

# LA INSPECCIÓN EDUCATIVA: REFLEXIONES EN TORNO A UNA NECESARIA CONMEMORACIÓN HISTÓRICA.

## EDUCATION INSPECTORATE: FUNCTIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM ON ITS 175TH ANNIVERSARY.

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### **Resumen**

La efeméride del 175 aniversario no solo es el homenaje a la inspección educativa y a quienes la ha ejercido en ese periodo histórico es simultáneamente una necesaria reflexión colectiva sobre nuestra profesión y un punto de inflexión para que las funciones propias de la inspección educativa sean continúen dando sentido a nuestra profesión. El autor hace una primera aproximación a los principales factores que afectan a ese desarrollo profesional y los elementos de mejora que podrían llevarse a cabo, solo de esa forma el valioso legado de la inspección educativa en España será no solo individual sino colectivo.

**Palabras clave:** *inspección, funciones, historia, leyes, limites, propuestas.*

## Abstract

The 175th anniversary is not only a tribute to educational inspection and to those who have exercised it during this historical period, but also a necessary collective reflection on our profession and a turning point so that the functions of educational inspection continue to give meaning to our profession. The author makes a first approach to the main factors affecting this professional development and the elements of improvement that could be carried out, only in this way will the valuable legacy of educational inspection in Spain be not only individual but also collective.

**Keywords:** *inspection, functions, history, laws, limits, proposals.*

## INTRODUCTION

The commemoration on 2 April 2024 of the 175th anniversary of the creation of the corps of education inspectors in Spain raises the need to reflect on their contribution to the education system and to society as a whole. One of the main problems in highlighting and gaining social recognition for the educational and social work carried out by educational inspectorates is the widely held perception that their primary, and even sole, purpose is to control what happens in educational centres and services and to monitor compliance with the legislation applicable at any given time. In order to counteract this simplistic and mistaken view of the functions of the inspectorate, to highlight the diversity of functions it performs and to reflect on the difficulties and improvements necessary for its exercise, the article is divided into three sections and a series of conclusions.

In the first section, a brief historical overview is presented, from 1849 to 2020, in which the most relevant state regulations governing the inspectorate are mentioned and in which the diversity of functions (administrative, pedagogical, dissemination...) assigned at key moments in its history is noted, which shows that the supervisory role is not the only one, nor often the most relevant, as is argued with verifiable data.

The second section points out the importance of going beyond the regulations to understand the history and role of educational inspection and for this purpose it is based on the contributions and work carried out by inspectors from the nineteenth century to the present day. Their trajectory and legacy shows that the functions assigned to them were relevant in different educational fields such as pedagogical, legislative, school organisation, complementary services, student care, educational publications, etc., and even transcended the social and cultural sphere.

The third and final section begins with a reflection on why this biased view of the inspection function is maintained. The answer is largely given by a set of factors that have historically hindered the full performance of the functions assigned to the inspectorate and that still persist today. Identifying them is the first step towards eliminating them or at least reducing their impact both within the inspectorate itself and in the education system and public administrations. Finally, and with the aim of being coherent with the regulations and the historical legacy of the inspectorate, some proposals are put forward to improve the performance of the inspectorate so that it can adequately fulfil the functions assigned to it by law as a public education service owed to the public.

## **I. ON THE HISTORICAL DIVERSITY OF INSPECTORATE'S FUNCTIONS**

The commemoration of the 175th anniversary of the creation of the inspectorate by royal decree on 30 March 1849, published in the *Gaceta de Madrid* on 2 April, should serve as an incentive to reflect on the role played by educational inspection in our country, to learn about its past, to analyse its present and to make proposals for improvement for the future.

Like any other profession, educational inspection has its detractors and its particular black legend, so this commemoration is an excellent opportunity to make visible a profession that throughout its history has contributed as a collective and individually through its members a great

legacy to education in our country and the world, as can be seen in American countries and international organisations.

The usual prejudice is to crudely identify inspection action with its supervisory role insofar as a certain control is exercised over the functioning of the centres and services. As Hernández Díaz (2019, 81) rightly expresses: "Surely society has a blurred, confused and disfigured image of a technical figure who should be above all that of a pedagogical travelling companion for all members of the educational community, and in particular for teachers".

Overseeing compliance with the law is an original function of the inspectorate, maintained by the regulations that have governed its performance over time and which is currently established in article 151 of Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education, modified by Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December.

Educational inspection arose in the 19th century, among other things for this purpose, because of the need for the nascent liberal State of the time to have a body of officials to guarantee the establishment of the national education system set up by the liberal and conservative governments of the middle of the century. It was a key element in establishing a modern state, with separation of powers and the establishment of rights, in which basic education would be universal and free, as enacted by the legal norms of the time.

The simplistic view that some social agents have of the role of the inspectorate ignores a more complex reality and contributes to maintaining a negative perception of the inspectorate, intentionally ignoring the fact that since its origins it has assumed numerous and diverse functions in addition to those carried out *motu proprio* or assigned by the education administration. In this regard, it is worth remembering that the Royal Decree of 20 May 1849 established that in addition to ensuring compliance with the law, provincial inspectors were responsible for "investigating the needs of primary education, in order to propose to the provincial authorities and the

government as many improvements as they consider appropriate, ensuring that teachers are paid punctually and are treated with due decorum, and investigating the resources used to support the school and overseeing their proper administration " (López del Castillo, 2014)<sup>1</sup> . This same regulation prescribed the rules for the inspectors' visits to schools, and among the purpose of the visit was the following: "to advise the teachers: to indicate to them the methods and systems that they should follow for the most perfect teaching" (López del Castillo, 2014)<sup>2</sup>.

Other subsequent regulations maintained this diversity of functions assigned to the primary education inspectorate, the two that I consider most relevant in this regard:

-The Decree on the Organisation of the Inspectorate of Primary Education of 2 December 1932. Castán (2017, p. 3) considers that "this decree, which was in force for 35 years, was the most important in the history of the Inspectorate in Spain". We highlight the content of article 15, which establishes the fourteen functions of the Board of Inspectors of the province:

1. Coordinate the work of the inspectors in their respective areas so that the work of the whole province is based on principles of unity.
2. Report on appeals lodged against the decisions of the inspectors and to collect and process complaints that may be lodged against their actions and to process them at the central inspectorate.
3. Organise pedagogical information courses, study trips, conferences, etc., in order to interest and orientate the teaching profession in the problems of education.

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<sup>1</sup> LÓPEZ DEL CASTILLO, M.T. (2014). Historia de la inspección de enseñanza primaria. La inspección Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, página 143.

<sup>2 2</sup> LÓPEZ DEL CASTILLO, M.T. (2014). Historia de la inspección de enseñanza primaria. La inspección Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, página 144.

4. Agree on the proposal of the inspector concerned, to transfer the premises of the National Schools, to accept the housing of the teachers and to propose to the Provincial Council the closure of the schools.
5. Publish a monthly Bulletin, which will be the official organ of communication of the Board of Inspectors and the Provincial Council with teachers and local authorities and an instrument of information and guidance on educational issues and problems. Subscription to the Education Bulletin shall be compulsory for all schools in the province and shall be paid for out of the school budget.
6. Propose to the Directorate General the organisation of pilot schools. The Directorate General, after hearing the Central Inspectorate, may accept the plan drawn up by the Board of Inspectors and grant resources and preferential attention to these schools.
7. Agree on the distribution of office supplies to meet office needs.
8. Agree on the distribution of zones into which the province is to be divided, formulating the corresponding reasoned proposal to the Central Inspectorate, and also to propose the inspectors who are to be assigned to each of them, according to the rotation foreseen in article 24.
9. Encourage the creation of Centres for pedagogical collaboration, grouping together teachers from nearby towns who meet periodically to study specific aspects of school life, give model lessons followed by criticism, jointly acquire material, promote public events in favour of the interests of the school, etc.
10. Contribute to the organisation of educational museums and organise the service of the circulating library of the province.
11. Propose to the Directorate General, for very justified reasons, the transfer of teachers from one grade to another within the

same graduate, and from one graduate to another within the same locality.

12. Agree on the necessary measures to fulfil the mission entrusted to the inspectors by this Decree, concerning meetings of Inspectors by zones or districts, to study fundamental matters of school life.

13. Propose to the Central Inspectorate, following a report from the area inspector, the appointment of one or more teachers, who will act as Delegates of the Inspectorate, in charge, on a temporary or permanent basis, of visiting a group of schools close to their own, to collaborate with their colleagues in carrying out the pedagogical instructions given by the inspector during his visits.

14. All matters raised by the inspectors or of interest to the Central Inspectorate or the Directorate General of Primary Education.

- Decree 2915/1967, of 23 November, approving the Regulations of the State Primary Education Professional Inspection Corps, which sets out in detail in article 2 the twenty-five functions of inspectors, as follows:

1. Ensure that all state and non-state primary education centres in the country comply with the laws and regulations in force for this level of education.

2. Exercise the tasks of supervision, technical direction and pedagogical guidance of teaching and school services within the jurisdiction corresponding to their different hierarchical levels, respecting and encouraging the spirit of initiative of principals and teachers in their teaching activities.

3. Conduct and keep up to date a detailed study of the school population, trend and geographical distribution, of the inspection areas with special reference to economic and social aspects.

4. Inspect the Centres. State and non-State primary level educational institutions and services. This function shall be extended to those Centres not subject to another Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education and Science, whose pupils fall within the primary schooling period, even when the teaching provided therein differs from that established in the questionnaires for this level.
5. To ensure compliance with the regulations promulgated on the proposal of the relevant bodies in the fields of religious education, formation of the national spirit, physical education, home education and complementary activities.
6. Intervene in the elaboration of curricula and educational activities at primary level, questionnaires, methodological standards and tests for school promotion and issuance of the primary school certificate.
7. Advise Primary Education Centres on the application of questionnaires, the preparation of programmes and the use of texts, in accordance with the characteristics of the area.
8. Promote or, where appropriate, inform the implementation and guide the operation of Institutions, services and complementary activities in Primary Education Centres.
9. Check the performance of the primary school system, in its dual educational and instructional aspects.
10. Promote the projection of the school into the surrounding environment.
11. Authorise the official use of the Primary School Book.
12. Chair the Examining Committees for the award of the primary school certificate.
13. Organise the Centres for Pedagogical Collaboration and other meetings for the improvement of the teaching profession.



14. Participate in opinions and competitions for the selection of textbooks, furniture and teaching materials to be used in primary schools.

15. Issue such reports or opinions on matters within its competence as may be requested by the superior.

16. Collect, purify and elaborate statistical data related to Primary Education and cultural promotion of adults in the field of Primary Education.

17. Assume the guiding, advisory and executive functions entrusted to it in the preparation and implementation of school building plans, without prejudice to the competence attributed to the Provincial School Building Boards and their services. They shall report on the appropriateness of accepting plots of land according to their surface area and location and form part of the Receiving Committee for 108 newly constructed school buildings or those on which repairs have been carried out.

18. Inform and promote the creation, transformation, temporary closure or suppression of State Primary Education Centres in their different modalities. In case of urgency, the Inspectorate may temporarily close any State Primary School, immediately informing the Directorate General of the reasons for its closure and the measures adopted for the assignment of its teachers.

19. Report on applications for authorisation of non-state centres, especially with regard to the hygienic-pedagogical conditions of their facilities, teacher qualifications, questionnaires, teaching materials, class timetables and holiday arrangements. The Inspectorate may also propose the application of appropriate sanctions, including the closure of non-state centres when they fail to comply with the law.

20. Be a member of the tribunals and commissions appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science for the selection, promotion

and reassignment of school directors and teachers under the conditions established in the respective regulations.

21. Be a member of the tribunals and commissions appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science for the selection, promotion and reassignment of Primary Education Inspectors.

22. Grant, by delegation, up to ten days of leave during the school year to school Headmasters, Headmasters with a course of graduate schools or teachers of unitary and mixed schools, reporting to the respective Municipal Teaching Board and, where appropriate, to the Headmaster of the School.

23. Propose to the superiority the distinctions or rewards to the Municipal Boards of Primary Education that are deserving of them or the warning, sanction or modification of those in whose operation negligence or irregularities are observed that are detrimental to the interests of education.

24. Inform and promote the files of rewards to school principals and teachers.

25. Any others attributed by "Laws and Regulations".

It is clear that both legal texts establish functions not only of control but also of administrative and personnel management, training and counselling, and the dissemination of standards and organisational and pedagogical proposals. When it is currently proposed to give relevance to the pedagogical and innovative role of educational inspection, nothing new is being proposed. As Galicia Mangas (2017, p. 155) rightly points out:

The consolidation of the Inspectorate as a professional and technical body took place at the beginning of the 20th century, when special importance began to be given not only to its supervisory work but also, and to a large extent, to its pedagogical work, to the supervision, support and encouragement of teachers, and to the promotion, development and improvement of teaching.

This wide range of functions, not limited to monitoring compliance, was later also applied to the two new inspectorates created in the 20th century: the corps of secondary education inspectors and the corps of vocational training inspectors.

In 1954, the Secondary Education Inspectorate was created by means of the Decree of 5 May 1954 regulating the constitution and functioning of the Official Secondary Education Inspectorate, which establishes the following:

Article 3: Powers of the State Inspectorate in the legal order.

By virtue of its powers, it is incumbent on this Inspectorate. mainly:

- a) Verify compliance with the legal provisions on the recognition or authorisation of Education Centres and, as a consequence, to report on applications for the opening of new Centres, on academic classification and on the granting of benefits to all of them.
- b) Monitor in all types of establishments the observance of the provisions on the Formation of the National Spirit. Physical education and sporting activities. Home, public order, public health and hygiene education.
- c) Take part in the examination boards entrusted to it by law and to cooperate in their organisation.
- d) Promote the cultural extension activities of Secondary Schools, in accordance with the instructions of the Ministry.
- e) Promote the action of the Pupils' Parents' Associations and to transmit their reports to the Rectorate and to the Ministry.
- f) Provide due assistance to the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, if required by it, in the exercise of the inspection which it is incumbent upon it over all educational establishments, with regard to the teaching of Religion, the orthodoxy of doctrines and the morality of customs, and also to inform it of those questions concerning the operation of Secondary

Schools which, by their special nature, require the knowledge or intervention of the said Hierarchy.

g) Monitor compliance with the obligations of the Centres with regard to the granting of free tuition and other benefits of the legal system of school protection.

Article 4. Powers of the State Inspectorate in the pedagogical field. The State Inspectorate will include in the pedagogical order, with respect to the official, Patronage and non-official private schools mentioned in articles twenty and twenty-one of the current Law on Secondary Education, all matters relating to the discretionary interpretation of teaching and educational guidelines. By virtue of these powers, the Inspectorate is responsible for promoting the renewal and improvement of teaching and educational methods in these centres in accordance with the regulations of the Law on the Organisation of Secondary Education and the provisions in force.

On the other hand, article 3 of Law 31/1980 of 21 June 1980 on the creation of the Special Corps of Technical Inspectors of Vocational Training established that this corps would be responsible for the functions set out in article 142 of the General Law on Education, with regard to vocational training. The aforementioned article 142 of Law 14/1970 of 4 August 1970 on General Education and Financing of Educational Reform states the following:

a) Ensure compliance with the laws, regulations and other provisions in all state and non-state educational establishments in the field of education.

b) Collaborate with the Planning Services in the study of educational needs and in the drawing up and updating of the school map of the areas where it exercises its function, as well as to carry out research concerning the educational problems of these areas.

c) Advise teachers in State and non-State schools on the methods best suited to the effectiveness of the teaching they provide.

- d) Evaluate the educational performance of the teaching centres and teachers in their respective area or speciality in collaboration with the Institutes of Educational Sciences. To this end, it shall take into account the guidance and internal inspection activity that, where appropriate, the promoting Entities may establish for their Centres.
- e) Collaborate with the Institutes of Education Sciences in the organisation of courses and activities for the improvement and activity of teaching staff".

The analysis of both texts clearly establishes different functions for the education inspectorate that go beyond the enforcement of the law by assigning it important administrative and pedagogical roles.

Subsequently, the fifteenth additional provision of Law 30/1984, of 2 August 1984, on measures to reform the Civil Service, integrated the three inspectorates into a single one: the Corps of Inspectors at the Service of the Education Administration (CISAE), declaring it a body to be extinguished as vacancies in it were not filled. This marked the beginning of a period (1985-1996) in which the inspectorate was accessed by means of a merit-based competition and a temporary performance, thus regrettably interrupting a historically fruitful trajectory of a professional body.

The failure of this temporary inspection model (there was a limitation of years to carry out the inspection function) led to the creation of the current Corps of Education Inspectors in article 37 of Organic Law 9/1995, of 20 November, on the participation, evaluation and governance of schools, article 36 of the law establishes the inspection functions of this new Corps of Inspectors:

- a) Control and supervise, from a pedagogical and organisational point of view, the operation of both public and private educational centres.
- b) Collaborate in the improvement of teaching practice and the functioning of the centres, as well as in the processes of educational reform and pedagogical renewal.

- c) Participate in the evaluation of the education system, especially in that which corresponds to schools, the management function and the teaching function, through the analysis of their organisation, operation and results.
- d) Ensure compliance, in educational centres, with the laws, regulations and other provisions in force that affect the education system.
- e) Advise, guide and inform the different sectors of the educational community in the exercise of their rights and in the fulfilment of their obligations. '
- f) Report on educational programmes and activities promoted or authorised by the competent educational administrations, as well as on any aspect related to education that may be required of it by the competent authority or that it becomes aware of in the exercise of its functions, through regulatory channels.

The above shows that the laws and regulations of the inspectorate have combined throughout its history a diversity of functions, always maintaining those inherent in ensuring compliance with laws and legal standards, reporting on the functioning of schools, using among other instruments the visit to them, and advising teachers, even participating in their training.

In this sense, the words of D. Francisco Carrillo Guerrero, chief inspector of Asturias, later also of Madrid, and first president of the National Association of Primary Education Inspectors in the conference given at the *Ateneo de Madrid* on 14 May 1914, are still valid: "the obligation of inspectors was not limited to the action of control over the centres and of informing the State and proposing reforms, but it was necessary to turn to pedagogical action with teachers" (Carrillo, 2014, p. 1). (Carrillo, 2014, p. 382).

## II. ON PERFORMANCES AND WORKS THAT HAVE LEFT THEIR MARK ON HISTORY.

The history of education inspectorate is obviously much more than the chronological evolution of the regulations that have governed it since its creation. In this sense, the best known works on the history of inspectorate (Maillo, 1993, Mayorga, 2000; López del Castillo, 2014, Ramírez Aisa, 2006, Esteban Frades, 2010, Montero Alcaide, 2021, among others) refer to inspectors who have stood out for their professional careers and in many cases also for their relevant contribution to Spanish education from different spheres: legislative (Lorenzo Luzuriaga), educational supervision (Gómez Dacal, Zacarias Ramo, Eduardo Soler, Herminio Almendros), professional associations (Francisco Carrillo, Juvenal de la Vega, José Antonio Palacios), teaching (Matilde García, Arsenio Palacios, Pura Lorenzana), defence of women (Faustina Álvarez, Matilde García), pedagogical renewal (Antonio Ballesteros, José Blat, Adolfo Maillo, Joaquín Salvador Artigas) publication of school texts (Antonio J. Onieva, Agustín Serrano de Haro, Josefina Álvarez...) and coexistence (Lorenzo Vidal).

Other works whose authors are not inspectors also highlight these contributions, such as the book by Mainer (2009) in which he makes specific references to thirty-one primary school inspectors who stood out in the field of pedagogy and social science didactics in the 1930s, which serves as an excellent example of the legacy contributed to our educational system by education inspectors.

Not forgetting, on the other hand, the social commitment of many of these inspectors to the disadvantaged school population through the creation and promotion of school dining halls and canteens, cloakrooms, holiday camps, permanent camps, nursery schools, adult schools and school preserves. Work in which they are role models: Victoria Adrados, Juvenal de Vega, Antonio Casona and Faustina Álvarez.

The collective work "*Historias de vida de la inspección*" [Inspection life stories] coordinated by José Luis Castán (2021) is an excellent example of this work of recovery of the legacy of education inspectors throughout our history, with the life and work of eight important figures such as Miguel Villarroja, Francisco Carrillo, Herminio Almendros, Agustín Serrano, Aurora Medina, María Teresa López, Isabel Álvarez and Eduardo Soler. The three research seminars carried out by the Education Inspection Study Group (GEINSP) since 2022 have brought to light new figures with interesting careers such as Arsenio Pacios López, Pura Lorenzana Prado, Adelaida García de Castro, Adelia Díez y Díez and Teodora Hernández San Juan.

This educational commitment is not limited to personalities of the past; it would be both unfair and erroneous. Today, this involvement with the world of education is still alive in active and retired inspectors who continue to contribute their knowledge and experience to the inspectorate and to education, some of whom will undoubtedly be a reference for future promotions. Without wishing to be exhaustive, I would like to mention some of them who are well known for their numerous works, which can be easily consulted in the two professional journals of educational inspection and other publications: Concha Vidorreta, Elías Ramírez, María Antonia Casanova, Avelino Sarasua, José Luis Castán, Lourdes Alcalá, Antonio Montero, Marcos Fernández, Jesús Viñas, José M<sup>a</sup> Vera, Santiago Frades, etc.

Such a numerous and relevant pleiad over time is evidence that many education inspectors have considered or consider that their professional functions go beyond applying the regulations, ensuring compliance, informing the education administration of the issues they are required to deal with or attending to the demands and complaints of the different sectors of the education community.

And from this evidence, among other equally important questions, two arise: why is the inspectorate as a professional group not capable of overcoming its dark heritage, improving its social perception, and what



hinders it from fully carrying out all the functions attributed to it by the regulations?

These are not easy questions to answer, but we will point to some issues that have already been mentioned to some extent by other authors cited in this text and also in a recent article of mine (Marrodán 2024).

With regard to the first question, it should be noted that the current configuration of the selective processes of access to the Corps of Education Inspectors maintains this negative role. Any teacher who has studied the syllabus of competitive examinations for access to the CEI will observe the generalised simplistic narrative of the history of the inspectorate centred on a chronological succession of dates and rules that have regulated the inspectorate in Spain. There is no record of relevant figures, no reflection on functions, and no analysis of professional changes. On the other hand, the matter is aggravated if we take into account that in the processes of extraordinary merit-based competitive examinations, almost everything is centred on stating the regulations correctly.

The lack of knowledge of personalities and experiences that serve as a reference to broaden the mission and action of the inspectorate, together with the analysis of the functions historically assigned to the inspectorate, are factors that explain the reductionist practice centred on controlling and ensuring compliance with the norm, reducing actions of greater educational commitment that in no case oppose other functions that have a more pedagogical, external evaluation and advisory nature.

This shortcoming highlights both the need for specific training for access to the inspectorate (so far non-existent except for that which each teacher carries out voluntarily with their own means) and for diverse and up-to-date continuous training so that the functions can be carried out with efficiency and integrity. In this sense, adequate training is essential to help differentiate in practice the existing confusion between supervision and control, which, although they are related, are not the same thing. What

characterises inspection is supervision, as established in article 151 of the LOE, as amended by the LOMLOE.

### III. ON THE FUNCTIONS OF THE INSPECTORATE AND ITS LIMITATIONS.

The deletion of the previous letter h) from the original text of article 151 of the LOE: "Any others that may be attributed to it by the Education Administrations, within the scope of their competences" by the sole article, seventy-seven of the LOMLOE is undoubtedly one of the best pieces of news for the exercise of educational inspection. Unfortunately, letter f) of article 153 remains in force: "Any other powers attributed to it by the education authorities, within the scope of their competences".

This is relevant because one of the factors that contribute and have contributed to what Sarasua (2018) has so aptly defined as "the uncertain future of the inspectorate" is the blurring of its functions by educational administrations through the false door of assigning "any other functions" to the inspectorate, which are not based on the inspectorate's own regulations, but come from decisions of the governing bodies of educational administrations. An example of this for many years and in a generalised manner is the assignment of tasks such as the investigation of disciplinary proceedings, the drafting of resolutions or the assessment of merits in different calls for applications and a wide range of other tasks that take up time and effort that should be devoted to the inspectorate's own functions.

In addition to the time taken away from the performance of the inspectorate's own functions, there is another important issue: insufficient staffing levels in relation to the number of schools, teachers and students in all the teaching areas that need to be attended to, just consider the following data for the 2022-2023 academic year provided by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training:

#### **TABLE 1.**

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**Data for academic year 2022/2023**

Number of general education students (ERG)	8.309.480
Number of special education students (ERE)	731.434
Number of teachers	770.018
Number of centres: 28735*(forecast 2023/2024) of ERG and 2101 of ERE (2022/2023)	30.836
Number of education inspectors MEFP and CCAA*	1664

Note: Compilation based on MEFP (2023) Facts and figures. Academic year 2023/2024. Inspection data from USIE (2023).

Given that in all the Autonomous Communities, there are senior positions in the inspectorate (central or general inspectorates, heads or similar) that are not assigned to centres, it is evident that the inspector/centre ratio is higher than 1/20. To this situation we could add two other variables that have an impact on this unequal and incomplete attention to the centres:

- Long-term sick leave is not covered in contrast to any other teaching position, which means that the workload is assigned to other staff members who have to take on new tasks.
- There are ordinary, systematic or habitual actions established in the inspection action plans of the different Autonomous Communities that generally reach high figures (Martín and Manzano, 2020, p. 13), some of which are dispensable due to their low impact on the education system.

Therefore, it is difficult, if not impossible, to carry out tasks as important as the supervision of curricular proposals and teaching programmes or the continuous advice to teaching teams, not only to management teams. This difficulty in adequately carrying out their own functions generates a certain frustration and unease among those who carry out educational inspection.

There are other factors, not of a minor nature, which jeopardise or at least limit and hinder the exercise of the inspectorate's functions, some of

which we have already discussed recently (Marrodan (2024), such as the provision of technological resources, the absence of regular competitive examinations, etc.).

To these factors should be added a key element, also raised by Sarasua and Hernández Díaz in the aforementioned works and by USIE in its trade union programme (2019): the essential initial training for accessing the inspectorate. This initial training should be compulsory, regulated and accessible to all teachers.

We have mentioned above some of the factors that limit the various functions of inspection, but two of great importance remain:

- The difficult balance between control, monitoring, evaluation and advice. In this balance, the inspection model required in each circumstance is at stake. In a democratic society, supervision and evaluation must take precedence in order to implement improvements in the different areas of the education system, and this must be accompanied by the necessary and appropriate advice to teachers and the educational community.
- The inspectorate, like the rest of the civil service, is under the orders of its hierarchical superiors, which means that on some occasions this organic dependence becomes political and even personal pressure. Achieving maximum autonomy from political power and having internal bodies for participation and consultation is essential in order to maintain technical independence of criteria and action.

The elimination, or at least the reduction, of the factors that have a negative impact on the performance of the inspection function requires important changes in terms of legislation, organisation and the design of educational inspection.

In the legislative field, there is a need for a basic common regulation of education inspection that establishes a new system of access to

education inspection, a minimum initial training for access to the performance of the inspection function, a regulation of the professional rights of the civil servants who carry it out and a recognition of their administrative and economic status such as the allocation of at least a level 28 remuneration. The draft royal regulatory project for educational inspection on which USIE, together with the professional bodies, has worked intensively, should see its legislative processing soon and should not be delayed any longer.

On the other hand, taking into account that according to article 148 point 2 of the LOE:

It is the responsibility of the competent public administrations to order, regulate and exercise educational inspection within their respective territorial scope. It would be necessary to modify the inspection decrees and orders to adapt their articles and provisions to state regulations, while at the same time creating a model of inspection that is more involved in the life of educational centres and services, more participative in terms of having consultation and participation bodies, with a greater impact of its actions on the dynamics of the educational system, focused on its functions and more transparent with respect to the public.

Regulatory modification must be accompanied by an inspection practice, I would not dare to say "inspection model", which, based on the axis of *supervise-evaluate-advise*, focuses its intervention on educational centres and services in a planned, systematic, rigorous manner and with results shared with the educational community and the administration, depending on the case. The debate raised by Secadura (2013) continues to be necessary in order to recall both the need to promote educational improvement and compliance with the law, thus benefiting the educational community directly, and to ensure that the education system as a whole

evolves favourably and in accordance with its aims thanks to the global and transversal vision provided by the inspectorate.

Relying on regulatory changes is unwise and unrealistic. Any relevant change is relevant because that is what those who have to implement it consider it to be and do so in their daily practice. Those of us who exercise the inspection function must reflect on it, not resign ourselves to a passive role in our profession, but rather the opposite: to continuously, systematically and also publicly contribute proposals on our professional performance in order to introduce elements for improvement and corrective factors, as well as to monitor the implementation of procedures that contribute to the dual purpose of our profession: to guarantee educational rights and to be a factor in the quality of the education system.

As Professor Hernández Díaz (2009) concluded in his assessment of the future of inspection:

...society needs pedagogical figures to guide and help it in different ways, and one of them, very important, is the inspector (of course, always in the masculine and feminine sense), who must be at the service of the school culture of the educational centres assigned to them, of the respective educational community and its components.

That must be our legacy to the generations to come as we continue the great educational work of those who preceded us in the noble office of inspecting education for the collective good.

## CONCLUSIONS

Since the creation in 1849 of the corps of primary education inspectors, this work has been carried out by education officials whose basic functions and their identifying elements of action (hearings, reports, etc.)

have been maintained over time, as well as their limitations in terms of regulations and resources.

The 175th anniversary is cause for reflection on the professional future of this teaching body, as there is often a social misperception of the work carried out by educational inspectors which must be overcome based on the regulations themselves, which assign them supervisory, assessment and advisory functions as well as ensuring compliance with the law. The contributions and legacy of inspectors over these 175 years show that it is possible and necessary to carry out functions related to the pedagogical sphere, administrative and resource management, teacher training, attention to the entire educational community, etc.

The impact of inspection work in the Spanish education system is evident both in the individual and collective work of those who have carried it out and in the application of regulations that have affected the educational community, albeit in different ways and with different repercussions.

In order for the functions assigned to it, which are of different types and nature, to continue to be a key element of the education system, it is necessary to overcome the main distorting factors (administrative, regulatory, resources, access...) that hinder the full development of the functions attributed to it by law and blur professional performance. In order to contribute to improving this situation, several proposals of different types (organisational, regulatory, resources, training) are mentioned, the implementation of which is necessary and to a certain extent urgent in order for educational inspection to continue to be a factor of quality and equity in the education system.

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