



Supervision of Primary and Secondary Education: A Five-Country Comparison

Key Messages

- At the request of the Government of Poland which is reforming its educational system, the World Bank conducted a review of how five high-performing countries in the education sector provide supervision and support to their schools.
- England, Finland, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and the Republic of Korea approach supervision and support to schools and teachers in a variety of ways; there is no single right way and their decisions take into account the overall organization of their education systems.
- A common theme to school supervision in all five countries is that schools are required to perform self assessments. The criteria for supervision extend beyond issues of regulatory compliance into questions about the quality of school processes, context and outcomes for students. All systems include elements of both accountability and support.

Introduction

As countries work towards improving their educational outcomes, systems of supervision and support to schools are frequent areas of reform. In 2009, Poland's Ministry of Education (MoE) requested the World

Bank's assistance in exploring ways to improve teaching quality and educational outcomes through improved systems of supervision and support to schools. The World Bank therefore prepared a review¹ examining how five countries - England, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea - organize the supervision and support of schools and teachers at the primary and secondary levels.

School Supervision Systems in Five Countries

The five countries included in the review - England, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea - were selected according to the following criteria:

- Countries that have excellent educational outcomes, as evident in high rankings on international benchmark tests such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)*.
- Diversity in geographic location and approach to supervision.
- Countries where there is considerable to moderate geographic spread of schools under supervision.

Defining "supervision"

The review distinguishes between supervision, inspection, evaluation, and support; it defines supervision as: *"the regular/periodic oversight of individuals or entities, which uses the results of evaluation (and sometimes inspection) to inform and direct action of those supervised."* It is perfectly

¹ Hovde, Kate. "Supervision and Support of Primary and Secondary Education: A Policy Note for the Government of Poland." World Bank, May 19, 2010. The Knowledge Brief is based on this review.

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possible that a single individual or entity may provide several functions at the same time and also that the name of the entity (for example, Inspectorate) may not reflect other important aspects of its work and mission. Supervision, according to this definition, has some overlap with evaluation and inspection, and often also with support, at least in the form of advice.

Who supervises and who/what is supervised?

Students, Teachers and Principals: In all five countries, students are supervised by their teachers and the teachers are primarily supervised by the school principals/head teachers. In some systems and schools, teachers (particularly new teachers) may also be supervised by experienced teachers or mentors for a period of time. The use of induction programs and mentoring periods has gained prominence over the last decade as one avenue for improving teacher quality and retention. Of the five countries included in this review, three have instituted new teacher mentoring and induction guidelines or programs; in Finland, the existence of such programs varies according to the municipalities. In Korea, mentoring and induction periods are not required in public schools but private schools, which make up over 30 percent of the total number of schools in the country, often have them. The supervision and evaluation of school principals is usually the responsibility of different entities in different school systems and countries, often depending on the overall organization of the education systems (see Figure 1).

Schools: In four of the countries examined, schools, rather than teachers and principals, are the primary focus of external supervision. While the supervision of schools may include drawing conclusions regarding teaching quality, external supervision, for the most part, does not include detailed reviews of individual teacher quality/performance. A notable exception to this rule is Korea which has been

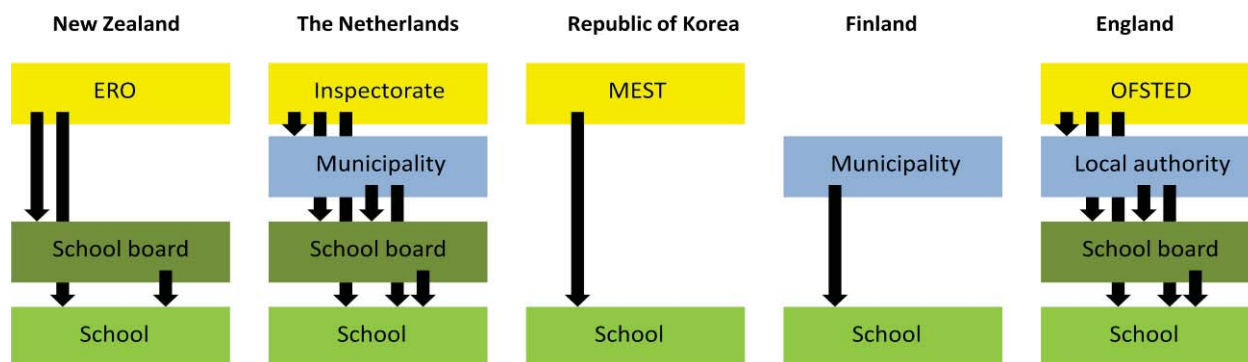
experimenting with a teacher evaluation system for the past few years. Institutions charged with the supervision of schools include the Education Review Office (ERO) and school boards in New Zealand; a national Inspectorate, municipalities and local school boards in the Netherlands; the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in Korea; municipalities in Finland, and; the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED), local authorities and local school boards in England.

What are the criteria and focus for supervision of schools?

Although the emphasis is slightly different depending on each country, supervision at the school level mostly includes consideration of three main aspects: student outcomes, school processes, and the context in which the schools are operating. While regulatory compliance issues are usually considered in the context of school management and financial stewardship, external supervision in most high-performing school systems goes well beyond compliance - considerable emphasis is placed on looking at student outcomes, the quality of teaching and school leadership, student needs, and the schools' abilities to diagnose and address their own strengths and weaknesses.

Guidelines as to what should be considered as part of both school self-assessment and external supervision are explicit and mandatory in England, New Zealand, and Korea. In the Netherlands, guidelines for school self-assessment are provided but are not mandatory. In Finland, there are no formal guidelines beyond the requirement that schools produce annual self-assessment reports and municipalities perform annual school evaluations.

Figure 1: Agencies Involved in Supervision of Schools



Source: A. Paglayan; additional interviews, Eurybase reports.

How does information flow in an effective supervision system?

For supervision systems to be effective, schools must receive useful, actionable feedback on their performance. In many education systems worldwide, schools are required to submit reams of information on which they receive virtually no feedback; this is not the case in high performing systems. A number of reform efforts in the five countries profiled have focused on improving school-level access to, organization, and use of data, particularly student assessment and outcome information. In both England and the Netherlands, external supervision reports also include the contextualization of student outcome results, so that schools can see how they are faring among their peers or other schools with similar characteristics. This information can only be produced at a system level but often provides useful feedback at the individual school level.

In most systems, some school level information, such as student report cards, is provided to parents. Where parents and the public have a more active role in school governance, information may flow both ways. In some systems - like those in the Netherlands, England and New Zealand - not only is information regarding parental and community relations a focus for external supervision, but parents and the public have full and easy access to the external assessments themselves; there is a culture of parents relying on such assessments in making choices about schooling options.

What are the stakes or consequences of supervision?

For teachers, poor performance during an induction program or period may lead to dismissal or delay in granting of permanent job status, although this is more common in higher accountability systems such as England's or New Zealand's. Once granted permanent status, dismissal of teachers is uncommon across all systems. With regard to consequences for schools, there is considerable variance among the countries examined. In all cases, external supervision produces actionable information about a school's strengths and weaknesses. In Finland, schools and municipalities then use this information to seek help as needed. The approach is similar in Korea, with the addition of some performance rewards. In contrast, there are sanctions attached to schools being identified as under-performing in England, the Netherlands and New Zealand, including, occasionally, school closure (see Figure 2).

What are the types and sources of support for teachers, principals and schools?

In all five systems, support for teachers may target instruction directly (for example, providing access to internal or external instructional coaches) or may focus on improving the learning environment (for example, providing additional physical and instructional resources, better coordination with social services for children's non-instructional needs, re-arrangement of school schedules to allow teachers more time to work together, and/or investment in formative assessment programs that enable teachers to better track individual student learning, etc.).

Figure 2: Consequences of Supervision



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The *types* of support for principals and schools tend to be similar across systems in all five countries, although the *sources* of support vary according to the overall educational management structures. Types of support include: a) additional financing; b) professional development for teachers and principals; c) better access to information, data and technology; d) supervision feedback; e) outside management advice or access to specialized services; f) services oriented to student non-academic needs; and g) policy guidelines and examples. Institutional connections between supervision and support are tightest in Finland and Korea where the supervising institutions also provide support, and more loose in New Zealand where schools rely primarily on the private sector for educational support services.

Conclusion

In all five countries examined, school supervision at the primary and secondary levels is mainly concerned with improving educational outcomes for students. The two primary levers used to improve student outcomes are accountability and support. While the experience of each of the countries studied is culturally and historically unique, no system is without some elements of both these levers. All five countries understand that insisting on accountability without offering support is unfair, while support without accountability can be unwise.

* The PISA (Programme for International Assessment) test is a standardized international test coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is an international assessment of the mathematics and science knowledge of fourth and eighth-grade students around the world. It was developed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) to allow participating nations to compare students' educational achievement across borders.

These countries have also all had to face questions about where to locate supervision and support institutionally, whether to keep these functions institutionally distinct or not, how to balance accountability and support (particularly given the need for accurate information), how to provide adequate financial resources and skilled human resources to schools, and how to ensure the legitimacy of the systems. Individual countries have made different choices in this regard but all have considered and answered these questions.

In the meantime, Poland has continued to explore some of these questions and experiment with reforms. The MoE has issued a requirement that schools perform self-assessments and begun to train a cadre of Inspectorate staff on performing assessments that go beyond the traditional regulatory focus. The MoE has also approached the World Bank regarding the possibility of using European Funds to contract the Bank's continued technical assistance in this area.

About the Authors

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