

OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education

Norway

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

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Executive summary

Norway has a well-established tradition of decentralisation and school autonomy, with a strong sense of individual schools being “owned” by their local communities and accountable to them rather than the national authorities. This decentralisation is especially marked in the case of primary and lower secondary education, where, with the exception of a small private sector, schools are run by the 430 municipalities. Many of these, especially in rural areas, are very small and responsible for just a few schools each. In this decentralised context, evaluation and assessment are essential to monitor the quality of education nationally and provide feedback for improvement to school owners and schools.

The Norwegian authorities have set up a national quality assessment system (NKVS) for the education sector in 2004. NKVS provides access to a range of data and tools intended to help schools, school owners and education authorities evaluate their performance and inform strategies for improvement. The system initially included mandatory national student assessments, user surveys and a web-based School Portal, and was later complemented by additional tools and guidance to support evaluation at the local level. Taken together, the different elements of NKVS have the potential to provide the sector with a powerful toolkit to support a decentralised system of evaluation and assessment. Norway deserves credit for the initiative to create a multi-faceted evaluation and assessment framework that provides monitoring information at different levels and aims to achieve both accountability and improvement purposes. To further strengthen Norway’s approach to evaluation and assessment, top priorities are to:

Clarify learning goals and quality criteria to guide assessment and evaluation

For evaluation and assessment to be effective in improving quality across the whole education system, it is essential that all schools and school owners have a clear understanding of the level of performance that can be achieved by the most successful schools, and are able to accurately evaluate how their performance stands in comparison. This requires the development of a clear set of reference points for common orientation across Norway to help local actors evaluate the quality of processes and outcomes. There is room to develop clearer expectations and criteria for student performance in different subjects and year levels and to clarify key aspects of quality in teaching practices and school organisation.

The Ministry of Education and Research and the Directorate for Education and Training should engage with key stakeholders to (1) refine and expand national competence goals and provide clearer guidance concerning expected learning progressions and criteria for assessment in different subjects, (2) develop an evidence-based statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do, as a reference framework to guide teacher appraisal, professional development and career progression, and (3) establish an agreed framework of process quality indicators

for school evaluation that can help schools review and improve core elements of their practice such as teaching and learning, curriculum management, assessment approaches, and management and leadership.

Complete the evaluation and assessment framework and make it coherent

The establishment of NKVS and its various elements provide Norway with a strong basis to develop a comprehensive national framework for evaluation and assessment. However, the distinct purposes of the various tools and data sources established through NKVS have not been well communicated and there is little understanding of NKVS as a coherent system. It is now important to increase clarity in the communication about the evaluation and assessment framework, take stock of the work accomplished so far and enhance coherence between the different elements of evaluation and assessment. To this end, it would be helpful to develop a strategic plan or framework that clearly maps all the existing elements of evaluation and assessment in Norway, including those that are currently not perceived as part of NKVS.

In particular, teacher appraisal is an important element of a comprehensive evaluation and assessment framework that is currently not well integrated into NKVS. Teacher appraisal and feedback can be powerful levers to increase teacher effectiveness and achieve better student learning outcomes. To complete the evaluation and assessment framework, the appraisal of teaching practices should be integrated into NKVS, and be linked to both teacher professional development and school evaluation and improvement.

The national authorities should emphasise that the evaluation and assessment framework includes both formative and summative elements, and school-internal as well as external components. For each of the key components of evaluation and assessment, the framework or strategic plan could provide links to the relevant reference standards, and point to existing tools and professional learning opportunities. To make the system coherent, it is important that learning goals are placed at the centre of the framework and that all other elements align to work towards these goals.

Further strengthen competencies for evaluation and assessment among teachers, school leaders and school owners

The successful implementation of an evaluation and assessment framework crucially depends on whether professionals in counties, municipalities and schools have the understanding and competencies to collect, analyse and interpret evaluative information with a view to improve practices. Embedding an evaluation culture in schools and municipalities across Norway is a large culture shift that requires further investment in professional learning opportunities, targeted to the needs of different stakeholder groups.

- **Teachers**, responsible for student assessment, need to further strengthen their competencies to (1) interpret and follow up on student assessment results obtained from national tests and mapping tests, (2) develop valid and reliable assessment tools to meet their own specific local needs, and (3) enhance formative assessment practice, especially giving feedback and engaging students. To focus the professional learning offer regarding assessment, it would be helpful to define a set of teacher competencies related to assessment that can be integrated in overall teaching standards (see above).

- **School leaders**, responsible for both teacher appraisal and school self-evaluation, need to develop their skills to operate effective feedback, coaching and appraisal arrangements for their staff and to use data in a purposeful way for whole-school evaluation and improvement. The national training programme for new school leaders is a promising step in this direction. The provision of leadership training could be expanded to differentiate offers for a wider range of school staff including middle and deputy leaders, beginning leaders and experienced leaders. It is also important to ensure that school leaders receive adequate appraisal and feedback from their employers.
- **School owners**, responsible for external evaluation of individual schools and monitoring of their local education systems, need to develop the capacity to understand and make decisions based on evaluative information from their schools. In many parts of Norway, it is unrealistic to expect that individual school owners would be able to develop robust local quality assurance systems on their own and follow up with schools accordingly. It is likely to make more sense to build larger scale “shared service” approaches, which offer school improvement services, including external evaluation, coaching and consultancy, to groups of schools and school owners across a region. The County Governors could play a key role in promoting and supporting strategic partnerships between school owners and key sources of support.

Conclusions and recommendations

Education system context

A high level of decentralisation and local ownership

Norway has a well-established tradition of school autonomy, with a strong sense of individual schools being “owned” by their local communities and accountable to them rather than more distant national bodies. This decentralisation is especially marked in the case of primary and lower secondary education, where, with the exception of a small private sector, schools are run by the 430 municipalities. Many of these, particularly in the more rural areas, are very small and are only responsible for a few schools each. In the case of upper secondary education, schools are run by the 19 counties with the only exception being Oslo, the largest local authority, which runs both primary and both levels of secondary schools. The 2006 Knowledge Promotion curriculum focuses strongly on basic skills and outcome-based learning, leaving it up to the school owners to adapt and implement more detailed curricula at the local level. In addition to granting school owners a high level of curricular autonomy, legislation has recently given them greater freedom to make their own decisions regarding organisational and funding aspects of schooling.

Strong school autonomy and a focus on building the capacity of principals and teachers

Schools also benefit from a high degree of autonomy. School owners typically delegate a range of tasks including budget allocation, recruitment of staff and development of pedagogical plans to the school level. Principals and teachers are generally in charge of setting more specific learning goals and deciding on the content, methods and organisation of teaching. There is a growing recognition that the high level of school autonomy requires strong and effective school leadership. To build the capacity of new school leaders, a national principal education programme was introduced in 2009 to support principals in becoming educational leaders capable of guiding the core processes of teaching and learning in schools. In addition, a range of measures were introduced to raise the status, capacity and performance of the teaching profession. These included enhanced admission requirements for entry into teacher training, a re-organisation of initial teacher education, mentoring and induction for new teachers and a broad offer of continuing professional development.

A sustained focus on raising quality and equity in education

While Norway's results in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 are at or above the OECD average depending on the subject, the number of top performers is small. The relatively modest overall performance is not considered satisfactory, especially given that Norway's annual expense per student is well above the OECD average. Even though Norway achieves a high level of equity among students from different socio-economic backgrounds, there are also concerns about the consistently low performance of certain groups such as first-generation immigrant students. Another key challenge for Norway is to raise upper secondary completion rates, as currently about one-fifth of students over 16 do not complete their education. The Ministry of Education and Research has set three core objectives for education, namely (1) all students leaving compulsory education with the necessary basic skills, (2) all youngsters who are able to do so completing upper secondary education, and (3) all students experiencing inclusion and a sense of mastery in education.

Strengths and challenges

Norway is working towards a comprehensive evaluation and assessment system, but it is still incomplete

With the launch of a national quality assessment system (NKVS) in 2004, the Norwegian authorities set out to build a multi-faceted framework for evaluation and assessment. In less than a decade, Norway has come far in developing a range of tools intended to help schools, school owners and education authorities evaluate their performance and inform strategies for improvement. Taken together, the different elements of NKVS have the potential to provide the sector with a powerful and comprehensive toolkit to support a decentralised system of evaluation and assessment. Norway deserves credit for the initiative to create a balanced evaluation and assessment framework that provides monitoring information at different levels and aims to achieve both accountability and improvement purposes. So far, however, NKVS has not been well communicated with a clear and consistent vision for evaluation and assessment. There is no policy document providing an overview of all the different elements that form part of NKVS. Some key components of a comprehensive evaluation and assessment framework are currently still underdeveloped and the articulations between them need to be strengthened.

Decentralisation helps build local ownership, but the evaluation capacities of municipalities are variable

Policy making in Norway is characterised by a high level of respect for local ownership and this is evident in the development of the national evaluation and assessment framework as well. School owners and schools have a high degree of autonomy regarding school policies, curriculum development and evaluation and assessment. There is a shared understanding that democratic decision-making and buy-in from those concerned by evaluation and assessment policy are essential for successful implementation. Networking among schools and municipalities is frequently used as a means to share responsibility and build capacity through mutual learning. However, in

several parts of Norway, especially in the smaller and more rural municipalities, it seems unrealistic to expect that individual school owners would be able to acquire and sustain the expert capacity to design effective curricula and mount a comprehensive school evaluation and improvement system on their own. Despite the fact that many municipalities are very small and losing population, there have been few mergers of municipalities. Further, the background and qualifications of municipal officials responsible for school evaluation vary significantly and some municipalities have actually downsized their educational expertise in recent years.

While the strong focus on outcomes is commendable, there is a need for clearer reference points and assessment criteria

The launch of the national quality assessment system reflects an intention to move the policy focus away from inputs and processes to pay more attention to the outcomes of education. In parallel to the introduction of NKVS, work was undertaken to clarify the expected learning outcomes for the education system. The Knowledge Promotion reform in 2006 introduced a new outcomes-based curriculum with competence goals for key stages of education. While the focus on outcomes is commendable, the competence goals are only defined for certain years of education and there are indications that teachers find it difficult to translate national competence aims into concrete lesson plans and objectives. There seems to be a need for more visible reference points for a substantial number of teachers. Classroom-based assessment would also benefit from clearer rubrics that detail assessment criteria to provide achievable targets for students. There seems to be little shared understanding regarding what constitutes adequate, good and excellent performance in different subject areas and year levels.

Norway is developing a balanced approach to student assessment and needs to be clear about the distinct purposes of different types of assessment

Norway has engaged in developing a balanced approach to student assessment with a range of different internal and external assessment formats aiming to provide a broad picture of student learning. Taken together, classroom assessment, national testing and selection for central and oral examinations cover a broad base of purposes, subjects and forms of assessment that are fit for different purposes. However, there is a risk that the national tests could become more “high stakes” than others and shift the balance that is currently in place. The communication around the purposes of large-scale assessments in Norway has not always been sufficiently clear. Although the Norwegian system in recent years has intentionally worked to ensure that they are not used for teacher appraisal, there was considerable interest in using the results from the national tests in the classroom and, to some extent, they are also used by the general public to judge school quality. As the raw test results of individual schools are published by the media, it is likely that teachers will work to avoid the public stigma of poor results, which may have unintended consequences such as curriculum narrowing, teaching to the test and emphasising basic knowledge and skills that are easily measurable.

A range of professional development opportunities have emerged, but assessment capacities are still variable across schools

As assessment has become a central part of the Norwegian educational landscape, a range of approaches to professional development and learning have been emerging for school leaders and teachers at the national, regional and local level. Professional development also takes place around teachers' marking of central examinations and in moderated grading of oral examinations. The focus on professional learning is commendable and needs to be further enhanced. There is much room to strengthen the capacity of school leaders and teachers to use evaluation and assessment data in a purposeful and systematic way to direct changes in schools and classrooms. Teachers still vary in their capacity to implement multi-faceted assessment approaches, make consistent judgements of student performance and provide effective feedback to students and parents. School leaders have little tradition and training in using assessment data for whole-school self-evaluation. The use of data is often ad hoc at the particular point of time that test results are received by the schools, but there is not yet much sense of using data in a holistic way, pulling together data from different sources to inform strategies at the school and classroom level

Norway's strong focus on formative assessment is commendable and needs to be further sustained

Formative assessment or "assessment for learning" has gained increasing prominence in both policy and practice in Norway. A statutory requirement has been introduced for schools to implement formative assessment and the Directorate has created a website with tools and materials to support teachers in fulfilling this requirement. Formative assessment has also been identified as a priority for professional learning and the Directorate has launched a four-year Assessment for Learning programme. Norway's long-standing tradition of teacher-based assessment provides a good basis for a stronger focus on formative assessment. However, there is a risk that the national focus on formative assessment is being accepted by teachers as just another name for what they already do. Assessment *for* learning requires a major shift in mindset for teachers, as well as changes in assessment practices. Assessment is considered as formative only if it actually shapes subsequent teaching and learning, *i.e.* if teachers use the assessment to identify misunderstandings, misconceptions or missing elements of student learning, provide detailed feedback, and change teaching practices.

There is little national support or guidance to ensure consistently effective teacher appraisal across Norway

Teacher appraisal is not considered to be part of the national quality assessment system (NKVS). While regulations state that teacher appraisal must be implemented by school administrations, the processes for appraisal are not regulated by law and there are no national performance criteria or reference standards to guide the process. As the employing authorities for teachers, school owners are free to establish their own frameworks for teacher appraisal but few of them have systematic frameworks in place to appraise the quality of teachers' practice. This limits the possibilities for teachers to receive professional feedback from their employer and a validation of their work by an external entity. Despite the national requirement for school administrations to appraise

teachers annually, there is no guarantee that all teachers actually receive professional feedback from their school leaders. Over a quarter of the Norwegian teachers surveyed in the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) reported that they never received any appraisal from their principal about their work in the school.

There is little tradition for educational leadership, but principals are now receiving training related to teacher appraisal

The existing teacher appraisal practices are the initiative of individual schools (sometimes in the context of municipality programmes) and largely depend on the leadership style of the principal. The most common form of feedback for teachers is an annual employee dialogue with the school leader. However, the historical pattern has been for school leaders to operate as “first among equals” focussing on administration and management rather than influencing the day-to-day professional practice in their colleagues' classrooms. There is little tradition in Norway for school leaders or even teacher peers to routinely observe classroom teaching with an evaluative focus and follow-up with coaching and mentoring of teachers. According to TALIS, of those teachers who were appraised, less than 30% indicated that the appraisal contained suggestions for improving certain aspects of their work. The recent introduction of a training programme for school leaders has the potential to contribute considerably to the professionalisation of school leadership and can help school leaders focus on appraising and guiding the teaching staff to achieve better learning outcomes for students.

There is room to strengthen the links between teacher appraisal, teacher development and school development

Without a clear link to professional development opportunities, the impact of appraisal on teacher performance will be quite limited. Even though the importance of professional development is clearly recognised in Norway, its provision appears still fragmented and not systematically linked to teacher appraisal. There is also scope to better link teacher professional development to school development and improvement. Another challenge is that there are hardly any links between teacher appraisal and greater recognition or increasing responsibility for teachers. At the national level, there is no clearly designed career structure for teachers and the organisational structure in schools is typically flat with few promoted posts and few explicit means of giving teachers significant whole-school lead responsibilities. This is likely to undermine the potentially powerful links between teacher appraisal, professional development and career development. Salary differences also seem disconnected from actual performance or commitment which reduces the school leaders' possibilities to incentivise good performance.

Schools' self-evaluation is supported by a range of tools and data, but the extent and quality of self-evaluation is variable across schools

There is a strong emphasis on keeping responsibility for school evaluation and improvement firmly with the schools and school owners. The web-based School Portal gives schools access to nationally standardised analyses of data they can use to evaluate aspects of their performance. These include national test results, examination results and results from the national Pupil Survey. The availability of good data on user views is a

particular strength of the Norwegian system. In addition to data analyses, two methodological analysis tools have been designed to support schools' self-evaluation activities. While there has been increasing focus on quality work at the school level, the extent to which school self-evaluation is undertaken across Norway is still variable. There appeared to be limited awareness and use of the School Portal, which may be explained partly by a lack of trust in the data and partly by a lack of capacity for effective data use at the school level. The development and maintenance of some commonality and comparability of standards in school self-evaluation is also a clear challenge for Norway as there are no national guidelines for self-evaluation and no consistent quality criteria or reference standards to evaluate core processes such as teaching and learning, assessment, curriculum management and leadership.

Recent developments to introduce elements of external review have the potential to complement and enhance schools' self-review practices

Whilst the Norwegian approach to quality improvement has been developed with a very strong reliance on encouraging the “bottom-up” development of self-evaluation within schools, the benefits of introducing a stronger element of external review have been recognised more recently. As a result of this growing awareness, some promising initiatives have been introduced nationally, regionally and locally to strengthen the extent to which schools could benefit from direct external evaluation of their practice. Participation in national programmes such as the “Word to Deed” and the “Guidance Corps” organised by the Directorate have been such opportunities. In association with such projects, or through their own initiative, some schools have also developed relationships with local universities or teacher education institutions which has given them access to an element of external evaluation of their work. Some municipalities have developed regional co-operation on external school evaluation.

Local system monitoring has been strengthened, but the provision of data is not optimal for use by municipalities

There have been a number of approaches to strengthening monitoring at the local level. School owners are obliged to have a system in place to monitor school compliance with legal requirements. This was reinforced in 2009 by a requirement for school owners to produce an annual report on “the state of basic education” in their school(s). The Directorate, via the School Portal, has provided since 2010 a Template tool for school owners to complete such reports, which includes data for both compulsory and suggested indicators. The Directorate and the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) also provide capacity building and support offers for municipalities facing challenges related to the quality of their local systems. While the School Portal offers a rich information system on teacher resources, student results and student enrolment and allows users much flexibility in selection of information, it is still not optimal from a local management perspective. For example, it is currently not possible for municipalities to have an overview of the indicators aggregated to the municipal level or indeed to show indicators for all schools within a given municipality.

Norway has a strong framework for education system evaluation, but cannot monitor changes over time

The Directorate for Education and Training uses a well-established reporting framework to evaluate the Norwegian school system, based on key indicators including the results from international assessments, national tests, students' final assessments and the Pupil Survey. Norway also monitors the equity of education outcomes, with robust information on individual student characteristics and economic and demographic data aggregated to the municipal level, and collects evidence of student views on their learning environment. Such information is analysed and reported on in the *Education Mirror* and feeds into the policy debate in the key thematic areas. Currently, however, Norway does not have national measures to indicate performance changes over time. The national tests do not allow measuring improvement over time, as all questions and tasks used in the tests are publically released and the level of difficulty may vary from year to year. There is a further note of caution about using school and local level results for quality monitoring as there is a lack of stability of both overall grades and final examinations at the school and municipal levels across years.

There is a new thematic focus for nationwide inspections, but the monitoring of municipalities' local school systems remains relatively light

Inspections are becoming increasingly relevant to the national monitoring system. The first “national inspections” were launched in 2006 and have so far primarily focused on school owners' systems to assess school compliance with the Education Act and to follow up on results. 2010 saw the introduction of a thematic nationwide inspection, with a focus on the students' psycho-social environment. In theory, this new approach holds great potential for inspections to go beyond a focus on whether or not there is a monitoring system in place, to actually look into the different aspects that are monitored. However, the current approach for inspection activities is to monitor school owners' compliance with laws and regulations and the quality of teaching and learning will only be captured to the extent that the law addresses this. There are also concerns about large differences in how inspections are carried out by the County Governors' offices. There have been efforts to address this by collaboratively developing inspection guidelines at the national level, but there are no national competency profiles for inspectors or a national understanding of their tasks.

Policy recommendations

Complete the evaluation and assessment framework and strengthen coherence between its components

The establishment of NKVS and its various elements provides Norway with a strong basis to develop a comprehensive national system for evaluation and assessment. To go further, it would be important to develop a strategic plan that sets out to complete the evaluation and assessment framework and to strengthen coherence between its different elements. This should involve a mapping of all the existing elements of evaluation and assessment in Norway, including those that are currently not perceived as being part of NKVS. The framework should cover the key elements of evaluation and assessment –

student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation. It should emphasise that a comprehensive framework includes both formative and summative elements, and school-internal as well as external components. For each of the key components of the evaluation and assessment framework, the national authorities could describe and provide links to the relevant reference standards and existing tools to support implementation. Starting from the mapping exercise, the Directorate together with key stakeholders should work to identify the components that are still underdeveloped in the current framework and prioritise steps for further development. To make the system coherent, it is important that the learning goals to be achieved are placed at the centre of the framework and that all other evaluation and assessment activities align to work towards these goals.

Develop clearer and more visible learning goals and criteria to guide student assessment

The Knowledge Promotion curriculum is still relatively recent and there is room to further build on and deepen it by creating more specific learning objectives and learning progressions that describe the way that students typically move through learning in each subject area. This would provide teachers and other stakeholders with concrete images of what to expect in student learning, with direct links to the curriculum. Learning progressions can provide a picture from beginning learning to expertise, and enable students, parents, teachers, and the public to see student progress over time. Teachers can use such learning progressions or roadmaps to identify the set of skills and knowledge that students must master en route to becoming competent in the complex and multi-faceted outcomes that make up the curriculum. To assist teachers in their practical assessment work against competence goals, the Directorate should also engage with stakeholder groups to facilitate the development of scoring rubrics listing criteria for rating different aspects of performance and exemplars illustrating student performance at different levels of achievement. Teachers also need to develop skills to create their own specific objectives and criteria and should be encouraged to share and co-construct assessment criteria with students so that they understand different levels of quality work.

Enhance focused professional learning on student assessment

Norway has already taken various steps to increase the offer of professional development opportunities related to student assessment. These steps are commendable and need to be sustained to further reduce variations in the quality and effectiveness of practices at the local and school level. School professionals not only need to strengthen their capacity to use, interpret and follow up on results obtained from national tests and mapping tests, but also to develop valid and reliable assessment tools to meet their own specific local needs. This concerns in particular the subjects other than reading, mathematics and English where there are no national tests or mapping tests available, and those subjects where there are no central examinations. Schools should also learn to develop assessment strategies and materials particularly in areas where school results are problematic and where more information is needed on sub-groups of students. To focus the offer of professional learning opportunities for teachers, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Directorate for Education and Training should consider engaging universities and stakeholders in a process to define a set of teacher competencies related to assessment that can be integrated in overall teaching standards.

Strengthen clarity in the communication about purposes and uses of national assessments

Because national testing is a relatively new phenomenon in Norway, it is important to be clear about its purposes, to develop the tests over time to be able to accommodate the purposes that are reasonable, point out inappropriate uses and provide guidance for the way in which the tests can be used. The role of the national tests should be clearly fixed and the tests should be continually developed, reviewed and validated to ensure that they are fit for purpose. The national authorities should continue to be clear in their communication that raw national test results are not fulsome measures of student achievement or progress, and even less so of teacher or school quality. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that the breadth of curriculum and learning goals is maintained in student assessment by ensuring that all subject areas and objectives are given certain forms of attention. As the national tests results are published by the media, teachers are likely to devote more time to what is measured in them. To prevent teaching to the tests and curriculum narrowing, multiple measures of student performance should be used to measure achievement and progress.

Continue to support formative assessment in schools, with particular focus on feedback and student engagement

Assessment for learning requires a fundamental shift in thinking about how teachers and students interact and use the assessment experiences to promote learning, independent of the requirement to accredit performance. In order to help teachers gain a deeper understanding of the purposes and practice of formative assessment, professional learning offers should help them to systematically incorporate formative assessment methods in their course planning. In particular, teachers need to develop their competencies to give specific and detailed feedback to students and to work with students so that they can develop self-monitoring skills and habits. The Directorate could use “feedback for learning” as an intensive and widespread national professional learning focus, with resources, pre-service and in-service sessions, forums and conferences, as well as incentives to municipalities and counties to participate and to share.

Develop teaching standards to guide teacher appraisal and professional development

The development of a clear and concise statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do should be a priority in Norway. Teaching standards are a key element in any teacher appraisal system as they provide a shared understanding of accomplished teaching and a credible reference to make judgements about teacher competence. The teaching standards should provide a common basis to guide key elements of the teaching profession such as initial teacher education, teacher professional development, career advancement and, of course, teacher appraisal. They should build on the competence aims developed for initial teacher training to establish more explicit criteria of high performance and to describe different levels of expertise expected to be developed while on the job.

Support school leaders to embed effective teacher appraisal for improvement purposes in regular school practices

Meaningful teacher appraisal should aim at teacher development and improvements in teaching and learning processes. It can help teachers develop their competencies by recognising strengths on which they can build and identifying weaknesses to be addressed by suitable professional development. Teacher appraisal for improvement should be an internal process carried out by line managers, senior peers and the school leader with a focus on teachers' practices in the classroom. It can be low-key and low-cost and include a mix of methods appropriate to the school. Distributing leadership more among senior and middle management functions can help reduce the burden of principals and foster leadership capacity across the school. The provision of school leadership training could be expanded and scaled up to include offers for a wider group of school staff including middle leaders, deputy principals and members of the leadership team. To ensure that such internal appraisal is systematic and coherent across Norwegian schools, it would be important that an external body provides a validation of school level processes for teacher appraisal, holding the school leader accountable as necessary.

Create a common career structure for teachers, linked to a more formal appraisal process at key stages of the career

In addition to the developmental appraisal described above, the teaching profession in Norway would also benefit from a more formal process of teacher appraisal for accountability purposes at key stages in their career. Such appraisal would be more summative in nature and would formalise the principle of advancement based on high performance associated with career opportunities for effective teachers. It can provide incentives for teachers to perform at their best, bring recognition to effective teachers, support career progression and help recognise and spread good practice more widely. Advancement in the teaching career could be organised through a system of teacher registration or certification at key stages in the career. While the process should be mostly school-based, led by the school leadership team, there would need to be a stronger component external to the school to validate the process and ensure that practices are consistent across Norway. This element of externality could be introduced via an accredited external evaluator, typically a teacher from another school with expertise in the same area as the teacher being appraised.

Develop a set of national quality standards for school evaluation and extend capacity for external review and support

To help structure the evaluation of core school processes such as teaching and learning, assessment, curriculum and leadership, it is essential to develop a set of nationally agreed quality criteria for school evaluation. A national programme should be established to develop an agreed framework of process quality indicators, which could then be made widely available to schools and school owners to use in their own evaluative processes. In the Norwegian context, one very appropriate way of taking forward the development of a clearer set of national quality standards for school evaluation would be to extend, enhance and to some extent re-focus the nationally-sponsored programme promoting external reviews for schools. The Directorate, in partnership with school owners and County Governors across Norway,

could take the lead in this development, perhaps taking a stronger direct role in establishing and managing a national sample programme of external school reviews. Through these reviews, the Directorate could design, trial and refine an agreed national quality indicator framework, while also building capacity and skills for more rigorous self-evaluation within municipalities and the schools involved.

Build a comprehensive set of national tools and advice for undertaking school evaluation

Building on the methodological tools already available and on the developments of a set of process indicators (see above), there is scope for creating a more comprehensive and integrated package of resources designed to give school leaders a practical toolkit for structuring the different aspects of school self-evaluation. The School Portal is clearly a step in the right direction in that it potentially provides a flexible, interactive method of giving every school access to data relevant to the school's own performance. The Directorate should now establish a development programme designed to substantially raise the awareness and impact of the Portal. The range of types of analyses should also be broadened with a strong focus being placed on developing benchmarking analyses which are trusted and valued by school leaders and school owners. Alongside creating more user-friendly and sophisticated forms of benchmarking data with more help for non-technical users in interpreting it, effort should also be directed towards increasing the skills of school staff in the use and interpretation of data for the purposes of school improvement.

Continue to build capacity and partnerships to support evaluation and improvement at the local level

More local mechanisms should be developed to ensure that all school owners and schools, consistently across Norway, can more easily access external support for their own evaluation and improvement activities as and when they require it. For school owners, an area of particular importance is to develop the capacity to understand, interpret and make decisions based on evaluative information from their schools. The County Governors offices, in collaboration with regional offices of the Directorate should take a pro-active role in promoting and supporting the development of strategic partnerships between school owners and key potential sources of support. This could include university education departments, teacher training institutions and any other potential providers in their regions. Rather than expecting each school owner to develop school improvement services on their own, Norway should consider building “shared school improvement services” offering regional support to a larger group of school owners. Such larger scale approaches could offer shared services such as external evaluation, coaching and consultancy, to groups of school owners across a region.

Strengthen efforts to monitor the results and evaluation capacity of municipalities

Both the Directorate and County Governors should systematically monitor municipal performance on key outcome indicators. Careful monitoring of municipality results can aid investigation into both potential performance concerns and examples of performance improvement. It follows that this would be critical information in prioritising national and county inspections. In monitoring and promoting the evaluation capacity of municipalities, the Directorate should evaluate the value and impact of the recent

requirement for municipalities to draw up an annual status report. In this context, there is room for the Directorate in collaboration with KS to promote an exchange of different approaches to use and follow-up of results in the reports.

Optimise the reporting and use of system-level data

Norway, over a short period of time, has put in place a national monitoring system with new national measures of outcomes (the national tests and the Pupil Survey) and an electronic platform to report and share the results from the system (the School Portal). At this stage, the Directorate should devise a strategy to optimise the use of such system-level data by key stakeholders throughout the system, notably the County Governors, municipalities and schools. Optimising the provision of national monitoring results for use at the municipal level is a critical step toward securing the effective use of such results for school improvement at the local level. For public school owners, in particular, it is of keen interest to have an easy overview of all indicators for their municipality. Further, there is demand from school owners to see major indicators for all schools within a municipality. Reporting results in a useful format for municipalities would be an effective way to avoid the repetition of basic statistical tasks throughout the system and the Directorate could consult with KS and school owners in designing a suitable reporting format.

Consider ways to strengthen national measures to monitor improvement

There is potential to more fully exploit the national tests to give useful information at the system level. The shift to an electronic testing format provides a welcome opportunity to revisit the design of the national tests. First, it would be useful to ensure the comparability of results over time by keeping a stable element of items in the tests and releasing only a small proportion of the items for use by teachers after the tests. Second, a more strategic use of the national test results could provide indicators on the progress of particular student cohorts through compulsory education. With the individual student identification numbers, results from the national tests could be linked across cohorts to report on the success of a given cohort on national tests in Years 5, 8 and 9. As is done in Oslo, the national authorities could explore ways to link information for individual student progress through primary and lower secondary as well as upper secondary education.