

THE FRENCH INSPECTION FROM THE CLASS TO THE EDUCATIVE SYSTEM

LA INSPECCIÓN FRANCESA DE LA CLASE AL SISTEMA EDUCATIVO

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Abstract

The French inspectorate is different from most other European inspectorate as inspectors take part in the individual evaluation of teachers. They visit schools, assess them as a whole but they also manage disciplinary teams, advise each teacher individually speaking on their practices and involvement and provide for their training and recognition. Inspectors are an essential hub for schools.

Keywords: inspectors, evaluation, teachers, schools, career, success.

Resumen

A diferencia de la mayoría de las inspecciones europeas, la inspección francesa participa en la evaluación individual de los profesores. Visitan los centros escolares, los evalúan en su conjunto, pero también dirigen los equipos disciplinarios, asesoran individualmente a cada profesor hablando de sus prácticas y de su implicación y se ocupan de su formación y reconocimiento. Los inspectores son un eje esencial para los centros escolares.

Palabras clave: *inspectores, evaluación, profesores, escuelas, carrera, éxito.*

Introduction

The nature of the missions of the French Ministry of National Education and Youth gives an eminent place to pedagogical action and educational issues. The July 8, 2013, Framework Act on the Refoundation of the school of the Republic lays out that "[...] the right to education is guaranteed to everyone in order to enable them to develop their personality, to raise their level of initial and continuing education, to fit into social and professional life, to exercise their citizenship". The July 26, 2019, Law for a School of Trust gives the school as a main goal to guarantee all students the acquisition of basic knowledge. It also ensures the acquisition of a general culture and a recognized qualification, regardless of their social, cultural, or geographical origins.

In order to serve this ambition, the coherent and effective deployment as well as the promotion of leadership of Education inspectors serving the priorities of the educational system are major challenges for the management of the latter. The articulation of their actions with those carried out by all the supervision staff is a necessity. To this end, their missions are specified, regarding the evolutions of the educational system and within their scope and priorities.

The identity of education inspectors in France

Being for the most of them former teachers, the French inspectors have a didactic and pedagogical expertise on all of initial and continuous training methods. They carry out numerous missions: expertise and advice, evaluation, inspection, control, animation, and training. They are essential actors of the educational management. So as to ensure the success of all students, their main lines of collective actions are establishing confidence, explaining the meaning of the reforms, ensuring their implementation at the heart of the class, as well as supporting and evaluating teachers and teaching units. They also contribute to this end to the missions of control within the framework of homeschooling and to private schools that have no contract with the French state.

Placed under the Rector's authority, each inspector receives a three-year engagement letter. It defines the objectives for the inspector and plans their activities and responsibilities. The inspector is free to organize his/her agenda.

Within the framework of this consolidated management, the Rector prioritizes and organizes the action of the inspectors to guarantee the balance and effectiveness of the actions of the body of inspectors. Maintaining a high standard of expertise also requires specific care on the professional development, training, and background of each inspector, which should also be included in the letter.

As civil servants, the French Education inspectors exercise their functions within the framework of the regional educational work program, in full responsibility, alone or with others. Individual and collective support on the one hand, and pedagogical management on the other, are at the heart of their missions. A specific focus is the human dimensions of the support and the skills of the managers for the professional development of the teachers and teams.

The heart of the French Education Inspectors is Pedagogy

The main mission of our French inspectorate consists into providing didactic, pedagogical, and educational expertise in the service of all students' success. Indeed, the efficiency of teaching is measurable within the classroom and the school.

The national education inspectors in charge of a Primary school district ensure the steering of their district, based on all the indicators that are at their disposal, on regional orientations and their departmental adaptations. They are the local interlocutors for the teacher teams, school directors, users, and elected officials.

Information and guidance inspectors are responsible for implementing the regional orientation policy in the departments. They advise their hierarchy on the subject and lead the network of information and guidance centers.

Secondary school inspectors are experts of a specific subject or specialty. They ensure its management. They support the implementation of teaching programs and professional diploma reference systems. They can be in charge of the evaluation of a disciplinary or interdisciplinary teaching, to assess the local impact of a specific educational initiative or an educational policy or monitor its implementation.

Inspection within the classroom

If we had to define what individual inspection is, we could say it is a "Judgment on the activity of an agent or of an organization, in light of its results, offering explanations of the level of achievement of these results in order to allow improvement to the agent or the organization."

In 2017, individual inspection became a "career meeting" alongside a skill assessment.

The goal is above all to profoundly transform the meaning of this event, from summative ("this is what you are worth") to formative ("this is what you can rely on and what you can do to improve"), towards the concept of professional support.

There are two complementary approaches:

- Career meetings, which are privileged moments to take a look at a given professional period and outline professional development prospects.
- Support for teams of teachers throughout their professional career.

A career meeting is an opportunity for the teacher

This way of evaluating the civil servants is called PPCR (experience, careers, and wage). It aims to **a better recognition** of their commitment by upgrading their index salary grids and improving their career prospects.

Every seven years, the teacher has a career meeting which consists into three stages:

- A class visit (the inspector and sometimes the principal).
- An interview with the inspector.
- An interview with the principal.

As part of this protocol, the inspectors carry out "career meetings" and provide individual and collective support to teacher teams and, following their expertise, to educational teams, to school psychologists or directors delegated to vocational and technological training as well as to personnel in charge of adult continuing education.

These career meetings are dealt in public and private schools under contract, on the basis of the reference framework for professional skills¹.

They ensure **the quality of the education provided** with regard to the students' learning and achievements and they appreciate the professional value of the staff they observe exercising their job, according to their specialties.

Combined with the national evaluations of students and their exam results, with the evaluation of lessons and teaching units, the inspection is based on observation and interview, and provided with these objective contextual elements, it aims particularly to assess the way in which **the improvement of student learning** is thought out and implemented by the professional. It makes it possible **to evaluate and value** the skills observed, to propose **appropriate responses in training, development and professional development**.

The career meeting is an opportunity for the teacher to carry out **a reflective and contextualized analysis** of his activities and his practice by identifying the most characteristic changes in his career between two assessments. The assessment resulting from the career meeting influences the course of the professional career by **the opportunity of accelerating the change of salary level** (gain of one year on the duration of the level).

For the school principal, who assesses the teacher alongside the inspector, it is a matter of recognizing and valuing the commitment and mobilization of staff.

Account is also taken of the possible involvement in various responsibilities at the regional level promoting professional development (academic trainer or National Higher Institute for Teaching and Education, inspection officer for example).

Interviews are privileged moments to advise, guide and develop individual reflection on pedagogical and educational practices in order to make them evolve positively. These interviews are real managerial levers. They can be part of a logic of management and support for change and contribute effectively, in a second step, to collective reflection.

The principle of a career meeting

In June the authority sends the school principals the list of teachers concerned by the career appointment for the coming year.

October-May: this is the inspection period. Teachers are notified 15 days before the inspection. They can prepare the interview thanks to a reference document, in three parts:

- The professional career: positions held before joining the corps, since joining the corps and the specific functions and missions performed.
- Appreciation by the teacher of the skills implemented in the context of his professional career:
 - The teacher in the class: skills related to the mastery of teaching, scientific, didactic, pedagogical, and educational skills. In about twenty lines, the teacher describes the achievements and approaches that seem decisive in characterizing the pedagogy and their contribution to the progress of all students.
 - The teacher is part of a collective dimension: In about ten lines, the teacher relies on a few concrete and contextualized examples to analyze the participation in student monitoring, in the life of the school and the involvement in relations with partners and the environment.
 - The teacher and the commitment to an individual and collective approach to professional development: In about ten lines, the teacher describes the steps taken to develop this skill as explained in the reference system and formulates, if necessary, the support needs.
- Wishes for professional development.

The inspection takes place according to the following method: a period of observation in situation (in class the inspector can observe the students' job and speak with them. The principal may also attend to the lesson) followed by an individual interview. Then within a maximum period of 6 weeks, a new interview takes place with the Principal.

After the inspection, the inspector, and the principal both write a report online, specifying a level of expertise for a certain number of professional skills (11 for teachers, 12 for CPEs, etc.).

The teacher has fifteen days to make any comments in the framework for this purpose. This report is sent at the beginning of the next school year. Within two weeks, the Rector validates the final assessment. The teacher has then thirty more days to request a possible review of the assessment.

Evaluation contributes to improving **the quality and performance of the education system**. In this regard, within the framework of career meetings, the development of shared steering allows the cross-fertilization of views between the inspection bodies and the management staff.

As part of the support component of the PPCR, the presence in the class, in the school, makes it possible to **ensure the quality of the teaching** provided at any time in the teacher's career, to **encourage and promote teamwork** and **respond to individual or collective needs** for advice, support, training. The challenge is to develop the individual potential of actors in the school and to build up collective skills in order to ensure the consistency and effectiveness of educational action.

Individual support between inspections

Linked to these career meetings and between them, individual support can meet the needs expressed by the staff or identified during an interview or an inspection.

Indeed, while **career development is a legitimate concern**, teaching and education staff also expect **continuous support in their professional development**.

This approach, which should benefit all teachers, has a formative dimension. The objectives are to:

- Consolidate and develop professional skills:
 - consolidate the skills listed in the personnel reference system, particularly at the start of career, during the first and second years after tenure;

- offer training in the fields of general pedagogy, didactics or management of class;
- deepen disciplinary knowledge.
- Remedy the difficulties encountered by some:
 - by providing support to staff reporting difficulties;
 - by offering assistance following an observation made by competent supervisory staff at their regard.
- Promote professional mobility:
 - support staff wishing to broaden their scope of responsibilities within the school, the establishment, at the level of the district, the department or the academy;
 - identify, help and advise staff wishing to progress to other functions and in particular supervisory functions.

Individual support is the subject, as necessary, of a formal restitution to the teacher.

Collective support in schools

As part of their missions and their contribution to educational management in the territories, the inspectors can each be a referent of one or more schools, one or more networks of priority education, school networks or education areas.

Present in schools, the inspectors lead educational activities, reinforce, if appropriate, the dynamics of pedagogical continuity and ensure the compliance of lessons.

Collective support can concern the teaching team of a school, a disciplinary or multidisciplinary team of a secondary school, a multi-professional team, a training pool, or even an inter-degree team of teachers. It can respond to a request from the team concerned or result from a proposition from the principal, the pedagogical council—in each school—or the inspector. It may relate to the design

and implementation of pedagogical projects or systems, on the evolution of pedagogical practices and on the explanation of national and academic orientations in the field of education.

This support may also consist of assistance in setting up programs and assessment of student achievement. It can also meet any other need expressed locally. Building trust, explaining the meaning of the reforms, contributing to their implementation as closely as possible to the staff and the students, are the main lines of the collective action of the management staff whose goal is the success of all students.

School principals and inspectors are therefore both the pillars of what is the management staff. In order to guarantee the coherence and effectiveness of this action, it has to be part of the regional educational strategy.

Collective actions between inspectors and school principals or directors

To ensure the continuity of teaching and the coherence of learning courses, inspectors also act together, regardless of their specialties, often in coordination with the management staff or school principals. They contribute to improve the care and success of students by piloting and encouraging the use of national assessments. They all lead the teams of pedagogical trainers. They rely on these networks to carry out their support and training mission.

The management of human resources is at the heart of public education policies, it is a clearly reaffirmed priority. Inspectors contribute directly to the professional development of the staff by designing and implementing the initial and continuous training plans. They also participate on a national scale in the recruitment and training of the teachers. They contribute to this through their participation in juries, and through the tenure of trainees.

Moreover, they recruit contract teachers whom they train, encourage and support in their entry.

Inspectors are part of the external evaluators of schools

School evaluation aims at the local improvement of the public and private service under school education contract. It focuses on the quality of student learning, their training and professional integration paths, educational success and life in the school. It aims to improve for all actors the conditions for collective success, the exercise of the various professions and well-being in the establishment. Based on cooperation between actors, the evaluation of teaching units opens up in France a new space for pedagogical and educational management, project design, in collaboration with school principals and management staff.

Linked to these school evaluations, for the establishments for which they are referents or the schools in their district, inspectors provide their support in the development and monitoring of school and establishment projects and performance contracts between the academic authority and the establishment. In the context of calls for projects or expressions of interest, they provide advice and expertise in the development of projects or are solicited in the evaluation commissions.

An education based on Republican values

In addition to the transmission of knowledge, the Nation sets to the schools the primary mission to share with pupils and students the values and principles of the Republic. The public service of education ensures that all pupils acquire the respect for the equal dignity of human beings, freedom of conscience and secularism. It guarantees the inclusion of all pupils, with the consideration of their special educational needs. In the performance of their duties, inspectors embody these values and principles and ensure that they are respected and transmitted.

Conclusion

As the different parts make a whole, the French inspectors get a holistic view on education, thanks to the step back that an external assessor can take to understand the contexts and the various situations. They can identify the educational system in all its components as well as the interactions with its environment, and therefore get a systemic view on education.

As William Huitt said in *A holistic view of education and schooling: Guiding students to develop capacities, acquire virtues, and provide service*:

"A new vision for educating children and youth, both formally and informally, is required if they are to become successful adults in the twenty-first century. Exactly what that means needs to be considered and plans need to be made and implemented. This requires the ability to think beyond the actual to the possible through the use of imagination. The use of imagination is the first step towards developing creative solutions to seemingly intractable challenges. It is then necessary to develop innovative products and services that can be used to meet those challenges."

As education inspectors, we all should think about the role we want to play in the education of these successful adults in the twenty-first century. Therefore, all inspectors will also have to innovate, to think of new creative solutions to be the inspectors of the 21 century. For this, we shall have to leave our comfort zone and find our own "magic zone".

Addenda

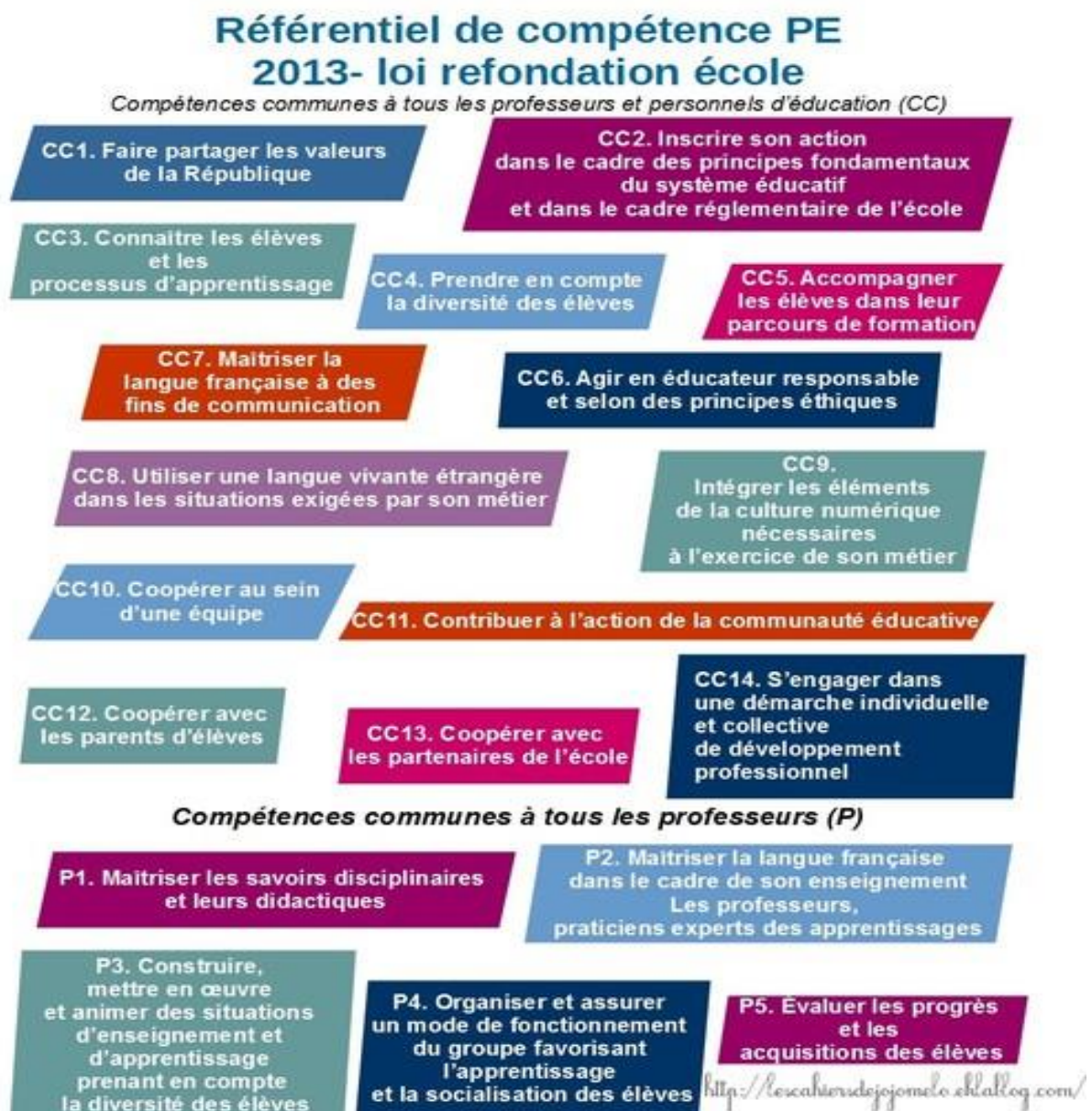
1. The teachers' common reference framework

The teachers' common reference framework defines:

- skills common to all teachers and education staff (skills 1 to 14,

- skills common to all teachers (skills P1 to P5) and specific to librarian teachers (skills D1 to D4),
- specific professional skills for principal educational advisers (skills C1 to C8).

As agents of the public education service, they transmit and enforce the values of the Republic. They act within an institutional framework and refer to ethical principles and responsibility that establish their exemplarity and their authority.



2. The PPCR reference document for the teacher

3. The inspector's and principal's evaluation grid