



LITERATURE REVIEW

School Inspection: recent experiences in high performing education systems

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Introduction

“*School inspection systems are assuming key importance in ensuring quality provision for all.*”

With school decentralisation becoming increasingly widespread internationally, especially as regards staff and resource management or even educational practice in general, school inspection systems are assuming key importance in ensuring quality provision for all. ‘Around the world school inspection is subject to critical scrutiny’ (MacBeath, 2000, preface), however there has been little rigorous research on the impact of inspection (Byatt &

Lyons, 2001, cited in Martin, 2005, p500), and ‘no analysis to determine which... styles [of inspection] are the most appropriate’ (Vass and Simmonds, 2001, p16). This report attempts to summarise the existing literature in the field by looking at why education is inspected, whether inspection systems should be self- or externally-regulated (or a mixture of the two), who and what is inspected, and the stakeholders in the processes and the products of inspection.

1. Methodology

This report focuses on inspection practices in a range of countries with developed education systems, including in particular: England, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Scotland, Singapore and the Netherlands. The report is based on the findings of a systematic, thematic comparison of inspection systems, based primarily on the six countries identified above, but also drawing on other international examples as appropriate.

Literature, dating from 2000 onwards, that was sought related to compulsory education (that is, early years, post-16 and Higher Education were not included). The focus was on literature and documentation relevant to school inspection in mainstream schools. Only literature written in English was obtained and relevant websites and publication lists were also searched. In total more than 40 documents were read and systematically reviewed.

2. Why inspect?

“Almost all countries in Europe arrange for evaluation of their schools so as to improve the quality of compulsory education.”

(Eurydice, 2004, p1)

‘Almost all countries in Europe arrange for evaluation of their schools so as to improve the quality of compulsory education’ (Eurydice, 2004, p1). Indeed, it is likely that almost all countries in the world arrange for evaluation of their schools for similar purposes, and it is certainly the case in the six countries which form the focus of this report. In England, for example, the role of the inspectorate is to provide an ‘independent external assessment... in the drive to reform and strengthen our public services’ (Ofsted, 2007, p3), and lead to ‘school improvement and improvement in broader outcomes for children and young people, including well-being’ (Children, Schools and Families Committee, 2010, para 15). Whilst in Hong Kong, the Education and Manpower Bureau (2006) aims to ‘achieve balance between providing support to schools through school improvement and exerting pressure through accountability’ (p2), whilst in the Netherlands there is a statutory responsibility for inspection to contribute to improvement.

Yet there is surprisingly little proof of the relationship between inspection and school improvement. As David Bell, the Chief Inspector for Schools in England, warns ‘I have always been cautious in saying that inspections cause improvement because, frankly, we do not’ (quoted in MacBeath, 2006, p30). However, the evidence body is growing, most significantly with the

publication of a recent independent evaluation of school inspection in England (McCrone et al., 2009). This research found that the inspection process was generally perceived by school leaders as ‘contributing to school improvement and... as impetus to drive forward progress’ (pi). Inspection was also generally perceived to have achieved a ‘direct positive impact on school improvement in terms of assessment and, to some extent, quality of teaching, and to have contributed to attainment’ (piv).

There does, however, remain a paradox between the role of an inspectorate encouraging school improvement and an inspectorate participating in school improvement, as described in a recent British Government Select Committee Report:

‘We note that Ofsted has a duty to encourage improvement in schools. However, we do not accept that Ofsted necessarily has an active role to play in school improvement. It is Ofsted’s role to evaluate a school’s performance across its many areas of responsibility and to identify issues which need to be addressed so that a school can be set on the path to improvement. Ofsted has neither the time nor resources to be an active participant in the improvement process which takes place following inspection, aside from the occasional monitoring visit to verify progress.’ (2010, para 137).

“Changes to inspection systems are often made in order to align inspections with changes made to the education system as a whole.”

2.1 Recent changes to inspections

The last seven years have seen an unprecedented interest in school inspection, as De Grauwe and Naidoo (2004) explain, ‘evaluation is at the centre of almost all education quality improvement policies and strategies in most countries today’ (p15). Changes to inspection systems are often made in order to align inspections with changes made to the education system as a whole, for example, in Singapore, following the introduction of the ‘Thinking Schools, Learning Nation’ (TSLN) vision in 1997, a new school inspection system was instigated in 2000. However, as Meuret and Morlaix (2003) point out, although there is some evidence that inspection ‘is likely to be useful... it is more praised by policymakers than it is liked and really used by schools’ (p54).

2.2 Legal obligations to inspect

It is interesting to note that not all inspection systems are, legislatively speaking, compulsory. For example in Finland there are no national regulations or recommendations for the inspection of individual schools. Furthermore, the level at which inspection is instigated changes markedly between some countries, coming from either a national (e.g. England, the Netherlands) or local level (e.g. Denmark, Estonia), centralised (e.g. Papua New Guinea, Korea), decentralised (e.g. Hong Kong, New Zealand) or autonomous (although autonomous systems are almost only used in the inspection of private school systems). The body which then conducts the inspection can be a representative from any one of these levels (see table 1), however Barber (2004) argues that a system independent of government is best as this ‘enables not only the education service to be held to account but also government itself’ (p22).

Figure 1. New Zealand early childhood and school education system
(Education Review Office, 2006)

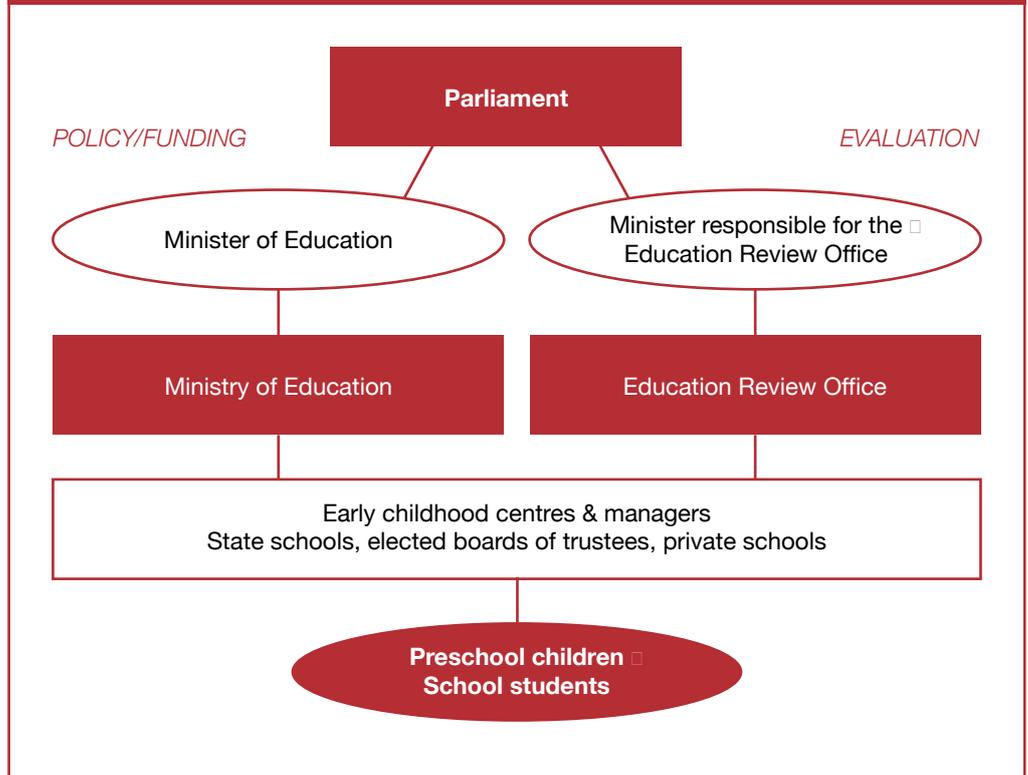


Table 1. National inspection bodies

Country	Inspecting body	Relationship to government
England	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)	Non-ministerial government department
Hong Kong	Quality Assurance Inspection	Government department
Netherlands	Inspectorate of Education	Executive agency
New Zealand	Education Review Office (ERO)	'Stand alone' government department (see figure 1)
Scotland	Her Majesty's Inspectorate Of Education (HMIE)	Executive agency
Singapore	School Appraisal Branch (plus the 'Internal Audit Branch' who are responsible for inspecting the 'soundness, adequacy and application of accounting, financial and other controls in schools')	Government department

Figure 1: Education Review Office, New Zealand

2.3 Levels of inspection

Van Bruggen (2006, cited in Janssen and Amelsvoort, 2008, p17) identified three main functions that inspectorates have:

- Giving a public account concerning the quality of education
- Providing a guarantee of compliance with regulation
- Providing an imposed service for quality management.

Stanley & Patrick (1998) classified quality assurance (QA) systems into 'self-regulating', 'externally regulated' or a 'mixture of the two' according to whether the process is regulated by the schools themselves, imposed by external agency or is a combination of the two (cited in Mok et al., 2003, p.945). The Eurydice (2004) evaluation of schools providing compulsory education in Europe also identifies two main models of inspection. In the first, 'evaluation of schools is at the very heart of the system'

(this occurs in a substantial majority of countries taking part in the Eurydice evaluation). In this case inspection is conducted by both an external inspectorate, and internally by the school community. The second model identified occurs in a minority of countries, and here evaluation is concerned with levels other than the school. For example, teachers themselves are evaluated by external inspectors. In the six countries forming the focus of this report, it is the first (whole school) model that is utilised. A potential third model is identified by Martin (2005), who introduces the idea that inspection could also look at the level above the school:

'The focus of inspection is usually on whether and how well... 'delivery agents' have implemented central government policies. Inspectors do not, on the whole, examine the appropriateness of the policies themselves, nor do they pay much attention to the way in which government assists effective implementation' (p501).

3. Self-evaluation

The most common format for self-regulating systems as described in the literature is school self-evaluation. Self-evaluation is 'on the educational agenda in all European countries' (Meuret and Morlaix, 2003, p53), and is a 'priority for most economically advanced countries in the world' (MacBeath, 2006, p173). Indeed, self-evaluation is an important factor in the inspection system of each of the six countries focused on in this study. For example, in the Netherlands, the 1998 Quality Act made it a legal requirement that schools develop a system of quality assurance through self-evaluation. While in Hong Kong the School Development and Accountability Framework has put self-evaluation 'centre stage' and has 'lent a sense of urgency to improvement and accountability', putting 'expectations on schools to deliver' (Quality Assurance Division: Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005, pp1-2). In Singapore, the School Excellence Model (SEM) is used to guide schools in self-assessment. The model is adapted from various quality models used by business organisations and provides a 'systematic and holistic framework for self-assessment'. (Seong, 2006, p52).

In England, a recent government Select Committee Report (2010) stated that 'true self-evaluation is at the heart of what a good school does' (para 63), and that:

'Self-evaluation – as an iterative, reflexive and continuous process, embedded in the culture of a school – is a highly effective means for a school to consolidate success and secure improvement across the full range of its activities' (para 53).

Furthermore, the committee found that self-evaluation was: *'applicable, not just to its academic performance, but across the full range of a school's influence over the well-being of the children who learn there and the community outside' (ibid).*

Although self-evaluation is common in most education inspection systems, according

to some sources it is not always a formal (legislative) requirement. The Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectorates of Education (SICI) Effective School Self-Evaluation (ESSE) project found that of the 13 European countries they surveyed, only four had a formal obligation to implement self-evaluation (Ireland, Upper Austria, Belgium, Denmark), whereas in the majority (including England, Scotland, and the Netherlands) there was no formal obligation, but often schools were 'strongly encouraged to' (European Commission and SICI, 2001, pp4-8). For example in the Netherlands, schools are obliged to implement a system of quality control. Even though this makes self-evaluations a logical step, schools are not legally obliged to perform a self-evaluation. The government wants to leave it up to the schools how they want to control and improve their quality. Yet most schools do work on self-evaluations (SICI European Inspectorates' Profiles: Netherlands, 2009, p16).

However the Eurydice evaluation of schools providing compulsory education in Europe (2004) reported that self-evaluation 'is compulsory in 22 countries' and 'recommended in six others' (p3). This discrepancy may be because the term 'self-evaluation' is, itself, loosely defined, on the one-hand it can 'refer to a brief document written almost in isolation by the principal following strict central guidelines' or on the other to a 'long drawn-out process in which all school partners (teachers, parents and students) are involved' (De Grauwe and Naidoo, 2004, p11).

3.1 Support and guidance for self-evaluation

The amount of support and guidance schools receive can differ markedly between countries. Many countries provide performance indicators (PIs) or Self-Evaluation Frameworks (SEFs) to enhance the process of self-evaluation. The ESSE project identified two key areas – teaching-learning and management – under which schools in most countries self-evaluate (see table 2).

Table 2. Common key areas in self-evaluation
(based on European Commission and SICl, 2001, p18)

Key area	Indicator	Country					
		En	Sc	Nl	Si	Hk	Nz
Teaching-learning processes	Curriculum	•	•	•		•	•
	Teaching and learning	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Support and guidance	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Climate/ethos	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Specific subject contents	•		•			•
Management processes	Management	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Quality assurance		•	•		•	
	Leadership	•	•		•	•	•
	Link with parents and community	•	•	•	•	•	•
	School planning		•	•	•	•	•
	Internal communication			•			
	Resources	•	•	•	•	•	
	Human resource management			•	•	•	•
Output	Administrative procedures	•		•	•	•	•
	Attainment and achievement	•	•	•	•	•	
	Attitudes, values, personal development	•	•		•	•	

Chris Webb from the Scottish HMIE stresses that school self-evaluation does ‘not exist in a vacuum, but in a context where external support and benchmarks are important’ (cited in SICl, 2005, p.2). He lists external support in the shape of statistical data for comparison, a set of quality standards, and training in self-evaluation methods (ibid). Scotland’s latest guidance on school self evaluation, *How good is our school?: The Journey to Excellence: Part 3*, states that self evaluation:

‘is not a bureaucratic or mechanistic process. It is a reflective professional process through which schools get to know themselves well and identify the best way forward for their pupils...Self-evaluation is forward looking. It is about change and improvement, whether gradual or transformational, and is based on professional reflection, challenge and support. It involves taking considered decisions about

actions which result in clear benefits for young people’ (2007, p6).

However, also writing on the case in Scotland, Ozga (2003), warns that if teachers, heads and their employers feel ‘under pressure to demonstrate good performance... it may reduce trust, inhibit discussion of difficulty and diminish honest self-evaluation at all levels in the system (p3). Self-evaluation is used for school accountability and quality assurance, however ‘its primary impulse is developmental’ (MacBeath et al., 2000, p91). Therefore, it is not a surprise that McCrone et al. (2009) found that, in England, self-evaluation was widely perceived to be ‘an ongoing, inclusive process, rather than an event with all school staff reported as contributing to some extent’ (piv). This is true in the majority of countries, leading to school self-evaluation papers forming ‘living’ documents.

Table 2: EUROPEAN COMMISSION and SICl. (2001). Effective School Self-Evaluation (ESSE) Project School Self-Evaluation in Thirteen European Countries/Regions [online]. Available: http://www.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/school-self-eval-in-13-countries.pdf

4. External inspection

“As opposed to self-evaluation, external inspection is more often driven primarily by a need for accountability.”

Where an exclusively external system of inspection is in place it is often justified on the grounds of need at a centralised level to ‘control and guide schools’ (MacBeath et al., 2000, p91). Of all the EU member states, MacBeath et al. assert that it is England and The Netherlands that have the most developed external evaluation systems (ibid). As opposed to self-evaluation, external inspection is more often driven primarily by a need for accountability, although it may be combined with an improvement perspective (ibid).

4.1 Frequency of external inspection

Of the six countries focused on in this report, only the Netherlands externally inspect their schools every year. Here: *‘annual visits are considered to be necessary for the frequent monitoring of schools. To maintain the proportional character of inspection, this annual visit should focus on the smallest possible selection of standards necessary to assess the functioning of the schools’* (Ehren, Leeuw and Scheerens, 2005, p66).

External inspections are conducted most frequently in England and New Zealand (every three years), and least frequently in Singapore (every five years). In most countries the frequency of external inspection often depends on documents (including self-evaluation documentation) that the school submits to the external inspectorate and schools are then visited ‘proportional to need’. For example in England, Ofsted uses a risk-based approach to inspection, using evidence from performance data and from the most recent inspection report to inform decisions about whether a provider should have a ‘full inspection’ or, in the case of those that appear to be doing well, a ‘light-touch’ visit. This proportionate approach enables Ofsted to focus its resources on those providers that are doing less well and where inspection can have the most impact. In the Netherlands, the Inspectorate of Education adopts a risk-based inspection structure, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Netherlands Risk-based Inspection Structure
(SICI European Inspectorates’ Profiles: Netherlands, 2009, p11)

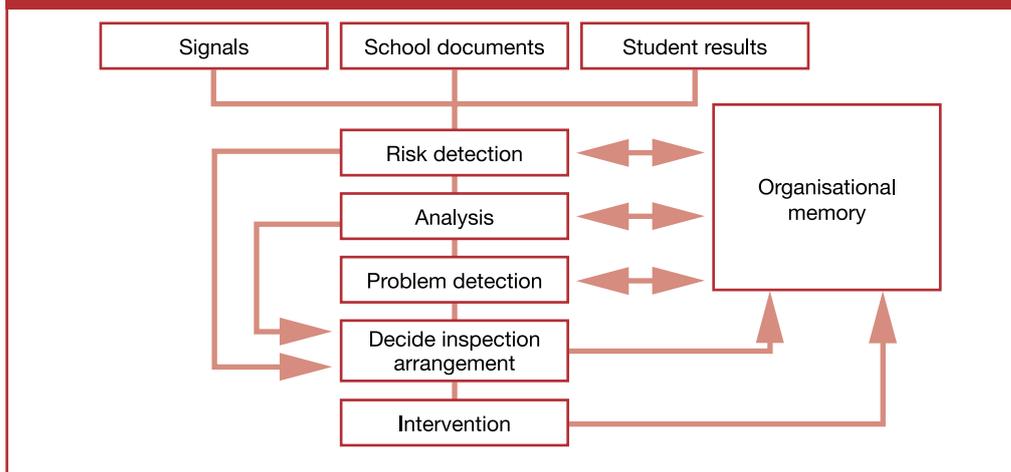


Figure 2: SICI (The Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectorates of Education). 2009. ‘The Inspectorate of Education of the Netherlands’ in European Inspectorates’ Profiles. Available: <http://www.sici-inspectorates.org/web/guest/home>

“*The composition and responsibilities of external inspectors influences a schools' response to an inspection.*”

4.2 The inspectors

By definition, external inspection is 'conducted by players who are not directly involved in school activities' (Eurydice, 2004, p.3), i.e. the national inspection bodies (see table 1). In a review of external inspection in New Zealand, the ERO Review Committee (2000) identified literature which suggested that the composition and responsibilities of external inspectors influences a schools' response to an inspection. They go on to suggest that it is essential that schools 'have faith in the competence and credibility of the review team' and recommended that 'wherever possible, no less than half of each review team has the appropriate knowledge base' e.g. primary level specialist, secondary level specialist etc. (pp30-31).

In Europe the qualification to become part of an inspection team is normally teacher training and professional experience in education, in some cases there are also obligations to complete a specialist course in evaluation or pass a qualifying examination (Eurydice, 2004a, p.109). In Scotland and in Hong Kong, the inspectorate also consists of 'lay-members' who specifically have 'no professional qualification in teaching' and 'no working experience in the education field', although they are required to attend a training course organised by the Education Bureau before conducting inspections (Education Bureau, 2007 and SICI European Inspectorates' Profiles: Scotland, 2009, p18). In a sample of inspections, the inspectorate in

Scotland also employs a Health and Nutrition Inspector (SICI European Inspectorates' Profiles: Scotland, 2009, p18).

In England, a Treasury Select Report into the role of external evaluation in improving performance warns that the current 'rapid growth in inspection... seems to be placing strains on the ability to recruit sufficient skilled inspectors', and moreover, that there is also 'a danger of extracting too many highly skilled inspectors from service delivery organisations, reducing their ability to effect the very improvements we are seeking from the system' (Byatt and Lyons, 2001, p18). Conversely, in the Netherlands, spending time as an inspector is often part of a career path into school leadership or a senior position in local government (SICI European Inspectorates' Profiles: Netherlands, 2009, p24).

4.3 Areas inspected

In the majority of countries that utilise external inspection schools are inspected based on a predetermined list of criteria, including the countries forming the focus of this report. Such lists are produced either by senior or chief inspectors (as in the Netherlands, England and Scotland) or by departments in ministries or education authorities (as in New Zealand, Singapore and Hong Kong). Key areas which are common in self-evaluation (see table 2) are also common to external-evaluation, although often with the added component of inspection of the self-evaluation process (see table 3).

“ Key areas which are common in self-evaluation are also common to external-evaluation. ”

Self-evaluation	External inspection
Gather information on the functioning of a school (via discussion, questionnaires) and sometimes on the basis of pupil attainment (via national data)	Gather information on the functioning of a school (via interviews, the study of documents, including the self-evaluation report, visits), and on the basis of pupil attainment (via national data)
Analyse the situation with respect to local and national objectives or identify strengths and weaknesses	Analyse the findings with respect to national objectives and the performance of other schools, and formulate a judgment regarding the means adopted (sometimes with reference to a predetermined list of evaluation criteria)
Draft an evaluation report, as well as a proposal for improvement or fresh objectives, for the school and the external evaluator	Draft an evaluation report for the school and also prepare a report for the education authorities
Implement changes at school level	Monitor the implementation of changes by schools and often contribute to discussion at central level on the regulations needed to improve the education system as a whole
Main responsibility:	Main responsibility:

Literature collected by the ERO Review Committee (New Zealand) suggests that external inspection is likely to be most effective when it is focused on improvement and based on ‘collaboration, collegiality and a sense of a shared experience’, including ‘discussing the content and focus of the review with the school’ and ‘ensuring that the criteria to be used in the evaluation are relevant to the educational institution and its objectives’ (ERO, 2000. p21). In particular, the ERO Review Committee recommends that schools ‘must be made aware of the criteria on which they will be assessed’ (ibid). This is also stressed by

Brian Fidler (2002) and Donald MacNab (2004), who points out:

‘effective educational change requires a ‘hearts and minds’ approach... however much school inspectorates may recognize the need for change and adaptation, as long as they are perceived, both by themselves and by schools, as agent of national or state government with the authority to require schools to act in certain ways, then their capacity to effect systematic and long-term change will remain problematic’ (p56).

Table 3: Eurydice, the information network on education in Europe [2004a, p132]

“ McCrone et al. (2009) found a statistically significant relationship between constructive oral feedback and overall satisfaction with the inspection process (pij). ”

4.4 Stakeholders in external inspection

Evidence of meeting inspection criteria frequently involves discussions with key stakeholders (see table 4 and figure 3), with the aim of gaining ‘greater insight into the overall complexity of matters by observing schools from several perspectives’ (Eurydice, 2004, p3). Looking at

educational evaluation around the world, the Danish Evaluation Institute found that ‘all evaluation agents believe that involving stakeholders in their work is beneficial to the evaluation process, the outcomes and the utilization of the reports’ (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2003, p20).

Table 4. Stakeholders in external inspection

Country	Stakeholder							
	Head teacher	School staff	School board /gov	Pupils	Parents	Community partners	School friend	Employers
England	•	•	•	•		•		
Hong Kong	•	•		•	•			•
Netherlands	•	•		•	•			
New Zealand	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Scotland	•	•	•	•	•			
Singapore	•	•		•		•		

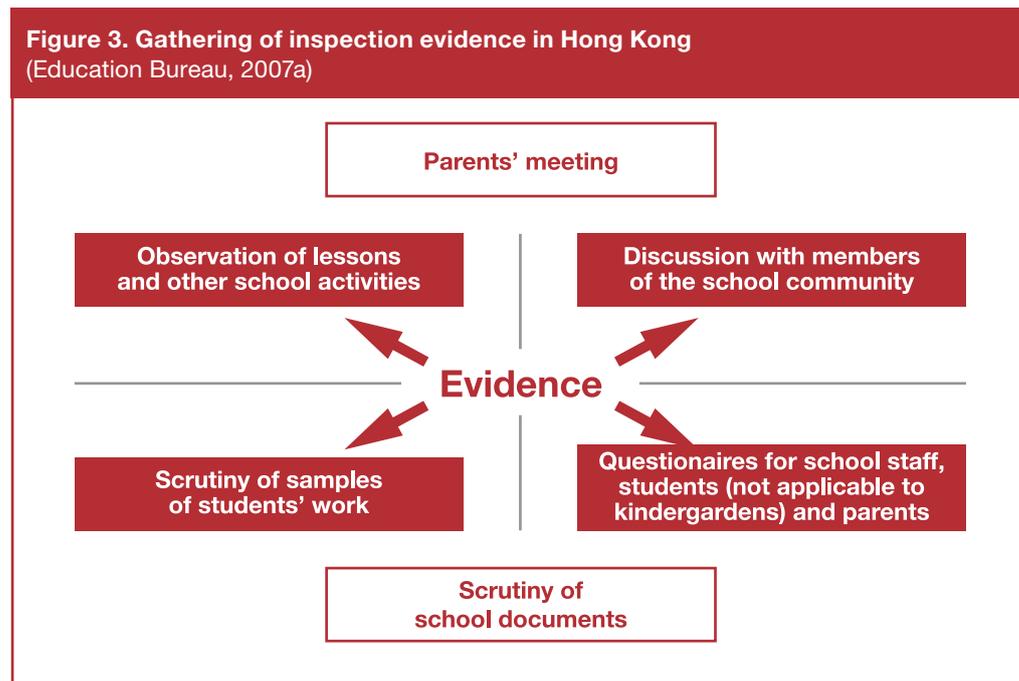


Figure 3: Education Bureau (Hong Kong). (2007a).Gathering of Evidence [online]. Available: <http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?langno=1&nodeID=753> [23 November 2007].

External inspection findings are often communicated back to the school inspected within a few days of the inspection being conducted, for example, the recent report by McCrone et al. (2009) found a statistically significant relationship between constructive oral feedback and overall satisfaction with the inspection process (pii). McCrone et al. also found that 'specific recommendations' were most helpful as they provide focus and the appropriate actions needed were easy to identify (piii). Conversely, it was found that very broad recommendations 'did not instigate direct action' (ibid).

A national and international literature review of planning and accountability for school improvement (RADII, 2005) identified that an 'increasing focus on parent and community rights to quality information' (p4). In fact, the majority of inspectorates publish their inspection findings in the public domain, including all six of the countries focused on in this report, for example, the findings of school inspections in the Netherlands are published 'with the intent of giving the environment of the school a role in school improvement' (Ehren et al., 2005, p67). Furthermore, as a result of this

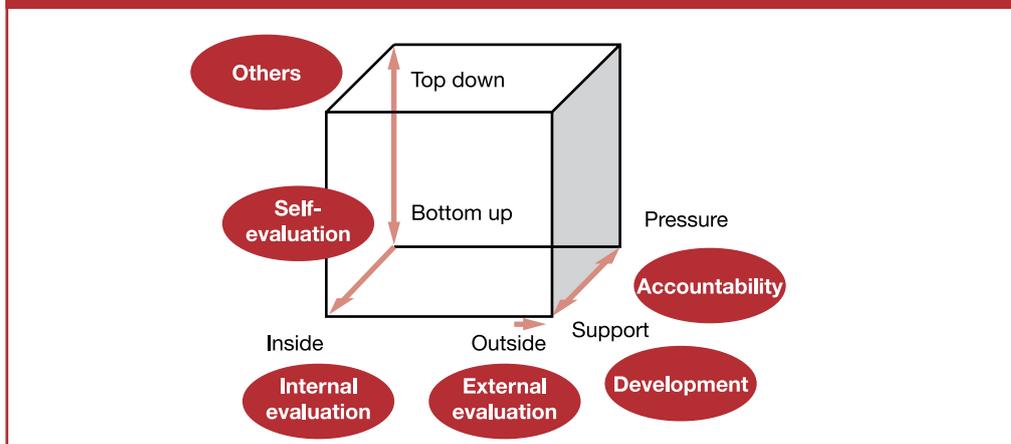
growing demand for access to information on school performance, many inspection systems internationally are providing access to school performance data online (RADII, 2005, p4).

This approach does have its critics, for example in England, what has been seen by some as the 'name and shame' approach adopted by Ofsted has often been criticised and is seen by some as having 'an extremely negative impact on teachers and the teaching profession' (Vass and Simmonds, 2001, p31). Furthermore, the literature suggests that 'the quality and structure of the written report can affect the likelihood of schools... making improvements following an evaluation' (Education Review Office, 2000, pp32-33).

Another method to report on school performance is the 'school report card'. This method, used to different extents in the USA, Australia, Canada and India, is a reporting mechanism detailing how schools are performing in key areas such as academic achievement and school improvement (Maughan et al, 2009).

“A ‘successful and lasting marriage’ between self-evaluation and external inspection can have a positive impact on school improvement.”

Figure 5. The cube model of evaluation (MacBeath, 2000, p93)



Interesting examples of combining self-evaluation and external inspection are also provided in Victoria (Australia), Bangladesh, Singapore and to some extent in South Africa. In these countries, external inspectors work with a school and its teaching staff to:

- define tasks;
- set targets;
- implement on-going internal monitoring processes; and
- evaluate with the school the achievement of targets at the end of the time-period (MacNab, 2004, p61).

5.1 Tensions

The literature suggests that the relationship between self-evaluation and external inspection can be a tense one (see MacBeath et al., 2000, SICI, 2005, De Grauwe and Naidoo, 2004). For example, in England, Meuret and Morlaix (2003) assert that ‘self-evaluation matters less for schools than external inspection does’ (p54), a view backed-up by MacBeath (2006):

‘While it may be assumed... that the purpose of the new inspection is to validate the school’s own self-evaluation, Ofsted is quick to disabuse people of that notion. While self-evaluation is described as an integral element of the process,

inspectors will continue to arrive at their own overall assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the school... there is no pretence that this is an equal relationship’ (p5).

The literature suggests that a tension between self-evaluation and external inspection can result in ‘undesirable side effects’ (SICI, 2005, p9). For example there is a documented risk that ‘self-evaluations are written for the inspectorates only and no longer serve the goal of improving education’ (ibid) or that an imbalance causes ‘negative perceptions of evaluation systems and strategies, particularly among teachers’ (De Grauwe and Naidoo, 2004, p16).

However, the literature also suggests that a ‘successful and lasting marriage’ between self-evaluation and external inspection can have a positive impact on school improvement (MacBeath et al., 2000, p93). Chris Webb from the Scottish HMIE explained to the Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectorates of Education in 2005 that external-evaluation provides an ‘important input’ into self-evaluation, preventing self-evaluation from resulting in ‘self-delusion’ (p2). Similarly, the New Zealand ERO Review Committee (2000) reported that ‘external evaluation is unlikely to lead to improvement’ without the provision of support for change that self-evaluation provides (p10).

Figure 5: MACBEATH, J., with SCHRATZ, M., MEURET, D., and JAKOBSEN, L. (2000). Self-Evaluation in European School. RoutledgeFalmer: London.

6. Conclusions

All high performing education systems inspect their schools in order to improve their quality and effectiveness, yet there is limited evidence as to its long-term impact or success. The majority of high performing education systems use a combination of school self-evaluation and external inspection; however there can be tensions between these two systems.

There is a high level of commonality between inspection criteria, both across countries and inspection types, however the amount of guidance and support that schools receive in self-evaluation and external inspection appears to markedly affect the impact that inspections have on schools.

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