



Evaluation of Schools providing Compulsory Education in Europe

Country Reports





The Information Network on Education in Europe

APPROACHES TO THE EVALUATION OF SCHOOLS WHICH PROVIDE COMPULSORY EDUCATION

MALTA

2000/2001

Persons responsible for preparation of the monograph:
Ms M. Vella (Director Curriculum Management, Department of Curriculum Management,
Education Division) and
Dr. C. Borg (Director Operations, Department of Operations, Education Division)

I. Introduction

The choice of self-assessment as the mainstay for school monitoring in Malta was a very deliberate one as self-assessment is considered to be the most effective form of evaluation. No drive for improvement can be as effective as that driven from within.

1. Historical Background

One can trace back with certainty the existence of an inspectorate within the Maltese educational system to the mid-19th century when the post of Inspector for Primary Education was established. School inspectors were appointed from among senior heads of school. The school inspector would appear unannounced in school and primarily his/her role was the inspection of teachers although he/she would also assess mentally the state of the school and its administration and advise the head accordingly. The Inspector would inspect a teacher during a lesson, observing and evaluating content, pedagogy, and class management. She/he would inspect lesson notes, class register, scheme of work and also the pupils' copybooks. As a follow-up, the Inspector would send a written report to the head of school, who in turn would show it to the teacher concerned so that she/he could take remedial action in anticipation of the next visit. The grade of school inspector was revoked in 1975 as part of a reorganisation agreement between the government and the teachers' union, regarding the teaching grades in government employment. The post of Education Officer replaced that of school inspector. The change was more radical than a change in the name of the post. The inspectorial function of the post was diluted, taking on more of an advisory and supportive role.

In the early-nineties, Maltese public education started to shed its centralised character and introduce aspects of school self-management. The educational authorities recognised the need that if schools' self-management was to be placed on a sound footing, schools should have their own development plans coupled with a methodology for schools' evaluation. After looking at systems adopted by other countries, the local authorities opted for the system used by the Scottish Education Board. In January 1997, officials from the Education Division visited Scotland to become well acquainted with the system of school development planning and school evaluation. On their return a training programme for heads of school was initiated. Officials from the Scottish Education Board were invited to Malta to facilitate the training of Maltese heads of school. During school year 1997/98, each secondary school had to produce its first development plan.

2. General Overview of current approaches to the evaluation of schools

School tasks which are being evaluated		Evaluators		
		External	Internal	Joint
Educational tasks	1. Teaching/learning concerned with abilities and knowledge	EOs	School Managt. Team	
	2. Teaching/learning concerned with preparation for life in society / career guidance	EOs	School Managt Team	
Administrative tasks	3. Management of human resources	EOs	School Managt Team	
	4. Management of operational resources	EOs	School Managt Team	
	5. Management of capital resources	EOs	School Managt Team	
	6. Information/information resources/relations/partnerships	EOs	School Managt Team	

Malta bases school evaluation mainly on internal evaluation. The process of School Development Planning is now well established in all Maltese Primary and Secondary Schools. This process is built on an internal audit of strengths and weaknesses. This reflection on one's provision and practices then forms the basis for remedial action and for further developments.

The aspect of internal evaluation in school appraisal is however complemented by a system of external monitoring. The external assessment is carried out by officers at the Centre who are called Education Officers (EOs). Most of the evaluation that goes on is of educational tasks. Moreover, Education Officers, within the Department of Curriculum Management, monitor teacher performance in the classroom primarily rather than whole school provision and achievement. In addition, the number of Education Officers is small in comparison to the teacher cohort and therefore Education Officers mainly visit teachers who are eventually due for promotion or facing difficulties. Some indirect monitoring of administrative tasks also takes place by Education Officers (Administration).

3. Structure of the Monograph

Malta has one approach to external evaluation. This is carried out by Education Officers. There is also one approach to internal evaluation. The school management team carries this out. Both relate to educational and administrative tasks.

4. How the evaluation of schools relates to evaluation of education as a whole

Government is committed to provide to the public quality services that are efficient and effective. Besides the government is duty bound to provide an education service that meets the needs of each individual child, the aspirations of parents as well as the expectations of society. Although there is no prescribed, and formal, evaluation of education as a whole, the system is being monitored all the time by various mechanisms. At the apex of these mechanisms there is the Cabinet of Ministers that demands memos and ad hoc evaluations related to the items on the Cabinet's agenda, Such demands from the Cabinet of Ministers are addressed to the apposite ministry, in this case the Ministry of Education. The Ministry processes these

demands, contacts the officials or schools directly concerned, gathers the required information and transmits it back to the Cabinet. The data gathered in the process of internal evaluation at times forms the basis of the memos sent to the Cabinet.

Parliament through parliamentary questions and during debates on education can scrutinize the provision of education. Educational officials may be requested to appear before the Parliamentary Committee for Social Affairs, during its discussions on education. Another Parliamentary Committee, the Public Accounts Committee looks into financing of education and the utilization of public funds.

The National Audit Office also looks into various aspects of the education service, although this has a slant towards cost-effectiveness. Both the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office look into account books and at inventories that are kept in accordance to national finance regulations. The keeping of such records has always been statutory and is kept separate from the internal or external evaluation of schools. Both Offices check adherence to finance regulations rather than school effectiveness.

The Central Agency is the Education Division. This agency uses the result of the schools' self audit in order first of all to identify areas where each particular school requires more support. The information gathered from the different schools then creates an overall picture of what are national priorities for further developments, for remedial interventions, for training and for the provision of resources.

II. Approaches to Evaluation

1. External Evaluation

1.1. General Objectives

School and classroom visits by EOs serve two purposes: one of support and the other of audit.

The lesson observation, the giving of feedback and the interaction between teacher and EO are meant to support and promote good practice.

The other characteristic of the evaluation process, that of audit, is still very low key in comparison to the objective of support. While the present culture in Malta is not hostile to the idea of external audit, it is not exactly fully tuned to it and quite a substantial shift will be required before external audit becomes an integral part of the whole monitoring process.

1.2. Evaluators

The evaluators are Education Officers. Education Officers are all members of the teaching profession having moved up the career ladder after a call for applications. Education Officers are chosen from among assistant heads of school who have at least four years experience in the post. They are employed as civil servants and are part of the organisational structure of the Education Division. Education Officers have a specific area of responsibility on the basis of which they are assigned to particular departments within the Education Division. The direct superior of an Education Officer is an Assistant Director of Education.

Most of these officers are subject specialists while others have specialised in a particular field such as Early Childhood and Primary Education, Student Assessment, Documentation or School Administration. Education Officers (School Administration) are responsible for the overall quality of a school.

1.3. How Evaluation is Organised

A. Extent to which the approach to evaluation is encountered

This approach to external evaluation is conducted systematically on a priority basis within the limits imposed by the number of Education Officers in post. The system strives to ensure that all new teachers as well as those who move to a higher grade are evaluated following their induction year. Moreover, a roster by which all schools receive their fair share of attention is maintained.

B. Players in the school who are responsible for one or more of the tasks evaluated

- The teachers are responsible for the curricular tasks evaluated.
- Members of the school management team are responsible for the administrative tasks.

C. Evaluation Criteria and procedures

The evaluation usually takes the form of school and classroom visits and lesson observation.

Some visits are preannounced and others aren't, but visits after which the EO is going to recommend or withhold a teacher's promotion to the next higher salary or career grade are usually preannounced. All visits are followed by feedback and in most cases this takes the form of a written report that goes into the teacher's personal record.

D. Use made of evaluation results

The principal objectives for these visits are:

- a. routine monitoring;
- b. reporting on teacher performance at landmarks in career progression;
- c. response to problematic situations;
- d. results are also used to configure in-service courses.

2. Internal Evaluation

2.1. General Objectives

- To identify strengths and weaknesses
- To prioritise needs
- To decide on new initiatives and remedial action

2.2. Evaluators

The senior management team, the head of school, assistant heads of school and subject co-ordinators and the teachers themselves. To a certain extent parents are also involved in the evaluation process when they are asked to answer questionnaires about various aspects of the school.

2.3. How evaluation is Organised

A. Extent to which the approach to evaluation is encountered

This is a collaborative effort with participation of all teaching staff. It takes the form of a school development plan (SDP) that covers a maximum period of three years. Schools can decide to adopt an annual or a biennial development plan. Practice has shown that more schools are opting in favour of a three-year development plan. This is a rolling plan that is audited annually and adjusted accordingly. All primary and secondary schools are bound to adopt an SDP and perform internal evaluation.

B. Players in the school who are responsible for one or more of the tasks evaluated

- The teachers are responsible for the curricular tasks evaluated.
- Members of the school management team are responsible for the administrative tasks.

C. Evaluation Criteria and procedures

The main areas that are evaluated are:

- Curriculum
- Attainment
- Learning and teaching
- Support for pupils
- Ethos
- Resources
- Management leadership and quality assurance

For each area, there is a set of performance indicators. There are examples put forward by Heads of Schools during peer discussion and consultation, aiming at establishing a set of national performance indicators. The list of indicators should be finalized in 2002.

Examples of Performance Indicators Across the Seven Key Areas

A. Curriculum

A1 Structure of the curriculum

- Breadth and balance across elements of the curriculum*
- Integration, permeation*
- Effectiveness of timetabling and arrangements for pupil choice*

B. Attainment

B1 Attainment in coursework

- Pupil's attainment in coursework*

C. Learning and teaching

C2 Quality of pupils' learning

- The extent to which pupils are motivated by their learning experience*
- Progress in learning*
- Involvement in learning*
- Interaction with others*

D. Support for Pupils

D1 Pastoral Care

- Provision for the emotional, physical and social needs of individual pupils*
- Provision of support for pupils*

E. Ethos

E2 Partnership with parents and school council

- Encouragement to parents to be involved in their child's learning and the life of the school.*
- Responsiveness of the school to parents' views and enquiries*
- Effectiveness of links between school and the School Council.*

F. Resources

F3. Organisation and use of resources and space

- Organisation and accessibility*
- Use of resources*

- *Display and presentation of items of interest*

G. Management leadership and quality assurance

G4. Effectiveness of leadership

- *Professional competence and commitment*
- *Leadership qualities*
- *Relationship with people and development of leadership*

Each school measures its performance against these indicators annually.

Various tools are adopted to collect reliable information and evidence regarding the seven key areas from parents, teachers and students/pupils (class prefects and students representative councils). These include:

- *Discussions/meetings*
- *Observation*
- *Analyses of documentation*
- *Analyses of examination results*
- *Questionnaires*
- *Interviews*
- *Class visits*
- *Seminars*
- *Feedback from external sources (e.g. Education Officers)*

The data collated in relation to the performance indicators is assessed on a four point scale called “Quality Levels”.

*Quality level 4 – very good – **major strengths***

*Quality level 3 – good - **strengths outweigh weaknesses***

*Quality level 2 – fair - **some important weaknesses***

*Quality level 1 – unsatisfactory – **major weaknesses***

It is mandatory that each school sends a copy of its school development plan and the results of the schools’ internal evaluation to the central agency. The school management team draws up the internal evaluation report.

D. Use made of evaluation results

Through the school development plan the school’s teaching staff identifies lines for future actions that may include either a new development or a remedial action. Schools organise a school development day where the teaching staff come together to discuss the school development plan, and the self-audit. The school may seek the support of officials from head office to address certain issues/weaknesses identified through the internal evaluation (.). The Central agency studies the Development Plans and the internal evaluation results and uses the results in order first of all to identify areas where each particular school requires more support. The information gathered from the different schools then creates an overall picture of what are national priorities for further developments, for remedial interventions, for training and for the provision of resources

III Current Trends and the Future

The supportive side of the approach to external evaluation has been encouraged by national policy and by the teachers' Union. It has been ably developed by the Education Officers and is welcomed by the teachers. Though there is no formal research to prove its efficacy, it is generally considered to be beneficial to learning and teaching.

The other characteristic of the evaluation process, that of audit, is still very low key in comparison to the objective of support. While the present culture in Malta is not hostile to the idea of external audit, it is not exactly fully tuned to it and quite a substantial shift will be required before external audit becomes an integral part of the whole monitoring process.

At the present stage, we are still researching this issue of external evaluation and the views of different stakeholders to it. Therefore we are not in a position to give more detailed information.