

Country Profile

Belgium – Flanders

September 2024

1. Overview of the Inspectorate

Age of inspectorate 33 years (since 17 July 1991)

Structure of inspectorate

The inspection in Flanders is organised centrally. The inspectorate is an independent body under the direct jurisdiction of the Minister of Education. It's main role is to monitor educational quality and act as a lever for the improvement of educational quality.

Size:

153 inspectors, 5 co-ordinating inspectors, 1 inspector-general, 17 administrative staff members.

Remits:

Nursery education, (regular and special) primary education, (regular and special) secondary education, part-time artistic education, adult education and also centres for pupil guidance (CLB). We also carry out individual checks of pupils who are home-schooled.

Unit of inspection

It is prohibited to inspect teachers (since 1996). Teacher evaluation is the responsibility of schools themselves. The inspectorate inspects individual schools, but sometimes also inspects schools as a group (when a group of schools is one pedagogical unit).

Purpose of inspectorate

The purpose of the inspectorate is to control *and* stimulate quality in education. We want to give institutions confidence. We start from the premise that the educational institution is primarily responsible for its quality. Our aim is to have a development-oriented dialogue with the school. By doing this, we want to foster a stimulation of the quality development of the schools.

Strapline/motto

'Oog voor kwaliteit' (English: 'Eye for quality') and 'Doorlichten in dialoog' (English: 'Inspecting in dialogue')

Relationship with government

Our inspectorate is an independent organisation. Our inspections are required to guarantee the quality of education in Flanders. The tasks of our inspections are granted by decree:

- provide advice on which institutions should be given government recognition;
- conduct inspections of institutions;
- conduct any other tasks assigned by decree or enacted by order of the Flemish government.

Often, the inspectorate is consulted when new legislation is being prepared or when Parliament, the press or the general public asks questions related to quality in education.

Accountability

Our accountability tasks are set out in legislation. Among other things, the task of the inspectorate is to monitor the extent to which schools comply with legislation. An important part of that work is to monitor the way schools implement the Flemish national curriculum as determined by the Parliament. The main focus will be on the school's quality development and assurance. Quality standards are set out in the reference framework for quality of education 'OK' (www.mijnschoolisok.be, in Dutch). This framework is the result of co-creation with different stakeholders and it connects the internal quality assurance of institutions with the supervision by the inspectorate of education.

Impact of inspections

As of 2023, we developed a impact measurement model that combines internal and external data like the size of the workforce, frequency of school visits, results from feedback questionnaires etc. that are studied in a coherent framework. These results are analysed and presented in an annual internal report.

Quality assurance of inspections

The impact measurement model provides information what is working well and where there are challenges. Apart from that, the inspectorate works with a framework of development scales (rubrics) and a predetermined internal framework text, which contains all the procedures aimed at a fair and equitable evaluation process for all schools. Through sampling, case studies and intervision, inspectors receive feedback on how to operate within this system in a sufficiently uniform way.

2. Evaluation process

Self-evaluation

Schools are responsible for their quality of education. Internal evaluation is part of that. Schools choose how this happens; there is no central system or obligation to perform a self-assessment. There are, however, quality expectations in the reference framework 'OK' about quality development. There is also support by the school guidance organisations (pedagogical services ...).

Focus of inspection

Our inspection design starts with two research questions for each school visit:

1. To what extent does the educational institution develop its own quality, with special attention to the management and quality assurance of the teaching practice?
2. To what extent does the educational institution provide quality education that meets the quality expectations of our reference framework 'OK' and does it comply with the regulations?

To answer these two research questions, we carry out four studies:

1. the examination of quality development
2. the investigation of one or more quality areas (e.g. pupil guidance)
3. the study of the teaching practice
4. the study of habitability, safety and hygiene.

We examine both the level of the institution's policy and the level of the classroom practice. During school inspections, we are also attentive to financial malversations and unnecessary red tape, which we record separately from the actual evaluation process.

Inspection framework

The principles of the new inspection system of Flanders ('Inspectie 2.0') are:

1. Schools, pedagogical services and the inspectorate share the same reference framework for education quality: 'OK'
2. The education inspection has a controlling and a stimulating role (among other things by engaging in a dialogue with schools about the school's quality).
3. The Flemish inspection visits schools more frequently (every 6 years instead of every 10 years like before).
4. The Flemish inspectorate has faith in the school and starts each inspection from the principle: the school works qualitatively.
5. The inspectorate builds upon the internal quality assurance of the school.
6. The learner is the key figure.
7. The Flemish education inspectorate minimizes the administrative burden for schools.

These principles are translated into an inspection framework. This framework consists of an inspection design (what we inspect) and a cultural component (the way the dialogue with the school is being developed). This leads to a concrete inspection scenario (what happens before, during and after an inspection).

As of 2023, the inspectorate uses a more flexible inspection design that allows for a different trajectory of inspections and in-between visits for each school, depending on previous inspections and their data.

Inspection time and resources

While the length of an inspection may vary depending on the school profile, 4 days is the most common length. In primary education, 2 inspectors typically conduct the inspection; in secondary education, 3 inspectors typically conduct the inspection.

Frequency of inspections

At least once every 6 years. Not risk-based.

Non-inspection activities

While our inspectors are responsible for the inspection of schools, our staff members are responsible for policy research and information management. Our other responsibilities are divided into four main topics: additional controls (e.g. on arts initiation, Dutch education abroad ...); research (e.g. in response to political questions, or our annual report; 'The mirror of education'); advisory tasks (such as advising learning programs); and other tasks like the investigation of awarding certificate of primary education in special primary education. These staff members partly consist of inspectors with special assignments and partly of administrative staff members.

3. Consequences of inspection

Reporting

Our reports are published on a website and therefore accessible to everyone. As a consequence, parents can base their school choices on these reports, although this is not the prior aim of these reports.

Grading

We use development scales (a four point scale) for the different topics we investigate. These development scales are based on the reference framework 'OK' and made public. By working with development scales, we want to encourage the school team to (continue to) develop their own quality.

The development scales consist of four levels:

1. Below expectations: there are several essential elements that need improvement.
2. Approaching expectations: there are also several points for improvement next to strong points. As a result, the whole does not yet meet expectations.
3. In line with expectations: there are many strengths and no important points or areas for improvement. The whole meets expectations.
4. Exceeds expectations: many strengths, including significant good practice examples.

Because we want to support the educational institution with the inspection report in its further quality development, we visually present the answers to the research questions with a web diagram. In this way, it becomes clear at a glance what the strengths and the development opportunities are.

Sharing inspection findings

We autonomously publish reports about the results of school inspections or thematic inspections. We also present an annual report to the Minister and Parliament containing a summary of the results of our thematic surveys and a concise overview of audits and other assignments.

What happens following an inspection?

We follow up in accordance with two types of advices after a school visit: a positive and a negative advice. In the case of favorable advice, the school retains its recognition; in the case of unfavorable advice, the inspectorate will advise commencement of the procedure to withdraw recognition from the school.

Both advices have two variants; the "favorable advice" may imply the obligation for the board to work on the identified deficits. The "unfavorable advice" may include the possibility of requesting that the procedure for withdrawing the accreditation does not start, provided the school board commits to working on addressing the identified deficits with external support.

In between formal inspections, both schools with a favorable advice and schools with an unfavorable advice receive one-day visits from an inspector that have no legal consequences and are solely aimed at stimulating the schools to improve its quality.