



Inspectorate of Education
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

State of Education

System section



2023

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Foreword

The years we spend in education are formative years and, through the collective efforts of countless professionals, we want to prepare children and young people in the Netherlands for a bright future. After a difficult period during the pandemic, we can now look back on a year in which teaching largely returned to normal. People in education demonstrated their flexibility once again.. For example, many schools and institutions are paying extra attention to pupils and students who are struggling with their mental health after the pandemic.

Giving everybody the best start in life

Over the past two years, our State of Education report has called for more focus on the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and citizenship. If we do not provide children in the Netherlands with these basic skills, that will stay with them throughout their whole lives. I often reflect on the woman I met last year, who had difficulties with reading and writing. She showed me the deep impact this had on her for her and her children in a way that made a lasting impression on me. Not being able to buy a train ticket at the machine in the station; feeling ashamed when a friend texts you and you cannot understand what they are saying. That woman is not alone: some 2.5 million people in the Netherlands struggle with literacy and numeracy. Some pupils and students still leave education with literacy and math skills that are inadequate for life in a modern society. Those young people find it more difficult to find employment, or are ending up in debt. : In order to give everybody a good starting position in life, mastering these skills is essential. This is also a matter of equity and enabling everybody to begin their working life on an equal footing.

Broad agreement on where we need to go next

In last year's *State of Education*, we reported that a trend break was required. We also stated that if we all pulled together and took the right steps, it would be possible to halt the downward trend within two years. The past year has been an encouraging one for the Inspectorate. In our meetings with teachers, school leaders and school governing boards, we saw that there is a widely shared consensus that basic skills and equal opportunities are the most important goals for our education system. This was also reflected in the government's coalition

agreement. So we are all in agreement about where we need to go next, and why.

If we can maintain that focus and continue pulling together, there is so much that we can achieve. The first hopeful signs are to be found in this year's *State of Education* report. For example, the primary school children who had fallen the furthest behind in basic skills have been catching up. Schools have been focusing on those children as a matter of policy, and that decision is bearing fruit. Pupils are getting more opportunities. For example, school recommendations are being revised more often and children with special educational needs are being given the opportunity to participate in regular education slightly more often. Change takes time, of course.

Working together on how we get there

Now it is time for us all to work together on the 'how'. How do we ensure that we achieve a higher level in basic skills, which pupils and students will need so desperately for the rest of their lives? How do we make sure that a child's life chances do not depend on where they were born or where they go to school? And how do we give teachers – the most important force behind our children's development – the space and the time to do what they do best and tackle these challenges?

Our multi-year focus on basic skills will give us a better picture of pupil development and where problems are arising. We will draw on in-depth information that can be used to answer these 'how' questions. For example, our research shows that teaching should focus more on instruction and on the differences between pupils. That will help pupils to acquire better skills. Our research also shows that teachers should be given more frequent didactic guidance in their subject, so that they can convey the teaching material to pupils even better.

This year's *State of Education* report provides a range of pointers on 'how': guidance for working on basic skills, equity and proper support for teachers. In all these areas, time and the right focus are essential. Giving teachers more time sounds simple, but real life is unpredictable. School days take on a life of their own, and that is only to be expected because there is so much work to be done. The teacher shortage means that supervision for classes needs to be found, we are still feeling the after-effects

of the coronavirus pandemic, and groups of newcomers need education. These are challenging circumstances.

A continuous focus on results

In order to continue to bring basic skills up to a higher level, it is important that we follow children throughout their time at school. Education professionals can use the insight gained to make changes, ensure uninterrupted development and a learning path that will enable them to continue into further education. In this *State of Education*, we see that this is by no means always the case.

Teachers set the tone in schools

Teachers also need more time and focus. At a time when schools are running out of options for putting teachers in the classroom, I realize that this will be particularly challenging. But it will make all the difference. In our country, we spend more time on education and training than in many other countries, but we might not focus enough on what is actually needed in the classroom. Our teachers are struggling and, as they battle through their busy schedules, they don't often get the chance to put themselves first. Yet they deserve encouragement, and the opportunity to do exactly that. Because what is good for teachers is also good for pupils.

Equal opportunities at every stage of life

By equipping all children with the basic skills they will need for the rest of their lives and ensuring that teachers work on their professional development, we are also making significant progress on equal opportunities. We still see that – from the very youngest children to those leaving school – it is precisely those young people who need the most support that get the fewest opportunities.

This is sometimes because there are not enough places in preschool and early childhood education in neighbourhoods where many of the youngest children live in disadvantaged circumstances. Or sometimes it is due to selection procedures and discrimination around internships, which disadvantage precisely those groups of young people that are starting out in a more difficult position. To counter this type of unfairness, we have to prioritize equality of opportunities in all the choices we make, from lesson preparation and selection procedures to policy-setting by boards and national government.

A firm foundation, equal opportunities and well-equipped teachers – these goals require something from all of us and we will only achieve them if politicians, school boards, school leaders and teachers all work together. We need to take major steps in this area in the coming year. And among our education professionals, there is no shortage of enthusiasm to do so. They want to make sure that everybody has the best possible start in life. If we, collectively, keep an eye on what our pupils and students need, they will be able to look back on their school days with fulfilment and look forward to the future with confidence.



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Figure 1 A firm foundation, fair opportunities and well-equipped teachers – these goals require something from all of us and we will only achieve them if politicians, school boards, school leaders and teachers all work together

1.1 Pupils and students

Main points

Basic skills are below where they should be • Basic skills (literacy, numeracy, citizenship skills) are crucial for pupils and students. In recent years, we and others have repeatedly expressed our concerns regarding attainment levels in these basic skills. We remain concerned: too few pupils in primary education are achieving the levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy skills that are necessary to make a smooth transition into secondary education. Particularly in numeracy, more pupils should be achieving or surpassing the target levels. In addition, many pupils in the lower years of secondary education are still not achieving the basic levels for literacy and numeracy, and we are also seeing that attainment levels in Dutch and numeracy are falling. Partly as a result of this, too many young people are leaving secondary education with an inadequate command of the Dutch language. This may make it harder for them to cope as they begin the next phase, such as MBO or higher education. The reference levels that have been set represent the lower limit of what pupils will need, but all too often even those levels are not being achieved.

Progress among pupils who had fallen behind • There are also some encouraging signs to report, however. On average, reading comprehension and spelling skills among pupils in primary education are now back where they should be. Among pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds in primary education, fewer are behind where they should be in numeracy and spelling in relative terms, compared to other groups of pupils.

In VMBO, more pupils are passing their exams in Dutch than previously. It seems that the efforts being made by schools to ensure that the pupils who have fallen the furthest behind are able to catch up are starting to bear fruit.

Monitoring and control are important for basic skills • In order to equip pupils and students adequately for their subsequent education and for participation in society and the labour market, it is important that schools, institutions and the government have a good sense of pupil attainment levels with respect to basic skills across the whole education system. This year, we have also learned more about what works when it comes to improving basic skills: setting ambitious goals, monitoring, evaluating and making adjustments. Cooperation and knowledge sharing between the governing board, the school, the educational programme and support organizations, including regular discussion of basic skills, works as well. In other words, a professional quality culture. Particularly in secondary education, but also in MBO, there is still much work to be done on control in relation to basic skills.

There are many challenges with respect to pupil and student wellbeing • The wellbeing of pupils and students was undermined by the pandemic, but stress can, for example, also be caused by the amount of home work. Too many students are being bullied, in some cases because of their appearance, behaviour or sexual orientation. Students in higher education do not always feel safe enough to ask questions. Pupils and students should be able to count on a socially safe learning environment. Here, too, schools, educational programmes and governing boards need to develop

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policy, and monitor and intervene where necessary. They must constantly ask themselves what more they could be doing to provide every pupil and student with a safe and healthy learning environment.

Schools are giving pupils more opportunities, but not in all cases

Increasingly, primary schools are issuing multiple recommendations to pupils regarding secondary education. And since the right to move up to a higher level during the lower years of secondary education was introduced, more pupils are doing this. In particular, pupils with a non-Western migration background and pupils from families with a lower income or whose parents have completed MBO 2 at most are benefiting from these opportunities. However, once they complete the lower years of secondary education, too many pupils still have to repeat a year (almost 1 in 5 pupils in HAVO 4). Fewer are making it to further education and more young people are dropping out of education without a qualification. And these are often those with a migration background and those from a lower socio-economic background. These groups of pupils and students are more likely to repeat a year, they achieve lower exam results, end up at a lower level in MBO with the same qualifications, and they are more likely to drop out of education than other students. Of course, it is not necessary or appropriate for every pupil or student to obtain a diploma at the highest level, but there should be no barriers to progress for those pupils who want to and can set their sights higher. Too often, there is a lack of continuous learning pathways, adequate supervision, and proper selection procedures that focus on ensuring equal opportunities.

1.1.1 Basic skills

What are reference levels?

The reference levels for Dutch language and numeracy indicate the minimum level that pupils and students need to have attained at key transitional moments in their school career. The basic level (B level) is the level as many pupils as possible should attain. The target level (T level) is for pupils with a higher level of ability. All the reference levels together form the frame of reference for Dutch language and maths, which was evaluated last year (SLO et al., 2022). This frame of reference applies to (special) primary education, special (secondary) education (with the exception of pupils with learning difficulties and multiple handicaps), secondary education and MBO (Dutch language only). For Dutch language skills, 4 basic levels (1B, 2B, 3B and 4B) are described. These levels indicate increasing

difficulty in terms of basic knowledge and skills. For Dutch, the target level is equal to the next basic level up. For numeracy, in addition to three basic levels (1B, 2B and 3B), there are also three target levels (1T, 2T and 3T). The basic levels focus on the pupils' basic knowledge and understanding and a more functional approach to maths. The target levels focus more on formal and abstract maths (Expert Group on Continuous Learning Pathways in Language and Maths, 2009). Reference level 2B is the level required to participate in society with adequate literacy and numeracy. Based on the recommendations of the Meijerink committee, the ambition is that 85% of pupils should have attained reference level 1B (Dutch language and maths) and 65% 2B (Dutch language) and 1T (maths) by the end of primary school (Expert Group on Continuous Learning Pathways in Language and Maths, 2008). The following levels apply in each type of education: primary education (1B), VMBO and MBO 1/2/3 (2B), HAVO and MBO-4 (3B) and VWO (maths: 3B and Dutch language: 4B).

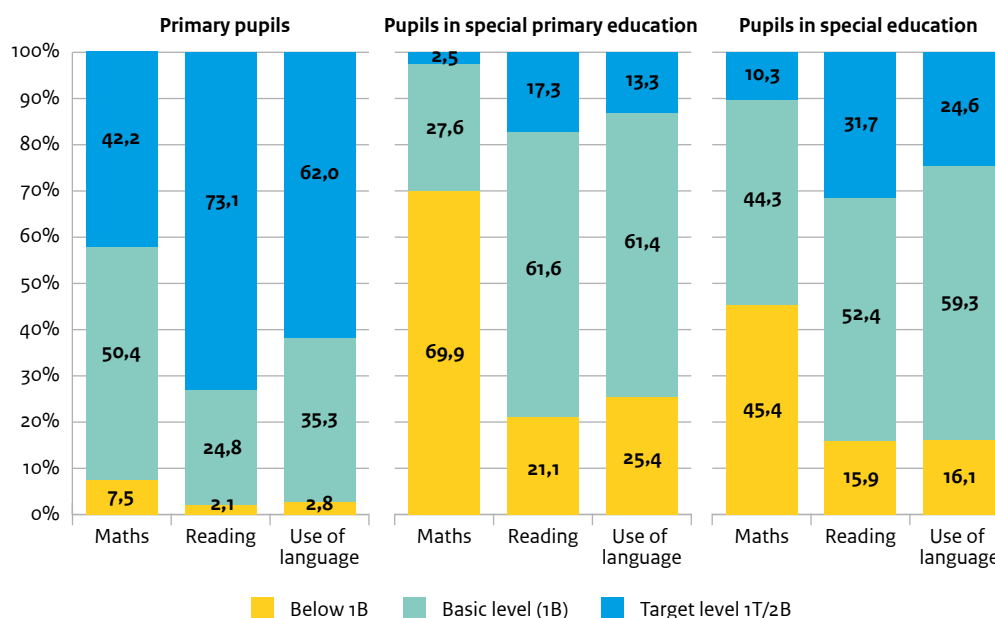
Most primary school pupils are attaining the basic level

In the 2021-2022 school year, having had no information in previous years, we once again had a picture of the attainment of reference levels among primary school pupils at the end of year 8 (Inspectorate of Education, 2022a). Most primary school pupils attained the basic level (1B) or higher for reading, use of literacy and numeracy (figure 2). After primary education, approximately 75% of pupils proceed to VMBO-T, HAVO or VWO. In order to ensure a smooth transition to these types of education, it is important that these pupils have also attained the target level. Nearly three-quarters of primary school pupils also attained the target level (2B) in reading, but the percentages were lower for use of literacy and numeracy. Notably in numeracy, more pupils should be able to attain or surpass the target levels.

Primary school pupils lagging in spelling and numeracy

Research by the National Education Cohort Study for Education (NCO) shows that between the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and the summer of 2022, primary school pupils made less progress in numeracy and spelling than pupils in a comparable period before the pandemic. They fell further behind in numeracy and spelling during the 2021-2022 school year. In reading comprehension, by contrast, pupils in the highest groups have caught up completely. Between the middle of the 2019-2020 school year and the end of the 2021-2022 school year, these pupils made as much progress as pupils over a comparable period prior to the coronavirus pandemic, on average (Haerlemans et al., 2022). Reading skills among primary school pupils, however, are slightly

Figure 2 Percentage of pupils in primary education, special primary education and special education attaining the reference levels in 2021-2022



Source: Inspectorate of Education 2023h

less advanced than they were ten years ago, according to a survey (Inspectorate of Education, 2022f).

Less lagging among primary school students for whom delay was previously highest

Research by the NCO also shows that at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, pupils whose parents have a maximum of a VMBO-G/T diploma or HAVO/VWO lower secondary education, who had fallen behind during the pandemic, were the least behind in numeracy and spelling in relative terms. Pupils whose parents hold an HBO diploma or higher have fallen the furthest behind. At the end of the 2020-2021 school year, the situation was the opposite (Haelermans et al., 2022). This may be because schools have focused more specifically on pupils whose parents have a lower level of education. Schools with a higher school weighting – i.e. schools where more pupils are at risk of an educational disadvantage – were also allocated more funding per pupil through the National Education Programme.

First picture of reference levels in special education

For the first time, we now have a picture of reference levels for literacy and numeracy among pupils who are leaving special education. This is thanks to the mandatory final test. A large proportion of pupils in special education who took part in the final test attained the basic level or higher in reading and use of language, but the proportion was lower for numeracy. Only a small proportion of pupils attain the target level in reading, use of literacy and numeracy (figure 1.1a). Pupils in special primary education

achieve the reference level 1B less often than primary school pupils, and they also achieve the target level much less often (Inspectorate of Education, 2023h). Pupils in special education generally do better than those in special primary education. The levels attained in special education are closer to those of regular education than those of special primary education.

Reference levels in literacy and numeracy are being attained less often in secondary education

Many pupils in the lower years are still not attaining the basic levels in literacy and numeracy. Research by Cito shows that in the 2021-2022 school year, more pupils in the lower years of secondary education performed below or at the reference level 1B than in previous years. Also, fewer pupils attained levels 2B or 3B in Dutch reading skills and numeracy. In year 3, some of pupils in VMBO actually failed to attain level 1B in Dutch reading skills (VMBO-B/K: 35.9%, VMBO-GT: 11.0%) and numeracy (VMBO-B/K: 52.6%, VMBO-GT: 14.0%) (Seton et al., 2022). By the end of secondary education, pupils in VMBO should have attained reference level 2B, pupils in HAVO level 3B and pupils in VWO level 3B (numeracy) and 4B (literacy).

Secondary school pupils are behind where they should be in Dutch and numeracy

Research by Cito also shows that in the lower years of secondary education, levels of attainment in Dutch reading skills, Dutch vocabulary and numeracy were generally lower in 2021-2022 than they were before the coronavirus pandemic. This indicates

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that pupils have fallen behind in these areas. Skills are also less well developed in some years and at some levels of education than they were during the first full school year during the pandemic (2020-2021). This implies that in some cases more pupils fell further behind during the 2021-2022 school year (Seton et al., 2022).

Many pupils in HAVO and VWO fail the central exam in Dutch

• Among pupils who graduated in the 2021-2022 school year, 20.5% in HAVO and 19.0% in VWO failed the central exam in Dutch. This means that approximately 1 in 5 HAVO and VWO pupils who completed secondary education with a diploma, many of whom continued into higher education, did so without an adequate level of proficiency in the Dutch language. In VMBO, the percentage of those who failed the central exam in Dutch is lower (VMBO-B: 7.3%, VMBO-K: 11.5% and VMBO-GT: 13.9%) (Inspectorate of Education, 20230). Among all exam candidates, Dutch language skills were lower in 2022 compared to before the coronavirus pandemic (2015-2019). The difference in attainment compared to the pre-pandemic period is smaller than was the case in 2020-2021, however (Cito, 2023).

First insight into Dutch language proficiency in MBO

• For the first time, we now have a picture of the attainment of reference levels in language (reading and listening) among students who obtained a diploma from MBO 2, 3 or 4 at a large proportion of institutions. Students who achieved a 5.5 or higher in the central exam in Dutch have attained the reference level on which that test is based (MBO-2: 2B; MBO-3: 2B or 3B; MBO-4: 3B). In the 2021-2022 academic year, almost 15% (MBO 2) and 7% (MBO 3) of students graduating did not pass the central exam at the 2B level. This means that 4,094 MBO 2 and 1,677 MBO 3 students who graduated, left education with inadequate literacy skills. They have not attained the minimum level to function in society and may therefore have difficulty reading letters from the government or understanding the main themes discussed in the news, for example. In 2021-2022, 70% of MBO 4 graduates attained the reference level 3B. Among MBO 3 students who chose to take the exam at 3B level, 62% attained the reference level (Inspectorate of Education, 2023m).

Dutch writing skills in higher education could be improved

• In higher education, too, it is important to understand how well students can express themselves in Dutch. However, information on the attainment of literacy skills among incoming and outgoing students is lacking. Students in higher education assessed their own Dutch writing skills by means of a questionnaire (see also section 6). Most students in HBO and university education assessed their writing skills as reasonable (34%) to good (60%) with respect

to reference level 3B/4B. Students in higher education with an MBO background estimate their level to be lower than students with a HAVO or VWO background (Inspectorate of Education, 2023s). However, the fact that students rate their own writing skills as good does not necessarily mean that those skills are as good as they believe. Educators in higher education report that students' Dutch-language skills remain one of the most important areas for improvement (Warps et al., 2021). This is certainly important, given the proportion of potential new students who leave secondary education with an unsatisfactory grade in Dutch.

Basic skills and the Inspectorate

Basic skills are a priority for the Inspectorate • The theme of basic skills is a priority for the Inspectorate. In the State of Education 2021 (Inspectorate of Education, 2021), we wrote that the level of attainment of primary and secondary pupils in the field of maths and language is stagnating or falling. More of them are leaving the education system with low levels of literacy and/or numeracy. When it comes to citizenship skills, there is little or no insight of the results being achieved, and for some time we have noticed that the quality of education is stagnating in this area too. For this reason, it is the focus of explicit attention in the supervision of school governing boards, schools and educational programmes. This is giving us a better insight into both education and student attainment in basic skills.

Supervision of basic skills • Explicit standards have been set regarding basic skills in our supervisory frameworks for primary education, secondary education and MBO. In our supervisory activities, we look at how governing boards monitor the (development of) basic skills among pupils and/or students. We also consider the vision, ambitions and goals regarding basic skills that have been formulated by governing boards. For example, we focus on their policy regarding basic skills and whether schools and governing boards have specific and verifiable goals regarding the quality of education in basic skills. The goal is to determine whether education meets statutory requirements. We also look at whether their own ambitions are being achieved. And we examine whether schools and governing boards are paying enough attention to specific groups of pupils who are at risk of low literacy or low numeracy, or where the promotion of fundamental values requires a specific approach.



Figure 3 Basic skills not yet up to standard

Citizenship skills among young people leaving special primary education and special education • We have relatively little insight into the development of citizenship skills among pupils and students (Inspectorate of Education, 2022a). This continues to be the case. In 2020-2021, a survey was conducted on citizenship and sexual resilience among pupils in the final year of special education and special primary education who are moving on to (special) secondary education. In special education, only cluster 4 schools, which cater for pupils with behavioural or psychological problems, took part. Over half of pupils in both special primary education and special education showed a high degree of sexual resilience. Pupils' attitudes to citizenship varied considerably, from highly positive to not very positive. Pupils with a more positive attitude towards citizenship were more sexually resilient. Knowledge around citizenship and the ability to apply that knowledge is slightly higher among pupils in special education than those in special primary education. Compared to primary school pupils in group 8, who were surveyed previously, pupils in special education and special primary education have less knowledge of citizenship (Inspectorate of Education, 2023g).

Focusing on basic skills in literacy, numeracy and citizenship

Governing boards, schools and educational programmes want to improve basic skills • In the autumn of 2021, a representative group of school

governing boards and school leaders in primary, secondary and special (secondary) education, and programme managers in MBO, completed a survey regarding quality assurance for education in basic skills. Afterwards, in 2022, we held meetings with 331 governing boards, schools and educational programmes from the same sectors. The discussions that took place showed that the respondents recognize the need for more focus on literacy, numeracy and citizenship skills, and that they wish to make progress in these areas. The governing boards, schools and educational programmes mentioned various initiatives that they are working on or want to launch (also see sections 2, 3, 4 and 5).

Governing boards in primary and special (secondary) education focusing mainly on literacy and numeracy

• The results of the survey show that the governing boards of a majority of schools in primary and special (secondary) education and a minority of the schools in secondary education and MBO programmes are setting ambitious goals for literacy and numeracy, and looking critically at the results achieved. In primary education and special (secondary) education in particular, the schools indicated at the meetings that their governing boards were encouraging them to set ambitious goals in literacy and numeracy. In secondary education, several schools said that their governing board was either not doing this at all, or barely doing so. In MBO, several educational programmes indicated in the meetings that their

The goal of the reference levels is to ensure continuity in education, but this goal has not yet been achieved due to lack of insight.

- In primary education, insight is good due to final tests and surveys.
- For special primary education and special education, there is partial insight.

- No insight in lower years of secondary education and special secondary education at present, but surveys have been started.
- No insight of level among outgoing students in secondary and special secondary education.

- Limited insight in MBO at the system level, but some visibility for specific programmes.

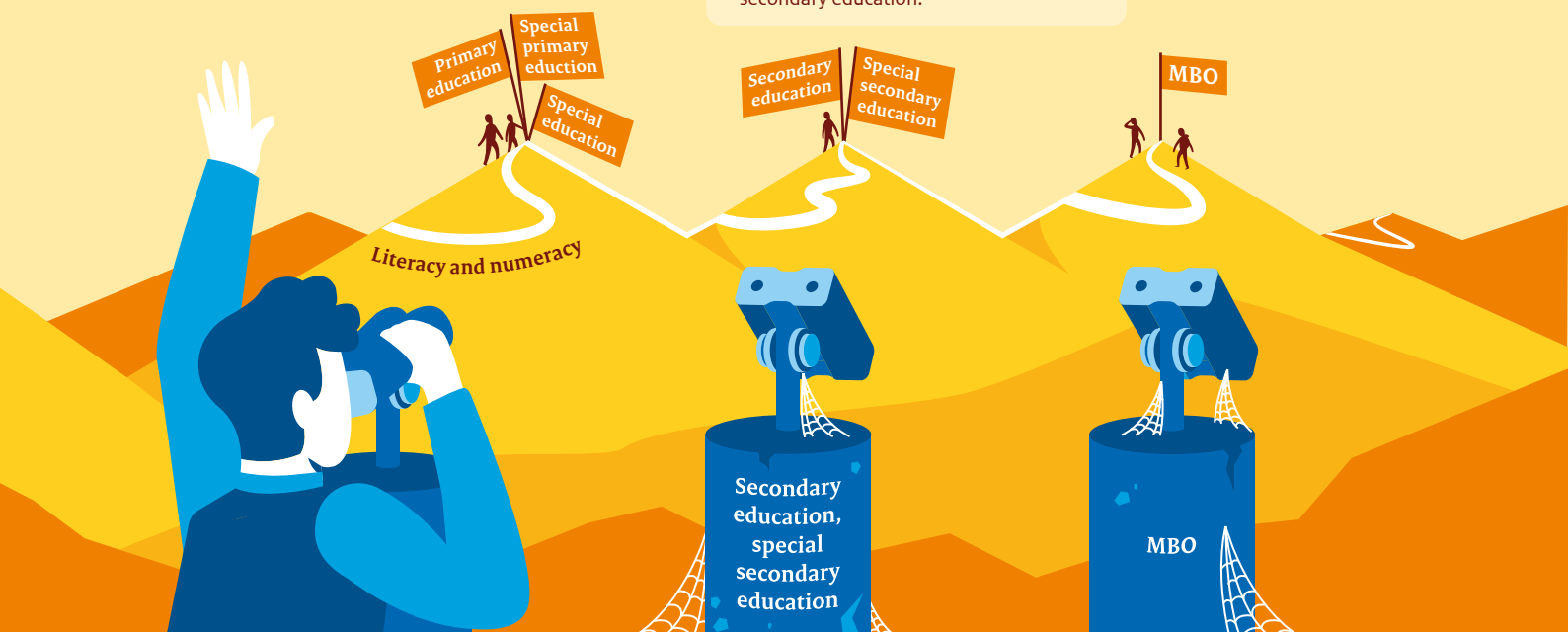


Figure 4 Insight of reference levels is not yet adequate

governing boards were focusing on activities to improve basic skills. Where governance measures are in place across the various sectors, this usually takes the form of meetings that are part of the regular quality assurance cycle, management meetings, setting up learning networks, steering groups and so on, professionalization, facilitation in terms of time and extra staff, and encouraging cooperation on basic skills (Inspectorate of Education, 2023r).

Specific goals and insight into attainment in literacy and numeracy often still lacking • A large majority of schools and educational programmes and a small number of governing boards indicated in the surveys that there were specific goals for literacy and numeracy. At the meetings, however, respondents talked about goals in more general terms, such as getting the basics right, complying with statutory requirements or promoting equity. The more specific goals mentioned were less ambitious and often based on the minimum requirements in the inspection framework. Primary education was an exception: several school governing boards and schools said that they aim to achieve a percentage of the reference levels in literacy and numeracy that is equal to or higher than the national average. By no means all school governing boards, schools and educational programme have insight into the results being achieved in literacy and numeracy. In the survey, more governing boards in secondary education and MBO than in primary and special (secondary) education indicated that they do not include results for

literacy and numeracy in their annual report, for example (Inspectorate of Education, 2023r). In order to evaluate and improve education on a structural basis, clear goals and regular monitoring are required (Education Council, 2022).

Reference levels are a limited aspect of ambitions • The frame of reference is more likely to influence the ambitions of schools in primary and secondary education and MBO than schools in special education and special secondary education (SLO et al., 2022). This was also apparent during our meetings with boards, schools and educational programmes. In special (secondary) education, the reason given was that it is not realistic for many students to achieve the reference levels. Secondary schools say they pay attention to the reference levels in lower years, but that these become less relevant in more senior years. Several schools and educational programmes in secondary education and MBO stated that the reference levels are not discussed with their governing boards (Inspectorate of Education, 2023r). The goal of the reference levels – ensuring continuity in education – has not yet been achieved.

Professional quality culture named as requirement for success • In the interviews, governing boards, schools and educational programmes all named the same success factors with respect to governance around basic skills. These can best be summarized as a professional quality culture. More specifically, respondents talked about working bottom-up and involving teachers in setting

policy, ambitions and goals in order to build support and promote shared responsibility. Other prerequisites include a clear focus on basic skills, clear frameworks, trust and facilitation from the governing board and school management or programme management, constructive and open dialogue and working systematically and cyclically using clear goals and data. Other success factors include knowledge sharing and support in the field of basic skills, such as via specific learning networks, peer consultation, cooperation in a broad sense, support from coordinators and quality assurance staff, targeted training and study days. It is worth noting that several secondary schools indicated that top-down governance and the imposition of policy leads to resistance. In the other sectors, however, respondents were positive about the frameworks and guidelines provided by governing boards (Inspectorate of Education, 2023r).

Progress on awareness of citizenship education in primary and secondary education

• We have previously remarked that too few schools are meeting the new statutory requirements for citizenship education (Inspectorate of Education, 2022a). According to schools and governing boards, awareness of the importance of citizenship education has grown, and it is receiving more attention. Schools indicate that they are already doing a lot of work on citizenship education, but that they do not know whether this meets the statutory requirements. Various schools are now assessing their curriculum on citizenship, setting out their vision and/or putting a continuous learning pathway in place. In many cases, schools and school governing boards have not yet set goals regarding citizenship education. Where goals have been identified, these are very general in nature, such as teaching pupils how to function in society or become citizens of the world. To support schools, some governing boards have appointed citizenship coordinators or set up special committees or working groups. Some schools also mention that they make use of information from the Primary Education Council, Secondary Education Council and/or the SLO. Not all schools mention citizenship education as a priority or are working actively to improve it. Many indicate that the learning loss caused by the coronavirus pandemic is taking priority at present. Several governing boards indicate that citizenship is not yet being discussed with the schools. Schools and governing boards find that monitoring pupil development in this area is a particular challenge due to the lack of suitable instruments (Inspectorate of Education, 2023r).

1.1.2 Wellbeing and social safety

Wellbeing among primary and secondary pupils has decreased • Pupil wellbeing is essential for learning. However, the percentage of pupils experiencing stress

and pressure to perform has increased in recent years. This seems to be a particular issue among girls and older adolescents (Boer et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2018). According to pupils, the reasons they experience stress about school relate to the recommendation for secondary education, the amount or difficulty of school work they are assigned, having too little free time, the high expectations of teachers or parents, and concerns about their future (Boer et al., 2021). The mark out of ten that pupils give to how satisfied they feel about their own lives fell by 0.3 points between 2017 and 2021 to 8.0 among primary school pupils in year 8, and by 0.5 points to 7.1 among secondary school pupils (Boer et al., 2021). Pupils' emotional wellbeing fell during the coronavirus pandemic, compared to the four years preceding the pandemic. In year 8 of primary education, 16% of pupils were experiencing low emotional wellbeing in 2021, and in secondary education this was the case for 32% of pupils. Pupils, particularly girls, reported more emotional problems and more behavioural and attention problems than prior to the coronavirus pandemic (Boer et al., 2021).

Student wellbeing in MBO and higher education has also deteriorated

• In 2022, 21% of MBO students reported that they were experiencing poor mental health. In HBO and university education this was the case for 25% and 24% of students, respectively (OCW, 2022b). The number of students with a mental health issue (anxiety, mood disorder and/or addiction) doubled from 22% in the period 2007-2009 to 44% in the period 2019-2022 (Ten Have et al., 2022). Even prior to the coronavirus pandemic, there were signals from healthcare professionals about the growing number of students using ADHD medication to improve their level of attainment (Van der Heijde et al., 2020).

Increase in perceived social safety in primary and secondary education

• A sense of safety is very important in order for pupils and students to learn and develop. They must perceive their school environment or educational institution as a safe environment – i.e. an environment that is free of bullying, discrimination, intolerance, violence or sexual abuse, for example. The number of pupils and students who feel unsafe rose from 11% in 2018 to 15% in 2021 (Van den Broek et al., 2022). In practice, there has been a moderate increase in online bullying and in the percentage of secondary school students who experience discrimination, in particular because of their gender (Boer et al., 2021). The number of reports made to confidential inspectors has also increased – from 1,296 in the 2020-2021 school year to 1,742 in 2021-2022. Due to the coronavirus pandemic these school years are difficult to compare however. Reports made in 2021-2022 concerned psychological violence (752), physical violence (478), sexual harassment

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(261) and (possible) sexual abuse (139). The proportion of reports in which the person concerned was a person in a position of responsibility, such as a teacher or an educational support staff member, went up (also see Inspectorate of Education, 2022b).

Bullying occurs mainly due to appearance, behaviour or sexual orientation • Around 8% of primary school pupils and 5% of secondary school pupils report being bullied (Boer et al., 2021). A study by the Ombudswoman for Children shows that children experience bullying because of how they look (e.g. their height), behave (e.g. shyness) and/or on the basis of prejudice (e.g. due to their ethnic background or sexual orientation). About a quarter of the pupils who are bullied say they do not know why they are being bullied (Hopman et al., 2022). Around half of teachers witness expressions of anti-Semitism at least once a year. Hurtful remarks about pupils with a migration background, Muslims, men, women or LGBTQI+ pupils occur on a weekly or monthly basis (Cuppen et al., 2022). Previously, there had been a decrease in sense of unsafety among LGBTQI+ pupils, but this trend has come to a halt in recent years; indeed, the situation appears to be deteriorating (Van den Broek et al., 2022).

Social safety and the Inspectorate

One part of schools' duty of care with respect to providing a safe social environment is to annually monitor pupils' sense of safety. Schools that do not provide safety monitoring data are issued with a remedial action order by the Inspectorate. If no changes are made, sanctions may be imposed. Pupils and parents should be able to assume that schools monitor school safety and their pupils' sense of safety, and take action to make improvements where necessary. A hotline is being established which pupils and parents can turn to if problems occur. In addition, the Inspectorate will respond to signals more swiftly and decisively when these are received, and in response to education or a school climate that is conflicting with the fundamental values of the democratic constitutional state.

Schools and teachers must monitor safety and take action when necessary • Schools must ensure a safe, positive environment, take action if problems or risks occur, and learn lessons from this. A safe social environment requires a school policy that is being implemented: monitoring what is happening, outlining clear duties and responsibilities, defining clear agreements and rules that are being monitored and a

pedagogical approach supported and applied by all those involved. Proper monitoring by teachers, school leaders and governing boards is important to gain a clearer picture of what is going on, in order to ascertain necessary improvements. This may involve asking questions such as: do students from specific groups, such as LGBTQI+ people or students with a Jewish background, feel accepted? Even if the majority of students feel safe, what can be done to ensure that all students do? Are all relevant parties doing what is expected of them? Does school management monitor this adequately? Are teachers supported, with help from outside if necessary? Does the school apply methods that have been shown to be effective?

Measures to promote social safety in higher education could be more effective • The majority of students in higher education (85%) feel safe and secure enough to be themselves, but 4% do not. Around 14% of students do not feel free to express their opinion on societal or ethical issues when they have a different view than the teacher or many of their fellow students (Inspectorate of Education, 2023). To ensure a safe social environment in education, the full policy cycle of monitoring, evaluation and adjustment is required. A survey among universities of applied sciences with educational programmes in art and fashion showed that all these institutions have policies regarding social safety among students. However, not all of them check whether the relevant measures are being implemented across the board, how these are being implemented and to what effect. The implementation of measures on social safety could be made more effective by initiating a dialogue with students and teaching staff.

1.1.3 School careers and equal opportunities

School recommendations revised slightly more often, and more double recommendations • The percentage of primary school pupils who qualify for a review of their recommendation for secondary education, on the basis of the result they achieve in the final test, remained around the same in the 2021-2022 school year as it had been in 2020-2021. The recommendation based on the test result was one full level higher or more than the school's recommendation in the case of 11.3% of pupils in the 2021-2022 school year. In 2020-2021, this was the case for 11.8% of pupils. Among pupils whose recommendation was reviewed based on their test result in 2021-2022, the school's recommendation was ultimately revised in 47.0% of cases, compared to 46.5% of cases in 2020-2021. Increasing numbers of primary school pupils are issued with a double recommendation (e.g. VMBO-T/HAVO) rather than a single recommendation (e.g. VMBO-T), and this trend continues. In the 2017-2018 school year, 26.1% of students received a double recommendation; by



2021-2022 this figure had risen to 32.5% (Inspectorate of Education, 2023n).

More than a quarter of secondary pupils change to a different type of education

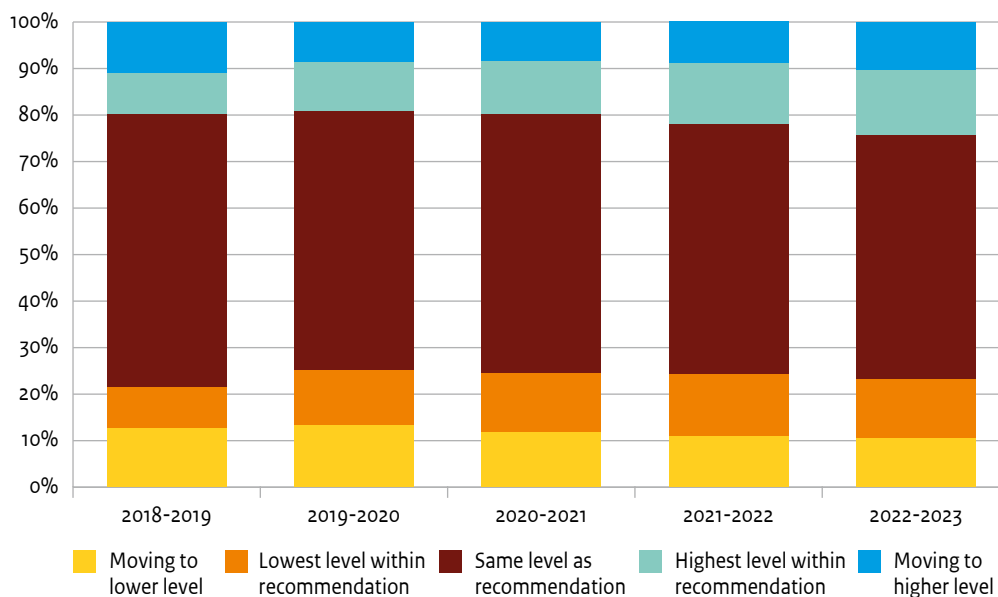
• In the 2022-2023 school year, 74% of the pupils issued with a single school recommendation were still in the same type of education in year 3 of secondary education (figure 5). A quarter of pupils had changed to a different type of education. This proportion is falling slightly: the number of those moving to a lower level of education than the level recommended is falling, while the number of those moving to a higher level is rising, in relative terms. In the 2022-2023 school year, 13% of pupils issued with a single recommendation are in a higher level of education, and 13% are at a lower level. For pupils issued with a double recommendation, the proportion that moved to a lower level is also falling, and the share that moves up to a higher level is rising. In cases where a double recommendation is given, around 5% of pupils end up at a level that is below the recommendation, and 44% end up at the lower level of the double recommendation. Just over half of pupils end up at the higher level within the double recommendation or at a higher level: 48% and 3%, respectively. Double school recommendations and mixed transitional classes (first year of secondary school) give pupils the possibility to find out which type of education is best suited to them. With regard to duplication in the lower years of secondary education, more than 4% of pupils had to repeat a year in years 1 or 2 in 2021-2022. With the exception of the first year of the pandemic (2019-2020), this figure has remained fairly stable. In year 3 the percentage has

increased slightly: 7% across all levels of education, which is also slightly higher than the pre-pandemic level (Inspectorate of Education, 2023o).

More pupils are having to repeat a year in secondary education, especially in HAVO

• In tandem with the trend towards fewer pupils moving to a lower level and more pupils moving to a higher level in the lower years of secondary education, the number of pupils who have to repeat a year in the upper years of secondary education is also rising. Since 2016, an increasing number of pupils have had to repeat a year, with the exception of the first year of the pandemic 2019-2020. This is the case across all levels of education. In 2021-2022, 9.2% of pupils in VWO had to repeat a year; in VMBO-G/T the proportion was 9.7%. In HAVO, 15% of students had to repeat a year. In 2016-2017, these figures were just over 7% among VMBO-G/T and among VWO pupils and 11.3% of HAVO pupils. The fourth year of HAVO particularly stands out: almost 1 in 5 pupils (19%) have had to repeat this year. In 2016, that figure was 15% (Inspectorate of Education, 2023o). Several factors may be playing a role in this rise. Since 2020, pupils who have graduated from their level of education have been allowed to continue to the next level of education without any impediments. More pupils have also been moving to a higher level in the lower years of secondary education, there is increased pressure to perform, and there has been a decline in student wellbeing. Moreover, the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic – as a result of which pupils have made less progress than they would have otherwise – may also be a factor. It is important that schools identify

Figure 5 Percentage of pupils moving to a lower or higher level during the lower years of secondary education



Source: Inspectorate of Education, (2023o)


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the underlying reasons and give pupils the right guidance and support to continue their school career successfully.

More secondary pupils are graduating, but fewer are proceeding directly to continued education Pass rates in all types of education fell slightly in the 2021-2022 school year, compared to 2020-2021. This is several percentage points higher than before the coronavirus pandemic, however. As in the 2020-2021 school year, compensatory measures were applied for the final exam in the 2021-2022 school year. Having obtained a HAVO or VWO diploma, fewer pupils are proceeding immediately to continued education in the following academic year. Among those graduating from HAVO in 2021-2022, 20.3% were not in any form of education in the following school year. This number was only 16.8% among those graduating in 2020-2021. Among those graduating from VWO, this figure increased from 18.1% in 2020-2021 to 23.7% in 2021-2022. Among those graduating from VMBO, the figure has been stable for years and is much lower, at around 2% (Inspectorate of Education, 2023o). Some of those young people will take a gap year before proceeding to the next phase in their education (also see Inspectorate of Education, 2020a).

Intermediate referral from special (secondary) education to mainstream education usually goes smoothly • The number of pupils moving from special education or special secondary education to a school for mainstream education has remained low and fairly constant over the years. Most of the pupils who move to mainstream education appear to be able to continue their school career successfully there. Around 90% of pupils in special education who transition to mainstream education are still there two years later. This percentage is 76% for special secondary education. On top of that, 13% of pupils who moved from special secondary education to mainstream education continue in mainstream education until their 18th birthday or beyond. After special secondary education, some pupils continue their studies in MBO, usually doing the entrance programme or a level 2 programme. About a quarter of former special secondary education pupils start with a MBO 4 programme. This transition is difficult for some: compared to other MBO pupils, those from special secondary education are more likely to leave MBO without a qualification. For example, in 2021-2022, 41% of former pupils from special secondary education left MBO 4 without a diploma, compared to 22% of level 4 students who joined from a different type of education (Inspectorate of Education, 2023p).

The coronavirus pandemic had a temporary impact on the number of those leaving education early • The number of young people leaving education without

a basic qualification rose from 22,766 (1.72%) in the 2019-2020 school year to 24,385 (1.88%) in the 2020-2021 school year. This means that the fall that began in 2019-2020 does not appear to have been sustained. That one-off fall may have been due to the reluctance of institutions to de-enrol students during the coronavirus pandemic. The increase in 2020-2021 could be the result of students choosing non-matching study programmes, lower student wellbeing or high economic growth (OCW, 2022a). Most of those students leaving early are in MBO. During the pandemic, institutions often had to cater for new students online. As a result, students may have had a less clear picture of the programme. The pandemic also led to a deterioration in students' mental health. On the basis of data collected before the pandemic, Statistics Netherlands (2021) has concluded that there is a relationship between mental health issues and the risk of dropping out of education. Finally, the labour market may have been an attractive alternative to education over the past year, due to shortages on the labour market.

Number of students entering MBO is falling, number leaving without a qualification is rising • The number of students entering government-funded MBO has been declining since 2018-2019. In that academic year, almost 166,000 students started in MBO, and by 2022-2023 the number of new enrolments had fallen to around 151,000. Among students who left MBO after the 2021-2022 school year, 22.9% left without a qualification. This shows an increase of 3 percentage points compared to 2020-2021. The proportion of students leaving MBO level 2 without a qualification rose to 41%. At MBO levels 3 and 4, the number of students leaving without a qualification was stable for many consecutive years, but this also increased after 2021-2022. Among students who leave level 3, 21% do so without a qualification; among level 4 students, this is 18% (Inspectorate of Education, 2023m).

Fewer students proceeding to higher education and more students dropping out • The proportion of students who, after completing an MBO level 4 programme (vocational training track), continue their studies in an HBO Bachelor's programme fell from 37.8% in 2020-2021 to 33.9% in 2021-2022. The proportion of students who proceed from a level 4 MBO programme to an associate degree is stabilizing at around 4%. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, this figure had been increasing gradually (Inspectorate of Education, 2023m). The proportion of those graduating from HAVO and VWO directly proceeding to higher education also decreased in 2022 (Inspectorate of Education, 2023o). In 2020 and 2021, the number of those dropping out or switching programmes fell among first-year students. In 2022, both these numbers returned to the levels seen before the pandemic. The dropout rate in the second year of

the study programme is higher among students who began their studies during the pandemic than in previous cohorts of students.

Equality of opportunities plays a limited role in selection procedures • The share of higher education programmes that use a selection procedure is increasing. The most commonly applied selection criteria are motivation, grades and subject knowledge. In the 2022-2023 academic year, around 17% of full-time Bachelor's programmes in both HBO and universities were selective (DUO, 2022c; Studiekeuze123, 2022). There is no consensus among educational programmes regarding the substantiation of selection criteria or the best criteria and instruments to use. Not all aspects of the selection procedure ensure equality of opportunities, for instance. Educational programmes should substantiate their selection procedures systematically and comprehensively, and take the risk of inequality of opportunities into account in this substantiation.

Differences between pupils according to migration background

School recommendations for pupils with a non-Western migration background are revised more frequently • Among pupils with a second-generation non-Western migration background, the recommendation for secondary education was revised for 16.2% of pupils in the 2021-2022 school year. This percentage was lower for students without a migration background, at 8.9%. Among pupils with a non-Western migration background, the school's initial recommendation is often lower than the test-based recommendation. This was the case for 40.2% of second-generation pupils and 46.6% of first-generation pupils. The figure was 36.5% for pupils without a migration background. Among pupils with a non-Western migration background whose initial recommendation was lower than the test-based recommendation, the recommendation was actually revised more frequently (first generation: 35.7%; second-generation: 40.2%) compared to pupils without a migration background (24.4%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2023n). In the 2022-2023 school year, 45.6% of secondary pupils without a migration background are in year 3 of HAVO or VWO. That figure is 26.2% for pupils with a first-generation non-Western migration background, and 36.3% for second generation. The share of non-Western migrants in these types of education is increasing over time (Inspectorate of Education, 2023o).

Lower pass rates among pupils with a non-Western migration background • In the 2021-2022 school year, the pass rates at HAVO and VWO were around

10 percentage points lower among pupils with a non-Western migration background than they were among pupils without a migration background. These differences are smaller in VMBO. With the exception of HAVO, pass rates among second-generation pupils with a non-Western migration background are slowly catching up. In the final exams, pupils with a non-Western migration background achieve lower average grades in the central exam (Inspectorate of Education, 2023o).

Pupils with a non-Western migration background are more likely to proceed to higher level of education • Among pupils with a first-generation non-Western migration background who have graduated from HAVO or VWO, 25% and 23%, respectively, were originally given a lower recommendation at the end of primary education. Among pupils without a migration background who have graduated from HAVO or VWO, 12% and 15%, respectively, were originally given a lower recommendation at the end of primary education. Pupils with a non-Western migration background are more likely to proceed to a higher level of education than pupils without a migration background: from VMBO-G/T to HAVO and from HAVO to VWO (Inspectorate of Education, 2023o).

More students with a non-Western migration background leave education without a qualification • Around 30% of students from a non-Western migration background leave MBO without a qualification, compared to 20% of students without a migration background. This is partly due to differences in participation in the MBO levels. There is a relatively high number of students from a non-Western migration background in level 2. Significantly more students leave that level without a qualification than at other levels. But even if we look solely at level 2, we still see that, in relative terms, more students with a migration background (second generation) leave education than students without a migration background: 53% versus 37% of students (Inspectorate of Education, 2023m).

More students with a migration background in higher education, in relative terms • In absolute terms, the number of HBO students with a non-Western migration background has remained virtually unchanged. This means that they make up an increasing share of incoming students. The same is true of new students starting a Bachelor's programme at a university. In both HBO and universities, students with a non-Western migration background are more likely to drop out or switch programmes than students without a migration background. Among students who started an HBO Bachelor's programme in the 2020-2021 academic year, 60.4% of students without a migration background were



still enrolled in the same programme two years later, while 15.3% had dropped out. Among students with a first or second-generation non-Western migration background, the proportions still enrolled were 55% and 48.4%, respectively. In these groups, 17% (first generation) and 20% (second generation) had dropped out. These differences are slightly smaller in university education: 73.9% (no migration background) compared with 68.0% (non-Western, second generation) and 67.5% (non-Western, first generation) and 3.1% dropped out (no migration background) compared with 13.8% (non-Western, second generation) and 3.4% (non-Western, first generation) (Inspectorate of Education, 2023l).

Education for newcomers

Newcomers in the education system • Since 2022, the outbreak of war in Ukraine and rising numbers of asylum seekers, the situation for newcomers in the education system has changed dramatically. On 1 October 2020, a large proportion of newcomers without Dutch nationality began mainstream primary education (44%) or secondary education (37%) straight away, not attending newcomer facilities. Other newcomers without Dutch nationality who had been in the Netherlands for less than a year attended primary education for newcomers or an first admission for non-native speakers facility/international transition class in secondary education. In primary education, pupils usually stayed at a newcomer facility for 10 to 14 months. Pupils usually stayed at the first admission for non-native speakers facility/international transition class for 14 to 26 months (Bisschop et al., 2022). In the spring of 2022, Temporary Education Facilities were established for Ukrainian students. These will be closed again at the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

Children and young people cannot always attend school • It is more and more difficult to guarantee the uninterrupted process of development for newcomers. Inspectors see that the rapid increase in the number of newcomers, combined with teacher shortages, means that increasing numbers of children and young people cannot attend school. Exact numbers of young people not in school are lacking because newcomers are not always added to municipal personal records databases, and agreements regarding registration, deregistration and reporting to attendance officers are not always clear or aren't enforced due to the hectic situation around education for newcomers. Available

education places for newcomers are scarce. These children and young people in need of and depending on a good education for their development are not currently receiving a full, high-quality education. This means that choices have to be made in allocating education places for newcomers.

Unequal treatment • In the provision of education for newcomers, a distinction is made between pupils from different migration backgrounds. Education for Ukrainian students is subject to separate legislation. The temporary education facilities established for Ukrainian pupils can deviate from the statutory requirements concerning qualified teachers, planned teaching time and the curriculum provided, for instance. This gives schools and school governing boards the chance to provide education for these pupils despite the shortage of teachers. Schools and school governing boards have made enormous efforts to organize education for Ukrainian students at very short notice. They deserve praise for this. At the same time, we must also note the risks involved with this approach to education. The separate legislation for temporary education facilities may lead to inequality and inadequacies in education for newcomers. Depending on their migration background (Ukrainian or not, migration background or not), pupils may receive the full range of education, a more limited education, or no education at all. The risk is that the children and young people who do not receive a good education will not acquire adequate basic skills, preventing them from participating to their full potential in society in later life.

Education and safety cannot be taken for granted • Among children and young people living at family accommodation locations (asylum seeker centres for families whose asylum applications have been turned down), safety and education cannot be taken for granted. Schools and school governing boards do their very best to provide their pupils with a relatively stable school environment where they can develop and feel safe. However, these pupils are growing up in an unsafe environment, despite the efforts of everyone involved. This undermines the uninterrupted process of development of children and young people (Inspectorate of Education, 2023w).

Temporary education facilities are highly diverse • Schools, school governing boards and municipalities have established temporary education facilities at very short notice, so that Ukrainian school-aged children in the Netherlands can attend school. In

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cases where a temporary education facility has links with an existing facility for newcomers/international transition class, the speed of the start-up and the quality of education benefits as a result of those links. Due to the difficulty of predicting pupil numbers and how long children might stay, the temporary education facilities only started planning their approach to education more systematically after the summer holidays of 2022 in many cases. As a result, the content of those plans are often general in nature. Many temporary education facilities have not yet drafted the required progress plans. However, this is an important aspect of goal-oriented education. The future perspectives of these temporary education facilities remain unclear as well (Inspectorate of Education, 2023u).

Constant flux • Education for newcomers is in a constant state of flux and reflects the situation in the wider world. More refugees and asylum seekers arrive during times of war. The economic situation abroad affects the number of labour migrants arriving in the Netherlands. And if unrest in the world decreases, this will mean that newcomer facilities will need to cater for a decreasing number of pupils. Teachers, teaching assistants and support staff will leave as a result. As such, it is often a matter of trying to keep up with the hectic pace of change in this sector. Retaining expertise and maintaining the quality of education requires education for newcomers to be organized sustainably and on a regional basis.

Differences between pupils according to parents' level of education and household income

Revisions to school recommendation vary according to parents' level of education • Pupils whose parents have completed MBO level 2 at most are the most likely to be eligible for a review of the school recommendation issued at the end of primary education. For 49% of these pupils, the test result is at least half a level higher than the initial recommendation given. The recommendation is revised for 15% of pupils. It is revised for 7% of pupils whose parents have completed a university or HBO Master's degree; 22% of all pupils received a higher recommendation based on the test than the recommendation they were initially given by the school. In relative terms, the recommendation is revised just as often among children whose parents have a university or HBO Master's degree as among children whose parents are educated to MBO level 2 at most (31.9%). These percentages are slightly higher than among children whose parents were educated at HBO level or at MBO level 3 or 4 – both around 27.5% (Inspectorate of Education, 2023n).

Among pupils whose parents have completed MBO level 2 at most, more have to repeat a year • Across all types of secondary education and all years, pupils whose parents have completed MBO level 2 at most are, on average, more likely to repeat a year than pupils whose parents have a university or HBO Master's degree. The largest difference is evident in years 4 and 5 of VWO. In the 2021-2022 school year, 16.9% of pupils with parents with MBO level 2 at most had to repeat year 4, compared to 10.2% among pupils of parents with a university or HBO Master's degree. In year 5, those percentages were 19.6 and 10.8. Pupils whose parents are in a lower income category are also more likely to repeat a year than pupils whose parents are in a higher income category (Inspectorate of Education, 2023o).

Start level and progression in MBO is related to parents' education and income • Among students with a VMBO-T diploma whose parents completed MBO level 2 at most, 20% do not start in level 4. This figure is about 10% among students with the same diploma whose parents have a university or HBO Master's degree. This difference between students with parents of different levels of education was smaller in 2018-2019. This may be related to the placement of these students by the educational programmes, but it may also be a deliberate choice by new students to start their educational programme at level 2 or 3. Start level and progression within MBO also vary according to the income level of the parents. The lower the income of the parents, the higher the percentage of students who are placed below their recommended level or who switch programmes in the meantime. The number of those leaving without a qualification is also higher among students whose parents have a lower income level (Inspectorate of Education, TRMBO).

Inequality by income and parents' level of education does not increase in higher education • At the start of higher education, compared to the general population, there is a relatively high number of students whose parents are in higher income groups and/or whose parents have a higher education diploma. This is because these students are more likely to make better progress earlier in their school careers (Inspectorate of Education, 2017; 2019; 2020a). Parents' educational level and income level are not strongly determinative of students' academic progress in higher education. With a few exceptions, after five years of education, the differences between students according to their parents' level of education and income level do not increase or decrease further. Comparable percentages of students obtain a diploma within the allotted number of years plus one. Only students with parents in the lowest income group are less likely to obtain an HBO Bachelor's degree within

five years than students with parents in higher income groups (Inspectorate of Education, TRHO).

Many municipalities are reluctant in setting measurable goals regarding tackling educational disadvantage • To tackle educational disadvantage and inequality of opportunities among pupils, municipalities are required to consult annually with primary and secondary school governing boards and the owners of childcare facilities. On topics such as preventing segregation, promoting integration, reducing educational disadvantage and coordinating registration and admission procedures. Most municipalities conduct this consultation (known as the Local Education Agenda Consultation, or LEA) in a rigorous manner. The consultations address how to prevent educational disadvantage regularly, and often leads to agreements. However, measurable targets to tackle educational disadvantage are often lacking. The subject of how to tackle segregation features on the agenda of the LEA consultations relatively infrequently, and hardly any concrete agreements are made on this subject. Municipalities give various explanations of why setting concrete targets for tackling segregation is so difficult. Firstly, they point out that educational segregation is often related to residential segregation – a factor that the LEA has little control over. Secondly, some municipalities indicate that tackling segregation is not relevant in their case because they believe that there is no segregation in their municipality. Thirdly, the competitive position between education partners plays a role; governing boards and owners are often cautious or even reluctant to make concrete and binding agreements about distributing or reallocating children’s placements. Finally, municipalities also point out that they do not want to make agreements that may undermine parents’ free choice of education (Inspectorate of Education, 2022f).

Policy recommendations • According to municipalities policy is stalling or stagnating, as a result of the high turnover rate among civil servants and frequent personnel changes among school governing boards and childcare owners. This stagnation is reinforced by the fact that goals and agreements are often inadequately embedded in the municipal quality cycle, or not at all. Nevertheless, we see opportunities for municipalities to take control and, as a neutral partner in the field, to bring stakeholders together and encourage them to look beyond their own interests in order to contribute to legislative goals. The best way for municipalities to safeguard policy is by setting up a robust quality cycle around the LEA. This ensures that substantive goals, clear agreements and the associated evaluation (regarding the goal and the associated process) can take root and

are less subject to stagnation due to staff turnover. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) can help medium-sized and smaller municipalities to acquire expertise and set up a functional quality cycle around their policy on educational disadvantage. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science could evaluate the feasibility and applicability of statutory requirements regarding the policy consultation process on educational disadvantage (Article 161 of the Primary Education Act). This should include what options exist for municipalities to contribute to preventing segregation through the LEA (Inspectorate of Education, 2022f).

Inspiration from across the border: Scoil Naomh Eoin primary school (Ireland)

Schools in other countries also provide education for pupils who are growing up in difficult circumstances. Scoil Naomh Eoin Primary School is located in County Meath, near Dublin in Ireland. Many are part of the Irish ‘traveller’ community or refugee families. And many of the pupils at the school have to deal with social problems. Unemployment, single-parent families, low ambitions and limited social participation are part of the daily reality of many of the school’s pupils. Many of the pupils speak a different language at home than they do at school. The Irish government has designated Scoil Naomh Eoin as a DEIS school. The DEIS programme exists for about 15 years already. DEIS stands for Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools.

The Irish government identifies schools that are eligible for the programme based on deprivation indicators such as poverty and unemployment. Schools can also request participation themselves and are then assessed for eligibility in the programme. Participation in the programme entitles schools to various facilities and extra funding. These include a lower pupil-teacher ratio, free school meals, support from educational counsellors and government programmes.

DEIS schools are required to report on a number of themes. These are: attendance and retention of pupils, literacy and numeracy, continuity between preschool centres and schools and cooperation with parents and other parties, such as preschool centres, the municipality and (youth) care. For secondary schools, the theme of examinations is also included. Schools also report on conditional themes such as ‘leadership’, ‘continuous professional development’ and ‘wellbeing’.

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Staff at Scoil Naomh Eoin work with great passion and enthusiasm on all these themes. For example, one teacher works full-time on home visits and organizing activities for parents at the school. There is a continuous training and coaching programme for teachers that is tailored to their student population, including on how to support students with trauma or students who do not speak English at home. Scoil Naomh Eoin together with preschool centres actively promotes preschool education (in various languages). A number of teachers do not have their own classroom, but work with small groups on projects or supervise intensive maths or language programmes for groups of pupils for shorter periods of time.

Scoil Naomh Eoin is not just a school, but a place where pupils can go for free sports, music, movies and other activities all day long. Pupils and parents are free to walk in and out and feel visibly at home. A good example of the sense of community among pupils is the bus that transports former pupils from Scoil Naomh Eoin to the secondary school a few kilometres away every day. All former pupils can use the bus free of charge until they have successfully completed their secondary education.

1.1.4 Inclusive education

Investment in inclusive education¹ remains necessary

Governing boards and inter-institutional partnerships must continue to invest in providing as inclusive an education as possible for pupils with special educational needs. It is currently not clear whether more pupils with special educational needs are finding suitable places in mainstream education. The context in which schools, governing boards and inter-institutional partnerships must implement inclusive education has changed since the partnerships were first launched in 2014. The increasing shortage of teachers, the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and greater diversity among pupils due to large numbers of newcomers are now serious issues that demand attention. Currently, looking at the public reporting of inter-institutional partnerships and governing boards, it isn't made evident what is going well and what is not. The governing boards of inter-institutional partnerships and the affiliated schools must take steps to ensure that more inclusive education can be achieved in the years to come. It has also proven difficult to verify whether the policy choices made by

inter-institutional partnerships are successful, and to what effect (Inspectorate of Education, 2023x).

Participation in specialized education not distributed evenly across the Netherlands

Participation in all forms of specialized education increased in most inter-institutional partnerships in the period between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023. In both primary and secondary education, there are eight inter-institutional partnerships where the number of those taking part in special primary education and special education or practical education and special secondary education is on a downward trend (DUO, 2022a). These partnerships are moving towards more inclusive education, and are spread across the Netherlands. Participation in specialized education was not evenly distributed across the Netherlands before the introduction of inclusive education either. Because no substantive explanation could be found for this, the resources available for extra support were distributed evenly across the country in a process known as equalization. Inter-institutional partnerships with a high negative equalization requirement managed to reduce participation in the years immediately following the introduction of inclusive education. Two years later, however, the number of incoming pupils increased once again (Inspectorate of Education, 2023x). Inter-institutional partnerships themselves determine the entry requirements for specialized education and can therefore manage participation in that way. However, figures regarding participation in specialized education say little about the quality of the extra support provided, either in specialized education or mainstream education.

What is required to make mainstream education more inclusive?

It is unclear how many pupils in mainstream education receive extra support, and what the quality of the education and support provided is. Despite a statutory requirement to register the progress and development plans (OPPs) of all pupils receiving extra support, this has not been done properly for years and hardly any improvement is evident. In secondary education, the number of OPPs registered is actually declining – from 21,936 OPPs in 2018-2019 to 16,334 in 2022-2023 (Inspectorate of Education, 2023o). This is equal to approximately 1.7% of the number of pupils in mainstream secondary education. For primary education, the figure is 0.6% (Inspectorate of Education, 2023n). Since the introduction of the registration requirement, the number of OPPs registered has doubled (from 4,018 in 2015-2016 to 8,442 in 2022-2023), but two-thirds of primary schools do not register OPPs. The resulting lack of data means there is no nation-wide picture of the number of pupils with special educational needs who are in mainstream education. Consequently, it is impossible to say whether mainstream education is becoming

¹ In The Netherlands we use the term 'passend onderwijs', translated in this report as 'inclusive education'. In our current context this means '(mainstream) education which is tailored as much as possible'. For pupils with severe special needs there are special schools.

more inclusive. This does not mean that schools are not creating or using OPPs. OPPs are a helpful tool for governing boards and inter-institutional partnerships, which can be used to improve their insight into the effect of the support provided, and the efficient use of resources. In addition, OPPs give schools and governing boards an insight into what is needed to improve or expand support services.

1.1.5 New initiatives

More research into flexibilization is required • There is an increasing trend towards more flexible educational pathways. This involves the creation of pathways that are flexible enough to cater to the changing needs of students, the professional field and society. This leads to better opportunities for young and adult students and for the professional field, but it also entails risks and requires additional research. We do not know enough about the results achieved by special tracks in MBO, and it might be possible that the functions of education related to personal development and socialisation are receiving less attention.

Applications for new schools • In primary and secondary education, the identity of new schools is no longer the primary factor. Interest among parents and pupils and the expected quality of education are now the most important factors. Under the new funding system, the number of applications for new primary schools has increased, but this is not the case for secondary education (OCW, 2022d). In 2021, the Inspectorate assessed 37 initiatives in primary education. Of these, two were declined because they did not meet the statutory requirement of promoting citizenship skills. One initiative was also unable to demonstrate that the pupils would undergo an uninterrupted process of development. In secondary education there were 16 applications for new schools. The Inspectorate declined 11 of those applications due to the expected quality of education. Seven applicants were unable to demonstrate adequate interest in the proposed new school. Two applications were ultimately approved.

Increase in the number of applications for B3 schools • In recent years, the number of applications to establish B3 schools has risen, particularly in primary education. B3 schools are non-publicly funded schools in primary and secondary education. Pupils cannot take part in the central exam at these secondary schools, but they are able to take the state exam. According to inspectors, the coronavirus pandemic has been a contributing factor to the increase in the number of applications. Parents saw that their children were learning differently and, sometimes, faster. Conversations with a number of the

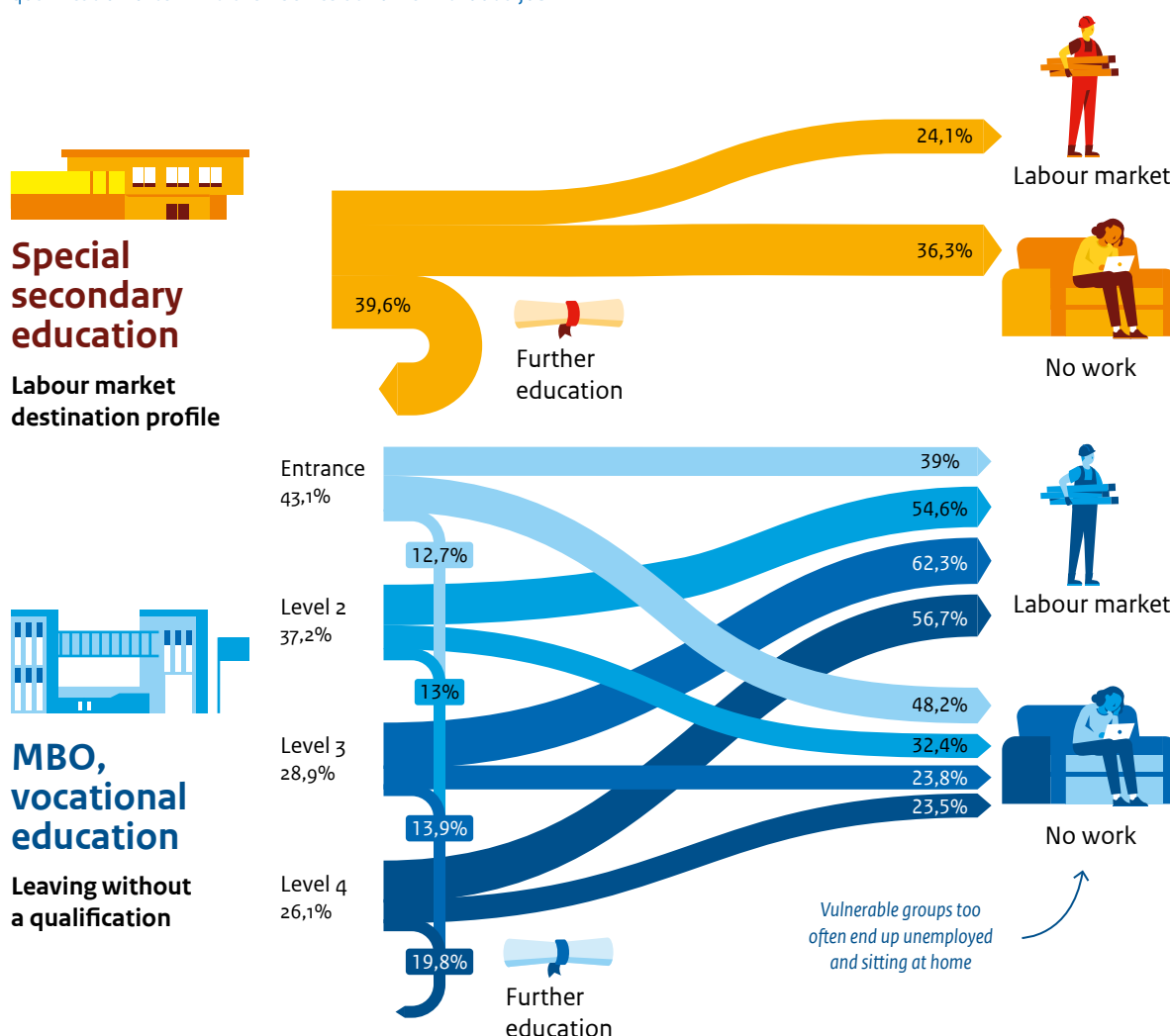
initiators of these non-publicly funded schools show that they favour different methods of learning and teaching, which is sometimes related to a particular way of life or pedagogics. They say that they are establishing B3 schools because of dissatisfaction with the way education is currently organized. The initiators wish to provide a form of education where learning is based on intrinsic motivation with more input from the child, where children learn in mixed age groups, with more active involvement in education by parents, and education fostering more respect for society and nature. Some initiators also mention situations in which (their own) children have become stuck due to a lack of tailored education. The latter motive is also reflected in research into additional and shadow education (Bisschop et al., 2019).

1.1.6 Responding to the labour market

Labour market position varies according to level of education • Unemployment among young people is historically low, but there are large differences in unemployment between those graduating from MBO 1 or below (7%), MBO 2, MBO 3 or MBO 4 graduates (4%) and HBO or university graduates (2%) (SEO, 2022b). A large proportion of young people who left education just before or during the coronavirus pandemic (cohorts leaving in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020) had fewer job opportunities than previous cohorts for a while, but subsequently saw the number of employment opportunities increase rapidly. However, this does not apply to all young people: those who completed special secondary education and MBO 2 have only seen a partial recovery in the number of opportunities, while the number of job opportunities for young people educated at HBO or university level increased during the pandemic (SEO, 2022a; 2022b).

Young people leaving special secondary education struggle to find employment • The employment prospects for students leaving the labour market destination profile remain gloomy. There has been hardly any improvement compared to previous years. Of young people who left special secondary education at the end of 2020-2021 with the labour market destination profile, approximately a quarter (25.7%) found employment immediately after leaving, and 0.8% are employed also in combination with receiving benefits. Of those completing their labour market destination profile, 33.9% proceed to continued education and 16.7% receive benefits. The others have no work and do not receive benefits. Among the cohort of young people who left school three years earlier, only some are in work or training two years after school completion: almost 44% are in education, 21.2% are in employment and 1.8% are in employment and also receive benefits (Inspectorate of Education, 2023p).

Figure 6 Pupils leaving special secondary education, labour market destination profile, and MBO pupils who leave without a qualification often find themselves at home without a job



Source: Inspectorate of Education, 2023i, 2023p; own calculations based on non-public microdata from Statistics Netherlands

Differences in number of jobs On average, graduates from MBO and higher education have three different paid jobs in the first five years after leaving education. There are clear differences between groups of students. For example, students who drop out of MBO have, on average, more than four different jobs, while students with a university Master's degree have slightly less than three jobs. There are differences in the number of jobs that MBO students have in the five years after leaving education. This is partly related to the type of education they completed. Particularly in engineering and technology (e.g. installation engineering, process engineering, mobility technology, health technology), graduates are more likely to have a stable job in the first five years after completing education (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j).

1.2 Teachers and lessons

Main points

Having enough good education professionals is a requirement for providing good education In order to provide good education, we need enough qualified education professionals. Without them, it is not possible to work on improving basic skills, or to promote equal opportunities and inclusive education. However, there is a significant shortage of teachers and school leaders and generally speaking this shortage is continuing to grow. The teacher shortage is acute in a large number of the schools and in certain regions. These are often schools with a high number of vulnerable pupils who are already more likely to fall behind.

Schools are taking various steps to deal with the teacher shortage • Understandably, the focus of many of the schools that we spoke to is primarily on the acute problem that they are facing. Currently, they are managing by extending the hours of existing staff members or taking steps to retain or recruit staff, for example. Some schools are organizing their education differently, increasing class sizes and involving a larger and more diverse range of teaching staff, for instance. School leaders and teaching staff certainly see longer-term opportunities, such as making the teaching profession more attractive, but they are also concerned about teacher workload and the adverse effect this has on pupils. The satisfaction that teachers derive from their work is being undermined.

Teacher shortage shows no signs of going away in the near future • With the exception of primary teacher training and level-one teacher training in HBO, the number of people undergoing teacher training has been declining for years. The dropout rate is also high. The annual number of those qualifying as level-two teachers, particularly from university programmes, is falling. This is concerning, given the context outlined above.

Facilitate better guidance supervision and professional development • In order to retain teachers in the profession, it is important to ensure that there are routes for professional development. This is important for the quality of education and the job satisfaction of teachers themselves. Novice teachers do not always feel adequately equipped to teach the required basic skills, and do not always have the skills they need to support pupils properly. More and (above all) better guidance for novice teachers is needed. The support that is being provided is not always effective because, for instance, it does not match what teachers need. Effective professional development starts with an understanding of which skills need to be improved and requires a good staffing policy that focuses on the professional development of teachers.

We need better monitoring of the quality of lessons • Finding out more about the quality of lessons could also help to professionalize teachers further, and enhance quality assurance in schools. In primary and secondary education, classroom environment and class management are generally in order. But improvement is needed with respect to effective instruction, tailoring education to the learning needs of pupils and self-regulated learning. For example, in order to improve the effectiveness of education, it is important that teachers make it clear enough what the goal of the lesson is. It is also helpful if teachers check whether pupils have understood the goal and content of the lesson.

1.2.1 Teacher shortage

Teacher shortage in primary education and special primary education has increased further, but has eased in special (secondary) education • On 1 October 2022, the teacher shortage in primary education rose to 9.2% of teaching positions, or the equivalent of 7,900 full-time teachers. This includes 'hidden' vacancies – situations where the lack of a teacher is made up for in some other way, such as by using unqualified teachers or merging classes. The teacher shortage has grown since 1 October 2021, when it stood at 8.6% (7,200 full-time teachers). In special primary education, the shortage is even higher than in primary education, in relative terms: 15.2% (700 full-time teachers). This figure has also increased compared to 2021 (13.3%; 600 full-time teachers). The shortage is 9.7% in special (secondary) education (1,100 full-time teachers). That remains high, but is lower than last year, when it was 11.2% (1,300 full-time teachers) (Adriaens et al., 2021; Adriaens et al., 2022b).

Teacher shortage in primary education not evenly distributed across schools • On average, secondary schools have a shortage of 9% of their workforce, but this figure varies considerably between schools. For example, 37% of schools outside the five largest cities (the 'G5') indicate that they have no shortage of teachers. Inside the G5, the proportion reporting no shortage is 11% (Adriaens et al., 2022b). The shortage is particularly acute in Amsterdam, Almere and The Hague, with average teacher shortages of 17.6%, 19.2% and 17.3%, respectively. The teacher shortages in Utrecht (10%) and Rotterdam (8.5%) are around the national average. Teachers' mobility patterns play a role in this: in the period between 2017 and 2021, 1,270 more primary school teachers (FTE) moved from schools in the G5 to schools outside the G5 than vice versa. This exodus has decreased over time, from 417 FTE in 2017-2018 to 205 in 2020-2021 (OCW, 2022c). In addition, primary schools serving a more complex population tend to have a larger teacher shortage than primary schools with an average or low school weighting (Adriaens et al., 2022b).

In primary education the shortage of school leaders is larger than the shortage of teachers • The shortage of school leaders is larger than the shortage of teachers, in proportional terms. In primary education, special primary education and special (secondary) education combined, the shortage of school leaders is 13.6% (1,120 FTE). This shortage is the most acute in special primary education, at 18.4%. It is 13.5% in primary education and 11.8% in special (secondary) education (Adriaens, 2022b). In secondary education there are fewer vacancies for school leaders than there are for teachers, at 11.0% and 23.1%, respectively. In MBO there are about as many vacancies

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for school leaders as there are for teachers, at 9.3% and 9.4%, respectively (De Wilde et al., 2022).

Teacher shortage in secondary education continues to grow

In secondary education, the number of unfilled vacancies was higher last year than in the previous year: 23.1% of all teaching positions were vacant in 2021-2022. The previous year, the figure was 16.9% (De Wilde et al., 2022) and in 2018-2019 it was 10.5%. The rise in the number of vacancies in secondary education is large. In absolute terms (teachers required, FTE), the teacher shortages in Dutch language, numeracy and English language are in the top 3. This is concerning in light of the need to improve basic skills. However, in relative terms (the number of vacancies as a proportion of the total number of teachers required in the subject), the shortage is the most acute in computer science, physics, chemistry and German language. The number of vacancies in MBO has also increased, from 8.8% of teaching positions to 9.4%. In MBO, the greatest shortage was among teachers of Dutch language, followed by teachers of care and wellbeing and teachers of technology (De Wilde et al., 2022). The staff shortage in MBO is expected to stabilize over the next few years as a result of lower pupil numbers, although it is difficult to predict the future supply of teachers in this sector (Adriaens et al., 2022a).

1.2.2 Developments on the labour market in education

Absolute number of staff working in education sector has grown, despite shortage

The number of staff working in the education sector (primary education, special primary education, secondary education, special (secondary) education and MBO) rose from 251,000 in 2017 to 268,000 in 2021 (FTE). This increase is mainly due to additional teaching support staff (an additional 14,000 FTE), the majority of whom work in primary education. The number of teachers grew by more than 3,000 FTE over the same period. The number rose in 2021, in particular. A relatively large proportion of this increase occurred in MBO. The scope of employment contracts hardly changed, on average, in the period 2017-2021. This is around 0.8 FTE for teaching staff and slightly lower for support staff (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j).

Average pupil-teacher ratio is lower, but not in the major cities

Due to the increase in the number of teachers and the slight fall in pupil numbers, the ratio between pupils and teaching staff has come down in most sectors. This is most evident in primary education, secondary education and MBO, but not in special primary education or special (secondary) education. At first glance, this would appear to be inconsistent with the findings regarding the increasing teacher shortage.

However, the fall in the pupil-teacher ratio in primary education is concentrated particularly in areas and schools where the shortage of teachers was already relatively low (OCW, 2022c). The teacher shortage does not affect all schools, cities and regions equally. In the five largest cities, for example, the teacher-pupil ratio in primary education has risen, even though it is on a downward trend for the country as a whole (DUO, 2022b).

New teachers more likely to stay in the profession

The share of newly qualified teachers still working in education after a given number of years is on the rise. In 2015, 76% of those graduating from primary teacher training programmes were still employed in education after one year, while that figure was 90% for those graduating in 2022. Longer-term retention is also increasing. Of those graduating from primary teacher training programmes in 2012, 77% were still employed in education five years later. Among those graduating in 2016, that figure was 85%. Graduates from level-two teacher training programmes are also increasingly likely still to be working in education in the years after they graduate. Among those graduating in 2015, 65% were still employed in education one year later, while for the 2020 cohort the figure was 75%. Retention after five years increased from 65% for the 2012 cohort to 70% for the 2016 cohort (OCW, 2022c). All in all, newly qualified teachers are less likely to leave the profession than was previously the case.

More new teachers have a permanent employment contract and work more hours

Among new teachers, temporary employment contracts are one predictor of whether they will leave the profession (Inspectorate of Education, 2022a). Teachers working in education six months after graduating are increasingly likely to have a permanent employment contract or a temporary employment contract with the prospect of a permanent contract. The increase is particularly sharp in primary education: among those graduating in 2015 the figure was 33%, while among those graduating in 2021 the figure had risen to 80%. The same trend is evident in secondary education and MBO, although the rise in the share of permanent employment contracts is less pronounced. In secondary education the number rose from 74% to 80% and in MBO it rose from 72% to 77% (De Vos et al., 2022). There has also been a sharp increase in the number of hours worked by new teachers in recent years. The percentage of young teachers who are working full-time (defined as >0.8 FTE) one year after graduating has risen from 49% (2013 cohort) to 80% (2020 cohort) among graduates from primary teacher training programmes. Among those graduating from level-two teacher training programmes, the percentage rose from 56% to 62% over the same period.

Numbers joining teacher training programmes is falling • Apart from primary teacher training programmes, the numbers joining almost all types of teacher training programmes is declining compared to ten years ago (Inspectorate of Education, 2023). Given the teacher shortage, the decline in the number of those training to be language and science teachers is a particular cause for concern. In addition, both level-two teacher training programmes and primary teacher training programmes are seeing a higher dropout rate and more students are switching to a different programme in the first year.

Those graduating from primary teacher training programmes is stable, fewer graduating from level-two teacher training programmes • The number of primary teaching diplomas awarded has been fairly constant over the past seven years at around 3,800 diplomas per year. In 2021-2022, the number of diplomas awarded by level-two teacher training programmes fell by 17% compared to the previous year. The number of diplomas awarded every year by university teacher training programmes has fallen for six consecutive

years, with the exception of a one-off uptick in the year 2020-2021 (Inspectorate of Education, 2023). If these trends in the number of new teachers graduating continue, the number of newly qualified teachers is not expected to resolve the teacher shortage in the near future (Adriaens et al., 2022).

1.2.3 Coping with the teacher shortage

Schools are taking various measures to cope with the teacher shortage • The Inspectorate spoke with school managers and teaching staff at 16 schools that are contending with a teacher shortage (ten primary schools, four secondary schools and two schools in special education). The subjects discussed included how the schools are coping with the teacher shortage in practice, what steps they are taking and the (expected) effects on the quality of education. In many of the schools surveyed, the focus is on the acute problem that has to be resolved: filling the gaps caused by staff shortages. The steps being taken include asking teaching support staff, management team members, trainee teachers, retirees or (other) externals to teach classes,

Figure 7 Various steps are being taken by schools to deal with the teacher shortage



Teachers and lessons

as well as extending the number of hours that teachers work and combining classes. In addition, some schools are focusing on retaining their existing staff (e.g. by offering opportunities for professional development and taking measures to reduce their workload), and on recruiting new staff. When it comes to recruiting new staff members, schools mention job fairs, registration as a training school or wider advertising campaigns (Inspectorate of Education, 2023t).

Alternative approaches to organizing education •

Of the 16 schools surveyed, some schools indicated that they are organizing their education differently – using a different structure and a different mix of staff, for example. Examples include learning plazas/education units, larger groups of pupils with a larger and more diverse pool of staff members and the use of technology such as remote learning. These measures may have an effect on the demand for teachers in the longer term. They require a thoughtful approach, with proper preparation and careful implementation (Inspectorate of Education, 2023t).

School leaders and teachers see opportunities to tackle the teacher shortage • According to many of the school leaders and teaching staff at the 16 schools surveyed, it is important to generate more enthusiasm for the teaching profession. Some believe that teacher training programmes could also be made more attractive (by enabling paid internships or social internships, for instance) and ensuring that professional practice is reflected more accurately. The image of the profession could also be improved, as well as staff retention. According to some of the schools surveyed, it would help to reduce workload (and improve quality of education) if the teachers could focus more on their core tasks (Inspectorate of Education, 2023t).

Concerns regarding impact on quality of education and workload • The 16 schools surveyed are concerned about the possible impact of the teacher shortage, including adverse outcomes for pupils, lower quality of education, lower results and less attention for special needs students. Some schools indicate that the quality of education remains largely safeguarded and that there are also opportunities. But they are concerned too – for example, regarding the disappearance of funding from the National Education Programme, finding new staff and the quality of education for special needs students. Several of the schools surveyed indicated that staff wellbeing and job satisfaction is being adversely affected by the number of additional responsibilities they are having to take on (including training new colleagues) and the increased workload as a consequence. There are concerns about colleagues leaving the profession

and there is uncertainty about how long the shortages will continue. Some schools indicate that support from colleagues can help and that the measures being taken can also provide relief: smarter ways of organizing education may provide some breathing space and more diversity in the background of teaching staff brings in more varied expertise, for instance (Inspectorate of Education, 2023t).

Schools see legal requirements as impediment •

Several of the schools surveyed see the legal requirement for a qualified teacher in the class at all times as a millstone. In their view, it should be possible to safeguard the quality and competence of potential candidates using an admission test, for instance. Some schools also indicate that the transition programme for those joining the teaching profession from a different previous career, for example, and the transition from teaching assistant to full teacher require too much time and energy over and above existing responsibilities, due to the often limited exemptions. Other schools argued for more flexibility in terms of education and teaching time, too (Inspectorate of Education, 2023t).

Certificate of Good Conduct is sometimes lacking •

Schools sometimes have to deal with situations where a replacement teacher is required at very short notice, but then discover that a suitable substitute does not yet have the required Certificate of Good Conduct. This can mean that they have to send pupils home. For two consecutive years (both in 2020 and 2021), the accountant reported that in the case of 889 school governing boards, no Certificate of Good Conduct was available when required for one or more staff members (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j). Speaking with school governing boards, inspectors hear that these were often substitutes who were asked to teach urgently and for whom a Certificate of Good Conduct application was submitted. The certificate usually takes 1 or 2 weeks to arrive. It would be sensible for stand-in pools and employment agencies for teaching staff to ensure that their potential teaching staff always have a Certificate of Good Conduct and that this is updated every six months. This will enable temporary staff to be deployed to schools at very short notice.

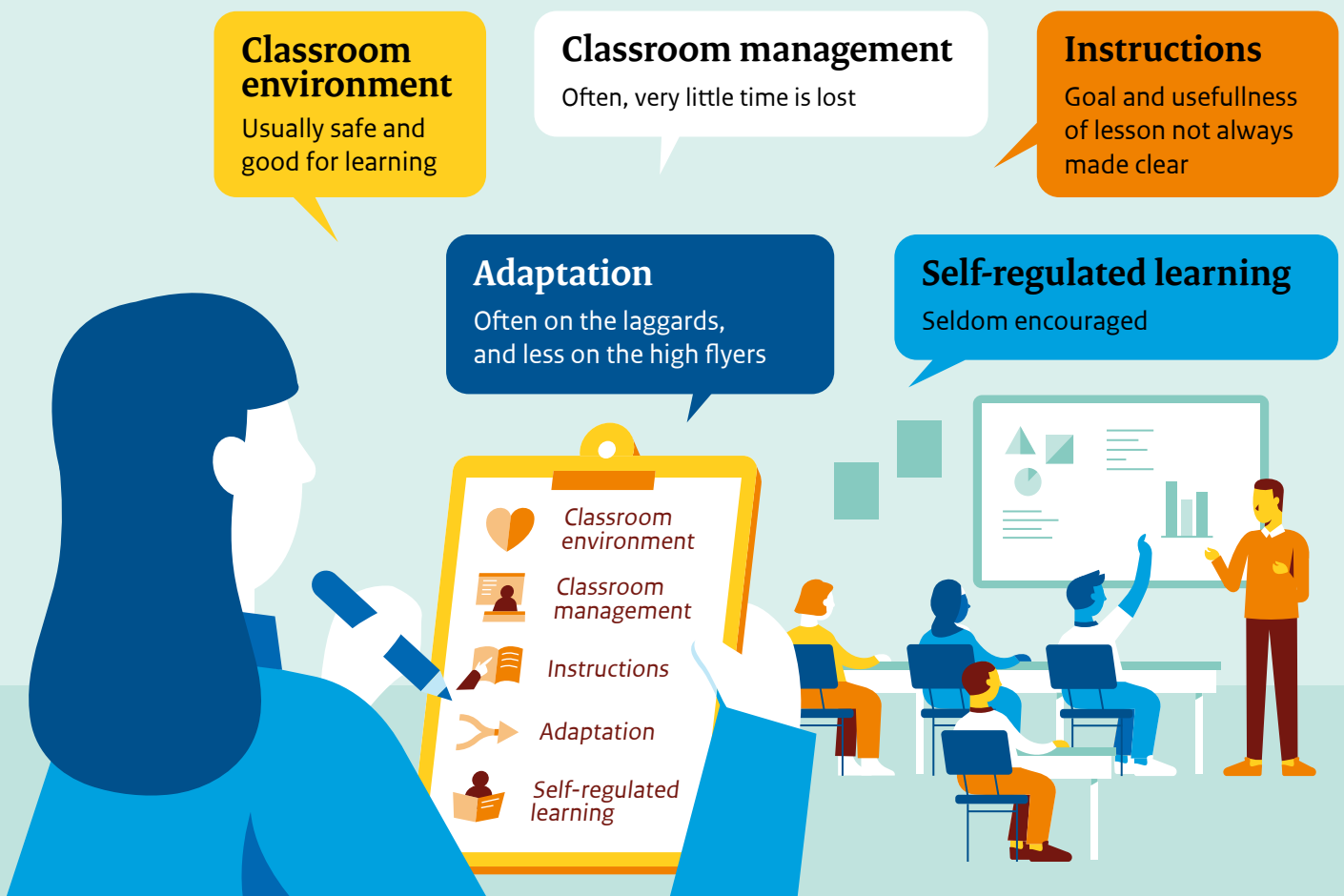


Figure 8 Insight into lesson quality

1.2.4 Professionalization and retention of teaching staff

Professionalization of teachers is important • Professionalization among teachers can improve the quality of education and learning outcomes for pupils and students (Sims et al., 2021). Teachers in the Netherlands spend a lot of time on professional development, compared to teachers in other European countries (Vrieling et al., 2022). Nevertheless, teachers sometimes experience barriers when it comes to their professional development. Frequently mentioned reasons for not participating in professionalization activities are lack of time, cost, no suitable options, too little support from their employer and lack of encouragement (Vrieling et al., 2022). Almost all teachers do participate in formal and/or informal professional development activities every year, such as taking part in a course, consulting colleagues about educational improvements or attending a conference (Vrieling et al., 2022). However, many of the professionalization activities offered have not been proven to be effective (Sims et al., 2021). Professional development is most effective when it builds on teachers' existing knowledge; provides an opportunity to try out new ideas in the classroom; meets personal development needs; provides opportunities for active learning; provides the opportunity to learn collaboratively;

and focuses on innovation in teaching (Vrieling et al., 2022). It is important that the content of professional development activities matches teachers' development needs. This is an important task for school governing boards that facilitate professionalization opportunities with a clear policy and ensure a safe learning culture within the school/organization (Schenke et al., 2022; Van Geel et al., 2022).

1.2.5 Quality of teachers and lessons

Lesson quality in focus • The quality of the lessons is essential to the learning process. It is therefore important to have a clear picture of teaching quality. This tells us what teachers are good at, and also where there is room for improvement. This insight can be used in teacher training programmes, ongoing teacher professionalization and quality assurance in schools. To gain a better understanding of lesson quality, in 2021 and 2022 we observed lessons at a representative group of primary and secondary schools using a lesson observation instrument that is based on the features of effective lessons: classroom environment, class management, instruction, coordination and self-regulated learning (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2015; Inspectorate of Education, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e, 2023e).

Teachers and lessons

Satisfactory classroom environment and classroom management in primary education, special (secondary) education and secondary education

• Across primary education, special (secondary) education and secondary education, inspectors saw comparable results with regard to the classroom environment and classroom management (Inspectorate of Education, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e, 2023e). In the majority of lessons, teachers make pupils feel safe, encourage them to learn and create a pleasant working environment – this was observed in 85-95% of lessons. Teachers also generally ensure that lessons are organized in such a way that pupils listen and participate. They use lesson time efficiently (80-90%). In secondary education, however, fewer features of an effective classroom environment and class management are present than in primary education and special (secondary) education. Notably, teachers do not always communicate high expectations to all pupils. In 20 to 25% of lessons, teachers do not always show that students can be good at the subject being taught, even though this is an important way of tackling inequality of opportunities, for instance (Rubie-Davies, 2014).

Room for improvement on instruction, coordination and self-regulated learning

• In primary education, special (secondary) education and secondary education, not all the features of effective instruction were evident in the lessons observed. The teaching material is usually explained clearly (80-85%) and sufficient time is given to practise using the material (80-90%). However, the aim of the lesson is not always stated (60-70%) and teachers do not always reflect on what has been learned at the end of the lesson (40-50%). This is necessary in order to show what the focus of the lesson was. Furthermore, pupils are not always told why they need to learn what they are going to learn (30-35%), even though this is important to ensure that they are motivated to learn. Across all sectors, teachers do not ask many questions to encourage pupils to reflect more deeply during lessons (40-55%). At the same time, it appears that teachers seldom adapt their lesson (instruction, tempo and processing) for pupils who already understand the lesson material (35-40%). The question is therefore whether pupils who benefit from a greater challenge are getting the education they need. Adjusting lessons according to differences between pupils remains challenging, and several times already we have stated that adjusting teaching and practice assignments to various learning needs is an area where improvement is needed (Inspectorate of Education, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e, 2023e).

A range of factors are associated with variations in lesson quality

• A number of factors are associated with variations in lesson quality. These factors vary between sectors (Inspectorate of Education, 2022c,

2022d, 2022e, 2023e). In primary education, inspectors see more features of effective instruction in the upper years than in the middle and lower years. In special education there are fewer features of effective lessons in combined groups than in age-based groups. In special secondary education, inspectors saw fewer features of effective instruction during social education lessons than during maths lessons. In secondary education, effective classroom management is less common in VMBO-B/K than in HAVO, and inspectors saw fewer features of effective instruction in upper years than in lower years (also see sections 2, 3 and 4).

Concerns over teaching skills in literacy and numeracy

• In teacher training programmes, the teacher training curriculum requires more attention. Among those training to become primary teachers who took part in the national knowledge base tests in the academic year 2020-2021, 69% passed the Dutch language test the first time, and 73% passed the maths test (10voordeleaar, 2022). New teachers who have completed VWO got higher marks on the national knowledge base tests than new teachers who have completed MBO or HAVO (Inspectorate of Education, 2023k). Teacher trainers working in teacher training programmes for primary education believe that the subject teaching skills of some graduates are not where they need to be in some areas of literacy and numeracy. More than half believe that this applies to at least 20% of graduates when it comes to the ability to explain how to identify the grammatical subject of a sentence (part of literacy) and measuring (part of numeracy) (Education Council, 2022). Some new primary school teachers also indicate that they do not have enough knowledge and skills to explain certain aspects of literacy (reading skills: 13.1%, speaking skills: 8.9%, writing skills: 16.3% and use of language: 9.2%) and numeracy (numbers: 4.4%, measuring: 11.2%, equations: 13.4% and ratios: 12.0%) clearly. Only just over half of new teachers indicate that they have had sufficient guidance on applying teaching methods in literacy (55.6%) and numeracy (59.6%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2023k).

More work required on differentiation skills and providing guidance for new teachers

• Ensuring that classroom activities reflect relevant differences between pupils has a positive influence on pupil attainment (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2015) and is an important aspect of achieving equal opportunities. However, not all new teachers report having enough knowledge and skills to be able to differentiate effectively between pupils. This may mean that they have difficulty monitoring students systematically or adapting their lessons to pupils who are ahead of or behind the average. Some school leaders are also critical of the differentiation skills of new teachers (Inspectorate of Education, 2023k). In 2015 and 2016,



Figure 9 New teachers do not feel adequately prepared

following a survey of newly qualified teachers, an appeal was made to establish a continuous learning pathway to help new teachers to continue developing their differentiation skills (Inspectorate of Education, 2015). However, according to new teachers, only a minority of schools provide this kind of focused guidance in order to improve differentiation skills (Inspectorate of Education, 2023k).

Some new teachers feel inadequately prepared for certain components • At the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, we asked new teachers (316 in primary education and 247 in secondary education) about how prepared they felt for a number of important aspects of teaching. The majority of these new teachers felt adequately prepared for pedagogical activities (primary education: 89.1% and secondary education: 80.4%) and didactic activities (primary education: 89.5% and secondary education: 84.9%). However, a proportion (one third or more) of new teachers did not feel adequately prepared for certain aspects of practice. In primary education, this was particularly the case for working with parents and the use of digital resources in didactics. In secondary education, this mainly concerned supervising pupils, equipping pupils to participate in a diverse and democratic society (citizenship skills) and working within the school organization. When it comes to the guidance

provided, however, the majority of schools focus on skills that new teachers say that they already have, and less frequently on the areas that the new teachers feel less well prepared for (Inspectorate of Education, 2023k).

Preparation for providing additional support could be improved • A large majority of teachers indicate that working with pupils with special educational needs involves an increased workload. Primary teachers indicate that one specific pupil with special educational needs requires over 80 hours per year outside lesson times. These additional hours are spent on incidental and structural activities in order to organize the additional support required. In the experience of primary school teachers, not enough time is available to supervise pupils with special educational needs. The majority of teachers felt adequately equipped to provide inclusive education to the pupil in question (Inspectorate of Education, 2023v). In order to provide inclusive education, it is important that teachers have the knowledge and skills required to provide extra support. However, not all new teachers indicate that they feel adequately prepared to adapt their didactic activities (primary education: 70.4% and secondary education: 58.4%) and pedagogical activities (primary education: 71.9% and secondary education: 59.9%) for students with special educational needs (Inspectorate of Education, 2023k).

1.2.6 Curriculum

In numeracy, 60-80% of target-level topics are covered • It is not only teachers who are important to the pupil's learning process, but also the topics that are covered. The curriculum has a major impact on pupils' learning outcomes (Marzano, 2013; Scheerens, 2013). However, we have limited insight into the curriculum that schools provide. At the end of the 2021-2022 school year, we asked teachers and pupils at a representative sample of primary and secondary schools about numeracy teaching provided at the target level (see inset for the reference levels). According to most pupils and teachers in group 8 of primary education (80% or more) and secondary education (60% or more), the majority of numeracy topics had been covered at target level (15) that school year. In secondary education (year 3 of VMBO-G/T, HAVO and VWO), at least 70% of pupils and teachers indicated that most numeracy topics had been covered at the target level (≥5) that school year. However, the teachers were more likely to indicate that most of the target level numeracy topics had been covered than the pupils were (Inspectorate of Education, 2023k).

Pupils may not always recognize the curriculum • Generally, teachers' idea of the math topics covered in the lessons coincided with that of pupils. The topics most often reported as not having been covered were usually the same for the teachers and the pupils. However, in some cases the pupils indicated much more often than teachers that certain topics had not been covered (Inspectorate of Education, 2023q). This difference in perceptions could be due to several reasons. It may mean that pupils did not fully understand what the numeracy lesson was about – possibly because the teacher did not state this clearly enough. Teachers do not always state the goals of a lesson, and at the end of the lesson they do not always reflect on what has been learned (Inspectorate of Education, 2023q). The difference may also be because the teacher has adapted the curriculum to the level of individual pupils, and that some pupils only covered the material at the basic level and not at the target level. This is a risk in terms of equal opportunities: if the level of material covered is adjusted downwards too readily, pupils will not have enough opportunity to master the subject matter at a higher level. Finally, it is possible that pupils do not recognize the material at the target level as numeracy – in secondary education, for example, the target level focuses less on everyday arithmetic and more on pure mathematics.

Inspiration from across the border: the curriculum is at the heart of school supervision in England

In 2017, Ofsted, the education inspectorate in England, shifted its focus from learning outcomes to the school curriculum. The English national curriculum is described in broad terms, with goals set for each phase. This gives schools and teachers considerable scope for interpretation.

English schools must be able to explain how they have translated the national curriculum into their own school's curriculum and why they have done it in that way. The supervision of the school curriculum is based on scientific research. This shows that a wide and varied curriculum is essential for the development and opportunities for pupils, especially those whose situation at home is less encouraging. According to this research, pupils achieve better results in language and maths when the range is broad and varied. It is particularly important that subjects and skills are covered in a coherent and targeted way. Ofsted inspectors receive intensive training in the field of cognitive learning psychology so that they can recognize the features of effective lessons, for instance.

During each inspection visit, Ofsted inspectors look at what the school aims to offer its pupils (intent), how the curriculum is actually taught in the classroom (implementation) and what impact the school achieves through this (impact). Inspectors conduct 'deep dives' to investigate what pupils are learning in a number of subject areas. These deep dives consist of lesson observations, inspecting pupils' school books and talking with teachers and pupils. Inspectors always look at the teaching of reading during inspections. They then select further subject areas for inspection based on the meeting held with school management.

Since 2017, Ofsted has placed much less emphasis on central exam results in its supervision. The results of the deep dives largely determine the assessment of the impact of education on the knowledge and skills of pupils. One of the reasons for choosing this method is that central exams only measure one part of the curriculum. Focusing on these exams in supervision can lead to 'teaching to the test' and a narrowing of the actual curriculum. However, exam results are used for risk-analysis purposes, to determine in advance which schools will be visited. In practice there is a connection; schools that achieve better exam results almost always provide good

quality education and the pupils there are learning what they need to learn.

To help schools put in place a good school curriculum, Ofsted publishes reports, videos, podcasts and other material according to subject area ('subject reports'), supported by scientific research into the most effective ways of ensuring that pupils learn.

Literacy teaching in primary education and special primary education focuses mainly on reading comprehension and technical reading

Teachers in primary education and special primary education spend more than 7.5 and 8.5 hours a week, respectively, on targeted literacy teaching. The time spent varies considerably between schools: the 10% of teachers who spend the most time on reading, spend (over) 12 hours (in primary education) and 13 hours (in special primary education) per week on reading skills. The 10% of teachers who spend the least time, spend (under) 4 hours (primary education) and 5 hours (special primary education) on reading per week. Teachers spend the most time on reading comprehension and advanced technical reading, and the least time on vocabulary. A majority of teachers in primary and special primary education regularly combine reading comprehension with other subjects. More integration with other subjects is associated with more advanced reading skills among pupils. The Education Council, among others, therefore argues for more and better integration of literacy (and numeracy) with other subjects (Education Council, 2022). The use of texts about an interesting subject is also associated with better developed reading skills: the more interesting that pupils find the texts and lessons in reading comprehension, the higher scores they achieve for reading (Inspectorate of Education, 2022f).

Education in citizenship in primary education and special primary education focuses mainly on personal development and social interaction

Teachers in special primary education and primary education say that they spend an average of around four hours a week on education in citizenship. This is most often addressed through the way people interact and the overall atmosphere at the school (school culture). At approximately 20% of the schools in (special) primary education, education in citizenship is designated as a subject in its own right or as a separate part of the curriculum. Goals associated with personal development and social interaction, such as learning how to resolve conflicts, receive the most attention. Learning goals that relate to societal involvement receive the least attention, in relative terms, and are more likely to be formulated

in broader terms. Around 1 in 5 school leaders and teachers in (special) primary education find it difficult to implement education in citizenship (Inspectorate of Education, 2023g).

1.3 Management of education and finances

Main points

Development of a professional quality culture among school governing boards is required • Governing boards have primary responsibility for the quality of education at their schools and institutions. This means that they continuously need to know which goals they are aiming to achieve through the education they provide to all pupils and students, the extent to which those goals are being achieved, which improvements are required, and whether their actions are having the desired effect. Based on this information, new goals should be set or existing goals adjusted. While there are examples of school governing boards where this cycle works very effectively, by no means every governing board completes it in full. Good governance is nurtured by a trio of the school governing board, internal supervision and parent and student participation. Among the school governing boards in primary and secondary education that we visited last year, over a quarter were assessed as unsatisfactory. Student participation can help boards to make the right decisions and make progress on improving quality, but involving students has proven difficult in practice.

Structural problems require structural investment • Education receives lump-sum funding, but school governing boards also receive a lot of incidental funding from various sources. This funding is very welcome, but sometimes it can have unintended side effects. It is difficult to tackle the structural problems in education sustainably using incidental funding. In addition, acquiring this funding requires knowledge and sometimes a great deal of administrative work, and it is not always clear whether the funds end up where they are needed the most. It would be useful to check whether more funding can be made structural in nature.

Policy-oriented multi-year budgets are required • School governing boards are in the process of reducing their reserves. Negative budgets must be set in order to achieve this. Many boards are budgeting accordingly, but most end up actually spending less than their annual budget. As a result, boards are not reducing their capital reserves, or by less than intended. The scale of



excess capital reserves increased in 2021. An important factor in this was funding from the National Education Programme which had been received but not yet spent. However, factors such as aversion to loss and uncertainty concerning the amounts to be received also play a role when setting a budget. Better monitoring of targets and a longer-term focus within the planning and control cycle can help. School governing boards could make improvements by drawing up multi-year budgets that well reflect policy aims. This includes setting clear goals and ensuring a link between funding and achieving those goals. This may also improve management and accountability with respect to the efficient use of resources. There is also an important role for internal supervision, which needs to be improved because often there are no clear lines of responsibility in the way supervision is structured.

Quality assurance is also not always organized properly in inter-institutional partnerships •

Inter-institutional partnerships are responsible for, among other things, providing a comprehensive range of facilities for pupils with special educational needs. But in both primary and secondary education, only some partnerships achieve this. In cases where this is not being achieved, pupils risk ending up on waiting lists for special education, which means they are not receiving the education they need for a period of time.

Support resources for pupils with special educational needs, sometimes end up elsewhere •

When allocating support resources to school governing boards, inter-institutional partnerships often assume that all schools have an equal number of pupils with special educational needs. However, in practice this is not the case, and as a result support resources go not only to pupils with special educational needs but also to other pupils. Accountability regarding resources for inclusive education is inadequate, in a qualitative sense. Both school governing boards and inter-institutional partnerships report very little on the results achieved and the effect on pupils. Better accountability is required in order to be able to manage the efficient use of resources. Internal supervision of the way in which funds are spent in inter-institutional partnerships also requires improvement.

1.3.1 Quality

Quality of school governing boards

Quality assurance cycle not always completed in full •

School governing boards are responsible for the quality of education in their schools and institutions. In 2022, some boards were inspected using the new inspection

framework (2021). For slightly over a quarter of primary school boards, the Inspectorate's overall judgement was unsatisfactory. In secondary education, ten out of the 47 boards examined were judged unsatisfactory and in special (secondary) education seven of the 18 boards examined were judged unsatisfactory (Inspectorate of Education, 2023n; 2023o; 2023p). No comparison with the past is possible due to the change in the inspection framework. In previous years, we reported that, depending on the sector, 15-30% of governing boards were not providing adequate quality assurance (Inspectorate of Education, 2020; 2021; 2022a). Neither do the figures based on the new framework provide a more positive picture: many governing boards are not implementing (aspects of) the quality assurance cycle effectively. Many of them are not in a position to oversee quality improvements properly. This is sometimes due to the lack of a detailed picture of the quality of education, and therefore also the lack of a systematic evaluation of quality. Sometimes the ambitions and goals are not concrete enough or there is no quality culture. The school governing boards and schools that we spoke to regarding basic skills also mentioned that completing the full quality assurance cycle is a success factor: cyclical working with clear goals, proper analysis and evaluations based on the available data (Inspectorate of Education, 2023r). Some governing boards do complete the full quality assurance cycle. These received a 'good' appraisal. In primary education, 7% of boards received this appraisal, and in special (secondary) education 3 of the 18 boards did. No boards received a good appraisal in secondary education.

Student participation in improving quality is limited •

MBO institutions were also inspected using the new inspection framework. In government-funded MBO, one of the 16 institutions inspected received an unsatisfactory judgment. In non-publicly funded MBO, five of the 23 institutions inspected received an unsatisfactory judgment. An important factor in active quality improvement is the interplay between the governing board, supervisory board, works council and student council. When these bodies work closely together, better-informed decisions are made (Goodijk, 2017). The importance of working together is not always recognized, however, and is not always a point of attention for governing boards and supervisory boards. As a result, supervisory boards do not always have a clear picture of what is going on in the educational programmes. Differences between educational programmes in MBO exist when it comes to facilitating and organizing participation, meaning it is not always easy for students to participate (Inspectorate of Education 2023X). In higher education, steps to promote participation in decision-making have already been taken, such as better

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facilitation, better provision of information, reinforcing the culture of openness and professionalization. But this has not led to greater student involvement in participatory bodies. Students in higher education are not always aware of their programme committee (Inspectorate of Education, 2023s) and not many of them vote in elections of participatory bodies (Inspectorate of Education, 2019). In order to achieve quality improvements in which the perspective of students is taken into account, it is important to rethink the way in which students are involved.

Quality of schools and childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands

Most schools meet basic quality requirements

Most schools in the Caribbean Netherlands – Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba – have achieved basic quality requirements in recent years. Many have increased their awareness of quality, and there is a collective will to improve quality. Increasingly, this is manifesting itself in a professional quality culture and the improvement of certain aspects of the teaching-learning process. The expertise centres in the field of education and care meet basic quality requirements on the three islands, and play an important role in supporting schools with respect to specific care and support needs (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b).

Quality of education is vulnerable • The quality of education at the schools is variable and, in part, vulnerable. Primary schools in particular have difficulty maintaining quality. The fluctuating quality of education relates in part to the quality of the management provided by school governing boards and school management. Schools where basic quality requirements are not guaranteed adequately have all had to deal with management discontinuity. The lack of administrative experience and educational leadership is an issue for some schools. There is also a lack of professional support of school governing boards. Other factors that can affect the quality of education include the diversity of the pupil population, an increase in the number of pupils with complex care needs and/or a vulnerable home situation, increasing poverty and the lack of special education on the islands. As a result, schools have to handle numerous care issues in the classroom, which the teachers are often not adequately equipped to cope with without extra support. As a result, they are unable to offer tailored education for pupils with specific learning or care needs. In addition, the number of Spanish-speaking pupils on the islands is increasing. As well as giving rise to literacy problems, this increase is also associated with specific support needs (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b).

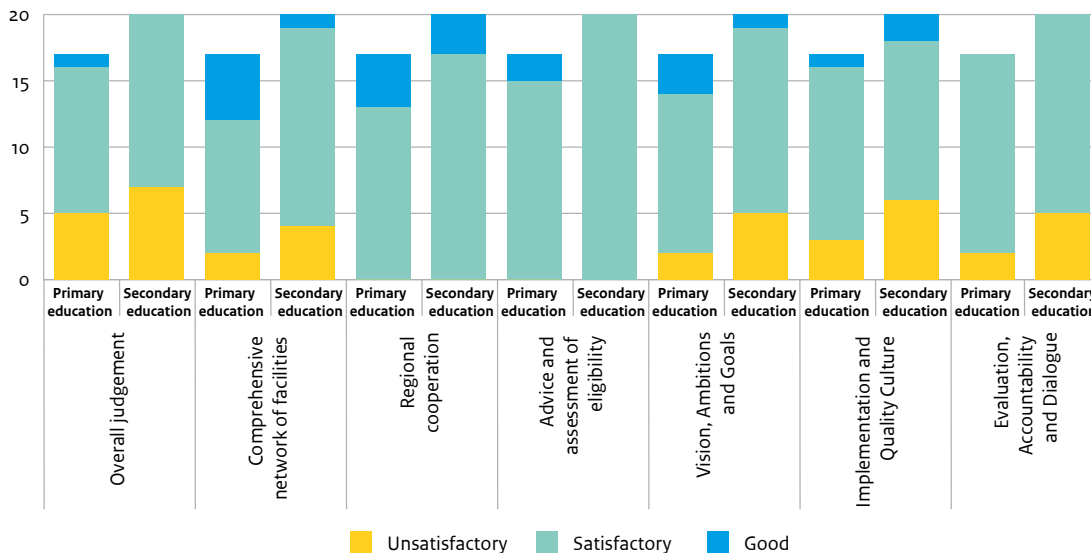
Variety in the quality of childcare provided • We also evaluated the quality of childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands at all 68 locations for day care, out-of-school care and host parent care. Together with the local inspectorate, we looked at whether each childcare facility meets the relevant requirements for administration, staff and accommodation, whether the children's development is promoted adequately, whether the locations are safe and healthy for children and whether management is focusing on quality improvements. A great deal has already been achieved: we see growth, potential and a high degree of commitment. Even so, there remains a long way to go. Many locations do not yet meet the relevant standards. The quality achieved so far varies between locations. There are significant differences and risks in the buildings occupied by the various facilities, as well as in the level of education among staff and the available play and development facilities. It is essential that owners comply with requirements that affect the health and safety of children – such as up-to-date Certificates of Good Conduct – as rapidly as possible (Inspectorate of Education, 2023c).

Quality of inter-institutional partnerships

Variation in governance regarding quality between inter-institutional partnerships in primary and secondary education

• Inter-institutional partnerships in secondary education are more likely to be judged as unsatisfactory, and less likely to receive a good appraisal than those in primary education (figure 10). Frequently, the (internal) organization of the inter-institutional partnerships in secondary education is found to be ineffective. If partnerships fail to meet standards relating to governance, quality assurance and ambition, and implementation and quality culture, this means that a system of quality assurance is lacking or not being implemented adequately in practice in order to ensure that the statutory duties of the partnership are being fulfilled. Not only is improvement required, but this is essential in order to ensure that more inclusive education can be achieved in the years to come. Goals and intended results must be formulated in more specific terms. In addition, partnerships and school governing boards must ensure they have a better picture of whether pupils with special educational needs are receiving the most appropriate education on the basis of the support available in the region (Inspectorate of Education, 2023v). It also helps when the government formulates clear and concrete frameworks and objectives, so that inter-institutional partnerships can translate these into policy and agreements for their own region.

Figure 10 Judgements regarding inter-institutional partnerships in primary and secondary education (in numbers)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2023p).

It is becoming increasingly difficult to provide suitable places for pupils

It is proving to be increasingly difficult to ensure that a suitable place is available for pupils who need extra support. In the period September 2021 to December 2022, the Inspectorate judged the comprehensive network of facilities at six of the 37 inter-institutional partnerships to be unsatisfactory. Last year, we reported that almost all inter-institutional partnerships had achieved a comprehensive network (Inspectorate of Education, 2022a). In six of the 37 inter-institutional partnerships, the implementation of this statutory task was rated as good. It is therefore not the case that it is impossible to achieve this goal. One aspect of a comprehensive network is ensuring sufficient capacity in special education. Waiting lists can arise when this capacity is inadequate. It is not clear yet where there are waiting lists or how long they are. A monitor survey was sent out to inter-institutional partnerships at the end of 2022 to get a better picture of this. This is key information because suitable teaching places in specialized education must be available for pupils who need them. The sooner we have a clear picture of any waiting lists and their underlying causes, the sooner those responsible can start working to resolve them.

1.3.2 Financial management

Incidental funding

Lump-sum funding makes up the majority of funding

Public funding for education is provided largely in the form of lump-sum funding. Essentially, this involves the

disbursement of funding to a school governing board by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. In most sectors of education, the amount is based on the number of pupils. In MBO and higher education, the number of diplomas awarded is used as well. Each governing board then decides for itself how this funding is spent on education. This reflects two key principles: the autonomy of educational institutions and stable funding, so that the board can set policy for the longer term and thus also ensure continuity of education. In 2018, the Education Council recommended continuing to work with lump-sum funding and to exercise restraint in the use of targeted funding in the form of supplementary funding, special funding and grants (Education Council, 2018). Partly as a result of the Council’s report, lump-sum funding for primary and secondary education has recently been simplified. This helps improve the predictability of school funding.

No reduction in targeted funding yet

In recent years, the Ministry has also provided targeted funding (additional targeted funding and grants) on a regular basis. Most notably, this includes workload funding, funding from the National Education Programme and grants for improving basic skills. Other targeted funding includes grants for providing breakfast at school. A large number of other types of grants are available. These not only come from national government but also from municipalities, with larger municipalities sometimes providing a range of different grants. There are also grants from regions (e.g. in the field of technical education), from Europe and from other affiliated


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organizations. At present, no reduction in the provision of targeted funding is evident. It is not easy for school governing boards to get a comprehensive picture of all the schemes available. These are aimed at various types of applicants (particularly school governing boards, schools, teachers) and apply various models of accountability. Annual reports show that school governing boards have to account for numerous specific funding sources. These include not only funding from central government, but many other sources too.

Extra funding is welcome, but it can also have unintended effects • For many school governing boards, the availability of targeted funding is certainly welcome and helps them to address acute bottlenecks. For instance, it enables them to launch new initiatives or to take on new staff temporarily. It also ensures there is enough money for the educational activities that are required. In addition, in some cases the allocation method itself leads to quality improvements. One example is the funding from the National Education Programme, which required a clear problem analysis and emphasized evidence-based measures. This approach has added value, because it ensures a clear link between goals and funding. It also provides a good basis for accountability. Sometimes there can also be unintended effects, however. In our research into how schools are coping with the teacher shortage, some of the 16 schools surveyed indicated that the funding from the National Education Programme had actually exacerbated the teacher shortage. Because all schools were fishing in the same pond, some teachers left for other schools, particularly those serving a less complex pupil population (Inspectorate of Education, 2023t).

It is difficult to achieve structural goals using incidental funding • The use of targeted funding also has disadvantages. It is not long-term in nature and, in the case of grants, it cannot be assumed that the funds will actually be awarded. The main goals for the education system at which this funding is often aimed – enhancing equality of opportunities, achieving inclusive education and improving basic skills – are structural in nature and require school governing boards to adopt a long-term strategy. These goals can be achieved on a more sustainable basis if funding is also provided on a structural basis. The associate structural requirements (staff on permanent contracts and long-term investments) cannot be achieved using funding that is incidental in nature. One example is that many school governing boards and schools are having to operate with fewer staff after the funding from the National Education Programme has been spent, even though the scale of the education that they need to provide has not become any smaller. In addition, targeted funding places greater pressure on school governing boards due to the

conditions attached to spending the money and the period within which it must be spent. As a result, those conditions – rather than substantive requirements – determine decisions regarding the use of such resources. It does not help when grants are frequently awarded late and sometimes with retroactive effect. The temporary and uncertain nature of targeted funding makes multi-annual budgeting (and the systematic reduction of reserves) difficult for school governing boards, even though they are expected to take action on these points.

A large number of smaller grant schemes can lead to unnecessary bureaucracy • The funding provided through the National Education Programme is substantial. Many other schemes involve relatively small amounts which add up to no more than a few percent of the total funding available to boards. Together, they can lead to an administrative burden (sometimes significant) with respect to designing, requesting, monitoring and reporting. It also takes time to build up and maintain knowledge about these schemes. It is right to ask whether the relationship between the amounts of funding available and the administrative burden is still proportionate.

It is unclear whether funding ends up where it is needed most • In order to acquire a grant, schools must actively apply for it. This means that the distribution of funding depends on the capacity and knowledge of the school governing boards or schools to apply for it. Due to too many applications, the funding for basic skills was awarded using a lottery among applicants. Within each sector, part of the funding from the National Education Programme was distributed to all governing boards equally. Another part was linked to the problems identified in each type of education and pupil population. In addition, the availability of municipal grants also varies significantly. As a consequence of these varied methods of distribution, funding is not always allocated according to actual need. As such, efficiency is not adequately guaranteed at the system level.

Reinforcing the structural nature of funding • The simplification of funding in primary and secondary education has reduced some of the complexity and uncertainty of funding from national government. We appeal for an examination of how the structural nature of funding could be increased further still, so that schools can develop management strategies and long-term policies. Funding from national government and municipalities should be the main focus, because these bodies are responsible for the largest proportion of targeted funding. In this context, it is important to be able to guarantee that structural funding ends up where it is needed in view of the education that must be provided.

One positive effect of this would be a reduction in the administrative burden. Accountability regarding the effective spending of lump-sum funding can and must be improved. In addition, targeted funding must be limited to true 'incidents' (such as an unexpected rise in energy costs, emergencies) or innovations that go beyond the possibilities of an individual school governing board (cf. Education Council, 2018).

Accountability by school governing boards

Most annual reports include the required multi-year budgets and forecasts • In the continuity section of their annual report, school governing boards must provide a large number of forecasts and an insight into aspects of the planning & control cycle. This is the multi-year budget (with the appropriate level of detail) together with an accompanying commentary, and the multi-year forecasts for pupils and staff numbers together with an accompanying commentary. For most school governing boards, there is no issue in this regard. Most boards also report on their capital reserves: in 2022 the Inspectorate issued only a small number of remedial action orders on this subject (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j).

Increase in excess capital in 2021 • Potentially excess capital increased from €1.15 billion in 2020 to €1.51 billion in 2021. In 2020, this figure had actually fallen for the first time in years. In 2021, the entire education sector received a large injection of funding from the National Education Programme. Not all of this funding was spent in 2021, and the remainder was added to reserves. This has impeded progress on the ongoing reduction of possibly excess reserves. In 2021, 855 boards had potentially excess capital reserves. The bulk of these reserves are in primary and secondary education, and the amount is particularly high in special (secondary) education, in relative terms (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j).

Reducing capital reserves, but no sense of urgency • We held discussions with a selection of school governing boards with a high level of excess capital reserves whose multi-year figures showed no sign that they intended to reduce these reserves. These boards realize that they have potentially excess reserves. Some of them see these reserves as temporary, and they say there are plans to reduce them or that investments will be made in due course, for which they have set aside specific funds. This picture differs from our findings in 2021, when a similar selection of school governing boards indicated that they were drawing up plans to reduce their reserves. At the same time, these boards do not yet seem to feel any sense of urgency to do this: in their annual report, the reduction in their multi-year budget is not yet leading to public reserves below the guidance level.

Negative budgeting can be a challenge • Negative budgeting is an important strategy for reducing excess reserves. In practice, however, negative budgeting can be challenging to achieve. The Inspectorate looked at this for the years 2018, 2019 and 2020. In these years the actual profitability was higher than the budgeted profitability, across all sectors. A significant proportion of school governing boards show this pattern every year (Inspectorate of Education, 2023f). The research showed that there are several possible explanations for the higher profitability achieved. Firstly, the future is always uncertain. Secondly, both aversion to loss and the certainty effect result in some revenue streams being estimated cautiously and a higher amount being set aside for contingencies. Better-than-expected budget results often raise fewer questions afterwards. Finally, (almost) every year there are recurring additional sources of funding that are not taken into account when budgeting. Changes to government funding are an important cause of this. Staffing costs often turn out higher than expected, but this difference is less than the total additional resources provided by government. It is important for school governing boards – especially those that wish to reduce their capital reserves – to be aware of mechanisms such as loss aversion and the certainty effect.

Managing according to the budget • There are also school governing boards which succeed in achieving the expected results year after year. These boards ensure that they maintain a balance between actual income and actual spending. It appears that it is not so much about making good predictions, but more about making the predictions come true – by spending more when more money is available, for example, or by focusing on existing or additional strategic goals. When comparing multi-year budgets, annual budgets and the actual results achieved over the years, it is worth noting that successful school governing boards often start out from a zero budget. In principle, therefore, they aim to spend all the funds that they receive (Inspectorate of Education, 2023f). The annual reports of school governing boards that budget 'predictably' often show that they do not take uncertain wage adjustments into account in their budgets. They only budget for these once they are actually known, both on the cost side and on the income side. The effects cancel each other out over the year.

Adjustments throughout the year • School governing boards that budget 'predictably' usually have a good tool available to support the process of staff planning, drawing up budgets and reports. This means they have up-to-date information at their disposal, so that reports can be available quickly, right up to the level of the current profit and loss account. This ensures that

deviations from the budget can be identified rapidly and that the causes are investigated. If spending lags behind, resources are often redistributed, averaging out spending between units. In some cases, the remaining funds are set aside for a specific purpose. In all cases, discussions are held with the budget managers regarding the outlook – both periodically and in the event of deviations. In addition to the school governor and those responsible for the budget (school director/management/departmental director), the staffing manager is often also present because staffing costs represent such a large component of the budget (Inspectorate of Education, 2023f).

More policy-oriented multi-year budgets are desirable • In a policy-oriented multi-year budget, resources are linked explicitly to the school’s strategic goals, such as the deployment of staff, hiring in external parties, professionalization or investments. In practice, however, the multi-year budgets drawn up by school governing boards are often still financial and technical in nature. This means that the multi-year budget focuses particularly on matters such as changes in funding, the collective labour agreement and the multi-year maintenance plan. Strategic goals are also regularly included in multi-year budgets, but what fewer boards do is to establish a link between these goals and the deployment of resources. This was a point for improvement for more than half of the boards when we conducted a four-year survey in 2022 (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j). We think this is important because it encourages school governing boards to formulate clear goals (preferably including goals relating to basic skills) and state clearly which resources will be used to achieve those goals. This helps boards to monitor and evaluate progress, providing concrete information on which to base adjustments. It also provides better information for the internal supervisor and the participation council to fulfil their role. This also reinforces external accountability regarding the efficient use of all resources (and not just incidental funds).

Internal supervision of efficient spending often requires improvement • Internal supervision can be strengthened in a number of areas. It is important that internal supervisory boards reflect specifically on the results of supervision and enable accountability for this. About half of school governing boards examined in 2022 were issued with a remedial action order on this point. Internal supervisory boards often state that internal supervision includes the effective use of resources, but there is no explanation of how this is done. Over half of governing boards have received a remedial action order on this point, with variations between sectors (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j). It is important that the internal supervisory board ensures accountability

– through a supervisory framework for example – and reports on this in the annual report. A policy-oriented, multi-year budget is a good place to start. Internal supervision can evaluate the degree to which policy is integrated. Progress can then be tracked by means of management reports and the annual report.

Financial management in inter-institutional partnerships

Most funding for inclusive education ends up in schools • The total budget available for inclusive education in 2021 was over €2.28 billion. One third of this went directly to schools providing special (secondary) education in the form of fixed payments. For inter-institutional partnerships in primary education, this was an average of 31.7% in 2018 and 35.8% in 2021, while for inter-institutional partnerships in secondary education, it was an average of 34.2% in 2018 and 34.3% in 2021. The remaining amount, almost €1.16 billion in 2021, went to inter-institutional partnerships: over €581 million to partnerships in primary education and almost €574 million to partnerships in secondary education. These resources represent the support funding available for organizing inclusive education at the regional level. In 2021, partnerships opted to pass on an average of 78.2% (2018: 73.7%) of this to the affiliated school governing boards: partnerships in primary education passed on an average of 76.3% (€457 million) and partnerships in secondary education passed on an average of 80.0% (€462 million). These resources also end up with schools in the region through the affiliated school governing boards.

Money also ends up with pupils without special educational needs • Before 2014, the funding available for inclusive education was only available for pupils with special educational needs. The definition of pupils with special educational needs has changed since then. This definition was initially based on national criteria, but is now defined using regionally determined criteria. Funding now also ends up with pupils who are not classified as pupils with special educational needs. The affiliated school governing boards receive resources for providing (or improving) basic support (Inspectorate of Education, 2023a). This support extends to all pupils, including those without special educational needs. In addition, inter-institutional partnerships sometimes do allocate targeted resources to pupils with special educational needs, but the amount is not based on the support needs that have been identified. Instead, it is based on the total number of pupils enrolled. Partnerships that allocate resources in this way assume that the target group across all schools is comparable and that there are equal numbers of pupils with special educational needs at all schools. It would be preferable, however, for partnerships

to allocate resources based on pupil characteristics and support needs.

There is often no (financial) accountability regarding the effectiveness of inclusive education

• School governing boards must account for how funding is spent, including the funding that they receive from inter-institutional partnerships. In the majority of the inspections of school governing boards carried out in 2022, the Inspectorate commented on the lack of accountability in annual reports regarding the effective use of resources for inclusive education (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j). We have previously reported on the lack of accountability reporting on the use of resources and the results achieved (Inspectorate of Education, 2020a). Those governing boards that do provide accountability mainly focus on what money has been spent on (such as additional staff), but not what has been achieved with it. However, this information is indispensable in the case of inter-institutional partnerships. School governing boards also need to know about the quality of education and the (additional) support their pupils are provided with. Not least because this can enable more pupils with special educational needs to take part in regular education, with a view to achieving more inclusive education.

Resources from inter-institutional partnerships also go to pupils and schools

• Resources that inter-institutional partnerships have left over after all payments (compulsory and voluntary) have been made, can be allocated according to regional needs. Most of these resources end up with pupils, either directly or indirectly. Inter-institutional partnerships can, for example, deploy experts to schools or spend money on facilities that can be shared by multiple schools (Inspectorate of Education, 2023a). One example of an interschool facility is an orthopedagogic-didactic centre (OPDC) – an educational facility where students can receive temporary education and extra support. These partnerships therefore provide pupils with education and extra support via the OPDC.

Better accountability reporting by inter-institutional partnerships is needed

• Inter-institutional partnerships report annually on how the resources that are allocated for extra support are actually spent. To do this, they rely in part on the information provided by school governing boards. Inter-institutional partnerships do not report enough on the results achieved and the effects for pupils. There is also room for improvement in the quality of reporting on the funding that partnerships spend themselves – on experts and OPDCs, for instance. A partnership with an OPDC is responsible for its own management and monitoring, and is less dependent on third parties for accountability. Yet here, too, there is a

lack of thorough reporting on the educational results achieved through the extra support provided and the associated funding (Inspectorate of Education, 2023a). A link between the results achieved and the use of funding is necessary in order to ensure accountability regarding the effective use of funding.

Internal supervision of expenditure and reporting needs tightening

• One task for internal supervisory boards is supervising the effective and lawful allocation and use of resources. They report on this annually in their annual report. In 2022, 80% of inter-institutional partnerships were given a remedial action order due to shortcomings in accountability reporting by the internal supervisory board (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j). If reporting by the school governing board is inadequate, the internal supervisory board must call the governing board to account. The internal supervision of some of the partnerships is carried out by the affiliated school governing boards, meaning that they must therefore hold themselves accountable in such a situation (Inspectorate of Education, 2020b).

Reduction of capital reserves in inter-institutional partnerships still above target

• The number of inter-institutional partnerships with potentially excess capital reserves is falling, both in primary and secondary education. At the end of 2021, these still numbered 65 (out of 76) and 59 (out of 75), respectively, however. The total amount of possibly excess capital reserves for 2021 was €133 million (2020: €160 million). The ratio of public resources available compared to the target level is much higher than for school governing boards in primary and secondary education. The reduction of these capital reserves is reflected in a fall in liquidity and solvency (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j). At the beginning of 2021, the inter-institutional partnerships drew up a joint plan with the aim of reducing excess capital reserves to zero by 2022, with a limited extension in 2023.



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