



Education Inspectorate
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

The State of Education in the Netherlands 2008/2009

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education

Every year the Dutch Inspectorate of Education publishes the Annual Education Report on the state of education. This report outlines developments and key themes in Dutch education. The first chapter reflects on major developments and facets of education that are in need of improvement. This chapter is published in English with the aim of making the information accessible for an international audience. In addition, information about the Inspectorate and the Dutch educational system is provided.

Mrs. drs. A.S. Roeters

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Senior Chief Inspector of Education

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The State of Education in the Netherlands 2008/2009

Every year the Dutch Inspectorate of Education determines whether schools for primary, secondary, special, and secondary vocational education, meet the standards for basic educational quality. In 2008/2009 more schools met these standards than in 2007/2008. The Inspectorate urges weak and unsatisfactory schools to improve as quickly as possible to provide students with an adequate education. Schools that have achieved basic educational quality already can often improve the quality of teaching, special educational needs support, and quality assurance systems.

This report focuses on the following key themes:

- The quality of education, first described from the scope of the Inspectorate in which schools are central and then described from the wider scope of the educational system;
- Themes directly related to the quality of education: outcome-based education, compliance with educational rules and regulations, and civic education and social integration;
- Themes highlighted in the Annual Education Report on the state of education in 2007/2008: special educational needs support and examinations.

1 The Quality of Education

Annual Assessment Every year the Inspectorate assesses student outcomes, school board annual accounts and failure signals (such as parent complaints or media information). When no risks are detected, the Inspectorate supposes that the school offers basic educational quality. When risks are detected the Inspectorate investigates further.

Standards In the assessment of student outcomes, the Inspectorate uses standards that lie below mean test scores. The Inspectorate also takes characteristics of the student population into account. When the Inspectorate concludes that a school is weak or unsatisfactory, this means that student achievement is much lower than the average level of schools with similar students.

- In primary and secondary education the Inspectorate considers a school weak when student outcomes are below the inspection standards for three consecutive years and there are minor shortcomings in the teaching and learning process;
- When a school shows serious shortcomings in the teaching and learning process together with insufficient student outcomes, the Inspectorate considers a school unsatisfactory.

Adaptation In other types of education the Inspectorate uses standards that are adapted to the data available. In special primary education schools, secondary schools for practical training, and special schools the Inspectorate focuses on the quality of the system for special educational

needs and the extent to which schools define and achieve goals for each student. In secondary vocational education the Inspectorate focuses on the percentage of graduated students.

The Quality of Schools and Courses

Basic Educational Quality There are currently more schools achieving basic quality in all types of education than in the preceding year:

- 92.8 per cent of primary schools have now achieved basic educational quality compared to 91.1 per cent last year. The percentage of unsatisfactory schools remained level at 1.5 per cent in 2007/2008 and 1.3 per cent in 2008/2009. The percentage of weak schools was reduced from 7.4 per cent to 5.9 per cent;
- 90.5 per cent of secondary schools now have basic educational quality compared to 87.2 per cent last year. The percentage of unsatisfactory schools was reduced from 1.9 per cent to 1.0 per cent and the percentage of weak schools from 10.9 per cent to 8.5 per cent. All types of secondary schools improved, except for pre-university education where the percentage of schools with basic educational quality fell slightly from 88.0 per cent to 86.8 per cent. Schools for practical training improved the most growing from 79 per cent with basic quality in 2007/2008 to 89 per cent in 2008/2009;
- In special primary education and special education 77.8 per cent and 70.4 per cent of schools have achieved basic quality, respectively. In previous years only half of the schools in these types of education met the standards for basic quality (Inspectorate of Education, 2007, 2008b, 2009). Despite these improvements, it is disturbing that so many students who need these schools still have to settle for education that lacks basic quality.

School Boards A total of 7 per cent of all students in primary, secondary and special education (approximately 145,000 students) attend weak or unsatisfactory schools (table 1). The percentages differ in different types of education. Depending on the type of education, a quarter to one third of all school boards has to deal with one or more weak or unsatisfactory schools. Weak and unsatisfactory schools cannot be attributed to a small subset of school boards.

Concentration of Weak and Unsatisfactory Schools Weak and unsatisfactory schools are overrepresented in the northern part of the Netherlands and the four largest cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, The Hague). Students attending these schools often come from disadvantaged Dutch and ethnic groups and have low educated parents. These students need good schools. The fact that good education cannot be guaranteed is a problem for them and for society at large.

Vocational Education Secondary vocational education offers about 11,000 courses, 44 of which are unsatisfactory and 411 are weak. Almost one fifth of the school boards in this sector (18 per cent) has weak or unsatisfactory courses.

Table 1

Percentages of schools with basic educational quality, weak schools, unsatisfactory schools, and percentages of students and school boards that are involved, per school type (1 January, 2010)

	schools with basic quality	weak schools	unsatisfactory schools	students in weak and unsatisfactory schools	school boards with weak and/or unsatisfactory schools
Primary Education	92,8	5,9	1,3	6	25
Special Primary Education	77,8	20,5	1,7	25	26
Pre-vocational Secondary Education:					
• Basic Vocational Programme	91,4	7,2	1,4	11	30
• Middle management Vocational Programme	91,2	7,7	1,1	8	
• Combined and Theoretical Programme	90,6	8,3	1,1	6	
Senior General Secondary Education	93,0	6,4	0,6	6	
Pre-university Education	86,8	12,4	0,8	9	
Schools for Practical Training	89,0	9,8	1,2	9	12
Special Education	70,4	27,9	1,7	38	38

Source: Inspectorate of Education, 2010

Financial Risks Every year the Inspectorate examines the financial risks of each school board. A small percentage of school boards demonstrates risk factors:

- 1.5 per cent in primary education;
- 5 per cent in secondary education;
- 3 per cent in (secondary) special education;
- 16 per cent in secondary vocational education;
- 3 per cent in higher education.

The financial problems in secondary vocational education are almost exclusively caused by the school boards of Regional Educational Centres. One third of these centres has financial problems and has not brought spending in line with their gradually decreasing income.

School Board Measures Focused and powerful measures taken by the school board can lead to fast improvement in weak and unsatisfactory schools, which is very important for the attending students. Schools can get assistance in their efforts to improve from the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science and educational organisations. The reduction of the number of weak and unsatisfactory schools is an important policy area for the Dutch Ministry.

Outcomes of the Dutch Educational System

Primary Education In 2008 the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science initiated an analysis of student achievement in grades 4 and 8 (8 and 12 years). This analysis is conducted annually to show changes in the level of achievement in primary education. The most recent analysis in grade 8 shows that the results of ethnic minority students have come closer to the national mean, a trend that has been developing over the last few years (Hemker and Van Weerden, 2009; Hemker, Kuhlemeijer and Van Weerden, 2010; Driessen, 2009).

Special Primary Education Schools for special primary education are designed for students with learning and behavioural difficulties. As a consequence it can be expected that the achievement level is lower than in regular schools, but the differences are far too large. Twelve year old students in special primary education show maths and reading achievements that resemble the scores of eight year old students in regular primary education (Kraemer, Van der Schoot and Van Rijn, 2009; Heesters, Van Berkel, Krom, Van der Schoot and Hemker, 2007). Several studies have shown that students in special primary education can do much better when the quality of their school improves (Houtveen, Kuypers and Vernooij, 2005; Houtveen, 2007). The Inspectorate recently started gathering data on the outcomes of special primary schools to see the extent of the difference in their results.

Secondary Education The mean score for the national examination in secondary education was 6.3, the same as in 2008 and 2007. In 2005 and 2006 the mean score was slightly higher at 6.4. The mean scores in the basic vocational programme, the combined/theoretical programme and pre-university education stayed the same at 6.5, 6.3 and 6.4 respectively. The mean scores in the middle management vocational programme and senior general secondary education fell from 6.3 to 6.2. Assuming that the national examination measures the same level of achievement every year (CEVO, 2006) these are very slight changes.

Special Education and Practical Training The Inspectorate is not able to judge the results of special education, because there are no examinations and the students attending schools for special education differ immensely. The Inspectorate recognises that these schools are showing an increased interest in student outcomes. In practical training schools fewer students start work after completing school (40 per cent in 2008/2009, 43 per cent and 45 per cent in the preceding school years). More students enrolled in secondary vocational education in 2008/2009 (31 per cent, 28 per cent and 29 per cent in the preceding school years). Each year 2 per cent of students go to schools for pre-vocational secondary education (Heijjens, 2009; Koopman, Derriks en Voncken, 2009).

Secondary Vocational Education There is no national examination in secondary vocational education and outcomes are expressed by the percentage of students obtaining a diploma. In 2009 69 per cent of students in the final year of training obtained diplomas. This is much higher than 2003, when 60 per cent of students were awarded diplomas (OCW, 2009a). There is still an urgent need for more improvement in secondary vocational education to increase the number of students that graduate successfully.

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Higher Education Of all full-time students who enrolled in higher professional education in 2000, only 54 per cent had obtained a degree after five years (courses officially take four years). About 60 per cent of university students who started in 2000 had a degree after six years (university studies generally take four years too). The percentage of students stopping after two years is persistently high, at 22 per cent in higher professional education and 13 per cent in university education.

The International Perspective In internationally comparative studies Dutch students at the ages of 10 and 15 achieve well above the international mean scores for reading and mathematics. Other countries are catching up with the Netherlands pushing down the Dutch position in the international rankings. Compared with earlier measurements, the achievement of Dutch students has dropped slightly (OCW, 2009a; Meelissen and Drent, 2008). In comparison to other countries there are relatively few low achievers in the Netherlands, but also relatively few high achievers.

Language and Mathematics The improvement of student outcomes in language and mathematics is an important policy area for the Dutch Ministry as well as in schools. Many schools participate in improvement activities run by educational organisations and the Ministry. It is important to maintain this focus to prevent the energy invested in improvements evaporating.

The Need for Learning Standards

Absolute Standards The government is developing national goals for language and mathematics in primary and secondary education and secondary vocational education. These goals will outline what skills and knowledge students require at certain points in their school career. The goals will promote a better link between these different types of education. When the national goals are incorporated in reliable tests and examinations, it will be easier to make solid statements about the outcomes of Dutch education. All of the indicators that are now available rely on relative norms.

More Clarity Roeleveld and Béguin (2009) used national goals in a preliminary analysis, defining the basic goals as the level that is now obtained by 75 per cent of all students. In the four largest cities in the Netherlands only 57 per cent of all primary school students achieve that level. This supports the Inspectorate's conclusion that the quality of education in these cities is lagging behind. The results of special primary education are very poor. Only 8 per cent of students acquire the basic goals for language, 1 per cent for mathematics and 12 per cent for reading comprehension.

Testing It is very important that schools and teachers accept national goals and pursue them in their daily practice. The Inspectorate has already advocated the implementation of compulsory testing at the end of primary school and at other moments in the school career. This argument still holds. Tests should not only measure whether students achieve a certain level, but should also make clear how far they achieve above or below that level. Such data are essential for the improvement of education at student, classroom, school, and national levels.

The Quality of Teaching and Learning Processes

School Samples Every year the Inspectorate examines representative samples of primary and secondary schools to report on the quality of teaching and learning processes. Most schools have an adequate curriculum and most teachers can provide their students with clear instruction.

Adaptive Instruction A lot of teachers find it very hard to adapt instruction and seatwork to the needs of students. One third of primary school teachers, half of secondary school teachers and more than half of teachers in special education do not do this well enough. This is particularly surprising in special education, as class sizes are much smaller than in primary and secondary schools. It is clear that current teaching qualifications are not good enough to bring about adaptive instruction. Teachers in secondary vocational education and higher education experience similar difficulties.

Special Educational Needs Gradually more schools succeed in offering goal-oriented special needs support, but a quarter of all primary schools (28 per cent in 2007/2008) and 17 per cent of all secondary schools (23 per cent in 2007/2008) still do not. Special needs support is not adequately developed at more than half of the special education schools. These schools do not work with enough focus and do not check whether their efforts are achieving the desired effects.

Quality Assurance Quality assurance has improved over the years, but one third of all primary schools and one quarter of secondary schools do not evaluate student outcomes on an annual basis. In special education, more than half of all schools do not assess the effects of individual educational plans. When schools do not make a critical evaluation of their results, there is a high chance that they act too late when students start falling behind.

2 Improving Results with Outcome-based Education

Improvement All educational sectors have considerable room for improvement. The less developed facets of schools are the levers for change: quality assurance, special educational needs support, adaptive instruction and teaching.

Outcome-based Education Outcome-based education is defined by the Inspectorate as working systematically and purposefully in order to maximize student achievement. The Inspectorate studied outcome-based education in mathematics teaching and its effects on student achievement in a representative sample of primary schools (Inspectorate of Education, 2010b).

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Effectiveness One quarter of the primary schools in the sample practices outcome-based education. These schools:

- set clear goals for all students;
- make sure that teachers know what they have to teach;
- adapt education to the needs of students;
- analyse problems of students who do not achieve goals easily;
- overcome those problems by good special needs support;
- conduct a critical review of student achievement in all classes each year;
- improve quickly when achievement is not good enough;
- Student achievement is higher in outcome-based schools than in schools that do not work this way or to a lesser extent.

Accountability In outcome-based education it is essential that schools hold themselves accountable for student achievement. This is not as evident as it might seem. The Inspectorate often finds that weak and unsatisfactory schools do not consider their role when student achievement is low, but think student characteristics are the main cause, or attribute the results to coincidences such as a sick teacher (Van Schilt-Mol and Van Vijfeijken, 2009; Van Vijfeijken, Smeets, Van Schilt-Mol and Wester, 2010).

Use of Data Almost all primary schools know a lot about the achievement of their students, but often do not know how to use the data to improve outcomes. An analysis of the curricula of teacher training schools shows that little attention is paid to this issue. In a similar vein, school counsellors and school boards do not know enough about the possibilities of student monitoring systems, even though almost all schools use such a system.

School Boards The Inspectorate discusses the outcomes of schools every year with school boards. This has enhanced the school boards focus on achievement issues. Many schools and school boards participate in projects that were started by the government and educational organisations (Houtveen, Van der Velde, Brokamp and Spaans, 2009). Local and provincial authorities have become more attentive and want to support efforts to enhance achievement. Teacher training schools plan to pay more attention to outcome-based education. In a few years time it will be possible to assess how successfully these activities have reduced the number of weak and unsatisfactory schools and enhanced student achievement.

The Quality of Teachers Good teachers are essential for good outcomes. On the basis of lesson observation, the Inspectorate knows that almost 20 per cent of primary school teachers and 15 per cent of secondary school teachers struggle to achieve clarity of instruction and good classroom management. Experienced teachers do not perform better than newly qualified teachers. A quality assurance system controlled by principals or school boards can make clear which teachers need support or training.

Teacher Shortage One in six lessons in secondary schools is taught by a teacher who is not fully qualified to do so. In secondary vocational education one in ten lessons is taught by a teaching assistant and 5 per cent of the staff is not qualified pedagogically or didactically. In the near future many Dutch teachers, especially in secondary education and secondary vocational

education, will retire (OCW, 2009b). Many qualified teachers are needed to prevent unqualified teachers teaching even more lessons. Teacher training schools enrol about 13,000 new students every year (OCW, 2009b) but the number of students is falling and dropouts are higher than in other sectors of higher education. New initiatives, such as an academic teacher training school, seem promising but so far they encompass only small groups of students. More measures are needed to deal with the shortage of teachers expected in the coming years. Higher professional education and universities need to acquire and retain more students. School boards should pay more attention to the support of new teachers to prevent them from leaving the profession within a few years of qualifying.

In-service Training School boards should develop a policy on in-service training for their teachers, principals and themselves. Good leadership at all levels (national educational system, school boards, schools, classrooms) is a precondition for high achieving educational systems. A new law has defined the obligations and rights of teachers and school boards. The Inspectorate is expected to play a part in monitoring the quality of educational personnel in the near future.

3 Compliance with Rules and Regulations

Compliance The Inspectorate is paying more attention to the compliance of schools and school boards with educational rules and regulations. In the future, the Inspectorate may get authority to sanction lack of compliance. Compliance is important for the quality of education. Non-compliance is particularly serious when it causes damage for students in daily educational practice.

Consequences for Students

Time for Learning Students have a right to sufficient time for learning. In recent years the Inspectorate has controlled consistently whether schools provide students with sufficient time. In secondary education and secondary vocational education a positive trend is developing.

- According to the new standard of 1,000 hours per annum two thirds of all secondary schools provide sufficient time for learning. The old standard was 1,040 hours per annum. In the school year 2006/2007 only 7 per cent of schools achieved this standard, in 2008/2009 43 per cent. Even when the new standard is observed, one third of secondary schools still do not provide sufficient time for learning;
- In secondary vocational education 75 per cent of all schools offered sufficient learning time two years ago compared to 83 per cent today. Sufficient learning time is still not a guarantee.

The Importance of Time for Learning Last year the Inspectorate stated that schools do not seem fully aware of the importance of time for learning for achieving educational goals. The Inspectorate would like to stress this point of view. Achievement is related to time for learning and the quality of the time spent learning (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; Onderwijsraad, 2010b). Time should be considered as an important strategic factor for student achievement. Too often the Inspectorate finds that schools have spent time on activities that do not serve any educational goal.

Educational Plans Less than half of secondary schools live up to the legal requirements for the support of students with special educational needs, as an exploratory study conducted by the Inspectorate in 62 schools made clear (Inspectorate of Education, 2010c). Regularly obligatory educational plans for students in need of educational support in pre-vocational secondary education are absent and the same holds for students with special educational needs and a personal budget who attend regular schools. Earlier the Inspectorate drew similar conclusions for students with other types of handicaps (Inspectorate of Education, 2008b). Without educational plans, schools cannot make clear what kind of education they give and the effects they achieve.

Truancy and Dropout The Inspectorate checked 23 schools for secondary vocational education to find out whether they report truancy and student dropout accurately. Only 4 of these 23 schools reported correctly. Of the schools identified the previous year by the Inspectorate as failing to report adequately, only half showed any improvement. This is serious, because the rate of dropout is very high in secondary vocational education and adequate handling of truancy can prevent dropout. Procedures for reporting truancy and student dropout were simplified recently and the Inspectorate will investigate whether this leads to improvements.

Information for Parents

School Guide and School Plan Schools are obliged to inform parents of their plans and policies by means of their school guide and school plan. Sometimes information is incomplete and lacking data that may be important for parents. For example, most primary schools mention the financial contribution parents are expected to make to the school, but 15 per cent does not make clear that the contribution is voluntary and 30 per cent does not detail the exact amount. In secondary education, a quarter of schools do not provide enough information about the financial contribution they expect parents to make.

Special Educational Needs Individual educational plans are not always drawn up by regular schools that enrol students with special educational needs. These schools get budgets for the students and are obliged to draw up a plan for them. It is a legal requirement that school plans are signed by the parents, but in half of the cases where schools do have plans, they have not been signed by the parents. This means it is not clear whether parents approve of the plans, as is required. Schools do not always comply with legal obligations, do not hold themselves accountable and seem to underestimate the importance of good cooperation between school and parents (Onderwijsraad, 2010).

Relationship with the Government

Annual Reports School boards have to report on their policies to the national government and other stakeholders on an annual basis. In 2009 less than half of all school boards submitted their annual reports on time. Most school boards delivered their report shortly after the deadline. In some cases important parts of the report were missing, such as budget plans for the next year or information about student achievement.

Mistakes School boards made a lot of mistakes in the information provided, which is used by the government to calculate the additional budget a school needs to serve disadvantaged

students. Schools do not know the regulations well enough and school boards do not check the information that schools give. As a result school boards received a total of 28 million Euros erroneously.

Improving Compliance

Simplification Often schools and school boards comply better when the Inspectorate draws their attention to gaps in their knowledge about regulations. Mostly they are willing to comply, but are disorganised or do not know what is expected of them. Timely and repeated information about regulations from the Ministry, educational organisations and the Inspectorate is a simple way of bringing about better compliance. In addition, it is necessary to manage schools and school boards that repeatedly do not comply voluntarily. Sometimes a simplification of rules and regulations seems useful.

Initiatives When rules and regulations are not clear or are complex, the Inspectorate expects that schools and educational organisations take the initiative to discuss their problems with the government. The assertion of rules and regulations is most effective when they are clear, tested in practice and supported by schools and school boards. The Inspectorate will continue to investigate compliance in school visits and where necessary it will point out shortcomings in rules and regulations.

4 Civic Education and Social Integration

Quality of Schools Some Dutch primary and secondary schools are mainly populated by disadvantaged Dutch or ethnic minority students with low educated parents. These students are very dependent on school for cognitive development and are sensitive to the effects of a homogeneous student population (Dronkers, 2007). Schools with a majority of disadvantaged students are often relatively weak or unsatisfactory. In primary education these students lag behind and in secondary education their scores for the national examination are relatively low. This is disturbing because education plays an important role in providing qualifications, especially for disadvantaged students (see also Shewbridge, Kim, Wurzburg and Hostens, 2010). So far little is known about the effects of these schools on the socialisation of students.

Civic Education Schools are obliged to promote civic education and social integration. They must try to ensure that students can and will participate in society, know enough about society and feel committed to it. Schools should enhance the competencies that students need to fulfil these goals. A curriculum that is consistent over grades and subjects is necessary. Schools are free to define their own curriculum on the basis of their vision of what students need.

Evaluation The Inspectorate concludes for the third year in a row that the development of civic education in schools is slow, even though schools say it is important. There are only some schools with a curriculum based on a clear vision and clear goals, more than a set of loosely coupled activities and projects. The Inspectorate advocates an in-depth evaluation to find out why progress is so slow and how this can be changed.

5 Special Educational Needs

Special Educational Needs Last year the Inspectorate reported that about 10 per cent of all primary school students and 18 per cent of all secondary school students required some form of special needs support (Inspectorate of Education, 2009). This year the percentages are 9 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively. They refer to students who have individual learning programmes in regular education, students in schools for special primary education and special education, students who need support in pre-vocational secondary education, and students in schools for practical training. Students who need some extra attention from their teachers for a short time are not included in the percentages mentioned above.

Quality Not all schools succeed in offering special needs support of sufficient quality. A quarter of all primary schools and 17 per cent of all secondary schools are not able to offer goal-orientated support. Schools for special primary education, special education and practical training are often relatively weak or unsatisfactory and therefore good provision is not guaranteed. It can be assumed that students sometimes need support because of shortcomings in the quality of education. If they attended a better school, they might not require special needs support.

Students with Special Educational Needs in Regular Schools Students diagnosed for special education can attend regular schools when their parents want this and the school accepts them. These schools then get additional budget. Students may be blind, deaf, mentally handicapped or have severe behavioural problems. Sometimes the media suggests that almost all regular schools enrol students with severe behavioural problems, but this is not the case, as a study by the Inspectorate shows:

- In 2008/2009 almost half of all primary schools and one third of all secondary schools did not enrol students with severe behavioural problems;
- One quarter of schools did not have these students from 2005 till 2009;
- A school for primary education has on average two students with severe behavioural problems and a school for secondary education has nine;
- Some small rural schools have many of these students (they sometimes recruit them on purpose), but they do not always offer good special needs support.

Examination Results The Inspectorate studied the examination results of students with additional financial support in pre-vocational secondary education and compared them to the results of the other students in this school type. The students with additional support are not as successful as the other students, even though this is the explicit goal of the financial support. The percentages of students with support who pass their examinations successfully are lower than those of the other students (2 per cent to 5 per cent, depending on the learning programmes in pre-vocational secondary education). Some students with financial support drop out of school before taking their final examinations. It is possible that the differences in examination success would be even larger if students did not get additional support, but their results might be better if schools were to change the way in which students are supported. Focus is currently given to the social-emotional well-being of students, even though they are

eligible for extra support because of learning problems in the cognitive domain (Inspectorate of Education, 2010c). More knowledge is needed about the actual support that schools give, as well as more information from schools about the way the additional budget is spent.

Adaptive Education Adaptive education is a major policy issue. Schools are expected to offer good education to all students, including those with special educational needs. The Inspectorate concludes that teachers in all school types experience problems implementing adaptive instruction. In-service training is necessary. If teachers have more professional skills, the chance of students falling behind is reduced and the need for special attention may decrease.

Projects for Excluded Students Some 4,500 students, mostly in secondary education, are excluded from school because of behavioural problems that threaten social safety. Several projects cater for these students with the intention of getting them back into a regular school for secondary education. Sometimes it seems wise to remove students with behavioural problems from the problematic school situation for their own protection and the security of others. It is not a good idea to exclude them from school for several months. The Inspectorate has concluded that these projects do not offer education of a sufficient quality, neither in the cognitive nor in the social-emotional domain and would be better integrated in regular secondary schools.

Successful Needs Support There is a need for research into the effectiveness of special needs support to determine which forms are successful and under which conditions (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2010). Special needs support is a policy area that the Inspectorate will focus on in the years to come and remains an important element in school visits.

6 Testing and Examinations

Reliability of Diplomas Last year the Inspectorate reported that schools and school boards cannot always guarantee the quality of testing and examinations. As a result the students' right to equality in examinations is in jeopardy, as are the reliability and validity of diplomas. The government and educational organisations are aware of these problems and are working to overcome them.

Discrepancy The final examination of secondary education in the Netherlands consists of two parts. The national examination is the same for all schools, but the school examination is prepared by individual schools and differs from one school to another. The Inspectorate considers the discrepancy between the score for the national examination and the score for the school examination too large when the latter is more than half a point above the former. This may mean that schools do not prepare their students well enough for the national examination, causing relatively poor achievement. When students in one school get more of an opportunity to compensate for low results in the national examinations than students in another school, the equality of rights is at stake.

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- The discrepancy between the mean scores for the national examination and the school examination in 2009 was 0.25 points. In 2008 the difference was 0.24 points;
- In the middle management programme of pre-vocational secondary education the discrepancy increased from 0.11 to 0.35 between 2005 and 2009. The scores for the national examinations decreased in the same time span;
- In pre-university education the stability of the difference is alarming. In 2005 the discrepancy was 0.39 and in 2009 it is 0.40 while in fact it should decrease.

School Response Some schools have succeeded in decreasing the discrepancy. Good quality assurance, teacher response and better preparation of students for the national examination lead to higher scores for the national examination and a smaller difference in school examination scores. Such responses are especially useful in schools for pre-university education, which show the largest discrepancies.

Gender Differences Boys obtain higher scores in the national examination, while girls consistently obtain higher scores in school examinations. These gender differences exist across school types and school years.

- Boys score 0.1 to 0.3 points higher than girls on the national examination;
- Girls score 0.2 to 0.3 points higher than boys on school examinations;
- Girls compensate for their lower scores on the national examination by their scores on school examinations and leave secondary education with higher scores than boys.

The popular notion that girls are higher achievers in secondary education than boys is only partly true, as these findings make clear.

Explanations In general girls are more motivated to achieve than boys and spend more time on their homework, obtaining higher scores on tests and assignments and performing better in school examinations. Because of this, girls are less likely to repeat a year than boys. Fear of failure may lead to the lower scores on the national examination. Another explanation is the use of learning strategies that are not so useful for the assignments in the national examination. Girls use drilling and memorising more than boys, but this does not pay off in the national examination (Hustinx, 1996; Hustinx, 1998; Hustinx, Kuyper and Van der Werf, 2005; Korpershoek, Kuyper and Van der Werf, 2006).

Examination Developers The Inspectorate investigated examination products that secondary vocational schools can buy, as they do not have national examinations. More than a quarter of these products lack general quality. The only alternative for schools is to develop their own examinations, but they often find this hard. In principle it is a good idea to buy examinations, but they must meet basic criteria. The developers and sellers of examinations need to improve their products as soon as possible.

Monitoring It is of major importance that society can trust diplomas and their reliability is necessary for further education and the labour market. It is important to guarantee the validity and quality of diplomas in all types of education. The Inspectorate will monitor further developments within the educational system as a whole and individually at schools.

7 Improving and Sustaining the Quality of Education

Variety Freedom of education is much larger in the Netherlands than in many other countries. As a consequence, there is a wide variety of schools and school types. Parents and students can choose freely for the school they want. School boards are autonomous in the way they spend their money and develop staff policies. These types of freedom are typical of the Dutch educational system.

School Boards The role of the national government with respect to education has changed over the years as well as the role of school boards. It is now their responsibility to guarantee that students achieve national goals. The national government decides on the preconditions, for example about hours of education. The government also wants to make school boards accountable for the results of their schools. School boards decide how they want to achieve these results. They are free in their teaching and learning processes, as long as the school performs sufficiently.

New Responsibilities School boards are still getting used to their new roles and responsibilities. Many school boards have to deal with one or more weak or unsatisfactory school and are trying to improve education in these schools. Some school boards experience financial problems. Gradually they are getting more support from educational organisations and are getting more used to being held accountable for the quality of their schools and their policies. There is still a need for improvement.

Governance Sometimes school boards fail to fulfil their duties over a long period of time. Until recently there was almost no room to act on this, even when it was obviously necessary for the sake of the students. A new law on good governance enables the government to intervene when the quality of primary or secondary schools is not guaranteed. In some cases the license has been revoked from school boards in secondary vocational education. Such measures show that they can enhance the improvement of the most problematic situations in education.

Conclusion In 2008/2009 there were fewer weak and unsatisfactory schools than in the preceding year. There were also fewer dropouts in secondary vocational education. A lot of schools can improve their quality. The Inspectorate has described levers for improvement that school boards and other stakeholders need to consider. Outcome-based education, which should not only focus on the cognitive outcomes of education but also on the social outcomes, is a key concept in the improvement of education.

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The Dutch Inspectorate of Education

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education is responsible for the inspection and evaluation of schools and educational institutions:

- assessing the quality of education offered in schools;
- reporting publicly on the quality of individual institutions;
- reporting publicly on the educational system as a whole;
- encouraging schools to maintain and improve the education they offer;
- providing information for policy development;
- supplying reliable information on education.

Risk-based Inspection Since 2007 the Dutch Inspectorate of Education has carried out risk-based inspections of schools, assessing potential problems that could affect the quality of education. This system reduces the burden felt by schools and makes inspections more effective. Schools delivering a good education (no risks detected) and good results do not require inspection, allowing the Inspectorate to focus on the rapid improvement of schools that supply a poorer education (risks detected) and get unsatisfactory results.

The Dutch System Most Dutch students attend schools funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Schools can be publicly or privately run. Publicly and privately run schools are financed in the same way by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and evaluated in the same way by the Inspectorate. The non-government funded sector includes a small number of primary and secondary schools and a larger number of institutions for secondary vocational education and adult learning.

Freedom of Education Freedom of education is a key characteristic of the Dutch education system. Article 23 of the Constitution gives freedom to:

- found schools (freedom of establishment);
- organise teaching in schools (freedom of organisation of teaching);
- determine principles on which schools are based (freedom of religion and ideology).

The right to found schools that provide teaching based on religion, ideology or educational concepts has resulted in publicly and privately run schools that are funded by the state. Freedom to organise teaching means that schools can decide what they teach and how.

Autonomy of Dutch School Boards School boards in the Netherlands govern with a high level of autonomy, working within the framework set by central government. School boards are fully responsible for the organisation of teaching and learning, personnel and materials. The annual budget is received as block grant funding. School boards are free to decide how the budget is spent and are responsible for the quality of education provided.

Public Schools Public schools are open to all children and are generally subject to public law. They provide education on behalf of the state and are governed by the municipal council (or a governing committee), a public legal entity or a foundation set up by the council.

Private Schools Privately run schools have the right to reject students whose parents do not endorse the religion, ideology or educational concept of the school. They are subject to private law and can be government funded, although they have not been founded by the state. Private schools are governed by the board of the founding association. Teaching is based on religious or ideological beliefs. There are Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and anthroposophic schools. Schools that base teaching on specific educational concepts, such as the Montessori, Dalton, Freinet or the Jena Plan method may be publicly or privately run.

Quality standards The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science sets quality standards that apply to both public and private education prescribing:

- subjects to be studied;
- attainment targets or examination requirements;
- content of national examinations;
- number of teaching periods per year;
- required teaching qualifications.

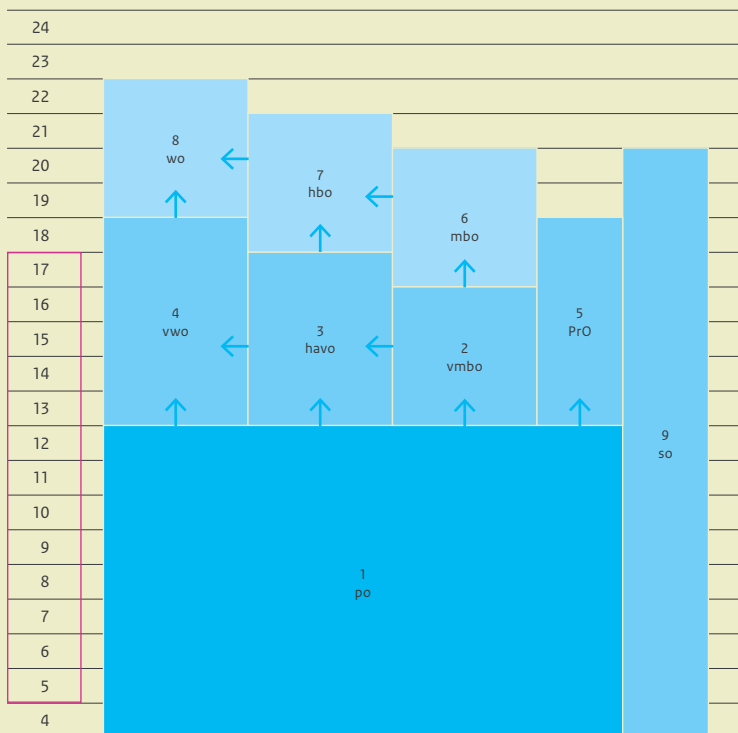
Non-Government Funded Schools The non-government funded sector includes three types of schools:

- Schools that provide secondary education preparing for national exams. They enrol students that have failed their exams in other schools. The Inspectorate evaluates these schools in the same way as schools funded by the government;
- Schools that offer a foreign educational programme like the British Schools, or an international programme like the international baccalaureate. These schools are generally set up for non-Dutch students. The Inspectorate plays a limited role;
- Schools where the design of education means they are not eligible for government funding. The Inspectorate visits these school regularly, but does not evaluate the educational process of the primary and secondary schools. Checks are performed to make sure the schools comply with legal obligations, such as the minimum amount of teaching time and attainment targets. These checks only apply to schools that provide education to pupils of statutory school age.

Vocational Education Secondary vocational education comprises many non-government funded institutions, most providing work-related courses. The Inspectorate evaluates the quality of these institutions and inspector arrangements are the same as for the government funded sector. There are a few non-government funded institutions for higher education.

Dutch Schools Abroad There are approximately 300 locations providing Dutch education abroad. The Inspectorate is responsible for evaluating the quality of education provided by these schools. Dutch schools abroad are inspected in a similar way to schools in the Netherlands.

The Dutch Educational System



Organisation of the Educational System in the Netherlands

- 1 Primary Education (po)
 - 2 Pre-vocational Secondary Education (vmbo)
 - 3 Senior General Secondary Education (havo)
 - 4 Pre-university Education (vwo)
 - 5 Practical Training (PrO)
 - 6 Secondary Vocational Education (mbo): 1/2-4 yrs
 - 7 Higher Professional Education (hbo-bachelor)
 - 8 University (wo-bachelor + -master)
 - 9 Special Education (so)
- Compulsory Education

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2007)

Key Data

	Number of school/institutions	Number of students in 2008 (x1.000)
Primary Education	6.898	1.552,9
Special Primary Education	313	44,1
Secondary Education	647	900,1
Secondary Vocational Education	60	484,1
Higher Education	56	596,7
Special Education	323	66,2
Agricultural Education	57	74,3

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