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Secondary School Evaluation Framework

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French Council for School Evaluation

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The following document is an update of the secondary school evaluation framework first introduced back in July 2020. It was the result of collaborative work involving researchers with recognised expertise on the matter, general inspectors, evaluation and statistics specialists, top ministry executives, and practitioners.

This new version was adopted by the Council for School Evaluation on June 8th, 2023.

This document is public.

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Introduction

The July 2019 School Act introduced [periodic school evaluation](#) in France, with the newly-created Council for School Evaluation in charge of

- designing the methodological framework and tools for the self-evaluation and external evaluation of schools,
- and analysing the findings.

It further stated the Council would

- rely on national and international scientific expertise in order to do so,
- ensure school evaluation happened regularly,
- and say to whom reports should be made available.

[School evaluation is carried out under the aegis of the heads \(recteurs\) of regional education authorities \(académies\)](#), who are responsible for the planning of evaluation and the sending of annual reports to the French Council for School Evaluation.

What follows is an [updated version of the evaluation framework](#) that was approved by the Council on June 8th, 2023. While it retains the principles of the original framework, it incorporates the lessons learned since 2020 thanks to the analysis of regional reports, stakeholders' feedback and many self- and external evaluation reports.

Evaluation applies to

- [State-owned and private secondary schools](#), under the authority of the education department,
- [Agricultural colleges and training institutions](#), under the authority of the agriculture department, in collaboration with the CSE.

Evaluation includes mainstream, technological and vocational courses, as well as all student profiles: secondary and higher education students, apprentices and trainees.

The framework also takes the characteristics of private schools into account, especially the fact that many are K-12 institutions combining primary and secondary schools.

The aim of evaluation and related issues

The aim of evaluation is primarily to **improve the quality of education provision in schools**, which includes teaching and learning, training and professional integration, and general education. It also aims at improving collective success as well as professional and personal well-being for all stakeholders, with a view to developing the sense of belonging.

To reach these objectives the point is to develop capacity building in schools, which implies:

- **Making the most of data** on student performance, well-being, progress and professional integration, taking into account the context of the school,
- **Analysing the effects** produced by school-made decisions, professional practices and organisation, in response to identified students' needs and set objectives,
- **Designing collectively a strategic plan** to foster student success and well-being.

The terms of reference include the purposes of school as defined by law as well as the primary objectives set to the public education service:

- Raise educational attainment, ensure the common core of knowledge, skills and culture is mastered, improve higher education and professional and social integration,
- Improve well-being at school and act against harassment,
- Develop school equity and social justice by tackling inequalities and discrimination,
- Encourage greater social and educational diversity in schools,
- Include and empower all stakeholders, especially students and parents,
- Build a school in line with the main issues of the 21st century.

Evaluation refers to **national educational policies, their regional application, and territorial policies**. It adapts to the objectives set by the school as part of its project or stated in the performance agreement. As for private schools, it also refers to the partnership with the State, which acknowledges their uniqueness and specific educational projects.

Supporting institutions with evaluation

Evaluation helps schools fulfil the mission entrusted to them by the State, *i.e.* provide efficient quality education and training, and develop collective responsibility and the sense of belonging.

It is based upon **self-evaluation and external evaluation and its outcome is a renewed school project**, which can be used for the next performance agreement. It helps structure the action of the school and promotes continuous development.

Since the law states that all schools must be evaluated regularly and that school projects' validity cannot exceed five years, the Council for School Evaluation decided that schools would be evaluated every five years, which implies the evaluation of about 20% of schools every year.

The aim of evaluation and its related issues in brief

- **Who?** All state-owned and private schools under the authority of the education department and the agriculture department.
- **What for?** Improving provision quality, *i.e.* teaching and learning, training and professional and social integration, and well-being at school for all stakeholders. Helping schools fulfil their public service mission thanks to capacity building.
- **How?** Self-evaluation and external evaluation leading to the design of the next school project.
- **School evaluation promotes continuous development over five-year cycles.**

Evaluation principles

The methodology of evaluation

Reference frame and context

The reference frame of evaluation includes all the educational public policies any given school must implement.

A school's decisions made as part of its autonomy are to be considered in connection with the school's context, *i.e.* everything it has to do with and upon which it cannot directly act. This is true of the allocated resources, for example.

Context identification is the first stage of evaluation. It comprises:

- external context, which is the school's demographic, economic, social and cultural environment,
- internal context, which is linked to the decisions made by the school's supervisory authorities, namely student and staff profiles, the school's history, its building and equipment, and the courses it provides.

Evaluation approach

Once the reference frame and context are taken into account the school can identify the needs of its students, upon which the rest of the evaluation process depends as it makes it possible for the school to set its objectives. The analysis of the results and impact of the resulting decisions made or considered is really what is at stake in evaluation as it enables the school to get into a continuous development process.

The features of evaluation

Participatory process

Evaluation implies the commitment of all members of the school community: state staff, local staff, privately-hired staff and volunteers in private schools, students, parents, and partners. Everyone's viewpoint is to be considered, whilst acknowledging each one's area of specific expertise and responsibility. It helps the school develop its capacity of observation and analysis of its operations, and of collective reflection during the self-evaluation and external evaluation phases.

Comprehensive process

The school is considered globally. The Council for School Evaluation has identified four areas of decisions and actions:

- Teaching and learning, student progress
- Life and well-being at school
- School operation, management and strategy
- Relations with authorities and partners

The analysis covers all four areas. It considers student needs and the objectives set accordingly, and it helps identify levers the school can use as part of its autonomy. All stakeholders take part as they can provide input in all areas.

Documentation: the evidence triangle

Self-evaluation and external evaluation are based on the same set of qualitative and quantitative data and analytical tools, so that the school community and the external evaluators can build their reflection on them.

Data and indicators. A set of robust data and indicators characterises the school profile. The set was designed by the CSE and the ministry's statistical department. It is provided to evaluated schools by regional statistical offices together with interpretation, cross-referencing and visualisation tools. It is to be shared among the school community to substantiate findings and analyses.

Viewpoints. The collection of stakeholders' viewpoints can be carried out in various ways: questionnaires, with examples provided by the CSE, interviews and homogeneous or composite focus groups. The various formats make it possible to hear everyone's views and cross perspectives.

Process observation and documentation. Process observation (e.g. 'class councils', student guidance, etc.) helps documenting school action, thus clarifying its motivation, expected results and coherence. Documentation is a way to encourage schools to formalise their action and elucidate potentially implicit elements. It includes various resources, such as the minutes of meetings, the presentation of projects, etc.

Data, viewpoints and process observation and documentation must be combined in order to provide perspective on school action. At any rate, self-evaluation cannot solely be based upon indicators or surveys, nor can questionnaires be the only way to involve stakeholders, especially students and parents.

Code of practice

School evaluation complies with a code of practice both for self-evaluation and external evaluation. It is based on full process transparency.

Self-evaluation. The collective nature of self-evaluation implies a capacity to listen to and respect others, and therefore to ensure the confidentiality of the information gathered and analysed, which is not supposed to be made available outside the evaluation process itself. Only those directly involved in the school can take part in self-evaluation. People in a supervisory position in the regional education authority or the local executive authority cannot

participate in self-evaluation, but they receive the ensuing report.

External evaluation. Evaluators must not have any personal or professional link with the evaluated school. They pledge to be impartial in their judgement. The list of members of the team is sent to the school, which has the right to reject a member if they feel he/she has a conflict of interest. Each external evaluator is to sign and comply with the code of practice charter. Evaluators do not pass personal judgements, they do not impose their own professional practices (*i.e.* as principals, inspectors or teachers – they are strictly evaluators) and they do not disclose any information or data about the evaluated school.

Team composition is supervised by the head of the regional education authority. It is designed to ensure neutrality, plurality (diversity of backgrounds), legitimacy and skills, thanks to experience and specific training. Each team is coordinated by a senior member specifically designated by the regional education authority.

As for private schools, evaluation teams include at least one representative of the sector, provided he/she has no link with the evaluated school. He/she is jointly chosen by the head of the regional education authority and the regional head of the sector, typically the regional religious school authority. Conversely all team members are trained about the specificities of private schools.

Evaluation principles in brief

- Evaluation includes **contextualisation** to help the school identify what is imposed from outside and what it can do.
- Evaluation identifies **student needs** so as to design a relevant **strategic plan**.
- Evaluation is **participatory**, it involves all stakeholders in order to share the same vision of the school and choose common objectives.
- Evaluation analyses the school **comprehensively**, based on four thematic areas, and tackles all the decisions and actions.
- Evaluation is **documented**, which enables the school to come up with an objective analysis of what it is and what it does.
- Evaluation is based upon a **code of practice** which ensures transparency and thoroughness and protects all those involved.

The organisation of evaluation

Steering by regional education authorities

The organisation of school evaluation is in the hands of the heads of regional education authorities, who determine which schools are to be evaluated each year and design the composition of evaluation teams. Heads also designate the regional referents for school evaluation whose job it is to monitor the actual implementation of evaluation.

As for private schools, the list of evaluated schools is drawn jointly by the heads of the regional education authority and the regional private school authority. Evaluation teams include a representative of the sector who is also designated jointly.

The list of evaluated institutions is shared with schools at the end of the school year preceding evaluation so they can include the process in their working plan for the year to come. The list is also shared with the Council for School Evaluation and the relevant regional executive authority.

In order to help schools with the evaluation process, regional education authorities provide them with their profiles, which include all the relevant data available.

A regional evaluation support team led by the evaluation referent is there to help schools and evaluation teams, ensure procedures are coherent and complied with, and proofread evaluation reports.

Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is logically organised by the school itself. A steering committee involving all stakeholders should be set up early to facilitate a collective approach to evaluation. The same applies to dedicated thematic working groups.

Self-evaluation is based on evaluation principles. It involves all stakeholders, and starts with contextualisation, the identification of student needs and the analysis of their performance and progress. It also examines decisions made, actions taken, and the school's organisation and strategy by measuring their impact. It ends with a strategic plan setting work priorities and leading to a shared action and training plan and the outlining of the school project.

Self-evaluation makes use of the evidence triangle (data, viewpoints and process observation / documentation) in order to come up with a robust analysis of past and future action.

Evaluation questions

The analysis of the results and impact of decisions made and action taken based on past- and

forward-looking questions is central to evaluation.

Past-looking questions. What can we say about the decision made and action taken in connection to set objectives?

- What did we want to do? Why? With what student needs in mind? What did we do? How was this done? How coherent were the actions taken?
- Do we consider what we have done as successful or less so? Why? What made success possible or what prevented it from happening? What are our school's strengths, weaknesses and constraints?
- What can we say about school operation?

Forward-looking questions. How do we develop perspectives?

- What potentials and levers do we identify within our school in order to reach our objectives? What obstacles and difficulties are on the way?
- Consequently, what appropriate course of action and priorities do we identify for our school? How can we ensure actions are indeed taken and objectives are met? How can we organise to ensure this is done?
- What resources are available inside and outside the school?
- What training or support is needed?

Self-evaluation report

The collective result is a 15-to-20-page report outlining the next school plan and presented to the school board.

As for private schools, the report is presented to the relevant board under the responsibility of the school principal.

The report is based on the following structure:

- Method chosen by the school for its self-evaluation
- Presentation of the school context
- Identification of student needs depending on context, student performance and progress
- Analysis of school reflection and action taken with the four evaluation areas in mind
- Synthetic overview focussing on strengths, weaknesses, success and room for improvement
- Strategic plan, combined with action plan (actions taken, projected timetable, and monitoring indicators) and training plan
- Overall appreciation of the self-evaluation process

Self-evaluation documents include the self-evaluation report, school profile, school project, performance agreement and appendices considered useful by the school. They are sent to external evaluators as well as regional education authorities and relevant local executive authorities at the end of the process.

External evaluation

External evaluation is based upon and expands self-evaluation thanks to the combination of approaches it implies, with external observers meeting local players.

External evaluation considers the school's specificity and autonomy. It identifies its strengths and weaknesses, draws on its resources to uncover the necessary leeway to ensure robust knowledge and skills for all students, progress coherent with their profile and aspirations, and

relevant, ambitious guidance and counselling. It helps the school design its strategic plan and opens perspectives the school may not have thought about otherwise.

External evaluators

The selection of external evaluators is based on their expertise and impartiality. They are specially trained and they adhere to a code of practice. They can be inspectors, principals or deputy principals, teachers, administrative executives, etc. Evaluating teams may also include people coming from outside the school system proper provided they have a good knowledge of it.

Evaluating teams are gender-inclusive, made up of three or four evaluators with various backgrounds, and are not hierarchically-structured. Having different viewpoints is key to efficiency and legitimacy.

External evaluation is a three-stage process: analysis, visit, and preliminary report presentation.

Analysis

The team coordinator contacts the evaluated school's principal, if possible before self-evaluation begins, so as to present the full evaluation process.

After self-evaluation is completed external evaluators are provided with the school's self-evaluation documents, the analysis of which enables them to:

- Identify the main features of the school's context and student needs,
- Analyse the relevance of decisions made and of existing and projected strategies,
- Pinpoint the school's strong points, needs and weaknesses,
- Prepare the questions to be asked during the visit.

The analysis stage helps determine what the visit will focus upon, whom evaluators should meet and what observations would be relevant. The team coordinator and the principal then agree on the specific content and planning of the visit.

School visit

The visit includes observations, interviews and meetings with all the school's players. Meeting with students, which is compulsory in higher secondary schools, is especially interesting and should be prepared carefully as evaluators should ensure they meet students with various backgrounds that are representative of the students attending the school.

Evaluators can observe the school itself and its operations: classrooms, specific areas (canteen, locker rooms, gymnasium, etc.), lessons, extracurricular activities, and more generally school life for students and staff alike.

Preliminary report presentation

Before they write the final report evaluators come back to the school and present the preliminary report to all the school's players, with board members attending. The meeting is organised with the principal, who co-chairs it with the evaluation team. Prior to the meeting the principal is sent the preliminary report within 30 days after the visit as well as the slideshow

to be used. Both documents sum up the evaluators' analysis and recommendations. Evaluators use what comes out of the debates in order to finalise the evaluation report.

Final evaluation report

The final report is about 15 pages long. It identifies and analyses:

- the school's specificities,
- its strengths and success,
- its weaknesses and areas of improvement,
- its strategic directions
- the action and training plan.

It also provides recommendations, new development paths, and a one-page summary.

The final evaluation report goes further than and enriches self-evaluation, hence adding value to the school's reflection and helping it with the design of its development plan.

Report content

- Summary,
- Self-evaluation and external evaluation methodology presentation,
- Main features of the school's context,
- Student needs, progress and results,
- Analysis of the school's decisions, leeway use, strengths and weaknesses, development areas, recommendations, action plan with provisional timetable, plus special attention given to good practices,
- Analysis of self-evaluation's strategic directions, proposals for other possible directions, identification of levers and internal resources the school could use,
- Recommended follow-up procedure, especially as to staff training.

Report release

Once it is proof-read by senior evaluators the report is sent to the school's principal and board. The school may provide evaluators with a written answer within two weeks. It is then annexed to the report.

The report is then final and sent to the school's supervising authorities (regional education authority and relevant local council), who are to support the school's development and training plan. The Council for School Evaluation is sent a copy, to be used for analysis.

After evaluation

Evaluation is pivotal to the school's development as it enables it to look ahead and enhance the coherence of its various projects and actions.

What comes after evaluation takes different forms:

- School development plan and its implementation,
- Performance agreement with its supervisory authorities and support plan,
- Yearly regional education authority report on school evaluation sent to the CSE.

School development plan and its implementation

Self-evaluation is a context-and-student-needs-based comprehensive and participatory analysis of the school's past, present and future action leading to a preliminary definition of a development plan. External evaluation takes the analysis further thanks to the complementary viewpoint and expertise it provides.

The final report supports the development of the school community thanks to the diagnosis, perspectives and strategic directions it contains. It helps the school design its plan based on the decisions it makes as part of its autonomy and internal steering processes.

School support plan

Autonomy and support. Because it focusses on the areas where a school can make decisions, evaluation contributes to developing the school's autonomy.

As initiated by self-evaluation, regularly-scheduled exchanges and consultative meetings in the school enable the pooling of good practices, project design, and progress updates and adjustments.

Support is primarily to be considered at local level, *i.e.* the school itself and its links with other schools around (primary, lower and upper secondary) and its supervisory authorities. Its aim is to show the importance of coherent action and awareness of everyone's contribution to public education service.

Training. A complement to strategic directions and action plan, training is designed in the school. Training needs are mentioned in both self-evaluation and evaluation reports, which are sent to the regional education authority. The latter adapts the regional training plan accordingly so as to meet the needs of the schools.

From development plan to performance agreement. Following evaluation and the design of the school development plan, the formalisation of a performance agreement with the school's supervisory authorities gives more strength to the objectives set. This is also a move from internal to external steering as the priorities given to the school logically include those of the regional education authority, which are added to the school's internally-selected priorities.

Yearly regional education authority report on school evaluation

At the end of every school year regional education authorities send the Council for School Evaluation

- a report on the school evaluations carried out during the year,
- a proposed list of schools to be evaluated the following year,
- operational feedback, which is used to improve the evaluation process

The authority also provides the CSE with all self-evaluation and evaluation reports.

Regional reports enable supervisory authorities, together with the reading of individual school evaluation reports and feedback analysis, to monitor changes in the evaluation maturity of schools and players and act accordingly, with training designed for the principals of schools to be evaluated and for external evaluators who need to update their knowledge and evaluating skills.

Regional reports may vary from year to year depending on emerging thematic focuses or themes the Council for School Evaluation wishes to explore. Indeed, regional reports

- feed the CSE's annual evaluation report, which is publicly released but contains no explicit reference to specific schools or regional education authorities,
- contribute to improving CSE resources for schools and evaluators and adjusting the content of national training, especially in connection with the French Institute of Advanced Education and Training Studies (*Institut des Hautes Études de l'Éducation et de la Formation*),
- enable the evaluation of the implementation of the school evaluation process and its impact on the school system.



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