.

Verification inspection: information and management checks

In a verification inspection, we assess how well information obtained from the governing body about the quality of a school's educational provision matches our own observations. This exercise also gives us a picture of the school's overall quality. At issue is not only whether the information we have received is correct, but also whether quality management efforts are working in practice. To ascertain this, we look at such factors as whether policy set by the governing body is working through to the classroom – to teachers and, especially, pupils. We also consider how the governors fulfil their duty of accountability to stakeholders. When conducting this form of inspection, we take the information available from the governing body as our starting point.

Verification inspections in the coming year will be carried out in accordance with the 2017 draft assessment framework. We will select the specific standard(s) to be investigated based on our own expert analysis and the accountability information provided by the governing body. In all cases, though, we shall examine quality

assurance at school level as this gives us useful information about that system's impact in the school and its lessons, as well as the practical work in vocational schooling (VMBO).

A reasoned sample of schools is selected for such inspections, taking into account the structure of the organization. We also endeavour to achieve a balanced selection of the types of school falling under the auspices of the governing body.

Quality inspection of risk-affected schools

We conduct quality inspections of schools suspected of providing inadequate quality or being affected by risks in terms of their financial management at the governance level. Such suspicions may well arise during the expert analysis preparatory to the quadrennial inspection.

A quality inspection is intended to reveal whether or not the school is complying with the statutory requirements for the basic quality of its educational provision. Its scope depends on the amount of information the governing body is able to provide concerning the quality of that provision and/or its continuity. In part, the specific standard(s) to be investigated are selected accordingly. During the 2016/2017 school year, such inspections will be conducted under the existing statutory framework and *not* the 2017 draft version, since that is not officially due to enter force until August 2017. However, it is possible that we may work with the new framework alongside the existing one, in order to gain experience of the proposed future regime. Whatever the case, your inspector will provide you with further information as and when necessary.

Voluntary inspections of good schools

As a governing body, you are entitled to request that we conduct inspections of schools you believe rate as "Good". For each governing body, we are prepared to perform a limited number of such inspections in accordance with the 2017 assessment framework. Before we will do so, however, you must provide us with a thorough self-evaluation of each school concerned, clearly demonstrating why you think the school in question rates as "Good". We will then assess the school's actual quality, applying the 2017 inspection framework, and compare that with your impression of it. If the two tally, the school is officially judged "Good".

c. Inspection plan

We now translate the results of the expert analysis and the governors' meeting, as well as any other discussions held so far, into an inspection plan. This is a clear, well-structured summary of the activities to be undertaken at both governance and school level during the subsequent phases of the inspection process. It states which schools are to undergo verification inspections and what specific standards are to be investigated at them. In other words, what we want to verify and how we intend to do that. It also lists those schools to be subjected to quality inspections due to risks identified during the expert analysis and those to be inspected voluntarily at your request, because you as their governing body believe they should be rated as "good". If you are responsible for activities in more than one sector, the plan also sets out which schools and courses we intend to inspect in each sector. Finally, it also contains details of the standards or themes we intend to examine as part of the process of systemic regulation (see chapter 10 of the inspection framework).

In planning and organizing our subsequent inspection activities, as far as reasonably

possible we will coordinate with you as the governing body of the schools concerned. You are therefore requested to study the inspection plan carefully, and in particular to check its organizational and logistical feasibility for you. Within reason, we will then endeavour to make any adjustments you deem necessary.

Cooperative planning – who does what?

Our inspection plan describes which schools we intend to inspect, and in what manner. Because the entire process has to be completed within a set period, it is possible that our inspectors may arrive at very short notice. It is very helpful to us if the schools concerned are prepared for this possibility.

Under the new regime, it is your responsibility as their governing body to notify the selected schools that they are to be inspected. We will provide you with the information you need to do this. To keep the process of arranging specific appointments and so on as smoothly as possible, we ask that you nominate a single contact person for your entire organization.

d. Governing body inspection

We begin by studying the documents you have compiled as a governing body, in order to gain an insight into the structure and workings of your quality assurance system. You do not have to submit these yourself, since we can use material already available to us: the Internet School Dossier (ISD), your websites, Windows for Accountability data and so on. If anything else is needed, this is usually specified at the initial governors' meeting. To help us better understand your approach to accountability for quality, our expert analysis includes examination of the relationship between the documents studied, your inspection history and key figures concerning your educational outcomes and financial management.

In addition, we want to build up a picture of your approach to quality assurance. In particular, whether you operate an effective system which not only guarantees the quality and continuity of your educational provision but also encourages further improvement in this respect. To this end, we use the outcome of our expert analysis to decide who we want to speak with personally. That could be anyone from quality assurance officers to school leaders or coordinators. In all cases, we also hold meetings with the governing body, the internal regulator and the staff representative body. These provide us with information we need to help us answer our questions as school inspectors. (To be absolutely clear, in that capacity we do not make any judgements concerning the internal regulator or staff representation.)

Next, we move on to the school inspection phase. It is possible, however, that we may seek one or more further meetings with you as a governing body later in the process.

e. School inspection

If a school so wishes, it can give us a presentation at the start of our inspection. Whilst there is no obligation to do so, as far as possible we do seek to appreciate the school's image of itself through the information it provides us with. In that way the teaching staff and the rest of the school team can let us know what they stand for. What is their vision? What are their ambitions? Their goals? What results have they achieved? What do they hope to achieve in the future? The form is free. We watch, listen and ask questions in an effort to obtain as much relevant information as we can for the purposes of the inspection.

We also look at how that information relates to the school plan, which is intended to be the guiding document for institutions in the primary, secondary and special education sectors. If a presentation is given, it is scheduled in consultation with the school.

At the end of each inspection day, there is always a first round of feedback.

f. Final meeting and report

Based on its observations and findings, the inspection team compiles a draft report. This is a concise document intended for the governing body. It outlines the conclusions reached in respect of the primary purpose of the inspection and any secondary aspects, with substantiation. The inspectors' judgements and assessments about the schools, and any remedial action they recommend, are set out in the so-called governors' report. This applies equally whether the inspection was to verify certain standards, to check basic quality due to possible risks or conducted voluntarily to see if a school qualifies as "Good".

At the final meeting, we discuss the findings and judgements in the draft report with you. We like to begin with what is being done well, and in the case of primary, secondary and special education to make a link with the school plan. We also talk about what you intend to do in response to our findings and judgements, and if necessary we agree on remedial actions and improvements with you. In this respect we draw a distinction between what *has* to be done better (statutory requirements) and what *can* be done better (self-defined quality factors). Depending on our findings with regard to quality assurance by the governing body, we may agree on remedial action in that area as well. This meeting is also your opportunity to correct any factual inaccuracies in the report and to make additional comments. Based on it, we then compile the final report and send it to you. As the governing body concerned, you are entitled to submit a formal response to this (see section 8.3 of the Inspection Framework).

Verification inspection reports

In the final report of a verification inspection, we present our findings in two ways. We first describe quality assurance at the governance level: what we found at the schools and how that tallies with the picture painted by the governing body. In addition, we set out how the quality assurance system works through to classroom level – an assessment based on objectives defined by the governing body and selected by us. Secondly, we report the outcome of the verification exercise itself: our judgement of the inspected schools in respect of the selected standards.

Online publication

The final report of the quadrennial inspection is published on our website. If we have conducted a risk-based quality inspection or a voluntary inspection of a potentially "Good" school, we also post a quality profile and details of the standards investigated. Schools we have visited to conduct verification inspections receive a link on our website to the governors' report.

g. Feedback meeting

It is important to us that schools recognize themselves in our findings and judgements. Ultimately, these are intended to encourage improvement. Feedback sessions following verification inspections take place at the governance level; only risk-based quality inspections result in – optional – feedback meetings at the school level. At such sessions, we explain our findings and try to answer any questions the school may have. This approach allows us to share more information with the teaching staff and school leadership

than we are able to provide in our reports. If aspects of quality defined by you are involved, we relate them to the school plan. The timing of any feedback meeting is decided in consultation with the school.

h. Follow-up decision

After inspecting your governing body, we decide what regulatory follow-up is needed. The defining factor here is our judgement concerning financial management and, in particular, quality assurance at the governance level. The basic question we ask ourselves is: in the light of the outcome of the inspection, what needs to be corrected or improved and what role should the governing body itself play in achieving that? Depending on what we have found, in broad terms four scenarios are possible.

1. Quality assurance is in order and no governance or educational shortcomings have been found: no regulatory follow-up required.
2. Quality assurance is in order but shortcomings have been found in other areas: agreements are made with the governing body about its role in quality improvement and/or remedial follow-up.
3. Quality assurance is not in order: in all cases the Inspectorate conducts further quality or remedial inspections.
4. Financial management is not in order: combination of scenarios.

These situations are described in more detail in chapter 9 of the Inspection Framework. The rules used to decide which scenario applies are not set in stone; the final choice depends on a number of factors, including the number of schools the governing body is responsible for, the complexity of its work (number of sectors covered), developments in the quality and quality-assurance domains, the seriousness and extent of any shortcomings and risks identified, the scope and speed of any current remedial programmes and the institution's inspection history.

The 2016/2017 school year: a transitional period

The legislation on which the 2017 inspection framework is based will not enter into force before the end of the 2016/2017 school year. This means that, strictly speaking, we cannot enforce our judgements and follow-up measures during the coming year. However, we still want to gain as much experience as possible with this new way of working. At all times, we will communicate with you as clearly as possible about the current situation. Remember, too, that – as stated in the descriptions of the different types of inspection – “risk-affected” schools will continue to be inspected and judged under the current statutory regime.

Finally...

For background information and answers to frequently asked questions about the new regime, please visit our website: <http://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/toezicht/vernieuwing-in-het-toezicht> (in Dutch only). If you have any specific questions or comments about our inspections or this document, contact the leader of your quadrennial inspection or your contact inspector.

The new inspection regime – practical FAQs

1. In practice, what are the main differences compared with the current regime?

As far as inspections are concerned, the main differences are as follows.

- All quadrennial and other inspections will now start with the governing body (previously, this was only the case with MBO vocational further education).
- The Inspectorate selects a number of schools for inspection and draws up an inspection plan. At the school level, there are three possible types of inspection: the verification inspection, the quality inspection of "risk-affected" schools and the voluntary inspection of good schools.
- The process will now include a feedback meeting.
- The draft 2017 inspection framework draws a clearer distinction between statutory requirements and an institution's own self-defined quality factors.

2. How many schools within an organization will be visited during the quadrennial inspection?

We will decide this after the initial meeting with the governing body. At the very least we will visit all schools identified during our expert analysis as "risk-affected" to undertake quality inspections. In addition, selected schools will undergo verification inspections and, at the request of the governing body, we may voluntarily inspect one or more schools believed to rate as "good".

As well as conducting these quadrennial inspections, in the intervening period we may include the organization's other schools in wider thematic inspection exercises. These address such topics as their approach to citizenship education, promoting equal opportunities in the transition from primary to secondary education and the practical implications of tailored education for teachers and pupils.

If necessary, we also conduct inspections as and when a school is identified as "risk-affected".

3. What does a verification inspection involve?

In a verification inspection, we consider the following questions at the school level.

- Does the information supplied by the governing body about the quality of the school's educational provision tally with our own observations?
- What image does the school have of its own quality?
- Is the quality management system working?
- How does the governing body fulfil its duty of accountability to stakeholders?

Verification inspections are conducted in accordance with the draft 2017 Inspection Framework.

4. Does the Inspectorate investigate all standards at every school it visits?

No. In the case of verification inspections, only selected standards are looked at. The inspection plan states which have been chosen. When conducting a quality inspection of a "risk-affected" school, we consider more standards. The exact number depends on the risks identified, but is always enough to reach a substantiated final judgement about its educational provision.

5. Does the school receive feedback about the standards investigated?

At the end of any inspection day at a school, the inspectors always provide their initial feedback verbally. When we have conducted a quality inspection of a "risk-affected" school, we also organize a more formal feedback meeting.

6. Does the Inspectorate compile a report about each school?

Following a quadrennial inspection, we compile a so-called "governor's report". As well as our judgements in respect of quality assurance and financial management at the governance level, this presents our findings at each school inspected. This applies regardless of whether we conducted (a) a verification inspection, (b) a quality inspection of a "risk-affected" school or (c) a voluntary inspection of a good one. In the latter two cases, we also post a school quality profile and details of the standards investigated on our website. Following a verification inspection, schools receive a link on our website to the governors' report.

As well as conducting quadrennial inspections, in the intervening period we may inspect a school if and when our annual performance analysis identifies it as "risk-affected". This form of inspection results in a separate report at school level.

It is also possible that other schools may be involved in wider inspection exercises during the period between quadrennial inspections.

7. Who notifies a school that it is to be inspected?

Under the new regime, it is the responsibility of the governing body – not the Inspectorate – to notify a school that it has been selected for inspection. It may be useful to inform your schools that some of them may receive a visit from our inspectors at very short notice.

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