

Inspectorate Profile

Inspectorate of Education and Science (IGEC), Portugal Mainland

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1. Overview of the Inspectorate

Age of inspectorate

The Inspectorate of Education and Science (IGEC) was officially established in 1979. However, the origins of school inspection trace back to 1771, when the Royal Censorship conducted the first inspections. Following the Republican Proclamation of 1910, significant reforms were introduced, and the global education reform of 1971 led to the creation of the National Ministry of Education. This marked a pivotal moment in shaping the modern Inspectorate, which assumed its current structure in 1979. Since 2012, the Inspectorate has been formally known as the Inspectorate of Education and Science, a designation defined by Regulatory Decree-Law No. 15/2012, dated January 27.

Structure of inspectorate

The Inspectorate operates under the Ministry of Education, Science, and Innovation and is centrally organized, with its headquarters in Lisbon, where the Office of the Chief Inspector is located. Additionally, three regional offices are situated in the north, centre, and south of the country. Inspection regulations are standardized across all regions.

IGEC is led by a Chief Inspector, supported by two Deputy Chief Inspectors. Its organizational structure combines both hierarchical and matrix models to effectively manage support and inspection functions.

For support functions, IGEC follows a hierarchical structure, with two central organizational units: the Juridical Department (DSJ) and the Administration Department (DSAG). It also includes two flexible units: the Provisioning, Accounting, and Assets Unit (DACP) and the Communication and IT Unit (DCSI).

For inspection functions, IGEC uses a matrix structure consisting of nine multidisciplinary teams (MTs). These teams operate both centrally and across regional offices, ensuring thorough oversight and coordination.

- Higher Education and Science MT (EMESC)
- Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education MT (EMEE)
- Audits and Financial Conformity MT (EMAF)
- North Area Managing the Inspection Activity MT (EMGAI-N)
- Central Area Managing the Inspection Activity and promotion of monitoring pilots in schools MT (EMGAI-C)
- South Area Managing the Inspection Activity MT (EMGAI-S)

- Ombudsmanship MT (EMP)
- Support for Managing the Inspection Activity and Promotion of Monitoring Pilots in Schools MT – North (EMGAI-N)
- Support for Managing the Inspection Activity and Promotion of Monitoring Pilots in Schools MT – South (EMGAI-S)

Inspectors are part of a specialized group of public servants, characterized by a distinct status and a well-defined career path.

Size

The Inspectorate comprises 148 inspectors, of whom 133 are actively engaged in job-related duties, including nine heads of multidisciplinary teams and 11 inspectors assigned to roles outside the IGEC. In addition, 58 administrative staff members and other personnel provide support to their work.

Remits

IGEC inspects educational provision across all schools and services under the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation. Its responsibilities include monitoring and evaluating both the technical-pedagogical and administrative-financial aspects of preschools, schools, and universities. This includes public, private, and partnership-based institutions, as well as schools and courses abroad where Portuguese is taught.

The Inspectorate also conducts inspections and audits of higher education institutions. In addition, two inspectors work part-time with the European Schools. Across all its inspections, IGEC monitors the implementation of inclusive education.

Unit of inspection

The Inspectorate primarily evaluates the quality of educational provision in clusters and individual schools, encompassing kindergartens, schools, clusters of schools, and universities. The focus of each inspection varies depending on the chosen inspection model, which is determined by the specific program and activities to be assessed. Detailed information on these models is available in the Inspectorate's published framework and guides for the External Evaluation of Schools.

The Inspectorate does not conduct specific inspections of individual teachers or subject departments, except as part of ombudsmanship procedures.

Purpose of the Inspectorate

According to its organic statutes, IGEC has the authority to oversee various aspects of the education system, including preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education institutions, as well as services related to Science, Technology, and Higher Education. Its responsibilities include monitoring, controlling, auditing, and evaluating the technical-pedagogical and administrative-financial activities of preschools, schools, and out-of-school education programmes. This oversight extends to institutions in public, private, cooperative, and

solidarity networks, as well as to institutions and courses teaching Portuguese abroad. IGEC is also tasked with inspecting and auditing higher education institutions.

The accountability and improvement processes are supported by the publication of individual inspection reports, which provide feedback to schools and inform parents and the wider community about the inspection outcomes. Additionally, the Inspectorate works to enhance the quality of education for children and pupils by sharing examples of good practice in its reports and encouraging schools to engage in self-evaluation.

IGEC's Code of Practice is designed to support its mission and vision by incorporating ethical principles and conduct rules from the Charter of Ethics for Public Administration. It serves as a guide for the actions of managers and employees, aiming to strengthen the organization's ethical culture and public service values. The Code encourages employees to reflect these principles in their attitudes, promoting a culture of professionalism that upholds the dignity and prestige of the organization's mission.

The Inspectorate has also a Plan for the Prevention of Corruption and Related Transgressions.

What is your strapline/motto?

"High-quality educational provision within inclusive education for all pupils" is the vision the Inspectorate strives to accomplish.

Relationship with government

IGEC is a division within the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, operating with administrative autonomy. The Inspectorate is responsible for selecting the schools to be inspected, and the Chief Inspector reports directly to the Minister, delivering formal assessments of quality and standards in schools. Annual thematic activity reports are submitted, including recommendations for the Ministry. The Minister may also request targeted evaluations to inform policy decisions. IGEC is not authorized to publish any reports without prior government approval.

Accountability

As previously mentioned, the Inspectorate is accountable to the Minister of Education, Science and Innovation. It provides technical support by proposing and collaborating on measures to improve the education system and, when necessary, initiates disciplinary actions based on regular inspection findings. Additionally, the Inspectorate offers pedagogical and administrative support to educational bodies and teaching institutions and represents Science, Technology, Higher Education, and Education within the inspection structures of European schools.

Impact of inspections

The current processes for measuring the impact of inspections include:

- Publication of inspection reports on IGEC's website.
- Release of annual thematic reports.

- Adherence to IGEC's Code of Practice and the Plan for the Prevention of Corruption and Related Transgressions, which ensures respectful engagement during inspections, promotes professional dialogue, and encourages schools to take action based on inspection findings.
- Conducting pre- and post-inspection surveys for principals, teachers, staff, parents, and pupils to gather their feedback.
- Follow-up inspections and continued support for schools with low performance.

Quality assurance of inspections

The Inspectorate employs a variety of mechanisms to ensure that its work meets the highest professional standards, with judgments that are both valid and reliable. These mechanisms include robust internal quality assurance processes as well as the integration of external evidence.

Key internal quality assurance processes include:

- Publishing the methodology and procedures followed by the Inspectorate, especially for the *External Evaluation of Schools*.
- Recruiting inspectors from a pool of highly qualified, experienced teachers through a rigorous multi-stage process, which includes written assessments and interviews.
- Providing comprehensive training to inspectors and maintaining their evaluative expertise throughout their service.
- Investing in the continuous professional development of inspectors through internal training opportunities and encouraging participation in external training programs and research initiatives.
- Carrying out the *External Evaluation of Schools* with academia – professors and researchers.
- Reviewing of methodologies and instruments by experts in the intervention areas.
- Collaborating with school stakeholders to develop inspection activities and models, drawing on research, best practices, and insights gained from school trials.
- Collaborating with MECI services for the implementation of inspections, with emphasis on DGEEC and IGefe for the data they provide on the schools to be visited.
- Equipping inspectors with detailed internal guidance and efficient data.
- Ensuring thorough editing and quality assurance processes for inspection reports prior to publication.

The Inspectorate utilizes various mechanisms to gather external perspectives on its work, including:

- Post-inspection questionnaires, which collect feedback from pupils, teachers, principals, boards of management, and parents following inspections.
- Formal review procedures, allowing principals who are dissatisfied with an inspection report to request a formal review.
- Collaboration with external experts who review the Inspectorate's work, particularly in the context of the *External Evaluation of Schools*.

In addition, the Inspectorate employs internal strategies to ensure the quality of inspections, such as team reviews, peer reviews, and inspection file reviews.

2. Evaluation process

Self-evaluation

In Portugal, school self-evaluation is a process in which school staff reflect on their practices and identify areas for improvement to enhance student learning and foster professional development.

Since 2002, schools have been required to implement self-evaluation processes. For most schools, this began in 2006, following visits from IGEC as part of the External Evaluation of Schools initiative. Self-evaluation is encouraged and considered during inspections. Although IGEC does not mandate a specific model for self-evaluation, schools may find the External Evaluation of Schools framework, available on the IGEC website, to be a valuable resource. The first domain of this framework focuses on school self-evaluation.

Schools are required to prepare an annual report and improvement plan, which must be shared with the school board, staff, parents, and pupils.

Focus of inspection

IGEC carries out a range of activities based on the programs outlined in its Annual Plan of Activities. A central function is the evaluation and monitoring of teaching and learning quality. Currently, inspectors observe educational environments in the scope of *Monitoring of Educational Action* and conduct lesson observations as part of the *External Evaluation of Schools*. They collect additional evidence through document analysis and interviews, ensuring a comprehensive approach that triangulates information. Inspectors do not grade lessons but focus on gathering qualitative insights.

Previously, lesson observations were expanded through monitoring activities in areas such as Special Education, Curriculum Management for Teaching Sciences, Curriculum Management for Teaching English (Grades 3-6), and the Development of Oral and Writing Skills, though these activities have since been discontinued. Inspectors also engage directly with pupils, and further evidence is gathered through meetings and interviews with school stakeholders, as well as through the review of planning documents and questionnaires completed by pupils, teachers, and parents.

Financial oversight is handled by the Multidisciplinary Team of Audits and Financial Conformity, while legal compliance is monitored through the conformity program.

Inspection framework

All inspections conducted within the scope of the monitoring and evaluation programmes adhere to quality models. Inspections under the conformity program are designed based on compliance models.

The Quality Framework for Early Years Inspections brings together the core aspects of best practices in early education, organized into four main areas: educational intentionality, design of the learning environment, key focus areas (domains and subdomains), and educational continuity and transitions.

The Framework for *External Evaluation of Schools* defines standards across four key areas: self-evaluation, leadership and management, educational provision, and outcomes. These standards are not prescriptive formulae for standardization, nor do they serve as a checklist of mandatory requirements. Instead, they are thoughtfully designed to respect the professional autonomy of inspectors, teachers, and school leaders, enabling them to exercise their judgment in assessing quality. The framework is accessible on the IGEC website.

Inspection time and resources

The type of inspection determines its duration, the activities conducted during the process, and the number of inspectors involved. Typically, core inspection activities in schools range from one to five days. For instance, unannounced inspections (ombudsmanship) are completed within one to two days, monitoring inspections take up to five days, and audit activities extend over 10 days.

Unannounced inspections are usually carried out by a single inspector, while other types of inspections typically involve two inspectors. On average, inspections last five days.

All entrants to the Inspectorate must hold a degree, a recognized teaching qualification, and a minimum of five years' experience in teaching and education.

Many new recruits are highly accomplished professionals who have dedicated significant time to their professional development, including postgraduate studies. Among them are principals, individuals with experience in education support agencies and higher education institutions. They often bring specialized expertise in areas deemed valuable during recruitment, such as early years and special educational needs.

Most inspectors were formerly teachers, with many having over 20 years of experience in public service.

Frequency of inspections

Schools are inspected based on programmes that are developed for each individual school/school cluster.

When planning its annual inspection programme, the Inspectorate uses a risk-based, proportionate approach, taking into account a variety of criteria related to each school. These criteria include the school's inspection history, the results of previous inspections (including unannounced inspections), and other pertinent information received by the Head of MT and the Inspectorate.

The use of different inspection models allows the Inspectorate to tailor inspections to meet specific needs. Additionally, data from thematic inspections plays a key role in planning inspections based on risk.

Non-inspection activities

Under the provisions of Regulatory Order No. 12/2012, dated January 27, the Inspectorate's role extends beyond inspection. It is also tasked with providing information and advice to the Minister of Education and policy makers within the Ministry of Education, Science and

Innovation on matters related to educational policy and provision. This advisory role is largely informed by the findings of inspections carried out by the Inspectorate and is delivered through thematic reports.

Additionally, the Inspectorate represents the Ministry in international organizations, including the European Schools. It is also involved in the review of complaints. However, the Inspectorate does not participate in the selection of headmasters.

3. Consequences of inspection

Reporting

The Inspectorate releases school inspection reports on IGEC's official website. By making these reports publicly accessible, the insights and recommendations derived from inspections are shared with the entire school community and the public.

This transparency serves multiple purposes, such as fostering a culture of self-assessment and continuous improvement within schools, as well as promoting the broader dissemination of best practices across educational institutions. Additionally, these published reports aim to offer reliable and well-rounded evaluations of school effectiveness, equipping parents, prospective parents, and learners with valuable insights to make informed decisions about education.

Grading

The Inspectorate does not issue overall ratings for individual schools, school clusters, or educational institutions. Instead, inspection reports provide detailed evaluative insights into key aspects of a school or educational setting. External Evaluation Reports use a five-tier rating system —Excellent, Very Good, Good, Sufficient, and Insufficient— each accompanied by a descriptor that defines the level of quality observed.

Inspections do not result in rewards. They may result in disciplinary procedures and administrative offenses. If shortcomings are identified, follow-up monitoring procedures are implemented to ensure necessary improvements are made.

Sharing inspection findings

Inspection findings are disseminated through the publication of comprehensive reports on thematic activities. These reports serve a crucial role in informing educational policy and guiding national strategies.

What happens following an inspection?

Although the primary responsibility for implementing the improvements outlined in an inspection report lies with the leadership of schools and educational institutions, as part of its annual inspection program, the Inspectorate conducts follow-up evaluations for certain activities in a selected group of schools, including those where significant challenges were previously identified. These follow-through inspections assess the progress made in

addressing the recommendations from earlier visits, ensuring accountability and continuous development.