Belgium – Germanspeaking Community

**External evaluation of schools**

1. Purpose of external evaluation and responsible bodies

External evaluation has been compulsory since January 2009. It is carried out by a department for external evaluation established within the only higher education institution in the Germanspeaking Community. This department falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Education.

The German-speaking Community sees evaluation as an important tool for quality assurance and ensuring the improvement of schools and teaching.

The purposes of external school evaluation are to:

- encourage school improvement and teaching development;
- establish comparability based on quality standards;
- facilitate accountability among independent schools;
- provide an evidence base for monitoring the education system in the German-speaking Community of Belgium.

2. Evaluators

The three people currently involved in carrying out external evaluation of schools are full-time employees of the higher education institution department which carries out the external evaluation. Evaluators must have a teaching qualification for one of the levels of education being evaluated (primary, lower or upper secondary education).

When a school is being evaluated, at least one of the evaluators must be qualified for the level of education provided by the school. Evaluators must have at least ten years’ teaching experience.

The persons responsible for the external evaluation must not have any involvement in the school development council (a department of the ministry of education) or the school inspection services which both have a role in supporting schools implement improvements following external evaluation (see point 5 below). There is thus a clear separation of functions between external evaluation and school improvement support services.

Candidates for external evaluator roles must undertake intensive training provided by Ministry of Education and Training of North Rhine-Westphalia. This several months’ training addresses various aspects of the evaluation process, including the evaluation framework (parameters and standards); evaluation techniques; principles
of communication; conflict management and team work; as well as methods for producing evaluation reports. This close cooperation with North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany and – additionally – the Flemish Community of Belgium, results in regular refresher training for the external evaluators.

3. Evaluation framework
The guiding framework for school quality ¹ published in 2009, is the first document published by the German-speaking Community of Belgium which systematically describes a set of core characteristics and standards for good schools. The framework identifies six quality areas:
1. School results
2. Learning and teaching
3. School culture
4. Leadership and school management
5. Teacher professionalism
6. Objectives and strategies of quality development

These six areas are further subdivided into 28 quality aspects. These quality aspects are associated with 149 standards of quality, including 42 focusing on classroom observation. The external evaluators use the quality standards to give the school a score between one and four, for each of the six quality areas of the evaluation framework. The four levels are: described as 'exemplary', 'more strengths than weaknesses', 'more weaknesses than strengths', and 'greatly in need of improvement'.

4. Procedures
External evaluation is carried out at all schools in a five-year cycle. The school management and the school ‘organising body’ receive three months notification of the planned external evaluation (excluding school holidays).

¹ http://www.ahsdg.be/PortalData/13/Resources/20131009_Der_Orientierungsrahmen_Schulqualitaet.pdf
The evaluation team decides the length of the school visit and the procedures to be included taking into account: the number of students, the size of school and whether there is a German- and French-speaking department.

Each external evaluation is based on a standardised method and uses standardised instruments, which include:

- a preliminary analysis of various documents (school policy documents in educational and organisational areas, student performance data, self-evaluation documents, school prospectus, factual data on staff, information on resources and buildings);
- a school visit, concerning the infrastructure (building and schoolyard) to which the school ‘organising body’ is invited by the school head;
- observations of lessons of at least 50% of teachers (except classes in philosophical subjects and ethics);
- individual and group interviews addressing the various topics included in the guiding framework for school quality (see point 3). The interviews are generally conducted with the school management and the pedagogical council and/or school representatives.

Interviews with school staff, the pupil council and/or pupil representatives, parents (depending on their availability and the school’s ‘organising body’) are also be carried out;

- a parent questionnaire covering: children’s life at school, teaching in the school, information provided about teaching and learning, parental involvement and satisfaction levels;
- initial verbal feedback followed by written feedback.

About five weeks after the school visit, the school head and the school ‘organising body’ receive a draft of the evaluation report. The school management is obliged to inform the teaching staff about this draft and, together with staff, follow the ‘feedback protocol to the draft report’. A response must be sent to the evaluation team at least

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2 The Pedagogical Council is composed of the school head, representatives of the school ‘organising body’, as well as at least five members of staff including teaching, education assistance, paramedical and social
one week before the feedback conference. During the feedback conference, the draft report is discussed by the evaluation team with the school management, the pedagogical council or a representative of the teaching staff, the school ‘organising body’ and possibly the school development council (see Section II). The evaluation team may consider the comments of the school in the evaluation report. The evaluation report is sent to the school and the school ‘organising body’ about one week after the conference. The school has the opportunity to formulate a written reply within five working days of the receipt of the evaluation report.

5. Outcomes of external evaluation

After the external evaluation, the school analyses the evaluation report and other available data (average results for the Germanspeaking Community in standardised tests such as DELF (French language proficiency tests), PISA, etc., as well as performance studies and internal evaluation results). The school then develops its own goals and measures for quality assurance and school improvement. The school decides whether to ask for support in this process and who to approach, for example, the school development council in the pedagogical department of the ministry of education, subject councils of the higher education institution or external experts (see Section II). The school head is responsible for this school process and, using a standard form, must inform the school inspection service within four months of receipt of the evaluation report of the school’s new goals for quality assurance and development. After setting its goals, the school carries out anticipated improvement measures. In cooperation with the school, the school inspection service normally monitors a school’s progress towards the goals it has set for quality assurance and improvement, and checks are carried out at least every two years. However, in cases of serious deficiencies, the evaluation team may decide that a re-evaluation is necessary. This re-evaluation takes place 16 months after the receipt of the evaluation report and refers only to the quality assurance goals set by the school in response to the report.

6. Reporting of external evaluation findings

The evaluation team sends the school evaluation report and any observations to the Minister of Education, training and employment. Within 20 working days of receipt,
the school head provides the evaluation report to all groups involved in the external evaluation (teachers, school ‘organising body’, etc.) and the Department of Education in the Ministry for Information.