

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

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1. The education system facing the challenges of the twenty-first century: an overview

1.1 Major reforms and innovations introduced in the education system

1.1.1 The organization, structure and management of the education system

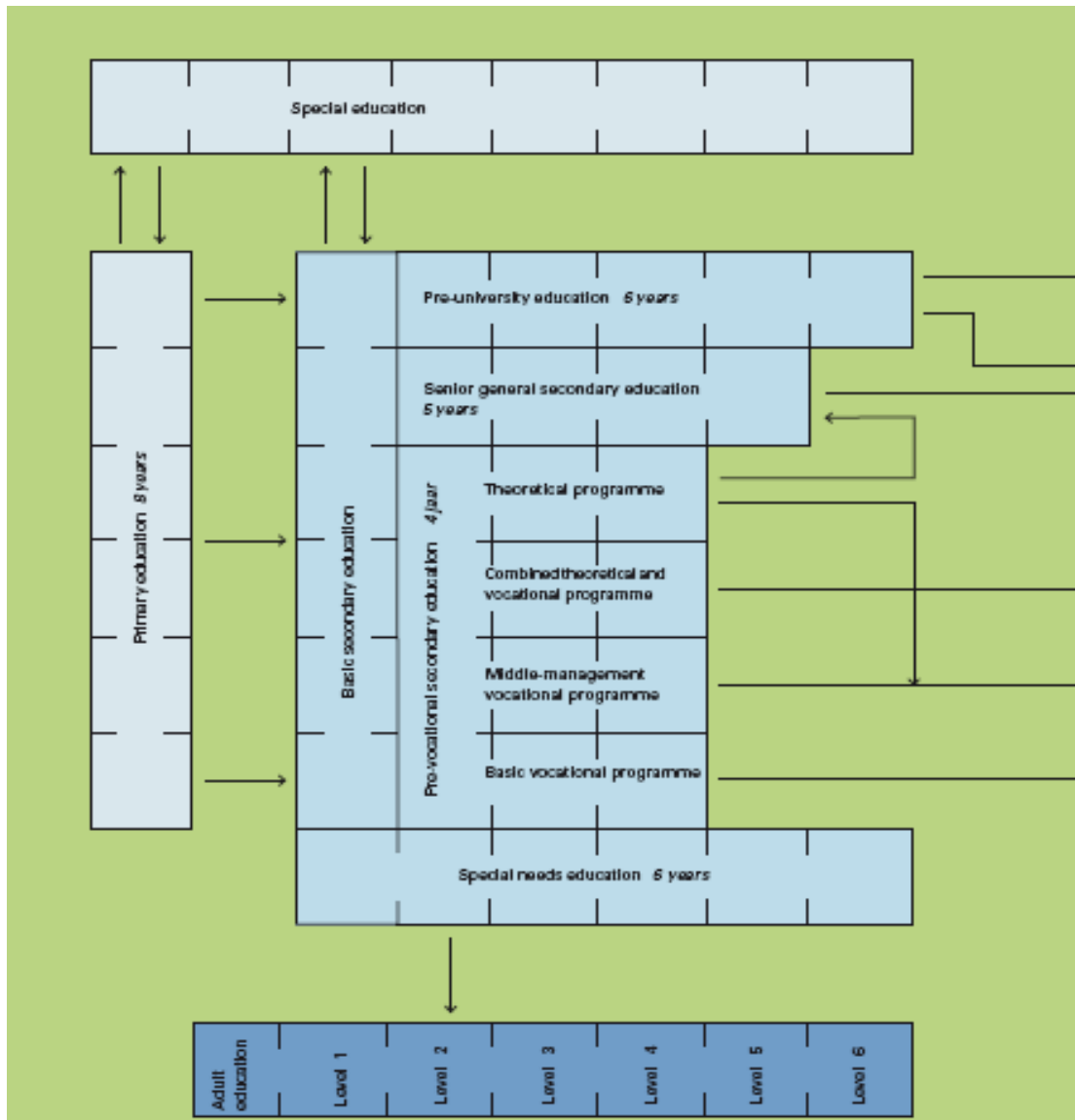


Figure 1: The structure of the Dutch education system (Inspectorate of Education, 2007)

Pre-primary education

The Netherlands has no formal pre-primary educational provision. From the age of 4 onwards, children attend primary school. Although the mandatory school age is 5, almost all children (98%) begin school at age 4. For children under the age of 4 there is no formal educational provision, but there are various childcare facilities available outside the education system.

The following organised facilities are available:

- *Playgroups*: these groups are open to all children aged 2 to 4 years, and are the most popular form of pre-primary provision. Children usually attend the playgroups twice a week, about 2-3 hours per visit. The main aim of the playgroups is to allow children to meet and play with other children and to stimulate their development. At the national level, no educational goals have been defined for playgroups. Most playgroups are subsidised by local government, but income-related parental contributions are often also demanded.
- *Pre-schools*: an increasing number of playgroups offer development stimulation programmes and have a more educational focus. These so-called 'pre-schools' are particularly intended for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (children of parents with low levels of education), with the central aim of preventing and mitigating educational deficiencies, particularly in the domain of language development.
- *Day nurseries*: the day nurseries cater for children aged from 6 weeks to 4 years. They are open on weekdays from around 8.00 to 18.00 hours. The main function of the day nurseries is to take care of children in order to allow parents to work. They provide daily care for children and opportunities to meet and play with other children. The responsibility for childcare facilities as a policy area has recently been transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Primary education

Primary education in the Netherlands comprises general primary education, special primary education and (secondary) special education. The primary education programme consists of eight years for education, from the age of four until the age of twelve. Compulsory education starts at the age of five, but children can attend primary school from the age of four. In the school year, 2007/2008 there are 7909 primary schools for 1,663,500 pupils. These include public-authority and denominational schools. Besides these, there is a small number of private schools not financed by the government. Public authority schools are open to all children, no matter what their denomination or philosophy of life may be. *Public authority* schools do not work on the basis of a denomination or philosophy of life. These schools are mostly run by the local authorities, a school board, a foundation or by a legal person appointed by the city council. About one third of all children go to public authority schools. *Denominational schools* are run as an association, of which parents can become members, or as a foundation. There are all sorts of denominational schools. Most of these schools are Roman Catholic or Protestant. In addition, there are Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and humanistic schools, and so called 'free schools' that base their education on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. And, there are schools that organise their education according to certain pedagogical principles, such as Montessori, Jenaplan, Dalton and Freinet schools (these can be either public-authority or denominational schools). There is also non-denominational private education, which does not depart from a special philosophy of life. About two thirds of all children go to denominational schools.

For pupils who require specialized care and support, there is special (primary) education and secondary special education. In 1998, schools for children with learning and behavioural difficulties (lom) and children with moderate learning difficulties (mlk) were converted to schools for special primary education (sba). These schools fall under the legislation of primary education (see section 1.1.4).

Secondary education

On average, children are 12 years of age when they enter secondary education. In the school year 2007/2008 there are 645 secondary schools that cater for 941,900 pupils. Secondary education encompasses schools providing pre-university education (vwo), general secondary education (havo), pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo) and practical training (pro). Vmbo comprises four learning pathways:

- the basic vocational programme (BL);
- the middle-management vocational programme (KL);
- the combined theoretical and vocational programme (GL);
- the theoretical programme (TL).

Vmbo students can receive additional support through learning support programmes (lwoo). After vmbo, at an average age of 16, students may transfer to vocational education (mbo).

Those who have completed the theoretical programme can also choose to transfer to havo. Havo is intended as preparation for higher professional education (hbo). Vwo is intended to prepare students for research-oriented education (wo). In practice, however, vwo graduates also transfer to hbo. The school types differ in terms of the duration of their programmes: vmbo takes 4 years, havo 5 years and vwo 6 years.

Secondary schools have completed the implementation of two major educational innovations: the innovation of upper secondary education and the introduction of vmbo.

1. In the 1999/2000 school year, a new structure for the second stage of havo and vwo education was introduced. All havo and vwo schools introduced set subject combinations and the concept of independent study in the last two/three course year (years four and five for havo, and years four, five, six for vwo).
2. In 1998 vbo and mavo were combined into vmbo. At the same time, the learning support departments (lwoo) were given a more definite shape. In 1998 ivbo was incorporated into the learning support departments. In addition, practical training programmes (pro) were initiated. With the conversion of practical training programmes and the learning support departments, special secondary education has been incorporated into mainstream secondary education. On 28 May 1998, an Act was implemented which required all svo/lom (for children with learning and behavioural difficulties) and svo/mlk (for children with moderate learning difficulties) schools either to merge with a mainstream secondary school, or to convert to a practical training institution (pro) or a special education centre (opdc).

Vocational education (mbo)

Since 1 January 1998 all adult and vocational education institutions have been incorporated in regional training centres (ROCs). mbo comprises a vocational training programme (BOL) and a block or day release programme (BBL). There are four qualification levels:

- assistant worker (level 1)
- basic vocational training (level 2)
- professional training (level 3)
- middle management and specialized training (level 4).

The programmes last a maximum of 4 years.

Higher education

Higher education comprises higher professional education (hbo) and university education. These types of education are provided by hbo institutions and universities respectively. As of 2008, there are 41 hbo institutions and 13 universities. There is also one establishment providing open higher distance education, the Open University of the Netherlands. In addition there are number of approved private institutions and institutes for international education. The private institutions include several theological colleges, the University for Humanist Studies and Nijenrode University (business education). The international education colleges include the Institute of Social Science (ISS), International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC), Institute for Urban Housing and Development Studies (IHS), and the Institute for Water Education (IHE).

Higher education in the Netherlands is composed of higher professional education (hbo) and research-oriented education (wo). Since 1993, the universities of applied sciences or hbo institutions and research universities have been governed by the same legislation: the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW). This Act permits the institutions a large measure of freedom in the way they organize their teaching and other matters to meet changing demands. The universities of applied sciences are responsible for the programming and quality of the courses they provide. Quality control is exercised by the institutions themselves and by external experts. With effect from 1 September 2003, the Education Inspectorate's external quality assurance dossier has been transferred to the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). The NVAO took over two tasks of the Education Inspectorate: a) the follow-up to old style reviews previously approved by the Education Inspectorate, the so-called evaluation of administrative processing, and b) the follow-up to reviews conducted from 2003 on.

In order to be able to link up with international developments, the Bachelor's - Master's degree structure was introduced in the 2002/03 academic year. The Bachelor programs comprise of 180 ECTS¹, which amounts to three years of full-time study. The Masters programs take 1 year (60 ECTS) to 2 years (120 ECTS).

Higher professional education is extremely diverse: courses lead to some 250 different qualifications for a wide range of occupations in various areas of society. There are both broad and specialist courses. There are large hbo institutions offering a wide variety of courses in many different sectors and medium-sized and small colleges offering a small assortment in one sector only. Administrative mergers have reduced the number of hbo institutions from almost 350 in the mid-1980s to 41 in 2007. Programmes are divided into seven sectors: Education, Engineering & Technology, Healthcare, Economics, Behaviour & Society, Language & Culture, and Agriculture & the Natural Environment. The last sector falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV).

Special schools

Since 1998, schools for children with learning and behavioural difficulties (lom) and children with moderate learning difficulties (mlk) were converted to special primary schools (SBAO). These schools now fall under the legislation of primary education. This is related to the introduction of the law on the Expertise Centres in 1998. This law was formally effectuated in 2003. As a result of this law regional expertise centres (RECs) have been set up, i.e., consortiums of special schools and secondary special schools within a district. These consortiums are divided into four clusters:

- cluster 1: education for the visually handicapped (from the former schools for the blind and partially sighted);
- cluster 2: education for pupils with hearing impediments or communicative handicaps from existing schools, for deaf or hearing-impaired pupils and pupils with severe speech disorders;
- cluster 3: education for physically, mentally and multi-handicapped pupils, and for chronically sick children;
- cluster 4: education for pupils with behavioural disorders from existing schools, for severely maladjusted children, chronically sick children (psychosomatic) and pupils in paedological institutes.

Within secondary special schools, pupils can follow the curriculum for practical training, vmbo, havo or vwo.

In 2003 the financing mechanism (funding special schools on the basis of the number of children that are placed) has been changed in favour of linking financing of special services to the student involved, regardless of the type of schooling. If a student meets the criteria for this so-called 'pupil-bound budget', parents and pupils can choose a school, special or mainstream, and take part in decision making on the best way to use the funds in order to meet the student's special needs. Peripatetic supervision entails the provision of extra help to enable pupils with special educational needs to attend a mainstream school. The help is provided by teachers from special schools. In the Netherlands, there is a growing continuum between separated education (special schools) and full inclusive schools. There are many mainstream schools with pupils with special educational needs in regular classes and mainstream schools with a special group for children with special needs within the school. Some mainstream school specialize in a particular target group and some mainstream schools collaborate intensively with special schools.

1.1.2 The aims and purposes of education at each level

Pre-primary education

Childcare facilities and playgroups offer young children the opportunity and the space to play and develop in the company of children of their own age. The aim is to stimulate children's social, cognitive and emotional development. There is no curriculum as such in childcare provision, but there is a trend towards developing pedagogical plans for day nurseries and playgroups. Also, a national pedagogical curriculum for teaching staff is being developed.

¹ ECTS refer to the European Credit Transfer system, where 1 ECTS corresponds to 28 study hours

Playgroups that offer pre-school programmes have a more educational focus and include activities that are aimed at preparing children for school. The development stimulation programmes that are used include educationally oriented activities in which children play with concepts related to literacy and numeracy. Language development is an area of special concern.

Primary education

The general aims and purposes of primary education are laid down in the Primary Education Act (WPO), which was last revised in 1998. As specified in this Act, primary education aims to promote the development of children's emotions, intellect and creativity and the acquisition of essential knowledge together with social, cultural and physical skills in an uninterrupted process of development. Teaching must reflect the fact that pupils are growing up in a multicultural society. Recently the Act was amended and an additional specification was included stating that primary education should stimulate active citizenship en social integration.

In the case of children who need extra help, the aim is to provide this help as much as possible within the school. Teaching in special schools for primary education is, in addition, geared to enabling as many pupils as possible to return to mainstream education .

Secondary education

Secondary education prepares pupils for their future place in society. Vwo is intended to prepare students for university education, havo is intended as preparation for higher professional education (hbo), vmbo is intended as preparation for vocational education (mbo), and practical training is intended for youngsters for whom a qualification at the lowest vmbo-level is out of reach. For them, preparation for transition to employment is the most important aim. Practical education also aims at preparing these pupils to take part in the society as independent as possible. Besides academic development (meeting the needs and possibilities of the individual learners), personal development and social competences are important learning domains.

Vocational education

Vocational education prepares learners for their future place in society, with an important focus on their future employment. The national vocational education bodies are responsible for developing a clear qualification structure setting out the knowledge, skills and attitude required by employers.

1.1.3 Curricular policies, educational content and teaching and learning strategies

Pre-primary education

Most Dutch pre-schools use ready-made curricular programs, selected by either the local government or the organization itself. Many programs aim at children both in playgroups as well as in the first two years of primary education, while some specifically target the two-three age range. Pre-school curricula vary in nature and content and have been developed by a wide variety of individuals and organizations. Some programs are more comprehensive (Kaleidoscoop, Piramid), while others focus more on certain areas such as language development or social-emotional development. In addition to centre-based programs, there has also been a movement toward home-based programs or programs for special needs children.

Used by 64% of Dutch preschools, the Piramid program is the most popular pre-school program in the Netherlands (Kloprogge, 2003). Piramid, developed by the Cito National Institute for Educational Measurement is briefly described in Box 1.

Ready-made program example: Pyramid

Designed for children from three to seven years old, the Pyramid program provides a safe play-learn environment in which children can take initiative in play and independent learning. While variations are available for children who require additional support, such as language development, the core program addresses the following developmental areas:

1. *Developing observation skills:* all senses - feeling, tasting, smelling seeing and hearing with the aid of illustrative material. Sensory development is seen as an important condition for further development
2. *Personality development:* abilities to cope, independence, self-control and perseverance
3. *Social-emotional development:* learning to deal with feelings such as happy, sad, angry, scared; social behaviour as defensibility, cooperation and collaborative play
4. *Cognitive development and numeracy:* Ordering, sorting, classification, seriation, numbers, counting, comparing and simple operations.
5. *Language development and development of reading and writing:* communicating with other children is important, but also communicating with adults, working on vocabulary development, interactive reading aloud and pre-reading and writing
6. *Orientation to space and time and world exploration:* sense of space and time, learning spatial and temporal concepts and experiencing these aspects of the world through projects
7. *Motor development:* fine motor skills (drawing, writing, using markers, pencils, scissors) and gross motor skills (jumping, aiming, swimming, dancing)
8. *Artistic development:* visual development, working with clay, pain, paper, textiles and aspects such as colour, shape, light and space; musical development including songs, tempo, rhythm, tone and volume

The play-learn environment sets the stage and the method offers structure. Challenging materials and activity corners ensure that children can take initiative, discover and explore in all the developmental areas. Pyramid is a project-based method; each project has a structure with activities, applications, ideas, games, songs and other options.

Box 1: Pyramid program characteristics (McKenney, Letschert & Kloprogge, 2007)

Primary education

Primary education aims to broadly educate children. Under the terms of the Primary Education Act, the following subjects must appear in the curriculum, where possible in an integrated form: (i) sensory coordination and physical education; (ii) Dutch; (iii) arithmetic and mathematics; (iv) English; (v) a number of factual subjects, including geography, history, science (including biology), (vi) social structures (including political studies) and religious and ideological movements; (vii) expressive activities, including use of language, drawing, music, handicrafts, and play and movement; (viii) social and life skills, including road safety, and (ix) healthy living. Although these subject areas are compulsory, schools are free to decide how much time they devote to each domain.

The prescribed learning areas are further specified in a set of *core objectives*. Core objectives in the Netherlands may be considered as general indicators of common educational content. They sketch the outlines of a basic education programme schools should offer their pupils. They include descriptions of the knowledge, insight and skills that should be offered to pupils and thereby the learning targets that schools should strive for. They make up a framework for the school to facilitate the development of pupils and provide a frame of reference for public accountability. Since the first set of core objectives was published in 1993, and a second version came about in 1998, a number of changes have taken place (SLO, 2007). National curriculum policy in the Netherlands has increasingly shifted from a belief in the necessity of solid steering at macro level to a belief in the power at meso level, the level of school policy. The central curriculum policy has turned into processes of decentralisation and an increase in the allowance of local autonomy. Schools are given more room to develop education that is in line with the specific needs and local environment of their pupils. The need was felt to enhance the coherence of the proposed content areas, also based on recent pedagogical and instructional insights. These developments have affected the design of the core objectives.

The latest version of core objectives for primary education in the Netherlands was published in 2006. An important revision has been the substantial reduction in the number of core objectives: from 103 core objectives in 1998 to 58 in 2006. Moreover, the core objectives are of a more global nature than was the case in the previous version.

The main reason for this reduction of specification was the felt need to provide schools with the freedom to develop their own educational program. The current core objectives refer to the following learning areas:

- Dutch language: oral and written language use; linguistics, including strategies.
- English language: no subdivisions. The emphasis lies on communication skills.
- Frisian language: oral and written language use; linguistics, including strategies (for Frisian schools only).
- Mathematics/arithmetics: mathematical insight and operation; numbers and calculations; measuring and geometry.
- Personal and world orientation: social studies; nature and technology; space; time.
- Art education: no subdivisions. The emphasis lies on personal expression, reflective skills, and knowledge of and appreciation for cultural heritage.
- Physical education: no subdivisions. The emphasis lies on participation in the present-day exercise culture.

The core objectives describe the desired results of a learning process, not the way in which these are to be achieved. Schools themselves choose their own pedagogical approach and select or develop their teaching and learning materials. In the preamble that accompanies the core objectives it is stated that teachers are encouraged to address and stimulate children's natural curiosity and their need for development and communication. The preamble further stresses the necessity for the broad development of children, and for a coherent education programme in which the different learning areas are closely linked to each other.

Lower secondary education

Secondary education prepares pupils for their future place in society. Many changes have taken place in lower secondary education over the last few years. In 1999, the school inspectorate concluded that the existing programme was overloaded and cluttered. In addition, the inspectorate stated that the curriculum did not do provide sufficient room to deal with the diverging capacities of pupils. With reference to these conclusions the Dutch Advisory Council for Education recommended to formulate a new curriculum in close collaboration with schools. This curriculum should give schools more freedom to develop tailor-made programmes and to create a distinct profile for their school. In 2002, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science, commissioned the Task Force Reformation Lower Secondary Education to revise the core objectives. The Ministry presents the Task Force with a rather extensive assignment, because, in addition to the reformulation of core objectives and the solving of a number of specific bottlenecks, attention should also be given to the process of implementation (SLO, 2007). The products should explicitly be based on practical experiences of schools and should gain broad public support. School development was to be stimulated. Therefore, the dialogue with the field played an important part during this process, which was conducted publicly in all aspects. The Task Force's interactive approach can safely be called a breach with the past in policy development in the Netherlands. The most important actors in the decision-making process included the Dutch Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science, the Dutch Advisory Council for Education, the Task Force Lower Secondary Education, and teachers and principals. Contrary to the former situation, intermediate organisations and trade unions played only a minor part in the considerations and decisions.

From the very start, the Task Force based its efforts upon pupil-oriented dynamics, and aimed to stimulate coherence between subjects. The following principles on pupil learning were used:

- the pupil learns in an active and increasingly independent way;
- the pupil learns in collaboration with others;
- the pupil learns in cohesion;
- the pupil researches;
- the pupil learns in a challenging, safe and healthy learning environment;
- the pupil learns in a continuous learning line.

The Task Group arrived at 58 core objectives, covering the following areas:

- Dutch language: the emphasis lies on the communicative function of language and strategic skills, as well as on cultural and literary aspects.
- Frisian language and culture: the emphasis lies on participation in Frisian culture (for Frisian schools only).
- English language: the emphasis lies on the communicative function of the language. A relationship exists with the European frame of reference.
- Mathematics and arithmetic: the emphasis lies on arithmetic skills.
- Man and nature: the emphasis lies on physical, technological and care-related subjects.
- Man and society: the emphasis lies on the ability to ask questions and do research, to place phenomena in space and time, and to use concrete materials and resources.
- Art and culture: the emphasis lies on making and presenting own work, experiencing the work of others, report activities, and reflect.
- Physical education and sports: the emphasis lies on a wide orientation on different types of physical activities.

In 2006 the new set of 58 core objectives was introduced in schools. The core objectives concern global guidelines on core content that should be offered. Schools are encouraged to offer this content in broad learning areas, but this is not prescribed. Schools have the freedom to determine their own curriculum, within the framework of the core objectives. Scenarios have been formulated to guide schools in deciding on how to organise the different learning areas within their curriculum.

Upper secondary education

Upon completion of the basic secondary education, students move on to the upper stage of secondary education. In this stage they choose certain areas of specialization.

Vocational education (vmbo)

After two years of vocational basic education, pupils in vmbo enter the specialisation stage, which lasts two years. In this stage students specialize by choosing for:

- a particular sector: this is a group of subjects that lays the foundation for further training;
- vocational stream within that sector: each pathway comprises distinctive groups of subjects and vocationally oriented programmes that are more theoretical or more practical oriented. The choice of pathway has implications for the options open to pupils beyond vmbo;
- a vocationally-oriented programme within the chosen stream: pupils can opt to specialise within one particular department (this programme leads on to vocational training in a specific occupation) or they can delay choosing a specialisation by opting for an intrasectoral programme, which provides a broader base (see 'broad-based' options in the table below).

The specialisation stage lasts two years.

Academic education (havo/vwo)

The last two years of havo and the last three years of vwo are referred to as the *tweede fase* (literally, second phase), or upper secondary education. During these years, pupils focus on one of four subject clusters (*profielen*), each of which emphasizes a certain field of study. The following subject clusters exist:

- science and technology
- science and health
- economics and society
- culture and society

Each group of subjects includes: (i) a common component, which covers 40% to 46% of the curriculum; (ii) a specialised component (consisting of subjects relating to the chosen subject combination), consisting of 36% to 38% of the curriculum, and (iii) an optional component occupying 18% to 21% of the curriculum. For the optional component pupils are free to choose from the subjects offered by the school.

Currently the prescribed framework for the subject clusters is undergoing certain changes. The tendency is towards including fewer compulsory elements and enabling schools to offer optional specialised subjects as part of the four fixed subject combinations.

The new Act of Parliament adapting the rules on subject combinations entered into force on 1 August 2007. The aim is to enhance the cohesion in and organization of the subject programmes in the upper years and to ensure that pupils will no longer be overburdened by too many subjects. Pupils will have more freedom to choose their own subjects, and there will be more scope to deepen or broaden knowledge and develop skills. Several committees have been set up to produce recommendations on further curricular reform in the long term, especially in the science area.

Examinations

The secondary examination consists of two components: (i) a school examination, and (ii) national examination). The school exams are set and administered at the school level, and usually consist of two or more tests or practical assignments per subject areas in the last two course years. Schools decide when to set the examinations. The national examination takes place at a fixed moment at the end of the school year (May). The elements of both the school examination and national examination are indicated in an examination syllabus that is approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Based on this syllabus schools develop their own school exams. The school examination syllabus, in which schools specify what will be tested, how and when, is to be submitted to the Inspectorate.

1.1.4 The legal framework of education

The Dutch educational system is governed by different acts. Each type of education has own legislation:

- Primary education: Primary Education Act (WPO)
- Special education: Expertise Centres Act (WEC)
- Secondary education: Secondary Education Act (WVO)
- Adult and Vocational Education : Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB)
- Higher Education: Higher Education and Research Act (WHO)

Freedom of education

One of the key features of the Dutch education system, guaranteed under article 23 of the Constitution, is freedom of education. This refers to the freedom to found schools (freedom of establishment), to organise the teaching in schools (freedom of organisation of teaching) and to determine the principles on which they are based (freedom of conviction). People have the right to found schools and to provide teaching based on religious, ideological or educational beliefs. As a result there are both publicly run and privately run schools in the Netherlands.

Publicly run schools are open to all children regardless of religion or outlook and provide education on behalf of the state. Public schools are subject to public law. They are governed by the municipal council or by a public legal entity or foundation set up by the council. Some publicly run schools base their teaching on specific educational ideas, such as the Montessori, Jenaplan or Dalton method.

Privately run schools are subject to private law and are state-funded although not set up by the state. These schools are governed by the board of the association or foundation that set them up. These so-called denominational schools base their teaching on religious or ideological beliefs. They include Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindustani and anthroposophic schools. Some private schools base their teaching on specific educational ideas, such as the Montessori, Jenaplan or Dalton method. The denominational schools can refuse to admit pupils whose parents do not subscribe to the belief or ideology on which the school's teaching is based.

The freedom to organise teaching means that private schools are free to determine what is taught and how. This freedom is however limited by the qualitative standards set by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in educational legislation. These standards, which apply to both public and private education, prescribe the subjects to be studied, the attainment targets or examination syllabuses and the content of national examinations, the number of instructional hours per year, the qualifications which teachers are required to have, the right for parents and pupils to have a say in school matters, planning and reporting obligations, and so on.

The Constitution places public and private schools on an equal financial footing. This means that government expenditure on public education must be matched by spending on private education. The conditions which private schools must satisfy in order to qualify for funding are laid down by law.

Compulsory Education Act

The obligation to attend school is laid down in the Compulsory Education Act 1969. Every child must attend school full time from the first school day of the month following its fifth birthday; in fact, however, nearly all children attend school from the age of four. Children must attend school full time for 12 full school years and, in any event, until the end of the school year in which they turn 16. Those who have a practical training contract in a particular sector of employment attend classes one day a week and work the rest of the week. Since August 2007, the obligation to continue education in order to obtain a basic qualification is applicable to youngsters under the age of 18, who have finished compulsory education but have not yet obtained a basic qualification certificate. They have to achieve at least a certificate at havo, vwo or mbo 2 level.

The Compulsory Education Act is implemented by municipal authorities. The municipal executive checks that children below school-leaving age who are registered as resident in the area are enrolled as pupils at an educational establishment. The municipal authorities ensure compliance with the Act in both public and private schools through the school attendance officer appointed for this purpose. The Act requires each municipality to have one sworn attendance officer with specific responsibility for this matter, although in smaller local authorities such officials frequently carry out other duties in addition.

Since 1995 the municipal authorities have been responsible for registering early school leavers under the age of 23 and coordinating regional policy on this matter. In 2001 the Regional Registration and Coordination (Early School Leavers) Bill was adopted by parliament. This bill contains amendments to educational legislation designed to prevent and tackle early school leaving in ordinary and special secondary schools, secondary vocational education and adult general secondary education. The main aim is for all young people to leave school with a basic qualification.

Pre-Primary Education

The 1999 policy document on childcare contains an overview of current policy which is geared to achieving a substantial increase in the number of childcare places available, especially for 4 to 12-year-olds. In 2001 the government approved the Basic Childcare Provision Bill (WBK) and submitted it to the Council of State. This Act entered into force in 2004. The Act regulates the structure of the childcare sector, the division of responsibilities, quality, supervision and funding (including parental contributions). The aim is to provide adequate facilities throughout the Netherlands, with appropriate educational standards. Parents receive an income-related government subsidy, thus giving them more choice and making childcare provision more market-led. It also became easier for new providers of childcare to enter the market. A new national system of requirements to be met by providers and checks on municipal supervision will improve quality control. The new national standards will create greater clarity; it will moreover become easier to obtain planning permission and operating licences. Importantly, responsibility for childcare is to be shared by parents, employers and government, who will also share its financing.

As a result of the Act, the distinction between subsidised, employer-funded and privately-funded childcare has disappeared. A uniform childcare funding system has been introduced (fixed employer's contribution, income-related government subsidy, remainder paid by parents). In the 1999-2002 policy document on welfare, entitled "Towards social quality", childcare policy forms an integral part of policy on participation and integration and is therefore to be coordinated with the further development of local youth and education policy. Childcare as a policy area is now transferred to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Before it fell under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW).

Primary Education

The Primary Education Act (WPO) came into force on 1 August 1998, replacing the Primary Education Act 1981 and the Special Education Interim Act, both of which had been in force since 1985.

The purpose of the new Act was to enhance the integration of and cooperation between mainstream primary schools and certain types of special school. It governs both mainstream schools and special schools for children with learning and behavioural difficulties (lom), children with learning difficulties (mlk) and preschool children with developmental difficulties (IOBK). lom and mlk schools are now officially known as special schools for primary education. IOBK schools are integrated in cluster 4 schools (see section 1.1.1). The term primary encompasses both ordinary mainstream schools and schools for special primary education.

On 1 August 2006, the block grant funding system was introduced in primary education. Under this system, schools' competent authorities receive a single block grant budget for staff and non-staff costs. They are free to decide how to spend this budget. The school budgets encompass three flows of funds: (i) the regular staff budget, (ii) funding for staff and labour market policies (the former school budget), and (iii) funding for running costs. Until 1 August 2006, staff budgets were calculated in staff units of account. School accommodations are financed by local governments.

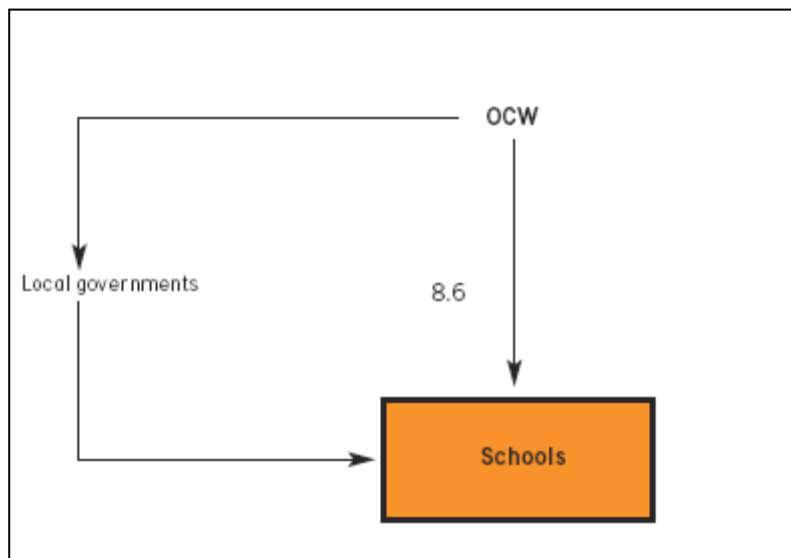


Figure 2: Flows of funds in primary education (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2007)
Note: Amounts for 2007 x € 1 billion

Weightings and cultural minorities

In primary education, pupils with a potential educational disadvantage are given a weighting based on certain criteria. Until August 2006, the following weighting system applied:

- 0.25 for Dutch pupils whose parents have a low level of education;
- 0.4 for bargees' children;
- 0.7 for caravan dwellers' and gypsies' children;
- 0.9 for ethnic minority pupils whose parents have a low level of education.

On the basis of these weightings school receive extra staff and other resources. The weightings do not have a direct effect on the funding of schools. In order to qualify for extra funds under the weighting system, a school must meet a number of additional criteria, such as a minimum percentage of pupils with a weighting. No additional funds are allocated if the school fails to meet this minimum requirement.

Since 1 August 2006, a new weighting system has taken effect for primary education in which only the parents' level of education counts. Two weightings are used:

- 0.3 for pupils whose parents have no more than lbo (lower vocational training)/vbo (prevocational education) qualifications;
- 1.2 for pupils who have one parent with only a primary education and one parent with no more than lbo/vbo qualification.

The new weighting system will be introduced in steps between 2006 and 2010. Starting in 2006, two extra pupil age groups will be counted every year according to the new system and will be included in the funding a year later.

In 2007, the number of 0.3 pupils totalled approximately 68,000, while the number of 1.2 pupils totalled approximately 44,000. As a result of the new weighting system, the total number of 0.25 and 0.9 pupils fell. Numbers in both groups more than halved in comparison with 2005. There has also been a sharp increase in the percentage of pupils without a weighting: 4.5% vis à vis 2005. In comparison, between 2003 and 2005, the proportion of these groups of pupils increased by 2.2%. In addition to pupils with weightings, the pupils in the primary education sector with a non-Dutch cultural background (CUMI pupils) are counted, irrespective of their parents' level of education. The number of CUMI pupils is not evenly spread throughout the Netherlands. Amsterdam and Rotterdam have more than 50% of CUMI pupils, whereas the proportion is less than 10% for the majority of the other municipalities.

Secondary education

A system of block grant funding applies to secondary schools. On the basis of a number of criteria they are awarded funds to cover staff and running costs, which they can spend as they see fit, provided they do so within the statutory parameters. In line with the general policy of deregulation (reducing the administrative burden) and greater autonomy (e.g. block grant funding), schools are encouraged to plan their own activities and pursue their own policies. To this end, the funding system for secondary education has been simplified. On 1 January 2006, the first step was taken toward simplifying funding of staff costs with the abolition of the age-related allowance. Funding allocations no longer take account of the average age of the school's staff. In the same year a shift took place from school year to calendar year funding. The number of pupils enrolled on 1 October determines the amount schools receive for staff and running costs in the following calendar year. Schools now receive funding for the pupils on their rolls earlier in the year, i.e. three months after the final headcount on 1 October. School accommodations are financed by local governments.

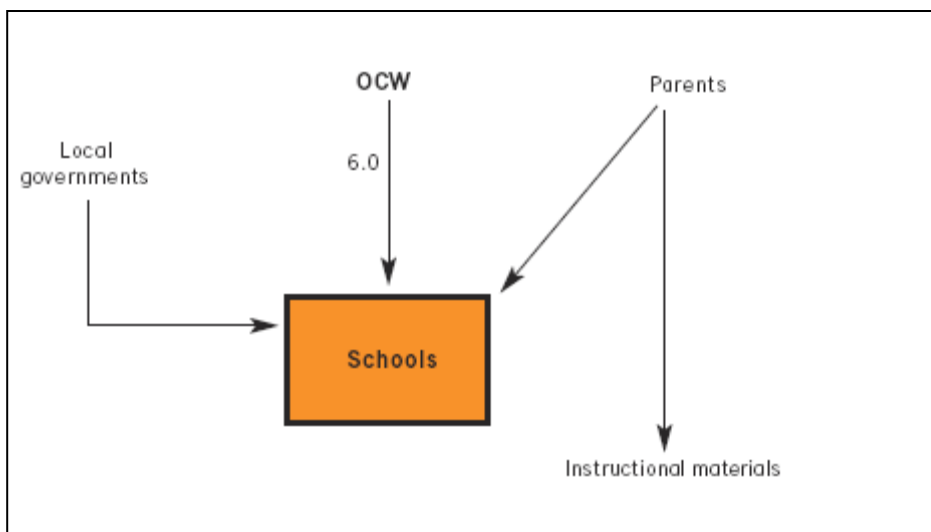


Figure 3: Flows of funds in secondary education (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2007)

Note: Amounts for 2007 x € 1 billion

Special education

In 1998 the law on the Expertise Centres was introduced. Regional expertise centres (RECs) have been set up, i.e., consortiums of special schools and secondary special schools within a district. The consortiums are divided into four clusters:

- cluster 1: education for the visually handicapped (from the former schools for the blind and partially sighted);
- cluster 2: education for pupils with hearing impediments or communicative handicaps from existing schools, for deaf or hearing-impaired pupils and pupils with severe speech disorders;

- cluster 3: education for physically, mentally and multi-handicapped pupils, and chronically sick pupils;
- cluster 4: education for pupils with behavioural disorders from existing schools, for severely maladjusted children, chronically sick (psycho-somatic) children and pupils in paedological institutes.

The law on the Expertise Centres states that pupils are eligible for special education if they meet certain criteria. These are largely based on existing practice. Criteria for the visually impaired are a visual acuity: <0,3 or a visual field: < 30 and limited participation in education as a result of the visual impairment. For hearing impaired pupils a hearing loss > 80 dB (or for hard of hearing pupils 35 -80 dB) and limited participation in education are required. The decision to provide extra funding for mentally handicapped pupils will be based largely on IQ < 55, for physically impaired and chronically ill pupils medical data showing diagnosed disabilities and illness are needed. The criteria for behaviourally disturbed pupils require a diagnosis in terms of categories of the DSM-IV, problems at school, at home and in the community and a limited participation in education as a result of the behaviour problems.

The funding of special needs education has been modified in 2003. The system changed from a supply-oriented financing to a system in which the means are forwarded to the person requiring the services to more demand-oriented financing. The policy is known as the 'back-pack' policy: pupils take the funding with them to the school of their choice. If a student meets the criteria for this so-called 'pupil-bound budget', parents and pupils can choose a school, special or mainstream, and take part in decision making on the best way to use the funds in order to meet the student's special needs.

Post-secondary education

In adult and vocational education (BVE), higher professional education (hbo) and research-oriented (university) education (wo), the contributions for accommodations are included in the central government allowance. For compulsory education, until the age of 18, no school fees are charged. For higher education or vocational education after the age of 18, tuition fees are charged. Depending on the parents' income, students can receive a grant to pay for school fees and books. Tuition fees (in hbo and wo) go from participants directly to the institutions and are not a part of the central government grant.

1.1.5 Objectives and principal characteristics of current and forthcoming reforms

Early childhood intervention

Early childhood intervention is an important priority in educational policy in the Netherlands. By offering early childhood education (VVE), the aim is to address language and/or educational arrears among children at an early stage. Target group children are children whose parents have a low level of education. Preschool programmes in playgroups reach out to target group children aged 2.5 to 4, while children aged 4 and 5 are catered for through early school programmes in primary years 1 and 2. The administrative and financial responsibility for early childhood education rests with local governments. School boards make the decisions that affect early childhood education. The policy objective is to strive for 70 per cent of the target group children to attend a minimum of three half-days of VVE per week in 2010.

A forthcoming reform is to incorporate nursery schools, kindergartens, playgroups and early childhood education within one legislation (Childcare Act). Now these organisations fall under different legislations. All have their own, and different, rules and requirements. Playgroups fall under the Social support Act (WMO), nursery schools and kindergartens fall under the Childcare Act and VVE falls under the Primary Education Act (WPO). The most important aims are to prevent segregation, strengthen the quality of early childhood education, enhance the transition to primary schools and to diagnose and tackle language disadvantages as early as possible.

Specifying outcome standards

An important reform in Dutch education is the development of common outcome standards for literacy and numeracy for all pupils across the different educational streams.

The development of these standards grew out of the desire to smoothen the transition from one educational level to the next and thus encourage continuous learning of pupils. Dutch education is offered in a diversified system whereby pupils are tracked in different streams according to their capacities.

There are several transition points in which students can move from one level to the next, for example from vmbo (lower secondary vocational education) to mbo (vocational education). These transitions are not always made easily as the educational programmes are not always sufficiently geared to each other. Moreover, because of the different educational programmes at each level there is also a lack of common terminology in reporting about students' learning outcomes. This makes it difficult for schools to take students' capacities into account at the start of each level and develop education that is tailored to the needs of the individual learner. To enhance opportunities for a continuous process of development of pupils, regardless their route through the different tracks in the education system, common learning strands with outcome standards were formulated in 2007. Currently, pilots are being held in which schools work with the standards. The outcomes of the pilots will be used to finalize the standards. The outcome standards describe the learning outcomes of pupils at different levels according to the ages:

- 12 years (end of primary education)
- 16 years (entry into vocational education)
- 18 years (entry into higher education)

At each level, two standards are specified: a common, basic standard, and an advanced standard. Bearing in mind that schools have a large amount of autonomy regarding the development of education (core objectives are very few and global in nature), the introduction of common standards can be seen as a remarkable shift in policy. It should be noted that the standards specify the desired learning outcomes, and thereby refer to the educational content that should be dealt with in education. The way in which education is organized in order to meet these standards is up to the school. The pedagogical approach is not specified. The specification of both a standard and an advanced standard reflect the current discussion and policy emphasis on striving for excellence and creating more room for advanced learning outcomes.

Adequate education for all pupils

Currently a new policy is being put into place, called *Adequate education*. An important aim of this policy is to improve the realisation of education for every pupil with special educational needs within the educational system. The policy arose out of the felt need and desire to improve the care for special needs students, to streamline the provisions for special needs education that each have their own funding and procedures, and to avoid that children get lost between the systems. Under this policy, every school board has the responsibility to provide adequate education for every pupil that enrolls, regardless his specific educational needs and the kind of support that he needs. By cooperating with other school boards at a regional level, schools are required to arrange educational provisions in such a way that every child can be educated taking into account the special educational needs. Schools are free to decide on how the arrangements are offered. Currently, schools in different regions schools have started with first pilots. Depending on the different outcomes and experiences within the pilots, legislation will be adapted in 2012. Some important features of this policy are:

- no child left behind: school boards have the responsibility to provide an adequate place in the educational system for every child;
- cooperation between boards of different school types, including primary education, secondary education, vocational education, and special education;
- cooperation between schools and other organisations and institutions responsible for the care and well-being of children (health organisations, youth care, etc);
- participation of all stakeholders (school board, management, teachers and parents)

Quality of special needs education

Another important issue in the Netherlands is the quality of education for pupils and students with special educational needs, irrespective of the place where education takes place: in regular schools, in special schools or in combinations of both. There is more attention for learning outcomes, especially regarding language development and mathematics. There are several initiatives to enhance curricular frameworks, material resources and capacity building in schools. Besides the well-being of pupils, cognitive development becomes more and more important in special needs education.

Adequate qualifications

Currently different policy initiatives are being taken to enhance the possibilities for mainstream and special secondary schools to qualify pupils with special educational needs as high as possible. The current structures for certification of special needs students are currently looked in to in order to identify problems faced by schools and to search for possible to enhance the quality in developing adequate qualifications. The adagium being that every pupil counts and has the right to be qualified as high as possible.

Early school leavers

The aim of Dutch education policy is to prepare as many young people as possible for participation in a modern knowledge society. The award of basic qualifications (a havo or vwo certificate or one at mbo level 2) is a major policy priority. The national objective is to reduce the annual number of new early school-leavers by 50 per cent between 2002 and 2012, i.e., a reduction to a maximum of 35,000 new dropouts by 2012.

1.2 Main policies, achievements and lessons learned

1.2.1 Access to education

In the Netherlands, everyone has the right to be educated. The obligation to attend school is laid down in the Compulsory Education Act 1969. Every child must attend school full time from the first school day of the month following its fifth birthday. Children must attend school full time for 12 full school years and, in any event, until the end of the school year in which they turn 16. Since august 2007, the obligation to continue education in order to obtain a basic qualification is applicable to youngsters under the age of 18, who have finished compulsory education but have not yet obtained a basic qualification certificate. They have to achieve at least a certificate at havo, vwo or mbo 2 level.

Participation and enrolment

Although compulsory education starts at the age of 5, most children start school at the age of 4. The participation in education of 5-14-years-olds in the Netherlands is 99 per cent. Of the 15- of 19 year olds, 86 per cent attends school. The participation in education of 20- to 29 year olds is 26 per cent. The participation in education of 30- to 39-year-olds in the Netherlands is 3 per cent (see figure 4).

	5-14	15-19	20-29	30-39	40 and over
The Netherlands	99	86	26	3	1

Figure 4: The Dutch educational system with percentages of a cohort of pupils leaving primary education, 2006 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2008)

In 2007, almost 3.7 million pupils, participants and students participated in education funded by the Ministries of OCW and LNV. The participation rates per age group rose significantly between 1990 and 2007, particularly among 20-year-olds. In 1990, almost 46 per cent of 20-year-olds participated in education, in 2007, this had risen to nearly 69 per cent. Participation in havo and vwo in particular increased, as did transfers from secondary education (VO) and secondary vocational education (mbo) to higher professional education (hbo). In 2007, almost 1.7 million pupils were enrolled in primary education and over 940 thousand pupils in secondary education. Participation in primary and secondary education has remained fairly stable over the years. Because pupils are of compulsory school age in primary education and secondary education, participation in these sectors is largely determined by demographic factors. Mbo numbered over 500 thousand participants in 2007. In recent years, participation in mbo has been rising. From 2003 to 2006 participation in block or day release programmes (BBL) has been falling. In 2007, participation in BBL rose to 157 thousand participants.

Over 370 students participated in hbo in 2007 and over 210 thousand students were enrolled in wo. In recent years, participation in higher professional education (hbo) and research-oriented education (wo) has risen considerably.

Dropouts and early school leavers

As said, the national objective is to reduce the annual number of new early school-leavers by 50 per cent between 2002 and 2012. This is in line with European policy. Within the framework of the Lisbon strategy, European agreements have been made aimed at a 50 per cent reduction between 2000 and 2010 in the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds that are no longer in the education system and do not have basic qualifications. To this end, an EU indicator was agreed on which is monitored annually using data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). For the Netherlands, this means a reduction of 15.5 per cent (value in 2000) to approximately 8 per cent in 2010. In 2006, the percentage was 12.9.

In 2006/2007, there were 53,100 early school-leavers. Young men constitute the majority of early school-leavers with 59 per cent. The percentage of non-Western ethnic minority early school-leavers is twice as high as that of the native Dutch. The share of early school-leavers among ethnic minorities is gradually falling and was 6.3 per cent in 2007. This drop also applies to non-Western ethnic minorities. The dropout rate is still significantly higher than among native Dutch and Western ethnic minorities. Early school-leavers experience a delay in their school careers more often than those who stay in school. Some 66 per cent of early school-leavers has experienced a delay of one or more years, versus approximately 29 per cent of non-early school-leavers. Approximately 24 per cent of early school-leavers come from single-parent families, versus 15 per cent of non-early school-leavers. The percentage of early school-leavers that is suspected of a crime is higher in mbo (16 per cent) than in secondary education (13 per cent). The percentage of suspects among early school-leavers is particularly high in level 1 of mbo (28 per cent) and vmbo 3 (24 per cent). In the four large cities, 35 per cent of early school-leavers are suspected of a crime, versus 27 per cent in the rest of the Netherlands.

High concentrations of drop-outs are often found in larger municipalities. In 36 of the largest municipalities in the country, the percentage of dropouts is above the national average. The highest concentrations are found in the four large cities: Amsterdam, Den Haag, Rotterdam, and Utrecht. In districts (postal code areas) with multiple, related problems, the dropout rates are also high, as demonstrated by the dropout figures for the so-called poverty problem accumulation areas (CBS). The drop out rate is particularly high in districts with a large number of households on benefits. This does not only apply to the large cities. Approximately 25 per cent of all new early school-leavers live in a poverty problem accumulation area. These areas are marked by a relatively high number of households on benefits, households with low incomes and non-Western ethnic minorities.

In 2006, 12.9 per cent of Dutch young people aged 18-24 were not enrolled in education and had not attained a basic qualification level (havo, vwo or mbo-2 certificate). This puts the Netherlands under the EU average of 15.2 per cent. In 2001, a downward trend in the proportion of dropouts set in. The Dutch goal is a 50 per cent reduction in the number of dropouts. This means that by 2010 the proportion of early school-leavers must be reduced to approximately 8 per cent.

Increasing educational levels

The educational level of the population has been rising over the years. The share of the population with an educational level equal to a basic qualification (at least a certificate at havo/vwo or mbo-2 level) has increased in recent years. In 2006, almost 18 per cent of 25- to 64-year-olds had obtained a higher professional education (hbo) qualification, and 11 per cent of this age group obtained a qualification in research-oriented education (wo). The increase in the educational level of the population is most significant among young people. In 2006, 21 per cent had a qualification at hbo level. In 1996, 23 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds had a higher education qualification (hbo or wo). In 2006, this rose to 34 per cent, comprising 21 per cent hbo and 13 per cent wo graduates.

Access to mainstream education for pupils with special educational needs

Movements of pupils from mainstream primary schools to special primary schools have fallen in recent years. In 2007, approximately 8,600 mainstream primary school pupils were referred to special primary schools. The movements from mainstream primary schools to special education and secondary special education have remained fairly constant over the past few years. The number of children being referred back from special schools to mainstream primary schools has fallen slightly in recent years. In 2007, approximately 700 pupils were referred back to mainstream education.

The number of primary school pupils attending mainstream schools with peripatetic supervision from a (secondary) special school continues to rise. In 2003, some 9,600 pupils in mainstream primary schools were receiving supervision from (secondary) special schools. By 2007, this number had increased to approximately 21,200. In addition, pupils qualifying for admission to special education and secondary special education were increasingly being admitted directly to mainstream secondary schools with peripatetic supervision from a (secondary) special school. Between 2003 and 2007, the number of pupils receiving peripatetic supervision in mainstream secondary schools increased from 4,300 to more than 14,400.

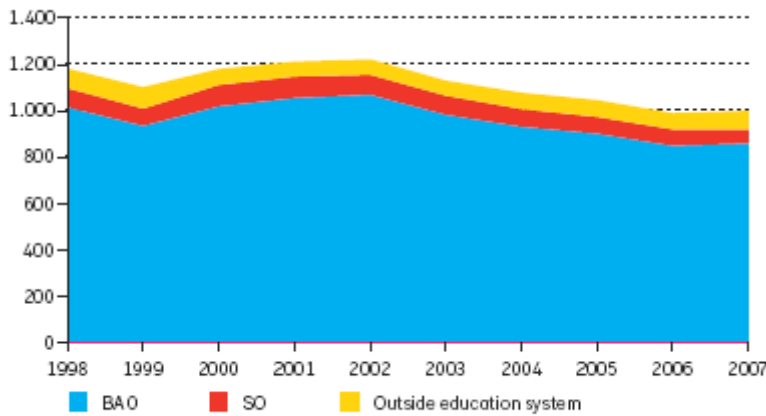


Figure 5: Referrals to special primary education (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2007)
 Note: From BAO, SO and outside the education system (numbers x 1000)

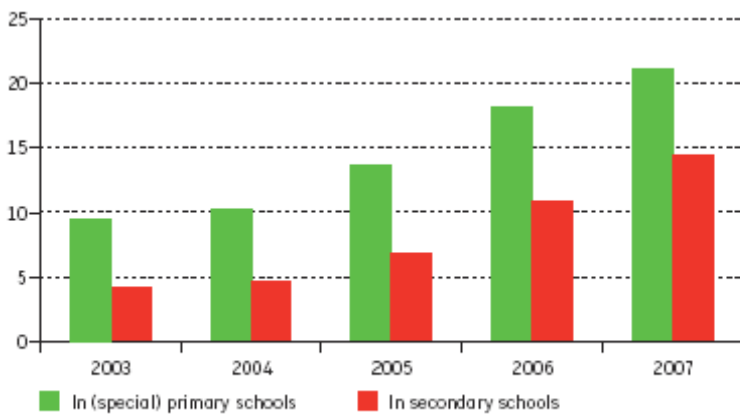


Figure 6: Numbers receiving peripatetic supervision (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2007)
 Note: From special and secondary special education (numbers x 1000)

Enrolment and achievements of ethnic minorities in education

Dutch society is becoming more and more multicultural. The national statistical institute estimate that currently about 20% of the population has a non-Western background. The largest groups of immigrant groups come from Turkey, Morocco, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles. Since the 1960s, these immigrant groups have been migrating to the Netherlands, mostly in search of employment. Over the last decades, there also is a growing number of immigrants that come to the Netherlands as refugee, coming from a diversity of countries, including the Balkan, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Somalia. The growing ethnic diversity in Dutch society also contributes to the cultural diversity of school populations. 15% of the pupils in primary and secondary education have a non-Dutch origin. These pupils primarily reside in the bigger cities. About one in ten primary and secondary schools have more than 50% immigrant pupils. In the four big cities - Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht - half of the schools have more than 50% immigrant pupils, and 30% of the schools has more than 80% immigrant pupils.

The obligation to attend school also applies to children from asylum seekers and illegal residents. Throughout the country, there are several schools and institutions that provide specific educational provisions for these children, including intensive training in the Dutch language and specific individual pupil guidance. These provisions are provided in regular schools that receive additional support or in separate classes for this target group only. In the separate classes, the international transition classes, pupils receive intensive language training for two years, after which they integrate in regular education.

Overall, the enrolment of ethnic minority pupils in primary education is satisfactory. At the start of compulsory education at the age of 5 years, all pupils enrol in primary education. All pupils complete primary education, though their achievements in language and mathematics are on average lower than those of native Dutch pupils. This is especially the case for pupils with parents of Turkish and Moroccan origin. Because of these achievements, more immigrant pupils enrol in lower levels of secondary education than native Dutch pupils do. Pupils from non-Western origin more often enrol in a vmbo programme than do native Dutch pupils and non-Dutch pupils of Western origin. Within vmbo, non-Western non-natives tend to opt for the lower-level programmes and they also qualify for learning support (lwoo) more often. In part, this latter aspect is related to their over-representation in the lower-level programmes, where a larger proportion of pupils qualify for learning support. Yet even within the vmbo programmes, non-Western ethnic minority pupils qualifying for learning support outnumber their native Dutch peers. In the 2006/07 school year, 45 per cent of the non-Western ethnic minority pupils in the third year of secondary school were enrolled in either the basic vocational programme or the middle-management vocational programme, versus just over a fourth of the other pupils. The participation in the combined and theoretical programmes of vmbo, at approximately 25 per cent, is virtually the same for all these groups. Pupils with a Turkish or Moroccan background, especially, often do not go on to havo and vwo. Furthermore, the dropout ratio among immigrant pupils is high. Drop-out usually occurs in the final years of secondary education, especially in vocational streams (vmbo/mbo). Dropout ratios among immigrant pupils are twice as high as among native Dutch pupils.

Despite the high dropout ratios, the continuation of immigrants pupils into higher education and senior vocational education has enhanced in the past years. More and more pupils continue with senior vocational education, and the enrolment of immigrant pupils in higher education is also rising. The current enrolment of pupils with a non-Western background in higher education is 12%.

1.2.2 Early childhood intervention

By offering early childhood education (VVE), language and/or educational disadvantages among children are addressed at an early stage. Early childhood education is an important priority area in educational policy in the Netherlands. In the spring of 2007, the first National VVE Monitor was conducted among 294 municipalities to clarify the state of affairs concerning early childhood education at the start of a new policy period. The first results of the monitor function as a benchmark for the results of the changing early childhood education policy in the coming years.

The policy success of early childhood education can be assessed from the proportion of the target group reached and the quality of the provision. For this Cabinet period, the policy objective is for 70 per cent of the target group children to attend a minimum of three half-days of VVE per week by 2010. Slowly but surely, progress will be made towards reaching the entire target group (100 per cent) and providing four half days per week of VVE to target group children, to start in three VVE pilot projects in the problem districts of the four largest cities (Amsterdam, Den Haag, Rotterdam, Utrecht), the 9 East Groningen municipalities and more than 10 rural municipalities in South Limburg.

In the 2006/2007 school year, VVE programmes reached slightly more than half (53 per cent) of the 2.5- to 4-year-old children in the target group. The programmes reach more than two-thirds (67 per cent) of the 4- and 5-year-old children in the early school target group (primary years 1 and 2).

Municipalities	Preschool (ages 2.5 to 4) (playgroups and day care)			Early school years (ages 4 and 5) (primary schools)		
	Numbers reached	Per cent reached	Target group	Numbers reached	Per cent reached	Target group
G4	7,111	59	12,053	13,051	85	15,354
G27	5,728	54	10,607	7,873	56	14,059
Medium-sized municipalities (> 30,000)	6,975	49	14,234	13,025	67	19,441
Small municipalities (< 30,000)	3,438	52	6,611	4,051	54	9,108
Total	23,252	53	43,505	38,900	67	58,022

Figure 7: Provision of early childhood education to target group, 2006 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2007)

Across the board, VVE programmes in the large cities reach more children in preschool and early school years than is the case in smaller municipalities. In the four largest cities, the target group children that are reached already receive VVE for 4 half-days a week, versus usually 2 or 3 half-days in the smaller municipalities. The national average is 2.8 half-days per week.

In 75% of the municipalities, (nearly) all playgroup leaders are trained in offering VVE programmes. In the municipalities with a VVE policy, the majority of leaders at childcare centres still have to be trained in VVE. Primary school teachers are trained in VVE to a somewhat lesser extent than the leaders of preschool playgroups. Leaders of day-care centres and preschool playgroups are often trained at mbo level; hbo graduates are rare. One-fourth of the municipalities state they are participating in the first phase (March-June 2007) of the training project “Vversterk”, another 35 per cent plan to participate in a later phase. “Vversterk” is a national project that aims to reinforce the quality of early childhood education by providing training and support to education professionals that are directly or indirectly involved in VVE: leaders in preschool playgroups and day-care centres, teachers in primary years 1 and 2, managers of institutions, policy-makers in local governments, staff at teacher-training institutes and teachers themselves. In two-thirds of the municipalities, at (nearly) all the preschool playgroups extra staff hours are put in for VVE. A majority of the municipalities have “VVE links”, i.e., partnerships between day-care centres/preschool playgroups and primary schools with the same VVE programme. In general, the quality of the early childhood education provided in larger municipalities is higher than in the smaller municipalities.

1.2.3 Learning outcomes

The quality of education in the Netherlands is of a high and satisfactory level; this is the main conclusion of the Inspectorate of Education (2007) based on recent research into the state of Dutch education. Students are performing to their capacities and potential. At the majority of institutions, the quality of subject matter teaching is of high quality and the pedagogical climate in the school is stimulating. Parents are satisfied with the quality of education that is offered to their children. A UNICEF study (2007) in to children wellbeing showed that Dutch children are the happiest children in the industrialized world. As a result of the education system, the educational level of the Dutch population has been rising over the years, as indicated in section 1.2.1. The good performance of Dutch pupils is also reflected in international comparative studies. Results of recent international assessment studies point at the following trends:

- The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) - an international study into the skills of 15 year olds in mathematics, reading and sciences in 57 countries showed that Dutch pupils scored an average of 525 points in the field of science. This is higher than the OECD average of 500 points. Finland performed the best with pupils recording an average score of 563 points in the test. Compared to 2003, the average score of Dutch pupils has hardly changed.
- The PISA 2006 study further showed that the mathematics performances of Dutch 15-year-olds are of a fairly high level. In 2006, Dutch pupils scored an average of 531 points. This is higher than the OECD average of 498 points. This score places the Netherlands in third place in the rankings.
- In the PISA 2006 reading skills test Dutch pupils scored an average of 507 points. This is higher than the OECD average of 491 points. Of the participating European countries, only Finland (547 points) and Ireland (517 points) scored a higher average than the Netherlands. In 2006, the percentage of pupils that cannot read well (skill level 1 or less in the PISA study) was 15.1 per cent in the Netherlands. This is lower than the OECD average of 20.2 percent.
- The PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) test - an international comparative study into the reading comprehension performances of pupils aged 9 and 10 - showed that pupils aged 9 and 10 years old scored an average of 547 points, which is higher than the average of all other participating countries (500 points).

The international studies show that the overall scores of students are good. When looking more specifically at the results of individual students the studies also show that, as compared to other countries, there are not many differences between scores of students. The PIRLS study, for example, in which scores were measured at an advanced, high, average and low level, showed that most students performed at an average of high level. Only 6 per cent of Dutch pupils scored at the advanced level, and 8 per cent scored at the low level. In its percentage of advanced readers the Netherlands is somewhat lagging behind as compared to neighbouring countries.

The need to develop more opportunities for advanced learners is increasingly being felt, and several policy initiatives are currently being taken to stretch pupils' potential to the full. Another policy area that has received more attention in viewing of boosting learning outcomes is the development of language and mathematic skills. The Inspectorate (2007) recently pointed at the need to provide additional support to students with weak and unsatisfactory skills in mathematics and language. The Dutch Advisory Council for Education (2007) identified five groups of pupils that need additional support in order to achieve to their full potential. These include:

- Dutch pupils with low qualified parents
- pupils from Turkish origin
- boys regarding language development
- girls regarding science, mathematics and technology education
- highly gifted pupils, who are often less motivated or have fear of failure

Currently several policy initiatives are taken to develop rich learning environments that stretch pupils' potential to the full, especially in the domain and language and mathematics learning in primary education.

1.2.4 Pre-service teacher training and professional development

Preservice training programmes

In the Netherlands, it takes four years to gain a mainstream teaching qualification. *Primary school* teachers study at institutions of higher education. They are trained to teach all curriculum subjects, but also a specialist subject. The initial teacher training includes an introduction to educating pupils with special needs. Current government policy requires more knowledge of educating special needs pupils within teacher training, but the programme is oversubscribed and adding special needs programmes is not easy. Students can enter primary school colleges with a secondary school certificate (havo/vwo) or vocational diploma (mbo). Because of concerns for disappointing results of first year teacher training students, a compulsory mathematics and language test has recently been introduced. Research showed that a large group of students in teacher education was not able to perform in mathematics at the level that is required for pupils at the end of primary education. All students at the end of the first year of the teacher-training course are now required to complete the test. Failure for the test means they cannot continue with the next year of their programme.

Another initiative related to primary teacher training is the start of an academic teaching training course. In order to motivate students with academic ambitions to enter the teaching force and to raise the academic potential of the force, initiatives have been taken to start a teacher-training course for primary school teachers on academic level. For example, the University of Utrecht offers a combined course of teacher training for primary education and educational science for vwo graduates.

Though supplementary training for teachers in special education is optional, the majority of special teachers follow a two year, part time training. The course assumes the pupils are already working in education and focuses upon both theory and practice. There are several specialist fields including the visually handicapped, behaviour problems, the mentally handicapped, remedial teaching and peripatetic teaching. Although not obligatory, a growing number of mainstream teachers have a special education certificate.

As for *secondary education*, two forms of teaching qualification exist:

- lower secondary qualification: this so called 'grade two' qualification qualifies teachers for the first three years of havo and vwo and all years of secondary vocational education (vmbo/mbo). Courses for this level are provided at higher education institutes.
- full qualification: this 'grade one' qualification qualifies teachers for all levels of secondary education.

The grade one qualification courses are provided at higher education (hbo) institutes and at universities. The hbo courses are available for general subjects, art subjects, technical subjects and agricultural subjects. Students specialise in one subject and the course prepares them to meet the required standards of competence (see below). At university, courses are offered for university graduates with a master's degree. Students can take a postgraduate teacher training course or begin while they are still undergraduate. Courses are available for all subjects in the secondary curriculum.

Common framework of teacher competence

The Dutch government has the constitutional duty to provide high quality education for everybody. This reasoning caused the Dutch Parliament to pass the 'Professions in Education Act' in the summer of 2004. The essence of the act (shortly called 'BIO-Act') is that educational staff - teachers, assisting staff members, school managers - must not only be qualified, but also competent. For this reason, sets of competences and its requirements have been developed for teachers, and are being developed for assisting staff members and (primary) school managers. The competence requirements for teachers are accepted by the government and are operational from august 2006. Schools are obliged to take competent staff into their employment and subsequently enable them to keep up their competences at a high level and to further improve them. Teacher training colleges use these competences as a guideline to their educational programme.

There are three versions of the competence requirements: (1) for teachers in primary education, (2) for teachers in secondary and vocational education and (3) for teachers in the last two classes of higher general secondary education (havo) and the last three classes of pre-university education (vwo). The differences between the three versions are only marginal. In fact, all Dutch teachers are required to have the same basic competences. The framework of competence requirements specifies four professional roles that teachers have (i) interpersonal role, (ii) pedagogical role, (iii) organizational role and (iv) the role of an expert in subject matter and teaching methods. The teacher fulfils these professional roles in four different types of situations, which are characteristic of a teacher's profession: (a) working with students, (b) colleagues, (c) the school's working environment, and (d) with him-/herself. The latter refers to his/her own personal development. The framework specifies competence requirements for each role and in each situation (see www.lerarenweb.nl/english).

Inservice training

On 30 June 2006, the Minister of OCW concluded the 'Agreement on the professionalization and support of staff in primary and secondary education with education sector employers' and employees' associations'. As a result of this agreement, as of 1 August 2006, primary and secondary schools receive additional resources for the Professionalization and support of education staff. The agreement is mainly aimed at expanding the possibilities for further development for teachers and other education staff within the school. The agreement contains arrangements about maintaining competency requirements and about training and professionalization in relation to the Education Professions Act and the competency dossier. These arrangements have been further elaborated in the decentralised collective labour agreements.

1.3 The role of the education system in combating poverty, social exclusion and cultural marginalization

Education is seen as an important tool to combat poverty, social inclusion and marginalisation. Education is open to all pupils, emphasizes equality and provides each pupil with equal opportunities for development and participation in society, and to foster social inclusion and cohesion. To make this happen a number of policy measures are in place:

1. Compulsory education is free of charge. Schools may ask for voluntary parental contribution for extra activities (e.g. celebrations, excursions), but it may not constitute an obstacle to the admission of pupils.
2. Policies are in place to provide schools with additional resources and staff to support pupils with a potential educational disadvantage in order to improve their educational achievement and career prospects (see section 1.1.4).
3. The recent policy on support for disadvantaged pupils requires municipalities to draw a local educational agenda together with school boards and childcare providers. In the local agenda school boards, local municipalities, and childcare providers discuss and decide on how best educational disadvantages can be combated and how segregation - high concentrations of either ethnic minorities or Dutch pupils in certain schools - in education can be avoided.
4. Combating early school leaving is a central policy priority. The national objective is to reduce the annual number of new early school-leavers by 50 per cent between 2002 and 2012 (see section 1.2.1).
5. Early detection of potential disadvantages among young children and increased enrolment of children from underprivileged backgrounds, who are at risk of educational or language disadvantage, in preschools (see section 1.2.2).
6. The development of community schools is stimulated. In these schools collaborate with other social services like the police, health and welfare services, and sports and cultural institutions in order to enhance pupils' opportunities for development. Dutch municipalities, who are in charge of the community schools, aim to have set up 1200 community schools by 2010 (see section 2.4.4).
7. To foster social inclusion and participation of pupils in society, the Primary Education Act and Secondary Education Act were recently amended with an additional specification, which obliges schools to offer education that 'stimulate active citizenship en social integration'. The Acts more specifically state that education should enable pupils to get acquainted with the various cultural backgrounds of their fellow pupils (see section 2.1.2).

2 Inclusive education: the way of the future

2.1 Approaches, scope and content

2.1.1 Vision on inclusive education

Equality and equity are important characteristics of the Dutch educational system. Policy aims at striving for inclusion of all pupils. This is visible in the *accessibility* of education. Almost all pupils in the age of 5-14 years (99 per cent) are participating in education. Basic education is the same for all pupils. In primary and lower secondary education all pupils work towards achieving the same core objectives. Streaming does not take place in primary education, and also hardly occurs in lower secondary education. Pupils are supported individually to achieve to their full potential.

The philosophy of inclusion is also visible in special needs education. In the last decade, there is a growing tendency to integrate more children with special needs into mainstream education. Policy aims to decrease the number of pupils with special educational needs in special schools and increase their integration in mainstream school. The emphasis is on improving the bandwidth in dealing with diversity in mainstream schools and stimulating cooperation between schools at a regional level.

Another important issue in the Netherlands is the *quality* of education for all pupils, especially for pupils and students with special educational needs, irrespective of the place where education their takes place – in special schools or mainstream schools. There is increasing attention for learning outcomes, especially concerning literacy and numeracy skills. Besides the well-being of pupils, cognitive development becomes more and more important. Through different policy measures both mainstream and special schools are supported to provide all that is needed to qualify pupils with SEN as high as possible. Strengthening the accessibility (physical and curricular) of secondary, vocational and higher education is a challenge that has been taken up in the policy arena.

Inclusive education also calls for a positive school climate in which *social and cultural diversity* is welcomed. Promoting belonging and connectedness are important values, also in Dutch education. Strengthening social cohesion and stimulating active citizenship, is an important issue in current policy discussions. According to the policy laws, teaching must reflect the fact that pupils are growing up in a multicultural society. Recently the Primary Education Act (WPO) and the Secondary Education Act (WVO) were amended and an additional specification was included stating that primary and secondary education should 'stimulate active citizenship en social integration'.

An issue that is subject to ongoing discussion is the policy ideal to strive for schools with a student population that reflects the current multicultural nature of Dutch society. There are schools with a diverse school population, but many schools have a population with a large majority of students with a Dutch origin. The current 15% of the ethnic minority pupils primarily resides in the bigger cities. In these cities, half of the schools have more than 50% immigrant pupils, and 30% has more than 80% immigrant pupils. The concern is that a lack of integration of immigrant pupils and Dutch pupils will hinder their social integration in society and will not be conducive to social cohesion. Because of the free choice that parents have for a school for their children it is, however, difficult to influence the cultural composition of a school population. Another difficulty in this matter is the right that denominational schools have to refuse pupils who do not subscribe to the ideology or religion on which their teaching programme is based.

2.1.2 Challenges for ensuring educational and social inclusion

Enhancing intersectoral cooperation

Education plays an important role in ensuring social inclusion. The contribution of education to the development of a more inclusive society is significant, though not all determining. Cooperation with other policy developments for example within the context of employment or social affairs is important. Within the Dutch education system, intersectoral cooperation is increasingly taking place, and is to be enhanced in the future.

Dealing with special educational needs

One of the challenges in the Dutch education context is to reduce the number of pupils with special educational needs who are referred to special schools. In 2007, approximately 8,600 mainstream primary school pupils were referred to special primary schools. The movements from mainstream primary schools to special education and secondary special education have remained fairly constant over the past few years. The number of primary school pupils attending mainstream schools with peripatetic supervision from a (secondary) special school continues to rise. In 2003, some 9,600 pupils in mainstream primary schools received supervision from (secondary) special schools. By 2007, this number had increased to approximately 21,200. In addition, pupils qualifying for admission to special education and secondary special education were increasingly being admitted directly to mainstream secondary schools with peripatetic supervision from a (secondary) special school. Between 2003 and 2007, the number of pupils receiving peripatetic supervision in mainstream secondary schools increased from 4,300 to more than 14,400. The greatest challenge is to reduce the growth of pupils with behavioural problems who are referred to schools in cluster 4.

The current policy to integrate more learners with special educational needs in mainstream education asks for more tailor-made curricula. This requires a lot from schools and teachers (van Leeuwen, 2008). It is important to realise that schools differ in the way they design and implement the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs, the people who are involved and their tasks and responsibilities in this process. In addition, there are differences between teachers in knowledge, skills and attitude and there are differences between pupils with special educational needs as well. To strengthen the role of the teacher in enhancing the curricular and social integration of special needs students, both curriculum development, school development and teacher development should be stimulated.

Dealing with cultural diversity

Inclusive education is also concerned with developing a learning environment in which cultural diversity is welcomed and the different social and cultural backgrounds of pupils are taken into account. The increasing cultural diversity in school populations creates two important challenges for schools and teachers: (i) to develop education that cater for the specific learning needs and interests of children with a large variety of social and cultural backgrounds and home situations; (ii) to develop and strengthen healthy intercultural relationships among pupils. To take up the first challenge of developing effective learning environments that cater for the different cultural backgrounds, teachers need to be aware of the cultural differences between pupils and how that affects their learning needs. Research shows that most teachers have a positive attitude towards the ethno-cultural diversity in their classrooms (Derriks & Ledoux, 2002). They do, however, not always feel sufficiently equipped to deal with the diversity in a positive way. They would like to learn more about: (i) the cultural backgrounds of their students; (ii) how best to differentiate in order to cater for specific learning needs and interests of pupils with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; (iii) how best to offer intercultural education through which pupils develop positive intercultural relationships; (iv) how to discuss moral issues that touch on deeply rooted cultural and religious ideals and assumptions (Thijs & Berlet, 2008).

Fostering social inclusion and cohesion

Recently the Primary Education Act and the Secondary Education Act were amended with an additional specification stating that schools should offer education that is aimed towards developing active citizenship and social integration.

Active citizenship refers to the willingness to be part of a community and to make an active contribution to it. Social integration refers to the participation of citizens (irrespective of their ethnic or cultural background) in society, which means social integration, as well as participation in society and its institutions, and eventually familiarity with and involvement in cultural phenomena in the Netherlands. The task schools have in promoting and stimulating active citizenship and social integration has been laid down in a number of legal provisions such as the following:

“Education

- a. departs among others from the assumption that pupils grow up in a multiform society,*
- b. aims among others at the promotion of active citizenship and social integration, and*
- c. is among others directed towards the pupils’ knowledge of and acquaintance with their fellow pupils’ various backgrounds and cultures.”*

As is the case with other school subjects, schools are free to determine *how* such citizenship education is integrated in their curriculum. Schools inform the Inspectorate about the goals and activities they organize to foster active citizenship and social integration. The Inspectorate is charged with monitoring and evaluation. A recent study of the Dutch Inspectorate (2007) shows that most schools currently engage in some way or another in active citizenship and social integration. While there is a lot of willingness and many initiatives are taken, a wider vision and a systematic approach to achieving the set objectives is not always in place in schools. Further development of citizenship education and more insight into effective approaches are important challenges for the future.

Developing Dutch proficiency

Basic language skills are seen as a prerequisite for participation and inclusion in society. Strengthening the language proficiency of all pupils is thus seen as an important aim to strive for in education. The emphasis is increasingly on Dutch language teaching; opportunities to support the development of minority language and culture have recently been abolished. Schools receive extra staff and resources to provide the necessary support for pupils that lag behind in Dutch language development. For pupils with serious language arrears separate support provisions are provided in primary education. In so-called bridging classes, small groups of pupils receive intensive language training. There are three types of bridging classes:

- separate full time classes, in which pupils receive one year of full-time language training;
- part-time classes, often part of a regular school and in which pupils participate for several hours during a regular school day;
- out of school classes, in which pupils participate after regular school hours.

Early childhood intervention

Strengthening early childhood intervention is another important challenge in enhancing the inclusive nature of education. A specific concern is increasing the enrolment of pupils who are at risk of potential educational disadvantages in early childhood programmes. The government strives towards reaching out to full 100 per cent of pupils at risk in VVE-programmes (see section 1.2.2.).

Early school leaving

In spite of all the investments in the last years, early school leaving still is a problem in the Netherlands. As noted in section 1.2.1, there were 53,100 early school leavers in 2006/2007, the most of which were pupils with a non-Western origin. Reducing the number of early school leavers is a major policy priority in the Netherlands.

2.1.3 Legal and regulatory frameworks referring to inclusive education issues

In the Netherlands, a number of legal and regulatory frameworks are in place to ensure the inclusive nature of the education system. These include:

- Everyone has the right to be educated. The obligation to attend school is laid down in the Compulsory Education Act 1969. Every child must attend school full time from the first school day of the month following its fifth birthday. Children must attend school full time for 12 full school years and, in any event, until the end of the school year in which they turn 18.

- Since 1995, the municipal authorities have been responsible for registering early school leavers under the age of 23 and coordinating regional policy on this matter. In 2001 the Regional Registration and Coordination (Early School Leavers) Bill was adopted by Parliament. This bill contains amendments to educational legislation designed to prevent and tackle early school leaving in ordinary and special secondary schools, secondary vocational education and adult general secondary education. The main aim is for all young people to complete education with a basic qualification certificate.
- In august 2007, the Compulsory Education Act was amended such that besides the obligation to attend school until the age of 16, pupils now also have the obligation to obtain a basic qualification that is a certificate at havo, vwo or mbo-2 level. Youngsters between the age of 16 and 18 who have finished compulsory education but have not yet obtained such a basic qualification now are obliged to attend school, either fulltime or in combination with a part-time job. This prolongation of compulsory education has been introduced to ensure that all youngsters make a good entry into the labour market.
- Recently the Primary Education Act and the Secondary Education Act were amended and an additional specification was included stating that primary and secondary education should 'stimulate active citizenship en social integration'.
- Since 1 August 2006, a new weighting system for funding has taken effect for primary education in which only the parents' level of education counts. With these weighting system schools receive extra resources and staff to be able to help pupils with potential educational disadvantages. Two weightings are used: 0.3 for pupils whose parents have no more than lbo (lower vocational training) / vbo (prevocational education) qualifications and 1.2 for pupils who have one parent with only a primary education and one parent with no more than lbo/vbo qualifications.
- Since 1998, schools for children with learning and behavioural difficulties (lom) and children with moderate learning difficulties (mlk) were converted to special primary schools (SBAO). These schools fall under the legislation of primary education now.
- Since 1998, vbo and mavo is transferred into vmbo. At the same time, the learning support departments (lwoo) were given a more definite shape. In 1998, ivbo was incorporated into the learning support departments. In addition, practical training programmes (pro) were initiated. With the conversion of practical training programmes and the learning support departments, special secondary education and secondary special education for children with moderate learning difficulties (vso/mlk) has been incorporated into mainstream secondary education. On 28 May 1998, an Act was implemented which required all svo/lom and svo/mlk schools either to merge with a mainstream secondary school, or to convert to a practical training institution (pro) or a special education centre (opdc).
- In 1998, the law on the Expertise Centres was introduced. Regional expertise centres (RECs) have been set up, i.e., consortiums of special schools and secondary special schools within a district. The schools and therefore also the RECs are divided into four clusters:
 - o cluster 1: education for the visually handicapped (from the former schools for the blind and partially sighted);
 - o cluster 2: education for pupils with hearing impediments or communicative handicaps from existing schools, for deaf or hearing-impaired pupils and pupils with severe speech disorders;
 - o cluster 3: education for physically, mentally and multi-handicapped pupils;
 - o cluster 4: education for pupils with behavioural disorders from existing schools, for severely maladjusted children, chronically sick children and pupils in paedological institutes.
- The law on the Expertise Centres states that pupils are eligible for special education if they meet certain criteria. These are largely based on existing practice. Criteria for the visually impaired are a visual acuity: <0,3 or a visual field: < 30 and limited participation in education as a result of the visual impairment. For hearing impaired pupils a hearing loss > 80 dB (or for hard of hearing pupils 35 -80 dB) and limited participation in education are required. The decision to provide extra funding for mentally handicapped pupils will be based largely on IQ < 60, for physically impaired and chronically ill pupils medical data showing diagnosed disabilities / illness are needed. The criteria for behaviourally disturbed pupils require a diagnosis in terms of categories of the DSM-IV, problems at school, at home and in the community and a limited participation in education as a result of the behaviour problems.

- The funding of special needs education has been modified in 2003. The system changed from a supply-oriented financing to a system in which the means are forwarded to the person requiring the services: demand-oriented financing. The policy is known as the 'back-pack' policy: pupils take the funding with them to the school of their choice (see development of integration/inclusion). If a student meets the criteria for this so-called 'pupil-bound budget', parents and pupils can choose a school, special or mainstream, and take part in decision making on the best way to use the funds in order to meet the student's special needs. This funding system has been implemented in primary, secondary and vocational education.
- In 2007, the Law on equal treatment in virtue of handicap and chronically disease has changed. Before 2007, the law only applied to employment, living and vocational education. In 2009, this law will be applied to primary and secondary education as well.
- The Netherlands has agreed on several international agreements considering inclusive education. These include the Council Resolution integration of children and young people with disabilities into ordinary systems of education (1990), the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

2.2 Public policies

2.2.1 Indicators and dimensions of exclusion and inclusion

Virtually all children in the age of 5-15 participate in education (see 1.2.1). With an enrolment of about 99 per cent, there is no real exclusion. While there is no exclusion in terms of participation, there is concern for potential exclusion in terms of achievement. Areas of concern regarding the potential exclusion of pupils include the participation of children at risk of potential disadvantages in early childhood programmes, early school dropouts, and participation of special needs students in mainstream education. While almost all pupils attend school, not every pupil is integrated in a mainstream school. In the Dutch education system, special needs students can either attend mainstream education or special education. When discussing issues related to exclusion in the Dutch context, these often refer to the placement of pupils with SEN in special schools and the extent to which curricular and social integration are realised for these pupils in mainstream schools.

To inform inclusive education policies, several indicators and data are used. These include:

- the number of pupils in the age of 5-18 who are not enrolled in education;
- the number of pupils who are referred to special schools;
- the educational achievement of all pupils, in mainstream education and in special education;
- the number of pupils at risk of educational disadvantage who are not enrolled in early childhood education programmes;
- the number of early school leavers under the age of 23;
- the number of people who leave school without a basic qualification;
- the results of national and international comparative studies (PISA, PIRLS, etc.).

2.2.2 Groups vulnerable to exclusion

In terms of access to and participation in education, exclusion is not a matter of concern in the Dutch educational system. Virtually all pupils participate in compulsory education. For those children that have difficulty to participate because of their mobility or physical condition, such as caravan dwellers' and Roma children, bargees' children, children of asylum seekers and ill children, special arrangements are made to encourage and enable them to participate in education in a more flexible way. For pupils with special needs there is a variety of educational strands in which they can enrol, ranging from specific segregated special needs schools to full inclusive mainstream schools in which they are provided with appropriate education. The number of pupils with special needs that enrolled in mainstream schools is growing. The question is, however, whether they are indeed provided with inclusive education. While physical integration is taking place, it is questionable whether schools are always able to achieve the desired curricular and social integration of these students as well.

Studies show that teachers in mainstream schools feel uncertain in meeting the needs of special needs pupils, especially where it concerns behavioural problems and (severe) learning problems (van Leeuwen, 2007). While exclusion in terms of access and participation is non-existing, there is concern about the extent to which all pupils are provided with equal opportunities to complete compulsory education with good results and are provided with equal chances for social and economic mobility. From this perspective, the concern lies with the following groups:

- early school leavers;
- students who complete compulsory education without a basic qualification;
- pupils who complete compulsory education but do not achieve to their full potential and show signs of underachievement (see section 1.2.3);
- pupils who lag behind in terms of educational achievement and have difficulty to achieve according to the levels specified in core objectives and examinations. This is especially the case for pupils with parents who have no more than primary or lower (pre)vocational education and pupils with parents of non-Western origin (see section 1.2.1);
- pupils who show signs of underachievement (see section 1.2.3);
- pupils with special needs, as specified above.

2.2.3 Educational reforms addressing inclusive education

Several policy measures have been taken to enhance inclusive education for all pupils. These include:

- the provision of 'adequate education', the policy that puts the responsibility to provide each pupil with the care that he needs with school boards, through collaboration at the regional level;
- weighting system through which schools receive additional funds in order to support pupils with educational disadvantages, especially in the domain of literacy and numeracy development;
- reforms to increase participation of pupils in early childhood (VVE) programmes;
- policy initiatives to strengthen the quality of education for all pupils;
- policies aimed at reducing the number of early school leavers.

For more information, please refer to sections 1.1.5 and 1.2.

2.3 Systems, links and transitions

2.3.1 Main barriers to inclusive education

Although education emphasizes equality and strives to provide each pupil with equal opportunities for development and participation in society, the future social and economic mobility of students also depends on the social and economic context. Social inequality is an important area of concern in Dutch society. There are vulnerable groups for whom social participation is a challenge, because of their economic and/or social conditions.

Another challenge in realising inclusive education is the growing number of pupils with special educational needs. There is a stark increase in pupils with social-emotional and/or behavioural problems, both in special education and in mainstream education (van Dijk, Slabbértje & Maarschalkerweerd, 2007). One of the problems is the willingness of schools and teachers to integrate these pupils in their groups, and the possibilities that they have to offer these children the educational support that they need.

An important goal of inclusive education is to provide all pupils with relevant education in which their social participation is stimulated and strengthened. The growing number of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream education provides schools with the challenge to ensure curricular quality for these pupils and to foster their social integration. This challenge is complex and comprehensive, especially in the case of pupils with behavioural problems and intellectual disabilities.

Regarding the latter, the challenge is to develop a tailor-made curriculum that meets the specific needs of the student and can be offered within a whole-group setting. The lack of resources, expertise, and staff are often seen as barriers in developing such inclusive education.

While there are many developments regarding inclusive education and integration of pupils with special needs primary education, this is not so much the case in secondary education. One of the problems is the more complex organisational structure of secondary schools, e.g. the large number of subject teachers that are involved in education and the examination requirements. Many schools and teachers are not willing to include youngsters with special educational needs because of these organisational complexities. Teacher beliefs and attitudes on what is relevant for these pupils also play a role (Boswinkel & van Leeuwen, 2008).

2.3.2 Main facilitators of inclusive education and measures to make the education system more inclusive

As noted in the previous section, an important facilitator in developing more inclusive education is the presence of curricular expertise and resources in schools. Leadership and involvement of school leaders, parent involvement, involvement of the pupils themselves, support (internal and external), a flexible curriculum and the willingness, knowledge and skills of the teaching staff are often mentioned as important facilitators for inclusive education (van Leeuwen, 2007). To enhance capacity building in schools, there is need for more comprehensive support programs that stimulate teacher development, curriculum development and school development.

Besides investments in capacity building, strengthening of the knowledge base regarding relevant curricular support strategies for pupils with special needs is needed. While there is ample research into the specific needs of pupils, there is much less insight in pedagogical implications of these needs for curriculum design. More insight in effective, evidence-based, strategies to support these pupils is needed. There is a need for a shared knowledge base that is also accessible for schools and teachers. The challenge is to apply generic outcomes of the state-of-the-art knowledge base to workable and effective strategies for specific school contexts (practice-based evidence). Therefore development research (see van den Akker, Gravemeijer, McKenney & Nieveen, 2006), in which research is combined with development activities in classroom practice, is to be recommended.

Collaboration within and between schools and other relevant organisations at a regional level (health care, welfare organisations, research institute etc.) is an important facilitator in ensuring the inclusion of all learners. As teachers do not always have the necessary staff, resources, and expertise to provide all pupils with the support they need, combining capacity is seen as a necessary and fruitful means to strengthen inclusion. Moreover, sharing knowledge and good practices also contributes to the shared knowledge base that is needed.

Finally, the way of *funding* can influence the development of inclusive education as well. Meijer's study into the financing of special needs education (1999) shows that a direct input funding model for special schools, in which more learners in special schools leads to more funds, leads to less inclusion, more labelling and rising costs. Pupil-bound budgeting, on the other hand, also seems to have some clear disadvantages. At times, regular schools are eager to have pupils with special needs (and their budgets), but they prefer learners (and their budgets) who are considered to be 'easy to fit in'. The study concludes that the most attractive funding option in support of inclusive education is a strongly decentralized system where budgets for supporting learners with special needs are delegated to local institutions (municipalities, districts, school clusters). In the Netherlands discussion is taking place on the need to replace the current pupil-bound budget with an alternative funding model.

2.3.3 Measures to make the education system more flexible for drop-out students

In the Dutch education system, several measures are taken to offer additional education opportunities for early school leavers without an appropriate level of education. To stimulate early school leavers to obtain an appropriate level of qualification, compulsory education has recently been prolonged to the age of 18.

As noted in section 2.1.3, youngsters below the age of 18 who do not have a basic qualification certificate are obliged to attend school. This policy has the aim to prevent early school leaving and to give youngsters a good position for the labour market.

For pupils that do not proceed sufficiently within secondary and are above the age of 18, a special education programme is offered with more comprehensive and individual support (VAVO). These programmes have more flexible schedule time than regular education (e.g. also including evening classes) and adhere to principles of adult education. In some cases, the VAVO programmes are also open to 16 or 17 year olds who have difficulty to participate in regular secondary education.

The obligation for further education and employment has been further emphasised through a recent change in legislation. Due to this policy change, youngsters under the age of 27, who do not possess a basic qualification certificate (mbo level 2) and are unemployed, are not entitled to receive an employment benefit. Instead, municipalities are obliged to offer them opportunities for a job or further education. If this offer is refused, youngsters do not receive any benefits. Exceptions are made for students who cannot work or learn, because of disabilities or single parenthood. The aim of the policy is to combat unemployment and strengthen youngsters' social and economic position.

To cater for individual needs and situations of students, there is a growing number of flexible programmes with combinations of school- and job-related activities and tasks. In the domain of vocational education, emphasis is being put on practical training and combined learning-working trajectories with opportunities for on-the-job learning and apprenticeship training within vocational education. Stimulating students to continue with vocational (mbo) after completion of pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo) is another area of concern. As these two types of education have a different structure and are offered in different institutions and locations, students have difficulty to step from the one to the other. To smoothen the transition between the two levels of education, schools are being set up in which both vmbo and mbo-courses are offered within the same institution. Moreover, many initiatives for guidance and counselling services in secondary education and vocational education have been developed to guide and stimulate students in their educational and professional careers.

Life-long learning is further stimulated through numerous facilities for part-time and/or distance learning in higher education and adult education.

2.4. Learners and teachers

2.4.1 Teaching and learning approaches to increase educational opportunities for all

Schools and teachers are responsible to offer pupils education that is geared towards their developmental needs. The Inspectorate sees to it that schools offer education that is sufficiently geared to pupils' needs. Based on the philosophy that teachers have the best insight in pupils' needs and capacities, educational policy provides schools with a lot of room to decide on teaching and learning approaches. As a result of this school autonomy, there are differences between schools in how educational programmes are organized. There is a trend towards offering more differentiated learning activities that ask for independent and active learners. There are innovative schools that strive to centre education around pupils' needs and interests and as much as possible work with individual learning lines for the different pupils (SLO, 2008). Most schools, however, look for possibilities for differentiation within more traditional forms of whole-class teaching. Pupils that need more support to keep up with the learning pace in the class are provided with remedial teaching and additional instruction. Through a weighting system schools receive extra staff and other resources to provide these pupils the support that is needed. For pupils with special needs, mainstream schools can utilise a pupil-bound budget to arrange additional expertise from special schools (e.g. peripatetic teachers). Furthermore, there is a growing insight that fast learners also need more additional activities to keep them motivated and allow them to develop to their full potential. For these learners three strategies are suggested: acceleration, enrichment, and a broad variety of curricular content.

Within the framework of local autonomy for schools, several measures have been introduced to ensure and enhance accountability and improve student learning outcomes. Recently common outcome standards have been formulated for literacy and numeracy for all pupils across the different educational streams. These standards specify desired learning outcomes in the domains of language development (Dutch) and mathematics for pupils at the age of 12, 14, 16 and 18 years. Currently, enhancing student performance in literacy and numeracy is a major policy initiative.

Another development is the formulation of core objectives for special schools. Based on the core objectives for regular schools, a set of objectives prescribe the core guidelines for pupils in special education. The core objectives for special education are yet to be endorsed.

2.4.2 Curriculum design and the diversity of learners

Schools have a large amount of freedom to organize the curriculum such that it responds to the diversity of their learners. The core content that is to be offered is specified in set of 58 core objectives for primary education and for lower secondary education. These core objectives describe the core content in global guidelines, and do not include detailed prescriptions of the way in which the content should be offered. This allows schools to choose the teaching and learning activities and materials they see fit considering the needs of their pupils. As for curricular time, the minimum number of instructional hours to be offered per year is prescribed. There are no prescriptions regarding the number of hours per subject or learning area. Schools can decide how to spend instructional time in view of the needs and capacities of their pupils. All core objectives should, however, be covered. The Inspectorate monitors schools to see if they implement the core content as specified in the core objectives.

2.4.3 Teacher support

The Inspectorate concludes that teachers in Dutch schools are well able to provide education that is of good quality. Learning outcomes are satisfactory and the educational level in the population is rising. While most pupils perform according to their potential, the need is felt to provide more additional support for low-performing and/or underachieving students. To strengthen inclusive education approaches, gearing instruction to the differences between learners is one of the areas in which further capacity building and professional development in schools is considered desirable.

Another challenge with which teachers are faced is the growing cultural diversity in their classrooms. While most teachers have a positive attitude towards the growing multiculturalism within their classroom, they do not always know how best to address the cultural heterogeneity among their pupils. In this respect, teachers face two main challenges: (i) to attune their teaching styles to the learning needs of immigrant students (ii) to strengthen positive intercultural relationships between pupils and as such prepare them for social participation in a multicultural society. Teachers and schools feel the need to develop more expertise in these domains (see section 2.1.2).

Another challenge for teachers in mainstream education is to deal with the growing number of SEN students in their classrooms. For students that can keep up with the levels and pace in the regular programmes, additional support can be provided with help of peripatetic supervisors and other professionals. These cases include pupils with a mild sight/hearing problems, who are often successfully placed and taken care of in mainstream education. For pupils with behavioural problems and mental disabilities curricular integration is less easy to achieve. This requires a lot from teachers. This is underlined by an ongoing small-scale study (van Leeuwen, Schram & Cordang, 2008) on the way in which teachers develop and implement education for special needs students in mainstream education. The study shows that most of the participating teachers considered their expertise in designing and implementing a tailor-made curriculum for pupils with a mental disability to be insufficient. Teachers were hesitant about the quality of their decisions: Are we doing the right things? Are we doing it well? To what extent are they able to meet the needs of the pupil with a mental disability?

And to what extent are they able to meet the needs of other pupils in the group? Teachers wanted more feedback and reflection. They also find it necessary to have additional support in the group in order to offer quality education to these children. This is also valid for external support. Providing support for teachers is seen as very important as they found themselves not prepared enough to deal with these children.

The study emphasizes the complex challenges with which teachers are faced with the integration of SEN students in mainstream education. The teacher has an important role to play as a designer and developer of a curricular program that meets the needs of the SEN students and also is feasible to implement in a classroom setting with many other students. Playing a role as a developer and implementer of such a tailor-made curriculum requires a broad repertoire, including a thorough knowledge of the specific learning needs of the pupil, design skills, subject matter knowledge, and knowledge about effective strategies to enhance curricular and social integration, organisational competences, pedagogical competences, communicative competences, and reflective competences. The challenge will be to look for relevant ways to provide SEN pupils with the education that they need, and explore ways to support teachers in this complex task. This requires a comprehensive support program that stimulates both teacher development, curriculum development and school development.

2.4.4 Bridges between formal and non-formal learning environment

In recent years, emphasis has been put on the development of community schools. In the concept of community schools, municipal authorities work with schools and other services like the police, health and welfare services, and sports and cultural institutions to enhance pupils' opportunities for development. A community school is a network in and around schools, within which teachers and other professionals work alongside to help children develop in all sorts of ways. A community school can be housed in a single multifunctional building, but can also consist of a number of different organisations working as a network and spread over the neighbourhood. The number of community schools is increasing quickly. Dutch municipalities aim to have set up some 1200 community schools by 2010.

The community school is based on the idea that teaching, youth care, sport and culture are all tailored to the needs of children and their parents in the neighbourhood. The aim of community schools is to prevent disadvantage, dropout, and learning and behavioural difficulties and strengthen social cohesion. In the case of primary schools, this can take the form of preschool provision, social work, out-of-school care for four to 12-year-olds, and an extended school day with sporting and art activities, and projects for teenagers. Activities can also target parents, offering courses and parenting support. Central government provides plenty of scope for local initiatives and decision-making. There are no national rules on community schools. Central government provides support in the form of grant schemes, and promotes the development of community schools through the provision of information.

Through an integrated approach of education, childcare, sports and cultural work and parent participation, the aim is to provide pupils with more opportunities for development, also out of school hours. The expectation is that by offering a broad package programme within the school, it will be easier for pupils and parents to participate in non-formal activities and the participation of children that would otherwise not engage in such activities will increase. This participation is seen as an important tool to increase social participation and cohesion and to provide equal opportunities for all pupils.

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