

# Inspection framework for VET schools

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

REGULATION/LEGISLATION

 BULGARIA

## Timeline



ID number 28050

## Description

In March 2018, as part of the 2015 Pre-school and School Education act, a National Education Inspectorate (NEI) was established; the mission of the Inspectorate is to:

- (a) develop, refine and approve inspection criteria and indicators;
- (b) organise and conduct inspection of kindergartens and schools;
- (c) draw up estimates and guidelines;
- (d) provide the education minister and the Council of Ministers with an analysis of the quality of education in the inspected kindergartens and schools for specified periods and areas.

One important feature of the inspection framework (involving five-yearly inspection cycles of all kindergartens and schools) is that it has been designed to be part of the quality evaluation system that should provide for the enforcement of performance-based funding in pre-school and school education. According to the Pre-school and School Education Act (PSEA, 2016), the resources for the development of kindergartens, schools and personality development support centres shall include earmarked funding for improvement of the quality of instruction (Art. 284 (1)). The school inspections results shall provide a basis for quality assessment and for distribution of these funds across kindergartens and schools.

### 2018 Pilot

The NEI started its work in March 2018 and developed a framework for inspection with a set of criteria and indicators for monitoring the quality of both VET and general education institutions. The indicators covered two major areas:

- (a) the education process (27 indicators reflecting the effectiveness of interaction in the learning process; the effectiveness of the activities for the personal development of students; monitoring the progress of students, the evaluation of learning outcomes and the effectiveness of socialisation; coverage, inclusion and prevention of dropping out; satisfaction with the education process);
- (b) institutional governance (24 indicators reflecting the sustainable development of the school; the effectiveness of resource management; the quality of the physical environment; the development of school culture; the development of

partnerships; the degree of satisfaction with the school management.

In 2018/19, the piloting of the criteria, indicators and procedures for school inspections started in 80 schools throughout the country, including VET schools.

### **2019 Implementation**

In 2019, the piloting phase of the inspection framework was completed. The piloting results were used for validating and improving the indicators and the evaluation scale, as well as for upgrading the electronic management system. The first group of external school inspectors was trained and a database with external evaluation was launched. The implementation phase involving the first group of school inspections started during the academic year 2019/20 (the actual timeframe that inspections were carried out was from September to December 2019 and from January to June 2020 however no data on the exact time period that the inspections took place exist). In the academic year 2019/20 only 48 schools were inspected, of which nine were VET schools.

### **2020 Implementation**

The process of school inspections was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. 35 schools were inspected in the period October-December 2020, of which seven were VET schools, three general secondary schools with VET classes, and two united schools providing VET.

### **2021 Implementation**

During the 2020/21 academic year 49 schools providing VET (including dual training) were inspected.

In September 2021, the education minister issued Ordinance No 18 on the inspection of kindergartens and schools, which established the State education standard (SES) on the inspection of kindergartens and schools. The SES defined inspection as a process of comprehensive, independent expert assessment of the quality of provision of the kindergarten or school education at a particular point in time and determines the guidelines for improvement set out by NEI.

Three areas for inspection were defined within the SES:

a. the education process, including learning outcomes. In this area, the following aspects are inspected:

i. the effectiveness of teaching-learning interaction and the application of the competence approach;

ii. classroom and learner management;

iii. learner assessment;

iv. the support provided for personal development and the teamwork between teachers and other pedagogical specialists for achieving the best results for each of their learners.

b. institutional management, including human resource management (HR), management of the effectiveness of qualifications and the appraisal of teaching staff. In this area, the following aspects are monitored:

i. management of financial information and technological resources;

ii. management of partnerships for the development of the kindergarten or school for improving education outcomes;

iii. leadership effectiveness.

c. institutional environment, including the physical environment and the information and library resources of schools and kindergartens). In this area, the following aspects are monitored:

- i. development of the organisational culture of the kindergarten or school;
- ii. development of a supportive environment and effective interaction between all those involved in the education process and with all stakeholders;
- iii. satisfaction of the participants.

A clause in the ordinance states that for each inspection area, the approval of the NEI director is required. The approval must be based on inspection criteria and indicators. According to the ordinance, by 31 August each year the NEI publishes on its website the criteria and indicators against which inspections are to be carried out in the forthcoming academic year.

The SES also established the inspection phases and procedures, as well as the quality evaluation scoring to be applied. The quality assessment involves the assignment of scores for each of the defined indicators. The evaluation for each criterion is formed as the sum of the scores for all indicators related to this criterion. The overall rating of each individual inspection area is formed as a percentage ratio of the sum of the scores obtained on the individual criteria to the maximum number of points for the area. The scores calculated this way are subsequently converted into a qualitative score, as follows: very good – higher than 81 per cent; good – from 61 to 80 per cent; satisfactory – from 41 to 60 per cent; unsatisfactory – lower than 40 per cent.

### **2022 Implementation**

The NEI continued to implement school inspections according to the annual plan of the institutions inspected, and semi-annual inspection plans. In 2022, the total number of inspected institutions (kindergartens and schools) was 148.

### **2023 Implementation**

In 2023, the National Education Inspectorate (NEI) continued carrying out school inspections in line with their annual and semi-annual inspection plans. For the 2023/24 academic year, a total of 63 educational institutions were inspected, including both kindergartens and schools. Only 3 VET schools were among those inspected.

### **2024 Implementation**

In 2024, the NEI published a revised version of its *Quality framework*, marking a continuation of the organisation's commitment to quality assessment in education. This revision builds upon the 2022 publication while ensuring alignment with current operational needs. The revised publication primarily focused on maintaining the document's relevance through technical updates, particularly in the areas of links, references, and instruction manuals to reflect the requirements of the 2024/25 academic year. The revision preserved the foundation laid in the 2022 version, retaining the same core principles, mission, vision, objectives, inspection areas, and methodological approaches.

In 2024, the NEI published a revised Inspection Handbook representing a comprehensive methodological guide for the inspection process. This document serves as the operational manual for inspection teams and provides detailed procedural guidance for all stakeholders in the inspection process, including inspected institutions, inspectors, and interested parties.

The Handbook systematises the conceptual framework for quality assessment in education, defining quality as 'a set of characteristics of the educational process that lead to the realisation of goals and policies related to: the level of knowledge, skills and competencies of students; the degree of development of personal qualities and social competencies; satisfaction of the needs of society, parents and students'. It

operationalises the inspection process through detailed descriptions of the three inspection phases (preparatory, substantive and concluding stages). The document provides comprehensive guidance on inspection approaches, methods, and instruments, including the use of the electronic inspection management system (ESUI), questionnaires for different stakeholder groups, focus group meetings, classroom observations, and institutional environment assessments.

A significant element of the 2024 Handbook is the formalisation of selection criteria for institutions to be inspected, incorporating risk analysis methodology that identifies factors potentially affecting educational quality, including concentration of vulnerable student populations, persistently low educational outcomes, and national assessment results. The document establishes clear competency profiles for inspectors, encompassing analytical, communicative, professional, and digital competencies, and outlines a two-phase training program for external inspectors.

The 2024 revision strengthens procedural transparency and standardisation, providing detailed protocols for inspector conduct, stakeholder participation, report preparation, and dissemination of results. By consolidating methodological principles, operational procedures, quality assurance mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement protocols, the Handbook serves as the definitive reference document for implementing the national inspection framework during the 2024/25 and 2025/26 academic year.

## 2025 Implementation

In 2025, the National Education Inspectorate (NEI) implemented a substantially expanded inspection programme. Within the 2024/25 inspection programme period the 2024/2025 academic year, NEI conducted 130 inspections, out of which VET schools represented a substantial proportion of the inspection sample - 26 professional gymnasiums (20% of all inspected schools) were included, alongside 14 profiled gymnasiums. This is considerable increase compared to the previous inspection cycle (2023/24 school year), when only 3 VET schools were inspected.

The emphasis on professional gymnasiums in 2025 inspection cycle demonstrates NEI's commitment to quality assurance across all educational pathways, with particular attention to VET as a strategic priority for aligning educational outcomes with labour market demands and supporting youth employability.

Inspections in 2025 followed a risk-based selection methodology. Schools are selected through multi-criteria analysis incorporating: territorial equity (under inspected regions), performance data from prior inspections and national assessments, institutional type (hub/protected, municipal/state-funded), and engagement in inclusive education projects. This approach directed inspection resources toward institutions with demonstrated improvement needs while maintaining systematic coverage and documenting innovative practices.

In September 2025, NEI approved new criteria and indicators for inspection for the 2025/26 academic year. This approval marks a transition to a new inspection cycle and represents a refinement and expansion of the quality framework established in 2021/24. The criteria were structured across three inspection areas:

- (a) educational process encompassing interaction in the teaching-learning process (expected outcomes, didactic planning, classroom management), competency-based approaches, development of key competencies (including STEM and digital skills, entrepreneurship), and inclusive education. Emphasis was placed on students' self-assessment skills and teamwork abilities.
- (b) management including strategic management
- (c) source leadership, quality improvement measures, partnerships, institutional autonomy, human management, and financial and information-technology resource management. Institutional Environment covering organisational culture, change management and knowledge management, inclusive climate, conflict management, interaction with stakeholders, physical and library environments, and the well-being of students and pedagogical specialists.

The 2025/26 criteria framework introduced several thematic expansions compared to previous cycles, notably: explicit attention to digital competencies as a standalone evaluation dimension; integration of sustainability and healthy lifestyles; emphasis on institutional autonomy as a criterion for effective governance; and formal inclusion of wellbeing indicators for both students and teaching staff.

## Bodies responsible

- National Education Inspectorate (NEI)

## Target group

### Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices

### Education professionals

Teachers  
School leaders

### Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

## Thematic categories

### Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Further developing national quality assurance systems

## Subsystem

IVET

## Further reading

[Decree of the Council of Ministers No 36/ 13 March 2018](#)

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[Inspection framework-website of the National Education Inspectorate](#)

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[Inspection report for 2019/20 academic year](#)

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[Ordinance No 18/9 September 2021 on the inspection of kindergartens and schools issued by the Minister for Education and Science](#)

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[National Education Inspectorate \(2022\)- Annual report for 2022](#)

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[National Education Inspectorate. \(2024\). Summarised information on evaluations and guidelines for improvement by areas of inspection from the inspections performed in the academic year 2023/24](#)

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[National Education Inspectorate. \(2024\). Annual report on the activity plan of the National Education Inspectorate for the academic year 2023/24 \(September 2023 - September 2024\)](#)

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[National Education Inspectorate. \(2024\). Quality assessment framework for education.](#)

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“ … ” **Cite as**

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28050>