Summary
Social Outcomes of education
The assessment of social outcomes and school improvement through school inspections
SICI working group Social Outcomes of education (SICI-SOE)

Good education is of major public interest. Governments consider its quality to be one of their important responsibilities, and use educational supervision – as a tool for accountability and school improvement – as one of their instruments. Because young people develop in more than one domain, the goals of education are multifaceted and include both cognitive and social development. Educational goals in the social domain are expressed in curricula, but are usually not evaluated and measured on a regular basis.

Is it possible to measure the social outcomes of education and evaluate the ‘social quality’ of schools? Can school inspectorates assess the effectiveness of the work done by schools in this area and can school inspections strengthen school improvement? Some national school inspectorates have already included (aspects of) social outcomes in their assessment schemes. Their experiences provide an insight into the possibilities of the measurement of social quality. The analyses presented are based on experiences in these countries – the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, Sweden – and use insights from scientific research about the social outcomes of education and effective educational supervision.

The study describes possible approaches to inspecting educational quality in the social domain and what contributions and effects may be expected of them, and provides the building blocks to answer the question about effective organization of assessment and school inspection for accountability and school improvement in the social domain.

Social outcomes
Social outcomes of education can be described as the individual and collective benefits of participating in education in the interpersonal sphere of the non-economic realms of life. This involves direct benefits such as the competences acquired via education, as well as indirect benefits due to the effect on other areas. Social outcomes can be individually acquired characteristics (e.g. knowledge and skills) or effects at the personal level (e.g. participating in political activities). Social outcomes also exist at a collective level, as the result of individual attitudes and behaviours (e.g. social capital and social cohesion).

At the level of the school social outcomes of education consist of the competences that people need to live with others. This concerns the social competences that people need to realize their goals and to relate to others in all kinds of situations, both at work and elsewhere. It also concerns the civic competences required to make a contribution to society, democracy and the social networks in which people live. The social quality of a school can be defined as all aspects of school quality that contribute to the acquisition of social and civic competences by its students. On the basis of the input-throughput-output model of educational quality, these aspects can be summarized as content, process and outcomes, in conjunction with the conditions influencing these aspects.

Inspecting social quality
In order to gain insight into the quality of a school, information is required about the characteristics of the school’s teaching and what students actually learn, that is, the achieved learning outcomes. Social competences are measured through tests, by measuring students’ competences or competence components such as knowledge, skills or attitudes in the social and civic domain. At aggregate level, such data provide a picture of the average level of the social competences of students at a school. Although they do not provide a direct measure of competences, behavioural intentions may be considered to be an indication of social outcomes. Students’ activities might indicate actual outcomes in the form of prosocial or antisocial behaviour at school, or social and civic participation outside of school.
The social quality of a school involves all aspects of its teaching and organization that contribute towards students acquiring social competences. Some of these characteristics will be the same as those that contribute to a school’s academic quality (e.g. inspiring school leadership). In other respects it is less clear to what degree the characteristics of effective education in the social domain resemble those that contribute to academic achievement (e.g. an orderly, instruction-oriented class climate).

The quality of the curriculum concerns both its content and the other resources available for teaching. This entails covering the aims selected by government and the school, and tailoring these to the students’ capabilities. The way content is structured within the curriculum and the way it is assessed are also important, as is providing meaningful opportunities to reflect on it. Aspects of the teaching process relevant to the social quality of education concern pedagogical behaviour, the didactic approach and the pedagogical climate. The day-to-day interaction between students and teachers reflects the school’s aims in the social and civic domains, and learning can take place through setting an example and creating opportunities for practice. Research shows that especially an open and democratic school culture, where students are taken seriously, contributes to students acquiring citizenship competences.

Another important element of quality is quality assurance, for example regarding the extent to which the school succeeds in systematically dovetailing teaching to the goals that it wants to achieve. This includes a quality assurance system which gives a school insight into its functioning and allows it to make improvements, close ties with the immediate environment, and the involvement of parents and other stakeholders. Factors that play a role in realizing the social aims of education include aspects of the school population such as its diversity, and the distance that exists between the sociocultural setting in which the students are being raised and the aims that the school is pursuing.

These factors give an impression of the aspects that should be taken into account when assessing the quality of schools in the social domain. Based on the national studies and the analyses presented in the study, the book presents ten central elements to take into consideration when assessing the quality of education in the social domain: Compliance with statutory requirements; Student results; The social climate in the classroom and the school at large; The pedagogical quality of the teaching, in which it is important that the pedagogical behaviour of teachers reflects the social and civic competences that the school wants to transfer; The didactic quality of the teaching and the teaching methods used fit the social and civic competences that the school wants to transfer; a socially safe environment, including effective anti-bullying programs; the organization and content of the curriculum; Clear learning objectives that are relevant to the school’s mission; Student care, including intrapersonal development; The school’s mission and the support base for this mission, including the school’s leadership.

A national framework of indicators and standards for the assessment of social quality depends on the dominant goals of education and functions of school inspection (e.g. accountability and school improvement). Although the weights attached to these goals and functions might differ across countries, principles of effective evaluation in the social domain include: Clear standards that give a good insight into the goals to be pursued and the various components of social quality; Outcome indicators regarding the students’ social and civic competences; Insight into curriculum content and teaching process; involvement of the school in the quality assessment (ownership); Insight into pedagogical quality and school climate.

Overview of the study

Part I: Social outcomes and school inspections. Chapter 1 Introduction: Inspecting social quality of schools; Ch2 Social outcomes of education. Concept and measurement; Ch3 Evaluation of social outcomes through school inspections; Ch4 Linking citizenship education policy to students’ citizenship competence in the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Sweden. Part II: Assessment of social outcomes through school inspections. Ch5 Evaluation of social outcomes in the Netherlands; Ch6 The Norwegian approach to inspecting the social quality of education; Ch7 Evaluating Social Outcomes. Inspection methods in Scotland; Ch8 Social outcomes. Inspection methods in Sweden. Part III: Inspecting social outcomes in schools: Models of Assessment. Ch9 Evaluating social outcomes of
The study was conducted by a SICI Working Group of inspectors affiliated with the educational inspectorates in the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Sweden. SICI is the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates.

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