

**National Testing of Pupils
in Europe:
Objectives, Organisation and
Use of Results**

Spain

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PART I: GENERAL OVERVIEW OF PUPIL ASSESSMENT

In Spain the evaluation of the education system is viewed as an essential element in order to improve the quality of education, since it constitutes a valuable instrument for the monitoring and assessment of both the functioning and the results of the education system, as well as for the improvement of the processes delivering these results.

The Spanish Act on Education (LOE) of 2006 establishes that the evaluation of the education system has, among others, the objectives of contributing to the quality and equity of the education system, guiding education policies, and increasing the efficacy of the education system. The evaluation must cover all educational areas and must be applied to the learning processes and results of students, teacher performance, education processes, management, and performance of schools, inspection and Education Administrations themselves.

Due to all these reasons, evaluation procedures of all areas and elements of the education system have been established, which has committed the relevant authorities and the different agents of the system to account for the current situation and its evolution. The approach of all these evaluation tasks is not sanctioning, but aimed at improving the quality of the education system.

The GENERAL EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM is a responsibility of the Ministry of Education and it is carried out by the Institute of Evaluation (IE) – formerly National Institute for Evaluation and Quality of the Education System – and by the equivalent bodies designated by the Education Administrations, who assess the education system in their area of competence. The IE is responsible for drawing up multi-annual plans for the general evaluation of the education system at national level, which include:

- *Evaluations of the different educational stages*, through national standardised tests and questionnaires.
- *General diagnostic evaluations (Evaluaciones generales de diagnóstico)*, in order to gather – through national standardised tests – representative data on pupils and institutions at regional and national level. These evaluations examine the basic competences of the curriculum and are to be conducted in both primary and secondary education.
- The *State System of Educational Indicators*, which contribute to facilitating knowledge of the education system and to guiding decision-making of both educational institutions and all sectors involved in education.

In addition, with the aim of accounting for the running of the education system, the Institute of Evaluation periodically publishes the conclusions of the evaluations carried out that are of general interest. Moreover, it must submit an annual report to the Parliament summarising the results of the general diagnostic evaluations, other evaluations, the main indicators of the Spanish education system and the most outstanding aspects of the annual report of the State School Council.

In accordance with the Act, the Government must annually submit to the Cabinet a report on the main indicators of the Spanish education system, the results of the Spanish or international diagnostic evaluations as well as the recommendations arising from them.

The EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITIES is carried out by their respective evaluation units or institutes. Their functions include the elaboration of the regional education indicators, the general evaluation of the education system of the Autonomous Community, the diagnostic evaluations of all students and schools and the evaluation of teachers.

As regards the *diagnostic evaluations (evaluaciones de diagnóstico)*, the Act on Education prescribes that the Autonomous Communities, in keeping with the framework of general diagnostic evaluations, must implement them in all educational institutions to evaluate the basic competences acquired by all students on completion of the second cycle of primary education and at the end of the second year of compulsory lower secondary education. Such evaluations have an educational and advising nature for schools and are informative for families and the educational community. Starting from the 2008/09 school year, a diagnostic evaluation must be conducted every year in all educational institutions through objective tests and standardised questionnaires.

PART II: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO NATIONAL TESTING AND ITS POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The Spanish education system was globally evaluated for the first time in 1976, when the Nation's Government commissioned the evaluation of the results obtained after the enactment of the 1970 General Act on Education and Financing of the Educational Reform (LGE).

Then, the Centre for Research, Documentation and Evaluation, nowadays called Institute for Teacher Training and Educational Research and Innovation (*Instituto de Formación del Profesorado, Investigación e Innovación Educativa* – IFIIE), undertook during the 1980's several partial appraisals on certain elements of the education system at non-university levels.

The 1990 the Act on the General Regulation of the Education System (LOGSE) represented a significant boost to the evaluation of the education system. When this Law was passed, a big education reform process got underway in Spain. This act attributed a special importance to the general evaluation of the education system, recognising it as a key factor for the quality and improvement of education, and created the National Institute of Quality and Evaluation (INCE), nowadays Institute of Evaluation (IE) with the objective of supporting the education authorities in their decision-making processes. Evaluation was considered an essential activity in order to evaluate the degree in which the different elements of the education system were contributing to achieve the educational goals established. For this reason, the evaluation should cover all elements and sectors involved in the educational activity. Another reason why this Act put special emphasis on evaluation was the fact of the progressive transfer of power in education to the Autonomous Communities that was taking place. In a

context of a decentralised structure, in which the different territories had an important degree of autonomy, it was still more important to count on an instrument that allowed to build a general view of the system in order to provide all instances with the relevant information for the exercise of their duties and the decision making.

The INCE's major task was to periodically carry out a general evaluation of the non-university educational levels. The CIDE therefore ceased to carry out the evaluation functions it had been performing and focused on educational research, innovation and documentation.

The evaluation of the education system was carried out at two levels, one corresponding to the State and the other to the regional education authorities. INCE was in the first of these, although it always counted on the participation of the Autonomous Communities to plan and carry out the national evaluations. Its area of action was: evaluating the basic aspects of the curriculum, which correspond to the core curriculum established by the LOGSE; designing evaluation systems; carrying out research, studies and assessment; and proposing initiatives and suggestions to help improve the quality of education.

In 1995, the Act on Participation, Evaluation and Administration of Educational Institutions (LOPEG) established the various contents and types of evaluation as well as the powers of the different institutions in relation to this issue. According to this Act, evaluation was to be applied to pupils, educational processes, teachers, schools, and authorities themselves. It also stated that the responsibility of the different education authorities was to formulate and implement periodic evaluation plans in publicly financed institutions, the INCE being in charge of carrying out the general evaluation of the education system, as well as supporting the education authorities with their respective evaluation plans and programmes.

In 2000, the completed process of transferring educational powers from the former Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport to the Autonomous Communities revealed the necessity for all Autonomous Communities to design their own internal and external school evaluation plans.

In addition, the 2002 Act on the Quality of Education (LOCE) deals again with the evaluation of the education system. This Act established that evaluation should cover all fields of education under its regulation, and should be applied to students' learning processes, educational processes, teachers' practice, schools, educational inspection and education authorities themselves. Additionally, the former National Institute of Quality and Evaluation (INCE) changed its name into National Institute of Evaluation and Quality of the Education System (INECSE).

In 2006, the Act on Education (LOE) was passed. This Act, in an attempt to simplify the complex current legal situation, repealed the previous acts (LOGSE, LOPEG and LOCE) and became the basic regulation for the general organisation of the Spanish education system. The LOE introduces in the Spanish education system goals shared with the other members of the European Union, including the improvement of the quality and effectiveness of the education and training systems. To this end, in accordance with the previous acts, the new Act emphasises educational evaluation as a factor favouring the quality of education, to which public powers should pay priority attention.

According to LOE, the former INECSE became the Institute of Evaluation (IE). This Institute is at present the body of the Ministry of Education responsible for the evaluation of the education system. It is run by a 'Governing Board' that is made up of the Secretary of State of Education (who chairs it), the Director of the IE and representatives of all the Autonomous Communities. This board is in charge of revising the multi-annual action plans, proposed by the Director, to approve the State System of Educational Indicators, the evaluation projects of the education system and the participation of Spain in the international evaluation as well as

the criteria for the publication and dissemination of the results of the evaluations, that in any case – regardless of the state-wide or autonomous regional area where they took place – can be used neither for individual assessments of students nor for the establishing school rankings. The Governing Board is supported by a ‘Technical Committee’, chaired by the Director of the Institute and made up by the persons responsible of the bodies in charge of the evaluation of the education system in the different Autonomous Communities. This Committee carries out the projects agreed by the ‘Governing Board’.

The Director of the IE is designated by the Ministry of Education, after consultation with the Autonomous Communities. He/she represents the Institute, takes charge of the implementation of the action plans y provides information to the State School Council on the works developed by the Institute. The Director counts on the support of a ‘Scientific Committee’ made up of persons of acknowledged scientific and professional prestige in the field of evaluation or educational research.

The evaluation of the education system has been the main purpose of the IE, which has developed it through evaluations of the different education stages. The quality as well as, indirectly, the equity of the system are evaluated.

In the national evaluations the achievement levels of students in relation to the objectives and contents of the different educational stages established by the minimum core curriculum are analysed. The impact of the following type of factors related to the context, the educational processes and the educational environment of the students on students’ achievement is studied:

- School environment: organisation and functioning of the school; school context; school resources; human, didactical and economic resources and services.
- Professional competence of teachers: initial and in-service training, professional competences.
- Educational practice: methodology, plans, tutorship, attention to student’s diversity, evaluation, additional and extracurricular activities.
- Methods and work and students’ study habits.
- Attitudes and expectations of the different sectors of the school community.
- Socio-cultural context of the families: cultural level, participation, levels of satisfaction, monitoring of the children studies.
- School and classroom climate: relationship between groups, coexistence, participation.

All this has allowed determining indicators of effectiveness and efficiency of the education system.

As abovementioned, the evaluation of the general situation of the education system in Spain started in the 80’s of the 20th century and took on a major boost with the creation of the National Institute of Quality and Evaluation (INCE) in 1993.

The main evaluations carried out in Spain up to the moment are the following:

Evaluation of primary education (1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007)

It has been carried out four times in four-year cycles. The data collections, that covered the whole country, took place at the end of the school years 1994/95, 1998/99, 2002/03 and 2006/07. In the first cycle, samples of pupils of grades 2 (8 year olds) and 6 (12 year olds) of primary education and, in the other three cycles, the 6th grade of primary education were evaluated. The pupils were tested in ‘Knowledge of the Natural, Social and Cultural Environment’, ‘Spanish language’ and ‘Mathematics’. In addition, the teachers of the groups

evaluated the pupils' families, as well as the coordinators of the three cycles of primary education and the management teams of the selected schools answered the respective questionnaires.

Another evaluation studies in primary education addressed Physical Education (1995) and English language (1999).

Of all these studies two reports were published: one with the preliminary data and a final report. <http://www.institutodeevaluacion.mec.es/publicaciones/?IdCategoriaPublicacion=1#0>

Evaluation of compulsory secondary education (ESO)

In this educational stage, three evaluations have been carried out. The first one, called 'Diagnosis of the education system. Compulsory secondary school' (1997), was organised around five broad sections: a) Students' results; b) Study plans and teaching methods; c) Schools functioning; d) The teaching profession and e) Socio-educational context: Schools and Families. The sample was made up of 14 and 16 years old students (general and vocational education). The areas in which students were tested were: 'Spanish Language – Reading and Writing – and Literature', 'Natural Sciences', 'Geography and History' and 'Mathematics'. Also, questionnaires were answered by the teachers of the tested students, the members of the school councils and the pupils' parents. The preliminary results of this evaluation were published in 1998 and later on the final report consisting of five volumes (one corresponding to each evaluated area and a synthesis). <http://www.institutodeevaluacion.mec.es/publicaciones/?IdCategoriaPublicacion=1#21>

The second one, 'Evaluation of compulsory secondary education 2000', was carried out in the school year 1999/2000 and was aimed at getting knowledge of what students know at the end of compulsory secondary education (4th grade, 16 years old students) in 'Natural Sciences', 'Social Sciences, Geography and History', 'Spanish Language and Literature' and 'Mathematics'. Moreover, questionnaires were passed to students, families, teachers and headmasters. Both a preliminary and a final report were published. <http://www.institutodeevaluacion.mec.es/publicaciones/?IdCategoriaPublicacion=1#15>

The third evaluation of compulsory secondary education was called 'Evaluation of the teaching and learning of the English Language (ESO). 2001' and it was aimed at assessing the basic abilities of the students in the second and fourth grade of this stage (ages 14 and 16) in the four blocks around which the curriculum of this area is organized: oral communication, written communication, systematic reflection on the language and its learning, and socio-cultural aspects. Apart from the test, questionnaires were passed to students and teachers. In this case, also a preliminary and a final report were published. <http://www.institutodeevaluacion.mec.es/publicaciones/?IdCategoriaPublicacion=1#13>

PART III: AIMS AND ORGANISATION OF NATIONAL TESTING

In Spain, there are two different types of evaluations at present. The first one are the General Diagnostic Evaluations (*Evaluaciones generales de diagnóstico*), which are nation-wide (sampled based) diagnosis of the education system that will take place every three years. The second type are the diagnostic evaluations (*Evaluaciones de diagnóstico*), which are census evaluations (all schools and all pupils) that all the Autonomous Communities must carry out every year. The first type is the only real 'national testing'. The second type also takes place throughout the country, but each Community is responsible and autonomous to implement it in its own way; therefore it cannot really be considered as a 'national testing'.

In the table below the General Diagnostic Evaluations are described.

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| Type of national testing n°.1: | <i>Evaluaciones Generales de Diagnóstico (General Diagnostic Evaluations)</i> |
| ISCED level 1 and/or 2 | ISCED levels 1 y 2 (primary and compulsory lower secondary). |
| 1. Aims | They aim at facilitating the production of representative data on both students and schools in the Autonomous Communities as well as the whole State. They address the basic competences of the curriculum and should lead to revision and improvement commitments according to the results obtained. These diagnostic evaluations have a formative purpose. |
| 2. Responsible bodies and players | <p>According to what the Act on Education 2/2006, of 3 May, establishes, the Institute of Evaluation (IE), a unit within the Ministry of Education, and the equivalent bodies of the Autonomous Communities collaborate to carry out these evaluations and agree by consensus all steps of the process to develop them.</p> <p>The IE is the body responsible for designing the national tests in Spain, but the tests are administered by personnel of external companies contracted for this purpose, that follows strict and detailed guidelines given by the IE.</p> <p>It is the responsibility of the education administrations of the Autonomous Communities to develop and control the diagnostic evaluations in the schools located in their area of power and to provide the necessary models and support to ensure that all schools can adequately carry out them. The questions of the tests are standardized for all the Autonomous Communities. Pupils do not necessarily take the test exactly the same day in all Communities, but in very close dates.</p> |
| 3. Timing | <p>The diagnostic evaluations are carried out at the end of the second cycle of primary education (10 year olds) and at the end of the second year of compulsory secondary education (14 year olds). The tests are passed at the end of the school year.</p> <p>A nine-year cycle was established to evaluate all the eight basic competences of the curriculum. They will take place every 3 years.</p> <p>The implementation of the general diagnostic evaluation has already started, once the new education system (as established by the 2006 Act) has been implemented. The general diagnostic evaluations have started in the school year 2008/09 in primary education and will be started in the school year 2009/10 in compulsory secondary education.</p> |
| 4. Target groups | <p>4th grade of primary education's pupils</p> <p>2nd year of lower secondary education's students</p> <p>The general diagnostic evaluations are sample-based evaluations carried out in public-sector and grant-aided schools. Therefore, the tests are not compulsory for all pupils of the same grade and for all schools, but only for the students and schools sampled.</p> |

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| | <p>Pupils with special education needs do not take part in national testing; these students are tested with the rest of pupils of their class, but their tests are not taken into account.</p> |
| 5. Subjects tested | <p>These evaluations address the basic competences of the curriculum:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Competence in language communication. 2: Mathematical competence. 3: Knowledge of and interaction with the physical environment. 4: Digital competence. 5: Social and civic competence. 6: Cultural y artistic competence. 7: Learn to learn. 8: Autonomy and personal initiative. <p>The evaluation of these eight competences will be done progressively along the nine-year cycles.</p> |
| 6. Links with the curriculum and types of test questions | <p>These evaluations address the intersection of the competences approach (more global, closer to the real life than to the academic abstraction and more associated to the applications of knowledge than to just the verification of concepts) with the curriculum approach (more linked to the areas of knowledge, arranged in sequence and organised according to the history of education). Therefore, it is an evaluation of competences associated to the knowledge, skills and attitudes established by the minimum national core curriculum (specially the evaluation criteria and, eventually, the contents). For this reason, it focuses on the junction of competences and curriculum contents, taking into account that any competence can directly be linked to a single subject matter or vice-versa.</p> <p>Together with the paper and pencil tests, oral tests can be used and also tests combining written and oral replies, with the aim of assessing the listening and speaking skills of pupils. The questions, formulated with basis on a problem-situation, are mostly multiple choice items, although different formats can be used (truth-false items, linking, completing phrases, short answer items, etc.). The questions of the tests are standardized for all the Autonomous Communities. The working of the items depends on the different types of situations and contexts, what allows for assessing the competence of the pupils in successfully applying the knowledge and abilities acquired.</p> <p>A matrix sampling model is used so all students take a set of common questions and also other different questions. Any student responds alone to all the questions.</p> <p>Moreover, background questionnaires are filled in by students, class teachers, headmasters and families. The questions included in them depend on the addressees. Students are asked for school interests,</p> |

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| | study habits, out-of-school activities, etc. Families are asked for level of studies, economical level, cultural habits, etc. Headmasters are asked for contextual and pedagogical characteristics of the school. Teachers are asked by their training, teaching methods, etc. All this information is used to find out correlations with student's achievement. |
| 7. Use of ICT | It is planned to progressively introduce the use of ICT in the diagnostic tests, apart from the fact that one of the competences to be evaluated is the digital competence. |
| 8. Main users | Decision-makers in education, at both national and regional level, the education community, students, families and society at large. |
| 9. Reporting test results | In the general diagnostic evaluations representative data at State level and at the level of the Autonomous Communities will be provided with a formative and advising purpose. Each Autonomous Community has a representative sample, which will allow for individual reports as well as for reports including comparisons between them. Results for individual schools are neither gathered nor published by the central government. Results are presented both as raw data and weighted on the basis of the pupil's background according to different indexes calculated. |
| 10. Reforms | These diagnostic evaluations replace the former evaluations of primary and compulsory secondary education. |

USES OF NATIONAL TEST RESULTS

One of the main points of any evaluation is the publication and dissemination of results. Informing the different sectors of society of the functioning and results of the education system is considered essential. Moreover, another purpose of the evaluation reports is providing and exchanging information with the education administrations of the Autonomous Communities that is useful for decision making. The results of the evaluation give an indication to the policy makers of the necessary measures needed to improve the quality and equity of the system.

It is also considered very important that the conclusions of the evaluations are disseminated among the schools, the teachers and the different sectors directly involved in education.

Importance is also given to the fact that the results of the evaluations is sent to the sectors and groups that participated in the data collection so they can also take profit of them and be aware of the importance of their collaboration. This is a way, also, to get that more relevance is given to evaluation and, at the same time, to contribute to schools' improvement.

The Institute of Evaluation elaborates different types of reports, according to the different audiences they will be addressed to. Short reports focused on very specific and relevant aspects of each evaluation are published through periodical brochures. Other reports, including basic information, are addressed to a wide audience: different educational sectors, press and general public. Finally, more extensive and technical reports addressed to policy makers of the different levels, professionals of education, teachers and researchers are also elaborated. All these reports are written by the staff of the Institute of Education and then revised by the Technical Committee and approved by the Governing Board of the Institute.

Most of these reports can be found at the Institute's web page. (<http://www.institutodeevaluacion.mec.es/>)

In short, information on the functioning of the system is provided to: policy makers and persons responsible of the education system at both the central and the autonomic level; schools' management teams; teachers, teachers and resources centres; teachers' associations; universities; specialised press; media and the general public.

PART IV: IMPACT OF NATIONAL TESTING

The educational indicators and the results of the recent evaluations carried out have been the object of a wide debate in Spain, particularly those that had shown the main weaknesses of the education system.

The results of evaluations have frequently been used as a tool for criticism, especially when they offer rankings of countries or schools. In these cases, the debate was more focused on pointing out the responsible of the results than in finding out solutions to the problems detected. The usual consequence of this is a negative general view of the functioning of the education system.

Although the results of evaluations are often used as a tool for criticism, they are basically used to know better and to improve the education system by providing policy makers with technical information that supported their decision making processes, as the one that resulted in the Act on Education (LOE) passed in 2006.

This Act has proposed, among others, a considerable number of measures to foster students' success in compulsory secondary education, and therefore to reduce school failure, as well as to reduce the number of early school leavers. These two aspects are of the outmost interest within the education community, and evaluation has shown that they are two key aspects to which big efforts should be dedicated. The most important of the abovementioned measures to reduce school failure are the following:

- Prevent learning difficulties from the moment they appear in primary education.
- Facilitate the transition between primary and secondary education.
- Put the emphasis in the acquisition of the basic competences.
- Attend the diversity of students as a rule, not as an exception.
- Supporting and reinforcing measures for all students who may need it.
- Repetition of a grade only in extraordinary cases, when the general objectives of a grade have not been achieved.

The proposal of the LOE to reduce the number of early school leavers:

- Initial vocational qualification programmes (PCPI) from the age of 15. Enough number of posts in these programmes.
- Facilitate the access from the initial vocational qualification programmes to the vocational training programmes (ISCED level 3C).
- Enough number of posts in the vocational training programmes of ISCED level 3C.
- Updating and modernisation of vocational training programmes.

Likewise, in June, 2009 the National School Board (in which students, families, teachers, Autonomous Communities, unions, intellectuals and authorities are represented), after analysing the educational indicators and the results of the national and international evaluations, has proposed a number of measures that are synthetically set out below:

In lower secondary education

- Facilitating the transition between the different educational stages. Co-ordination school-families.
- Detecting learning difficulties from pre-primary and primary education: early support and reinforcing measures.
- Offering enough posts in initial vocational qualification programmes (PCPI) in all schools.
- Complete and balanced schooling of immigrant children in the school system.

In post-secondary education

- Strategic plan against to reduce the rate of early school leavers.
- Increasing the number of students enrolled in both intermediate and advanced vocational training.
- Making the educational offer of post-secondary programmes more flexible.
- Reconciling education and work.

The national evaluations and the international evaluations in which Spain has participated have also allowed drawing important conclusions that led to the introduction of new measures. In addition to all abovementioned measures, already proposed or adopted, some other can be mentioned. In relation to education policy, the necessity for improving the resources in the school environment, so they allow to offer students the adequate supporting and reinforcing measures as necessary, has become evident. Moreover, the necessity of individualised education has been highlighted as well as the fact that equal opportunities for all students are guaranteed. On the other hand, evaluations have shown the decisive importance of the good training and involvement of teachers and the fact that, apart from students' efforts, the effort of the whole education community, policy makers and society at large is essential. The educational policies addressing the improvement of the system must be accompanied by evaluations of students, teachers, schools, administrations, actions and policies and by the general responsibility and commitment of all sectors.

As regards schools' organisation, evaluation has shown that the more autonomous and co-responsible the schools are the better results. In this sense, it is essential to stimulate the participation of teachers, students and families.

Finally, both the national evaluations and the international evaluations in which Spain has participated have made evident the importance that teaching is oriented towards the acquisition of key competences by students.

Unrevised English

The content is under the responsibility of the Eurydice National Unit.

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