

# OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education

## Czech Republic

### MAIN CONCLUSIONS

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This summary of main conclusions is drawn from *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Czech Republic*. The full report is available on the project's website: [www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy](http://www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy).

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## Executive summary

Student learning outcomes in the Czech Republic are around or slightly below the OECD average, depending on the skills assessed. However, there is some evidence from international student surveys of a significant decline in student learning outcomes in the last decade. There are also indications that both performance and choice of educational track are strongly influenced by family background. Another concern relates to the basis for attending a special school, sometimes as a result of learning difficulties and/or a social disadvantage and not following the identification of a learning disability. Since the 1989 Revolution, schools benefit from considerable autonomy including over the content of instruction, teaching methods, student assessment criteria, and management of the teaching body. In this context, the role of evaluation and assessment as key tools to achieve quality and equity in education was reinforced. While there are provisions for evaluation and assessment at student, teacher, school and system levels, challenges remain in strengthening some of the components of the evaluation and assessment framework, in ensuring articulations within the framework to ensure consistency and complementarity, and in establishing improvement-oriented evaluation practices. The Review Team identified the following priorities in its review of evaluation and assessment policies in the Czech Republic.

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### *Integrating the evaluation and assessment framework and developing capacity across the school system*

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There is clearly the perception in the education system that the evaluation and assessment framework needs to be strengthened and that there needs to be a greater focus on improving student outcomes. This is reflected in current initiatives. However, at the present time, there is no integrated evaluation and assessment framework – it is not perceived as a coherent whole and it does not visibly connect all the different components. An important initial step for policy development is to develop a strategic plan or framework document that conceptualises a complete evaluation and assessment framework and articulates ways to achieve the coherence between its different components. The process of developing an effective evaluation and assessment framework should give due attention to: achieving proper articulation between the different evaluation components (*e.g.* teacher appraisal, school evaluation and school development); and ensuring the several elements within an evaluation component are sufficiently linked (*e.g.* teaching standards and teacher appraisal). Another challenge are the limited evaluation and assessment competencies throughout the education system in spite of the considerable national efforts to stimulate an evaluation culture, as well as providing some competency-building learning opportunities. Hence, an area for policy priority is consolidating efforts to improve the capacity for evaluation and assessment. As the Czech education system is highly devolved and relies on the evaluation and assessment capacities of diverse school agents, it is important that capacity building responds to the diverse needs of school governing bodies (regions and municipalities), school principals and teachers.

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***Maintaining the centrality of teacher-based assessment, improving its consistency and introducing national standardised tests on a solid basis***

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At all levels of education, teachers play the major role in assessing and reporting on student achievement. In general, it can be said that the autonomy in assessment for teachers and for schools is uncontested and widely supported. However, generally there is a traditional approach to the organisation of classrooms in the Czech Republic. Assessment for learning is not systematically used in Czech schools. There is little emphasis in assessment practices on providing student feedback and developing teacher-student interactions about student learning. As a result, the Czech Republic needs a stronger commitment to improving students' achievement through the use of formative assessment to enhance student learning, rather than simply through the use of assessment summatively for recording and reporting learning. Another concern relates to the current introduction of national standardised tests at grades 5 and 9 (in Czech language, foreign language and mathematics), which arises as the result of the increased focus on key learning outcomes for students. The standards against which the national tests will be marked, currently being developed, may be more appropriately regarded as specifications for the national tests, rather than indicators of the quality of student achievement expected at different levels of the education system. The preparation of the standards is also being rushed by the requirement for national tests to be piloted in 2011. It would be best to thoroughly develop sound educational standards covering the full breadth of student learning objectives prior to developing national tests. Also, it is essential to better articulate the purposes of national tests and recognise that they cover a limited range of competencies. A further priority should be the introduction of moderation processes within and across schools to increase the reliability of teacher-based judgments. The objective is to reduce the variations in the ways teachers assess students and set marks so equity of student assessment is improved. This should go along with the development of guidelines at the national level for assessing against student learning objectives.

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***Developing teaching standards, strengthening teacher appraisal for improvement and establishing teacher certification***

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Teacher appraisal appears to be widely accepted and a well-established aspect of regular practice in schools. However, its application is hindered by the absence of teaching standards, no national framework to make school-based practices consistent across schools and there is no mechanism to ensure that each individual teacher receives proper professional feedback. As a result, the Czech education system should pursue the efforts that are being made in preparing a professional profile or standards for the teaching profession to provide a credible reference to make judgements about teacher competence. Another priority should be strengthening regular formative appraisal with a professional development focus which is separate from the more summative appraisal processes. Teacher appraisal for improvement purposes is likely to benefit from a non-threatening evaluation context, a culture of mutually providing and receiving feedback, clear individual and collective objectives, simple evaluation instruments, supportive school leadership, opportunities for professional development and close linkages to school self-evaluation. To ensure that developmental appraisal conducted by school principals is systematic and coherent across Czech schools, it is important that the Czech School Inspectorate validates externally the school-level processes for teacher appraisal. Finally, advancement in the

teaching career could be organised through a system of teacher certification at key stages in the career, which would imply the establishment of a clearer career structure that applies across the country. The different career steps should match the different levels of expertise reflected in teaching standards and be associated with certain pay levels.

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### ***Strengthening school evaluation and developing the instructional role of school leadership***

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The Czech Republic shows a clear commitment to external accountability based around school evaluation with a well-established regular cycle of external school evaluations carried out by the Czech School Inspectorate. However, a challenge for the Czech Republic is that currently external school evaluation tends to emphasise compliance with legislation rather than the promotion of school improvement. There is also a new emphasis on promoting schools' self-evaluation. However, the penetration of school self-evaluation across the school system remains at an early stage of development. As a result, the external school evaluation process should strengthen its focus on school improvement and move away from the current "compliance" driven model. This would imply providing advice for improvement to all schools evaluated, rather than just focusing on lower performing schools. The school evaluation framework, the criteria and questions governing judgements and the methods employed should all focus much more directly on the quality of learning and teaching and their relationship to student outcomes. Also, it is recommended establishing better synergies between external and schools' self-evaluation, especially concerning the alignments of the aspects assessed. In addition, school leaders need to refocus more their work on instructional leadership. This would imply school leaders engaging in more professional development to enhance capacities especially in promoting school improvement, and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. Finally, there is a need to re-conceptualise the overall approach to evaluate school principals by school organising bodies so that the role of the school principal as an instructional leader is reinforced.

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### ***Raising the profile of system evaluation within the evaluation and assessment framework***

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The evaluation of the education system as part of the evaluation and assessment framework has received limited policy attention thus far and there is no comprehensive strategic approach to it. As it stands, system evaluation draws mostly on the evaluation of schools complemented with a set of indicators on education. Some key information gaps remain such as the unavailability of measures on students' socio-economic background and the limited information on the teaching and learning environment. At the same time, the national monitoring system for school education is considerably weakened by the absence of national data on student performance, *i.e.* there is no information on student learning outcomes which is comparable across schools, regions or over time. Also, system-level data are not used to their full potential in analysis which could be useful to inform policy development. As a result, the profile of system evaluation within the evaluation and assessment framework needs to be raised. An initial priority is to broaden the concept of system evaluation as the wide range of system-level information which permits a good understanding of how well student learning objectives are being achieved. It should include a varied set of components such as broad measures of student outcomes; demographic, administrative and contextual data; information systems; and research and analysis to inform planning, intervention and policy development.



## Conclusions and recommendations

### Education system context

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#### *Student learning outcomes are around the OECD average but have declined significantly*

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Student learning outcomes in the Czech Republic are around or slightly below the OECD average, depending on the skills assessed. In 2009, achievement levels of Czech students in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were not statistically significantly different from the OECD average in mathematics and science and were just below the OECD average with statistical significance in reading literacy. However, trend analyses of PISA results have shown a serious decline in student learning outcomes, among the most serious in the OECD area – for instance, the Czech Republic is among the four OECD countries for which performance in reading literacy between 2000 and 2009 decreased significantly.

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#### *There are concerns about the strong social selectivity and inequities in the education system*

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There is evidence that performance as well as choice of educational track is strongly influenced by family background. An issue often debated is the fact that the 6- and 8-year *Gymnasium* has potentially far reaching effects on equity as it tends to favour a minority of students into elite publicly-funded schools. Another concern relates to the basis for attending a special school. It is well known in the Czech school system that a good proportion of students who attends special schools do so as a result of learning difficulties and/or a social disadvantage and not following the identification of a learning disability. This is particularly the case of Roma children whose attendance of special schools is still very high in spite of the decision to progressively integrate disadvantaged students into mainstream schools.

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#### *Increased autonomy for schools reinforces the role of evaluation and assessment*

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Prior to 1989, the Czech education system was characterised by a strong central direction and the standardisation of processes. Instruction was based on a detailed syllabus, specified textbooks, detailed guidelines for teachers and standardised procedures for the preparation of teachers. The approach radically changed following the 1989 Revolution. Schools benefit from the free choice of textbooks and considerable autonomy over the content of instruction, namely through the development of their own school education programmes (in accordance with the national Framework Education Programmes). Teachers can choose their teaching methods in agreement with the school strategy and the requirements set in the School Education Programme. In this context, the role of evaluation and assessment as key tools to achieve quality and equity in education was reinforced.

## Strengths and challenges

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### *There is a range of initiatives to strengthen the evaluation and assessment framework which nonetheless remains incomplete and not integrated*

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There is clearly the perception in the education system that the evaluation and assessment framework needs to be strengthened and that there needs to be a greater focus on improving student outcomes. This is reflected in current initiatives. National student standardised tests in grades 5 and 9 are in the course of development, the common part of the school-leaving examination was launched in 2011, external school evaluation is consolidated and increasingly focuses on the improvement of student outcomes, school self-evaluation is mandatory, Framework Education Programmes are formulated as competency aims, the availability of national indicators on education has considerably expanded, and there is the intention to introduce teaching standards. These developments clearly communicate that evaluation and assessment are priorities in the school system and reveal a broad agenda to develop an evaluation culture among school agents. However, at the present time, there is no integrated evaluation and assessment framework. As in other OECD countries, the different components of evaluation and assessment have developed independently of each other over time. There are provisions for student assessment, school evaluation, teacher appraisal and system evaluation, but these are not explicitly integrated or aligned. The existing framework is not perceived as a coherent whole and it does not connect all the different components.

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### *There are common references at the national level but Framework Education Programmes lack descriptions of expected performance*

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There are some common references to provide the basis for evaluation and assessment. At the national level, the central government in office establishes priorities for educational policy, which provide the framework for policy development. These are expressed in the 4-year Long-term policy objectives of education and development of the education system. These are relevant references to shape the evaluation and assessment framework. However, these policy objectives tend to be somewhat short-sighted and associated with single policy initiatives. Also, there are no clear national goals for education aligned with broader social and economic goals. By contrast, at the level of student learning goals, there is a good basis for common expectations of outcomes from schooling. Both in basic and secondary education, there are national Framework Education Programmes (FEPs) in a range of educational areas. These establish competency aims for students at key stages in the education system and broadly specify the content for the learning. Within these binding goals for student achievement, the schools are given a good degree of autonomy to develop local curricula (School Education Programmes) and approaches for evaluation and assessment. Nonetheless, a range of stakeholders expressed that FEPs do not provide statements of learning goals and expectations that are clear enough to guide teaching and assessment practices and bring consistency to education in the Czech Republic. The agreed national competency aims for student performance, as expressed in the FEPs, are quite broad and there are no descriptions of expected learning progress through the curriculum. This is part of a more general challenge about the lack of descriptions of expected performance in the education system. Standards have not been developed not only for student achievement but also for defining the expected performance of teachers, school principals and schools.



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***There is an “open door” climate among teachers but there is a narrow understanding of the purposes of evaluation and assessment***

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A major strength in the system is the “open door” climate which exists among teachers. Classroom observation is a key instrument in external school evaluation ensuring the proper evaluation of the quality of the teaching and learning in schools. Also, the observation of classes by school management is common practice in schools, including in the context of school-based teacher appraisal and schools’ self-evaluation processes. This is a crucial element to ensure the effectiveness of the evaluation and assessment framework which depends to a great extent on the ability to cultivate a culture of sharing classroom practice, professional feedback and peer learning. However, the Review Team formed the view that there is a narrow understanding of the purposes and the potential of evaluation and assessment. Evaluation and assessment are still perceived mostly as instruments to hold stakeholders accountable, to “control” and assess compliance with regulations. This is visible at all levels with the focus often being whether formal requirements are met and with less attention given to the quality of practices or ways for these to improve.

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***There is a need to strengthen competencies for evaluation and assessment across the system***

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While there have been considerable national efforts to stimulate an evaluation culture by strengthening assessment and evaluation activities, as well as providing competency-building learning opportunities in some cases, the Review Team assesses that there are still limited evaluation and assessment competencies throughout the education system. There is a need to improve the evaluation competencies of school governing bodies, in particular at the municipal level. There is great variation in the capacity for municipalities to develop and effectively use quality assurance systems. There is also a need to improve the competencies of school leaders in evaluation and assessment, in particular with regard to ensuring a meaningful school self-evaluation process, and providing pedagogical guidance and coaching to individual teachers. Another area where there is limited expertise is standardised test development. This is a rather technical area requiring very specific expertise in domains such as educational measurement, test development, validation of test items or scaling methods, which happens to be scarce in the Czech Republic. Other areas in which building capacity is a considerable challenge include: the competencies of teachers for student assessment (both formative and summative); the data handling skills of school agents; and analytical capacity for educational planning and policy development at the system level.

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***Assessment is seen as part of the professional role of teachers but approaches to learning and assessment remain markedly traditional***

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Teachers in the Czech Republic play an important role in the assessment of students. At all levels of education, teachers play the major role in assessing and reporting on student achievement. The introduction of School Education Programmes has given an even greater role and increased responsibility to teachers for establishing student learning objectives and assessing against these. Schools are required to establish and publish the criteria against which students are assessed, and have these validated by the school board.

All students are assessed in an ongoing manner throughout the school year in each curriculum area using a variety of approaches. There is widespread use of oral assessments, as well as written tests/examinations. There is an emerging use of student self-assessment in areas of key competencies. In general, it can be said that this autonomy in assessment for teachers and for schools is uncontested and widely supported. However, generally there is a traditional approach to the organisation of classrooms in the Czech Republic. Teaching and assessment practices have not changed for many decades and largely still reflect the beliefs and approaches used before the liberalisation of the education system in 1989. Assessment for learning is not systematically used in Czech schools. There is little emphasis in assessment practices on providing student feedback and developing teacher-student interactions about student learning. Feedback is often understood as “summative assessment done more often”.

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***An external dimension to assessment was introduced but the multiple purposes of school-leaving examinations raise some concerns***

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A component of centralised, national assessment of student achievement has been introduced into the procedures of the school-leaving examination. The school-leaving examination includes both a national common component as well as a school/teacher-based component. This model allows for an assessment of students that is consistent in format and content across all schools nationally, while recognising the value of assessments that are best made by teachers. Also, common assignments for the apprenticeship certificate have been developed by the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education for use by the schools. The national examinations at the end of secondary education appear to serve two competing purposes. One purpose for the examination is to provide a certificate of achievement for students at the end of their secondary school education. However, it also appears that national examination results may also be used for comparing the performance of schools. These two purposes are not compatible and would require different approaches to be optimally valid for each purpose. If the national examinations are for certifying students’ achievement, then it would be important to ensure that the examinations cover adequately the breadth and depth of the curriculum, knowledge and competencies/skills. There are important other sources of information that would be necessary to collect in order to understand the performance of a school.

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***There is an increased focus on student outcomes but the national standardised tests entail a range of limitations and risks***

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With the liberalisation of the education system and the introduction of curricular reforms, there is an increased focus on key learning outcomes for students. Alongside this focus, is a move to identify expected minimum standards of achievement for students at key points in their education. In this context, the Czech Republic is introducing national standardised tests at grades 5 and 9 (in Czech language, foreign language and mathematics). The purposes while announced by the Ministry remain not well understood by the education sector. The tests are being designed to be IT-based, and will therefore potentially cover the limited range of student learning objectives that can be assessed with objective item formats that can be computer marked. In preparation for the introduction of the national tests, a team of educators has been developing standards against which the national tests will be marked. It is the view of the Review Team that the development of

the standards is being rushed by the requirement for national tests to be piloted in 2011. Development of the standards began in November 2010 to be completed by mid 2011. Given the more immediate reason for their development, the standards may be more appropriately regarded as specifications for the national tests, rather than indicators of the quality of student achievement expected at different levels of the education system. Also, the Review Team considers that it is essential to better articulate the purposes of national tests and recognise that they cover a limited range of competencies. The tests, as originally announced by the Ministry, will likely be very “high stakes tests”. This will certainly arise if the test scores are used to evaluate schools and/or teachers. Overseas experience has demonstrated that there are serious negative side effects when national test scores of student achievement are used for these purposes (*e.g.* “teaching to the test”, “narrowing of the curriculum”).

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***There is limited consistency of student assessment across schools and classes***

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Each school is responsible for establishing the student assessment criteria. There is evidence that assessment rules and practices often differ between schools and descriptions of assessment procedures and criteria are often very general. In addition, it is not common practice for Czech teachers to specify assessment criteria in full detail and to inform students of them in advance. Even though schools may use the same five-point marking scale, schools have different marking criteria. Therefore, it cannot be assured that the marks awarded in one school align with similar marks awarded in another school. This inequity of grading becomes particularly problematic when a student moves to another school. The general lack of national specifications or guidelines for student assessment hinders a consistent application of assessment criteria. Also, there is little moderation (professional discussions between teachers about the quality of students’ work) of marks within schools and no moderation across schools in the Czech Republic, and generally, moderation which involves teachers discussing authentic student work is underdeveloped.

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***The principle that teachers should be evaluated is widely accepted but teacher appraisal is not systematically implemented for all teachers***

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While the processes and criteria for teacher appraisal are not regulated nationally, there is a clear legal requirement for school principals to appraise their teachers. In the schools visited by the Review Team, school principals and teachers described teacher appraisal as a well-established aspect of regular practice in schools. Teacher appraisal appears to be widely accepted as an important and normal part of school activities. A key strength of teacher appraisal in the Czech Republic is that the process is clearly focused on evaluating actual teaching practices in the classroom. The typical approach to teacher appraisal is for school principals and/or their deputies to observe classroom practice, followed by a common discussion and analysis of the observed practice with the teacher. At the same time, given that the design and implementation of teacher appraisal is the responsibility of each individual school, teacher appraisal practices vary across the system. The quality and extent of teacher appraisal approaches in individual schools depend on the capacity and leadership style of the school principals. While school inspectors check whether teacher appraisal is implemented as part of school self-evaluation, there is no mechanism to ensure that each individual teacher receives proper professional feedback. As a consequence, there is also no guarantee that underperformance is identified and addressed accordingly.

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***There is currently no shared understanding of what constitutes high quality teaching but there are plans to develop teaching standards***

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At the moment, there is no clear and concise statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do. At the national level, there are no uniform performance criteria or reference frameworks against which teachers could be appraised. Professional standards are essential to guide any fair and effective system of teacher appraisal, given the need to have a common reference of what counts as accomplished teaching. The lack of such a framework weakens the capacity of school principals to effectively appraise teachers as required by labour-law provisions. Nonetheless there are some plans to develop teaching standards and a new career system for teachers.

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***The importance of teacher professional development is formally recognised but its links to teacher appraisal could be enhanced***

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For teacher appraisal to lead to improvement of practices, it is important that feedback is followed up with appropriate professional development. The importance of continuous professional development for teachers is recognised in legal documents in the Czech Republic, with Act No. 563 on Pedagogical Staff establishing an obligation for teachers to undergo in-service training and an annual entitlement of 12 days leave for professional development purposes. However, the provision appears fragmented and not systematically linked to teacher appraisal. Without a clear link to professional development opportunities, the impact of performance review processes on teacher performance will be relatively limited. Professional development is predominantly a choice by individual teachers and is not systematically associated with school development needs. School principals interviewed by the Review Team rarely tracked their teachers' professional development activities and the extent of strategic planning for professional development appeared limited. There was little evidence of school-centred professional development that would emphasise the community of learners within the school.

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***The link between teacher appraisal and rewards is not transparent***

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There are potential benefits of linking teacher appraisal to pay increments, as is currently done by school principals in Czech schools. It can allow school principals to do proper staff planning, stimulate professional development, and reward, retain and motivate teachers. However, there are indications that the current system of performance-related pay increments does not fulfil these functions, mainly due to a lack of transparency in the way that increments are awarded. Many of the teachers the Review Team spoke to indicated that the relationship between performance and pay was not transparent. Teachers often did not know how their salary was determined and whether it was based on classroom observations or other aspects of their work. A major reason for the lack of transparency is the absence of a clear framework for evaluating the performance of teachers.

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***External school evaluation is established but it has limited emphasis on school improvement***

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The Czech Republic shows a clear commitment to external accountability based around school evaluation with a regular cycle of external school evaluations carried out by the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI). The CSI is highly respected and schools, municipal and regional authorities value the availability of individual inspection reports for schools on a regular basis. In general, the external evaluations are welcomed and found helpful to identify certain kinds of problems by schools and other stakeholders and to provide a national overview of the system in terms of the specified criteria used. However, a challenge for the Czech Republic is that currently external school evaluation by the CSI is predominantly an assessment of how legal requirements are met, or how the School Education Programme is being fulfilled and how it adheres to Framework Education Programmes. The accountability function tends to emphasise compliance with legislation rather than the promotion of school improvement. Advice is only given to “weaker” schools which are identified as those that do not meet the minimum standards as set by law. There is not enough focus on strategies for promoting improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and better outcomes for students including better progress and attainment for those schools that need it the most.

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***The external evaluation model embodies a number of features of best practice but a number of limitations exist***

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The process of external evaluation undertaken by the CSI is well structured and systematic. Each stage in the process is clear and the approach builds logically. The importance of communicating clearly the basis upon which evaluation judgements will be made has been recognised and built into the model. A set of publicly-available criteria for external inspection is drawn up every year. Also, the principle of transparency in publishing the results of inspection and the responsiveness to stakeholders (there are provisions that enable parents to trigger an inspection if they have concerns) are well established. Furthermore, the approach to external evaluation in the Czech Republic is designed to be evidence driven. The provision of a data profile for an inspection team, provided by the Institute of Information on Education, offers outcome information, aids efficiency by allowing the team to focus its attention on key issues and can help to benchmark and contextualise judgements. Similarly, documentation is sought and analysed as a key part of evidence gathering and a sample of stakeholders is interviewed in the course of the inspection. However, there are a number of challenges in the current approach to external school evaluation. It is difficult to take account of the socio-economic context of the school because this is not required by the Education Act and no national data are available to promote this. It also appears that there is not enough emphasis on pedagogical aspects particularly on identifying the main features of effective or high quality teaching using evidence from international studies and research. Moreover, the criteria used in the CSI external evaluations are not stable enough from year to year and as a result comparison across years might not be assured in all areas.

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***There is a new emphasis on schools' self-evaluation which needs to be strengthened***

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The new emphasis on promoting schools' self-evaluation has the potential to encourage schools and principals to place a greater emphasis on school improvement and development planning. Combined with external evaluation through the work of the CSI and regular publication of school reports the emphasis on institutional self-evaluation makes it a more balanced approach to school evaluation than one relying only on external evaluation. The introduction of self-evaluation is explicitly linked to the Czech Republic's intention to encourage flexibility and greater autonomy at the school level. Increasing schools' self-reflective abilities will support internal quality assurance and will help maintain quality across the board. However, the penetration of school self-evaluation across the school system remains at an early stage of development. Schools have only a limited understanding of the contribution that self-evaluation can and should make to improving practice and no clear models have emerged generally. There seems to be limited capacity amongst school staff and principals to engage in self-evaluation and ultimately school self-evaluation seems to lead to little change of school practices. As a result, although some form of self-evaluation can be identified generally, its rigour and impact on practice remains incipient. The potential of self-evaluation to engage parents in the work of the school has also not been sufficiently exploited.

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***School leadership is promoted in school evaluation but there is no full recognition of the role of school leaders and their appraisal is limited***

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There is an explicit recognition that the process of self-evaluation is hugely dependent on a principal's capacity to stimulate engagement, to mobilise resources and to ensure appropriate training and support. The approach to inspection has, in turn, reinforced the importance of such leadership. School principals are seen as important actors in the course of an inspection, have direct accountability during the self-evaluation and external evaluation processes and have the main responsibility for ensuring that the results of the inspection are communicated and its recommendations taken forward. In spite of this, there is little evidence of a culture of instructional/educational leadership (as opposed to administrative and managerial leadership) and while the school principal has a key role in the system and considerable responsibilities, this has not as yet been translated into a dedicated career structure. There is also limited preparation for the role of school principal and little recognition and financial reward. The CSI seeks to evaluate certain features of school leadership and management but these focus mostly on compliance with regulations and limited attention is given to the principal's pedagogical leadership abilities or professional development needs. The evaluation of school principals, conducted by organising bodies, is largely absent except in terms of the financial aspects of budget management. There is no link made between the evaluation of school leaders and evidence of student outcomes or the quality of teaching and learning.

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***There is little emphasis on the evaluation of the education system***

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The Review Team formed the impression that the evaluation of the education system as part of the evaluation and assessment framework has received limited policy attention thus far and there is no comprehensive strategic approach to it. While the 2005 Education Act determines who takes responsibility for system evaluation, it does not define the objectives of system evaluation and what it should achieve. As it stands, system evaluation draws mostly on the evaluation of schools complemented with a set of indicators on education. Even if there is the concern to establish Long-term policy objectives and develop indicators to assess progress towards achieving the objectives, it can be said that the policy objectives are narrow and do not adequately capture student learning objectives.

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***An Education Indicators Framework is established but there are key information gaps at the system level***

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An Education Indicators Framework is in place to assist decision makers analyse the state of the education system, monitor trends over time, compare regions and provide information to the general public. The framework includes four core components: students, teachers, schools and funding. However, some key information gaps remain. A significant gap is the unavailability of measures on students' socio-economic background. Other gaps include the unavailability of information on student assessment for individual students, incomplete data on teachers such as their qualifications and professional development activities and limited information on the teaching and learning environment.

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***The participation in international surveys is instrumental for system evaluation but national student performance data are absent***

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International surveys have provided – in spite of their lack of alignment with student learning objectives in the Czech Republic – unique information about student learning in the Czech Republic. Participation in international surveys provides benchmark information on the education system's performance and also allows monitoring of progress over time, for example via the trend data available for PISA from 2000. At the same time, the national monitoring system for school education is considerably weakened by the absence of national data on student performance, *i.e.* there is no information on student learning outcomes which is comparable across schools, regions or over time.

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***System-level information is not fully exploited***

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The Review Team formed the view that system-level data are not used to their full potential in analysis which could be useful to inform policy development. Comprehensive statistical analysis of student outcomes such as an assessment of the factors influencing student performance or a study about the impact of socio-economic background on student performance does not seem to be available. In addition, there is limited use of system-level data to inform school management, there is no comprehensive information system for use by education agencies and the systematic sharing of data between schools is limited.

## Policy recommendations

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### *Better articulate learning goals*

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For evaluation and assessment to be effective in improving quality across the whole education system, it is essential that all school agents have a clear understanding of the national goals for education. This requires the development of goals aligned with broader social and economic objectives, including aims at promoting equity and excellence and the articulation of the ultimate purposes of learning for citizens. In this respect, goals for the education system in the Czech Republic could be made more concrete. For instance, the Long-term policy objectives could include targets for improving educational outcomes, contemplating both achievement levels and equity. Furthermore, there is a need for clearer reference points in terms of expected levels of student performance. While it is important to keep the curriculum open so as to allow for teachers' professional judgements in the classroom, there is still scope to make student learning goals more concrete. The national competency goals established in the FEPs can be refined and expanded to include clearer guidance concerning expected student learning progressions and criteria for assessment in different subjects. This could take the form of national standards defining what constitutes adequate, good and excellent performance in different subject areas at different stages of the education system.

### *Integrate the evaluation and assessment framework*

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The full potential of evaluation and assessment will not be realised until the framework is fully integrated and is perceived as a coherent whole. An important initial step is to develop a strategic plan or framework document that conceptualises a complete evaluation and assessment framework and articulates ways to achieve the coherence between its different components. The different levels of education governance should be engaged in regions and municipalities so their responsibilities and roles in the framework are clearly established. The plan should essentially constitute a common framework of reference for educational evaluation across the country with the ultimate objective of embedding evaluation as an ongoing and essential part of the professionalism of the actors in the education system. The plan should establish a clear rationale for evaluation and assessment and a compelling narrative about how evaluation and assessment align with the different elements in the education reform programme. It should describe how each component of the evaluation and assessment framework can produce results that are useful for classroom practice and school improvement activities. The plan should include strategies to both strengthen some of the components of the evaluation and assessment framework and to develop articulations across the components.

### *Develop evaluation and assessment capacity across the school system*

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As the evaluation and assessment framework develops and gains coherence, an area for policy priority is consolidating efforts to improve the capacity for evaluation and assessment. As the Czech Republic education system is highly devolved and relies on the evaluation and assessment capacities of diverse school agents, it is important that capacity building responds to the diverse needs of school governing bodies (regions and municipalities), school principals and teachers. A priority is to develop the evaluation competencies of school governing bodies, at the region and municipality levels.



Competency profiles for regional and municipal education officers should be developed. There is also a need to reinforce the educational leadership skills of school principals as their role in the Czech Republic still retains a more traditional focus on administrative tasks. Teachers could also benefit from a range of professional development opportunities, including improving skills for formative assessment; enhancing the capacity to assess against the objectives defined in the FEPs; and improving the capacity to collect and analyse information for self-improvement. Another area to explore is building capacity at the system level, including regional and municipal levels, to ensure an effective use of the results generated by evaluation and assessment activities, including analytical capacity for educational planning and policy development. Finally, a considerable investment is needed to develop expertise in standardised test development, including areas such as educational measurement and test design.

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***Develop educational standards covering the breadth of student learning objectives prior to developing national standardised tests***

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There is a need for clear external reference points in terms of expected levels of student performance at different levels of education. While it is important to leave sufficient room for teachers' professional judgements in the classroom, it is necessary to provide clear and visible guidance concerning valued learning outcomes. Teachers would benefit from education standards with more specific descriptions of what students should know and be able to do at different stages of the learning process. The national tests should not be the vehicle for developing standards as this would set an inappropriate precedent. Rather, sound standards (and associated supporting resources such as learning progressions and assessment tasks) for the full breadth and depth of the curriculum should be developed as the basis primarily for guiding teachers' work in classrooms, assessing against the curriculum and reporting to students and parents. In other words, if tests are developed they should then be aligned to such standards rather than the tests setting the standards.

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***Limit the undesired effects of national standardised tests***

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Before implementation, the Ministry should reflect further on the purposes of the national tests, articulate those purposes in ways that are convincing for educators, and carefully design appropriate measures that will optimise the positive impacts on student learning and minimise the negative impacts. If they are to be introduced they should first be trialled to enable an evaluation of impacts before full-scale implementation. National standardised tests (as well as school-leaving examinations) should be valid and reliable instruments, assess the breadth of learning objectives in the curriculum, and results should be used properly for their intended purposes by teachers, schools and education agencies. An independent working group with representatives from a range of sectors and organisations in education could be established to further debate the national test, monitor its implementation and conduct impact evaluations. The high stakes nature of the test will undoubtedly influence classroom (and perhaps governmental) practices.

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***Strengthen the role of formative student assessment***

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At the heart of improving student achievement in the Czech Republic should be a greater awareness and practice of using assessment *for* learning, that is, using assessment formatively in an ongoing way to monitor students' learning and to plan for their next learning steps. The Czech Republic needs a stronger commitment to improving students' achievement through the use of formative assessment to enhance student learning, rather than simply through the use of assessment summatively for recording and reporting learning. Effective formative assessment requires that teachers develop sophisticated skills for uncovering students' level of understanding, for providing feedback and adjusting teaching strategies to meet identified needs, and for helping students to develop their own skills for learning to learn. Strategies to improve the impact of formative assessment might include a stronger focus on short-cycle classroom interactions, building teachers' repertoire of research-based formative assessment techniques, and strengthening the approaches to respond to identified learning needs.

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***Put in place moderation processes to ensure the consistency of student summative assessment***

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A priority should be the introduction of moderation processes within and across schools to increase the reliability of teacher-based judgments. The objective is to reduce the variations in the ways teachers assess students and set marks so equity of student assessment is improved. This should go along with the development of guidelines at the national level for assessing against student learning objectives. Teachers require exemplars of student work to illustrate achievement at different levels or marks, benchmarks or indicators of desired student achievement, optional assessment tasks, and tests. These issues are particularly important to consider for the school-based assessment component of the school-leaving examination if it is to have national comparability, be fair and have the confidence of the public. Engaging in appropriate moderation procedures also provides substantial professional learning benefits for teachers.

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***Develop a professional profile or standards for the teaching profession***

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The Czech Republic education system should pursue the efforts that are being made in preparing a professional profile or standards for the teaching profession. Teaching standards, *i.e.* a clear and concise statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do 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. Teaching standards should contain quality criteria or indicators for professional teaching practice and should be applied in individual performance appraisals. They should build on the work already accomplished and discussed in 2009 and be framed in the context of the overall objectives for schooling. The teaching standards should be developed in a way as to 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. It is also important that teacher appraisal takes account of the school context. Schools have to respond to different needs depending on the local context and face different circumstances.

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### *Strengthen teacher appraisal for improvement purposes*

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The Review Team recommends strengthening regular formative appraisal with a professional development focus which is separate from the more summative appraisal processes. Teacher appraisal for improvement purposes is likely to benefit from a non-threatening evaluation context, a culture of mutually providing and receiving feedback, clear individual and collective objectives, simple evaluation instruments, supportive school leadership, opportunities for professional development and close linkages to school self-evaluation. The main purpose of this process should be continuous improvement of teaching practice. It should be an internal process carried out by line managers, senior peers and the school principal with a focus on teachers' practices in the classroom. The main outcome would be feedback on teaching performance and contribution to school development, which should lead to a plan for professional development. To ensure that developmental appraisal conducted by school principals is systematic and coherent across Czech schools, it is important that the Czech School Inspectorate validates externally the school-level processes for teacher appraisal, holding the school principal accountable as necessary.

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### *Consider establishing a system of teacher certification to determine career progression*

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Teachers and school principals could benefit from the establishment of a clearer career structure that applies across the country. The concept of career stages, or a career ladder, would help meet this need. Access to each of the key stages of the career could be associated with formal processes of summative appraisal that complement the regular formative appraisal. The different career steps should match the different levels of expertise reflected in teaching standards and be associated with certain pay levels. This would ensure a link between teacher appraisal results and career progression, therefore establishing an indirect link with pay levels. 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 could 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 the Czech Republic. Teacher appraisal for registration/certification would have as its main purposes providing public assurance with regard to teachers' standards of practice, determining advancement in the career, and informing the professional development plan of the teacher.

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### *Strengthen external evaluation for school improvement*

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The CSI external school evaluation process should strengthen its focus on school improvement and move away from the current "compliance" driven model. This would imply providing advice for improvement to all schools evaluated, rather than just focusing on lower performing schools. The school evaluation framework, the criteria and questions governing judgements and the methods employed should all focus much more directly on the quality of learning and teaching and their relationship to student outcomes. The CSI external school evaluations would also benefit from a greater focus on monitoring student outcomes if appropriate national assessment data become available. Such analyses should take the schools' socio-economic and other features of context into consideration. This should be accompanied by judgments made on how well schools address equity, to be published in individual school reports and in overview reports at a

national and regional level. The CSI should report explicitly on school performance in relation to outcomes achieved for disadvantaged and minority students (particularly Roma students) and provide advice to support improvement. Also, it is suitable to ensure stability in inspection criteria across a wider range of areas for a longer period of time. This will allow for better comparisons to be made of change in the system across several inspection cycles and it will help to evaluate the impact of policy changes and system-level improvement more meaningfully. Follow-ups to external inspection should be strengthened (and generalised), requiring all schools to establish an improvement plan regardless of the results of the school evaluation. A programme of follow-up visits, suitably differentiated on the basis of the original report, would give added impetus and credibility to the overall evaluation process.

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***Improve the alignment between self-evaluation and external evaluation and thereby raise the profile of self-evaluation***

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The Review Team recommends establishing better synergies between external and schools' self-evaluation, especially concerning the alignments of the aspects assessed. There is a need to ensure that the criteria used in both processes are sufficiently similar as to create a common language about priorities and about the key factors which influence high quality learning and teaching. Lack of clarity about what matters is likely to reinforce confusion and continue to relegate self-evaluation to something which serves inspection rather than creating a platform for a discussion based on reliable and comparable evidence.

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***Improve the instructional leadership skills of school principals and strengthen the evaluation of these skills***

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School leaders need to refocus their work more on instructional leadership. This would imply school leaders engaging in professional development to enhance their leadership capacities especially in promoting school improvement, and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. School principals should be expected to engage in monitoring and evaluating the quality of student outcomes in their school compared with results in similar schools. In addition, school principals should be supported to place a greater emphasis on evaluating and promoting the quality of teaching, and focussing on the professional development needs of staff to support the school's improvement needs and priorities. Finally, there is a need to re-conceptualise the overall approach to evaluate school principals by school organising bodies so that the role of the school principal as a pedagogical leader is reinforced.

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***Raise the profile of system evaluation within the evaluation and assessment framework***

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The profile of system evaluation within the evaluation and assessment framework needs to be raised. An initial priority is to broaden the concept of system evaluation as the wide range of system-level information which permits a good understanding of how well student learning objectives are being achieved. It should include a varied set of components such as broad measures of student outcomes; demographic, administrative and contextual data; information systems; and research and analysis to inform planning, intervention and policy development.

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### *Develop national student performance data for system monitoring*

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A clear priority in the Czech Republic for system evaluation is the development of measures of student learning outcomes. This effort has now started with the development of national standardised tests for students in grades 5 and 9 in the curricular areas of Czech language, foreign language and mathematics. This is a valuable effort with the potential to provide national data on student performance which are comparable across schools, regions and over time. The Review Team supports these efforts but expresses cautions in three specific areas. First, standardised tests need to be closely aligned with student learning objectives. Second, it needs to be recognised that inevitably national tests measure a limited range of student learning outcomes. Third, the Review Team believes that the national tests at this stage should be conceived for dual purposes: to provide a powerful pedagogical tool to teachers against testable areas of the Framework Education Programmes; and to monitor national student performance and allow regions and municipalities to monitor their school results against it. To have reliable national measures of performance across broader curricular areas the Czech Republic could also consider introducing sample-based national monitoring surveys.

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### *Prioritise efforts to meet information needs for national monitoring*

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An immediate priority for meeting information needs to adequately monitor student outcomes in the Czech school system is to strengthen the information on student socio-economic background, including parental level of education, occupation and income level; immigrant or minority status; and special needs. Also, moving to data at the individual student level would be a considerable improvement to the collection of data from schools. Moreover, the monitoring of student performance across specific groups (*e.g.* by gender, socio-economic or immigrant background, minority status) as well as the analysis of student performance across regions needs to be strengthened. Finally, there is a need to include stakeholders' perceptions of the teaching and learning environment in the national monitoring system.

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### *Optimise the reporting and use of system-level data*

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The amount of existing information on schools and system performance offers many opportunities to engage stakeholders in supporting improvements across the school system. While large amounts of data are collected from schools and comparable student results will soon become available, there is room to strengthen the analysis and mobilisation of such information for system monitoring and improvement. This includes strengthening the analysis for educational planning and policy development; improving feedback for local monitoring; integrating available data and facilitating access by key agencies; and easing the sharing of student information across schools.