
Education and school quality

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Introduction

The following definition and description of education and school quality is based on the current state of scientific research into education and school quality. It is intended to provide players in the Austrian school system with a sense of direction in their efforts aimed at further developing the quality of schools and teaching. It is neither a checklist nor a target catalogue to be “worked through”, but can be very helpful when it comes to identifying and analysing relationships, influencing factors and indicators on the topic of learning and teaching in the sense of *SQA – School Quality in General Education*.

Map of education and school quality

The “map of education and school quality” created by Herbert Altrichter, Christoph Helm and Anna Kanape-Willingshofer (Institute of Education and Psychology at the Johannes Kepler University Linz) gives an overview of the quality areas of school and teaching and outlines factors that influence the quality of school and teaching.

What makes up the quality of school and teaching? The “Map of school quality” (Fig. 1) attempts to arrange various quality aspects and influencing factors.

The quality of a school is ultimately determined by whether and to what extent the pupils have learning experiences and achieve learning results that allow them to form an identity and feeling of self-worth, and to develop subject-based, interdisciplinary, social and personal competences for active participation in society, both at work and in their private lives. Learning and teaching in education and school is the place where these experiences and competences - supported and led by the professional knowledge of the teachers - should be acquired. However, school is not just a “learning space” but also a “living space”. In the living space of the classroom and school, the pupils have social experiences in a larger group with specific rules. This is intended to satisfy basic human needs (e.g. security, recognition,...), but also enables learning about social relationships, work structures and democracy, about taking responsibility, reliability as well as giving and taking in social contexts.

The learning experiences that pupils have in the area of learning and teaching, as well as in the living space of the classroom and school, form, as it were, the internal workings of school-based work, in which the quality of school and teaching is decisive. The individual school works on providing favourable conditions for this internal activity. Through staff development and the further development of professionalism, teachers work on their competences for the productive design of the classroom and school as a learning space and living space as well as on their reflective competence. Leadership and school management contribute to a sense of focus and conducive conditions for the work of everyone involved. The active shaping of school partnerships and external relations is intended to involve the school partners, inform the surrounding setting

as well as uncover and nurture potentials for supporting the school.

What external influences on the quality of school and education are there? The “Map of school quality” (Fig. 1) illustrates that not everything depends on the “internal work” of schools; external influences also impact the work done by schools and the quality of their results. Some of these sources of influence are “far away”, beyond the reach of schools, so to speak (e.g. statutory framework conditions, general economic development). The school is in contact with others or can make contact with them (e.g. higher education, municipality, feeder schools and consumer schools); it therefore has its own particular influence on whether these represent conducive, obstructive or neutral conditions for the school’s work.

You can find more information on the Map of school quality in the appendix.

Six quality areas of education and school quality

The six quality areas of education and school quality, which stand at the centre of the map of education and school quality, are explained further here.

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At the centre of the “education and school quality” map are six quality areas which are explained in more detail below.

Quality area 1: Learning experiences and learning results

The quality of learning experiences and of the results of school activity can be seen...

- in the competences of the pupils:
 - The pupils acquire the technical competences described in the educational standards and curricula.
 - The pupils exploit the potential of their learning conditions.
 - The pupils build up the personal (e.g. social, learning-related, linguistic) competences stipulated in the tasks of the Austrian school, which enable active participation in social life, in politics, work, culture and family as well as in other educational processes.
 - Pupils with different social origins and/or special needs have equal opportunities to acquire competences and sit school-leaving examinations.
- in how pupils and other reference groups appreciate the school:
 - The pupils and their guardians evaluate learning outcomes, teaching/learning processes, educational work and social climate in positive terms.
 - Educational and vocational institutions that supply and consume pupils appreciate the work done by the school and the competences acquired there.
 - The school is positively perceived by the general public.
- in the physical and mental health of pupils, teachers and other employees:
 - Physical and mental health is considered to be an important aspect of curricular and work arrangements in the development of curricula and schools, and is reflected in regulations within the school.

You can find more information on the quality area of learning experiences and learning results in the appendix.

Quality area 2: Learning and teaching

Quality in the learning and teaching of a school can be seen...

- 1) in the preparation and execution of the learning/teaching processes:
 - The accrual of technical and interdisciplinary competences is based on the attributes described in the area of learning experiences and learning results.
 - The teaching is cognitively activating and challenging.
 - The teaching gives the individual pupils a high proportion of real learning time.
 - The teaching is noted for technical and didactic quality (correctness, topicality, structuring, appropriately demanding,...) as well as for an appropriate practical orientation.
 - The teaching is clear and comprehensible; the meaning and relationship of the teaching contents is revealed to the pupils.
 - In the lesson, the learning and achievement requirements as well as the performance assessment criteria are transparent and insightful for everyone.
 - The pupils have the opportunity to learn independently and autonomously and acquire competences for autonomous working.
 - Stimulating learning environments, in which different sources of knowledge and media inside and outside of the school are used, are available.

- 2) in consciously dealing with different learning requirements and learning paths:
 - The individual learning requirements of the pupils (prior knowledge, experiences, potentials and interests) are diagnosed and taken as the starting point for tailored support.
 - Diverse methods and learning arrangements are used to build up knowledge and competences; they are aligned to diagnostic results, teaching objectives and contents.
 - Individual feedback strengthens the abilities of the pupil to reflect on progress and to develop responsibility for it.

You can find more information on the quality area of learning and teaching in the appendix.

Quality area 3: The living space of classroom and school

Quality in the living space of the classroom and school can be seen...

- 1) in a basic educational attitude:
 - The teachers involved in the educational process, the school management and other professional staff (e.g. free time educators, psychologists) formulate joint educational objectives.
 - The self-initiative of the pupils is strengthened, the taking of responsibility is stimulated and supported.

- 2) in the school and classroom climate:
 - Respect and a positive expectation of success characterise how teachers and pupils deal with one another.

- 3) in school life:
 - The pupils find diverse cultural, social, sports and other stimulations that promote their personal further development outside the classroom.
 - The types of organisation and approach facilitate the development of a school community, the social integration of the school community as well as the social integration of all members (e.g. through the recognition and appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity, the promotion of the equitable co-existence of the genders, or the inclusion of people with and without a disability).
 - Transparent agreements and precautions exist for dealing constructively with difficult situations and conflicts (e.g. induction for new pupils and teachers, mediator programmes, consulting offers for pupils and teachers).

- 4) in school buildings, school premises and school infrastructure:
 - School buildings, school premises and school infrastructure are designed according to the criteria of

aesthetics, user-friendliness, accessibility and security.

- The pupils are actively and responsibly involved in shaping their school; this is a way of working against a lack of responsibility and vandalism.

You can find more information on the quality area of the living space of classroom and school in the appendix.

Quality area 4: Leadership and school management

The quality of leadership and school management can be seen...

- 1) in the coordination and control of educational processes:
 - The school management and work organisation are based on the tasks of the Austrian school and on supporting the development of the pupils entrusted to it in the best way possible.
 - (Self-)evaluation and quality management are used to verify the attainment of educational goals and to put sustainable development measures in place.
- 2) in the organisation and administration of the school:
 - The legal stipulations are taken into consideration.
 - The organisational structures are clearly traceable, adapted to local potentials and needs, well documented and economically designed; they support and simplify fulfilment of the education mandate.
 - The organisational structures enable and support the cooperation of all members of the school community.
- 3) in staff management:
 - The deployment of staff and the responsibilities are forward-looking, transparent, goal-orientated, designed in consultation with the staff and focused on the needs of the pupils.
 - The school management acts as a role model through its management and communication behaviour and educational competence.

You can find more information on the quality area of leadership and school management in the appendix.

Quality area 5: Professionalism and staff development

The quality of the professionalism and staff development of a school can be seen...

- 1) in the professional ethics of teachers:
 - Reflection and further development of teaching and school (e.g. obtaining feedback, self-evaluation, sitting in on other colleagues' lessons, evaluation of the results of the competence measurement for curriculum development) are assigned great importance.
 - The teachers are noted for their great commitment and high degree of willingness to innovate.
 - The teachers know about their educational and didactic expertise; for questions that go beyond this expertise (e.g. questions about the personal development of individual pupils), they involve qualified persons (e.g. educational psychologists, consultants, support teachers, psychagogues).
- 2) in the recognition and further development of teachers' competences:
 - A coordinated concept for the training and development of all staff (internal training plan) is available.

- The staff development strategy takes into account both individual needs (e.g. acquisition of new competences and certificates, vocational further development, maintaining physical and mental health) and school needs (e.g. focus on the development goals of the school, acquisition of qualifications for dealing with new target groups).
- Further education is supported both within the school and with regard to specific subjects.
- The passing on of experiences from training and development to colleagues and their incorporation into lessons is encouraged.
- A functioning concept for the induction of new staff is available, on which the school management and professional colleagues cooperate.

3) in a culture of cooperation in the school:

- The cooperation of various players (e.g. leisure educators, school psychologists, after-school supervisors) who participate in school life is coordinated.
- The teachers communicate with each other about the learning and personality development of pupils and work on this together.
- There are binding agreements about the work done in learning groups and/or school grades (lesson content, standards, education).
- The teachers take responsibility in the team and work actively on the further development of teaching and school.
- There are institutionalised forms of collaboration between teachers (e.g. professional groups, class teams, year group teams) with a high degree of commitment.
- Interdisciplinary teaching is enabled, realised and reflected.
- Knowledge and experiences are reflected on between staff and passed on to each other.

You can find more information on the quality area of professionalism and staff development in the appendix.

Quality area 6: School partnership and external relationships

The quality of school partnerships and the external relationships of a school can be seen...

1) in an intensive cooperation with parents and guardians:

- These are incorporated via the formal committees of the school partnership as well as actively incorporated into the design of the school.
- Communication with parents/guardians and other players takes place in consideration of the social, linguistic and cultural diversity in the school environment.

2) in active public relations work:

- The environment is informed about the school's achievements and developments.
- A willingness to cooperate and provide support in the environment is stimulated.

3) in an actively designed cooperation with facilities in the local area:

- The learning opportunities of the pupils are improved through cooperation with institutions in the local area (e.g. with the municipality, its institutions, associations and enterprises).
- Relationships are nurtured with supplying and consuming schools or other institutions (e.g. higher education, social and youth office, special educational centres, school psychology, health).

You can find more information on the quality area of school partnerships and external

relationships in the appendix.

General information on milestone and target-setting meetings

Milestone and target-setting meetings (MTM) are a central element of the National Quality Framework. They are held periodically between or within the levels of the school system (school management - education board - BMB).

MTM are important management instruments. They demonstrate **dialogic leadership** and a culture of agreement. They are characterised by a climate of basic respect for personality and expertise of the meeting partner and are held on an equal footing in this sense.

At the same time, the existence of management and controlling responsibility is clear: The respective manager is a “guardian” of the statutory and organisational framework conditions as well as of the implementation of federal/regional interests and topics. The controlling includes the possibility – even the obligation, if necessary – for the management level to make a picture for itself about the MTM “on site” “Inspection”, however, is no longer the basic pattern.

The binding nature of the MTM is arrived at by signing the written agreements. A revision loop can be set up in the event of any need to make changes.

The MTM - in the sense of “dialogic management” - are essential talks between two managers (i.e. between the principal and compulsory school inspector or between the regional school inspector and the head of the relevant school managing department in the BMB). Because: agreement is a “matter for the boss”. The latter also applies in those cases in which several people meaningfully participate in the discussion: The agreement itself is a matter for the managers.

The MTM follow a specified **structure**. The basis and starting point of the MTM are the **development plans** as well as other relevant documents that are made available to the managers in advance.

MTM should ideally take place once a year. This is not always possible due to the partly unfavourable proportions (especially in the area of PSI - Schools). Corresponding regulations and discussion models are agreed with the states on the basis of a federal framework specification.

The BMB has organised qualification series for the education board and management staff in the BMB (Section I) since 2012. A similar further education series for all principals is offered by teacher training colleges on behalf of the BMB.

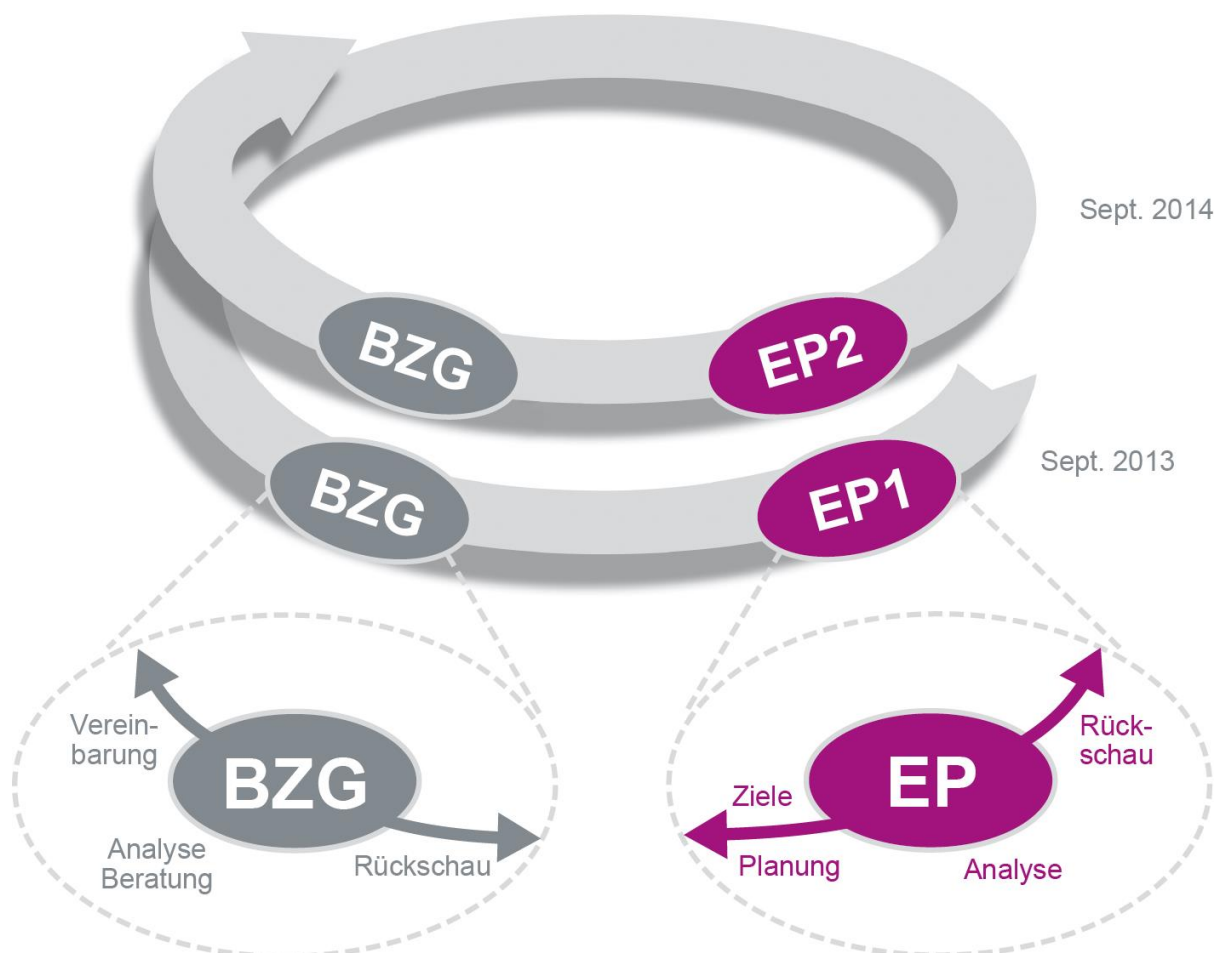
Development plans and milestone and target-setting meetings

Development plans and periodic milestone and target-setting meetings are the two central elements of SQA. But what is behind these terms?

Development plans (DP) are also a planning instrument and proof of quality development or quality assurance in the sense of accountability towards the general public. They are elaborated on all levels of the general education system and are predominantly analytical, with a focus on targets and results. They form the basis for the milestone and target-setting meetings.

The **milestone and target-setting meetings (MTM)** demonstrate dialogic management and a culture of agreement. They are characterised by a climate of basic respect and are held on an equal footing. They are made binding by putting them in writing. The MTM are based on the development plans as well as other relevant documents made available to the managers in advance.

The following graphic highlights how DP and MTM intertwine with each other.



The development plan (DP) takes up a topic and starts with a review: What did we succeed in doing? What not (yet)?

The milestone and target-setting meeting (MTM) also begins with this analysis. The meeting partners then jointly evaluate the targets contained in the DP and estimate the prognosis for success of the planned measures. The question always asked here is how the success will be identified (indicators).

The discussion over the need for further education and support results in a written agreement under which both parties commit to uphold their promises.

You can find more information on development plans and milestone and target-setting meetings under the main menu items [DP Development plan](#) and [MTM Milestone and target-setting meeting](#).