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Abstract

State school inspection in Norway is currently changing with targeted schools becoming subject to more complex methods of inquiry. Not only school principals but middle leaders are exposed to this shifting system, for the latter are in the frontline of their schools’ everyday practices. The article examines how state school inspection is used as means of controlling legal compliance, as well as evaluating the formative assessment routines and practices of schools, middle leaders, and individual teachers. Drawing on the concepts of accountability and performativity, field observations of inspectors interrogating department heads in primary education are analysed. The empirical study demonstrates how use of standardised rubrics steer the inspection process in schools, aiming more towards completing on task, rather than supporting middle leaders in their struggle to comply with legal standards. During such interrogation, the department heads comply with the system, and are at the same time open towards the inspectors’ questioning concerning the school’s lack of fully implemented routines.

Keywords: Accountability; education policy; leadership; performativity; school inspection

Introduction

Late modern society has experienced the rise of an ‘audit culture’, where key stakeholders must adhere to new policy tools, such as Quality Assessment and Evaluation (QAE), and performance measurement which express varying configurations of governing modes (Apple 2005, Hood 2007, Maroy 2012). Furthermore, in accordance with demands set forth in state education policies and regulations, local school districts, school leaders, and teachers must adjust to new expectations and the increasing juridification of the education system (Ball 2003, Trujillo and Howe 2015, Andenæs and Møller 2016, Bergh and Arneback 2016, Ottesen and Møller 2016, Skedsmo and Møller 2016).

European inspection systems are undergoing substantial change, in which frameworks for supervision are taking on new appearances (Baxter *et al.* 2015, Brown *et al.* 2016). However, policy contexts vary nationally in their mix of governing tools and levels of accountability (Hood 2007, Altrichter and Kemethofer 2015, Ehren *et al.* 2015). For example, in the high-stakes English system of school inspection facilitated through the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted), substandard results on inspection reports may result in severe legal actions and even closure of schools. Conversely, ‘softer’ accountability contexts as in Norway seemingly lack ‘hard’ accountability mechanisms (Maroy 2015). In such low-stakes accountability environments, some argue that little is at stake for school districts and school leaders (Perryman 2006, Elstad 2009). However, Norwegian teachers and school leaders experience considerable exposure to internal and external accountability mechanisms through the use of governing tools such as mandatory national testing and inspection (Skedsmo and Møller 2016, Gunnulfsen and Møller 2017). Such mechanisms clearly affect the professional role of

school leaders across national contexts including Scandinavian welfare states such as Norway (Møller 2016).

Following on previous critique of the potential negative consequences of inspections resulting from the ‘audit culture’, this paper focuses on modes of surveillance which have clear impact on the ‘inner lives’ of schools in (seemingly) low accountability contexts (Power 1997, Ball 2003, Apple 2005, Keddie 2013, Thomson and Mockler 2016). This article argues that modes of ‘soft governing’ also have clear implications for how school leaders and teachers may experience the inspection process, especially under new and shifting state inspectoral regimes currently being employed (UDIR 2013, Simons 2014, Maroy 2015). In the new system, schools are prone to more performative approaches, where inspectors interrogate principals, middle leaders and teachers about formative student assessment routines. Previous studies have mostly focused on how school principals are held accountable for test results and enactment of educational policy (Møller 2016). However, little research has been done on the reorganisation of leadership teams in Norwegian education (Abrahamsen *et al.* 2015), where middle leaders such as vice principals and department heads have gradually attained formal leadership status. As shown in the results and discussion sections, middle leaders in primary schools, such as department heads, are exposed to intricate questioning of their routines and practices of formative assessment (Hall 2017b). Thus, in addition to their superiors, school principals, middle leaders are also situated ‘in the line of fire’, implying they must respond to external accountability mechanisms. This comes in addition to what some scholars have described as ‘inspection for compliance’, where school leaders’ legal practices are closely examined (Brown *et al.* 2016, p. 7).

Using Norway as a case example, the purpose of this article is to address how inspection is targeted at both controlling legal compliance and evaluating the performance of schools and middle leaders. Thus, this article highlights a policy system in the process of transition, a regime moving from a previous system of compliance audit (2006–2012) to a policy context incorporating a new mixture of tools and methods increasing its focus on performance and evaluation (2013–2017). The article draws on empirical data in a recent qualitative study of the historical development and shifts in policy and enactment of state school inspection (Hall 2016), and addresses the following questions: What characterises the changing appearance of state school inspection in Norway? To what extent have performative modes of governing become part of the current inspection framework?

The welfare state of Norway represents a unique case since few empirical studies have been done on school inspection in the Norwegian context, especially examining how middle leaders relate to such forms of state intervention. In addition, such observation studies offer insight into the ‘inner lives’ of inspection processes, which are also of value for the research field outside the Scandinavian Peninsula (Hall 2017b). In the following sections of the article, I will first explain the case of Norwegian state school inspection, followed by the conceptual framework in which I position the study. Third, I will present the data and methods section as well as the main results of the study. Finally, I will address how performance has become part of the Norwegian discourse of policy and practice surrounding state school inspection.

The case of Norwegian state school inspection

In 2006, Norwegian education authorities launched regular state school inspection (RSI) targeted towards controlling and benchmarking quality of schools, alongside a battery of other governing

tools in the Quality Assessment System (QAS) such as national testing (Skedsmo 2009, Sivesind *et al.* 2016). The primary goal of QAS is to ‘promote quality development throughout kindergarten, primary education and secondary education and training’ (Eurydice 2017). From that point, the regional county governor’s offices (GCOs), currently 17 entities, became responsible for supervising all public schools in their respective counties, whilst the Directorate for Education and Training (UDIR) handles private/free schools.

State school inspection is thus not organised under a separate agency, such as in the case of neighbouring Sweden. Inspections are initiated by the Ministry of Education and Research, coordinated by the Directorate (UDIR [no date]), and employed by the 17 CGOs. Each CGO is responsible for (a) executing RSI and (b) conducting self-initiated inspections of public compulsory schools at the municipal level (grades 1–10) and public upper-secondary schools at the county (regional) level (grades 11–13). In addition, CGOs (c) process individual complaint cases concerning final examination scores, as well as (d) inspect the kindergarten sector. In addition, UDIR administers (e) ‘polycentric inspections’ of municipal and county school authorities to determine whether local/county authorities have ‘justifiable systems’ in place (Ehren *et al.* 2017). This article focuses on RSI of municipal, public primary schools.

Section 14 of the Education Act (Government Act 1998) covers state inspection of schools but offers sparse guidance on the practicalities of the inspection: ‘The County Governor supervises the municipal and county authorities’ fulfilment of the duties bestowed upon them’ (1998, Sec. 14-1). Since the establishment of RSI, the focus of inspection has been controlling legal compliance, though several cyclical shifts which have widened its scope (Sivesind *et al.* 2016). In the current framework (UDIR 2013), one of three principal areas of concern is student learning outcomes. This does not include summative assessment or mandatory national testing of

students, rather it includes overseeing individual schools' routines and pedagogical practices concerning formative assessment. In short, CGO inspectors evaluate if local enactment of the state curriculum (Knowledge Promotion 2006) and the schools' formative assessment routines are in accordance with legal standards put forth in the Education Act (Government Act 1998) and Regulation (2006).

CGO inspection teams thus determine the extent to which a school's procedures and practices comply with legal statutes and regulation. Inspectors are mostly trained educators or lawyers, and the inspection process is conducted in six steps. The first step is to notify schools of the inspection's scope and to provide samples of rubrics used in interviews at the school level. Targeted schools must then assemble considerable documentation by completing school self-evaluation (SSE) forms and administering student surveys. Third, the CGO team holds an opening meeting (1, Table 1) on the premises, where the key focus is presented to the local school authority, the school's leadership team and teaching staff. Thereafter, inspectors conduct interviews with the leadership team and teaching staff based upon SSE documentation and student survey data (2-4, Table 1). Fifth, inspectors present a preliminary report (PR) and invite the school to comment upon it at a closing meeting (5, Table 1). Targeted schools must then adjust their procedures to meet the standards put forth in the report within a specified timeframe. Following (usually) minor adjustments, the final report is eventually published on the CGO website.

Since legal statutes and regulation offer limited guidance, the current handbook and its framework represent key governing documents, surpassing more than 100 pages of guidelines, procedures, and accompanying rubrics (UDIR 2013). As part of the process, SSE has become a key tool in the framework and serves as the basis for interview guides, student surveys, and

preliminary/final reports. Finally, templates included in the handbook highly structure how the above-mentioned documents are designed, as well as the way in which interviews at the school level are conducted (Hall 2017b).

Conceptual framework: performance and accountability

To serve basic needs in society to control delivery of common goods and services such as students' right to sufficient, high-quality education, state authorities draw on a mixture of various governing tools and strategies such as monitoring, surveillance, and inspection (Hood 2007). Drawing on a critical policy studies viewpoint and using Norway as a case example, this article addresses how state school inspectors now employ more performative approaches to scrutinise schools (Fischer *et al.* 2015). As defined by Ball (2003), and more recently highlighted by Keddie (2013, p. 751)

'The performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output or displays of 'quality' or 'moments' of promotion of inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulating or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual organisation within a field of judgment'.

In this article, performance is not directly understood in regards of testing results and data comparisons, but rather concerns a school's capability to deliver quality education in compliance with indicators, state regulation and central curriculum standards. The evaluators in this case are the state school inspection teams mandated to control and assess how well each school performs in accordance with multiple, formal 'scripts'; legal statutes, the national curriculum, and the current inspection handbook, (Government Act 1998; Knowledge Promotion 2006; UDIR 2013).

Adding an additional conceptual layer to understanding state inspection in Scandinavian welfare states, such an approach needs to be viewed in addition to 'inspection for compliance'

(Brown *et al.* 2016). Thus, in such a system, policy actors in local school districts such as middle leaders and individual teachers are held accountable for any legal deviances pertaining to state legislation and regulation (Elstad 2009, Skedsmo and Møller 2016).

This article argues that school districts, leaders, and teachers are held accountable for conclusions in the preliminary and final inspection reports compiled by the CGOs, and must perform accordingly through the inspection process to escape punitive action. Performativity is furthermore understood as ‘a mode of regulation that employs judgments [...] as means of incentive, control, attrition and change’ (Ball 2003, p. 216). However, the social (and legal) norms encircling inspection may be relatively unclear and ‘fuzzy’ (Courtney 2016, Perryman *et al.* 2017).

One important method for acquiring knowledge of schools is the widespread use of interviews with, for example, school leaders. During these interviews, the ‘auditees’ must perform in line with strict protocols facilitated through use of rigid rubrics, leaving little room for learning and dialogue between the ‘auditors’ and ‘auditees’ (Power 1997, Hall 2017b).

Inspection evokes a certain level of surveillance and control, resulting in negative and positive feedback, as well as publication of data in the form of SSE documentation and online inspection reports (Ozga 2012). Several critical studies of surveillance and performativity view inspection as a means of controlling individual schools and school districts (Lyotard 1984). Relevant points of departure here are Perryman’s panoptic (2006, 2009) and Courtney’s post-panoptic (2016) studies of the Ofsted inspectorial regime in England. As Perryman (2006, p. 155) argues, ‘Panoptic performativity can describe the experience of an inspection regime in that teachers and pupils feel as if they are constantly being observed, and perform accordingly [in order] to escape the regime’. Thus, policy actors in Norwegian schools perform accordingly in an

environment with little room allocated for dialogue and policy learning despite recommendations of the White Paper no. 20 which states that schools and school leaders should receive necessary support and guidance (2013).

Thus, even if the Norwegian policy context is far from the ‘terrors of performativity’, such as in the case of Ofsted, the empirical data suggests that middle leaders are nevertheless clearly affected by the CGO inspectors’ line of questioning (Ball 2003). Before presenting the selected observation data, the following section describes the study’s methods and data.

Methods and data

A recent qualitative study drawing on state policy analysis interviews, observations, and local/regional policy documents rendered new insights into the inspection practices in the Scandinavian context (Hall 2016). Few observation studies of school inspectors have been conducted internationally, both in high-accountability settings, and also in the Nordic nations. Such studies offer additional insight into the internal life of school inspection processes and unveil more of the ‘black box of inspection’ (Latour 1987).

The overall observation study was done through shadowing three state school inspection teams in their quest to investigate the legal and pedagogical practices of three public schools in municipal school districts within one CGO (Hall 2017b). Primary data included field observations of meetings in three municipal school districts during enactment of the inspection handbook on the primary and lower-secondary school level (Braun *et al.* 2010, Ball *et al.* 2012). The overall study included analysis of observation data of 13 meetings in the three schools alongside local/regional policy documents such as SSE reports, preliminary reports, and final inspection reports.

Data presented in this article (Municipality A, ‘Greenfield Elementary School’), which was not included in the initial study (Hall 2017b), was collected in the 2012–2013 school year during the initial piloting phase of the current inspection framework (UDIR 2013). In addition, key policy documents from the national level, such as white papers, reports, legal statutes, and regulations were included as secondary data (Government Act 1998, Regulation 2006, UDIR 2013, 2016, White Paper 2013). Data collection was moreover conducted as part of a larger research project, which involved more than ten researchers from the fields of education and law at University of Osloⁱ.

Table 1 [Insert about here]

As a methodological approach, shadowing involves a researcher being able to closely follow a member of an organisation over a period from a single day to a longer duration (McDonald 2005, Gill 2011). Following data collection in the field, verbatim observation notes were theme-coded and analysed, drawing on the overall theoretical framework. Data was purposively selected to exemplify how performative approaches to school inspection play out between middle leaders and inspectors. Collected data was uploaded in Hyper Research, then first read to identify chunks of data, which were subsequently openly theme-coded according to the theoretical framework presented (Ragin and Amoroso 2011, Hall 2017b). Drawing on observation data, state policy documents, and regulation, this article addresses how inspection in the Norwegian context may also be analysed through discourses of performativity, since middle leaders are now prone to

new forms of accountability mechanisms and performance-based modes of governing (Ball 2003, Ball *et al.* 2012).

Results

Through enactment of the current inspection handbook, this article addresses how new, fixed templates and SSE have become central tools in controlling legal compliance and evaluating student assessment routines, thus strictly guiding the inspection process (Ball *et al.* 2012, UDIR 2013, Simons 2014). Even if the Norwegian system is set within a low-stakes accountability regime, school leaders perform to escape possible legal pursuance (Perryman 2006). Moreover, through a performative approach to their investigations, inspectors are focused on ‘moving through the checkout line’, where completing inspection within strict guidelines and limited timeframe outweighs supporting schools in complying with legal standards (Hall 2017b).

In the following example, inspection of ‘Greenfield Elementary School’ was observed during the piloting phase of the current inspection handbook (UDIR 2013). The local school authority represents a rapidly growing rural municipality that has surpassed 20,000 inhabitants. The school is a relatively large elementary school (grades 1–7) with nearly 600 students and 90 teaching staff members.

In this initial piloting phase Inspection Team A consisted of three inspectors. Inspector 1 (I1) and Inspector 2 (I2) were both women in their 40s with backgrounds as trained educators prior to their current positions. Inspector 3 (I3) was a male lawyer in his mid-30s.

The excerpt in this section derives from a group interview with the school’s three heads of department at Greenfield (Table 1, observation point 3). These individuals led their departments, and functioned as a key link between the principal and the teaching staff, whilst maintaining a

considerable teaching load. Department Head 1, 'Christian', was a man in his early 40s who was experienced as both a middle leader and a teacher. 'Peter' was also in his 40s, and new at the school. When asked about their other functions, Christian and Peter told the inspectors that they also led the extra-curricular school activities. Department Head 3, 'Anna', was a woman in her mid-30s who had been in her current leadership position since 2008. None of the three department heads had experienced an inspection process previously.

Inspector 1 (I1) started her examination by explaining that the three heads would be asked several control questions concerning the school's assessment routines and how the school had enacted the national curriculumⁱⁱ, especially through written routines (Ottesen and Møller 2016). The first area of concern was how the school ensured formative assessment in classrooms. Questions were partially based on a survey completed by 6th and 7th grade students at Greenfield:

I1: Has [school] self-assessment had any learning effects?

Christian: It has been a good way of reflecting upon our own teaching practice.

Peter: It was fun listening to them [referring to the students] discuss.

I1: Has anything [in the survey] been unclear?

Peter: [Making them understand the differences] ... between formative assessment and summative assessment has been quite an arduous process.

I1: Are there any other comments [again referring to the survey]?

[No further comments]

Here, student feedback obtained from the survey played a significant role in developing the interview guides used during the inspection process. Nevertheless, the

inspector moved rapidly through the interview guide, based on fixed templates, without reflecting much upon how the department heads responded. Thus, the rubrics rigidly guided the conversation, without any leeway to engage in developmental dialogues between auditors and auditees to further develop and improve routines and pedagogical practice at Greenfield Elementary (Power 1997).

The interview continued, and the inspectors and department heads talked about how the national curriculum was enacted in school (Knowledge Promotion 2006). Additionally, they were confronted with how the school's leadership team followed up on this point with individual teachers and how the principal held the department heads accountable:

I1: How is responsibility for quality assurance [referring to the curriculum] distributed?

Peter: [This is done] through dialogue and weekly meeting points with the principal.

Christian: Specifically speaking, through checking that aims in the curriculum are delivered [in the classroom] and that aims are in place.

Anna: We have daily contact.

Christian: When it comes to Reading Development Forms, it's defined that Anna is responsible.

Peter: [We are] all the time out substituting in classes, out there where everything happens.

The inspector (I1) then drew attention to the link between the half-year subject plans and the national curriculum. Teachers at Greenfield are obliged to develop half-year plans in every subject, where the goal is to ensure that all the aims in the national curriculum are sufficiently covered (Knowledge Promotion 2006). The inspector then confronted the department heads at

Greenfield to determine which routines they, the school's principal, and the school had adopted to put the half-year plans into practice:

I1: How does the principal check what is done?

Anna: [He] checks half-year plans and trusts us enough to know [...].

I1: Is the template standard? With clear criteria?

Christian, Peter and Anna (in unison): Yes.

Anna: [There are] clear guidelines, including [the school's] logo, and [they are done] in co-operation with others.

I1: How are the aims in the curriculum [The Knowledge Promotion] ensured?

Anna: Teachers [are engaged and] define the focus points and become the experts.

Routine meetings [referring to routine meetings before students are transferred] can supply [additional] information.

I2: Do you have routines for transferring information?

Christian, Peter and Anna (in unison): Yes.

Again, the inspectors briskly moved through the interview guides despite carefully taking notes; however, they did not follow up on what the interviewees revealed about the school's enactment of the national curriculum (Knowledge Promotion 2006). Simultaneously, the inspection team emphasised the results of the student survey. Finally, the inspectors were engaged in controlling the school leadership's routines for following up on the intentions of the central educational authorities; UDIR and the Ministry of Education and Research.

The inspectors continued and asked questions concerning the school's routines for ensuring that classroom teaching and teachers' formative assessment practices were based upon

specific learning outcomes and state curriculum, visually expressed through laminated ‘learning cards’ on display in each classroom:

I1: Do all year levels have, and [actively] make use of ‘goal cards’ [referring to the laminated cards stating learning outcomes in each subject area, displayed in classrooms]?

DH 1 and 2 (in unison): Yes.

DH 3: This is not equally done [in all classrooms].

DH1: The routines have failed a bit, but this matter was addressed before you [the inspection team] arrived. We discovered that something had failed.

I1: Students are to receive guidance [on how to achieve goals]. How [is this ensured]?

DH3: Through testing on a regular basis. And through weekly teaching plans and [use of] ‘goal cards’. [However] this is done differently [across subjects and year levels].

DH3: We could probably become more aligned.

As seen above, the department heads do not fully agree with the extent of which the school’s routines were fully enacted on all year levels, and in each separate subject. This specific point was followed up in further interviews the inspectors conducted the same day with 6th and 7th teachers as well as in the inspection team’s presentation of the preliminary inspection report the following month. The report revealed that Greenfield lacked sufficient routines for ensuring assessment across the whole school, upon which Greenfield Elementary was granted a few weeks to adjust their written routines in compliance with demands stated in the preliminary report.

Discussion

Compared to England and studies of the influence of Ofsted (Perryman 2006, 2009, Baxter *et al.* 2015, Courtney 2016), Norwegian authorities have fundamentally chosen a ‘lighter’ version of accountability mechanisms (Skedsmo and Møller 2016). However, in the Norwegian case, state inspection policy is currently adjusting to new expectations and international flows of ideas, where control of legal compliance and evaluation of performance are executed through use of SSE and fixed templates (Ozga 2012, Simons 2014). As seen in the empirical example above, schools are not only confronted with demands put forth in the legal statutes (Government Act 1998) and state regulation (Regulation 2006), but also how leadership and teachers enact the national curriculum (Knowledge Promotion 2006) at the classroom level.

As argued by Ball (2013, p. 137), ‘performativity is enacted through indicators and targets against which we are expected to position ourselves’. The various sets of tools employed through inspection include circulars, White Papers, and legal statutes on the policy level, as well as inspection handbooks, templates, and surveys on the practical level (Hood 2007). The mixture of these tools and how they are administered is in the process of transformation, representing new indicators and standards used to scrutinise schools and school districts. Within a ‘field of judgment’, the focus of inspection is now directly linked to student learning outcomes and formative assessment, representing a clear shift in state policy (Ball 2003). As demonstrated in the previous section, the department heads must respond to results of student surveys, in which students have answered questions concerning the school’s routines and practices around formative assessment.

Thus, the enactment of the current inspection handbook has become increasingly targeted at new areas of concern, through a more performative approach to inspection (UDIR 2013). Such

practices may signal an approach closer to individual classrooms and subject matters (Hall 2017b). Through such increased legal control as well as evaluation of performance, individual teachers are scrutinised to ascertain if expectations and demands put forth in the Education Act (Government Act 1998), Regulation (Regulation 2006), and national curriculum (Knowledge Promotion 2006) are fulfilled. Nevertheless, the study suggests that middle leaders are put under clear pressure by state inspection officials, especially when their formative assessment routines and routines concerning enactment of the national curriculum are closely examined (Behnke and Steins 2017,). Moreover, during the line of questioning, the department heads comply with the system, and are at the same time open towards the inspectors' interrogation concerning the school's lack of fully implemented routines. One clear example of this is when the department heads at Greenfield are confronted with the school's use of 'goal cards', and inconsistencies in assessment practice are revealed across the school.

Through a performative mode of governing, the department heads are held accountable for teachers' assessment practices as well as their responsibilities as representatives of the school's formal leadership team. These 'performative middle leaders' are thus subject to a system 'conditioned by various checks and reinforcements' through (in this case) audit (Holloway and Brass 2018, p. 376). In the next step, their responses are compared to responses in the student surveys and further interviews with subject teachers and the school's principal. Finally, middle leaders, as mentioned above, are answerable to a system more focused on completing the inspection task at hand, rather than providing necessary support and guidance in understanding the 'maze' of legal standards and regulations surrounding their everyday practices. As a purely technical exercise, leaving little leeway for policy learning experiences emerging between 'auditor' and 'auditees', a fixed schema strictly guides the interaction (Ball 2013, Hall 2017b).

Findings in this study suggest that such a performative system is not in line with policy set forth in White Paper no. 20 (2013), which calls for such legal support and guidance. From a critical point of view, there is reason to raise questions concerning the direction in which Norway seems to be moving (Fischer *et al.* 2015).

How the forthcoming inspection framework, to be employed in 2018, will further develop is still to be experienced by policy actors on all levels, as well the research community. However, as discussed in this article, the annual report from the Directorate (UDIR 2016) signals a continued focus on formative assessment routines of schools and on the QAE systems on the regional, local, and school levels (Hall 2017c). To what extent the current system, in which fixed rubrics play a key role throughout the inspection process, implies appropriate use of limited resources may be furthermore questioned (Hall 2017b). A possible shift could be to move from modes of control and performance to a framework characterised by support and guidance, which may necessarily evoke increased or refined resources as well as changes in the focus of the forthcoming inspection framework.

Concluding remarks

Not only must school inspectors and school leaders decide how to base their judgments in accordance with legal standards, but there also exists ample leeway for deliberation during the inspection process (Dedering and Sowada 2017, Hall 2017a). Legal compliance is however a challenging task for school leaders, and the process is prone to control as part of inspection, alongside other modes of governing (Maroy 2012, Andenæs and Møller 2016).

This article has addressed the following two questions: What characterises the changing appearance of state school inspection in Norway? To what extent have performative modes of

governing become part of the current inspection framework? Using the Norwegian welfare state as a case example and drawing on the concepts of accountability and performativity, this article has exemplified how middle leaders in at least one case must relate to a system characterised by inspection process in schools, aiming more towards completing on task, rather than supporting middle leaders in their struggle to comply with regulative standards.

Findings suggest that shadowing school inspectors in the field and reporting on the Norwegian example can offer important empirical insight into studies of the interplay between education law, policy, leadership, and school inspection practice. Moreover, the analysis shows how fixed templates rigidly steer the inspection process, characterised by a performative system which includes few supportive modes of governing such as those promoted in policy (Hall 2017b). Thus, rather than fostering actual dialogue between inspectors and the school's leadership team concerning enactment of the curriculum and their interpretation of legal requirements, conversations have been characterised by middle leaders submitting themselves to escape the regime of performativity (Ball 2003).

Moreover, to actively support policy actors on the local and regional levels in their struggle to comply with legal statutes and regulation, the limited time allocated for completion of the inspection process should be used in a more supportive and less performative manner. The study suggests that performing according to strict timeframes and guidelines to escape legal pursuance has become part of the Norwegian inspection process, even if the system is far from a high-stakes accountability environment (Maroy 2015).

A new framework has recently been enacted in 2018. The latest annual report from the Directorate (UDIR 2016) signalled renewed focus on the three main themes in the current framework (UDIR 2013): (a) student learning outcomes, (b) schools' competency in formal

administrative procedures, and (c) SSE, in many ways representing a continuum from the period 2013-2017. Also, recent changes in regulation concerning students' individual right to a good physical and psycho-social learning environment have clear implications for schools (Ministry of Education 2017). Recently, the Ministry of Education and Research has granted CGOs the authority to penalise schools that fail to sufficiently address students who experience acts of bullying, representing a new development in the Norwegian case. Such a shift represents another example of the Norwegian framework moving in the direction of other European countries (Hall and Sivesind 2015). The implications of such legal and financial measures regarding school leadership as well as local and regional school authorities are still unclear but are nevertheless interesting to follow in the further debate around the future role of state school inspection, educational law, and juridification of the educational sector in Norway.

In conclusion, in an educational system characterised by increased juridification and focus on legal issues, middle leaders are often 'in the line of fire' and must thus daily relate to demands set forth in legal statutes and regulations (Andenæs and Møller 2016). This calls for increased focus on legal issues in school leadership programs in higher education institutions, which may in the long run sufficiently equip leaders to tackle the many and diverging juridical challenges they meet in their everyday leadership roles.

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ⁱ The Legal Standards and Professional Judgment in Educational Leadership (LEXEL) project, funded by the Research Council of Norway (RCN). See <http://www.uv.uio.no/ils/english/research/projects/legalstandardsedu/>

ⁱⁱ The Knowledge Promotion (2006) is the current national, core curriculum in Norway, covering grades 1-13.