

# UNA PROPUESTA PARA LA IMPLEMENTACIÓN DE LA ESPECIALIZACIÓN EN LA INSPECCIÓN EDUCATIVA

## A PROPOSAL FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPECIALIZATION IN EDUCATIONAL INSPECTION

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### **Resumen**

El objetivo del presente artículo es mostrar una propuesta para la implementación y desarrollo de la especialización en la organización y funcionamiento de la Inspección Educativa. Si bien diferentes autores han expuesto la importancia que debe tener la especialización en el desempeño profesional del personal de inspección, no ha llegado a formularse, hasta el momento, ningún planteamiento específico de cómo debe desplegarse en un complejo entramado de funciones y actuaciones inspectoras. Este trabajo pretende, finalmente, poder servir de argumento para una necesaria modernización y transformación de la Inspección Educativa, promoviendo

principios organizativos más horizontales y en donde los equipos de trabajo adquieran más protagonismo y redunde en una mayor funcionalidad y operatividad en las actuaciones e intervenciones del personal de inspección.

**Palabras clave:** *inspección educativa, investigación sobre la profesión, competencias profesionales, formación, equipos de trabajo, organización y funcionamiento de la inspección.*

## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present a proposal for the implementation and development of specialization in the organization and functioning of the Educational Inspection. Although different authors have explained the importance that specialization should have in the professional performance of inspection personnel, no specific approach has been formulated so far on how it should be deployed in a complex network of inspection functions and actions. Finally, this work intends to serve as an argument for a necessary modernization and transformation of the Educational Inspection, promoting more horizontal organizational principles and where the work teams acquire more prominence and result in greater functionality and operability in the actions and interventions of the inspection personnel.

**Keywords:** *accountability educational, research on the profession, professional skills, training, work teams, organization and operation of the inspection.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, education inspectors are faced with an unmanageable number of requests from different members of the educational community (management, teachers, families, etc.), but also from different areas of the school environment itself (complementary services, the judiciary, coexistence conflicts, etc.). In addition, the wide dispersion of tasks, actions and interventions inevitably leads to a certain speed in advice and a presumably incomplete and superficial resolution

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of problems. All of this can weaken decision-making, since the meaning and purpose of the issue to be resolved can be so disparate that the resolution itself requires an exhaustive and specific study and analysis of the case for which, in many cases, one does not have the appropriate professional training and competence. This, to some extent, could be alleviated by restricting the field of action (which is diverse and extensive) to a certain area in which the inspection staff has an intense and solvent training and has a variety of intervention resources to provide effective and precise responses to a given problem: this is specialisation.

On the other hand, in order to contextualise our proposal, it is necessary to look at other countries close to ours with the intention of finding out how specialisation in education inspectorates is developed. In this sense, it is interesting to go back to recommendation no. 42 of the United Nations International Conference on Public Education addressed to the Ministers of Education concerning school inspection, which was held in Geneva in 1956. Years and changes in education laws have passed, but it is always worth noting the importance of inspection in the educational context in all periods. Thus, considering the complex, difficult and ever-changing role of teachers, it requires inspectors who possess special knowledge and skills of a specialised nature. Along these lines, recommendation no. 11 states the following:

Given the importance of the relationships between primary, secondary and vocational education, it is desirable for the Inspectors of these three categories to meet together from time to time to discuss common problems.

Regarding this, the recommendation of experts at a global level is clear. Following the researcher Galicia Mangas (2019), in his work "The Education Inspectorate in the European Union", he shows some characteristics of the Education Inspectorate systems of the most important countries in our environment.

A. France. Among the centralised models, France stands out, of course, with a structured EI organised in two categories called General Inspectorates and Territorial Inspectorates:

General Inspectorates

- IGEN, *Inspection Generale de l'Education Nationale*.
- IGAENR, *Inspection Generale de l'Administration de l'Education Nationale et de la Recherche*.

Territorial Inspections

- IA-IPR, *Inspection d'Academie- Inspection pedagogique regional*.
- IEN, *Inspection de l'Education Nationale*.

While General Inspectorates are more administrative and focused on the education system as a whole, on educational policies, internal organisation and personnel policies, the inspection of schools is carried out by territorial inspectorates. And focusing on the latter, leaving aside the more specialised Academy Inspectorate - Regional Pedagogical Inspectorate, Inspector Jardon (2022) (p.2) specifies the division existing in the real inspectorate focusing on the supervision of schools:

- National Education Inspectors in charge of a primary school district (IEN-CCPD).
- National Education Inspectors, IENs, for secondary schools:
  - IEN in charge of Information and Guidance (IEN-IO)
  - IEN in charge of vocational education for academic subjects (IEN-EG)
  - IEN in charge of vocational training for technical subjects (IEN-ET)

B. Germany. The organisation of EI in Germany corresponds to a decentralised model with almost total competences in the Länder, but within each of them the organisation has a centralised structure.

In this structure, EI is organised in two specialised branches:

- Inspectorate in charge of the supervision of Primary and Special Education schools.

- Inspectorate corresponding to the rest of the schools and education.

C. England. The English model of inspectorate is the one that enjoys the greatest independence with respect to the education authorities; OFSTED (Office for standards in education) is not attached to the corresponding Ministry of Education and is sufficiently independent to plan and carry out its work. It is accountable only to the parliamentary education committee of the House of Commons.

As for the organisation of the Inspectorate, it is grouped in the HMCI (her majesty's chief inspectors), divided into 3 categories:

- Registered Inspectors. Function: To lead inspection teams at the sites.

- Team Members. Function: To carry out the inspection of the centres.

- Lay Inspectors. Function: At the disposal of the Inspectors of the Professional Teams. They stand out for their specialisation in a subject of the curriculum.

D. Spain. Our country is situated in a model of decentralization that lies between centralized models (such as France) and the federal model (like Germany), with the characteristics we have seen, decentralization for the member states but centralization within each of them.

This isn't a new model; rather, it adopts features from both, as on one hand, the Central State retains certain educational competencies, but on the other hand, the Autonomous Communities also enjoy broad competencies in education (leaving provinces and municipalities without them).

Focusing on our country, we encounter specialists at all levels and fields, from Early Childhood Education to Primary Education (specialists in English, Physical Education, and Music), moving through Secondary Education (ESO, Baccalaureate, and Vocational Training), to language teaching or music and dance instruction.

Paradoxically, within the Education System, only the Education Inspection remains to incorporate this specialization, conflicting with the educational centers themselves where specialization by subject areas or disciplines prevails.

The situation described above leads us to reflect on the situation of education inspectorates, where a generalist context persists which, in the words of Tébar Cuesta (2015), is "a clean slate where specialisation is abruptly interrupted" (p.8). If we refer to the Corps of Education Inspectors, would it be reasonable to think that it can be generalist when all those at a lower level are specialists? Moreover, would an education inspector whose professional background is, for example, Early Childhood Education have credibility when carrying out supervisory functions in a highly specialised department of a Secondary School such as Physics and Chemistry? Or vice versa? A professor of Spanish Language and Literature supervising a Special Education School? These are examples which highlight the existence of a powerful contradiction which entails a rethinking of the current concept of generalist which prevails in the Education Inspectorate.

The situations described above can lead to inspection staff being subjected to the application of highly protocolised actions, having great difficulty in supervising certain schools unless they have strictly prepared everything they have to see, ask questions and take notes. There may also be situations in which they will have to consult technical staff belonging to teaching bodies who are in positions of responsibility in any department of the corresponding education ministry, on matters of which they are unfamiliar, or spend excessive time studying or analysing a new issue or one that is far removed from their professional profile. Undoubtedly, we consider that this generality could lead to a decrease in the quality of the actions of education inspectors and a clear step backwards in the meritorious conception that has characterised the Body of Education Inspectors for decades.

Having said this, there are no good reasons to convert a superior body of the Administration with inspectors with many years of experience, with ample solvency, highly qualified from the training point of view and with a demanding

selective access procedure, into a generalist body, without specialisation in the 21st century.

The Education Inspectorate must continue to contribute to its prestige and consideration, and to this end it must not be invaded and invalidated by other sectors, precisely because these are specialised in specific areas. The vision proposed here refers to the need for specialisation of the Education Inspectorate in order to add value to its actions.

For this approach to be effective, it would be appropriate to change the current model of organisation and operation of inspection services and to design a different organisational model such as the one proposed in this article. This proposal in its rationale is proportional and non-discriminatory, and at the same time implemented with transparent criteria and objectives in accordance with emerging international trends.

For all these reasons, we set out below some preliminary observations with regard to our proposal.

## **2. SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS**

Different works have mentioned the need for specialisation in Education Inspectorate (Barea Romero, 2014; Castán Esteban, 2014; Gómez-Elegido Ruizolalla, 2002, González Vila, 1999; Polo Martínez, 2018; Rodríguez Bravo, 2019; Rodríguez Bravo (coord) 2021; Rul Gargallo, 2006; Tébar Cuesta, 2020, 2018, 2017, 2015). These authors, although they have made important contributions to the necessary specialisation of the Education Inspectorate, have not addressed a proposal on how an inspection service should be organised so that specialisation can be a real protagonist and contribute to a real transformation of this institution. Rodríguez Bravo (2019) states in this regard that if what is expected of an inspector is rigorous, efficient and quality actions, they must inevitably start with specialisation in certain fields or areas (p. 4). Along the same lines, Tébar Cuesta (2015) states that:

If there are different teaching bodies, it is because they are specialised and deal with sectors of teaching that are off-limits to other teaching

professionals. Thus, within the teaching profession, there are various specialities in addition to the generalists; and in the case of secondary school teachers, this is even more clearly the case for the different teaching departments (p. 11)

Recently, Gómez Agüero (2022), in an interview published in the journal *Avances en Supervisión Educativa*, stated that:

I am in favour of specialisation. In a world where specialisation prevails, we insist on going against the current. To be versatile is not to be multifaceted. You can't know everything, and you can't supervise everything... fine. A single body, but with different specialisations that could be acquired through previous teaching, subsequent training or professional practice (p. 7)

With regard to the reference to specialisation in the different regional regulations governing the organisation and operation of the Education Inspection Services in the different Autonomous Communities, Rodríguez Bravo (2019) analyses them and draws the following conclusions: 1. All the regulations governing the organisation and operation include in their different articles the specialisation in the structure, principles, training and functions of educational inspection.

2. Only the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and the Autonomous Community of Valencia include specialisation in the exercise of inspection functions, while the rest of the Autonomous Communities make no mention of it or limit it to the principles of organisation and action.

3. The Autonomous Community of Murcia and the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country specify specialisation both in the area teams and in the working commissions, thus contributing to greater specificity in the intervention of the inspectorate staff.

4. The Autonomous Communities of the Canary Islands, Castile-La Mancha, Extremadura and the Basque Country are the only ones that include as a function



of the General and Central Inspectorate the promotion and planning of the specialisation of education inspectors.

5. No autonomous community specifies what is meant by specialisation and what it consists of in its structure, principles and organisation, limiting itself to considering it as just another aspect (a serious mistake) of the organisation and functioning of educational inspection services. Therefore, the aim is to advance the concept of specialisation by showing a real proposal for its implementation.

We are aware of the importance of this specification in our professional performance, as endorsed by various studies, but it is necessary to set out some general guidelines as to how this specialisation should be implemented in the organisation and operation of an inspectorate.

### **3. OUR PROPOSAL**

#### 3.1. GENERAL ASPECTS

The main organisation will be through the work teams, which will bring together a set of educational centres of different types, circumscribed and dependent on that team. There will be a distribution by zones with a reference inspector per centre, who will channel the request for advice and who will pass it on to the team coordinator for referral to the corresponding field or area of specialisation. In other words, the reference inspector collects the issue raised and then refers it to the team coordinator so that it can be analysed by the specialist inspector. Once a precise answer is available, it will be referred to the area inspector so that he/she can forward it to the person who made the query.

#### 3.2. IN RELATION TO THE EDUCATIONAL INSPECTORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM

They will have similar functions to those currently established in their organisational and operational rules, promoting a planning and distribution of monthly actions in the work teams. Similarly, a more horizontal organisation of work and autonomy in the execution of work plans by the teams will be

encouraged. In the event of discrepancies within the work teams, they will intervene to mediate or collaborate in the resolution of the specific case. Similarly, they will be responsible for drawing up the annual work plan and supervising its development and evaluation through the team coordinators.

### 3.3. IN RELATION TO THE ORGANISATION OF WORK TEAMS

3.3.1. Each work team shall allocate functions among its members according to professional experience, specific training and competence profile. This distribution shall be carried out by the person in charge of coordination agreed with the rest of the members. In the event of discrepancies, an inspector belonging to the management team of the inspection service shall intervene.

3.3.2. Each team may have several inspectors for different areas. In the event that a working team does not have inspection staff for a given area, a "transversal" collaboration shall be agreed with other coordinators".

3.3.3. The inspection staff of each working team will have assigned centres to collect the doubt, advice or requirement requested, but its resolution will be subject to the inspector of the team who is specialised in the sense, nature and content of the request. In this line, requests coming from a member of the educational community or from any other source will be dealt with and analysed by the specialised inspection staff of the team, who will subsequently issue a response which will be communicated both by the inspector of the area and the inspector of the zone. In this process, the team coordinator will be aware of the request and will collaborate in its resolution, if necessary. Similarly, the inspectors will also act in accordance with the tasks included in their monthly work plans according to their area of specialisation. Finally, actions involving several inspectors from different areas of specialisation may be carried out depending on the request or the specificity of the intervention. The area inspector, in addition to being the point of reference for the school, will also form part of a specialised area or field.

3.3.4. The working teams may request the support of inspectors from other working teams depending on the number of tasks assigned, the complexity of the action or as considered by the team coordination.

3.3.5. If a working team cannot have one inspector per area of specialisation, it may reorganise internally so that no area is left without assignment or request the collaboration of other working teams. In the same way, a member of the working team may be supported by other members with a lesser workload for reasons derived either from the actions contemplated in the work plan or in relation to the demands requested by the centres.

3.3.6. The inspection staff of a work team, in accordance with the actions related to their area of specialisation, may visit any centre assigned to it, after notifying the coordinator and accompanied by the area inspector.

3.3.7. On a weekly basis, there will be a team meeting to plan the actions foreseen in the work plan and to agree, if appropriate, on the distribution of tasks and demands requested or pending. Likewise, even if the requested response falls to the inspection staff of a specific area, the specific case may be discussed within the team if the inspector considers it appropriate or if the coordinator deems it convenient.

3.3.8. In those education inspectorates which do not have sufficient staff to organise themselves by specialised areas within a working team, this may be replaced by the figure of the referring inspector. This person will have one or more specialised areas and his/her tasks will be reduced according to what is established by the co-ordinating person, after consultation with the Education Inspectorate management team.

#### 3.4. IN RELATION TO THE COORDINATION OF WORK TEAMS

3.4.1. Each work team will have a coordinator whose main functions are to:

- a. Assign the inspectors who make up each work team to each area of specialisation.
- b. To distribute the tasks of the inspection staff assigned to the team according to the monthly work plan or other tasks that may arise, preferably those related to the request for reports from the different management bodies.
- c.

Coordinate and supervise the execution of the monthly work plan, as well as requests or demands for action and advice from school management teams, members of the educational community or from other departments or bodies. d. Support the inspectors and the educational community in the implementation of the monthly work plan. Supporting the inspectors who make up the team in the event of excessive workload, complexity of the action or other situations in which their intervention is considered appropriate.

e. Establish regular meetings with the rest of the team coordinators to establish joint actions, cross-cutting interventions or any others that may be considered.

f. Inform the higher bodies of the execution of the team's work plan or of other issues considered relevant for the proper functioning of the team.

### 3.5. IN RELATION TO FIELDS OR AREAS OF EXPERTISE

a. Absenteeism: this is related to those actions related to student and teacher absenteeism, as well as other interventions that require advice to the different management bodies of the educational administration.

b. Pedagogical - didactic: this refers to everything related to the elaboration and development of teaching programmes, supervision of teaching practice and analysis of academic performance.

c. Disciplinary: this refers to matters related to proposals for the initiation and processing of disciplinary proceedings in the teaching staff, as well as other actions and requirements in the disciplinary field.

d. Coexistence: matters related to mediation and conflict resolution in the educational community, intervention in protocols in the event of bullying, advice and control in the disciplinary field in the student body.

e. Non-compulsory" education (Vocational Training, Special Regime Education, Conservatories, Schools of the Arts, Private and Private Subsidised Centres): all matters relating to advice on this education and other actions included in the monthly work plans or entrusted by higher bodies.

f. Attention to diversity: this refers to actions related to the approval of psycho-pedagogical reports, requests for extraordinary resources, discrepancies in the

type of schooling with families, schooling reports and other actions associated with advice and control in this area.

g. Evaluation: this relates to the selection process and the evaluation of headmasters and headmistresses and the evaluation of trainee staff.

h. Web procedures and tasks: this is related to periodic procedures (admission, PGA, final report,) web visas, visas for degree proposals and other tasks by order of a superior.

i. Attention to families and pupils: it is related to the procedure for complaints about pupils' grades, discrepancies between families or associations (AMPA, pupils' associations, etc.) and the school.

It is necessary to state that inspection staff in these areas may request relocation for reasons linked to a different training path than the one in which they were initially appointed.

### 3.6. IN RELATION TO EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS

3.6.1. The management of the centres, other positions or other personnel assigned to the centre will have their area inspector as a reference. Depending on the request for advice, consultation or other consideration, the area inspector should refer the request to the team coordinator, who will refer it to the corresponding area of specialisation.

3.6.2. The relationship of the area inspector with his/her assigned schools does not change in an organisation by specialised areas, as he/she continues to act as a reference for his/her schools. The innovative aspect of this proposal is that the resolution of the problem raised, or the advice requested will fall to a specialised area which will analyse the case exhaustively in order to provide the most accurate response possible.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

In order to synthesise our proposal, we propose the following conclusions:

1. The current organisation of Education Inspectorate services is not configured under areas or areas of specialisation and decision-making by the area inspectorate prevails, regardless of the nature, meaning and purpose of the demand or request.
2. The fields or areas of specialisation shall guarantee a resolution in accordance with the advice or question requested.
3. The figure of the area inspector does not disappear in the specialised organisation but, on the one hand, acts as a point of reference for the centres assigned to his/her area and, on the other hand, will form part of a specialised area or field.
4. Education inspectorates must adapt to a different organisation from the current one, where specialisation prevails and thus contribute effectively to the quality of the whole education system.

Having said this, the Education Inspectorate must not miss the opportunity to become a highly specialised and qualified service of the education system. Necessarily, it cannot be burdened by administrative tasks that distort the true purpose entrusted to it since its origins (Rodríguez Bravo, 2019). Our proposal aims to contribute to the necessary modernisation of Education Inspectorate Services, where the uncontrolled number of tasks and dispersion of actions sometimes lead us to a scenario of imprecision in decision-making and problem-solving. Generality prevails because it is unfeasible to attend to demands that require precise and accurate responses. With the organisational structure based on areas of specialisation, mistakes are minimised and a rigorous study and analysis of the case or issue in question is guaranteed. Consequently, there is a greater guarantee of success than if all the matters requested were resolved by the area inspector. Furthermore, the concept of team and transversality is strengthened over an eminently hierarchical structure which, although it should remain a mere control mechanism, delegates to the team coordinators the power to make collegiate and agreed decisions. Therefore, the proposal presented aims to advance in the specialised organisation of the Education Inspectorate beyond the theoretical contributions made by different authors; to respond to the growing

autonomy of schools and the challenges of electronic administration and to contribute to this service abandoning certain antiquated vestiges and positioning itself on a plane of efficiency that provides real quality in accordance with the continuous transformations of the education system.

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