

Inspectorate Profile

Institute of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan

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1. Overview of the Inspectorate

Age of inspectorate: The Inspectorate was established in August 2021

Structure of inspectorate

The quality monitoring system in Azerbaijan is organised centrally at the national level. Monitoring regulations, standards, and the evaluation framework are developed and applied uniformly across the country. The same criteria, procedures, and tools are used for all schools, regardless of region or location.

Size

We have around 10 lead inspectors and 70 freelance inspectors.

Remits

We conduct quality monitoring of public schools (levels: primary, secondary) across the country.

Unit of inspection

The purpose of quality monitoring is to assess and evaluate the quality, effectiveness, and overall performance of public schools. The unit of inspection is the individual school. We do not inspect teachers, subject departments, groups of schools, or local authorities.

Purpose of inspectorate

The purpose of the inspectorate is to evaluate the quality of education in general education institutions, ensure public accountability, and support continuous improvement in teaching, learning, leadership, and student outcomes.

The inspectorate fulfills both accountability and improvement functions. On the one hand, it provides objective and evidence-based judgments on school performance against nationally defined standards, ensuring transparency, consistency, and public accountability. On the other hand, it supports schools' continuous improvement by identifying strengths and areas for development and by promoting reflective practice and informed decision-making at school level.

The underlying theory of action is that systematic, fair, and evidence-informed inspection, combined with constructive feedback leads to school improvement. Inspection findings are used to:

- inform school self-evaluation and development planning;
 - support targeted interventions and professional learning;
 - guide policy decisions at system level.
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What is your strapline/motto?

“Quality evaluation through evidence, improvement through dialogue.”

Relationship with government

The inspectorate operates within the national education system under the mandate of the Ministry of Science and Education, while maintaining operational and methodological independence in the conduct of inspections. Its authority and functions are defined through national legislation and ministerial regulations, which establish the inspectorate’s responsibility for evaluating educational institutions against the **Quality Evaluation Framework for General Education**. The framework sets out clearly defined quality areas, criteria, and performance levels, ensuring consistency, transparency, and fairness in inspection judgments.

Inspection findings, structured according to the Quality Evaluation Framework for General Education, are communicated to the inspected schools, relevant local education departments, and the Ministry of Science and Education. Reports are not published for public access; instead, the findings are shared to support school improvement planning, system oversight, and evidence-informed decision-making.

The inspectorate is independent in its professional judgments, evaluation methodologies, and interpretation of the Quality Evaluation Framework; monitoring conclusions are based solely on evidence collected during inspection, ensuring objectivity and professional integrity. While the inspectorate does not directly evaluate government policy, analysis of inspection results against the framework enables identification of system-wide trends, recurring challenges, and areas of risk, which are communicated to the Ministry to support policy development and targeted interventions and resource allocation decisions.

Accountability

The inspectorate is accountable for delivering independent, evidence-based evaluations of the quality of public schools in line with the Quality Evaluation Framework for General Education. Its mandate, responsibilities, and methodologies are set out in national education legislation and relevant ministerial regulations. Inspection findings are formally communicated to schools, local education departments, and the Ministry of Science and Education. As an organization, the inspectorate is held to account through formal reporting arrangements, including periodic and annual reporting on inspection activities, key findings, and system-level trends.

Impact of inspections

This is done primarily through follow up monitoring, which examines whether previously identified areas for improvement have been addressed and whether first monitoring recommendations have led to measurable changes in school practices and outcomes. In addition, the inspectorate monitors the effectiveness of system-level interventions, such as policies, programs, or projects introduced in response to quality monitoring findings, by incorporating their evaluation into subsequent monitoring cycles. Through this approach, quality monitoring visits serve both as a mechanism for accountability and as a tool for continuous improvement.

Quality assurance of inspections

The evaluation framework and related tools are regularly reviewed using analysis of monitoring outcomes and the effectiveness of follow-up interventions to ensure alignment with system priorities and school improvement needs; adjustments are made as evidence indicates to keep focus on the most relevant quality areas.

Inspectors and lead inspectors are selected against clear qualification criteria, complete mandatory training, and undertake shadow inspections with structured feedback before accreditation; regular calibration activities (joint lesson observations and professional discussions) ensure consistency of judgements and identify training needs.

Freelance inspectors are subject specialists for lesson observation and are continually monitored and mentored by lead inspectors; structured post-inspection stakeholder surveys are analysed for strengths and improvement areas; and the inspectorate runs recurring professional development and calibration workshops to address gaps and strengthen inspection quality.

2. Evaluation process

Self-evaluation

While systematic school self-evaluation is not yet established, schools occasionally engage in self-reporting. This includes completing pre-inspection information forms for the inspectorate and submitting structured school data through national reporting tools.

Focus of inspection

Quality monitoring visits examine four core areas: student behaviour (attendance, punctuality, attitudes), teaching and learning (individual lessons are observed and graded and contribute to the school-level judgement), care, guidance and support (safeguarding, wellbeing, inclusion), and leadership and management (strategy, monitoring, data use, implementation of improvement actions). Evidence is collected systematically from multiple sources — lesson and corridor observations, school records, behaviour logs, documents, interviews with leaders and staff, focus group discussions with teachers and students, and surveys — and judgements are triangulated rather than based on a single source. Evaluation prioritizes the impact of practices on student learning, wellbeing and development and is contextualized by schools' social, economic and geographic circumstances. Financial audits and detailed legal compliance checks are the remit of other authorities and are not a core focus of quality monitoring.

Inspection framework

The inspectorate operates within a Quality Evaluation Framework for general education schools. The framework is a quality-based evaluation model, not a purely compliance-driven one. It is designed to evaluate the quality of educational provision, with a strong focus on teaching and learning, student experience, and leadership impact. While compliance with key legal and regulatory requirements is considered, this is not the primary purpose of quality monitoring and is addressed only where it directly affects student safety, wellbeing, or the quality of educational provision. This approach ensures that monitoring findings provide a holistic, developmental picture of school quality and support school improvement alongside accountability.

The framework is structured around **four interrelated quality areas**:

1. Student behaviour
2. Teaching and learning
3. Care, guidance and support
4. Leadership and management.

Each area is broken down into criteria and sub-criteria, with clearly defined quality descriptors across 4 performance levels (excellent, good, satisfactory, and weak).

Inspection time and resources

Quality monitoring is a typically short, focused visit, lasting one to three days, depending on the size, type, and context of the school and the scope of the inspection. The duration may be adjusted where additional evidence is required or where specific risks or concerns are identified.

Inspection teams usually consist of a lead inspector and several inspectors, with team size varying according to school size and monitoring focus. Teams commonly include three to seven inspectors, ensuring sufficient subject and professional coverage while maintaining efficiency. The lead inspector plans and directs the inspection, assigns tasks, oversees evidence collection, moderates and signs off final judgements, conducts professional dialogue with school leaders, ensures compliance with inspection procedures, and provides feedback and mentorship to other inspectors. Freelance inspectors (subject specialists) primarily conduct lesson observations, focus group discussions, contribute evidence from observations, complete inspection records, and provide subject-specific analysis and feedback. Their findings are reviewed and moderated by the lead inspector; they receive ongoing monitoring, feedback and calibration to maintain consistency.

Inspectors are trained education professionals, including teachers, subject specialists, and school leaders. All inspectors meet defined qualification criteria, including a minimum of eight years of teaching experience and strong knowledge of teaching methodology, and complete mandatory training, shadow inspections, and ongoing calibration activities. Financial or legal specialists are not routinely involved, as quality monitoring visits focus on educational quality rather than financial audit or legal compliance alone.

Frequency of inspections

There is no rigid fixed inspection cycle; however, the inspectorate aims to revisit schools approximately every two years to review progress and the implementation of improvement actions.

The overall number of monitoring visits each year are guided by the Ministry's annual activity plan. Within this framework, the inspectorate selects schools based on varying criteria, which may include student achievement data, school size, or thematic and system-level priorities. In addition to planned visits, some monitoring visits are initiated in response to signals or concerns raised by relevant authorities. This allows the system to respond to emerging issues when necessary.

Non-inspection activities

Lead inspectors are involved in non-inspection activities like

- Participating in policy formation related to school quality and accountability;
- Delivering seminars for schools on writing effective School Improvement Plans;
- Meeting with school directors upon request to review quality monitoring results;
- Serving as representatives on school director selection committees;
- Identifying teachers' training needs and set priorities for professional development.

3. Consequences of inspection

Reporting

As a result of quality monitoring, we provide reports that

- are shared with schools, regional education offices and other higher authorities;
- are primarily intended for professional stakeholders; they are not designed as public rankings or tools for parental choice;
- provide schools with evidence-based feedback to support improvement and follow-up actions;
- inform policy development and accountability processes;
- are expected to be systematically incorporated into school improvement planning.

Grading

Schools are evaluated against each sub-criterion and an overall grade is assigned. The framework uses four performance levels (excellent- good- satisfactory- weak). The grades have no punitive or administrative consequences and are not linked to rewards, sanctions, or public rankings; they serve as diagnostic information to guide improvement and support.

Sharing inspection findings

Individual school reports present Quality Monitoring findings across the four areas of the School Quality Evaluation Framework. Each area is evaluated on the basis of the grades assigned to its sub-criteria: inspectors grade each sub-criterion (typically process indicators) and these sub-criterion grades are aggregated and weighed to determine the overall grade for the corresponding area. Reports justify sub-criterion and area grades with evidence and illustrative practice examples, and identify strengths, weaknesses and actionable recommendations for school improvement.

We publish an annual thematic report that describes overall system performance, analyzes trends, strengths and weaknesses and makes recommendations that inform ministerial-level reforms and policy formation.

What happens following an inspection?

Under our centralized system, closing a school as a response to quality monitoring findings is not considered. The quality assurance system for general education is still being established; processes, timelines, and resourcing for follow-up and support are under development and may evolve as the system matures. Quality monitoring is intended as a developmental, not punitive, process: inspections produce reports that target to help schools improve. Only where pupils face clear, imminent risk may temporary emergency measures be taken—such as suspending activities or short-term closure—coordinated immediately with safeguarding authorities and regional educational offices. These emergency actions are protective measures, not routine monitoring outcomes.