

# THE ITALIAN NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEM

## (SNV – SISTEMA NAZIONALE DI VALUTAZIONE)

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The **Italian National Evaluation System** (Italian acronym is SNV) evaluates the efficiency and effectiveness of the educational and training system to improve the quality of instruction and training system. According to the **Presidential Decree number 80** of 2013, the evaluation process of schools is developed in order to value the role of schools in the self-evaluation process.

In particular, the evaluation process is divided into **four phases**: in the *first phase*, all schools are involved into a process of self-evaluation. This means that all schools make an analysis of their services based on MIUR and INVALSI data. School self-evaluation includes also the development of a Self-evaluation Report (in Italian known as RAV) in electronic format based on the reference framework provided by INVALSI, in order to identify guidelines aimed at improving learning quality. The *second phase* is the External evaluation: under this pillar INVALSI select almost 10% of Italian schools based on defined criteria. External evaluation is conducted by an external evaluation team (known as NEV) composed of one inspector and two expert evaluators selected and specifically trained by INVALSI. The external evaluation visit is realized according to the program and the evaluation guidance-tool (in Italian known as “the protocol”) adopted by the National Evaluation System’s General Conference that oversees the National Evaluation System itself. According to the outcomes of the analysis conducted by the external evaluation team, school institutions redefine their improvement plans. In the *third phase*, schools define and

implement improvement actions, also with the research support of INDIRE (that is the Italian National Institute for Documentation, Research and Innovation in Education) or through collaboration with universities, research organizations, professional and cultural associations. In the *last phase*, a Social accounting of school institutions is realized and consist of the publication, dissemination of the achieved results through indicators and comparable data that will be shared with the community with the purpose to promote an improvement.

### SELF-EVALUATION OF ITALIAN SCHOOLS

Starting with the first of the two cornerstones that we mentioned, that is **Schools’ Self-Evaluation**, we now examine in details the structure of the Self-evaluation Report (the so-called RAV), which is the document which addresses the self-reflection process of Italian schools. This document is to be considered as the main guidance-tool.

The Self-Evaluation Report is composed by five sections. The first section, on **background and resources** allows schools to assess their own background and to highlight the restrictions and the positive factors existing in the context in order to act effectively on the results achieved by the students. The **results** obtained by the students are addressed in the second section. The third section is related to the **processes** implemented by the school. The fourth section discusses and analyses the **current self-evaluation** process as well as the possible integration with the previous self-evaluation practices (if any) in the school. The



last section allows schools to identify the **priorities** to be established in order to improve the results obtained, with the aim of preparing an improvement plan.

The first section on **Background and resources** analyses the school population, that is an indicator which identifies students' socio-economic and cultural background and characteristics of the population using the school's (for example employment, unemployment, immigration rates). **Geographical context** too is important as a background information: this, in fact, is another "context" indicator, which identifies the economic and productive features of the territory with regard to resources and skills available in the community as well as social involvement and economic networks. This indicator also considers the institutions which are relevant within the territory (for example: the institutions for integration, against early school leaving, for orientation and education programmes). The territory is defined as the geographical area where the school operates, as regards both the students' place of origin and the relationships between the school and local institutions and other external entities. Economic and material resources are another context-indicator which takes into account the situation of the school and degree of diversification of financial sources. It also considers the quality of the school structures and infrastructures.

The **Results** area of the Self-Evaluation Report (RAV) takes into account the learning achievements with reference to the results achieved by the students in the short and medium term: it is important for the school to support the educational path of all students, ensuring that each one of them will receive a successful education. The **National standardised test** results are considered with particular reference to the analysis of the results achieved at the national standardised

tests. This analysis also makes it possible to evaluate the ability of the school to ensure that all students achieve the basic level of competence. Therefore, the activities of the school should aim at reducing the percentage and size of the educational gap of the students with learning ability levels below a certain threshold, taking into account the variability of the results within the school and the **added-value** results. Then the Self-Evaluation Report (RAV) takes into account the so-called **European competences**. In this context, the term competences refers to a group of competences, also of an across-the-board nature, considered essential for a full European citizenship. These competences include, but are not limited to, social and civic abilities, as well as digital skills. The **Long-term** results part of the Self-Evaluation Report (RAV) refers to school's proactive actions which may be regarded as effective when they ensure long term results in the subsequent studies or in entering the labour market.

Coming now to the **Processes** part of the Self-Evaluation Report (RVA), Processes refers to Educational and didactic practices that identifies curricula, planning and assessment with the aim of identifying the school's basic curriculum and ability to meet the educational and training expectations of the community. The definition of learning objectives and goals for the different classes and years of courses is also important as well as the optional and elective activities that enhance the curriculum. Again, in the Processes' context, the **Learning environment** part of the Self-Evaluation Report takes into account the school's ability to create a learning environment for the developing of the students' competences. The attention devoted to the learning environment refers to the material and organisational aspects (for example the management of spaces, equipment, timetables and school times) as well as the educational aspects (diffusion of innovative methods) and, finally, the relational

aspects (focus on the development of a positive learning environment and transmission of accepted rules of conduct). The **Inclusion and differentiation strategies** section of the Self-Evaluation Report (RAV) analyses the strategies adopted by the school to promote inclusion processes and respect for diversity, like the reflection on how teaching and learning processes are sensitive with regard to educational needs of each student during in-class work and in other educational situations. The **Continuity and orientation section** of the Self-Evaluation Report (RAV) considers the activities which the school promotes to ensure the continuity of the educational paths. These Activities are aimed at guiding the personal, educational and professional orientation and development of students. In the context of **high schools** only, INVALSI also include the analysis of the **Transition between school system and the world of work**: a recently implemented reform in the light of improving the matching between educational systems and the job market. The **Management and organisational practices** section of the Self-Evaluation Report (RAV) takes into analysis the strategic orientation and school organisation making light on the identification and sharing of the mission, as well as values and development promoted by the school. The ability of the school to devote resources to the priorities, by catalysing the internal intellectual energies, contributions and resources of the territory, and the financial and instrumental resources available, in order to achieve the primary goals of the school. Here, the mission is defined as the application of the institutional mandate within its own context, construed in light of the school's autonomy. The mission is the identification of priority actions and in the realisation of the subsequent activities. The section of the Self-Evaluation Report (RAV) that reflects on the **Integration of schools with their territory** and their **relations with students'**

**families** refers to the integration with the context and the relations with students' families by inquiring into school's ability in acting as a strategic partner of territorial networks and to coordinate the different persons who are responsible for educational policies in the territory. Another essential part of the Self-Evaluation Report is dedicated to the **identification of school's priorities**, where the term "priority" refers to the general objectives that the school intends to achieve in the long term through enhancement actions. The priorities that the school intends to establish must necessarily refer to the students' results (for example: the Reduction of early school drop-outs; Reduction of learning outcomes variability among classes; and the development of social competences of junior secondary school, etc.).

In this very process of identification of priorities, the schools' **Long term goals** are important as well; and with the term "Long-term goals" we refer to the expected results of strategic priorities identifies by the school. These results are expected in the long term (three years). In particular, Long-term goals represent the objectives that the school intends to achieve with its enhancement activities. For each identified priority the relevant long term goal must be outlined as long-term change is considered as essential in achieving school's goals. If we consider for instance the students' results areas, with special reference to the strategic priority of "Reducing early school drop-outs", the long term goal may be defined as "Falling within the provincial early school leaving average and, specifically, lowering early school leaving rate at the institute level). It should be noted that, for the definition of the goal intended to be achieved, it is not always necessary to give a percentage, but a trend represented by reference targets, which the school intends to achieve in order to improve, or by the schools

or situations that should be taken as a reference in order to improve.

At the end of schools' Self-Evaluation and self-reflection process we come to consider the so-called Process objectives, where the term “**process objectives**” stands as a shorter-term measure than the Long-term goals as it defines the activities that must be performed in order to achieve the identified strategic priorities. These are the operational objectives to be achieved in the short term period (one school year) and refer to one or more process areas on which action will be taken and the objectives that schools intend to achieve by the end of the next school year (e.g. promoting the identification of educational criteria capable of ensuring equity-heterogeneity; or the reduction of exclusion practices or bullying; etc.).

Considering the use of guiding questions, we must note that the questions at the beginning of each area invites to reflect on the results obtained by the school in that specific sector. Starting from the reading of the data, the school should consider its achievements in every context, by focusing, specifically, on the results obtained, and by identifying strengths and weaknesses. Then, it will be possible to express an overall opinion on the area, which will be reflected by the level assigned. In this context, the available indicators represent a useful information tool if used by the school within the scope of a wider analysis and interpretation. The indicators allow the school to compare its own situation with the external benchmarks. Thus, such indicators support the self-evaluation group as regards expressing an opinion on each area included in the self-evaluation report. The opinion expressed should not result simply from the reading of the numeric values shown by the indicators, but should reflect the interpretation of such values and their subsequent consideration. Moreover, the

judgements expressed should be clearly explained to clarify the connection with the indicators and data available.

After the process of self-reflection on each of the above-mentioned points, we come to consider the use of the evaluation rubric as each school should, using a range of possible values from 1 to 7, expressing an overall opinion for each of the Results and Processes areas. Score 1 for instance stands for “Very critical”; whereas Score 3 outlines only “Some points for criticism”, Score 5 is “Positive” and eventually Score 7 outlines “Excellent” situations. The descriptions do not pretend to represent a picture of the situation of each individual school. Instead, they should be used as guidance for understanding where the school should be positioned within a range of values. Considering the criteria for justifying the evaluation assigned, it is worth mentioning that at the end of each Results and Processes area there is a space for an open text, titled Reasons for the Assigned Evaluation. In this open field, the school is required to provide the reasons why it has assigned a certain level in the range of values.

#### THE SCHOOLS' EXTERNAL EVALUATION VISIT: WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT IS CONDUCTED

The second big pillar that organises the Schools' Evaluation Area concerns Schools' External Evaluation.

In accordance with INVALSI's main tasks under the Italian National Evaluation System (SNV), each Italian school is likely to be selected to be visited by a team of three external evaluators. The sampling procedure of the schools, which are supposed to be evaluated, is random among schools of any order and level in the country. Schools' external evaluation visits last for three days.

Three experts, two of whom are selected through a public selection carried out

by INVALSI (one of whom is a teacher or a school manager to ensure a peer review process; the other is a researcher in the field of social sciences or evaluation to ensure the use of research techniques and for a correct interpretation of data) and an inspector from the Italian Ministry of Education, compose the evaluators' team. These professional figures regularly update their skills, as they are required to attend a training seminar of one week aimed at deepening an external evaluation guidance-tool approved in March 2015 by the General Conference that oversees the National Evaluation System (NVS). The requirement of attending a training seminar based on one general framework for external visits – where parts and sections follow the same structure of the Self-Evaluation Report – stands as a guarantee of impartiality, conformity and homogeneity in planning as well as carrying out external evaluation visits in the selected schools with same criteria. The underlying idea is grounded on the assumption that if the same school is visited by a different team of evaluators it would be evaluated exactly in the same way by following the same procedures and deepening knowledge of the most important educational, organizational and technical aspects of the school as well as the relation of the school with its students, teachers and parents.

Each school's external evaluation visit is preceded by several days of in-depth study of the documents that describe the school's setting as well as of the indicators of students' performance and learning outcomes. Amongst the documents which are taken into account there are: the Self-Evaluation Report (RAV) (that is the document in which self-perception and self-presentation of every single institution in terms of didactic as well as organizational potential and vulnerability); the scores of INVALSI's standard national tests taken by the students of the school; the scores of previous years' standard national tests; as

well as other learning outcomes such as final examinations' scores and the number of students admitted to following years).

Even this preliminary reflection must fully comply with a guidance-instrument delivered to each evaluator in order to guide their work of in-depth exam and reflection before the visit, by indicating how to use data of school's actions and performance also by considering the geographical context of the school. Again, before the visit, the three evaluators have a meeting aimed at exchanging views and hypotheses on the school under exam to be carefully verified during the actual visit.

The visit – as told before – lasts three days divided in numerous meetings aimed at encountering all the school's context stakeholders such as the Head teacher and his staff, the members of the Self-Evaluation team, the administrative, technical and auxiliary (ATA) staff, the teachers and students and their parents.

Even the visit itself carefully follows the general framework with a predefined program, once again under the auspices of ensuring homogeneity of treatment among the various schools. First, it is worth distinguishing between individual and group interviews, whose traces are provided by INVALSI: in particular, individual meeting with the head teacher, with the members of their staff, with the Administrative Director, with the members of the Self-Evaluation team, as well as students and teachers' representatives. These individual meetings follow the so-called semi-structured interview method in which each external evaluator has a schedule outlining all the topics of interest in relation to the component, which the evaluators are specifically dealing with in each moment of the visit. In any case, even though the pre-defined topics are all to be discussed with



stakeholders, the way in which the interview is carried out is left to the initiative of each evaluator. During the days in which the school's external evaluation visit is carried out, evaluators share the number and the stakeholder's category to audit (for instance, only the Ministry of Education's inspector interviews the head teacher, while the other two evaluators audit school's teachers and students in the number of 10-15 individually audited persons for each of these two groups). In these individual interviews, in addition to head teacher's executive staff, audits include teachers with special responsibility positions or those holding organizational assignments. These teachers, in particular, present the institutional activities carried out by the school and, in a second time, their point of view can be confirmed or not through cross-interviews with other teaching staff members who will be then audited.

Group interviews are aimed at scrutinising collective dynamics in order to confirm or contradict information already gathered during individual interviews, bringing out potential different point of views on the school's points of strength or weakness, which may have not clearly emerged during individual interviews. With reference to these group interviews, the head teacher is supposed to conduct a sorting among parents and students involved in order to represent different points of view (primary, secondary and high school's students, teachers and parents shall be properly represented in these meetings). Students with different backgrounds and performance shall be involved as well in this process. With special reference to high school, evaluators are also required to meet the students elected in the School Council. Usually at least twenty parents are met at a single external visit, some of whom are individually audited while other are invited to group interviews. Evaluators in specific surveys also visit school premises,

classrooms, laboratories, canteens, gyms and green spaces.

The moment after the visit is organised in two different steps: the informal communication and the return meeting. At the end of each visit, in fact, the three members of the External Evaluation Team meet for an immediate reviewing of personal points of view on what emerged. The External Evaluation Team informally communicates the end of the external visit and updates the agenda by scheduling a so-called "return meeting" to whom the entire group of people previously involved is invited to take part in. Approximately one month after the visit, the External Evaluation Team sends the External Evaluation Report to the head teacher (a Report which the school has now the opportunity to make public), opening from this moment a detailed reflection with the whole group of people previously audited during the three-days external visit.

This return meeting is organised according to the methodologies of the so-called "professional dialogue" with the aim of setting the improvement in the perspective of a peer-to-peer dialogue between evaluators and evaluated. During the return meeting, the External Evaluation Team will not focus on indicating mandatory patterns in order to improve critical issues, but it will outline the main weaknesses emerged and suggest possible solutions. At the same time, the strengths of the school, which represent the main levers to set up improvement, will be discussed in-depth. The return meeting is not conducted in the light of a top-down approach, but it represents the final moment of mutual listening between all the key components that live in the school and the external experts involved in the evaluation process.