

Inspectorate Profile

Externe Schulevaluation / External school evaluation, Austria

June 2025

1. Overview of the Inspectorate (evaluation body)

Age of evaluation body

A new department for external evaluation of schools was established at the Federal Ministry of Education in September 2021 as part of the 2017 Education Reform Act that aimed at strengthening autonomy and data informed quality improvement in the school system. Prior to this, there was no separate school evaluation body and no overarching nation-wide quality standards framework in place. Quality assurance was the sole responsibility of school supervisors (formerly "inspectors", now "school quality managers").

Structure of the evaluation body

The Austrian external school evaluation is organised as a department within the Federal Ministry of Education. Evaluation standards and procedures apply to all types of schools across Austria. There are two regional offices in Vienna and Salzburg.

Size

The department for external evaluation of schools employs in total ca. 30 civil servants including management and administrative staff, of which 25 are full time evaluators.

Remits

The external school evaluation extends to all schools (primary to upper secondary education). Currently, the focus is on general education (primary school, middle school, academic secondary school, polytechnic schools), as well as Technical Colleges.

Unit of evaluation

External evaluation is applied to individual schools as well as to school clusters (i.e. typically 3 – 5 small schools that are managed under one organisational umbrella). The focus of school evaluations is on the quality of schools' instructional and management processes. Therefore, neither individual teachers nor local authorities/school boards are evaluated.

Purpose of external evaluation

External school evaluation provides an external view on the quality of a school to support data-based improvement of school and teaching quality in the interests of pupils and the entire staff in schools. Furthermore, by analysing evidence across schools, external school evaluation is expected to generate system wide evidence on the overall state and development of school and teaching quality as part of the education monitoring system.

Relationship with government

Quality assurance and thus also external school evaluation is a competence of the Federal Government. As such, the ministry determines the sample of schools that are being evaluated. External school evaluation reports aggregated data on school quality to the Minister of Education, school authorities and the public as part of the triannual National Education Report.

Accountability

The external school evaluation reports directly to the Minister of Education. The organisational framework including staff regulations for school evaluators is enshrined in law. School evaluators are independent by law with regard to their quality judgements.

Impact of external evaluations

Currently, impact assessment relates primarily to the question as to what extent schools and school leaders consider the data from external evaluation useful for school improvement processes. To that end, each school is invited to answer a questionnaire after external evaluation has been carried out.

Quality assurance of external evaluations

Comprehensive quality assurance measures have been implemented in order to secure high quality and reliability of evaluation procedures. A tight quality management, including a continuous quality improvement process (CQI) has been established. The evaluation procedure itself is based on international standards and adhering to common quality standards of evaluation as set out by the DeGEval Evaluation Society. All methods and instruments used are science based and validated as well as regularly retested through statistical methods. School evaluators must go through 6 months of intense theoretical and practical training before they are employed permanently. Continuous professional development is an integral part of a school evaluator's job profile.

2. Evaluation process

Self-evaluation

There is no self-assessment requirement for schools during or prior to an external evaluation process. However, all Austrian schools are legally required to carry out self-evaluation on a regular basis, the results of which can be included in external evaluations.

Focus of external evaluation

The focus is on the quality of instructional and management processes as set out in the "Austrian Quality Framework for Schools" (www.qms.at). Lessons are observed with regard to generic instructional quality; there is no subject related assessment and no assessment of individual teachers' competences. Finances and compliance with legal requirements are not evaluated; this is the responsibility of the school authorities at federal and Länder level and of auditing bodies.

Evaluation framework

External evaluation is carried out according to an evaluation framework that closely refers to the Austrian Quality Framework for Schools. School evaluation follows a quality model and is based on a set of some 50 indicators.

Evaluation time and resources

The evaluation process from initial contact with the school until the evaluation report is handed over, takes ca. 3 months. A team of 2-3 evaluators visits the school during 2-3 days to observe lessons and conduct interviews (with the head of the school, teachers, students, parents). School evaluators need to have a background in pedagogy, often including prior experience as a school leader or school supervisor. They receive intense initial and continuing professional training.

Frequency of external evaluations

Evaluations do not follow a periodic cycle; rather schools are selected for evaluation based on a stratified sample to cover key characteristics of the school system. Evaluations are also conducted upon request from schools and regional school authorities.

Non-evaluation activities

The focus of external school evaluation lies solely on the evaluation of school quality and the analysis of school evaluation data.

3. Consequences of external evaluation**Reporting**

Evaluation reports of individual schools are not published. Only the school and the school community (parents' and pupils' representatives) as well as the school supervision authority receive the report.

Grading

School quality is graded based on some 50 indicators and a 4-grade scale.

Sharing findings of external evaluation

Aggregated information on school quality is shared with relevant departments of the ministry, education authorities in the Austrian states, schools, teacher training institutions etc.

What happens following an external evaluation?

Schools as well as the responsible school supervisors have to take into account results from an evaluation in school improvement processes and need to set adequate targets and measures. If schools do not meet minimum quality standards, school supervision has to initiate a comprehensive process of school improvement together with the school head. Schools can request professional support for school development processes (school development advisors).