



# The VEBADO Compass

## What is this Compass?

The VEBADO Compass is a strategic tool designed to support inspectorates in their strategic positioning regarding:

- 1) the definition of basic skills,
- 2) the approach to supervising basic skills, and
- 3) the general approach to inspection.

The Compass comprises 16 scales that allow inspectorates to determine their current position and, if necessary, their desired future position.

These 16 scales are divided into the three categories mentioned above. Within these categories, a distinction is made between, on the one hand, the *strategic choices* that inspectorates can make themselves and, on the other hand, the educational system *context* in which they operate (and which they can only indirectly influence through policy advocacy). In this capacity, the VEBADO Compass aims to foster dialogue and reflection within and between inspectorates.

## Overview of the 16 scales

### Definition of basic skills

#### context

There is a legal basis for basic skills in education.



There is no legal basis for basic skills.

#### strategic choices

The inspectorate defines basic skills.



Schools define basic skills.

The inspectorate adopts a broad definition of basic skills.



The inspectorate adopts a narrow definition.

### Inspection of basic skills

#### context

The inspectorate supervises school boards.



The inspectorate does not supervise boards.

The inspectorate specifically monitors (the distinct nature of) basic skills in early childhood education.



The inspectorate does not pay specific attention to early childhood education.

The inspectorate has access to central test results.



The inspectorate does not have access to central test results.

#### strategic choices

The inspectorate conducts in-depth subject-specific inspections.



The inspectorate takes a general view of school policy.

The inspectorate integrates basic skills into other standards.



The inspectorate uses separate standards for basic skills.

The inspectorate breaks down basic skills into targeted foci.



The inspectorate adopts a broad focus on all basic skills.

The inspectorate prepares inspections with extensive data and document analysis.



The inspectorate conducts minimal preparation.

The inspectorate actively involves teachers in monitoring basic skills.



The inspectorate involves teachers minimally.

## Inspection in general

### context

The inspectorate uses a scientifically defined reference framework for educational quality.



The inspectorate uses legislation as its reference framework.

### strategic choices

The inspectorate conducts low-frequency inspections.



The inspectorate conducts high-frequency inspections.

The inspectorate strictly follows up on negative evaluations.



The inspectorate places trust in schools regarding their self-improvement trajectory.

The inspectorate uses a developmental approach.



The inspectorate uses an evaluative approach.

The inspectorate uses standardized reporting.



The inspectorate uses school-specific reporting.

## How was the VEBADO Compass developed?

The VEBADO Compass was created as a result of the Erasmus+ project VEBADO, carried out by the inspectorates of Flanders and the Netherlands. Both inspectorates sent 20 inspectors on job shadowing assignments across the border. During these exchanges, inspectors shared insights and reflected on basic skills as well as their own practices. The VEBADO Compass represents an effort to synthesize the valuable insights from these inspectors into one coherent framework.

## Definition of basic skills

### context

There is a legal basis  
for basic skills in education.



There is no legal basis  
for basic skills.

#### General context

In some countries, the government has established a legal basis to implement basic skills in education. In other countries, this legal foundation is absent.

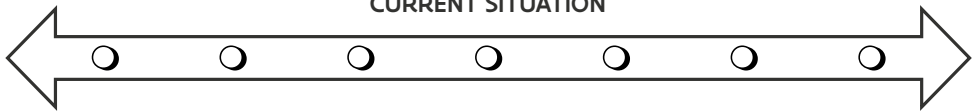
#### Points for consideration

- When the government specifies in detail what schools must do, there is a risk that schools' intrinsic motivation to act diminishes, and many schools may perceive this as an additional administrative or supervisory burden.
- A clear legal foundation legitimizes the inspectorate's focus on basic skills and elevates this focus above any doubt. It also provides clarity about the minimum expectations for schools.
- ...

There is a legal basis  
for basic skills in education.

#### CURRENT SITUATION

There is no legal basis  
for basic skills.



#### DESIRABLE SITUATION



**strategic choices**

**The inspectorate defines  
basic skills.**



**Schools define  
basic skills.**

**General context**

The term “basic skills” implies that some curriculum goals are more “foundational” than others. Which goals qualify as basic depends on the prevailing societal vision, which may include diverse perspectives. The inspectorate might define these basic skills itself (based on a rationale), or it may require schools or school boards to adopt basic goals for a core curriculum while allowing them to decide which goals those are.

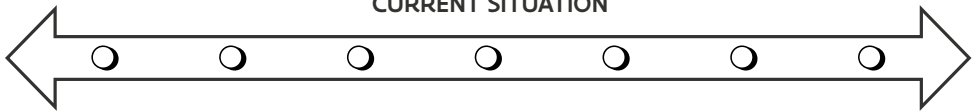
**Points for consideration**

- When the inspectorate defines basic skills, this creates uniformity across schools. Experiences from the Netherlands show that clearly defining basic skills—such as citizenship, literacy, and numeracy—has ensured that every school in the country now addresses them.
- Allowing schools or boards to define these skills themselves enables teachers, school leaders, and boards to reflect on what constitutes “basic” skills. This also allows schools to align their choices with their vision and the needs of their student population.
- A middle ground might involve the inspectorate defining different sets of basic skills for specific groups (e.g., preschoolers, primary school children, or vocational secondary students). However, this adds complexity.
- ...

The inspectorate  
defines basic skills.

**CURRENT SITUATION**

Schools define  
basic skills.

**DESIRABLE SITUATION**

## strategic choices

The inspectorate adopts a broad definition of basic skills.



The inspectorate adopts a narrow definition.

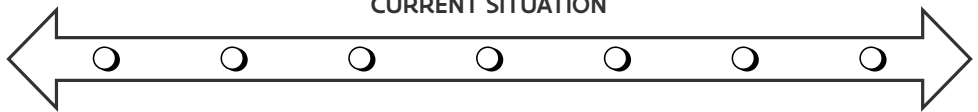
### General context

There are varying perspectives on what constitutes basic skills. Inspectorates may choose to interpret basic skills broadly (encompassing many components) or narrowly.

### Points for consideration

- A definition that is too broad risks making “basic skills” a vague and catch-all category, rendering it meaningless.
- Conversely, a definition that is too narrow might cause school to get overly fixated on a limited set of subjects or learning areas, potentially undermining the holistic development of students.
- ...

The inspectorate adopts a broad definition of basic skills.



The inspectorate adopts a narrow definition.

### DESIRABLE SITUATION



## Inspection of basic skills

### context

The inspectorate supervises school boards.



The inspectorate does not supervise boards.

#### General context

In many countries, the inspectorate focuses solely on individual schools. In others, the inspectorate also monitors school boards, including the extent to which boards oversee students' basic skills in their schools and implement targeted policies to improve them.

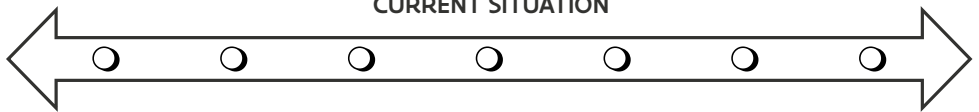
#### Points for consideration

- Schools sometimes face challenges due to the limited willingness or capability of their school board to make progress. If an inspectorate lacks the tools to motivate these boards, it becomes difficult for schools to bring about meaningful change.
- Paying attention to school boards can drive their professionalization, enabling them to intervene in areas that exceed the authority or capacity of school leaders.
- ...

The inspectorate supervises school boards.

#### CURRENT SITUATION

The inspectorate does not supervise boards.




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#### DESIRABLE SITUATION




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## context

The inspectorate specifically monitors (the distinct nature of) basic skills in early childhood education.



The inspectorate does not pay specific attention to early childhood education.

### General context

In some countries, there is a strong tradition of including (the distinct nature of) early childhood education as part of inspections. In others, early childhood education is only considered as one element within the overall assessment of educational quality.

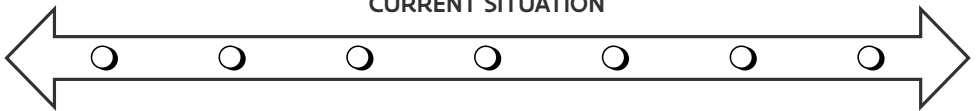
### Points for consideration

- Given that the foundation for basic skills is established very early in development, it can be meaningful to examine how schools stimulate these skills in students from the earliest stages.
- Since the development of young children follows its own logic, it may be better to evaluate early childhood education in an integrated way (rather than focusing on specific subject areas). On the other hand, many countries emphasize the importance of minimum language proficiency for young children.
- ...

The inspectorate specifically monitors (the distinct nature of) basic skills in early childhood education.

The inspectorate does not pay specific attention to early childhood education.

### CURRENT SITUATION



### DESIRABLE SITUATION





## context

**The inspectorate has access to central test results.**



**The inspectorate does not have access to central test results.**

### General context

Some countries have a long tradition of high-stakes central testing, while others either lack such systems or only use low-stakes central tests in a limited number of areas.

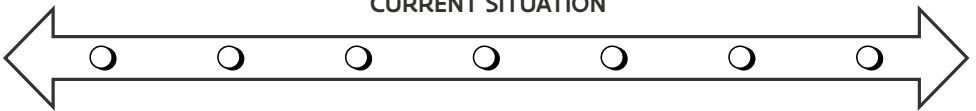
### Points for consideration

- Education systems without central tests have limited information on schools' output results. Inspectors in such systems rely more heavily on test results produced by schools themselves, which also require scrutiny for quality.
- Risks associated with central tests include "teaching to the test" and an overly narrow focus on the curriculum areas covered by the tests.
- A middle ground could involve the use of low-stakes test results. These tests have no direct impact on students' academic placement but provide schools with valuable information about student performance to support school improvement.
- If inspectorates have access to test results, they can decide how to use them—for instance, to identify at-risk schools or as a source of information when preparing for targeted school inspections.
- ...

The inspectorate has access to central test results.

The inspectorate does not have access to central test results.

### CURRENT SITUATION



### DESIRABLE SITUATION



## strategic choices

The inspectorate conducts in-depth subject-specific inspections.



The inspectorate takes a general view of school policy.

### General context

In some countries, inspections strongly emphasize “substantive” assessments of policies for specific subjects or disciplines. In others, inspections focus more broadly on policy at the school level.

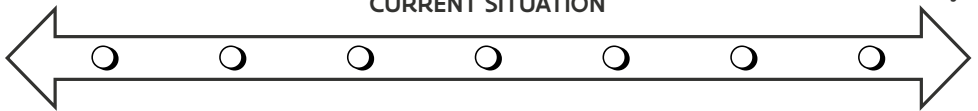
### Points for consideration

- A general view of school policy places clear responsibility for quality policy implementation on school leadership and boards.
- In-depth subject-specific inspections require inspectors with pedagogical and didactic expertise in those subjects.
- Substantive assessments allow inspectorates to better evaluate whether school policies translate effectively to classroom practices and whether students receive high-quality instruction.
- A key advantage of subject-specific inspections is that teachers receive feedback on their pedagogical and didactic practices, which can spark professional discussions and improvements.
- A disadvantage is that inspectors are less interchangeable, which adds complexity to planning and deployment.
- Inspectorates choosing subject-specific inspections typically rely on sampling to draw conclusions about overall quality. A critical question is how to ensure sample relevance.
- Whether or not subject-specific inspections are conducted, it is important to consider the methodology. Should it include only teacher interviews and document reviews, or also classroom observations?
- ...

The inspectorate conducts in-depth subject-specific inspections.

The inspectorate takes a general view of school policy.

### CURRENT SITUATION



### DESIRABLE SITUATION



## strategic choices

**The inspectorate integrates basic skills into other standards.**



**The inspectorate uses separate standards for basic skills.**

### General context

Inspectorates may choose to give basic skills a distinct focus with their own standards. Alternatively, they may embed basic skills into a variety of processes and standards. For example, basic Dutch skills might be evaluated by examining teachers' language-development approaches during subject-specific inspections or by exploring how schools promote students' learning competence within a focus on student guidance.

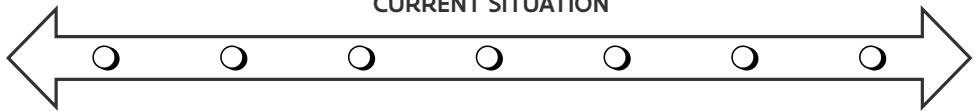
### Points for consideration

- A separate focus on basic skills ensures that this topic is firmly on every school's agenda, as schools know they will be evaluated on it specifically.
- An integrated approach encourages schools to view basic skills not as a standalone policy but as a transversal priority across various subjects, disciplines, and processes.
- ...

The inspectorate integrates basic skills into other standards.

The inspectorate uses separate standards for basic skills.

### CURRENT SITUATION



### DESIRABLE SITUATION



## strategic choices

The inspectorate breaks down basic skills into targeted foci.



The inspectorate adopts a broad focus on all basic skills.

### General context

Inspectorates may choose to link basic skills monitoring to specific subjects, disciplines, or processes within school operations. In this approach, only parts of basic skills are addressed, depending on the focus area. Alternatively, inspectorates may decide to focus on all basic skills comprehensively during each inspection.

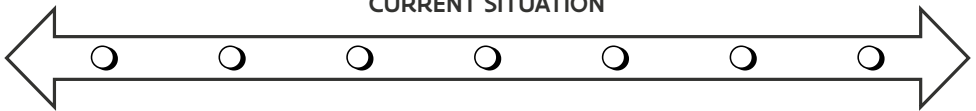
### Points for consideration

- A targeted approach ensures greater depth but does not cover the full spectrum of basic skills.
- A broad focus ensures all basic skills are addressed but risks more superficial discussions of individual components.
- A broad focus also provides opportunities to emphasize curriculum coherence during inspections.
- Inspectorates may also adopt targeted foci per inspection but ensure that all aspects of basic skills are reviewed for each school within a defined period (e.g., 10 years).
- ...

The inspectorate breaks down basic skills into targeted foci.

The inspectorate adopts a broad focus on all basic skills.

### CURRENT SITUATION



### DESIRABLE SITUATION



## strategic choices

**The inspectorate prepares inspections with extensive data and document analysis.**



**The inspectorate conducts minimal preparation.**

### General context

Inspectorates differ in how deeply they analyze school data and documents before and during visits. Some take a more limited approach or even enter schools “blind,” focusing instead on conversations and observations.

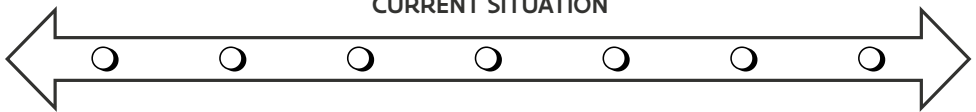
### Points for consideration

- Extensive document analysis can give schools the impression that inspectors focus primarily on paperwork, potentially encouraging schools to generate unnecessary administrative burdens.
- A significant benefit of in-depth preparation is that inspectors are well-informed about school performance indicators, which may enhance the efficiency of the inspection.
- A downside is that inspectors might approach schools with preconceived notions and base judgments too heavily on output data.
- Efficiency considerations include whether separate specialists should handle analyses for inspectors or whether inspectors should conduct their own data reviews.
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The inspectorate prepares inspections with extensive data and document analysis.

### CURRENT SITUATION

The inspectorate conducts minimal preparation.




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### DESIRABLE SITUATION




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## strategic choices

**The inspectorate actively involves teachers in monitoring basic skills.**



**The inspectorate involves teachers minimally.**

### General context

The degree to which teachers are directly involved in inspections varies. In some countries, inspectors closely examine what teachers do, while in others the focus is primarily on school boards and leadership.

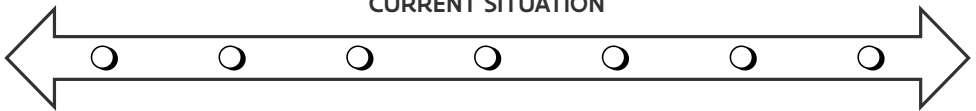
### Points for consideration

- Limited teacher involvement may foster a top-down approach, where plans are expected to flow from the board to school leadership and then to teachers. This reflects a belief that school leadership should manage policy implementation.
- If inspectors do not engage directly with teachers, it becomes harder to determine whether school policies are effectively translated into classroom practice.
- Conversations with teachers about pedagogy and didactics can have a stimulating effect at the teacher level. However, this is not always the primary role of an inspectorate.
- A strong focus on teachers signals that the inspectorate values core educational processes and takes teacher autonomy and expertise seriously.
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The inspectorate actively involves teachers in monitoring basic skills.

The inspectorate involves teachers minimally.

### CURRENT SITUATION




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### DESIRABLE SITUATION




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## Inspection in general

### context

The inspectorate uses a scientifically defined reference framework for educational quality.



The inspectorate uses legislation as its reference framework.

#### General context

In some countries, all relevant stakeholders in the education sector have collaboratively developed a scientifically grounded definition of educational quality. For example, Flanders has the Reference Framework for Educational Quality ("OK"). In other countries, legislation primarily serves as the reference framework.

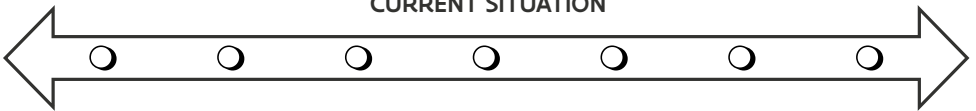
#### Points for consideration

- In countries with a national reference framework for educational quality, the inspectorate has more flexibility to adapt its inspections to evolving insights without being overly exposed to challenges about validity.
- In other countries, there is a clearer alignment between applicable legislation and what is assessed during school visits.
- A hybrid approach is also possible, where educational quality is scientifically defined and grounded in legislation. In some cases, such as in Flanders, the reference framework itself is granted the status of regulatory authority.
- ...

The inspectorate uses a scientifically defined reference framework for educational quality.

The inspectorate uses legislation as its reference framework.

#### CURRENT SITUATION



#### DESIRABLE SITUATION



## strategic choices

The inspectorate conducts low-frequency inspections.



The inspectorate conducts high-frequency inspections.

### General context

Inspectorates must allocate their resources efficiently. Some prioritize longer, more in-depth school visits, which leads to larger intervals between inspections, while others conduct shorter visits more frequently.

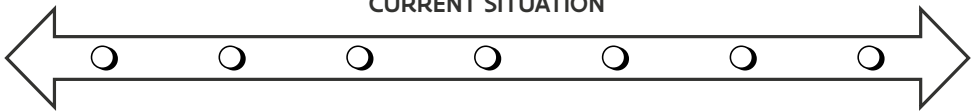
### Points for consideration

- Shorter visits may limit inspectors' ability to fully understand the school's specific context and to foster feedback comprehension and acceptance.
- Longer intervals between inspections risk leaving schools without external scrutiny for extended periods, which may reduce the inspectorate's ability to monitor quality consistently.
- High-frequency inspections may lead to "inspection fatigue" among schools, reducing their capacity to effectively implement improvements from prior evaluations.
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The inspectorate conducts low-frequency inspections.

The inspectorate conducts high-frequency inspections.

### CURRENT SITUATION




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### DESIRABLE SITUATION




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## strategic choices

The inspectorate strictly follows up on negative evaluations.



The inspectorate places trust in schools regarding their self-improvement trajectory.

### General context

When schools fail to meet required standards, an inspectorate can opt for a stringent, result-oriented follow-up with additional inspections or provide schools with more autonomy and time to address deficiencies independently.

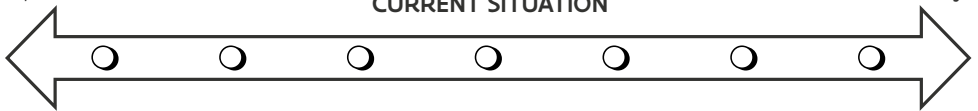
### Points for consideration

- Strict follow-up may create a dynamic where schools implement changes primarily to satisfy the inspectorate, potentially lacking intrinsic motivation for sustainable improvement.
- Immediate and result-oriented follow-ups can instill a greater sense of urgency, expediting the implementation of necessary changes, while a trust-based approach may delay action.
- Result-oriented follow-ups, with clear expectations, provide a mechanism to verify that steps have been taken to align educational quality with regulations, ensuring that students benefit from improved education sooner.
- A trust-based approach may allow schools to pursue a more systemic and durable resolution of shortcomings, leveraging their own insights for sustainable improvement.
- ...

The inspectorate strictly follows up on negative evaluations.

The inspectorate places trust in schools regarding their self-improvement trajectory.

### CURRENT SITUATION



### DESIRABLE SITUATION



## strategic choices

The inspectorate uses a developmental approach.



The inspectorate uses an evaluative approach.

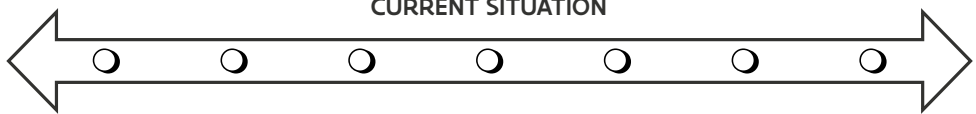
### General context

This scale concerns whether the inspectorate primarily acts as a regulator identifying shortcomings ("controller") or as a facilitator of school quality improvement ("critical friend").

### Points for consideration

- Should the inspectorate's goal be to clearly highlight what needs improvement or also to guide schools on how to address these issues?  
What is the boundary between inspection and school support services?
- ...

The inspectorate uses a developmental approach.



The inspectorate uses an evaluative approach.



## strategic choices

**The inspectorate uses standardized reporting.**



**The inspectorate uses school-specific reporting.**

### General context

Reporting is often a key component of the inspection process, but the time and detail dedicated to it vary significantly. Some inspectorates rely on standardized templates, while others craft reports tailored to each school's context.

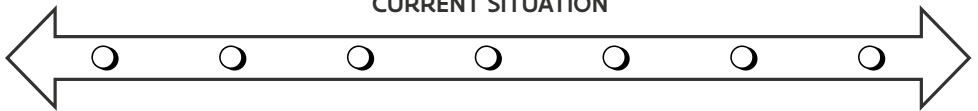
### Points for consideration

- Standardized reporting is faster and ensures consistency across schools, improving the comparability of inspection outcomes.
- School-specific reporting is more labor-intensive but allows for tailored feedback that considers the school's unique context, offering more precise recommendations and action plans. It may also hold up better under scrutiny if contested.
- Inspectors' ability to provide detailed, oral school-specific feedback during visits could justify a more concise and standardized report.
- The quality and tone of school-specific reports might depend heavily on individual inspectors, introducing variability in the inspection process.
- ...

The inspectorate uses standardized reporting.

The inspectorate uses school-specific reporting.

### CURRENT SITUATION



### DESIRABLE SITUATION



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