Inspectorate of Education
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

State of *Education* 2024

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Foreword

The Netherlands is facing major challenges, with many people feeling concerned about their livelihoods, child poverty, social injustice and the polarisation in society. Although such issues certainly have a negative impact on education, education could, at the same time, play a positive and key role in addressing these issues. After all, good education makes a difference to people's lives, from the classroom or lecture hall to later life and in society. It defines the extent to which our children will be able to participate in and contribute to a country that is ready for the future.

Education in dire straits

However, education is currently unable to play this positive role. Indeed the Inspectorate of Education, together with many others, has observed for some years now that education in this country is in dire straits. Increasing numbers of pupils and students do not attain basic skills in literacy, numeracy and civic skills and values. A harrowing shortage of teachers and school leaders also results in lessons being cancelled, particularly for vulnerable pupil groups, further increasing pressure on the quality of education.

There have been many calls over the years for all stakeholders to join forces in addressing this issue so we can change course. It is a message that is still valid today, although the need for change is now no longer simply desirable, it is vital. Improvements in education should be a top priority on political and social agendas, as every child, pupil and student deserves access to education of good quality, regardless of where they are born or go to school.

Quality is below par

We have observed in recent years that the type of school a child attends really makes a difference. We conducted more in-depth and targeted inspections of quality in a randomised sample of schools in 2023, and although this involved only a limited number of schools, the results are nevertheless concerning. Our inspectors assessed over 20% of the inspected schools as being unsatisfactory. We also had to issue a large majority of these schools with one or more remedial orders with respect to basic skills.

This means that many pupils are being taught at a school that falls short on quality of education. There are primary school pupils who have no other option but to stay at home one day a week as no teacher is available, and secondary school pupils who are struggling because they lack the basics in numeracy: these pupils are simply not getting what they need.

The positive difference

Averages do not illustrate the differences in education, which is why we examine those differences in more detail in this State of Education. Two facets play a role with respect to the State of Education.

There are still many schools and educational programmes that do manage to ensure educational quality. They offer sound basic skills education, their staff shortages are low, they ensure equal opportunities, offer extra support, address pupil and student wellbeing and provide good transfer opportunities from higher professional education to a university programme. These schools and educational programmes really make a difference to pupils and students and have a positive impact on their lives, even in neighbourhoods in which such schools would not be expected to thrive. There are so many examples and experiences that are there for the taking.

We have also observed what is possible in terms of professional development, with some schools and educational programmes demonstrating an effective approach to professional development that ensures that every teacher is well equipped for their role. There are also governing boards that have a transparent quality assurance system in place and develop a clear basic skills vision that is integrated across all subjects.

Freedoms can lead to inaction

In general, we hardly ever see such positive practices being disseminated and adopted on a national scale. Why does this prove so difficult? We have observed governing boards running two schools perfectly well but being unable to transfer these positive practices to a third school. What can we do to help such governing boards succeed at all their schools?

Our education system is highly decentralised and professionals and governing boards have a considerable degree of autonomy. However, the risk here is that rather than good education being everyone's responsibility, in practice it ends up being nobody's. Such freedoms and autonomy can lead to inaction, which could, in turn, result in problems and staff shortages being unevenly distributed across schools.

This raises the question of whether more directives are needed to clarify what schools are expected to organise. We must determine together what good quality education looks like. What is professionalism and how can we organise this? Do we know enough about our pupils and students and does the curriculum match their needs? Politicians, governing boards, school management and teachers must determine this together as, until they do this, external parties including consultants, educational publishers and homework institutes will continue to fill the gaps.

The positive examples we have observed offer opportunities for change. We had already concluded in a previous State of Education that what these examples have in common is cooperation, professional development and prioritisation: the key ingredients to initiate the much needed change.

Making a difference

Delivering good education is something we do together. So let's join forces to make a positive difference. Of course, a crucial condition here is that we address the shortage of teachers and school leaders. However, we also need to be realistic about the fact that these shortages are set to continue and not only in the education sector.

Making a difference is something you do together as teachers, starting in your own classroom. This means ascertaining the skills and knowledge pupils and students have when they arrive, what they need to attain in each lesson, by the end of term and when they move up a year. Teaching is all too often still based on the average pupil, rather than focusing on individual pupils or students and their specific needs. This is not effective.

School leaders or educational programme managers really make a difference in the school or educational programme by creating a safe climate in which pupils and students have space to learn, and by devising a broadly-supported vision and targets with respect to basic skills. When addressing staff shortages, they also make a difference by maximising the deployment of those professionals that are available. They also introduce effective professional development to ensure that these professionals are well-equipped to take on additional tasks. If there are not enough teachers, the focus on quality actually needs to increase in order to guarantee well-qualified professionals in the classroom. Having well-qualified professionals also ensures that the job remains attractive to lateral-entry teachers, because, fortunately, job satisfaction in teaching is still high compared with other sectors. And, of course, the same applies to school leaders as applies to teachers: these school leaders must be in place.

School governors can also make a difference, by defining clear ambitions and specific targets based on an educational vision. Although quality assurance and effective professional development could have been established long ago, there is nothing preventing governors from starting to use these tools today. School governors can also make a significant difference

in addressing the school leader shortage, personnel management and in ensuring the wellbeing of staff who, in some cases, are required to work in crisis conditions.

Finally, you can also make a difference in the political arena. Politicians ensure that schools have the space to be creative in addressing the shortage of school leaders and teachers. Political decisions shape the conditions for a smooth career pathway from teaching preschoolers through to vocational and higher education. And it is up to politicians to take the helm, ensuring a permanent boost to the quality of our education system, with a long-term approach and long-term, structural funding.

Changing course

As the Ancient Greek philosopher Euclid wrote: 'most ideas about education are not new, but not everyone knows the old ideas.' What was true in Ancient Greece is perhaps even more true today. The ideas are there, we know them and we use them, but we certainly do not use them enough. We now need to make sure we implement these ideas everywhere.

After painting a rather bleak picture, we would like to conclude on an optimistic note for the future: we can change course. After all, some schools have managed to do just that. All 4 million plus pupils and students are entitled to a secure and stimulating environment in which to prepare for their life in society. As employees, as citizens and as people. It is not just pupils and students who benefit from this, we all do.

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CHAPTER 1

State of Education

1.1 Key points

Pupils and students have the right to good quality education. They should be able to access education in schools and educational programmes that focus on continuous improvement. They should also be able to rely on governing boards that actively prioritise such continuous improvement and on a government that sets and enforces a facilitating framework.

Concerns about quality of schools in primary and secondary education

Inspectorate started inspecting the quality of a randomised sample of schools in primary and secondary education. The initial outcomes of this rather limited number of inspections, gave cause for concern. It appears that many pupils are not getting the education they need. A little over 20% of the inspected schools were assessed by our inspectors as being unsatisfactory or very poor; a proportion that may increase if the Basic skills standard is weighted in the overall judgement of schools. The key reason for assessing a school as unsatisfactory differs per sector. This could be due to the learning outcomes, how pupils' development and guidance are monitored, teachers' teaching strategies and/or the quality of how the school provides a safe environment for pupils. The system of quality assurance prescribed by legislation also does not always function well. Some schools, particularly those in secondary education, but also in special education, special secondary education and primary education, appear unable to properly monitor, improve and safeguard the quality of their education.

School governing boards must define ambitions and targets

Our inspections in recent years have focused more on school governing boards and less on schools and educational programmes. We assessed school governing boards' quality assurance as unsatisfactory in quarter of schools in primary and secondary education that we inspected in 2022 and 2023, with around a fifth of the school governing boards in senior secondary vocational education receiving this same assessment. In our view, sound governance of quality assurance starts with a shared vision on education, before translating this into ambitions and concrete targets. School governing boards in primary and secondary education do not always succeed in making this translation. And that is not the only issue, as these governing boards must also monitor whether ambitions and targets are achieved. The outcomes of our inspections of a randomised sample of schools show how imperative it is that school governing boards prioritise and manage quality improvement.

Inspections of a randomised sample of MBO schools started in 2024

We are also inspecting a randomised sample of MBO educational programmes, although these inspections only started in 2024. During quality inspections of risks in MBO institutions over the past two years, we assessed exam quality as being unsatisfactory at six publicly-funded and non-publicly funded MBO educational programmes.

Basic standard of quality in higher education

Almost all educational programmes in higher education meet the basic quality requirements. The accreditation system methodology was deemed satisfactory in terms

of impartiality, expertise, reliability and validity of the judgements and accreditations. One improvement point concerned alignment between the system's definition of basic quality requirements and educational quality aspects related to social developments. The funding of evaluation agencies must also be reconsidered.

Not all pupils have access to suitable provisions

In addition to our quality of education concerns, we are also concerned about pupils who are not receiving education that matches their needs. Shortcomings were established in some inter-institutional partnerships for inclusive education with respect to achieving a comprehensive network of provisions for pupils, whereas this should be the top priority, as children with special educational needs need effective and appropriate schooling. Inter-institutional partnerships must ensure that there are enough facilities for these pupils. They also need to improve accountability, monitoring and control to ensure that support funds are spent effectively.

Long-term improvements in education require structural funding

Education sectors are generally financially stable. However, one focus point is the increasing allocation of non-recurring funding. Non-recurring government funding for primary and secondary education more than doubled between 2018 and 2022. Some governing boards rely heavily on non-recurring funding, which makes up over 30% of their income. If these funds are withdrawn, governing boards may need to continue operating with fewer staff and be forced to cancel programmes intended to improve the quality of education. Non-recurring funds make it difficult to budget strategically, as the funds must be spent relatively quickly instead of allowing schools to take time to achieve long-term impact.

These school governing boards consider structural funding to be an important prerequisite for achieving the necessary long-term improvements in education, and that long-term programmes can also be used to prioritise specific goals.

Recommendations:

- Schools: do your utmost to achieve quality standards if quality is currently below par, by identifying and addressing shortcomings. Ensure that the taught basic skills are appropriate to the student population.
- Schools: seek connections with similar schools within or outside your own governing board, create learning networks together and learn from each other.
- School governing boards: be ambitious, set specific targets and monitor whether these are achieved.
- Inter-institutional partnerships, school governing boards and schools: establish sufficient and effective provisions in the short term for pupils with special educational needs.
- Government: focus on sustainable improvements in education by taking a long-term approach and establishing an appropriate structural funding system.

1.2 National picture of the quality of education

Quality of education and basic skills
In this State of Education we use various methods to examine whether pupils and students are learning enough and are developing to their full potential. One method is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of school and institution quality, as well as to assess the knowledge and skills of pupils and students. This first Chapter examines school quality, with the second Chapter covering pupils' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and mathematics, and civic skills and values.

Focus on basic skills
Concerns regarding quality have increased in recent years. The Inspectorate decided to shift its focus towards basic skills several years ago. It did this initially by analysing governance quality and expressly incorporating basic skills during inspections of school governing boards and during verification activities at schools. We have now developed a Basic skills standard.

Inspections of randomised sample starts
As data were collected during both governance-oriented and risk-oriented inspections, these data did not form a representative sample making it difficult to draw generalised conclusions on educational quality at schools and educational programmes, which is why we started to conduct inspections at a randomised sample of schools in 2023-2024. As well as presenting a picture that is representative of educational quality in schools, these inspections also provide information that enables us to further improve our risk analysis. The initial results of these inspections of a randomised sample of schools can be found in this first Chapter.

Learning outcomes at school level and pupil results
We also discuss the learning outcomes at school level in this Chapter. The way in which learning outcomes are calculated differs per sector. The assessment indicates at school level whether the benchmark is met on average. This benchmark is a minimum limit used by the inspectorate during the assessment. In primary and secondary education the benchmark partly takes the school's pupil population into account, but fails to show whether every pupil is learning enough. Chapter 2 presents pupil results for basic skills in literacy, numeracy and mathematics, and civic skills and values.

Greater ambition needed
It is clear from both Chapters that schools need to be more ambitious. The benchmark for learning outcomes that the Inspectorate uses in primary and secondary education is a minimum limit, and lies below the national average. If a school's learning outcomes are deemed satisfactory, this does not necessarily mean that all pupils achieved the best possible results or were offered the best possible opportunities (see also Chapter 3). Schools that meet the Inspectorate's benchmark should not be complacent. Governing boards and schools must be more ambitious and should set higher attainment targets in addition to the minimum goals. This ambition should extend from pre-school and early childhood education to further education in one continuous learning pathway that enables every pupil and student to find their place in society.

1.2.1 National picture of quality in preschool education

Inspection of preschool education
In 2022, the Inspectorate assessed the quality of preschool education at 195 preschools (Inspectorate of Education, 2023e). Preschool education is intended for toddlers aged between 2.5 and 4 years who are at risk of educational disadvantage. Preschool education is offered at daycare facilities and is vital in preparing children to make a good start in their school career. Inspectors assessed the preschools on eight standards from our assessment framework. The Curriculum, Teaching Strategies, and Cooperation standards were developed into more detailed quality aspects to gain greater understanding of preschool quality.

Quality up to standard, improvements possible
The performance of most preschools is satisfactory or good (Inspectorate of Education, 2023e). However, there are some focus points including the curriculum, teaching practice and cooperation with parents and primary schools. Improvements can be made in aligning the curriculum to children's development and the group rooms could be more attractive, challenging, and designed to stimulate play and language development. Teaching practice could improve by offering more effective and targeted language development activities, tailored to children's individual development. Childcare staff could also stimulate interaction between children,

Over 20% of schools in our randomised sample were assessed as unsatisfactory. Schools, school governing boards and the government must work together to address this.

give more process feedback and pay greater attention to how children can address problems. Preschools could improve cooperation with parents by offering parents more activities and encouraging them to engage in development-oriented activities at home. Cooperation with primary schools is key to achieving a continuous pathway towards primary education. This cooperation could be improved through closer alignment of the curriculum, the teaching approach, interaction with parents and supervision of children.

Preschool education quality is stable

Despite societal developments such as the Covid pandemic and staff shortages in the childcare sector, the quality of preschool education remained stable between 2019 and 2022 (Inspectorate of Education, 2023e). Although this also means that we observed the same focus points in 2022 as we did in 2019, the importance of the educational aspect means that quality in pre-school education is deserving of continued focus.

1.2.2 National image of primary and secondary education quality

Sample inspections of schools in primary and secondary education

The Inspectorate started conducting quality inspections at a randomised sample of schools and departments in primary and secondary education in September 2023. Similar inspections of MBO educational programmes started in January 2024. We aim to use this representative sample to obtain a reliable picture of educational quality at system level. These quality inspections result in an overall judgement for schools and, if statutory

requirements are not met, may result in the school governing board being issued with a remedial order. During these sample inspections we assess the standards that are determining for the overall judgement, quality assurance standards and the new basic skills standard. The latter has not yet been included in the assessment and is therefore not included in determining the overall judgement. However, remedial orders may be issued for basic skills in Dutch language, numeracy and mathematics, and citizenship skills (see also Chapter 2).

Initial outcomes of sample inspections

The Inspectorate conducted inspections at a randomised sample of schools and departments in primary, secondary, special and special secondary education in late 2023. Almost 80% of these inspections resulted in a satisfactory overall judgement (Table 1.2.2a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). As the randomised sample in the first inspection period was very small, the percentages only provide an indication of the quality of all schools in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, at 20% the percentage of schools assessed as unsatisfactory or very poor is high.

Key questions regarding quality of education

In its assessment framework, the Inspectorate defined three key questions regarding the quality of education in schools: are pupils learning enough, are they being taught well and do they feel safe? Those questions reflect what we consider to be most important.

Are pupils learning enough?

We used the Outcomes standard to assess whether pupils are learning enough in schools or departments. In secondary education we assessed 98% of the learning outcomes as being satisfactory or good (Figure 1.2.2a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). It should be noted here that – due to the pandemic – the Inspectorate used a modified benchmark (see also Section 1.3.3). Learning outcomes were satisfactory at 97% of primary schools. Schools in special education and special secondary education lagged behind with 77% being assessed as satisfactory. The way in which learning outcomes are calculated differs per sector. The assessment indicates at school level whether, on average, the benchmark is met. This benchmark is a minimum limit used by the inspectorate during the assessment. In primary and secondary education the benchmark partly takes the school's pupil population characteristics into account, but fails to show whether every pupil is learning enough. See Chapter 2 for more information on pupil results for basic skills in literacy, numeracy and mathematics, and citizenship.

Changes to assessment of learning outcomes in special and special secondary education

It is likely that the high percentage of unsatisfactory judgements on learning outcomes in special and special secondary education is due to the Inspectorate no longer only assessing whether 75% of pupils at a school achieve the final attainment level, but also assessing whether the school can demonstrate that the associated target levels for Dutch, numeracy and mathematics were met. Not all schools in special education and special secondary education adequately demonstrate whether target levels are being achieved.

Are pupils being taught well?

Teaching strategies were assessed as satisfactory or good in 94% of primary schools and in 85% of secondary education departments (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). This concerns assessments at school or department level. A school or department obtains a satisfactory assessment for teaching quality if a large majority of the inspected lessons at a school or department meet the basic quality requirements as described in the assessment framework.

Do pupils feel safe?

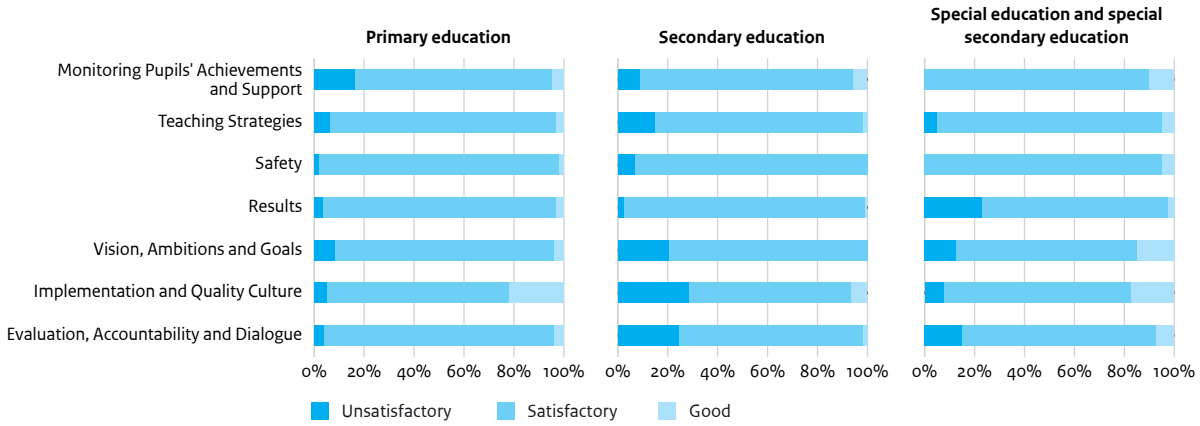
So far, we have assessed safety at all schools in special education and special secondary education as being satisfactory or good (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). In primary education the assessment was satisfactory

Table 1.2.2a Overall judgement of school and department standards in sample inspections of schools in primary, secondary, special and special secondary education between September and December 2023

	Primary education		Secondary education		Special education and special secondary education	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Satisfactory	79	79,8	67	77,9	31	77,5
Unsatisfactory	18	18,2	19	22,1	9	22,5
Very poor	2	2	0	0	0	0
Total	99	100	86	100	40	100

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024t)

Figure 1.2.2a Overall assessment of school and department standards in sample inspections of schools in primary, secondary, special and special secondary education between September and December 2023 (in percentages, n primary education=99, n secondary education=103, n special and special secondary education=40)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024t)

or good in 98% of cases. The secondary schools in the randomised sample lagged behind, with 93% being assessed as satisfactory. A school is assessed as satisfactory if it provides a safe environment for pupils. The law requires that schools have a safety policy in place, monitor pupil safety annually, assign a person to coordinate the anti-bullying policy and comply with statutory obligations in the event of a possible sexual offence (see also Chapter 4).

Differences between sectors

We established differences between sectors across almost all standards, with the differences in quality assurance standards being particularly striking. The outcome of the assessment of these standards in secondary education is concerning, with around 1 in 4 departments being assessed as unsatisfactory (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). This means that the system of quality assurance, which is required by law, does not function properly and that these departments are unable to effectively monitor, improve or safeguard the quality of education. The assessment of the Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support standard also differed per sector. In primary education, 16% of schools were assessed as unsatisfactory on this standard, whereas no schools in special education or special secondary education received such an assessment (see also Chapter 5). These differences between sectors require clarification. We hope to discover the cause of these differences by conducting more sample inspections of schools in the coming year.

Most remedial action orders concern basic skills

A satisfactory overall judgement does not necessarily mean that the Inspectorate will not issue any remedial action orders. A remedial action order may be issued with respect to a component of the standard, even if the overall judgement is satisfactory. We issue remedial action orders if schools do not comply with legislation. A large majority of remedial action orders were issued for basic skills and particularly for the citizenship skills (see also Chapter 2) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). This means that basic skills education leaves much to be desired at many schools. Considering the number of remedial action orders issued for basic skills, we are expecting the number of schools assessed as unsatisfactory or very poor to rise when the Basic Skills standard is included in the overall judgement.

Remedial action orders in primary education

In primary education, 74% of schools were issued with one or more remedial action orders for the assessed standards or for basic skills (Table 1.2.2b) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). Relatively few remedial action orders were issued for the Results, Safety, Implementation and Quality Culture, and Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue standards (10% or less). More remedial action orders were issued for the Teaching Strategies (21%), Vision, Ambitions and Goals (24%) and Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support (34%) standards and noticeably more than the number of schools that were rated as unsatisfactory for those standards.

Remedial action orders in special education and special secondary education

In special education and special secondary education, 88% of schools were given one or more remedial action orders for the assessed standards or for basic skills (Table

1.2.2b) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). Relatively few remedial action orders were issued for the Implementation and Quality Culture, and Safety standards (10% or less). More schools were issued with remedial action orders for the Vision, Ambitions and Goals and Teaching Strategies and Results standards. On two standards there were clear differences between the number of remedial action orders and the number of unsatisfactory assessments. For the Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue and Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support standards, respectively 42% and 48% of schools were issued with remedial action orders. However, the proportion of schools receiving an unsatisfactory assessment for the Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue standard was 22% and no schools in special education or special secondary education received an unsatisfactory for the Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support standard.

Table 1.2.2b Percentage of schools issued with one or more remedial action orders during sample inspections, by standard and basic skills (primary education n=98, secondary education n=103, special education and special secondary education n=40)

	Primary education	Secondary education	Special education and special secondary education
Basic skills	66	76	58
Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support	34	42	48
Teaching Strategies	21	42	18
Safety and Security	6	19	10
Results	3	1	28
Vision, Ambitions and Goals	24	30	15
Implementation and Quality Culture	5	38	8
Accountability and Dialogue	10	30	42
No remedial action orders	26	12	12

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024t)

Remedial action orders in secondary education

As in special education and special secondary education, 88% of secondary schools were issued with one or more remedial action orders for the assessed standards or for basic skills (Table 1.2.2.b) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024T). Remedial action orders for the Results standard were only issued to 1% of secondary schools. With respect to the other standards, approximately a fifth of schools was issued with a remedial action order for Safety, almost a third for Accountability and Dialogue and Vision, Ambitions and Goals, and approximately 40% received a remedial action order for Implementation and Quality Culture, Teaching Strategies and Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support. The low percentage of remedial action orders for the Results standard is associated with the decision not to use the exam results indicator to assess learning outcomes until 2024-2025 due to the consequences of the pandemic.

The preliminary picture is bleak

The initial impressions from sample inspections of schools indicate that the quality of education is insufficient at many schools and that thousands of pupils are not getting the education they need. Even at schools and departments at which the standards were assessed as satisfactory, remedial action orders still needed to be issued for these standards, as the schools failed to comply with the law. Few schools received no remedial action orders. There could be various reasons for schools being unable to deliver education of sufficient quality, with one of these reasons being the shortage of teachers (see also Chapter 6). The Inspectorate aims to build a more detailed quality of education overview in the coming years, by conducting more sample inspections of schools. For now, a school's task is to ascertain how they compare with the preliminary national image and how they can address any shortcomings. It is positive to note that across almost all the assessed standards, there are also schools and departments in every sector that manage to achieve a satisfactory appraisal and these schools can serve as a benchmark for best practice.

1.2.3 National image of MBO quality

Sample Inspections of MBO institutions started in 2024

The Inspectorate currently does not have a clear picture of the quality of education in MBO. The focus of school governing board inspections in recent years was on how they safeguard quality in all educational programmes. Similar to the inspections in primary and secondary education, we started sample quality inspections at schools in this sector on 1 January 2024 to enable us to obtain a clear view on the quality of education in educational programmes.

1.2.4 National image of higher education quality

Accreditation system
HNVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) is tasked with accrediting institutions and/or educational programmes based on quality assessments by audit panels. Audit panels are comprised of independent experts and a student. Unlike in other education sectors, it is not the Inspectorate's task to assess the quality of individual educational programmes or institutions in higher education. The Inspectorate is tasked with conducting periodic inspections of accreditation system development.

Reliable assessments

The accreditation system uses audits and accreditations to demonstrate that higher education quality is up to standard and is stable. The accreditation system is fundamentally satisfactory and everyone can be confident that the accredited educational programmes meet basic quality requirements (Inspectorate of Education, 2023f). The approach with respect to existing educational programmes is sufficient in safeguarding that quality assessments in audits and accreditations are made in a reliable, valid, independent and expert way.

Accreditation system improvement points

Some improvements are needed in the current accreditation system (Inspectorate of Education, 2023f). This concerns:

- improving the alignment between the definition of the education system's basic standard of quality and societal expectations of such a quality. If societal challenges are not clearly reflected in audit reports, this will undermine society's confidence in higher education over time, which is why the Inspectorate considers it vital that, during education programme audits, educational programmes explicitly account for such issues as quality of tutoring, internships and the teaching climate. These are basic components of the didactic process. Temporary indicators or themes can enable specific reporting on these components in audits over a six-year period.
- the perverse incentive of institutions financing the assessment agencies. The peers and panel secretaries who provide support and write the audit report are currently paid by the institutions (often via a contract to assessment agencies). In essence, they assess the one that pays them, which can compromise impartiality, even if this is only a perceived compromise. The Inspectorate recommends reviewing this system of financing.

Retain strong points, improve where necessary

The minister is currently working on a system of institutional accreditation. The Inspectorate recommends that any new system should retain the current system's strong points, particularly the approach that focuses on impartiality and on the reliability and validity of the assessments. The improvement points can be incorporated when implementing a new system.

Role of programme committees
Higher education institutions have a great deal of autonomy, although there are checks and balances, including internal quality assurance, accountability with six-yearly assessments of all educational programmes and governance with internal controls. Programme committees, comprising students and teaching staff, form part of this internal governance. They have right of consent on components of the Education and Examination Regulations and advise the programme management on educational programme quality.

Many students unaware of programme committees

Programme committees are comprised of both students and teaching staff. The Inspectorate conducted research into both student and teaching staff participation and interest in programme committees. Many higher education students appeared not to know what a programme committee is or what their own educational programme's programme committee stands for (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b). This is worrying as it undermines the impact of the programme committee as a participatory body.

Programme committee appreciated

In higher professional education (HBO) 11% of lecturers indicated that they were a member of a programme committee (Inspectorate of Education, 2024j, 2023). At universities this was 16%. Reasons given for not joining the programme committee included: no interest (28%), not possible because of their job (16%), previously been a member (16%), never elected (15%), or other reasons such as working too few hours. It is positive that programme committee appreciation is high, with only 3% of teaching staff indicating that they were not members of the programme committee because its work is not valued enough in their organisation. A negative perception of the time investment needed for a programme committee member or how the programme committee is facilitated were also not seen as significant reasons for not becoming a member.

Programme committee teaching staff members lack time

Teaching staff indicated that in practice the time available for the programme committee is often insufficient. Of teaching staff who were programme committee members, 32% indicated they did not have enough time for their programme committee work (Inspectorate of Education, 2024j, 2023). This lack of time is likely to have a negative impact on their work quality and limit the programme committee's impact in being part of an internal system of checks and balances. A small majority of programme committee members (HBO: 59% and university education: 48%) stated they needed further professional development, although it is unclear how much time they would be able to free up for this.

More time needed for programme committees

If programme committees are to have impact, students must be aware of their existence and teaching staff must have time available for their committee duties. The Inspectorate calls on the governing boards of institutions to ensure that programme committee members are allocated more time for their committee work and are offered more space for the desired professional development. Governing boards must also do more to create awareness of the programme committee among students. This effort towards teaching staff and students can help improve higher education quality and the effectiveness of internal accountability.

1.3 Inspections at schools and educational programmes

1.3.1 Outcomes of quality inspections in primary, secondary, special and special secondary education and in MBO

How the overall judgement is made

The Inspectorate only issues judgements about schools and educational programmes after inspecting the school's quality. In addition to sample inspections, we also conduct quality inspections in response to serious concerns, such as potential unsatisfactory learning outcomes. Our risk assessment shows that there is no reason to conduct quality inspections at the vast majority of schools and educational programmes. Quality inspections at schools and educational programmes lead to the overall judgement of either satisfactory, unsatisfactory or very poor.

Over half of high-risk schools and educational programmes unsatisfactory or very poor

In 2022 and based on 210 quality inspections in response to risks in primary, secondary and vocational education, the Inspectorate issued a judgement of unsatisfactory 75 times and a judgement of very poor 42 times (Table 1.3.1a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024q, 2024u, 2024v, 2024To). Such quality inspections are different from sample inspections of schools. Despite the risks, the Inspectorate issued a satisfactory judgement 93 times. In 2023, an unsatisfactory judgement was issued 117 times, very poor 38 times and satisfactory 131 times. The increased number of inspections is a result of the enhanced monitoring by the Inspectorate since school year 2022-2023. We also decided to conduct quality inspections for less serious risks.

Table 1.3.1a Overall judgements for quality inspections in response to risks at schools, departments and educational programmes, per sector in 2022 and 2023.

	Primary education		Secondary education		Special education and special secondary education		MBO		Total	
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
Satisfactory	51	76	21	33	17	16	4	6	93	131
Unsatisfactory	45	56	24	47	3	11	3	3	75	117
Very poor	26	33	11	3	4	2	1	0	42	38
Total	122	165	56	83	24	29	8	9	210	286

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024q, 2024u, 2024v, 2024o).

Most schools in the Caribbean Netherlands meet basic quality requirements

The Caribbean Netherlands (Bonaire, Saint Eustatius and Saba) has 14 primary schools and 3 secondary schools. Bonaire has one publicly funded MBO institution and one non-publicly funded institution. The Inspectorate conducts quality inspections at each school every two years. At the end of school year 2022-2023, three primary schools failed to meet the basic quality requirements, of which one had failed to do so for three consecutive years. This school is under enhanced supervision. All secondary and MBO schools met the basic quality requirements. Education in the Caribbean Netherlands is associated with specific challenges (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b). Transferring to further education in the Netherlands is too difficult for many pupils due to the language barrier. For pupils from the Windward Islands, such a transfer also means a switch to a different education system. As islands schools are small, there are also significant differences between pupils in a group or class, both in terms of level but especially in terms of special educational needs.

What entails very poor?

The law states that the Inspectorate should issue the assessment very poor in primary and secondary education if learning outcomes fall significantly below the required standard for a prolonged period, and if the education does not comply with one or more important statutory requirements. If the learning outcomes cannot be assessed, or, as is the case in special education and special secondary education, are not decisive for the assessment, the Inspectorate will include the school's quality assurance in its assessment. School governing boards and schools experience the assessment of very poor as harsh criticism. However, the Inspectorate's aim with this assessment is to clarify that, if a school is assessed as very poor, urgent educational improvements are needed for thousands of pupils.

An MBO educational programme will receive the assessment very poor if its academic success is below requirements and if it failed to adequately implement its duty of care relating to the curriculum and exams, the practical vocational training or rules concerning safety. An MBO educational programme's exam system is deemed to be of insufficient quality if it fails to meet national exam standards as included in the 2021 Regulation on Standards in Examination Quality in Vocational Education.

Monitoring of development insufficient at many very poor schools

When the assessment very poor is issued, the competent authority must ensure that educational quality improves within a year. In primary and secondary schools that have been assessed as very poor, the Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support standard is most likely to be unsatisfactory (Inspectorate of Education, 2024q, 2024u). This standard receives an unsatisfactory assessment relatively often in primary education. The Safety standard is least likely to be assessed as unsatisfactory. The Safety standard is assessed as being unsatisfactory more often in secondary education than in other sectors. These findings are consistent with those of the sample inspections of schools (see Section 1.2.2)

Quality generally up to standard after remedial action period

The Inspectorate conducts a remedial inspection one year after issuing its report assessing a school or department's performance as unsatisfactory or very poor. In most cases quality is no longer unsatisfactory or very poor, but it is not uncommon for educational quality to still be unsatisfactory, even after the remedial action period. Sometimes quality is reassessed as very poor. This occurred relatively often (9 times) in secondary education in 2022 (Inspectorate of Education, 2024u). If a school receives a second consecutive assessment of very poor, this is reported to the minister, who can take measures to address this, such as terminating the school's funding. When an MBO educational programme is issued with a very poor or an unsatisfactory exam quality assessment, the Inspectorate will send the institution a warning letter, stating the timeframe within which the established shortcomings must be addressed. The Inspectorate conducts a remedial inspection at the educational programme at the end of this timeframe. If this inspection demonstrates that the previously established shortcomings that led to the assessment very poor have not been addressed, the minister may decide to deprive the institution of its right to provide the educational programme.

Good quality assurance needed

A frequent comment in inspectors' reports of very poor schools is that there have been changes in school management, or words to that effect. A stable school governing board, good quality assurance and a professional quality culture are, according to us, ways to

maintain or better, to ensure continuing improvement in the quality of education. The Inspectorate defines good quality assurance as the governing board and school management establishing the desired quality of all key components of education and systematically monitoring and, where necessary, improving this quality. This is preferably achieved through promising interventions, such as improving the quality of instruction.

1.3.2 The quality of educational programmes in higher educations

How an assessment is made

Audit panels assess the quality of educational programmes and institutions in higher education. The Institutional Quality Assurance Assessment (ITK) is voluntary. Educational programmes of institutions with a positive ITK are subject to a limited institutional assessment once every six years. Educational programmes of institutions without an ITK are subject to an extensive institutional assessment once every six years. NVAO assesses whether the panels' assessments are verifiable and then decides on accreditation. An accreditation is confirmation that the educational programme meets basic quality requirements and that the institution's quality assurance system (both the internal system and quality culture) is up to standard. NVAO may impose conditions, where necessary.

Large majority of educational programmes meet basic quality requirements

In 2022, NVAO made accreditation decisions about 234 existing educational programmes: 228 educational programmes met basic quality requirements, conditions were imposed in 4 educational programmes and 2 educational programmes did not meet requirements (NVAO, 2023). NVAO also made 92 decisions on new educational programmes: 74 educational programmes were given the green light to start, conditions were imposed on 16 educational programmes and 2 applications were rejected. An unknown number of audits were also conducted on existing or new educational programmes, in which the result was negative. This prompted the involved institutions not to submit the audit report to NVAO for decision-making and to phase out or not start the educational programme for the time being. No new ITKs were conducted in 2022. However, NVAO did decide that two institutions complied with the ITK after an audit panel reached a positive assessment on the realisation of conditions previously imposed by NVAO.

1.3.3 Average learning outcomes of schools and departments in primary, secondary, special and special secondary education

Compiled judgements

Every year we compile a judgement of learning outcomes in primary and secondary education over a timeframe of three school years. The Inspectorate factors in the characteristics of the schools' student population in its assessment criteria. If the compiled judgement is unsatisfactory, a meeting is generally held with the governing board and this is followed by a quality inspection. The purpose of the quality inspection is to assess whether the compiled judgement is correct and can be finalised.

Primary schools meet learning outcomes

Each year, the Inspectorate calculates whether the three-year average of the learning outcomes is satisfactory or unsatisfactory for each primary school, based on the final tests (from 2023-2024 this is known as the Final attainment test). The assessment of learning outcomes relates to the percentage of a school's pupils that attain reference levels 1T and 1B/2T for literacy, use of language and numeracy. The compiled learning outcomes at most schools are at least at or above the minimum limits, with 98% of schools fulfilling the minimum limit for 1T and 89% for 1B/2T (Inspectorate of Education, 2024q). This does not mean that all pupils at these schools attain these levels (see also Chapter 2). The compiled proportion of unsatisfactory learning outcomes for 1B/2T was higher in 2023 than in 2022. This is due to the fact that we used higher correction values in 2023 than in 2022, because of the effects of the pandemic, as well as differences in criteria between the final tests in 2019 and 2021.

Learning outcomes stable in secondary education

The compiled judgement in secondary education is based on four indicators related to results in the lower and upper school and central exam results. The impact of the pandemic resulted in the Inspectorate not including the average central exam results in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Therefore, The judgement concerns three indicators, of which two must be above benchmark for a satisfactory judgement. In 2023, the proportion

of satisfactory judgements among the school types VMBO-B, VMBO-K and VMBO-G/T remained virtually the same as in 2022 (Inspectorate of Education, 2024u). This proportion rose slightly in VWO, whereas HAVO showed a slight downward trend.

Learning outcomes lower in special secondary education than in special education

Schools in special education and special secondary education are obliged to formulate and produce a progress and development plan for all pupils. This indicates a pupil's destination profile and the final attainment level the school expects a pupil to achieve. In 2022-2023, schools stated that 93% of special education pupils performed at or above the level indicated in their progress and development plan, whereas in special secondary education this was 84% of pupils (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). The situation remained stable in 2022 and 2023.

Be more ambitious

The benchmark for learning outcomes that the Inspectorate uses in primary and secondary education is a minimum limit, and lies below the national average. Most benchmarks that we use have been corrected for student population characteristics. If a school's learning outcomes are deemed satisfactory, this does not necessarily mean that all pupils achieved the best possible results or were offered the best possible opportunities (see also Chapter 3). Schools that meet the Inspectorate's benchmark should not be complacent. Governing boards and schools must be more ambitious and should set higher attainment targets in addition to the minimum goals.

Repeated research on school examinations in secondary education

Several national incidents concerning school exams occurred in 2018 and 2019, which had major consequences for pupils and schools. Therefore, we conducted research on the school exam process at secondary schools in 2019 (Inspectorate of Education, 2020c). The Secondary Education Act (WVO) was amended in 2021, partly based on the results of this research. Further research and a reassessment of whether secondary schools were diligent in how they organise their school exam process took place in 2023. We assessed 127 departments, which formed a representative sample of secondary education departments.

School examinations still not fully up to standard

Exam quality is still inadequate. School exams were assessed as unsatisfactory at 32% of departments (Inspectorate of Education, 2023d). In those cases, we established considerable shortcomings in both exam implementation and quality assurance. The research revealed that 37% of testing and graduation programmes did not cover all mandatory school exam domains. Not all mandatory exam material had been tested at 13% of schools. In addition to shortcomings, there were also some improvements compared with 2019, particularly with respect to the quality and implementation of the testing and graduation programme. In 2019, we had observed many more testing and graduation programmes not covering mandatory domains and these mandatory domains were more frequently not tested.

Inadequate performance of exam committees

The establishment of and tasks assigned to an exam committee have been regulated by law since August 2021. All schools involved in the research had established the legally required exam committee (Inspectorate of Education, 2023d). These committees are tasked with safeguarding exam quality but their performance in this role was inadequate. Schools were struggling with the legal provisions regarding irregularities, resits and making-up for missed school exams. Almost a third of schools occasionally deviated from statutory rules and regulations in the event of irregularities, or if pupils needed to resit or make-up for a missed exam. Schools stated that legislation and regulations is not always clear.

Limited vision on form and content of school exams

Many governing boards and schools have an examination vision or are developing one (Inspectorate of Education, 2023d). This vision is often restricted to the nature of exams in forming the conclusion of the school curriculum and to setting a limit on the number of exams. The vision rarely relates to the form and content of school exams.

The quality of school exams must be safeguarded

The Inspectorate expects governing boards, school management and exam committees to take action. Governing boards and school management must further detail their vision on examinations, and ensure a separation between organising exams and safeguarding the examination process. Exam organisation is a task for exam secretaries (in cooperation with school staff at all levels), while safeguarding the process is the exam committee's responsibility. We call on the ministry to ensure clear and effective legislation. It is important that all stakeholders, including ourselves, continue to provide information.

1.3.4 New schools in primary and secondary education

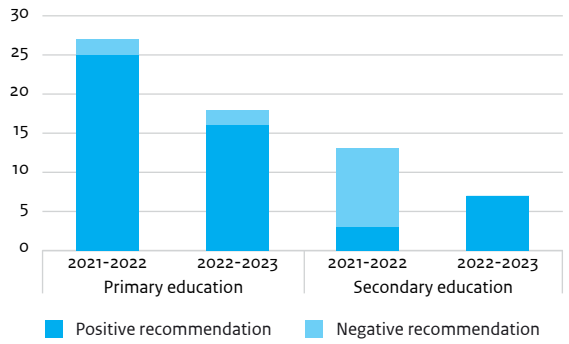
Legislation offers more space for new schools

The More Space for New Schools Act entered into force in early 2021. This Act amends the procedure relating to starting new public and private schools in primary and secondary education to enable these schools to align their programme to the actual interests of pupils and parents. The Act offers more space for new initiatives for schools based on certain religious or philosophical beliefs, as well as for schools based on certain teaching or other principles. The minister decides whether the school will receive funding, following a recommendation from the Inspectorate. The Inspectorate conducts a quality inspection at new schools in their first year of operation.

Accepted schools

Most initiatives for new schools received a positive recommendation from the Inspectorate in 2023 (Figure 1.3.4a). This was not the case for secondary education in 2022, when ten negative recommendations were given. In almost all these cases, the school failed to meet statutory requirements on civic skills and values. On 1 August 2023, 26 new private schools opened based on various principles (mainly non-faith and Islamic) and often based on innovative educational concepts. Nine schools which the Inspectorate gave a positive recommendation in 2022 did not start in 2023. That was because the school's opening had been postponed until 2024 (in eight cases) or because the initiators withdrew (in one case).

Figure 1.3.4a ANumber of positive and negative recommendations from the Inspectorate on new schools in 2022 and 2023*



**this excludes schools that have become independent from an existing private school group and private schools that have been split over various establishments.*

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024q, 2024u)

Risks

Despite contributing to greater variety in education, for the Inspectorate there are risks in establishing new schools. Such schools may lead to increased competition between schools and greater segregation between groups of pupils. There are also challenges in terms of buildings and teacher shortages, particularly in urban areas. We know from experience that not all new schools will be an immediate success. It remains to be seen whether the quality inspections carried out by

the Inspectorate since 2022 as part of the new school establishment procedure will contribute to new schools being more successful.

1.4 Quality of school governing boards

1.4.1 Governing boards in primary and secondary education and MBO

How an assessment is made

We conduct periodic inspections of governing boards of schools and institutions. If we observe serious concerns regarding how a governing board functions, we sometimes advance the periodic inspection and on rare occasions may conduct a specific inspection. Inspections of governing boards result in an appraisal of good or an overall judgement of satisfactory or unsatisfactory. This assessment relates to Quality Area Of Governance, Quality Assurance and Ambition. This is not an assessment of the school governors themselves.

Quality assurance is unsatisfactory in a quarter of inspected school governing boards in schools in primary, secondary, special and special secondary education

In calendar year 2022, after the four-yearly inspections of governing boards, the Inspectorate rated governing boards in primary and secondary education with an overall judgement of satisfactory or good 188 times and unsatisfactory 66 times (Table 1.4.1a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024q, 2024u, 2024v). In 2023, they were assessed as satisfactory or good 114 times versus unsatisfactory 38 times. The inspectors established shortcomings in a quarter of school governing boards, leading to an unsatisfactory overall judgement. Fewer risk-oriented four-yearly inspections were conducted into governing boards in 2023 than in 2022, as the Inspectorate had set other priorities.

Table 1.4.1a Overall judgements in four-yearly inspections of primary and secondary education governing boards in 2022 and 2023

	Primary education		Secondary education		Special education and special secondary education		Total	
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
Good	15	12	0	1	3	1	18	14
Satisfactory	118	76	43	13	10	11	171	100
Unsatisfactory	47	24	12	12	7	2	66	38
Total	180	112	55	26	20	14	255	152

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024q, 2024u, 2024v)

Quality assurance unsatisfactory at almost a fifth of inspected MBO governing boards

calendar year 2022, after the four-yearly inspections of governing boards, the Inspectorate rated governing boards in publicly-funded MBO institutions with the overall judgement of satisfactory or good 16 times and unsatisfactory twice (Table 1.4.1b) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024o). In 2023, they were assessed as satisfactory nine times versus unsatisfactory four times. Over a two-year period we assessed quality assurance in approximately a fifth of publicly-funded MBO governing boards as being unsatisfactory. The picture is similar among governing boards in non-publicly funded MBO institutions. The Inspectorate conducts a remedial inspection one year after issuing its report assessing a governing board's performance as unsatisfactory. The remedial inspection outcome is usually that the governing board's quality assurance is no longer unsatisfactory.

Table 1.4.1b Overall judgements in four-yearly inspections of MBO governing boards in 2022 and 2023

	Publicly-funded MBO		Non-publicly funded MBO	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
Good	3	0	1	3
Satisfactory	13	9	16	10
Unsatisfactory	2	4	4	3
Total	18	13	21	16

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024o)

Governing boards do not always define tangible targets

The Inspectorate does not prescribe how to establish a system of quality assurance, although we do provide a description of the quality cycle as assessed in the inspection framework. In a nutshell, this concerns the

design, implementation and evaluation of the governance of a school or institution. A professional quality culture and sound governance of quality assurance starts with a shared vision on education, which is then translated into ambitions and concrete targets. We notice that governing boards do not always succeed in making this translation. Inspectors often observe a lack of specific or tangible targets and a failure to conduct evaluations. Tangible (observable or verifiable) targets enable governing boards to clarify the direction in which they are heading and evaluate whether they have been successful.

1.4.2 Governing boards of inter-institutional partnerships for inclusive education

How an overall judgement is made

The Inspectorate also conducts periodic inspections of inter-institutional partnerships. The governing board of the inter-institutional partnership and the affiliated school governing boards are jointly responsible for delivering inclusive education. The Inspectorate's inspection provides insight into the extent to which inter-institutional partnerships succeed in fulfilling their statutory obligations. We examine two quality areas, i.e. Governance, Quality Assurance and Ambition and Realisation of Inclusive Education. Both quality areas comprise three standards that are assessed separately. The inspectors rate the appraisal as being good and the judgement as satisfactory or unsatisfactory using decision criteria that take all six standards into account.

One in three governing boards of inter-institutional partnerships unsatisfactory

Quality in a third of inter-institutional partnerships inspected in 2022 and 2023 was unsatisfactory (Table 1.4.2a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). one inter-institutional partnership was rated good in the overall judgement. Of the 47 inter-institutional partnerships that received an overall judgement of satisfactory in 2022 or 2023, over half were rated good in the appraisal of one or more standards. We generally issued this appraisal for one of the standards within the Realisation of Inclusive Education quality area. The inter-institutional partnerships judged to be unsatisfactory usually comply with their statutory duties but have shortcomings with respect to quality assurance or governance culture.

Comprehensive network the highest priority

In 2022 and 2023 we established that ten inter-institutional partnerships failed to meet statutory requirements, such as a comprehensive network of provisions for pupils with special educational needs (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). These shortcomings are concerning as they directly impact the ability to provide inclusive education for pupils. Delivering a comprehensive network of provisions should, therefore, take the highest priority. The governing board, the internal supervision of the inter-institutional partnerships and the associated school governing boards all have an interest in ensuring sufficient suitable classroom places or provisions for pupils with special educational needs. It is important in this respect that inter-institutional partnerships have a clear view of what is needed in the region, in both qualitative and quantitative terms (see also Chapter 5).

Inter-institutional partnerships' performance generally satisfactory after remedial period

The Inspectorate conducts a remedial inspection one year after assessing a partnership's performance as unsatisfactory. We conducted eleven remedial inspections at inter-institutional partnerships in 2022 and 2023. In nine cases, the governing board was able to address the shortcomings within the set timeframe and the partnership was awarded a satisfactory overall judgement (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v).

Table 1.4.2a Overall judgements in four-yearly inspections of governing boards of inter-institutional partnerships in 2022 and 2023

	Primary education		Secondary education		Total	
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
Good	1	0	0	0	1	0
Satisfactory	12	12	13	10	25	22
Unsatisfactory	5	6	8	5	13	11
Total	18	18	21	15	39	33

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024v)

Inter-institutional partnerships pay higher proportion of funds to governing boards

Inter-institutional partnerships contribute a substantial proportion of their income to special education and special secondary education. The partnerships' remaining funding is intended to provide extra support to pupils particularly in primary and secondary education. Inter-institutional partnerships do this by transferring funds to the school governing boards and by providing expertise or other support. After the partnerships have paid their contribution to special education and special secondary education, the remaining funds that these inter-institutional partnerships use for inclusive education – mainly in primary and secondary education – have risen in recent years, notably in secondary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k).

Monitoring, management and accountability of efficient spending needs to improve

Inter-institutional partnerships need to improve their insight, management as well as their accountability to ensure that support funding is spent effectively (Inspectorate of Education, 2023j). This requires the education sector to identify pupils' special educational needs and monitor these throughout the entire process. A system of quality assurance must also be established that focuses on efficient use of funds and there could be more dialogue regarding the efficient use of funds. The internal supervisory board may draw up a framework of expectations geared towards the efficient use of funds. The government must also provide a statutory definition of efficient use.

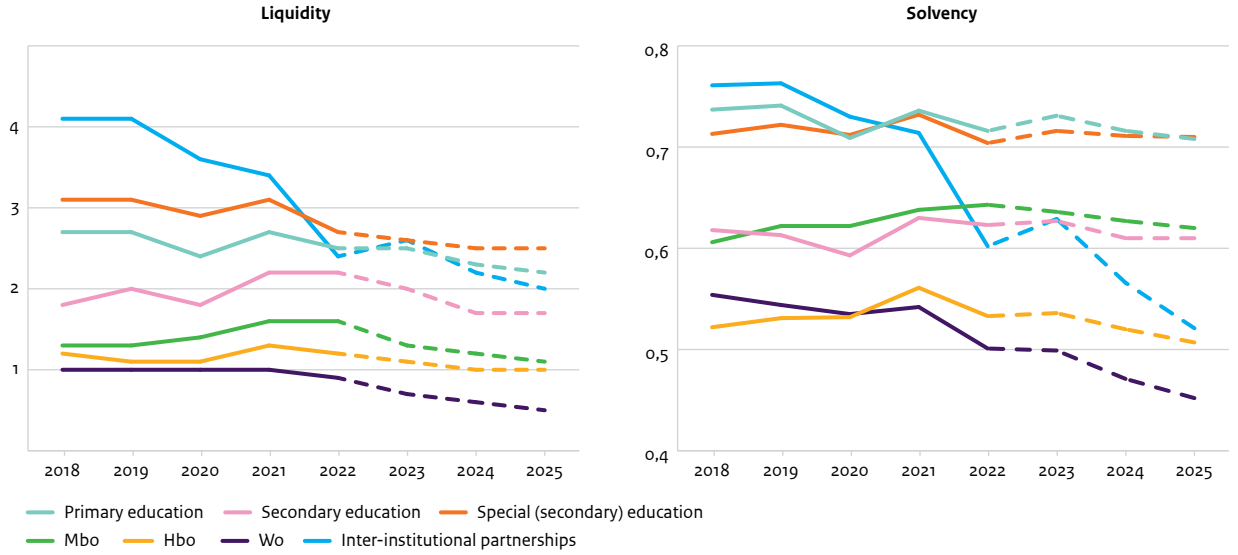
1.5 Financial quality

1.5.1 Continuity

Indicator limit

The Inspectorate uses solvency (governing boards' assets + reserves ÷ liabilities) to assess whether governing boards will be able to meet their financial obligations in the future. We use an indicator limit of 0.3. The Inspectorate uses liquidity (current assets ÷ current liabilities) as an indicator limit to assess whether a governing board has sufficient funds for short-term expenditure. The amount depends on the governing board's income: the higher the income, the lower the indicator limit (between 0.5 and 1.5). The Inspectorate also uses the absolute amount of liquid assets as an indicator limit (€100,000 in primary and secondary education and €2 million in MBO and higher education).

Figure1.5.1a Development of liquidity and solvency per sector between 2018 and 2025*



**from 2023 based on projections from governing boards*

Source: (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k)

Key financial figures are stable

Liquidity and solvency of educational institutions have remained relatively stable across all sectors in recent years and are on average above the Inspectorate's indicator limit (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k). There was a slight decrease in liquidity and solvency with respect to inter-institutional partnerships (Figure 1.4.3a). Governing boards expect the values in most sectors to fall slightly in the coming years.

Liquid assets and assets are needed

At the end of 2022, all governing boards combined had €13.4 billion in liquid assets and €16.8 billion in assets (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k). This does not mean that funds are being hoarded unnecessarily. These liquid assets are necessary as, without them, governing boards would risk being unable to pay for such things as salaries. Governing boards need sufficient long-term assets to pursue a stable policy and cope with setbacks.

Some governing boards below indicator limit

The key financial figures are not a cause for concern. However, approximately 5% of governing boards were below the indicator limit in 2022 on one or more key financial figures (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k). In primary, special, special secondary and secondary education this was the case for 4% of governing boards. The solvency of all governing boards in MBO, HBO and university education was above the indicator limit, while liquidity at some HBO and university institutions was below the indicator limit. In over 10% of cases, solvency at inter-institutional partnerships was, however, below the Inspectorate's indicator limit. The risk to inter-institutional partnerships' financial continuity is limited, as the affiliated governing boards are required to step in should financial problems arise, although this does reduce the funds available for inclusive education at the affiliated governing boards.

Around 1% of governing boards is under special financial supervision

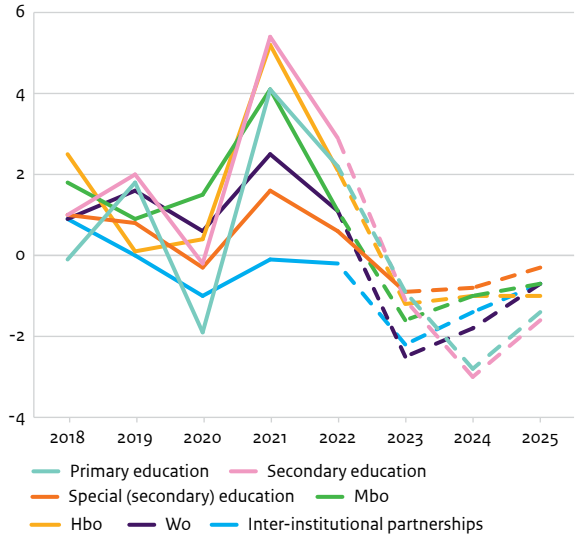
If the Inspectorate has concerns about a governing board's financial continuity, it can place the board under special financial supervision. This means that we closely monitor the financial position of these governing boards. Eight governing boards were under special financial supervision on 1 August 2023, of which three in primary education, two in special education and special secondary education, two in secondary education and one in HBO (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k). The numbers have fallen compared with 1 August 2022, when seventeen governing boards were under special financial supervision. Viewed over several years, approximately 1% of governing boards is under special financial supervision.

1.5.2 Financial management

Greatest expenditure is staffing

The income of governing boards in all sectors increased in recent years in absolute terms as well as on average per pupil or student (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k). Governing boards spend the majority of these funds on staffing. Over 82% of all expenditure was on staffing in primary education, special education and special secondary education in 2022. Staffing costs in secondary education amounted to 80% of total expenditure, with this being 76% in MBO, 79% in HBO and 71% in university education. The majority of staffing costs is spent on salaried staff. Salary costs per FTE rose in all sectors, due to salary increases resulting from collective labour agreements and agreements on aligning salary scales in primary and secondary education. The size of the workforce also increased (OCW, 2023b).

Figure 1.5.2a Development of profitability per sector between 2018 and 2025*



**from 2023 based on projections from governing boards*
Source: (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k)

Positive result on average

In 2022, the total income exceeded total expenditure, which means that the result was positive (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k). This did not apply to the inter-institutional partnerships (Figure 1.5.2a). This is mainly

due to pressure on the partnerships to reduce potentially excessive assets. As in 2021, non-recurring funding is a key reason for the positive result. Some of this funding was received in 2022 and can be spent up to and including school year 2024-2025. Governing boards allocated funds received in 2022 in earmarked reserves, although not all governing boards succeeded in achieving positive results in 2022. Just over a quarter of governing boards had negative results.

More positive results than budgeted in 2022

As in previous years, the realised result of governing boards in 2022 was, on average, higher than the budgeted result (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k). Governing boards increasingly budget a negative result but ultimately achieve a positive result. Consequently, reserves increased in almost all sectors. Governing boards expect that they will formulate a negative budget more frequently in the coming years. This is partly because the earmarked reserves will then be spent and partly because those governing boards with possible excess reserves aim to reduce them and use them for such things as retaining staff.

Use targeted multi-annual budget to achieve positive result

Each year, government contributions are higher than the governing boards budgeted. In 2022, €3.9 billion more was paid out in state contributions than was budgeted by governing boards (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k). It is possible that governing boards set their annual expectations too low or fail to respond adequately to changed funding. Targeted multi-annual budgets will enable governing boards to achieve their forecast positive result. Governing boards that are more successful in this area closely involve the budget holders including school directors and departmental heads throughout the process (Inspectorate of Education, (2023a). These governing boards also closely monitor expenditure and income during the financial year so that they can make immediate adjustments in the event of anomalies.

Increase of potential excess capital in primary and secondary education

Potential excess assets increased in 2022. This was mainly the case in primary and secondary education, with an increase of €218 million (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k). In inter-institutional partnerships the potential excess capital reserves fell in 2022, as did the size and number of governing boards with this excess. This could be a consequence of planned reductions, although the reduction was not as high as budgeted. It should be noted that assets above the indicator limit are not automatically considered as excess assets. A governing board may have good reasons to temporarily hold more assets, for instance to cope with the effects of growth or shrinkage or because a renovation is imminent. The governing board must account for this in its annual report.

Accountability on monitoring effectiveness proving difficult

The internal supervisory body often has difficulty in accounting for its supervision of the efficient use of funds. In 2022, over half of governing boards received a remedial action on this point (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b). Using 32 annual reports, we examined whether governing boards had followed up on these remedial actions. In three-quarters of cases the annual report had been amended, but the result was only satisfactory for a third of these governing boards (Inspectorate of Education, 2024k). The annual reports described the fact that supervision had taken place, but not how. There were also cases where the supervision of the efficient use of funds focused exclusively on non-recurring expenditure and not on regular expenditure, or the governing boards relied on the accepting opinion of the accountant. Where accountability was satisfactory, the annual report contained the following textual elements:

- reference to a monitoring framework, against which efficient spending is assessed and that describes what is meant by efficient spending.
- a specification of the targets the governing board intends to achieve, how the board will be held to account and the role of the supervisory body.
- an appeal to the governing board to use a policy-rich multi-year budget where the use of funds is linked to targets.
- a description of the specific outcomes of the supervision on accountability: what does the internal supervisory board consider efficient and not efficient?
- a list of tools used by the supervisory board such as management reports and interviews with people involved.

The Association of Supervisors in Education and Childcare produced guidelines with the Inspectorate to enable internal supervisors to shape their supervision of the efficient use of funds (VTOI-NVTK, 2023). This may help internal supervisors to improve the quality of their supervision and their accountability for this.

1.5.3 Non-recurring funding in primary and secondary education

Research into non-recurring funding in primary and secondary education

The Inspectorate indicated in 2023 that non-recurring funding of education could have its disadvantages (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b). We examined non-recurring funding in primary and secondary education in more detail by analysing financial data provided by governing boards (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m). We were unable to include part of the funding from the National Education Programme in our analysis as this is accounted for in the state contributions OCW lump sum item, although we do consider these funds to be non-recurring funds. This means that the figures in this section are an underestimate of the actual proportion of non-recurring funds. In addition to drafting the financial analysis, we interviewed fourteen governing boards in primary and secondary education.

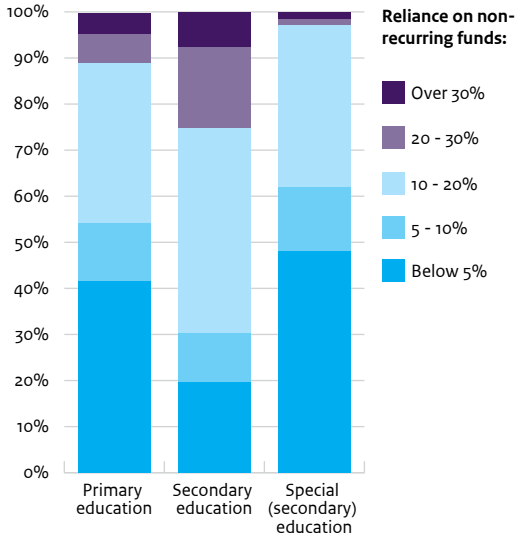
Increase in proportion of non-recurring government funds

2022, the percentage of non-recurring funds compared with the lump sum was 9% in primary education, 15% in secondary education and 7% in special and special secondary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m). Non-recurring state funds increased in primary and secondary education from €885 million in 2018 to €1.84 billion in 2022. Non-recurring funds from other providers (mainly municipalities) did not increase in that period and amounted to approximately €350 million. Most governing boards contend with varying types of non-recurring funds. Governing boards relatively often cited subsidies for basic skills, ventilation, strong technology education, catch-up and support programmes and lateral entry teachers on top of the funding from the National Education Programme (which includes the labour market allowance and heterogeneous transition groups). There are also subsidies at municipal or regional level, which vary in size and nature. Subsidies from the European Social Fund are another non-recurring but important source.

Differences between governing boards in funds received

Some governing boards receive more subsidies than others. In primary and secondary education, governing boards with a challenging student population receive relatively more non-recurring funds than other governing boards. This is because part of the subsidy is linked to the complexity of the student population (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m). Governing boards informed us that there are now stronger links between funding and target group characteristics. According to some governing boards, it is now the case that financial scarcity is greatest at schools with an average profile, as these are excluded from some subsidies, while they could still have some challenging target groups. Governing boards in municipalities with over 250,000 residents are awarded more non-recurring funds. This is especially the case for governing boards in primary education. This is partly due to the student population, but larger municipalities also award more non-recurring funds than other municipalities. Nationally, the proportion of non-recurring funds from municipalities is 2%, in larger municipalities this is 7% for primary school governing boards, 3% for secondary school governing boards and 4% for special and special secondary school governing boards.

Figure 1.5.3a Classification of governing boards according to share of non-recurring funds compared with the lump sum in 2022



Source: (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m)

Dependence on non-recurring funds differs per governing board

Governing boards are dependent on non-recurring funds to a varying degree. Governing boards receiving over 30% of their funding from non-recurring funds depend on this funding for their operations and to pay for their staff (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m). However, there are also governing boards that do not depend on these funds, as less than 5% of their funding is from non-recurring funds and they have a strong financial position. In 2022, the proportion of

non-recurring funds was over 10% for 46% of primary school governing boards, 70% for secondary school governing boards and 38% for special and special secondary school governing boards (Figure 1.5.3a). Some of these governing boards indicated that if they lost these non-recurring funds, they would still be able to function but would have to cancel current programmes or projects. This could lead to quality losses and to increased workload.

Most governing boards apply for available subsidies

Governing boards indicated that it was not difficult to find out which subsidies are available (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m), and they use various sources for this. School governors or controllers generally have a central role in the application. Larger governing boards often employ a staff member specifically for this job. Most governing boards stated that they apply for the available subsidies particularly if this involves a substantial amount. According to the governing boards, these subsidies are generally granted. There is a slight negative connection between solvency and the share of non-recurring funds received, which means that, on average, governing boards that are in a better financial position receive fewer non-recurring funds.

Most non-recurring funds go to staff

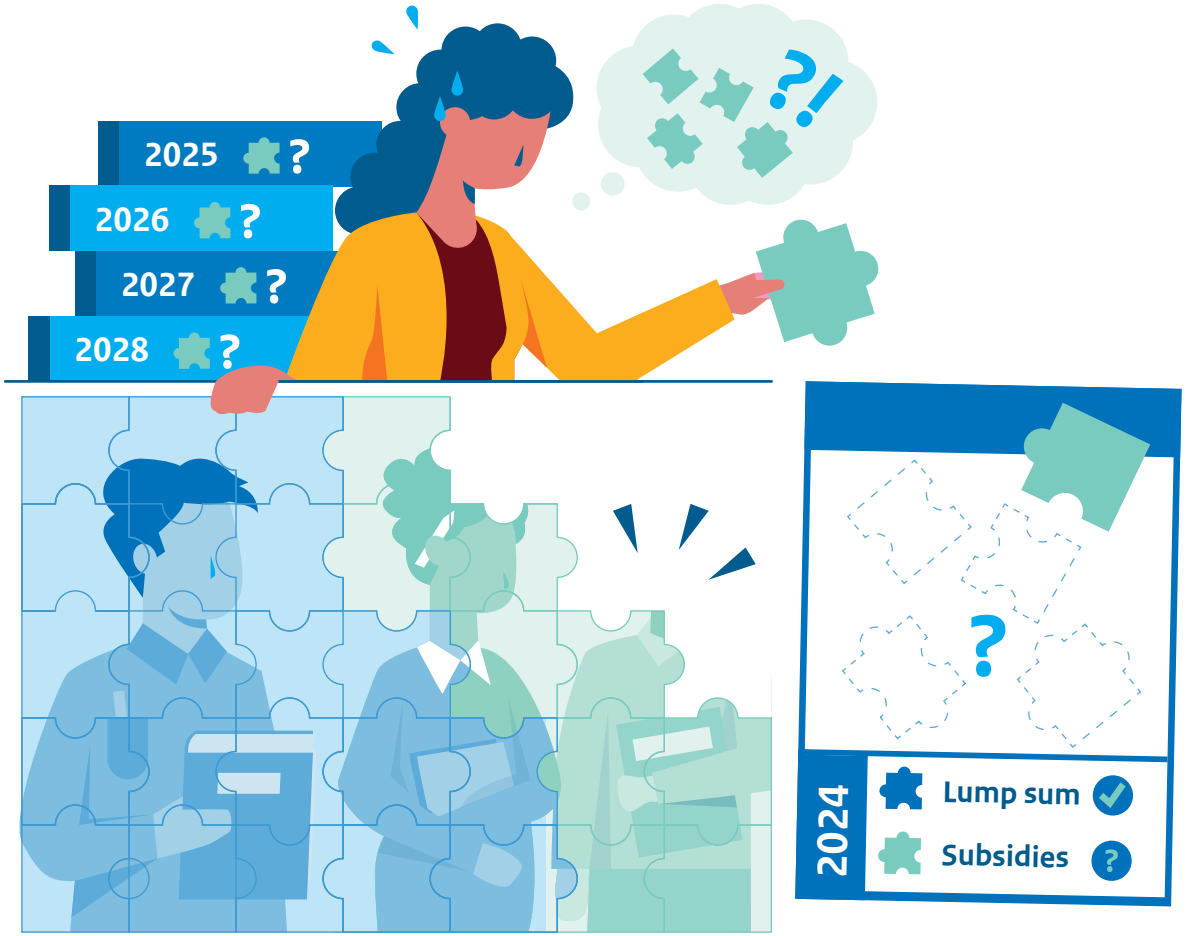
Non-recurring funds are generally used to attract or retain staff. Some governing boards stated that, although hiring permanent staff was preferable, they did not do this with non-recurring funds because of the risk, as non-recurring funds are only available for a relatively short period (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m). Instead of offering permanent contracts, some governing boards

opted to offer temporary contracts or hire external staff. However, temporary contracts must be terminated when the subsidy ends, which can result in a loss of knowledge for the schools and to job insecurity for staff, according to the governing boards. Sometimes subsidies are extended or new subsidies are created, but this often causes problems with timing. This is a problem as it makes the workplace less attractive and is detrimental to retaining teachers (see also Chapter 6).

Sustainable impact requires more time

Governing boards indicated that the goals of non-recurring funds often align with the tasks of governing boards (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m). However, governing boards are still critical of the non-recurring funds as these are often awarded at school level. Governing boards indicated that this limits their options to allocate these funds, while they felt that it was important that they were given the opportunity to decide on this allocation. And non-recurring funds generally need to be spent within one or a few years. One example is that hiring external staff can help to address learning delay in pupils who have fallen behind. This helps pupils in the short term. However, this improvement does not continue once the externally hired teacher has had to leave the school. According to governing boards, achieving a sustainable impact requires a longer timeframe. Indeed, to achieve structural improvements, it is vital that we have a shared picture of the causes, produce a joint improvement plan for the team and then implement, monitor, evaluate and improve it. This takes time.

It is difficult for school governors to make long-term plans as funding streams are increasingly non-recurring.



Accountability perceived as administrative burden

Every subsidy scheme uses its own model of accountability. Accountability to the government and to municipalities also differs (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m). Municipalities often request a more detailed accountability on content whereas the government has several accountability models, each with a fixed format. Auditor's reports are required in some cases, which results in costs. For some subsidies records must clearly show which part of the subsidy was earmarked for which staff, and directors must keep careful track of this at school level. This sometimes means asking for input from teachers. The governing board then writes and submits the necessary accountability report. Some governing boards indicated that this is very doable, while others state that it is time-consuming, particularly because of the multitude of schemes. This is then experienced as an administrative burden.

Enhancement of structural funding required

One governing board indicated that it was able to work in the current situation as the funding is much needed. A majority of the interviewed governing boards stated that they would prefer to see structural funding enhanced, while a proportion called for an end to non-recurring funds (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m). According to governing boards, such structural funding enhancement should be linked to a clear vision of the social tasks in which education plays a key role. These school governors consider structural funding as an important prerequisite for achieving the necessary long-term improvements in education. It is important that structural funding has clearly defined parameters that determine the funding need. Most governing boards consider it logical and desirable to link a proportion of the funds to the student population composition. However, careful monitoring of how this works in practice is needed. Their wish is in line with previous recommendations (IBO Sturing op Onderwijskwaliteit, 2022; Inspectorate of Education, 2023b; Onderwijsraad, 2023).

Focus on specific targets via long-term programmes

According to governing boards, earmarking funding is one way to focus on specific targets, or, alternatively, the use of long-term programmes (Inspectorate of Education, 2024m). Governing boards would prefer to receive such funding annually to reduce fluctuations in their asset position. By long-term, the governing boards mean a period of at least 4 years but preferably longer. This timeframe enables sustainable impact to be achieved and permanent contracts can be offered with fewer risks. Compared with a short-term subsidy, the scope and targets of a long-term programme are broader and this provides governing boards greater freedom to select and shape the interventions. The long-term programme would include accounting for the use of the funding and the results achieved.

CHAPTER 2

Basic skills

2.1 Key points

Education is about teaching pupils and students the basic skills they need to participate in society, including literacy, numeracy and maths, and citizenship skills. It is vital that pupils and students leave school with basic literacy and numeracy skills and that all types of education help pupils and students to acquire these skills.

Reading skills decline across the board

Literacy levels are falling among Dutch school pupils. The most prominent decline is in 15-year-olds' reading performance in the 2022 international PISA survey; a decline that is steeper than in previous years and steeper than in other countries. Our 15-year-olds' reading performance has fallen below the European average. Reading performance declined in both primary education and lower secondary education, and MBO graduates' reading skills have apparently also deteriorated.

Numeracy and mathematics levels in secondary education under pressure

Numeracy and mathematics performance is not much better, with fewer than half of primary education pupils attaining the 1S target level. Although Dutch 15-year-olds' mathematics performance in 2022 was still better on average than that of pupils in other European countries, their attainment levels did decline. In lower secondary education, pupils' reference level attainment has deteriorated across almost all year groups and all school types. Many VMBO pupils do not even attain the basic level (1F) for numeracy and mathematics. Secondary schools must provide additional guidance to these pupils to ensure that when they finish VMBO they have the numeracy skills they need to function in further education and in society.

Decline in citizenship skills among secondary school pupils

The 2022 international ICCS study shows that, while Dutch secondary school pupils' citizenship skills are at the international average, they are far lower than in comparable countries. As in many other countries, levels have also fallen in the Netherlands. Dutch pupils' average citizenship knowledge is low in relation to comparable countries and differences between schools are greater than in other countries. One in seven pupils lacks knowledge of basic concepts such as equality before the law or the importance of secret ballots in elections.

Many remedial orders for deficiencies in basic skills

With respect to teaching provision in basic skills, the inspectorate issued one or more remedial orders to a large majority of randomly selected primary and secondary schools, with most remedial orders being issued in secondary education. While more than half the inspected schools received a remedial order for citizenship skills, the curriculum was deemed insufficiently goal-oriented or coherent in almost all cases. Deficiencies established in remedial orders for Dutch literacy often related to the curriculum being both inappropriate for the school population and not in line with the school population's characteristics. These results give cause for concern and demonstrate how vital it is that schools improve their basic skills curriculum.

Reference level attainment affects further education

VMBO pupils who had not yet attained level 1F for literacy or use of language by primary school group 8 are more likely to fail the central Dutch exam than pupils who had attained 1F. Pupils progressing to VMBO (G/T), HAVO or preuniversity education need to attain target level 2F. However, of those pupils with a recommendation for VMBO (G/T), HAVO or preuniversity education, 1 in 8 failed on reading and 1 in 3 on use of language. Pupils in HAVO or preuniversity education who had not yet attained level 2F for reading or use of language by group 8 are more likely to fail the central Dutch exam. VMBO pupils who failed mathematics on their central exam and progress to MBO are almost twice as likely to drop out or move down to a lower level. It is vital for pupils' school careers that primary schools do everything possible to ensure that pupils' reading is at the level needed for their further education. If pupils have fallen behind, the next educational institution they attend must offer extra support to enable them to catch up.

Continuous learning pathways are essential

Schools in special primary education also need to ensure that pupils attain the reference levels. Pupils in special primary education are less likely to achieve level 1F than primary school pupils with the same school recommendation. In special education, about 80% of pupils progressing to secondary education attain level 1F for Dutch literacy. Secondary schools can no longer assume that all new pupils have attained the expected levels in reading and use of language. The same applies to MBO educational programmes for pupils transferring from VMBO. Continuous learning pathways between the educational sectors are essential for pupils and students. Schools and educational programmes should monitor pupil and student attainment levels on entry, track their ongoing progress, help them catch up if they have fallen behind, give them what they need to obtain the final target of their current educational programme, and offer them what they need to take their next steps in education or on the labour market. Too many pupils leave school without basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Recommendations:

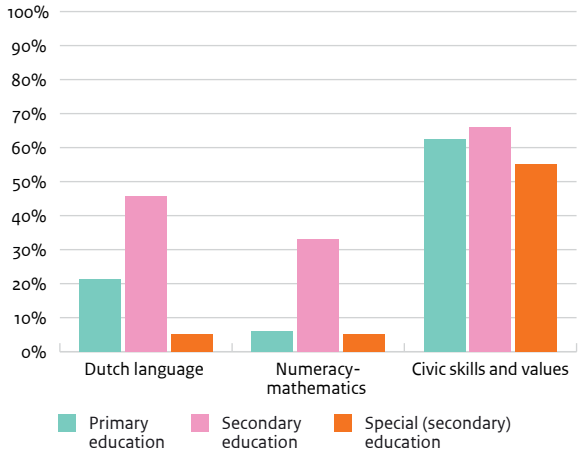
- Schools: improve the curriculum in basic skills. Ensure curriculum alignment with the school population and check that the citizenship skills curriculum is relatable and coherent.
- Secondary schools: maintain or develop the numeracy skills that should have been learned at primary school.
- All schools and educational programmes: verify whether pupils and students have the required literacy and numeracy levels on entry and ensure that they develop in line with the educational programme's target final attainment level. Offer extra support to help children to catch up.
- Governing boards, schools and educational programmes: set ambitious goals for all pupils and students.

2.2 Remedial orders for basic skills

Majority of schools in randomised inspections issued with remedial order(s) for basic skills

At the end of 2023, the Inspectorate conducted randomised quality inspections at schools and departments in primary, secondary and special primary and secondary education (see also Chapter 1). The inspectors did not issue an assessment on the standard basic skills during the randomised inspections, although they could issue the schools with a remedial order. A large majority of schools were issued with one or more remedial orders for the basic skills curriculum in Dutch literacy, numeracy and mathematics, and citizenship skills (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). More than half the inspected schools received a remedial order for citizenship skills (Figure 2.2a), with the curriculum being deemed insufficiently goal-oriented or coherent in almost all of these remedial orders. Around half the remedial orders in primary and secondary education related to an insufficient match between the curriculum and the characteristics of the school population. The same applied to basic Dutch literacy skills, with over half of remedial orders in primary and secondary education being issued because the curriculum did not sufficiently meet the needs of the school population. Schools must address these shortcomings to optimise pupils' opportunities to attain basic skills.

Figure 2.2a Percentage of schools issued with one or more remedial orders for literacy, numeracy and mathematics, and citizenship skills (n primary education=99, n special primary and secondary education=40, n secondary education=103)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024t)

2.3 Dutch literacy

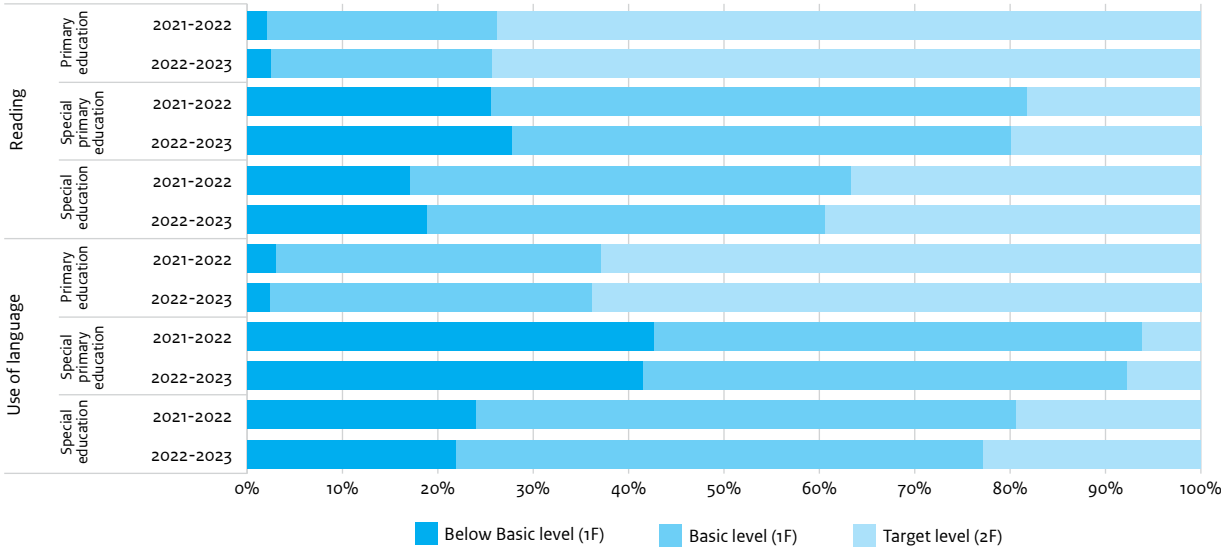
A quarter to over a third of pupils in primary education do not attain literacy target levels

The final test results in group 8 in school year 2022-2023 showed that almost all primary school pupils attained at least the basic level (1F) for Dutch literacy (Figure 2.3a). For reading, around three quarters of primary school pupils attained the target level (2F), while for use of language this was less than two thirds (Inspectorate of Education, 2024h). Around three quarters of all group 8 primary school pupils moved on to VMBO (G/T), HAVO or preuniversity education (Inspectorate of Education, 2024q). Those entering secondary education are expected to have attained the target level. By the end of group 8, 13.0% of pupils with a VMBO (G/T) or higher recommendation have not yet attained the target level for reading and 23.2% have not attained the target level for use of language (Inspectorate of Education, 2024h). Secondary schools will need to payextra attention to these pupils. There is no recent overview of reference level attainment for oral language and writing skills, as these areas are not measured in the final tests. However, schools should certainly address these areas as well.

School differences in literacy target level attainment in primary education

differences between primary schools regarding the percentage of pupils who attained 2F (Figure 2.3b). At the lowest scoring 15% of schools, a maximum of 58% of

Figure 2.3a Percentage of pupils in primary education, special primary education and special education attaining the reference levels for reading and use of language in 2022-2023 (n primary education=149,833, n special primary education=2,061, n special education=1,386)*

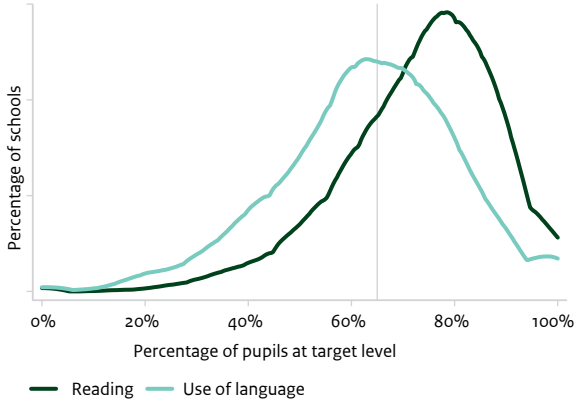


Not including the results based on ROUTE 8, see also Inspectorate of Education (2024h).

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024h)

pupils attained the literacy target level and 46% the use of language target level, while the percentages for literacy and use of language at the top scoring 15% of schools were at least 89% and 81%, respectively (Inspectorate of Education, 2024s). These figures do not factor in school population differences, such as pupils' country of origin or their parents' educational level and income (see Chapter 3). The national target is for 65% of pupils to attain level 2F by the end of primary school (Expert Group on Continuous Learning Pathways in Literacy and Numeracy, 2008). While approximately three quarters of schools attained this level for reading in school year 2022-2023, over half the schools failed to ensure that 65% of their pupils attained the target level for use of language. When schools do manage to ensure that 65% of their pupils attain the target level, it does not automatically mean they will be able to do so each year. A large proportion of schools struggle to ensure that two-thirds of their pupils attain the desired level on a structural basis.

Figure 2.3b Percentage of primary schools by percentage of pupils who attained the reading and use of language target levels by the end of primary school in 2022-2023 (n=5,296)



The vertical line refers to the percentage of pupils that should have attained the target level.
Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024s)

Literacy progress generally returned to pre-Covid levels

On average, in school year 2022-2023 primary school pupils demonstrated the same progress in reading comprehension and spelling as in the school year prior to the Covid pandemic (Haelermans et al., 2023). Some year groups made more progress than prior to the pandemic, whereas in others – the upper year groups – there is still some learning delay. The fact that progress at school is generally back on track does not mean that pupils' skills are at the same level as they were before the pandemic. The National Cohort Study for Education determined the reference level attainments in year groups 6 and 7 based on the results of the pupil monitoring tests. In school year 2021-2022, 80% of pupils in group 6 and 92% of pupils in group 7 attained the basic level for reading (Van Vugt et al., 2023). These percentages are around 2 percentage points lower than in 2017-2018.

Fewer pupils achieving higher reading skill levels

The national study in 2021 showed that group 8 primary school pupils' reading levels had declined slightly compared with a decade earlier (Inspectorate of Education, 2022b). The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) concluded that, in 2021, group 6 pupils also achieved a lower score on average than pupils who had taken part 5 to 10 years previously (Swart et al., 2023). Although the decline in reading skills can partly be explained by school closures during the Covid pandemic, pupils in the Netherlands were no longer scoring above the average of a large number of other Western countries. This suggests that there are other causes for the lower average reading score (see also the paragraph on PISA results in secondary education later in this chapter). There was a particular decline in the percentage of pupils attaining higher reading skill levels. Pupils who attain these levels are able to interpret and integrate storyline events and character actions to describe reasons, motivations, feelings and character development in difficult narrative texts. Dutch education appears to be less successful in developing these higher reading skills, which children need if they are to read well. One reason may be that there are fewer clearly defined goals for these reading skills (Inspectorate of Education 2023h). In this regard, there is room for improvement in the teaching of reading.

Many pupils in special primary education fail to attain 1F for literacy

In 2022-2023, the average reading comprehension level of all special primary education school leavers was the same as the mid/end of group 5 in primary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2024q). Information on reference level attainment does not encompass all of the pupils who took the final test: possibly due to the transition to a different psychometric model, the results of the final ROUTE 8 test are not fully comparable with those of the other tests. Of the pupils who took a final test other than ROUTE 8 (45%), a large proportion did not attain 1F for reading (27.7%) or use of language (41.5%) (Figure 2.3a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024h). Pupils in special primary education are less likely to achieve level 1F than primary school pupils with the same school recommendation. For example, in 2022-2023, 80.1% and 83.2% of primary school pupils with a VMBO-b recommendation attained at least 1F for reading and use of language respectively, compared with 77.8% and 62.6% of pupils in special primary education with this same recommendation. Schools in special primary education also need to ensure that pupils attain the reference levels and VMBO schools cannot assume that all new pupils have attained 1F.

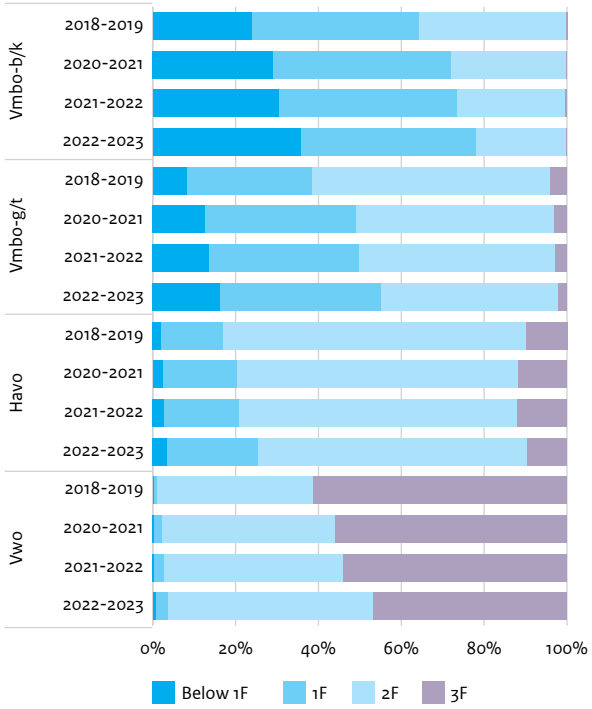
Majority of pupils taking tests in special education attain 1F for literacy

Around half of pupils in special education take an educational programme that is designed with progress to secondary education in mind (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). These pupils are expected to be able to obtain a school diploma. A final test is compulsory if these pupils are to transition to special secondary education. Around 55% of pupils took the ROUTE 8 final test. Only a part of the former cluster 3 and 4 schools administer an alternative final test to ROUTE 8. In 2022-2023, out of the pupils taking an alternative final test, 81.1% attained at least 1F for reading in and 78.1% for use of language (Figure 2.3a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024h).

Decline in reading skills in lower secondary education

In 2022-2023, secondary school pupils were less proficient in Dutch reading skills and vocabulary compared with the previous school year. This was also reflected in a lower percentage of pupils attaining the reading skill reference levels. In year 2 in 2022-2023 for example, 35.7% of VMBO-B/K pupils failed to attain 1F, while in the previous year this had been 30.3%. The percentage of pupils not attaining 1F is also increasing in other school types (Figure 2.3c) (Bais et al., 2023). Language skills are addressed in various subjects in secondary education, which may make targeted action to catch up on learning delays harder to implement. It is vital that secondary schools work to ensure that all their pupils attain the reference levels appropriate to the school type. Secondary schools must have a clear idea of a pupil's level when they start at their school and, particularly in the lower school, must take appropriate measures to help pupils achieve a level that is both appropriate to the school type and that offers pupils opportunities for the future.

Figure 2.3c Percentage of secondary school pupils in year 2 that attained the reference levels for Dutch reading skills between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023 (2022-2023: n VMBO-B/K=19,574, n VMBO-G/T=20,064, n HAVO=16,534, n preuniversity=13,434)



Source: Bais et al. (2023)

International study shows decline in reading skills among 15-year-olds

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) measures 15-year-olds' reading skills in a large number of countries. The 2022 study shows a steeper

decline in attainment levels in the Netherlands than in previous years and also steeper than in other countries (see Figure 2.3d). The reading skills of 15-year-olds in the Netherlands have now fallen below the European average. One in three of all 15-year-olds currently lacks sufficient literacy skills (Meelissen et al., 2023). Reading skills are complex in nature and, in addition to the effect of Covid pandemic restrictions, there are probably several reasons for the decline in Dutch pupils' attainment levels. A study into declining reading skills cites the main reason as the level of difficulty that many pupils experience with regard to the higher reading skills. They find it hard to make connections between a text and their own background knowledge and have difficulty integrating and evaluating what they read. These skills constitute an increasingly large part of the test (Van den Broek et al., 2021).

Figure 2.3d Average pupil reading skills test scores in a series of PISA surveys

Source: Meelissen et al. (2023)

Differences in reading skill attainment between pupils in various secondary school types

Reading attainment skills in secondary education are declining. Some pupils will not attain the target reference levels. A large proportion of VMBO pupils progress to MBO and are expected to have 2F level on entry. MBO educational programmes need to be aware that this is not always the case. There are also differences in the results attained within the school types. There are VMBO pupils with relatively strong reading skills who actually score better than pupils attending HAVO or preuniversity schools (Figure 2.3e). As incoming pupils have different reading skill levels, this requires careful alignment between the types of education.

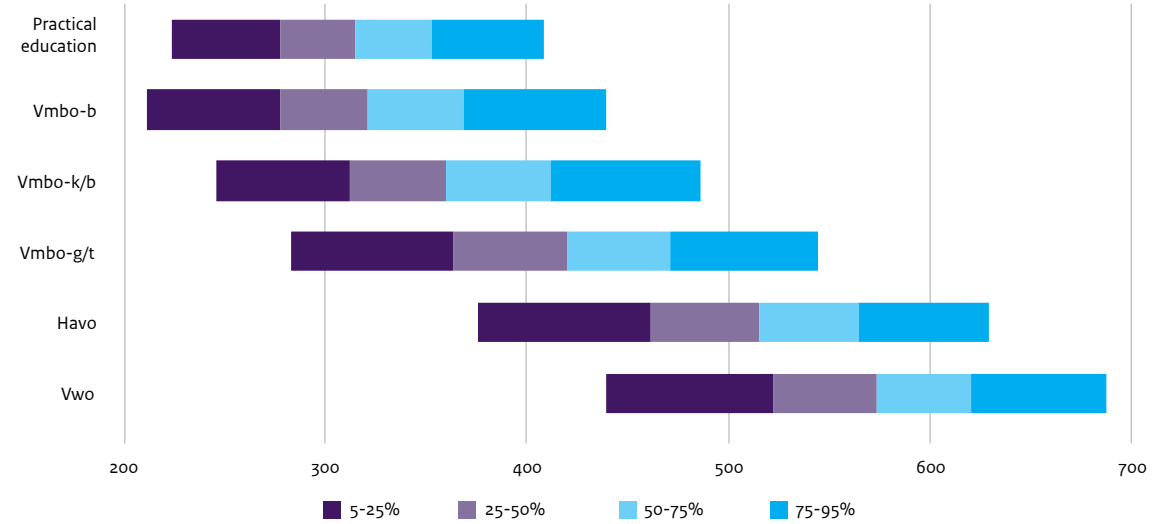
Literacy reference level attainment in primary education affects Dutch exam

Primary school pupils who have not attained 1F level for reading by group 8 are more likely to fail the central Dutch exam at VMBO than pupils who have attained level 1F by that stage (18.1% compared to 13.6%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024u). Pupils taking the HAVO or preuniversity exam who did not attain level 2F for reading by group 8 are more likely to fail the central Dutch exam than their counterparts who did attain level 2F by that stage (29.3% compared to 17.3%). There is also a correlation between attainment of reference levels for use of language by group 8 and passing the central Dutch exam. This suggests that a proportion of pupils who had literacy difficulties in primary school still have difficulties in this area at the end of secondary school. This makes it vital that continuous learning pathways are pursued across sectors. Pupils who have fallen behind in literacy must receive additional support to ensure that their chances of progressing to the next level are not hampered (see also Chapter 3).

Dutch exam candidates less proficient than before the pandemic

Cito carried out research into skills development among secondary school exam pupils, taking into account the differences in difficulty between the central exams (Cito, 2023). In school year 2022-2023, exam candidates' proficiency in Dutch was lower across all types of education than it had been prior to the Covid pandemic. On average, the candidates' proficiency was around 0.25

Figure 2.3e Average test scores of pupils and a breakdown of reading skills by school type in PISA 2022 survey



Source: Meelissen et al. (2023)

percentage points lower. Exam candidates' proficiency in 2022-2023 was the same as proficiency in the two school years during the pandemic. The decline in proficiency occurred more or less equally across all types of schools.

Differences between schools in failing grades in central Dutch exam

In 2022-2023, 16.9% of exam candidates failed their central Dutch exam. The central Dutch exam tests proficiency in reading comprehension and argumentation. A fail means that pupils do not possess these skills at the final target level. The percentage of pupils who obtain a pass or fail for the central Dutch exam varies between secondary schools. The difference between schools with the lowest percentage of pupils who failed and schools with the highest percentage who failed varies according to the type of school (VMBO-B: 16.7%, VMBO-K: 22.3%, VMBO-G/T: 25.4%, HAVO: 21.3%, preuniversity: 24.5%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024u). Some of these differences are due to differences in school population. If we take these differences within departments into account, a higher percentage of pupils still pass the exam in schools that only have HAVO and/or preuniversity departments than in community schools that offer a wider range of educational levels. In addition, the average mark for the central Dutch exam is higher in departments where pupils achieved a relatively high mark on their final primary school test and where fewer pupils take exams above the level of secondary education recommended by their primary school.

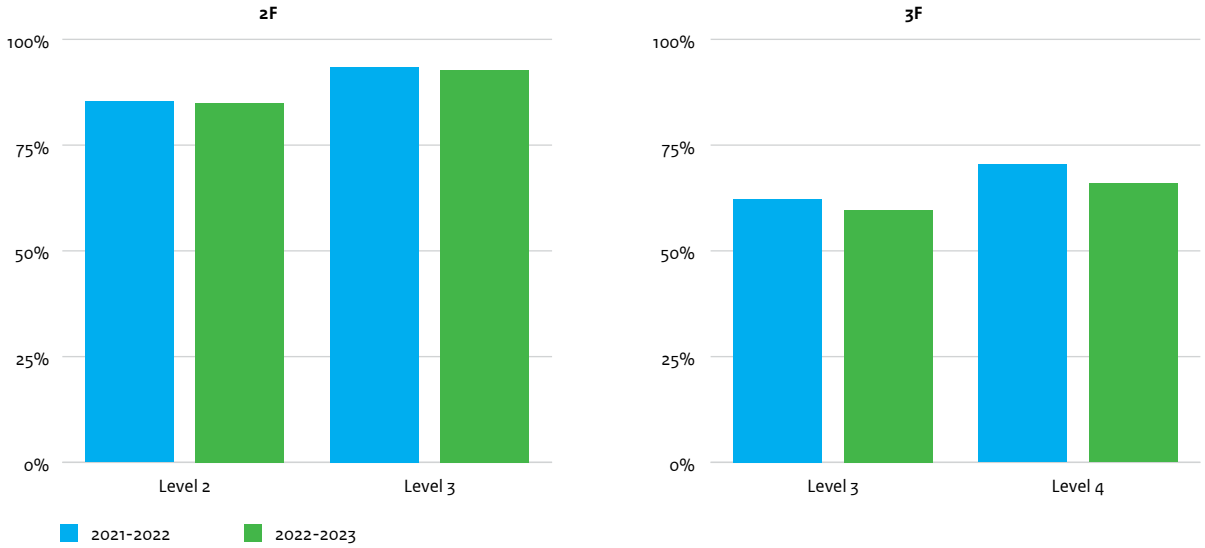
Some MBO students do not attain the target reference levels for reading and/or listening

MBO graduates who obtain a mark of 5.5 or higher on the central Dutch exam at MBO level demonstrate that they have attained the required reference levels for reading and listening (MBO 2: 2B, MBO 3: 2B or 3B, MBO 4: 3B). In 2022-2023, 15.0% of students graduating at MBO-2 and 7.3% of those graduating at MBO-3 did not attain reference level 2B (Inspectorate of Education, 2024o). This means that almost 5,000 MBO-2 and over 2,000 MBO-3 graduates did not have the minimum reading and/or listening level required to function in society. At MBO-4, 34.1% of graduates failed to attain the tested reference level (3B), while 40.3% of MBO-3 students who opted to sit the central exam at a higher reference level (3B) did not attain this level. It is unclear whether these students did attain 2B level. Reference level attainment for reading and/or listening was lower at all levels in 2022-2023 than in the previous school year (Figure 2.3f). Institutions differ in the percentage of graduates attaining the required reference levels. The proportion of students who fail the central Dutch exam at MBO-4 varies between 15% and 45% depending on the institution.

Students feel they are proficient in reading but do not always feel prepared

A survey held among a representative group of 2,806 first-year pupils at 23 secondary schools, 3,826 first-year MBO students and 2,932 students in higher education, shows that on average – i.e. not all – students feel that

Figure 2.3f Percentage of MBO graduates in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 attaining reference levels for reading and/or listening (2022-2023: n MBO 2=32,558, n MBO 3 (2B)=29,942, n MBO 3 (3B)=4,082, n MBO 4=69,903)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024o)

their reading skills are sufficient (on average around 3 on a scale of 4) (ResearchNed, 2024). They are less positive when asked whether what they learned at their previous school or on their previous educational programme has prepared them to read the texts required in their current educational programme. About half of incoming pupils and students indicate that they do not know whether their school or educational programme offers support for further reading skill development. Only some of the pupils and students who indicate that they are aware of the opportunity for support actually make use of it (secondary education(vo): 58%, MBO: 41%, HBO: 21% and university education: 19%). In a survey, recent graduates of MBO programmes (1,051) and higher education programmes (1,424) generally say they are satisfied with their own reading skills. They feel their educational programme has prepared them reasonably well for reading texts they will encounter in their chosen profession. Schools and educational programmes must assess whether all their pupils and students are adequately prepared, as this is not the case for some pupils and students. Schools and educational programmes can help them by proactively informing them about the support available and encouraging them to use it.

2.4 Numeracy and mathematics

Not all pupils in (special) primary education and special education attain 1Bfor numeracy

Final test results in group 8 show that 92.6% of primary school pupils attained the basic level (1B) for numeracy in school year 2022-2023 (Figure 2.4a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024h). In special primary education, 30.4% of pupils attained 1B. Pupils in special primary education participating in a final test are less likely to attain level 1B than primary school pupils with an equal recommendation for secondary education. For example, 46.6% of primary school pupils with a VMBO-B recommendation attained 1B for numeracy, compared with 25.0% of pupils in special primary education who were given the same recommendation. A large proportion of pupils in special education failed to attain 1B for numeracy when transferring to their next educational programme (41.9%). Due to problems with the ROUTE 8 final test (see 2.3) the data below is solely representing results of pupils in primary, special primary and special education taking one of the other final tests.

Not enough primary school pupils attain 1T for numeracy

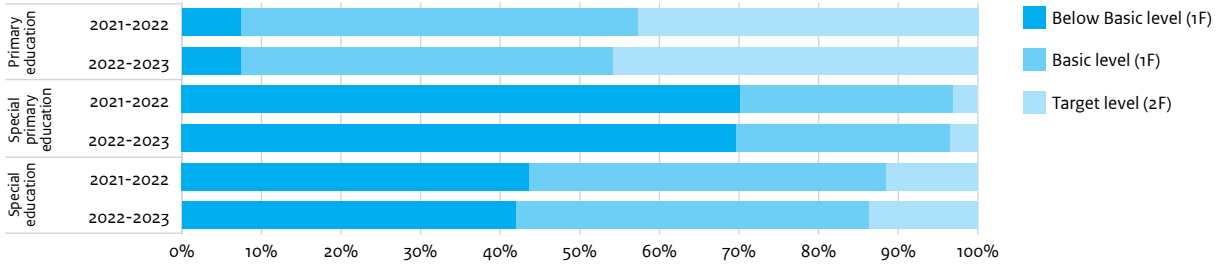
Less than half of primary school pupils attained numeracy target level 1T in addition to level 1B, whereas 65% are expected to achieve that level. A considerable number of pupils leaving primary education with a HAVO or preuniversity school recommendation also failed to attain 1T (22.3%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024h). These pupils need extra support in secondary education to ensure they are not held back in their development due to their lack of attainment at 1T. Primary schools do not always offer numeracy topics

at target level (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b). Research into several mathematics methods showed that, as a result of differentiated learning pathways, not all pupils were offered tasks at the target level (Van Zanten, 2020). More pupils may attain 1T if they are offered topics at target level.

School differences in numeracy target level proficiency in primary education

There are also differences between primary schools with respect to the percentage of pupils who attain 1S (Figure 2.4b). Some of these differences are due to differences in school population (see Chapter 3). At the 15% of schools at which 1T was attained by the fewest pupils in school year 2022-2023, only a maximum of 27% of pupils attained the target level (Inspectorate of Education, 2024s). This figure was at least 62% at the top 15% of highest scoring schools, which is still below the target percentage of 65%. Only 12% of schools had over 65% of pupils attaining 1T. A small proportion of those schools managed to ensure that 1S level was achieved by 65% of their pupils for two or more consecutive years.

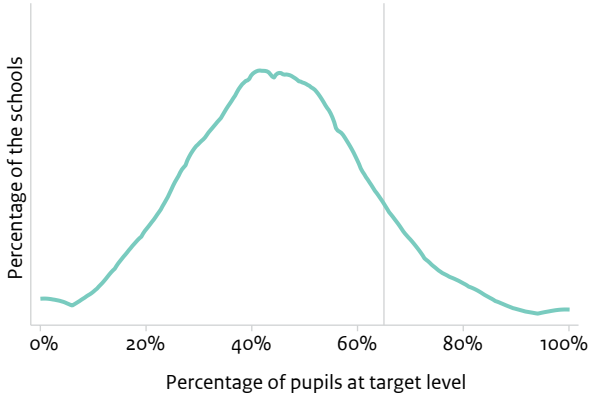
Figure 2.4a Percentage of pupils in primary education, special primary education and special education attaining numeracy reference levels in 2022-2023 (2022-2023: n primary education=149,833, n special primary education=2,061, n special education=1,386)*



Not including the results based on ROUTE 8, see also Inspectorate of Education (2024h).

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024h)

Figure 2.4b Differences between primary schools in the percentage of pupils attaining the numeracy target level in 2022-2023 (n=5,296)



The vertical line refers to the percentage of pupils that should be proficient at target level.

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024s)

1B proficiency for numeracy lower than pre-pandemic level

Proficiency in 1B for numeracy in groups 6 and 7 in school year 2021-2022 was lower than the level attained in the years before the Covid pandemic. In group 6, 37% of pupils attained 1F, 3 percentage points less than in school year 2017-2018. This level was attained by 71% of pupils in group 7, which is 7 percentage points less than in 2017-2018 (Van Vugt et al., 2023). The average progress in numeracy and mathematics in primary education has recovered though. Pupils are, on average, making as much progress in a school year as they did before the pandemic. However, there are differences between the year groups, with learning delays still occurring in groups 6 and 7 (Haelermans et al., 2023).

Many VMBO pupils in the lower school do not attain 1B for numeracy

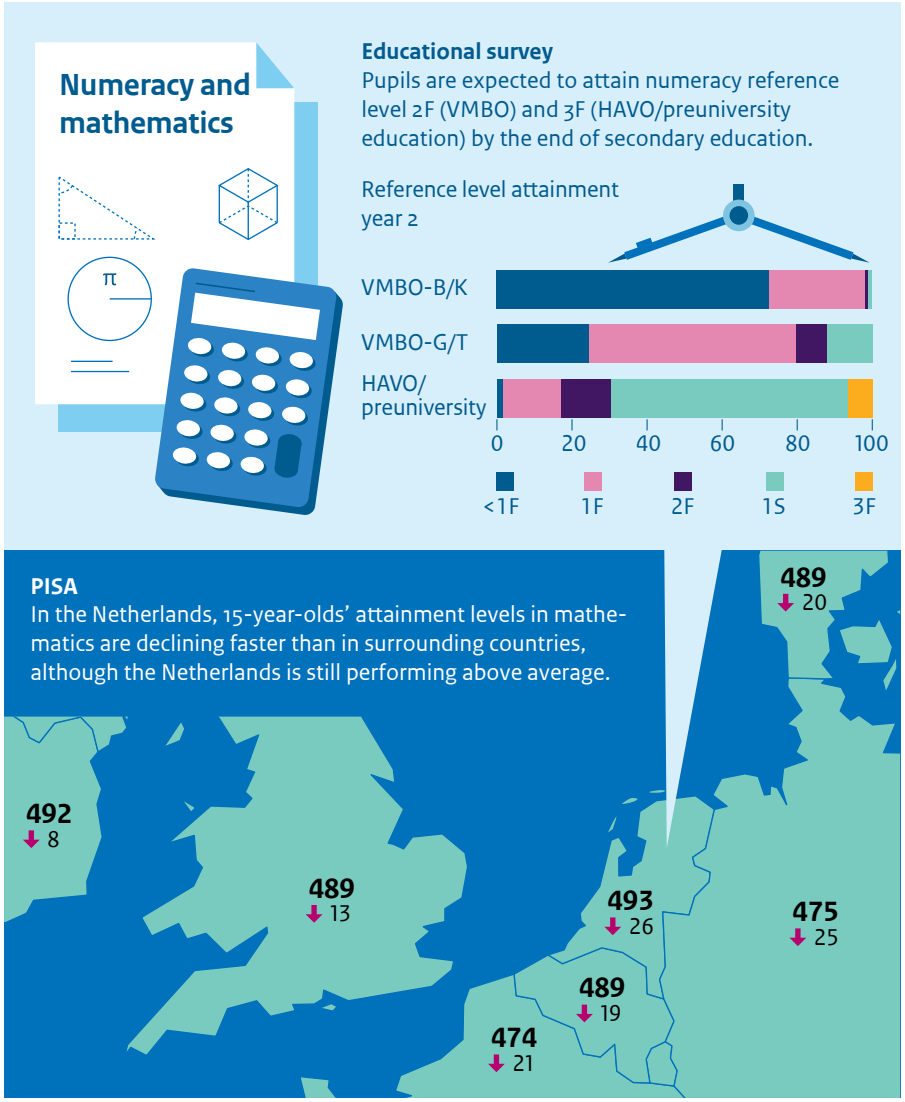
A national numeracy and mathematics study at the end of year 2 of secondary school was conducted for the first time in school year 2021-2022. Around a quarter of the VMBO-B/K pupils attained 1B (Inspectorate of Education, 2024g). This is the expected final level for special primary education. Three-quarters of VMBO-G/T pupils attained 1B. The fact that education focussed on attaining 1B is often no longer offered in secondary education may be a reason why many VMBO pupils fail to attain 1B. The law stipulates that pupils must attain level 2B by the end of VMBO. However, halfway through VMBO only 2% of VMBO-B/K and 20% of VMBO-G/T pupils attain this minimum level. This means that some VMBO pupils need to develop numeracy skills at final target level 2B in their last two years at school. The percentage of pupils who attain the reference level varies between numeracy topics. The relative proficiency level is generally highest in counting and lowest in measurement and geometry. This may be related to the difficulty of this topic, the amount of planned teaching time devoted to it or how it is incorporated into the curriculum (Inspectorate of Education, 2024g; Van Zanten, 2020)

Decline of proficiency in numeracy and mathematics in lower secondary education

Research by Cito shows a downward trend for numeracy and mathematics in school year 2022-2023 across almost all year groups and types of secondary schools (Bais et al., 2023). This reduction in pupils' proficiency is also reflected in reference level attainment. At the end of year 2 of VMBO, fewer pupils attained at least 1B in 2022-2023 than in the preceding year (VMBO-B/K: -3.8 percentage points, VMBO-G/T: -1.5 percentage points). In the same school year, fewer year 2 HAVO and preuniversity pupils than in 2021-2022 attained at least 2B (HAVO: -2.3 percentage points, preuniversity: -2.2 percentage points). This decline does not appear to relate to school or pupils' characteristics.

Differences in planned teaching time for numeracy and mathematics

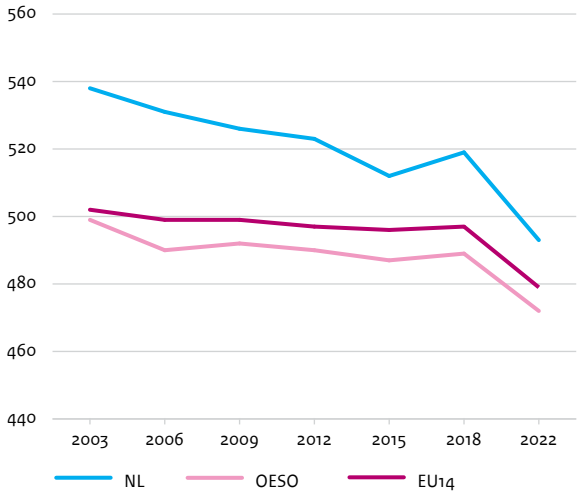
As in most other Western countries, the minimum amount of planned teaching time in the Netherlands is laid down in law. Schools in the Netherlands are free to determine how they divide these hours across the various subjects. Other Western countries spend 16% of compulsory teaching time on numeracy in primary education and 13% in secondary education (OECD, 2023). In the Netherlands, teachers spend an average 2.5 hours a week teaching numeracy and mathematics in year 2 of secondary school (Inspectorate of Education, 2024g). This means that around 10% of compulsory teaching time is devoted to numeracy and mathematics in the Netherlands. This differs per school type, particularly in practical education and VMBO-B/K. The 10% of teachers who reported spending the least time on numeracy and mathematics spend over 1 hour less per week teaching this subject than the 10% of teachers who spend the most time on it. Several studies have found evidence of a positive effect of more teaching time on learning attainment. However, the effects found were generally limited. The main factor in determining whether more teaching time results in higher attainment appears to be the productive use of teaching time (Van der Aa et al., 2020).



Decline in 15-year-olds' mathematics skills in international study

The mathematics skills of 15-year-olds were also examined in the international PISA study . In 2022, Dutch pupils performed better on average than pupils in other European countries (Meelissen et al., 2023). The study measures both process topics (reasoning, formulating, applying, interpreting and evaluating) as well as content-knowledge topics (space and shape, change and relationships, quantity, and uncertainty and data). Dutch pupils perform relatively well with respect to the topics of application and quantity, but have greater difficulty with reasoning, and space and shape. Compared to the previous survey, pupils' proficiency in mathematics has declined in most countries. Dutch pupils' attainment levels, however, declined more rapidly than in other countries (Figure 2.4d). Almost a quarter (24%) of Dutch 15-year-olds had yet to attain the skill level required for sufficient proficiency in mathematics. Pupils who do not achieve this level have difficulty with skills such as solving problems involving simple ratios.

Figure 2.4c Average pupil test scores for mathematics in various PISA surveys



Source: Meelissen et al. (2023)

Some VMBO pupils without mathematics do not attain numeracy level 2B

VMBO and HAVO pupils who do not take the final mathematics exam sit a compulsory school numeracy exam in their last or penultimate year. For VMBO pupils, this school exam must be based on reference levels 1B and 2B. The mark attained is recorded on an attachment to the list of marks but does not count towards the final exam result. Over 22,000 VMBO pupils sat the school numeracy exam in school year 2022-2023. Of those pupils, 58% (VMBO-B), 43% (VMBO-K) and 27% (VMBO-G/T) did not pass (Inspectorate of Education, 2024u). That means that these pupils leave VMBO without proficiency in numeracy at level 2B. It is important that MBO educational programmes are in a position to identify these pupils in order to offer them extra support once they have progressed to MBO. These pupils may have difficulty calculating percentages for example or reading and interpreting scales.

Decline in exam candidates' mathematics proficiency

In school year 2022-2023, 22.2% of secondary school pupils failed their central mathematics exam (Inspectorate of Education, 2024u). A fail means that pupils do not possess the mathematics skills tested at the expected final target level. A study of pupils' development of mathematics proficiency shows that exam candidates' proficiency in mathematics in 2022-2023 was around 0.4 of a percentage point lower than in the pre-pandemic period (Cito, 2023). The decline occurred more or less equally across all school types.

Differences between schools in failing central mathematics exam

The percentage of pupils who pass the central mathematics exam differs between secondary schools. The difference between the 10% of schools with the lowest percentage of pupils who passed and the 10% of schools with the highest percentage varied in school year 2022-2023 according to the type of school (VMBO-B: 48.7%, VMBO-K: 41.2%, VMBO-GT: 40.4%, HAVO: 29.7%, preuniversity: 25.9%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024u). These differences are related to the composition of the school population in addition to other characteristics. The percentage of fail grades was lower in larger departments than in smaller departments. VMBO departments at schools which only offer VMBO learning pathways had a higher percentage of fail grades than VMBO departments in community schools. As was the case in the central Dutch exam, the average mark for the central mathematics exam is higher in departments where pupils achieved a higher mark in their final primary school test and where fewer pupils take exams above the level of secondary education recommended by their primary school.

MBO dropout rate higher for students who fail the central mathematics exam at secondary school

VMBO students who failed the central mathematics exam are less successful in their first MBO school year than students who passed. After one year, almost 15% of students who failed this exam are no longer learning at their initial MBO level (Inspectorate of Education, 2024o), compared with 9% of students who did pass the central mathematics exam. Students who failed the central mathematics exam at VMBO are almost twice as likely to drop out or move down a level. This continues to apply when student characteristics (e.g. gender, origin and prior education) and educational programme characteristics (e.g. sector and level) are taken into consideration.

2.5 Citizenship

Decline in citizenship skills among secondary school pupils

In 2022, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) looked at the citizenship knowledge, attitudes and skills of over 2,600 pupils in year 2 in over 100 secondary schools. Citizenship skills were assessed in four areas: democracy, fundamental social values, social participation and identity. The citizenship skills of

Dutch pupils were in line with the international average. However, compared with similar countries and regions such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Dutch pupils scored considerably lower on average. As in many other countries, pupils' competencies in the Netherlands had declined since the previous study (Daas et al., 2023; Schulz et al., 2023). The Inspectorate has been reporting on the stagnation in the quality of citizenship education for some time (Inspectorate of Education (2017a, 2020e, 2022a). The statutory requirements for the promotion of civic skills and values were amended in 2021. Whether this leads to improvements in citizenship education will become clear in the coming years.

Average level of citizenship knowledge is low

The average level of citizenship knowledge among Dutch secondary school pupils is low compared with similar countries. A knowledge test was used to score pupils according to four skill levels. Almost two-thirds achieved a score at the two highest levels, but 1 in 7 pupils scored at or even below the lowest level. These pupils lack knowledge of basic concepts such as equality before the law or the importance of secret ballots in elections. In the Netherlands, the differences between schools with respect to pupils' citizenship knowledge are greater than in other countries. There are also differences between types of schools, but the differences are even greater within types of schools. It is striking that pupils are less confident in their own citizenship skills than pupils in comparable countries. They indicate that their school devotes little attention to citizenship (Daas et al., 2023; Schulz et al., 2023).

Pupils' opinions on citizenship have not changed

Secondary school pupils' opinions about citizenship and democratic values have not changed notably in recent years. Pupils value being able to vote in elections, follow political news and take part in political discussions. The majority of pupils widely support equal rights for men and women and all ethnic groups. However, this proportion is still below the international average and considerably lower than in surrounding countries. On the other hand, pupils' confidence in the Dutch justice system, media and government is higher than in surrounding countries (Daas et al., 2023; Schulz et al., 2023).

Across the border: monitoring citizenship education in Scotland and Sweden

To ensure that our supervision is as effective as possible, we maintain regular contact with inspectorates in other countries, including Scotland and Sweden. These countries and the Netherlands use a different definition of citizenship and focus on a number of different aspects:

- The Netherlands: focus on active citizenship and cohesion. Citizenship is part of the inspection framework: schools are required to provide goal-oriented, coherent and relatable citizenship education, with a focus on promoting fundamental democratic values.
- Sweden: focus on democratic norms and values. Elements of citizenship legislation are examined during inspections.
- Scotland: no clear definition, but a holistic approach. Personal development, socialisation, wellbeing and social development are woven throughout the curriculum. Citizenship is examined from a holistic perspective during inspections.

Self-evaluation by schools is encouraged in both in Scotland and in Sweden. Swedish schools complete an annual questionnaire. The inspectorate inquires about self-evaluation and the monitoring results of elements of citizenship. The government in Scotland has developed a tool that is used by all schools and governing boards. Citizenship education is incorporated into various parts of this tool.
The Scottish and Swedish inspectorates also share good practices in citizenship education with the educational sector. The Scottish inspectorate shares accessible information on good teaching practices in education and highlights these practices during the Scottish Learning Festival as an inspiration to other schools. In Sweden good practices from a variety of contexts are shared in themed reports on this topic.

Pupils and students feel they have reasonable social and societal skills

First-year secondary school pupils and first-year MBO and HBO students rate their social and societal skills as reasonable (on average around 3 on a scale of 4) (ResearchNed, 2024). These pupils and students are less positive about the extent to which their previous school or educational programme has prepared them for the social skills and societal competences they need in their current educational programme. Fewer than half of these pupils and students indicate that they are aware of the support options offered by their current school or educational programme with respect to developing social skills. Only some of the pupils and students who indicate that they are aware of the opportunity to obtain support actually make use of it (preuniversity: 54%, MBO: 36%, HBO: 30% and university education: 22%). In general, those entering the

labour market also indicate they are reasonably satisfied with their own competencies and feel they have the necessary social skills and societal competencies. However, they feel that their prior education was less effective in equipping them with the skills and competencies they need in their current work.

2.6 Basic skills in special secondary education

Target levels in special secondary education focus on the transition to work

Over a quarter of pupils in special secondary education follow a curriculum that focuses on the transition to work (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). These are pupils who are not expected to obtain a secondary school diploma but who are capable of transitioning to work or sheltered work. Education for these pupils is structured around its own key goals, with the educational programme placing an increasing emphasis on employee skills. A study among a representative group of 54 schools with school leavers in the destination profile geared towards the labour market shows that nearly all schools involved in the study set target levels for numeracy and Dutch literacy (Inspectorate of Education, 2024p). The national target group model supports schools in estimating what levels are feasible for pupils, based on cognitive, social, emotional, physical and medical factors. Schools also base their target levels on learning pathways or national reference levels. Reference level attainment by pupils with this destination profile is a best-efforts obligation for schools. A decisive factor in obtaining a job is that pupils need to have developed sufficient practical, social and employee skills. Even so, pupils with limited literacy and numeracy skills are generally at greater risk of not succeeding on the labour market and in society. Schools also need to focus attention on incorporating literacy and numeracy skills into practical subjects and internships to ensure that these skills are developed within a meaningful context.

Accountability is limited in schools in special secondary education with a labour market destination profile

Schools in special secondary education where school leavers have a labour market destination profile only have limited accountability for their results (Inspectorate of Education, 2024p). Only three quarters of these schools calculated the final result of each school leaver by comparing their individual performance to the target levels. Nor do the majority of these schools usually compare all school leavers' final results in Dutch literacy, numeracy and mathematics to a school standard, which means they do not establish the effectiveness of their literacy and numeracy teaching. Although pupils are usually able to transition to the planned destination profile if they do not attain Dutch literacy and numeracy target levels, it is still in the pupils' interests that schools draw conclusions about and account for their school leavers' final results.

Education in care placement to optimise independent functioning

Around a quarter of special secondary education pupils follow a curriculum that focuses on transition to a care placement (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). The teaching aims to optimise independent functioning in forms of care placement, taking into account these pupils' serious learning difficulties or multiple impairments. The key goals for this destination profile take a wide range of impairments into account and focus on aspects such as communication, play development and self-reliance. Basic skills are defined differently for this group of pupils and can vary widely from one individual to another. Learning to wipe their nose without the need for prompting can be a basic skill for pupils with a care placement destination profile. Learning pathways have been developed for these pupils in which development can be monitored based on observations. National comparable data on the targets that pupils attain is lacking. However, this information would only offer a limited understanding of the extent to which they have realised their full potential as regards independence. Their potential for independence depends on how accessible society is for these pupils and the extent to which it supports their independence. Do the traffic lights stay green long enough for them to cross the road? Do they have access to basic facilities? For these pupils, mastering basic skills implies a social responsibility.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CHAPTER 3

Equal opportunities and school careers

3.1 Key points

If our education system does not offer the same opportunities to pupils or students with the same abilities, this results in inequality of opportunity. And when pupils or students do not have equal access to a good education or to good lessons, guidance or support, this also means that they are denied equality of opportunity.

Equal abilities but not always equal opportunities

All pupils and students are entitled to a good education. This means that they should at least leave school literate and numerate, even if this requires extra support or guidance from the school or institution. Pupils and students of equal abilities must also be offered the same educational opportunities. These equal opportunities do not always exist in practice. Not every pupil at every school is given the same opportunity to learn sufficient basic skills; nor are the opportunities offered to pupils of equal abilities always equal at the various points of selection and transition during their school career. In some cases these inequalities are linked to differences in schools and education, sometimes the differences are regional and often they affect the same groups of pupils and students.

Fewer opportunities for specific groups of pupils

Migrants and the children of migrants, pupils whose parents' educational level is MBO-2 or lower, or whose household income is low often attain lower literacy and numeracy reference levels than other pupils. These groups of pupils and students also experience unequal opportunities at other times in their school career, for example when repeating a year or in the transition to secondary school or further education.

Differences between schools in achieving reference levels in comparable school populations

All pupils should at least attain reference level 1F for reading and numeracy by the end of primary school, as this provides a solid foundation for further education. Pupils transitioning to VMBO-G/T, HAVO or preuniversity education must attain target levels 2F/1S (see also Chapter 2). Not all schools succeed in ensuring that their pupils attain these levels, and the degree of success varies even if schools have similar populations. This is especially true where numeracy skills are concerned. These differences between schools show that some schools with a population that faces additional challenges and with pupils at risk of educational disadvantage unless they receive extra support nevertheless succeed in preparing many pupils adequately for further education, whereas other schools with a comparable population do not.

Still no upgrade for large proportion of reviewed recommendations

From school year 2023-2024, primary schools are required to upgrade a pupil's recommendation for secondary education if the result of the final attainment test (previously the centralised final test) indicates a higher level than the school's own recommendation. Primary schools now upgrade their recommendations in more cases than they did in previous years. However, a significant proportion of the recommendations that should be reviewed are not upgraded. Pupils in schools where the population faces greater challenges are more likely to have their recommendation reviewed than pupils at other schools. Schools in special education

upgrade their recommendations less frequently than primary schools, while these children should also be offered optimal opportunities to further develop their cognitive potential, in regular secondary education where possible.

Repeating a year is ineffective for most pupils

Many secondary school pupils have to repeat a year. This is more common among groups of pupils who already had fewer opportunities at primary school, including those with parents whose level of education was MBO-2 or lower or whose parents are from a lower income group. The percentage of pupils who repeat a year of school in the year before the final exam also differs between schools. This partly relates to the region in which the school is located and, in the case of VMBO, on the range of school types offered. According to teachers, the school's decision that a pupil needs to repeat a year is not consciously influenced by the pupil's background. Repeating a year is ineffective for most pupils: their results do not improve, and it demotivates them. This course of action should be avoided where possible.

Differences between MBO institutions in placement, dropout rates and labour market alignment

MBO institutions differ in their placement of students. The percentage of VMBO-K graduates who start at MBO-4 level is higher at some institutions than others, partly because not all educational programmes are offered at all levels. MBO institutions also differ in the proportion of students who drop out in the first year of their studies and in the extent to which their programmes align with the labour market. Various student characteristics and aspects of the educational programme influence the likelihood of dropping out, for instance the learning pathway, prior education and the sector. There are institutional differences in the student dropout rates, not only between, but also within educational domains, such as care and welfare or economics.

Institutional differences in dropout rates and transition to higher education

As with MBO, the risk of students dropping out in higher professional education (HBO) and university education differs per institution. These institutional differences remain, even if we take the student population into account or consider differences per sector. A relatively large proportion of students who drop out in their first year of study will resume the same or a different study programme in one or two years. This applies to 28% of students who drop out of HBO and 21% of those who drop out of university. There are also differences between institutions in the transition from HBO to university: almost a quarter of university Master's programmes are still not accessible to HBO graduates.

Fewer opportunities for newcomers

There is a growing demand for educational places for newcomers. The organisational response to this demand faces several problems, such as funding issues, the shortage of teaching staff and newcomers frequently having to move houses. As a result, places within the education system are not always available to newcomers or the quality tends to be unsatisfactory. These pupils, therefore, do not have equal opportunities in terms of receiving good education and realising their potential.

Recommendations:

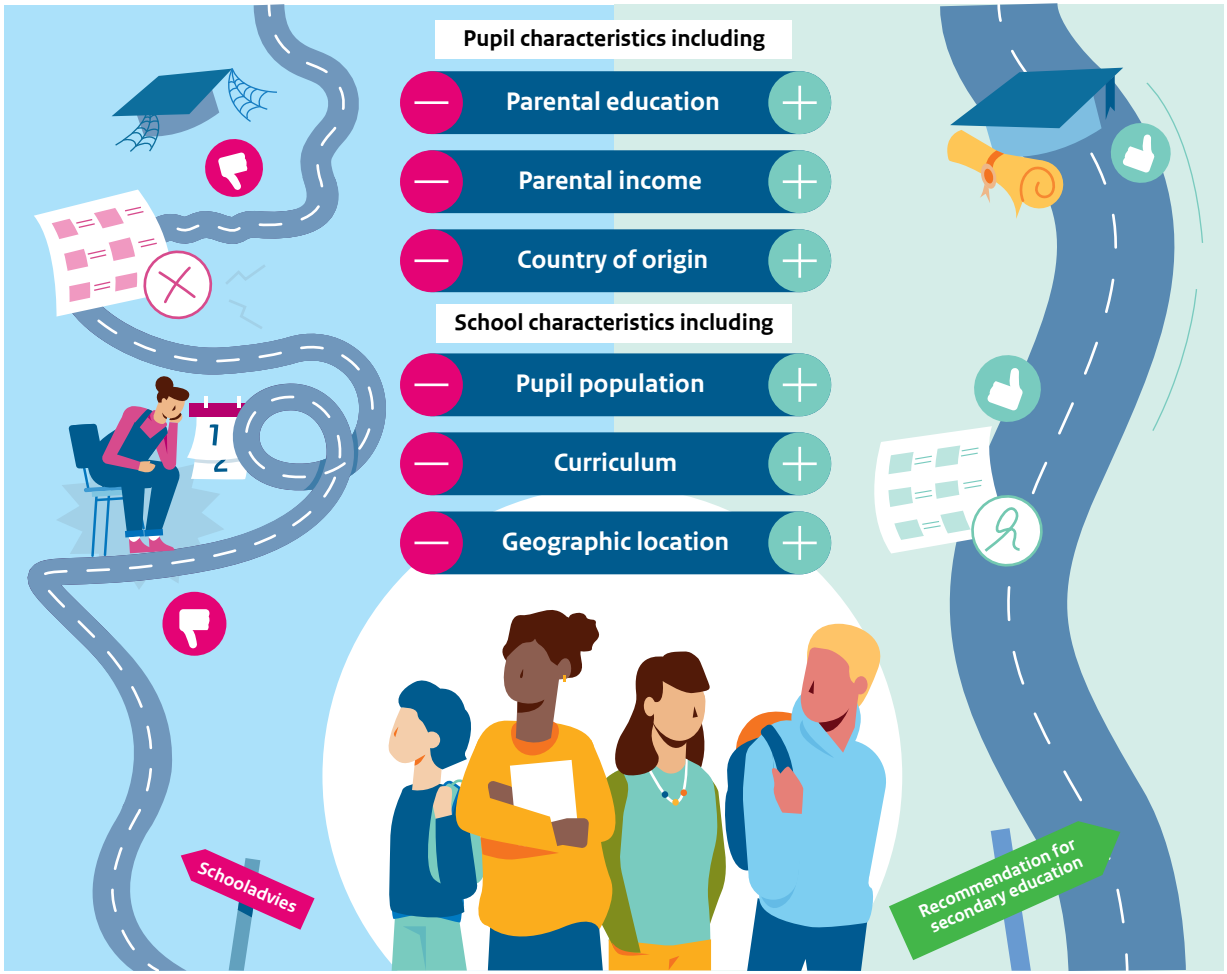
- Primary schools: show more ambition in designing education at target level for all pupils, so that each pupil has the opportunity to receive an education at target level up to group 8.
- Secondary schools: identify the risk of pupils having to repeat a year in time and offer tailored supervision when necessary. Consider alternatives if the number of pupils repeating a year is high.
- Secondary schools: make sure there are sufficient opportunities for pupils to switch levels, particularly at the start of their secondary education, for example by establishing mixed transition groups.
- MBO and HBO institutions: investigate causes for student dropouts. Use a combination of preventative and reactive measures to reduce the dropout rate.
- MBO institutions and educational programmes: make internship discrimination an explicit policy topic. Set clear benchmarks.
- Government: invest in educational places for newcomers to ensure that sufficient high-quality places are available to all.

3.2 Differences in opportunity

3.2.1 Differences in basic skills

What are equal opportunities?

If our education system does not offer the same opportunities to pupils or students with the same abilities, this results in inequality of opportunity. And when pupils or students do not have equal access to a good education or to good tuition, guidance or support, this also means that they are denied equality of opportunity (Elffers, 2022). Two pupils who have a HAVO diploma should both be able to progress to HBO if they wish to do so. But likewise, two pupils starting primary school should also be offered the same educational opportunities so that they can attain the basic level of literacy and numeracy, regardless of which school they attend, even if this means that one pupil needs more support than the other. Educating pupils to a basic minimum level, reduces disparities in opportunity. Conditions for equal opportunities include a fair selection or admission within the school system and ensuring a basic standard of quality in education (SER, 2021; Elffers, 2022). This does not mean that everyone needs to obtain an MBO, HBO or university degree. Whether pupils are more theoretically inclined, more practical or make the transition to day care or employment, it is vital that everyone is given the same opportunities to achieve what best reflects their ambitions and abilities.



The same groups of pupils and students keep encountering obstacles. Schools, educational programmes and institutions make a difference!

Not enough pupils attain reference levels at primary schools

Basic level 1B is the minimum proficiency level in literacy and numeracy for pupils in primary education. Target level 2B/1T is the minimum level they need to make their way in society. Not all primary school pupils attain 1B, although they need this level to progress to VMBO-B or VMBO-K. There are also not enough primary school pupils attaining 2B/1T (Inspectorate of Education, 2024h), and they are not always able to catch up at secondary school (see also Chapter 2). In addition to the quality of education, this is also due to cognitive, social-emotional and practical skills, and to external circumstances. Starting a school day without breakfast is a factor (Hoyland et al., 2009), as is unreliable school transport or lacking the financial resources to obtain extra tuition (private tuition) (Elffers, 2018: Inspectorate of Education, 2021). Schools must do their utmost to ensure that all pupils attain 1B and that as many as possible attain 2B/1T. It is up to the government to remove as many negative external circumstances as possible.

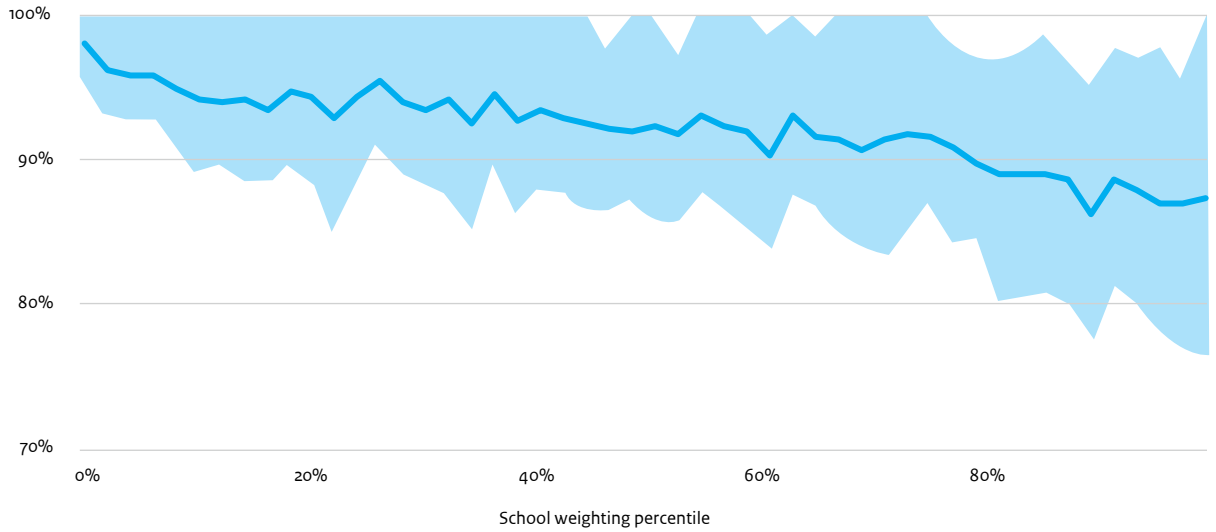
Differences between schools in attained reference levels

Some schools are more successful than others in ensuring that their pupils attain the reference levels, even if they have the same school weighting (a measure of the risk of developmental delays) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024s). The percentage of pupils who attain 1T for numeracy and literacy (use of language and reading) is lower at primary schools with a high school weighting than at schools with a low one (Figure 3.2.1a). At schools with the lowest weighting, an average of 94% of pupils attain 1T, compared to 87% at schools with the highest weighting. The percentage of pupils who attain 1T also varies between schools with the same weighting and comparable school populations; these differences are greater for numeracy than for literacy. These differences between schools also exist with respect to achieving target levels. These differences between schools clearly demonstrate that a number of schools could do better. These schools need to raise their standards and learn from other schools.

Ambition requires a consistent curriculum

It is in the interests of all primary school pupils that differentiation in the curriculum is introduced as late as possible. Inspectors regularly see pupils being assigned to different levels from group four on and staying in those levels. Pupils in certain levels sometimes follow an alternative curriculum of reduced complexity, particularly those pupils who need extra support. As a result, these pupils are offered less subject matter at the target level and end up in a lower attainment track from an early age. The pupils' results are no better than if they had been in a class without differentiation (Onderwijskennis, 2024; De Wolf, 2023). By taking this approach, schools create low expectations, low self-confidence and low self-esteem. It is vital that all pupils are offered a challenging curriculum with educational

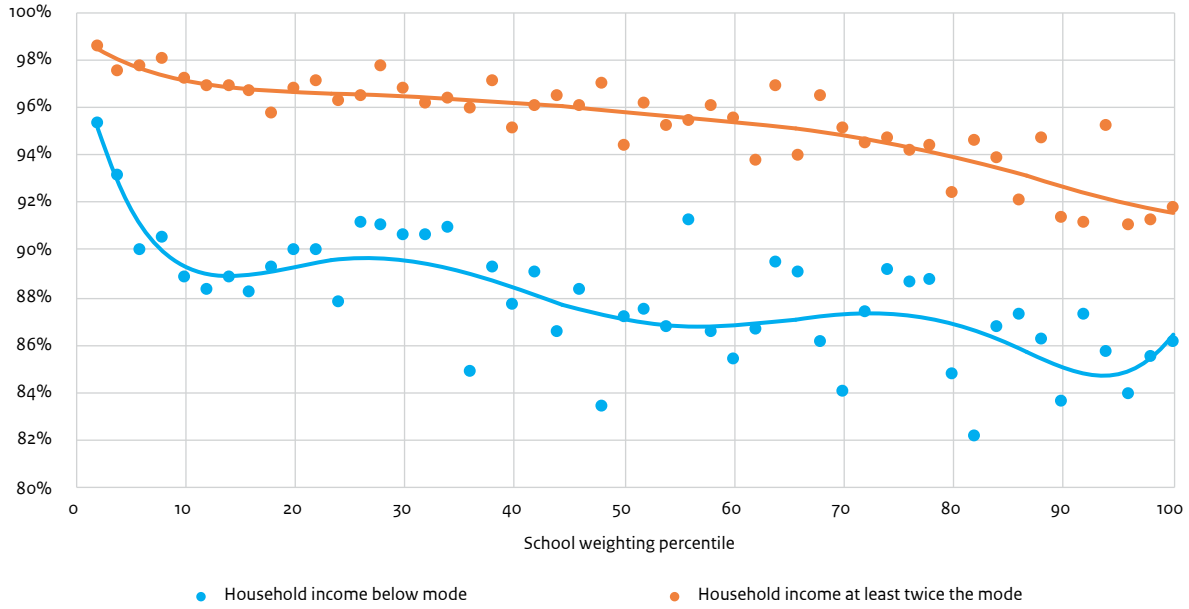
Figure 3.2.1a Average percentage of pupils who attain 1F in numeracy, by school weighting.



The line shows the average attainment of numeracy at 1T level at schools with a certain school weighting. The grey area shows the spread around the mean.
Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024s)

material that is presented at basic and target level. Extra instructions, minimum targets for the whole class, pre-teaching, tutoring and collaborative learning do constitute proven methods for good differentiation. Pupils with the ability to tackle more challenging tasks also benefit from such methods, supplemented by a more in-depth curriculum and additional learning objectives.

Figure 3.2.1b Average percentage of pupils who attain 1B level in numeracy, by parental income and school weighting



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024s)

Composition of school population not a factor in reducing differences

Primary school pupils who are migrants or the children of migrants, whose parents have an educational level of MBO-2 or lower, or who come from a low-income household are less likely to attain 1B and 2B/1T than children of Dutch origin whose parents have an HBO or university degree or who come from a high-income household. This is the case regardless of whether a school has a high or a low weighting (Inspectorate of Education, 2024s). Regardless of school weighting, pupils whose parents have a below-average income fall behind to the same extent compared to pupils whose parents have an above-average income (Figure 3.2.1b). In general, the average command of literacy and numeracy skills is higher at schools where the school population faces fewer challenges, but those schools do not narrow the gap more effectively than other schools.

Literacy and numeracy also important for school leavers in special secondary education

Pupils with limited literacy and numeracy skills are at greater risk of not succeeding on the labour market

and in society. Schools in special secondary education also need to focus more on incorporating literacy and numeracy skills into practical subjects and internships to ensure that these skills are developed within a meaningful context. In doing so, a school's standards can go beyond the entry requirements of the subsequent destination of the pupil.

3.2.2 Differences in pass rates

Secondary schools that create opportunities can also obtain good results

There are primary schools with a high weighting that succeed in ensuring that many pupils attain basic and target levels for literacy and numeracy. These schools help create equal opportunities for pupils. There are also secondary schools that offer their pupils such opportunities. Opportunity-rich schools with many pupils in year 3 of HAVO or preuniversity education who initially received a lower recommendation for secondary education were almost as able to guide many pupils to the end of HAVO or preuniversity without having to repeat a year as schools that provide less opportunities (Bles et al., 2020).

Across the border: the Irish DEIS programme

The Irish DEIS programme has been running for over 15 years and is now being expanded. Around 1,200 schools (30% of all schools) are included in the programme. Irish DEIS schools are identified using a social-economic weighting formula. The programme entitles schools to extra facilities and funding. Examples include a lower pupil-to-teacher ratio, free school meals, support and programmes offered by the Irish government. The schools are required to conduct targeted self-evaluations and undergo specific supportive supervision from the Irish inspectorate. Research shows that:

- The average PISA reading score in DEIS schools in 2018 was in line with the OESO average. The difference between non-DEIS schools and DEIS schools is considerably smaller than in 2009.
- There is no significant difference between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in terms of teacher shortages.
- There is no significant difference between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in terms of dropout rates of students.
- Parents at DEIS schools have a more positive perception of communication with their children's school, options for parental involvement and provision of parenting education and support.
- There is no significant difference between pupils at DEIS and non-DEIS schools on the index for emotional support from parents.
- On most of the wellbeing indicators examined, there are no significant differences between the average scores of pupils in DEIS and non-DEIS schools.
- There is no significant difference between pupils at DEIS and non-DEIS schools in bullying.

These findings confirm that targeted policy measures and practices can reduce the effect of socioeconomic status on learning outcomes in the broadest sense.

Differences in exam pass rates partly explained by differences between schools

Exam pass rates of pupils depend on which school they attend. Secondary schools differ with regards to the percentage of students that pass their exams. These differences vary between 50% and 100% for VMBO-B/K and between 24% and 100% for HAVO (Inspectorate of Education, 2024u). This is partly due to the composition of the school population but even when this is taken into account, some schools have higher pass rates than others (Inspectorate of Education, 2024s, 2024u). The higher the percentage of migrant pupils or pupils whose parents are migrants, the lower the pass rate. For HAVO and preuniversity pupils, the region in which the school is located and the presence of several educational tracks within the school are relevant factors. In the north of the Netherlands, the pass rate for HAVO and preuniversity education is significantly lower than in the central part of the country. Schools which only have HAVO and preuniversity departments also have a higher pass rate than schools with a broader range of educational tracks.

3.2.3 Differences in recommendation, placement and progression

Recommendations for secondary education often upgraded

Pupils receive their preliminary recommendation for secondary education in group 8 of primary school, after which they sit their final test. Until school year 2022-2023, schools were expected to reassess their preliminary recommendation if the result of the final test indicated a higher level, but they were not obliged to upgrade their recommendation. In school year 2022-2023, 9.7% of pupils were eligible to have their recommendation upgraded due to a difference that translated to at least a whole track of secondary education and 24.5% of pupils for a half-track difference (Inspectorate of Education, 2024q). In total, 10.3% of all recommendations were upgraded. Initial

recommendations were upgraded in 20.6% of cases where the final test result was a half-track higher and 50.8% of cases where the final test result was a whole track higher than the result. These percentages have increased in recent years: in 2017-2018 they were 15.8% and 35.5%, respectively. It is in the interests of the child that their primary school's recommendation is as accurate a prediction as possible of their educational potential. Every pupil should have an equal opportunity to have their recommendation upgraded if the outcome of the final test provides grounds to do so: equal opportunity for equal ability. From school year 2023-2024, primary schools are required to upgrade their initial recommendation if a pupil's final test result is higher than their recommendation. Schools are only permitted to deviate from this requirement if they can provide a solid justification for doing so.

Differences in recommendations between schools

There are differences between the recommendations given by schools with a high and low weighting. Pupils who attend schools with a high weighting tend to be given lower recommendations and are more likely to have their recommendation reviewed than pupils who attend schools with a low weighting (Inspectorate of Education, 2024s). However, in cases where the percentage of pupils eligible for an upgrade is similar, schools with a high weighting are more likely to upgrade than schools with a lower weighting. The recommendations that pupils receive also depend on where they attend school. Pupils in non-urban areas are more likely to have their recommendation reviewed (Inspectorate of Education, 2024q), yet less likely to have their recommendation upgraded.

Focus on opportunity-oriented recommendation in special education

In school year 2022-2023, 51% of pupils in special education were eligible to have their initial recommendation reviewed (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). For 32.9% of pupils, this was because their final test result indicated a half-track higher and for 18.4% of pupils because it indicated a full track higher. Compared to primary schools, schools in special education are twice as likely to issue a recommendation that is a full track lower than the pupil's test result (Inspectorate of Education, 2024q). They also do not always upgrade their recommendation: for pupils whose test recommendation was a full track higher, an upgrade was only given in 18.1% of cases. Some special education schools appear to err on the side of caution when formulating their recommendations, which may stem from them not wanting to overstretch pupils due to their impairments. However, these are children who should have optimal opportunities to further develop their cognitive skills, in mainstream secondary education where possible (see also Chapter 5). Some pupils in special education (26.4%) receive a higher recommendation from their school than indicated by their final test result, suggesting there are also schools that issue recommendations geared towards maximising a pupil's opportunities.

Across the border: study and career guidance compulsory in Sweden

In Sweden, the law prescribes compensatory measures that favour pupils whose family background gives them fewer opportunities. For schools in municipalities with low educational levels, this means they need to ensure that pupils' study or career choice is not restricted by their parents' background. A study by the Swedish inspectorate showed that the schools in question did not take sufficient measures, such as providing additional classroom support, study guidance or career advice. This guidance is needed to boost pupils' confidence in their own abilities and enable them to realise their full potential. Guidance in terms of studying and career choice guidance has low priority and is limited to individual initiatives at many of the inspected schools. The Swedish inspectorate recommends that school leaders and teachers make study guidance and career advice the mission of the entire school rather than the task of just the study guidance and career advice counsellor and is calling on policymakers to take more concerted action in this regard.

Mixed transition groups or a two-year transition period to offer opportunities

Assigning pupils to a particular educational track at age 12, as is customary in the Netherlands, is a strong determinant of their subsequent educational career. This categorisation is not independent of the pupils' socioeconomic status and offers little scope to late bloomers. The recommendation for secondary education is nothing more than a good prediction but it provisionally rules out many opportunities for large groups of pupils at an early age. To make education more accessible to all, the Education Council and other organisations advocate selection in a later phase, after the first three years of secondary education (Onderwijsraad, 2021). Mixed transition groups or a two-year transition period can postpone this early selection (Day et al., 2023; Elffers, 2022; Bles & Van der Velde, 2020). Pupils switch educational track more often at schools that offer a broad range of education. Pupils in mixed transition classes more frequently continue to

learn at or above their recommended track than pupils at single-stream schools (Inspectorate of Education, 2023c).

School curriculum influences position of year 3 pupils

Differences between the primary school recommendation and a pupil's position in year 3 may stem from an overly cautious or overly ambitious recommendation but may also relate to the opportunities offered by the secondary school. In VMBO departments, the percentage of pupils at or above their recommended track in year 3 is higher if the school only offers VMBO education, as fewer HAVO or preuniversity pupils move down at these schools (Inspectorate of Education, 2024u). The percentage of pupils at or above their recommended track in HAVO departments where the only other school department is a preuniversity department is lower than in HAVO departments at schools that also offer VMBO and preuniversity education. The latter form makes it easier for pupils who started secondary school with a VMBO recommendation to move up a track to HAVO.

Easing the transition of special secondary education pupils to MBO

A smooth transition to MBO, the entrance programme or a next level, is not a given for pupils from special secondary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2018b, 2020d). Regioplan (2023) identified bottlenecks, practical examples and conditions with the aim of ensuring a more successful transition. These bottlenecks include familiarity with each other's working methods, differences between MBO educational programmes in terms of the support they provide and lack of awareness of the support needed by pupils with a background in special secondary education. Initiatives to ensure a smoother transition include setting up a bridging pathway, standardising exchange of information about pupils, and coaching and mentoring pupils in schools for special secondary education. It is also essential that decisions on permitting pupils to progress to the entrance programme are not unduly influenced by a lack of opportunity to obtain a diploma at the school for special secondary education. The opportunities to obtain a diploma mainly take the form of state exams (see also Chapter 5) but to obtain a full VMBO diploma, the school must also arrange an exam for the core practical subjects by means of a symbiosis agreement.

Very limited progression of people with low literacy to MBO through adult education pathways

People with low literacy are another group whose members too often fail to obtain a basic qualification. The Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB) provides a framework for the education sector to give people with low literacy the opportunity to progress to an MBO educational programme. However, there are bottlenecks in this system. There is little progression from non-formal educational pathways to formal ones and progression from formal educational pathways to MBO is also limited. Less than 10% of the total target group served by the WEB budget enters formal education, either directly or following referral (De Greef & De Haan, 2023). For participants in adult education pathways, this therefore limits their ability to participate actively in society and find a long-term position on the labour market.

More HAVO pupils transitioning to MBO without a diploma

Increasing numbers of HAVO pupils are transitioning to MBO, with or without a HAVO diploma. In 2022, the number of HAVO pupils who transitioned to MBO without a diploma was 7,746 (Inspectorate of Education, 2024o), while 1,643 transitioned to MBO with a diploma. Progression to MBO is particularly increasing among year 4 HAVO pupils. The majority of HAVO pupils who transition to MBO start at level 4 of the vocational learning pathway. There are several possible reasons why HAVO pupils are transitioning to MBO, including the prospect of having to repeat a year and/or their preference for a more practical pathway. Another alternative for many pupils is the occupational HAVO now offered by many regional training centres (ROCs). The occupational HAVO is an intermediate form of HAVO and MBO geared towards more practically oriented pupils at MBO 4 level and offering a combination of theoretical classes and practical subjects. It is essential that MBO programmes monitor unqualified HAVO pupils carefully, as they have no diploma to fall back on. At the same time, the MBO does offer these pupils the opportunity to obtain a diploma.

Appropriate placement in MBO differs between institutions

Aspiring MBO students have had right of admission since 2017, which means that they are entitled to placement at an MBO level that corresponds to their prior education, on the condition that they apply before the 1st of April. Appropriate placement from VMBO-T occurs less frequently for students of Dutch origin, among boys and among students with MBO-educated parents. There are differences between institutions with respect to the percentage of students placed appropriately with equivalent prior education (Education Inspectorate, 2024o). Students with a VMBO-K diploma for example, start at level 4 at some institutions, whereas at others they start at level 2. This impacts the further progress of their studies.

Differences in appropriate placement partly due to institutions' curriculum

There are differences between institutions with respect to appropriate placement at almost all prior education levels. Some institutions have no VMBO-K diploma students who start an MBO educational programme at level 2, whereas at other institutions 1 in 10 students start at level 2, despite being entitled to admission at level 3 or 4. There are also institutions where 40% of VMBO-K graduates start at level 4 and institutions where almost all students start at level 4. These differences are probably due to the curriculum at the various institutions, as not every educational programme is offered at each level. This is most apparent in the apprenticeship-based vocational learning pathway (BBL), where the curriculum is not always available at level 4 or institutions focus on one or a small number of educational areas where the range of different levels is more limited. Where that is not the case, institutions should evaluate their intake policy and its consequences for students and their learning outcomes.

Small but persistent differences in progression to selective educational programme in higher education

The differences between groups of students, even those with equivalent prior education, who do or do not start a selective educational programme in higher education are not major, but they are persistent (De Visser, 2023). Between 2008 and 2022, the same groups of students were consistently underrepresented in programmes with a selective admissions policy. These groups were male students, students with a non-Western background, students with a low average final exam score, first generation students, students from low-income backgrounds and, in university education, students with a Dutch preuniversity diploma (Inspectorate of Education, 2024c).

Major focus on quality and fairness of selection procedures in higher education

After the lottery system was abolished for educational programmes with a restricted number of places (numerus fixus), all of these programmes had to decentralise their selection procedure. They programmes had to design their own procedure incorporating at least two qualitative selection criteria, with the aim of achieving a better match between the student and the educational programme. Decentralised selection prompted widespread debate about the quality of selection and the fairness of selection procedures for various student groups (see also Inspectorate of Education, 2022c; Mulder et al., 2023; 2024). This resulted in an increased focus on selection procedure design, including the provision of selection guidelines (Schreurs et al., 2022) and the reintroduction of the lottery system in academic year 2024-2025 as an additional selection tool.

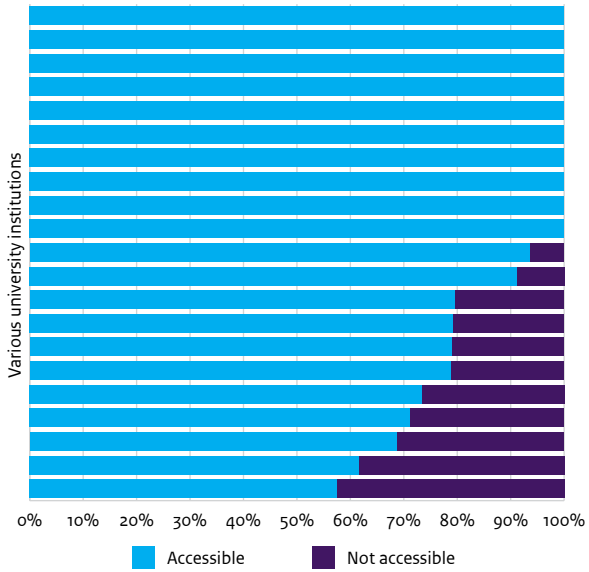
Fewer opportunities for students of non-Dutch origin in selection procedures

Origin, gender and age matter in terms of admission to a programme where student numbers are restricted (Mulder et al., 2023). In almost all similar groups of educational programmes with their own selection procedure, being of non-Dutch origin equates to a low probability of admission; for age and gender, the picture varies. For some educational programmes (or groups of programmes), being a woman is an advantage and in others, a disadvantage. The Inspectorate established this in earlier research into the accessibility of programmes that operate a selection procedure (Inspectorate of Education, 2015, 2017b, 2018a, 2020b).

Differences between institutions in admitting HBO graduates to university Master's

Master's programmes at Dutch universities are directly accessible to students with an HBO or a university Bachelor's degree, provided that the student possesses the requisite skills and knowledge specific to the Master's programme. Where that is not the case, the university must offer applicants an opportunity to remedy any shortcomings if this is feasible within an acceptable timeframe. Between 2018 and 2021, the accessibility of Master's programmes at the Netherlands' thirteen research universities increased for HBO graduates, rising from 70.8% to 77%. In 2023, this figure was 75.8% (Inspectorate of Education, 2024l). Almost a quarter of university Master's programmes are still not accessible to HBO graduates. There are also differences between institutions. In 10 of the 21 surveyed institutions that offer programmes at Master's level, a number of the programmes are not accessible to HBO graduates (Figure 3.2.3a). These are all research universities. The most commonly cited reason was that a university Master's programme requires academic skills.

Figure 3.2.3a Percentage of university Master's programmes accessible to HBO graduates per university in academic year 2023-2024



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024l)

3.2.4 Differences in repeating a year and dropout rates

Likelihood of repeating a year greater for some groups of pupils

The likelihood of repeating a year or dropping out differs between various groups of pupils and students. At all levels of secondary education, but particularly HAVO, the number of pupils repeating a year increased in 2021-2022. At the end of school year 2021-2022, almost 15% of HAVO pupils had to repeat the year (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b). In addition to differences between schools (region and educational provision), differences can also be seen between groups of pupils. Pupils whose parents have an HBO or university degree and whose parents have a high income are less likely to repeat a year than other pupils (Inspectorate of Education, 2023u).

Decision-making for repeating a year

School leaders and mentors indicate that a pupil's potential to obtain a diploma is the key factor in the decision to have them repeat a year. They say that the pupil's background and gender are not a factor (or at least a conscious factor) in this decision (Inspectorate of Education, 2024w). Nevertheless, some groups are overrepresented among pupils who have to repeat a year. Parents can be a resource to help prevent pupils from having to repeat a year, but this support takes place outside of school. Whether parents are able to help their child with schoolwork depends on their own educational background, and only high-income parents are likely to be able to afford private tuition for their child.

Repeating a year is ineffective

Repeating a year is largely ineffective: in most cases the pupil's performance does not improve and their motivation decreases (Onderwijskennis, 2021). The pupil's progress is delayed by a year, and they are more likely to have to switch school type. It is also an expensive measure, the costs of which are borne by society. Apart from occasional exceptions, repeating a year is a measure that should be avoided (Inspectorate of Education, 2024w). It is important that schools treat all pupils fairly. Pupils who have fallen behind earlier in their school careers are also more likely to fall behind later on.

Differences between groups in terms of dropping out or moving down to MBO

In the first year of an MBO educational programme, between 6% and 16% of students starting MBO for the first time drop out, having previously completed or attended secondary school (Inspectorate of Education, 2024o). The dropout rate is highest at level 1: 14.7% in 2021. In that same year, the dropout rates without graduating at levels 2, 3 and 4 were 8.5%, 7.2% and 6.9% respectively. The higher the MBO level, the lower the dropout rate. The opposite is true for those moving down to a lower level: the figure for level 4 was 7.3% in 2021. For levels 2 and 3 this was 6.6% and 0.2% respectively. Male students, migrant students or students whose parents are migrants, and students with a VMBO-K diploma are more likely to drop out or move down even when the interrelationships between these characteristics, and the learning pathway or sector are taken into account (Inspectorate of Education, 2024o, Netherlands Court of Audit, 2024). Other factors can also play a role in students dropping out or moving to a lower level, such as parental income or level of education (Bos et al., 2022). The dropout rate and number of students moving to a lower level are higher for the apprenticeship-based vocational learning pathway (BBL) than its education-based equivalent (BOL), and the dropout rate in the technology sector is lower than in other sectors.

MBO dropout rate varies between similar educational programmes at different institutions

The percentage of students who leave the educational programme within a year differs per MBO institution.

At five institutions, 1 in 10 students drops out in their first year, while at other institutions this applies to fewer than 1 in 20 students (Inspectorate of Education, 2024o). Among MBO institutions this differs between domains (clusters of educational programmes aligned to specific occupational sectors), levels, learning pathways and educational programmes. Nevertheless, differences between MBO institutions are sometimes greater than might be expected based on these characteristics.

Differences between institutions even for similar educational programmes

The dropout rate differs between different educational programmes, but also between similar educational programmes at different institutions (Inspectorate of Education, 2024o). For management and entrepreneurial educational programmes, the dropout rate at level 4 varies between 0% and 15%, depending on the institution where these programmes are taught (Figure 3.2.4a). In nursing and care-giving programmes the differences are smaller. At several institutions, the dropout rate for entrance programmes (not included in figure), retail and wholesale, hospitality and mobility technology at level 2 is over 20%, while at other institutions it is below 5%. Institutions with higher dropout rates should investigate why they differ from other institutions. Institutions with lower dropout rates under similar conditions could serve as an example and explain how their approach differs from that of their counterparts.

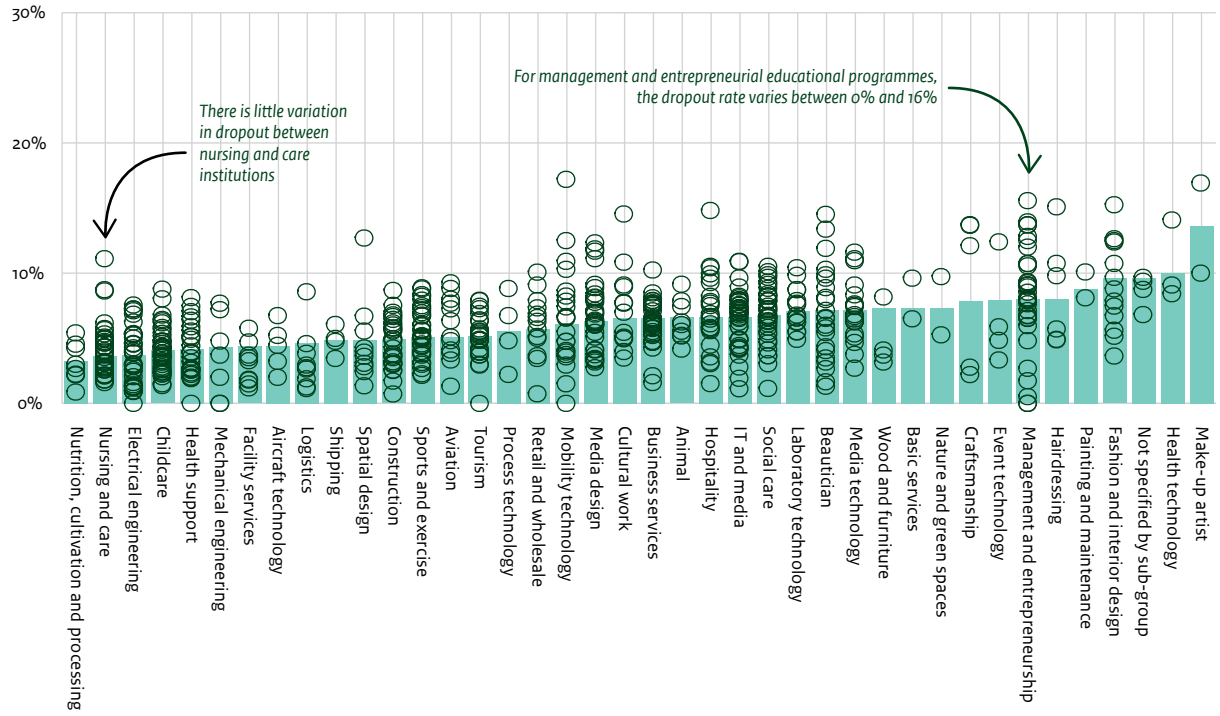
No link between level of MBO placement and dropout rate

Placement based on the prior educational programme diploma does not generally affect the likelihood of dropping out of a programme domain. The dropout rate is no higher for programme domains where more VMBO-K students are placed at level 4. This suggests that providing opportunities (i.e. placing students at the highest attainable level) need not have an adverse effect on efficiency (Inspectorate of Education, 2024o).

Some groups of HBO students at higher risk of dropping out

Taking into account the differences between institutions and their educational programmes and the interrelationship of student characteristics, some groups of students are more at risk of dropping out than others. The dropout

Figure 3.2.4a Dropout percentage after 1 year per institution by educational programme, BOL level 4 in the period 2019-2020 up to and including 2021-2022



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024o)

risk in HBO is higher for male students, older students, students whose parents are migrants from outside Europe, students with a prior education at MBO, first generation students and students with low-income parents (Inspectorate of Education, 2024l). The same applies to university education, except that parental income is not a factor in this sector. A student's prior education is the most decisive factor in HBO. Students with a HAVO background are 1.7 times more likely to drop out than preuniversity students, and students coming to HBO with an MBO background are 1.3 times more likely to drop out than students from a HAVO background. With respect to universities, this higher risk applies to students who have previously taken a study programme in higher education. They are 1.8 times more likely to drop out than students who have not previously started a higher education programme. Gender is also a key indicator of dropout risk: the likelihood of a male student dropping out of HBO (1.6) or university (1.4) is greater than that of a female student.

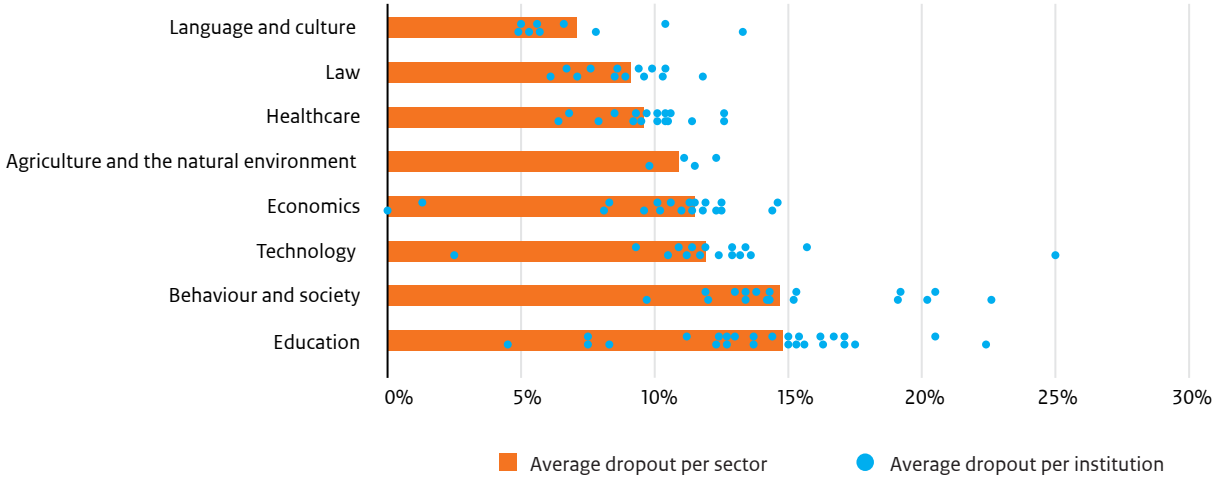
Differences between sectors in higher education dropout rates

The percentage of students who drop out varies between sectors in higher education. In academic year 2021-2022, the dropout in HBO was highest in the teaching sector (14.8%) and in behaviour and society (14.6%). In university education, this applied to the sectors language and culture (7.9%) and economics (7.7%). In other sectors the dropout rate was lower (Inspectorate of Education (2024l). If we take differences in student population into account, the differences between the sectors are less marked, particularly in HBO. Given the student population, we expected to see a higher dropout rate in some sectors (HBO: language and culture; university: law). These sectors therefore perform better than expected. In other sectors we expected a lower dropout rate than was actually the case (HBO: teaching and behaviour; university: economics).

Large differences in dropout rates between higher education institutions, decreasing slightly

There are major differences between higher education institutions with respect to the percentage of students who drop out in their first year. The dropout percentage varies between 1.3% and 16.2% in HBO and between 3.8% and 11.2% in university education (Inspectorate of Education, 2024l). There are also differences between institutions if we examine dropout rates between institutions by sector (Figures 3.2.4b and 3.2.4c). The behaviour and society and teaching sectors in HBO and behaviour and society and language and culture sectors in university education are particularly striking in terms of the major differences between institutions. These differences are far smaller in the healthcare sector, both in HBO and university education. Differences in the student population offer no clear explanation for the differences in dropout rates between the institutions. In university education, however, the institutional differences can be more easily explained by differences in student population than in HBO. More than in university education, differences between universities of applied sciences arise from factors other than student characteristics and sector differences. Universities and universities of applied sciences must investigate these factors and what they can do to reduce dropout rates.

Figure 3.2.4b Average dropout percentage per sector and per institution within an HBO sector

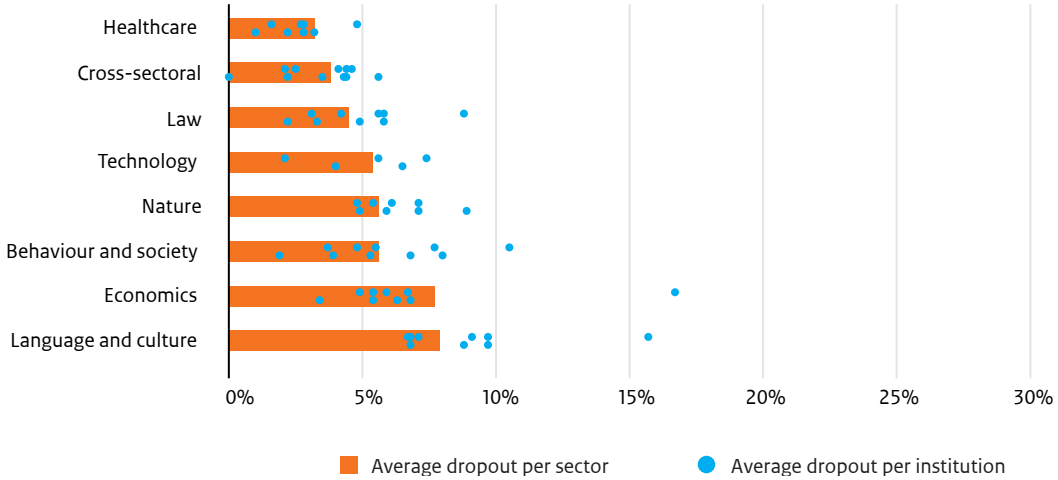


Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024l)

Around a quarter of HBO dropouts return to education within 2 years

In academic year 2019-2020, 27,724 students dropped out of their study programme within the first year, with 20,316 dropping out of state-funded HBO and 7,408 dropping out of state-funded university education. Some of those students did not leave education permanently. In HBO 3,401 students resumed their studies after two years (16.7%), with 458 resuming the same educational programme and 2,943 opting for another programme (Inspectorate of Education, 2024l). In university education, 1,358 students (18.3%) resumed their studies, with 436 resuming the same educational programme and 922 transferring to another. A further 1,740 students transferred to MBO after dropping out of their HBO educational programme. Only 31 university students did this. A small minority also transferred to non-publicly funded education. This was the case for 638 students who dropped out of HBO and 139 who dropped out of university education. Of the HBO students who dropped out in academic year 2019-2020, 28.4% started an educational programme within two years. That was the case for 20.6% of students who dropped out of university.

Figure 3.2.4c Average dropout percentage per sector and per institution within a university education sector



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024l)

3.3 Labour market alignment

Increase in pupils going from practical education to work

Of the pupils leaving practical education in school year 2021-2022, 61% progressed to further education, 26% started work, 4% received social security benefits and 9% had no work and received no benefits (Inspectorate of Education, 2024h). In comparison with previous cohorts, relatively fewer pupils progressed to further education and more pupils started work. Eighteen months after leaving education, the number of pupils who obtained a job continued to increase and the percentage of former practical education pupils still in education gradually decreased. At the same time, the percentage of former pupils not working and not in education also increased.

Extra guidance increases opportunities for special secondary education pupils with a labour market destination profile

As in previous years, pupils leaving special secondary education pupils with a labour market destination profile were by no means always in paid work. Of the pupils who left in school year 2021-2022, 27.6% immediately found a form of paid work. Most pupils with this destination profile transferred to further education (Inspectorate of Education (2024v). Some schools in special secondary education indicate that their pupils receive additional support, for example in the form of a job coach, to help them make a successful transition (Inspectorate of Education, 2024p). It is vital that schools provide a precise description of a school leaver's support needs in a transition document and that the labour market and the MBO institution meet these needs. This increases the likelihood of pupils finding long-term work or achieving success in further education.

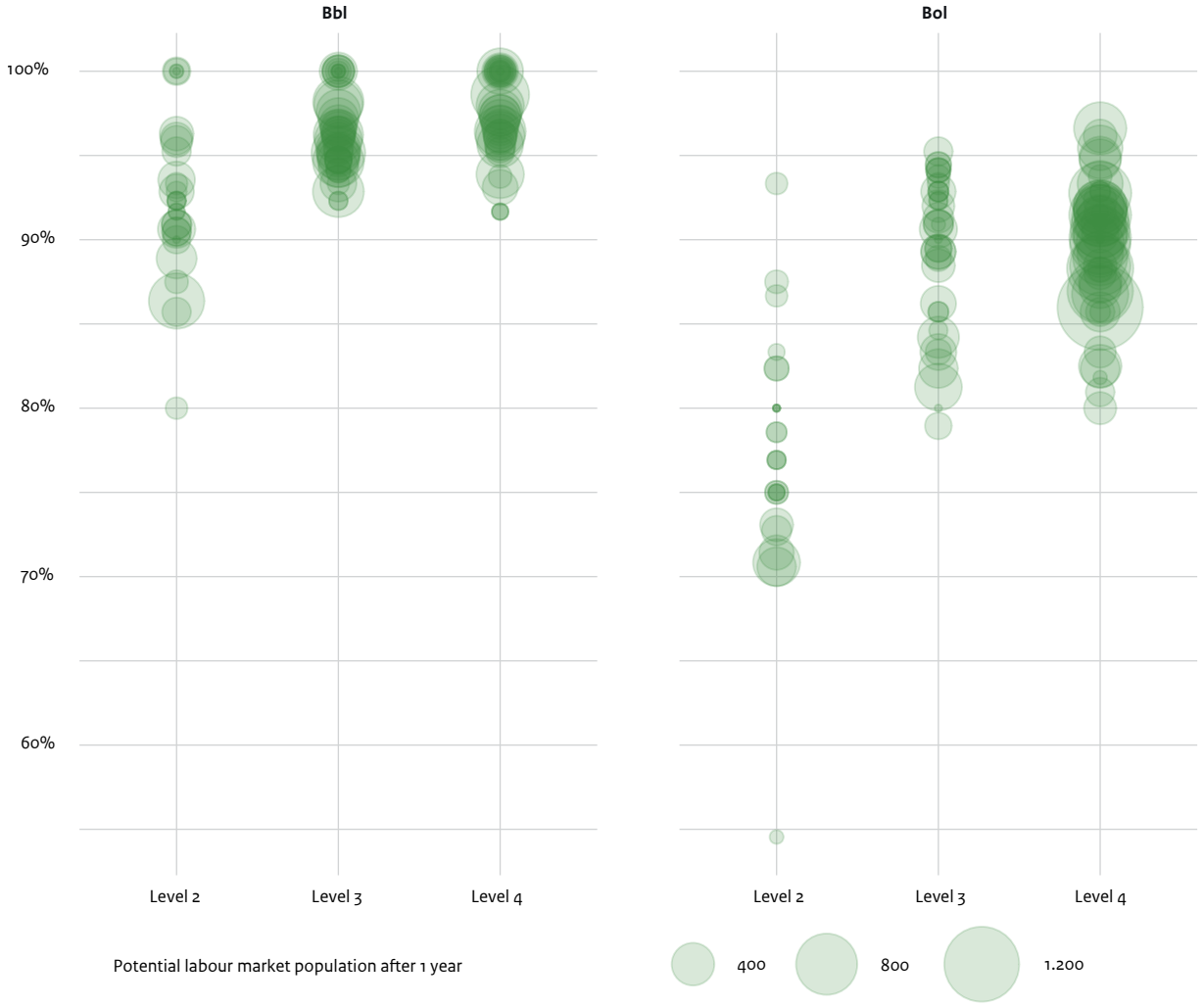
Still hardly any policy on internship discrimination in MBO

Internships serve as an initial introduction to the labour market and enable young people to use existing and learn new vocational skills. Discrimination during the process of obtaining an internship placement and during the internship itself adversely affects students' opportunities to gain experience in a learning environment and to learn the required vocational skills. Research conducted by the Inspectorate in early 2023 shows that managers and teachers in MBO institutions have very little insight into how often internship discrimination occurs, as few reports of internship discrimination are recorded (Inspectorate of Education, 2024a). This is due to students not trusting that any reports they make will be handled properly and due to their anxiety about potential negative consequences for the internship or their educational progress. The Inspectorate concluded that MBO institutions' policy on internship discrimination was still in its infancy. School governors and teachers can make internship discrimination easier to recognise and ensure that it becomes a specific policy topic. Setting clear standards is important in this respect: what characterises a positive teaching and learning environment and what can you expect from each other in the event of internship discrimination? The 2023-2027 MBO Internship Pact was concluded later in the year and included agreements designed to eliminate internship discrimination. Effective and ongoing monitoring of this agreement is needed to see whether it results in any discernible positive impact.

Percentage of MBO graduates in paid employment varies between institutions

BBL students already work for an employer during their studies and often continue to work for them after graduation. Most former BBL students are therefore in paid

Figure 3.3a Percentage of BBL and BOL graduates per institution with a job of at least 12 hours per week, categorised according to level



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024o)

employment a year after graduating. At some institutions, all BBL graduates are employed after one year (Figure 3.3a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024o). However, with respect to level 2 BBL educational programmes there are also institutions where over 10% of former students are not in paid employment after a year. This may be due to the fact that automation and job displacement have largely eliminated many jobs for level 2 graduates (CMMBO, 2017). The differences between institutions are greater for BOL graduates. In some cases this relates to the student's programme domain and perhaps to the regional labour market. Comparatively speaking, a large number of BOL graduates in the technology and process industry domain and the mobility and vehicle domain find paid employment: there are few differences between institutions in these areas. In the care and welfare domain, however, differences between institutions can be up to 10 percentage points. The most marked differences between institutions occur in economics and administration, reaching 20 percentage points in some cases.

3.4 Newcomers

Not all newcomers have access to education within three months

In school years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, it did not prove possible to arrange education for all newcomers within the statutory three-month period (Lowan, 2022, 2023). This was mainly due to the increasing numbers of newcomers and a shortage of teachers. Precise details on the number of newcomers who were unable to attend school are not available. Signals from the field indicate that the main bottlenecks affect young people of secondary school age. The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (most of whom are in the secondary school age group) rose sharply from 2020 (COA, 2024). The First Admission for Non-Native Speakers (EOA)/International Transition Classes (ISK) have been unable to add sufficient classroom places due to staff shortages and a lack of space (Bishop et. al., 2022). The government needs to invest in classroom places for newcomers to ensure that everyone has an educational opportunity of sufficient quality.

Young people aged 16 and over sometimes do not have the opportunity to start in an ISK

ISKs are faced with having to select which students they admit. Our inspectors have been informed that ISKs sometimes decide not to admit minors aged 16 or over to a starting place. This means that these young people are denied access to education and encounter serious disadvantages in obtaining their basic qualification at a subsequent institution. This choice not only negatively impacts their school career, but also their chances of participating in society later on.

Arduous route to basic qualification for adult newcomers

On leaving an ISK, young people ideally move on to secondary education. Young people who are too old for secondary education are referred to MBO. However, the process of progressing from an ISK to MBO is an arduous

one. In theory, there are no barriers to the entrance programme. In practice, however, obtaining a place is anything but straightforward, despite this barrier-free access. For non-native speakers, proficiency in Dutch at A2 level is usually the minimum level for starting the entrance programme (Inspectorate of Education, 2018b). However, several ROCs now offer an 'entry for non-native speakers' educational programme or provide education via an outsourcing structure.

Minimum quality requirements for temporary newcomer provisions

Newcomers do not always have equal opportunities in terms of obtaining a good education and realising their potential. Since October 2023, municipalities have had the option to apply to the minister to establish a temporary newcomer provision in emergency cases (such as a shortage of teachers). This provision may deviate from the Primary Education Act (Wet op het primair onderwijs, WPO) and the Secondary Education Act (Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs, WVO) in terms of teaching time, curriculum and, where primary education is concerned, the required competencies. The reasoning behind permitting these deviations is to enable all newcomers to attend school. However, the concern is that the very pupils who need a high standard of education in order to integrate into the Dutch education system run the risk of receiving an education that only needs to meet the minimum quality requirements.

Increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children participating in education beyond school-leaving age

There are also positive developments. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children with a residence permit are increasingly participating in education. Of the cohort that obtained a residence permit in 2020, 80% were participating in education on 1 October 2022, whereas only 44% of the cohort that obtained a residence permit in 2014 were participating in education on 1 October 2016. Young people aged 18 and over who are not subject to compulsory education are more likely to be in education the longer they remain in the Netherlands. Status holders who leave secondary education mainly enter MBO, although the proportion of former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children attending an educational programme at a university of applied sciences or a university is increasing. Of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who obtained a residence permit in 2014, 9% were pursuing an educational programme at HBO or university level on 1 October 2022, compared to fewer than 2% on 1 October 2017 (CBS, 2023).

First impression of language transition programmes for 18+ target group is positive

The civic integration system has three learning pathways for the 18+ target group: the education pathway, the B1 pathway and the self-reliance pathway. The education pathway comprises seven different language transition programmes. These programmes prepare participants to enter MBO, HBO or university programmes. Approximately 30 institutions have received accreditation to offer the education pathway. The Inspectorate supervises the education pathway and conducted quality inspections at ten institutions in 2023. In general, the initial impression with respect to the quality of education was positive. The institutions have developed programmes that are in accordance with legislation and regulations, and that meet the needs of the target group. However, we also observed that attainment targets are not always fully or appropriately addressed. The development and supervision of the participants are monitored. The teaching teams generally have experience with the target group, are knowledgeable and are strongly committed to teaching and to the participants. We have not yet assessed the examinations. The initial impression varies, and a number of exam boards are not yet able to provide assurance of certification. Adult newcomers who are not subject to the civic integration requirement are not eligible for the education pathway, which means they enter the labour market while still lacking basic skills (especially an adequate command of the Dutch language). This considerably reduces their likelihood of finding a suitable place in society.

Financial assistance offered to Ukrainian students varies

With regard to tuition fees, Dutch universities of applied sciences and universities made an exception for Ukrainian students in academic year 2022-2023. These students paid the statutory Dutch fee, instead of the institutional tuition fees, which are many times higher. Approximately 1,100 Ukrainian students took an HBO or university programme in academic year 2022-2023 (Nuffic, 2023). In 2023-2024 many but not all institutions withdrew this measure. A small number of municipalities are subsidising tuition fees, books and public transport costs for Ukrainian students within the municipality's boundaries. For these refugees without an official residence permit, where they live and study very much determines whether they receive financial support for their studies.

3.5 Local Educational Agenda and pre-school and early childhood education

Prevention of segregation insufficiently addressed in LEA consultations

Municipalities are obliged to organise consultations with the heads of childcare organisations and with school boards in primary and secondary education. These Local Educational Agenda (LEA) consultations focus on establishing agreements and formulating measurable objectives on themes including educational disadvantage, prevention of segregation, promoting integration, and coordinating admission and enrolment procedures. Each year, the Inspectorate monitors the extent to which municipalities consult, establish agreements and achieve targets on LEA themes. Most municipalities discuss the theme of preventing educational disadvantage in the LEA consultation. However, the themes of preventing segregation, and enrolment and admission procedures are insufficiently addressed. It is essential that municipalities take a more decisive approach in assuming their managerial role and that legislation and regulations relating to the LEA are further clarified (Inspectorate of Education, 2024e).

Reaching the target group and meeting agreed outcomes vital to effective pre-school and early childhood education

Pre-school and early childhood education is one of the most important instruments to prevent and combat educational disadvantage. Municipalities have a substantial measure of freedom in how they design their pre-school and early childhood education, but they are obliged to hold consultations and establish agreements on certain topics. Municipalities are not always aware of their statutory obligation to hold annual consultations on issues such as defining the target group, facilitating access and ensuring continuous learning pathways, nor are they aware of their responsibility to make sure that previous agreements are still sufficient (Inspectorate of Education, 2024e). The supply of child places seems to be sufficient in most municipalities. The same also applies to reaching the target group. For effective pre-school and early childhood education it is important to determine the anticipated impact: the outcome agreements. Approximately a third of municipalities do not succeed in making outcome agreements on early childhood education. It is key that municipalities and school boards have a clear picture of the children for which pre-school and early childhood education is intended. Municipalities also need to embed the outcome agreements in their wider youth policy and policy on combating educational disadvantage, in addition to fulfilling their managerial role in this regard.

CHAPTER 4

Wellbeing and social safety

4.1 Key points

Wellbeing and social safety are crucial if schools are to fulfil their teaching task across the full range of classes and subjects. Wellbeing and safety cannot be taken for granted. Schools are responsible for creating a safe learning environment that promotes wellbeing and in which pupils are able to learn and work.

Wellbeing and safety call for an ongoing focus

Young people's wellbeing is a concern. Pupils and students need to feel comfortable at school or when participating in an educational programme. A condition for this is that they feel safe. Social safety is sufficient in most schools and educational programmes, and most pupils and students do feel safe. However, not all pupils and students feel safe and/or comfortable at school. Feeling safe is a precondition for learning. Not feeling safe can lead to a reduced sense of wellbeing and may even result in students dropping out of education. Teachers, school leaders, school governors, the inspectorate and the education ministermust ensure an ongoing focus on wellbeing and social safety.

Safe environment essential for broad development

Schools and educational programmes are not only about gaining the knowledge and skills needed to obtain a diploma; they also aim to enhance personal development and enable pupils and students to acquire social skills. Pupils and students can only achieve personal development if they feel comfortable, however their wellbeing is currently being adversely affected. Pupils and students are less motivated and say they feel less happy about themselves. Although the Covid-19 pandemic played a part in this decline in wellbeing, stress and the amount of homework are other factors. Educational institutions cannot solve all problems, but they must offer a safe space in which a child or young person feels comfortable and can develop across a wide range of areas.

Wellbeing requires a structural and explicit focus

Schools, educational programmes and institutions understand the importance of wellbeing and most have used National Education Programme funding to finance activities that promote pupil and student wellbeing. However, it takes time to generate sustainable change in wellbeing,continuing beyond the horizon of available funding (see also Chapter 1). Pupil and student wellbeing calls for a structural and explicit focus from schools and educational programmes. Wellbeing will take its rightful place in education if schools and educational programmes set measurable goals, assess whether these actually improve pupil and student wellbeing, and change their approach where necessary.

The importance of monitoring safety

Most pupils in primary and secondary education feel safe. In a small number of randomised school inspections in primary and secondary education, school safety policies were generally found to be sufficient. However, remedial actions suggest that social safety is not yet comprehensively well-established. ? Safety monitors show that there are groups of pupils, such as LGBTIQ+ pupils, who feel less safe. Bullying is also increasing in primary and secondary education. Schools should offer an environment in which students feel safe enough to report incidents. It is vital that schools conduct an annual

monitor of student safety and use the outcomes to increase the safety of all those involved.

Differences between institutions in perceived safety

A large proportion of students feel safe in senior secondary vocational education (MBO), and there has been an upward trend in perceived safety since 2016. There are, however, clear differences between institutions: at the most unsafe institution a quarter of students indicate that they do not feel safe, as opposed to fewer than 5% at the safest institution. In publicly funded and non-publicly funded higher education, approximately 4% of students say they do not feel safe enough to be themselves at the institution where they are studying. Higher education institutions need to focus on improving the complaints procedures relating to undesirable behaviour.

Safety of newcomers at family locations of asylum-seekers' schools must improve

The difficult circumstances faced by newcomers often make learning a challenge for them. Children in family accommodation locations are especially at risk of facing unsafe situations. It is important that the government takes steps to improve the safety of these pupils. Staff shortages and the rapid growth in pupil numbers make this situation particularly concerning. It is currently difficult to provide a socially safe environment for pupils and staff.

Ensuring social safety is more than just a policy

It is essential that all sectors adhere to the plan-do-check-act cycle with respect to measures that promote social safety. Social safety also needs to be and remain a topic that people feel able to discuss. Compliance with safety policy legislation offers no guarantee of a safe school environment.

Recommendations:

- Schools and educational programmes: involve all stakeholders in discussing and setting targets for wellbeing and social safety, and developing effective approaches. Check among pupils and students to ascertain whether these targets have been achieved.
- Schools and educational programmes: compliance with legislation does not automatically mean that everyone feels safe. It is the entire team's responsibility to discuss safety norms and values and to make practical agreements.
- Governing boards, schools and educational programmes: do not only register reports of incidents but analyse them too and use this analysis as the basis for devising a targeted approach.
- Governing boards, schools and educational programmes: ensure that action is taken in response to reports of bullying and other unsafe situations. Involve parents in this situation.

4.2 Wellbeing

Wellbeing is vital for the broader development of pupils and students

The years that pupils and students spend in education enable them to gain knowledge and skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. This concerns not only educational knowledge and skills but also social and personal skills: making friends, dealing with a range of different people, discovering who you are and what you want, feeling free to be yourself and to express your opinion, daring to be critical, and developing resilience and self-confidence. To achieve this broader development (and to fulfil the social function of education) it is important that pupils and students experience wellbeing and that they feel seen and accepted. In this regard, it is essential that educational institutions offer a safe social environment. Pupils and students should be given the space to discover who they are, to make mistakes and to test boundaries. They can meet their peers at school and learn about different norms, values and behaviours. They can also explore ways of dealing with these differences.

Wellbeing under pressure

Pupil and student wellbeing has been an area of concern for some time (RIVM, 2018; RVS, 2018). Pupils and students are less motivated and say they feel less happy about themselves. The full extent of the issues affecting pupil and student wellbeing only became apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b). Young people's mental health deteriorated, with girls experiencing more problems than boys (Boer et al., 2022). Although the pandemic was a major underlying cause, stress and the amount of homework emerged as contributing factors. These remain areas of concern.

Reduced wellbeing leads to greater difficulties in learning

When pupils and students feel comfortable and experience a stronger connection with school, they find it easier to learn (Trimbos, 2021b). If they do not feel comfortable and experience psychosocial problems, their learning is adversely affected. This can result in

reduced motivation to attend school, less involvement in school life and poorer academic performance. In serious cases, pupils in secondary education and MBO are more likely to leave school early (CBS, 2021). The number of early school leavers in MBO has increased significantly in recent years (Figure 4.2a) and this may be related to reduced wellbeing. In MBO and higher education, 18% suffer wellbeing issues. This can lead to students in higher education taking time out or dropping out of their educational programme altogether.

Many MBO students suffer from loneliness and anxiety

A questionnaire completed by 22,000 MBO students in school year 2022-2023 showed that almost half (45%) said they suffered from social loneliness (113 Zelfmoordpreventie, 2023). They indicated having less contact with other people than they would like to have. Approximately a third of MBO students who completed the questionnaire experienced emotional loneliness. The study also showed that almost a third of respondents were at risk of suffering from anxiety and mood disorders. In the group of students with a high risk of anxiety and mood disorders, 60% said they had experienced suicidal thoughts. These findings do not necessarily apply to MBO students in general but do indicate the need for effective monitoring of wellbeing. Schools in vocational education generally do this, using online questionnaires or preventive measures such as an app.

High pressure, especially among pupils in secondary education

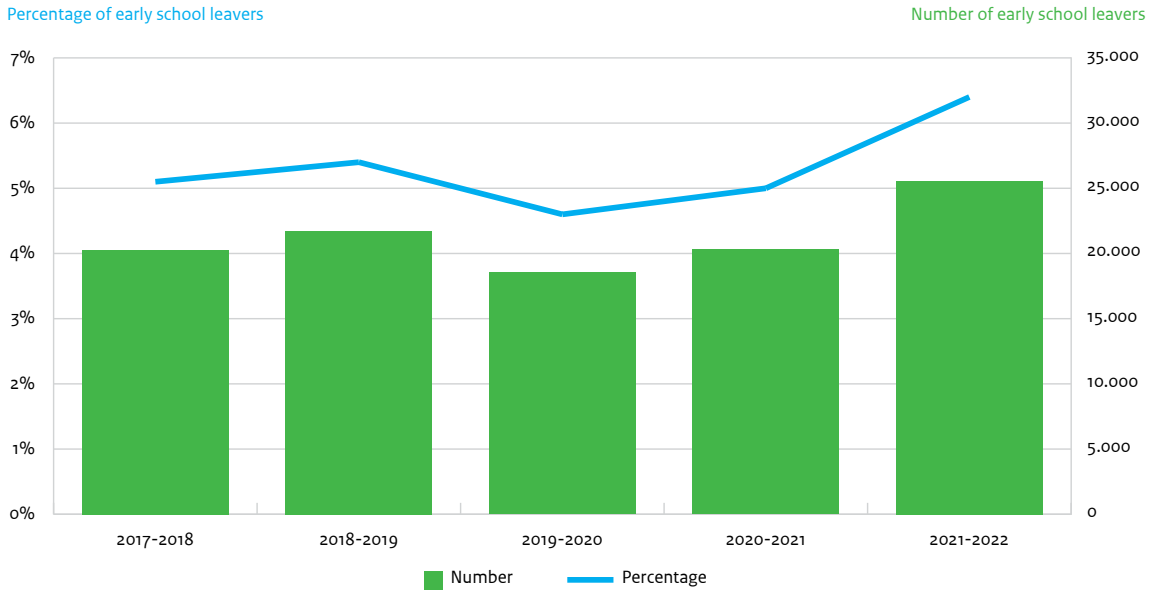
Most pupils in the final years of primary education report feeling good about themselves. When asked to rate their lives in a study in late 2022, the average score exceeded 8 out of 10 (Stevens et al., 2023). This general sense of wellbeing declined in secondary education. Pupils gave their wellbeing at school an average score of 7.8 in 2020-2021 and 7.4 in 2022-2023 (VO-raad, 2023). The average score for wellbeing at school differs between types of school. Young people report experiencing more stress due to school, homework and interactions with peers, and less due to their home situation or social media (Kleinjan et al., 2020). Almost 1 in 3 young people aged 12-16 also feels under pressure to live up to their own or other people's expectations (performance pressure).

Stress factors experienced by group 7 and 8 pupils in primary education mainly stem from the opinions of others, followed by stress due to homework or school. In 2021, the percentage of young people who feel under pressure as a result of schoolwork was 45% (Boer et al., 2022). This experience is more prevalent among girls.

Schools have many options to promote wellbeing

Young people believe that schools should focus more on personal and social-emotional development (Kleinjan et al., 2020), in other words, the social function of

Figure 4.2a Number and percentage of MBO early school leavers from school year 2017-2018 to 2021-2022



Source: DUO (2023)

Schools cannot eliminate all problems, but they can provide personal attention, stimulate connection and discuss what pupils or students can do to feel better.

education. They mention a range of factors that promote good mental health: a supportive social environment, positive personal development (e.g. a goal or vision for the future, being able to be yourself, handling emotions), having the opportunity to enjoy yourself and having enough time at your disposal. Schools and educational programmes can help pupils and students work on improving their prospects (e.g. through career information and guidance), help them develop their identity, resilience and interactive skills, provide support and help boost their self-confidence. Schools and educational programmes can also help reduce pressures associated with performing and social comparison. A number of universities are experimenting with no longer giving marks.

Sector uses National Education Programme funding to promote wellbeing

Schools recognise the importance of wellbeing. In 2022-2023, almost three quarters of primary schools spent some of their funding from the National Education Programme on activities to promote pupil wellbeing. The vast majority of schools integrated these activities into their standard curriculum (PO-Raad, 2023). In secondary education, almost all schools (95%) used some of the National Education Programme funding to promote pupil wellbeing in 2022-2023. In special education and special secondary education 91% did so. In addition, many schools in secondary education, special education and special secondary education also opt for interventions relating to the practical skills that are a condition for learning and social behaviour. In MBO, 88% of funding from the National Education Programme was spent on wellbeing. In HBO and

university education, institutions mainly directed this funding into four wellbeing themes: a strong support structure and student guidance, connections with the student, the social bond between teacher and student, and the social bond among students (OCW, 2023a). The impact of the funding spent on wellbeing – especially in the longer-term – is not yet known.

Managing wellbeing is increasingly left to MBO students

Online tools are increasingly used to promote student wellbeing in vocational education. These provide an insight into how students are feeling and offer students advice on what they can do to help themselves feel better. The instruments can also be used to reduce stress in education and offer more tailored support.

Banning mobile phones can help improve wellbeing

A classroom ban on the use of mobile phones, tablets and smartwatches was introduced this year. This was done because mobile phones distract pupils and make it more difficult for them to concentrate on their learning. Increased mobile phone use has been linked to an increased likelihood of poorer learning outcomes, especially among low achievers (Meier, 2022). Restricting smartphone access can also contribute to wellbeing because it leads to more interaction between pupils. Sense of connection is a key indicator of school success (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Tinto, 2012; Van Toly et al., 2018). The impact of a classroom ban on smartphones depends on how it is enforced. The effect of a ban on smartphone use will be different than the effect of a ban on carrying a smartphone on your person. The same is true of where the ban applies: only in the classroom or throughout the school. Spanish research based on PISA data reports a fall in the number of bullying incidents following the introduction of a smartphone ban (Beneito & Vicente-Chirivella, 2022).

Half of young people say they see no evidence of focus on wellbeing

In a survey of over 1,000 young people aged between 10 and 18, half indicated that their school does not focus on mental health or being unaware of any such focus at their school. At the same time, almost all of the young people surveyed expressed a need for a focus on this issue. The young people's need for a focus on wellbeing might be greater than what schools are currently providing, or young people might not recognise certain activities to be geared towards improving their mental health, or maybe the existing activities have not yet had a positive effect on wellbeing. Pupils and students can reap tangible benefits from such activities if schools address wellbeing structurally and implement the plan-do-check-act cycle. Wellbeing will take its rightful place in education if schools set measurable goals, assess whether these actually improve pupil and student wellbeing, and adjust their approach where necessary.

Across the border: a curriculum for health and wellbeing in Scotland

Pupil wellbeing has long been a high priority in Scotland, leading to the development of its curriculum for excellence for health and wellbeing. This is a flexible curriculum that can be used to evaluate health and wellbeing education in schools. Key to this is the design of a school curriculum and the measurement of results based on wellbeing indicators (the so-called SHANARRI Wheel). The 'getting it right for every child' strategy and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are essential to the approach. Schools are required to use the curriculum for excellence and the Inspectorate monitors compliance and offers support where necessary.

4.3 Social safety

Safety policy in place at almost all schools

To promote wellbeing, it is important that schools provide a safe learning environment. The initial impression from the randomised primary and secondary education inspections is that a viable safety policy is in place at almost all schools (see also Chapter 1). In special education and special secondary education, inspectors assessed the Secure Environment and Atmosphere standard as being satisfactory or good at all schools (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). This was the case at 98% of schools in primary education and at 93% of schools in secondary education. Despite the low number of unsatisfactory assessments, remedial orders were issued. Not many were issued in primary education, special education and special secondary education but, for various reasons, a fifth of the inspected schools in secondary education were issued with a remedial order. Schools in primary and secondary education are legally obliged to make efforts to address bullying and improve social safety. They are required to implement a social safety policy, have a point of contact where pupils and parents can report bullying, appoint someone to coordinate the school's policy on bullying and measure the pupils' perceptions of safety and wellbeing.

Specific groups in primary and secondary education feel less safe

Between 2016 and 2021, most pupils in primary and secondary education felt safe at and around their school. This percentage fluctuated between 95% and 98% (Lodewick et al., 2023). The picture is less positive for specific groups of pupils: LGBTIQ+ pupils in primary and secondary education, for example, experience a lower level of wellbeing. In primary education, wellbeing is also lower among pupils of non-Dutch origin, while in secondary education, girls' wellbeing is lower than that of boys. There is a lack of information about the wellbeing and social safety of pupils in special education and special secondary education. This gives cause for concern, as many pupils in this sector are vulnerable and not always able to express themselves clearly should an incident occur.

Most schools comply with the obligation to monitor social safety

As part of their social safety duty of care, schools in primary and secondary education are required to monitor their pupils' perceptions of safety at school each year and submit the data to the Inspectorate. In school year 2022-2023, 95% of schools in primary education, 83% in secondary education and 88% in special education and special secondary education fulfilled this obligation. These rates increased after a reminder from the Inspectorate. Schools use various instruments to monitor social safety. The most frequently used instruments in primary education are Vensters PO, ZIEN! and Kanjertraining, while the most frequently used instruments in secondary education are Vensters VO and Kwaliteitscholen (Inspectorate of Education, (2024r). A wider range of monitoring instruments are used in special education and special secondary education, where the most commonly used instrument was developed by Beekveld and Terpstra (22%). No other instrument is used by more than 10% of schools in special education and special secondary education. This makes it difficult to obtain an overview of pupils' perceptions of safety and wellbeing in special education and special secondary education.

Differences between schools in perceived social safety

There is a correlation between wellbeing and perceived social safety at schools that use the above-mentioned instruments: greater wellbeing among pupils correlates with a higher level of perceived social safety. In primary and secondary education, wellbeing and perceived social safety relate to the composition of a school's population. There are also differences between schools. Primary schools with higher levels of pupil wellbeing and perceived social safety are more commonly found in the east and north of the country than in the western Randstad region. The average final test scores are higher at schools which score higher on wellbeing and perceived social safety. In secondary education, there are differences between school types: first-year pupils and pupils in preuniversity departments experience greater wellbeing than pupils in VMBO and HAVO departments and, to a somewhat lesser extent, these departmental differences are apparent with respect to perceived social safety. At primary schools and in VMBO departments where pupils experience a higher level of wellbeing and social safety, absenteeism among teaching staff is lower (Inspectorate of Education, 2024r).

Lack of data on social safety and wellbeing in special education and special secondary education

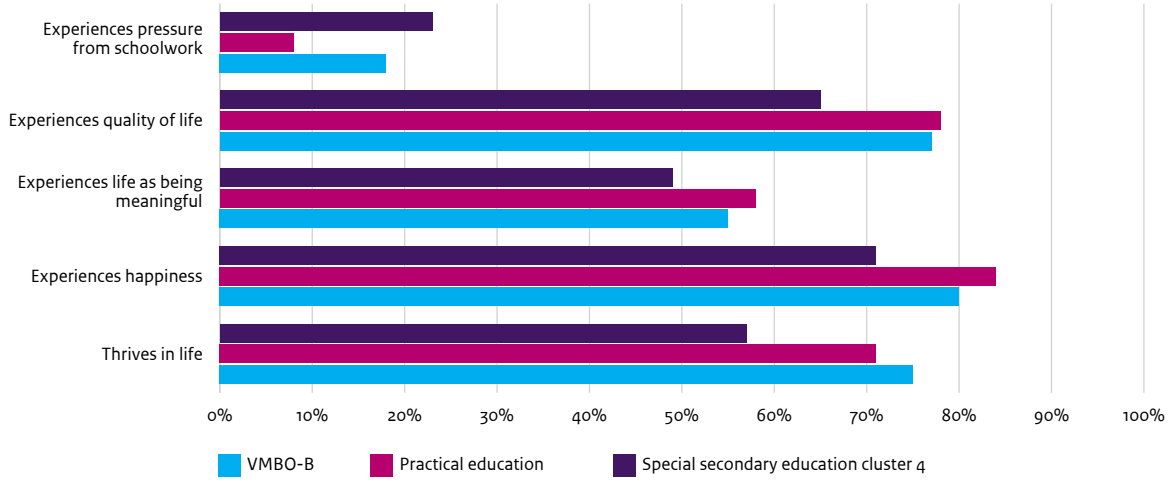
At most schools in special education and special secondary education that use the Beekveld and Terpstra instrument (not the cluster 2 schools), the average scores for wellbeing and perceived social safety were between 3 and 4 on a 4-point scale, indicating that pupils at these schools experience a high level of wellbeing and social safety (Inspectorate of Education, 2024r). These results cannot be used to

draw conclusions for all special education and special secondary education pupils at a national level. Little is known about the wellbeing and social safety of pupils in special education and special secondary education. Other research (Trimbos, 2021a) showed that the mental wellbeing of special secondary education pupils from the former cluster 4 was lower in almost all areas than that of pupils in VMBO basic and practical education (Figure 4.3a). These figures demonstrate the importance of including pupil wellbeing and perceived social safety in studies in special education and special secondary education. The measurement methods also need to be appropriate for these pupils. The picture is currently rather fragmented.

Among MBO students, 81% feel safe

Most, but not all MBO students feel safe according to the 2022 JOB-monitor (Cuppen et al., 2023). This figure was 76% in 2016, rising to 81% in 2022. There is a clear correlation with the atmosphere in the educational programme. The higher the number of students who indicated they did not feel safe, the more they rated the atmosphere on their programme as poor (Cuppen et al., 2023; Inspectorate of Education, 2023o). More students at vocational training institutions were positive about the atmosphere than students attending AOCs and ROCs. Entry-level students were more likely than other students to answer positively when asked whether they enjoy going to school, what they think of the areas for quiet study and what they think of the school canteen. The extent to which students feel safe also differs between groups of students. Female students and students with a disability are more likely to feel unsafe. This also applies to students at level 2 and students pursuing avocational learning pathway.

Figure 4.3a Percentage of VMBO basic, practical education and special secondary education cluster 4 pupils who experienced pressure from schoolwork and positive mental health in 2019



Source: Trimbos (2021a)

Clear differences in perceived safety between MBO institutions and sectors

The majority of employees at MBO institutions indicate that they feel safe. On average, employees at larger institutions with over 15,000 students feel less safe. In the north and east of the Netherlands, employees feel somewhat safer. Satisfaction and perceived safety go hand in hand with job satisfaction and safety. This may be because working in locations with urban problems often presents employees with more challenging circumstances that can have an adverse effect on perceived safety and job satisfaction (Cuppen et al., 2023).

Employees at large MBO institutions feel less safe

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Most higher education students indicate that they can be who they are

Approximately 85% of students in non-publicly funded higher education feel safe being themselves. In publicly funded and non-publicly funded higher education, approximately 4% of students do not feel safe enough to be themselves at the institution where they are studying (Studiekeuze 123, 2023). Approximately 8 in 100 students do not feel comfortable in the educational programme they have chosen to study. Approximately 7 in 10 students do feel comfortable in their educational programme. In addition, 2 in 3 students are confronted with transgressive behaviour or sexually transgressive behaviour (RCGOG, 2024). Since 2023, a large number of educational institutions and student organisations have been working to address this issue, but it is vital that students, teachers and school governors continue to discuss such matters. Establishing one social safety team at every educational institution can give victims support and also assistance and advice to managers and anyone accused of such behaviour.

Greater focus needed on prevention and full plan-do-check-act cycle

The Inspectorate examined the institutional policy on social safety for higher education programmes in fashion, art and design (Inspectorate of Education, 2023g). This showed that social safety was being addressed, but the emphasis was more on measures geared towards solving rather than preventing problems. In relation to social safety, the full plan-do-check-act cycle had yet to be implemented. At the time of the study, governing boards were primarily concerned with implementing measures and were less

focused on formulating concrete goals, monitoring and evaluation, and adapting policies and measures. It is essential that educational institutions complete the full plan-do-check-act cycle. By evaluating measures and consulting pupils, students and teachers, institutions and governing boards can assess whether a school or educational programme is actually perceived as a socially safe environment by all.

Information on confidential counsellors and complaints procedures often limited in higher education

Annual reports for 2022 in publicly funded higher education mentioned the availability of a confidential counsellor but generally provided no further details about the procedures of contacting and receiving support from confidential counsellors (Inspectorate of Education, 2024l). Information on the complaints procedure for inappropriate conduct was limited and often incomplete. Only art education in universities of applied sciences presents a different picture. These institutions report extensively on the procedures relating to confidential counsellors and the complaints procedure for inappropriate conduct. The focus on social safety in the arts sector could have made a positive contribution in this respect. The Social Safety Code in HBO art education can consolidate this focus.

Increase in reports to confidential inspectors

The fact that the vast majority of pupils and students feel safe does not mean that there are no problems. There has been an increase in the number of reports to our confidential inspectors. In school year 2022-2023, 2,152 new cases were received on the confidential inspectors' hotline (Inspectorate of Education, 2024f), compared with 1,743 the previous year. Although the increase could indicate a growing awareness of the Inspectorate hotline, it could also indicate a growing number of incidents. The increase is apparent in several areas: psychological aggression, physical violence, sexual harassment and sexual abuse. In addition to reports made to the confidential inspectors, the number of signals reaching the Inspectorate on the theme of safety is also increasing, with the number doubling in a two-year period.

Reports of physical violence increasing in severity

The number of files involving pupils below the age of 13 is increasing. In primary education, the cases show a shift towards physical violence of a more serious nature. In the past, these cases mainly concerned pushing and shoving, but in school year 2022-2023 they contained more reports of assault or culpable injury (Inspectorate of Education, 2024f). In secondary education, the number of cases relating to social media has increased compared to previous school years. Based on these cases, the inspectors have the impression that schools are not well-prepared to deal with incidents of this nature.

Bullying is increasing

More pupils in primary and secondary education indicate that they are bullied (Lodewick et al., 2023). In primary education, 17% of pupils indicate that they are bullied, compared to 9% in secondary education. LGBTIQ+ pupils are bullied more often than other pupils. Schools need to ensure that these pupils feel secure enough to report incidents and that incidents are followed up. Teachers are not always aware of bullying, as it also takes place outside school and increasingly online. When asked, teaching staff in primary education said they witness less bullying, while the number of pupils indicating that they were being bullied actually increased. Due to the fact that bullying also takes place outside school and online, the safe zone for children is becoming smaller (Broeren, 2023). This causes stress and results in children being unable to relax. Bullying can also have a negative impact in the classroom. Bullying affects the wellbeing and happiness of all children involved and its effects can last well into adulthood (Hopman et al., 2022).

Inability to provide adequate support to bullying

Teachers often fail to apply knowledge on how to address bullying correctly (Van Helvoirt & Smeets, 2022). They only notice some of the instances of bullying in the classroom. A number of teachers refrain from intervening, as they interpret bullying as being part of growing up. There are also teachers who do not always have an accurate impression of the social dynamics in the classroom. It is unclear how much knowledge teachers and particularly school governors have about safety within their school and the various aspects of safety at school. In secondary education, no action is taken on reports of bullying in over 30% of cases. Incidents are sometimes registered but are not evaluated. This is something that schools must do. Evaluation of incidents offers insights into whether incidents are particularly prevalent in relation to certain themes, or in certain locations or certain groups. It can also show which elements of the safety policy are effective and which can be improved. Moreover, bullying is a group process and positive group formation helps prevent bullying, which is why it is important that

policies and programmes focus on the role of both the individual and the group (Huitsing et al., 2015).

Safety of children and young people at asylum-seeker centre schools must be improved

It is difficult for pupils at asylum-seeker centre schools to learn effectively due to their circumstances (Inspectorate of Education, 2023i). Schools at family accommodation locations say they are unable to fulfil their statutory obligations regarding education in civic values and skills. This is because the pupils they teach are isolated from the rest of society.

Schools find it difficult to teach pupils respect for the fundamental values of a democratic constitutional state if these values appear not to apply to these pupils and their parents. The Inspectorate considers it vital that the government enables access to education for all newcomers as quickly as possible, safeguards their uninterrupted development, and takes steps to improve the safety of children and young people, particularly those living in family accommodation locations. The Inspectorate recognises that there is limited scope for change in the asylum chain. This makes it even more important that we address those issues which can be changed, starting by ensuring that children's rights are given greater priority and that children are well looked after.

Risk management and effective information exchange needed at Youth Detention Centres

Several inspections investigated two serious incidents at a Youth Detention Centre. A key point for improvement proved to be strengthening the connection and cooperation with education (Inspectorate of Justice and Security, 2023). The inspections concluded that both the centre and the school should have focused more rigorously on risk management with respect to treatment, guidance and security. Effective exchange of information is needed to enable the school to make the right assessment as to whether a young person can be admitted to education responsibly. A stronger focus on safety does not mean replacing a pedagogical living, learning and treatment climate with a more controlled approach.

Scaling back restrictive measures at secure youth care institutions

In the Netherlands, there are fifteen institutions with secure youth care (JeugdzorgPlus). These institutions have schools offering special secondary education. These institutions are being transformed into small-scale facilities that offer more scope for a specialist approach tailored to specific needs. In March 2018, JeugdzorgPlus made initial agreements to place fewer young people in secure accommodation. The institutions aim to support young people without using unnecessary force. We will be monitoring developments at the institutions closely, as these developments also impact the schools to which the institutions are connected.


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CHAPTER 5

Inclusive education

5.1 Key points

Pupils and students must be able to pursue an educational career that is consistent with their abilities and talents. Education needs to be adapted for pupils and students with special educational needs to ensure that they have the opportunity to complete their education without interruption. Inclusive education should help pupils and students attain this goal.

A large number of pupils and students have special educational needs

In the Netherlands, 107,000 pupils attend a form of specialised education. An estimated 10% of pupils in mainstream primary and secondary education also have special educational needs. This percentage is somewhat higher in MBO institutions and in higher education. This is primarily due to a broader definition of support needs. Pupils and students with support needs are entitled to the same opportunities and options as other pupils and students.

Quality of extra support in primary and secondary education must improve

Quality improvements need to be made in the planning, implementation and evaluation of extra support in all sectors of primary and secondary education. Governing boards and schools have to adapt their management strategies with this in mind. Schools also have a limited overview of the results of extra support, something they can improve by formulating more specific targets and improving evaluation in this area. This requires schools and school boards to incorporate evaluation more securely within the quality control cycle. Too few pupils with special educational needs in mainstream education are given a progress and development plan: a third in primary education and almost half in VMBO and HAVO/preuniversity education. Progress and development plans also need to be registered more clearly. National insight into these pupils and their development is currently limited. In mainstream education, progress and development plans often fall short of statutory requirements.

Shortage of suitable places

Inter-institutional partnerships in inclusive education are generally successful in realising their primary statutory task of providing a comprehensive network of services. In some cases, however, they fall short due to a lack of places in specialised education. Other relevant factors include shortages of staff and resources in municipalities and at the interface between education and special needs care. Transition arrangements and expansion of the support services in mainstream education offer temporary relief but no permanent solution. Inter-institutional partnerships place more emphasis on the temporary nature of specialised education and make ongoing assessments of whether and with what support a pupil can enter or return to mainstream education.

Options for tailored approach underutilised

Other pupil support options within the sphere of influence of schools, governing boards and inter-institutional partnerships could be used more frequently and effectively. However, knowledge of these options and the use of tailored interventions, such as deviating from planned teaching time and designing special

provisions, is sometimes lacking. This means that pupils are offered fewer opportunities to pursue a form of mainstream education and where possible to obtain a standard diploma. Utilising these opportunities could also alleviate the pressure on specialised education and shorten waiting lists, as well as helping to ensure that education is more inclusive.

Agreements between primary and secondary education, MBO and higher education

Inclusive education mainly focuses on primary and secondary education. Some of the pupils continue their education as student at an MBO or in a higher education programme. The bottlenecks and challenges faced by schools and institutions, in education and other sectors, are often similar. Research results and accounts of personal experiences can be relevant and instructive across all sectors.

Recommendations:

- Inter-institutional partnerships: make more specific agreements in the special needs support programme, particularly with regard to basic and extra support, procedures and criteria for admission to specialised education and the placement policy for mainstream education.
- Inter-institutional partnerships, school boards and schools: utilise opportunities to offer tailored intervention within the comprehensive network of provisions.
- Schools: improve the quality of extra support, using the progress and development plan as a guiding tool.
- School boards, schools and inter-institutional partnerships: improve overview of the results achieved in education for pupils with special educational needs.

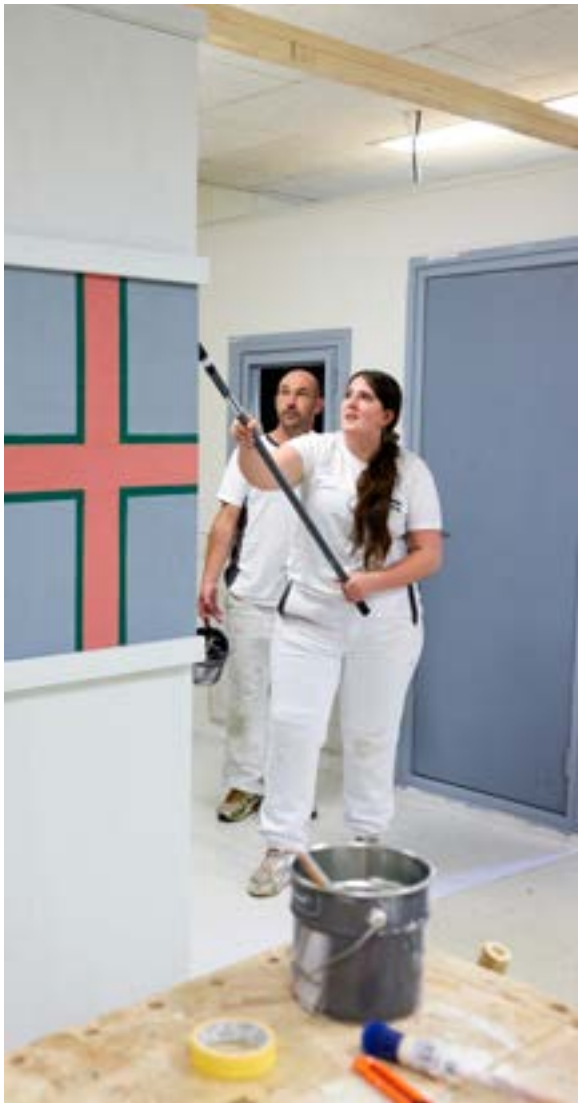
5.2 Pupils and students with special educational needs

Many pupils and students have special educational needs

Almost 107,000 pupils are enrolled in special education, special primary education, practical education or special secondary education (OCW, 2024a,b). This means that the total number of pupils in specialised education is almost the same as it was ten years ago. At primary level, the number of pupils in special education is falling, while in special education as a whole the number of pupils in the former cluster 3 and 4 schools is increasing. In mainstream education, almost 10% of pupils have special educational needs (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d). This amounts to over 136,000 pupils in primary education and over 75,000 pupils in secondary education. In MBO, 36% of students indicate that they have learning difficulties, a chronic illness or an impairment (Cuppen et al., 2023). In higher education, 38% of students have disability of some kind. Over a third of these students indicate that they encounter difficulties in their studies as a result (Van den Broek et al., 2023).

Different reasons for extra support in each sector

Extra support for pupils in primary and secondary education is offered by the school in which they are enrolled, sometimes with support from inter-institutional partnerships. A small proportion of pupils



receive peripatetic supervision from cluster 1 and cluster 2 schools, or schools for people with epilepsy. This concerns fewer than 0.5% of pupils and means that more pupils receive peripatetic support in mainstream schools than receive special needs education or special secondary education at these schools. Having a serious learning deficit is the main reason that other pupils need extra support in primary education and special primary education. In practical education, the main reason is a learning impairment and in secondary education this involves internalised problem behaviour, particularly in HAVO and preuniversity departments, and serious problems with attitude to work (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d). The need for extra support among MBO and higher education students is largely due to ADHD, ADD or concentration problems, dyslexia and/or dyscalculia, and psychological disorders (Kennis et al., 2023).

5.3 Quality of extra support

The Inspectorate assessed the quality of extra support in primary and secondary education. This involved visiting some 209 primary schools (168 in primary education, 41 in special primary education), 80 in special education and special secondary education, 78 departments in secondary education and 33 schools for practical education. This assessment resulted in an overview of the quality of extra support that pupils receive (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d).

Insufficient quality of extra support at many schools

Ten years after the introduction of inclusive education, the poor quality of the extra support offered by many schools gives cause for concern. A previous study led to the same conclusion for primary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2020a). Various shortcomings were identified in implementing pupil support and in the quality of progress and development plans. The quality of the progress and development plan is related to the quality of implementation: a better plan results in more effective implementation. A systematic overview of the quality and effectiveness of extra support is often lacking at school level and insufficiently embedded in the schools' quality control cycle (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d).

Quality of progress and development plan also falls short

Most of those responsible for implementing the progress and development plans – in many cases the teacher/subject teacher – were able to demonstrate that extra support was being provided as planned, but this was often insufficiently clear from the plans themselves (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d). It is essential to record how extra support is organised in practice, as well as its actual implementation. Parental and pupil involvement can also

be improved. At present, pupils' involvement consists of being given the opportunity to discuss their extra support plan, but their actual input is limited, particularly in primary education, special education and special secondary education. In view of the legal basis for the pupils' right to be heard, this is an area on which schools need to focus. Although in most cases schools did involve parents in the support plan, they only provided them with limited information on the planned destination profile. Nor were parents always asked to give their consent on the intervention section, although this is required by law.

Progress and development plans often do not meet statutory requirements

The fact that half of all progress and development plans in primary education and VMBO do not meet statutory requirements gives cause for concern (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d). In HAVO/preuniversity education, this figure was 73%. Progress and development plans in special education and special secondary education are of a higher standard than those in mainstream education but even so, not all of them meet the requirements. Progress and development plans generally meet requirements in practical education (91%) and special primary education (82%), although Inspectors have noticed that the destination profile is often missing. This is a key guiding element in the delivery of education and support. It gives a clear indication of the pupil's potential so that the support provided can focus on enabling the pupil to achieve this potential.

Targets could be improved: concrete, measurable and ambitious

Providing high-quality extra support begins with setting good targets. Although this can be improved across the whole sector, there are differences between the various types of education. Often the targets set are not specific and measurable or can only be measured to a limited extent. This is less of an issue in special primary education. In many cases, targets also lack ambition, whereas the targets set for specialised education, with the exception of special secondary education, are often assessed as ambitious (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d). The types of targets also differ: some are behavioural, some didactic and others conditional. We also encountered progress and development plans in which absolutely no targets were set, making it difficult to manage the implementation of the plan and complicating any evaluation of the support provided.

Teaching strategies matter

In almost all cases observed, the professional who implemented extra support – the teacher, subject teacher or remedial teacher – provided a safe environment (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d). These professionals gave pupils positive feedback and pointed out their achievements. If pupils demonstrated undesirable behaviour, these teachers handled this effectively. Pupils and parents were generally satisfied or very satisfied with the extra support provided.

Better and more extensive evaluation of extra support required

All sectors need to focus on objectively evaluating whether extra support targets are achieved and on recording these findings in the progress and development plan and the intervention section, if necessary. In primary education, this is done reasonably frequently to very frequently (primary education 64%, special primary education 78%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d). However, in too many cases, inspectors observed that records were either never kept or only to a limited extent. Evaluations of extra support are often general in nature. This means that schools only have limited information about the results achieved and the effectiveness of the extra support given. Almost half the pupils in the progress and development plans evaluated did not develop or showed only limited development with respect to the set targets. This means that too many pupils do not develop as intended. School boards must focus on using progress and development plans properly to give themselves a better understanding of the results of the education and support that pupils receive.

Interventions in special education and special secondary education often poorly substantiated

All pupils in special education and special secondary education must have a progress and development plan. For pupils who also receive specific extra support or guidance from the school, the progress and development plan also has an intervention section. This is the case for a large majority of pupils in special education and special secondary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d) and often concerns pupils with internalised behavioural problems. In the intervention section, inspectors encountered elements such as additional guidance during teaching time, a supplementary pedagogical intervention or an individual intervention. For the latter, this might include a form of therapy at school to achieve pedagogical, didactical or learning and developmental objectives. Approximately half of pupils' targets were only formulated to a limited extent in terms that were specific or measurable. This complicates evaluation,

making it difficult to determine whether extra support is effective. Prior consideration can also be given to whether an intervention is likely to be effective given the conditions at the school. Knowledge of interventions and how to apply them is essential. For around 70% of pupils, the effectiveness of a planned intervention is determined on the basis of intuition or experience. Only around 10% of the interventions used are evidence-based. It is important that knowledge about evidence-based interventions is available and made accessible to schools.

Governing boards need to be held more accountable for results

Insight into and accountability for the results of education for pupils who receive extra support, also in relation to relevant funding, is substandard (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b, 2023j). For this reason, accountability among governing boards of inter-institutional partnerships is often assessed as unsatisfactory (see also Chapter 1) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). School boards are primarily responsible for the quality of education, including education provided to pupils with special educational needs. If this quality falls short, the boards are also responsible for ensuring the necessary improvements. Governing boards of inter-institutional partnerships are required by law to account for the results achieved in education provided to pupils with special educational needs. This requirement does not apply to school boards. If a school board does not have a clear overview of the achieved results, they cannot account for them or communicate them effectively to an inter-institutional partnership. This puts the governing board of the inter-institutional partnership in a difficult situation.

Elements of extra support for pupils could improve at many schools in primary, secondary, special and special secondary education.

Conditions for properly embedding the quality of extra support are...

- a clear distinction between basic and extra support
- embedding of extra support in the quality assurance cycle
- accountability for the effects of extra support

The quality of extra support for ***pupils*** improves if...

- there are concrete, measurable and a mbitious targets
- the provider's teaching strategies are strong
- targets and the associated approach are evaluated and adjusted

Too often there is no progress and development plan for pupils who receive extra support

The fact that schools do not always formulate a progress and development plan for pupils who receivie extra support gives cause for concern. According to the schools, primary education produces a progress and development plan for only 30% of pupils who receive extra support and in VMBO and HAVO/VWO education this is almost 50% (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d). In special education, an intervention section must be included in the progress and development plan if the school offers more than basic teaching (special primary education 83%, special education 80%, practical education 90%, special secondary education 98%). Schools that do not formulate a progress and development plan or incorporate an intervention section are not only failing in their statutory duty but also failing to work systematically in providing extra support. In addition, this deprives parents and pupils of the right to consult the school about the progress and development plan and to give their consent on how the school designs the extra support (the intervention section). One of the causes seems to be the schools' lack of knowledge about when they need to draw up a progress and development plan. Many schools are unclear about what type of support counts as basic support and what support is deemed extra support. This is a task for inter-institutional partnerships: provide clearer and more specific descriptions of what constitutes basic support and what constitutes extra support when drawing up the special needs support programme.

Inadequate registration of progress and development plans by schools

When mainstream schools prepare progress and development plans, they are not always recorded in the Register of Educational Participants (ROD). Over half of primary and secondary schools do not register any progress and development plans, although registration in primary education increased in school year 2022-2023 (Table 5.3a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). Proper registration is needed to maintain an accurate overview of the actual extra support provided by schools. When progress and development plans are registered, a clear picture emerges of where and how many pupils in mainstream education receive extra support. This also results in national figures on whether the total number of pupils with special educational needs is increasing and whether, as time goes on, extra support is provided in mainstream education more often than is currently the case.

Table 5.3a Percentage of registered progress and development plans in primary and secondary education from school year 2018-2019 to 2022-2023.

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Primary education pupils with a progress and development plan	0,5	0,4	0,5	0,5	0,9
Primary schools that register at least one progress and development plan	26,2	23,7	24,4	24,2	44,7
Secondary education pupils with a progress and development plan	2,2	2,1	2,1	2,1	1,7
Secondary schools that register at least one progress and development plan	49,6	43,1	48	47,9	43,2

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024v)

Randomised inspections also show that improvement is still needed in schools

Initial impressions from the randomised inspections we conducted also indicate that schools still need to make progress in supporting pupils. In special education and special secondary education, all schools that were subject to a randomised inspection received a satisfactory assessment for the Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support standard (see also Chapter 1) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024t). In secondary education, 91% of departments were assessed as satisfactory , and 84% in primary education. Despite being given a satisfactory assessment, a relatively large number of schools received remedial orders for this standard. Half of special education and special secondary education schools received a remedial order, with a fifth to a third of schools in primary and secondary education. In primary education, remedial orders were generally given due to shortcomings observed in identifying language and other attainment deficits or in identifying pupils' need for extra support or a more challenging curriculum, and the school's failure to adapt its educational approach accordingly. In special education and special secondary education, the reasons for a remedial order were often diverse, from the absence of medical expertise to a lack of agreement with parents about the progress and development plan. In secondary education, schools received remedial orders for this

standard due to shortcomings in recording progress and development plans in the Register of Educational Participants.

Extra support in MBO and higher education

MBO students are generally satisfied with the extra support they receive or with the changes made to their educational programme or practical vocational training: 50% to 70% were positive, 15% to 35% neutral and 10% to 15% negative. A point of attention is that only a third of students with support needs indicated that they actually received extra support (Kennis et al., 2023). This requires additional focus during our inspections, made easier by the introduction of a law designed to improve the legal protection of MBO students. The Inspectorate will ensure that MBO institutions make agreements with these students and that these agreements are evaluated for effectiveness. Almost 80% of students with a disability in higher education make use of special provisions, such as guidance and counselling (56%) and modifications to their study programme (23%). Among students who make use of special provisions, 42% said they were satisfied with the provisions offered and 20% indicated that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (Van den Broek et al., 2023).

Broad commitment needed to improve the quality of extra support

Schools and governing boards must take action to improve the quality of extra support. Inter-institutional partnerships can support schools by improving the quality of the special needs support programme and ensuring that affiliated schools are familiar with the content of the programme. Responsibility for ensuring the latter lies just as much with the school board. Based on the MBO Inclusive Education Monitor (Kennis et al., 2023), there seem to be similarities between the quality of extra support provided in primary and secondary education and provided by MBO institutions. This implies that there is also room for improvement in MBO regarding the capacities and opportunities of students with special educational needs. This may also apply to the group of students with special educational needs in higher education.

5.4 Improving inclusive education: opportunities and threats

Across the border: inclusive education in Portugal

In Portugal, inclusive education is the norm. The most important step came with the introduction of new legislation in 2008, stipulating that pupils with cognitive and physical impairments should be able to attend mainstream schools. The law also states that if a class has children with an impairment, there should be no more than 20 pupils. Former special education schools were transformed into places where pupils with impairments can receive therapy, although far more pupils receive such therapy at their mainstream school. Special reference schools with specialised staff and technology were created to serve the needs of children with visual and hearing impairments.
These reforms did not prove sufficient to truly achieve inclusion, and thus new curriculums were developed to offer schools greater autonomy. This enables teachers to tailor their teaching to the composition of the class.

Special provisions to supplement the school curriculum

Schools, school boards and inter-institutional partnerships can improve pupils' opportunities in various ways. One way is to design specific provisions which offer pupils (temporary) extra support. If an inter-institutional partnership establishes such a provision, this is known as an orthopedagogic-didactic centre (OPDC). Education at OPDCs is generally of sufficient quality, although safeguarding this quality should remain a priority (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). The quality of the teaching-learning process is satisfactory across the board, including safety. A system of quality assurance and proper accountability for results are often lacking. School boards can also establish a special provision in the form of a separate class or a dedicated part of the school. Approximately 40% of inter-institutional partnerships have one or more of these provisions in their region (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d). Provisions that focus on gifted pupils are sometimes established entirely or partly on the basis of grants for gifted or highly gifted children (Bomhof et al., 2023).

Clarity needed on responsibilities for special provisions

Under certain conditions, pupils from other schools in the region are permitted to make use of an inter-school provision. The time that a pupil spends there can then count towards their teaching time. However, inspectors have observed that, in practice, it is not always clear to those involved where the responsibilities lies. Schools need to communicate more clearly on this matter, both with each other and with parents and pupils. Responsibilities should also be clearly delineated in cooperation with OPDCs. The school where the pupil is enrolled is responsible for drawing up a progress and development plan and the OPDC is responsible for implementing the intervention section. Inspectors often refer to the school's responsibility for the progress and development plan as a point for improvement. Pupils who temporarily attend an OPDC also need to be registered in the Register of Educational Participants and this is another area that needs to improve. Unless they are accurately registered, it is not possible to obtain a national overview of the number of pupils attending OPDCs and for how long.

Cooperation between education and special needs care

Education and special needs care have been cooperating more intensively in recent years. At over 60 locations, the experimental scheme to develop special needs care arrangements is in use. These special needs care arrangements focus on preventing non-attendance and helping pupils return to school. The Health and Youth Care Inspectorate and the Inspectorate of Education began making joint visits to several of these experimental schemes in 2023. The experiences gained by professionals in the field and the findings of these inspections should help shape how these provisions are monitored.

Symbiosis offers a promising collaborative approach

One of the goals of inclusive education is to improve and encourage collaboration between mainstream and special education. One form of collaboration is symbiosis: a pupil enrolled in special education or special secondary education is given the opportunity to attend a mainstream school for part of their education. This can be done with the aim of enabling pupils to make a phased transition to mainstream education and is a good way to improve pupils' transition prospects (De Boer et al., 2023). Benefits to pupils are not the only advantage to be gained from this collaboration between mainstream and special schools: symbiosis also facilitates the transfer of specialised educational knowledge and expertise to mainstream education.

Cooperation between special and mainstream secondary schools improves chances of special needs pupils obtaining diploma

Pupils enrolled in special secondary education can obtain a secondary school diploma in a number of ways. They can sit an exam at a designated school for special secondary education (one that has its own exam licence), as an external student at a secondary school, by taking state examinations or through general secondary education for adults. Most pupils in special secondary education obtain a secondary school diploma by taking state examinations. In 2023, 1,513 pupils in special secondary education took state examinations. In addition, 2,207 pupils sat partial exams (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). These numbers have been fairly stable in recent years. The same applies to the number of pupils in special secondary education who sit exams as external pupils, for example via symbiosis: this number hovers around 800 (Inspectorate of Education (2024v). The cooperation needed to make this happen is not always forthcoming. Some inter-institutional partnerships have a stated ambition to enable as many pupils as possible to study for a standard secondary school diploma by facilitating collaboration between schools in special secondary education and secondary education. This optimises the opportunities for pupils in special secondary education to both sit their exams and to complete their school career at a mainstream school. In MBO, 29% of students with support needs indicated that

they were offered adapted assessment and examinations as a form of extra support during their educational programme (Kennis et al., 2023). This figure is 43% in higher education (Van den Broek, 2023).

Maximising mainstream education options through placement and readmission

Inter-institutional partnerships determine who can be admitted to specialised education and for how long. Agreements in this area are set out in the special needs support programme. There could be a greater focus on maximising mainstream education opportunities in policies and procedures, and in the criteria for both placement and readmission. This would enable schools to make a more considered decision at the time of referral about placement options at another mainstream school. Inspectors have not observed many reasoned choices regarding the duration of a statement of admissibility or specific policies for readmission. At the end of the term of a statement of admissibility, inter-institutional partnerships could give more prominence to the return to mainstream education as a starting point. This is in line with the statutory requirement for specialised education, which states that pupils should return to a more mainstream form of education when a statement of admissibility ends unless there are reasons for not doing so. This requires a spirit of openness and commitment from all parties.

More opportunities in mainstream education for certain groups

Pupils with support needs on the boundary between types of education (e.g. special primary education and special education, practical education and special secondary education) have a better chance of obtaining a basic qualification or finding employment if they attend mainstream education (Inspectorate of Education, 2024b). If there are doubts about admitting a pupil to a more specialised educational setting, inter-institutional partnerships should consider whether the pupil's opportunities would be greater if they were to continue in the current mainstream educational setting and under what conditions. Mainstream education offers greater opportunities due to its scope and range of options, including choice of profile and in the setup of more practical classrooms. When inter-institutional partnerships identify pupils with support needs on the boundaries between types of education, temporary or long-term tailored supervision can help optimise their opportunities in mainstream education. This could involve deploying extra resources for a set period to provide support or facilitate exchange of expertise between mainstream and special education.

Differences in school performance and job opportunities between types of education

Pupils in special primary education and practical education are more likely to enter mainstream education and have a higher chance of obtaining a basic qualification at the age of 19 or 20 than pupils in special education and special secondary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2024b). Compared to pupils in special secondary education, pupils in practical education spend longer in education, are more likely to be enrolled in mainstream education (including MBO) and more likely to obtain a part-time or full-time job after leaving education. These differences may be related to differences in support needs between pupils and to how these types of schools differ in terms of teaching approach and educational targets. At the same time, some educational objectives and statutory obligations overlap. In some cases, the physical distance from a mainstream or special education school can be a factor, as pupils are more likely to attend a school that is located near their home. For other pupils, the equalisation requirement within the inter-institution partnership is related to whether they progress to special secondary education or to secondary education after special education. More pupils who in this way go from special education to mainstream secondary education obtain a basic qualification at 18 or 19 years of age than pupils who attend special secondary education.

Table 5.4a Pupils per school who move from special education and special secondary education to mainstream education, and length of stay (in percentages)

		Average	Minimum	Maximum
School transitions 2021-2022	Interim transition from special education to primary education/special primary education	5,3	0	100
	Final transition from special education to secondary education/ practical education	17,5	0	100
	Interim transition from special secondary education to secondary education/practical education	3,6	0	75
Continuation after 2 years, 2019-2020*	Special education to primary education/special primary education	91,5	20	100
	Special education to secondary education	91,9	50	100
	Special secondary education to secondary education/practical education	83,0	16,7	100

**excludes schools where no such transition took place in 2019-2020*
Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024v)

Differences between schools in (interim) transition to mainstream education

At various points in time, schools and inter-institutional partnerships consider whether it is best for a pupil to remain in specialised education. They do so during the annual evaluation of the progress and development plan, when the pupil goes from primary education or special education to secondary education, and when assessing the application or extension application of the statement of admissibility. When leaving primary education, an average of 18% of pupils per school in special education progress to secondary school or practical education (Table 5.4a). This percentage differs per school: there are schools where no pupils go on to secondary education or practical education and there are schools where every pupil makes this step (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). An interim transition from special education and special secondary education to a more mainstream form of education is far less common.

Pupils transitioned from special education and special secondary education usually stay in mainstream education

Approximately 90% of pupils who enter mainstream education are still pursuing a mainstream form of education two years later (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). However, there are differences between schools. At most schools, only a few pupils make this transition but two years later those pupils still have a place in mainstream education. Schools where higher numbers of pupils make this transition have lower continuation rates.

Limited number of applications for deviation from planned teaching time

Een school in het funderend onderwijs heeft de Under certain conditions, schools in primary and secondary education are permitted to deviate from the minimum number of teaching hours in the case of pupils who are temporarily unable to receive that many hours of education due to physical or psychological problems. Schools are not permitted to resort to this option if, for whatever reason, they are temporarily unable to provide sufficient education and support. Deviations from minimum teaching time only apply to a small group of pupils and mostly in special secondary education. This differs between inter-institutional partnerships (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). The number of applications to deviate from planned teaching time is increasing across all education sectors (Figure 5.4a). This is probably due to schools becoming more aware of the policy rule that specifies the conditions under which deviation from planned teaching time is permitted. It is up to schools to assess whether a temporary reduction in planned teaching time is a tailored intervention that can benefit the pupil. Also, inter-institutional partnerships could scrutinise these decisions more closely. When pupils return to education, more explicit consideration could be given to whether they can enter mainstream education instead of special education or special secondary education. Such a transition often has the additional advantage of enabling the pupil to attend a school that is closer to home.

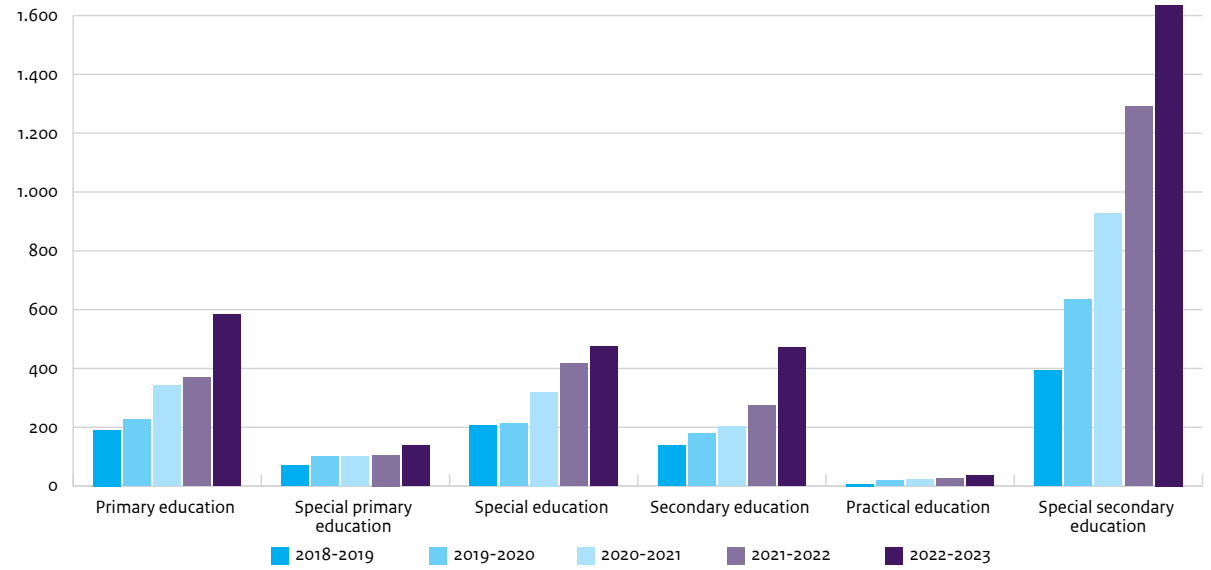
Reduction in teaching time must be a tailored intervention

Deviating from planned teaching time does not automatically count as a tailored intervention. For this to be the case, the progress and development plan needs to offer clarity on the reason for this measure, along with its duration and scope. It should also state how deviating from planned teaching time will support the objective of enabling the pupil to attend full-time education again. For the period during which the pupil receives fewer hours of education, the school has to make considered choices on how to tailor the curriculum to the reduced time available. In doing so, the school should work to ensure that the pupil fulfils their educational targets and predefined destination profile despite their physical and/or psychological problems. This in turn must be taken into account when evaluating the progress and development plan. The aim should always be for a pupil to return to the full teaching time, not least because attending school offers pupils the opportunity to develop social and societal competencies.

Lack of clarity on systematic approach and substantiation

Around half of schools in special education and special secondary education record their reason for deviating from the teaching time. Over 70% of schools provide information in the progress and development plan on the number of hours that the pupil attends school (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d). The necessary elements that contribute to a systematic approach are not in evidence at the majority of schools. For example, only 18% of schools in special education and 38% of

Figure 5.4a Number of requests to deviate from planned teaching time according to type of education from 2018-2019 to 2022-2023



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024v)

schools in special secondary education record how the deviation functions as part of a systematic approach leading to a return to full teaching time. Schools are not always successful in returning to the full number hours within a year. In special secondary education, 14% of the applications submitted were repeat applications (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). Whether this was due to the seriousness of the pupil's support needs or (the quality of) the school's approach is unclear. It does, either way, raise questions about whether deviation from planned teaching time is being used as a substantiated and targeted intervention. Schools need to investigate the extent to which deviation from teaching time is deployed as part of a systematic and substantiated approach.

Staff shortages sometimes undermine inclusive education

Naast kansen zijn er ook uitdagingen voor het In addition to opportunities, there are also challenges when it comes to improving inclusive education. The education sector as a whole and provisions for pupils with special educational needs are under considerable pressure. In 2022 and 2023, we assessed the quality of the comprehensive network

of provisions at 10 of the 72 inspected inter-institutional partnerships as being unsatisfactory (see also Chapter 1) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024v). The causes of this problem are in line with the findings of Berenschot (2023): staff shortages in education and in special needs care sometimes result in inclusive education being unavailable, particularly for pupils with more serious support needs. Interventions by inter-institutional partnerships to address gaps in the comprehensive network are often effective in the short term, but in some cases fall short. For example, inter-institutional partnerships facilitate transition arrangements to enable pupils to receive additional extra support for as long as needed. A lack of inclusive education results in an increase in applications for exemptions and the emergence of waiting lists for specialised education in some regions (De Roode & Walraven, 2023). According to the schools, half of the pupils on a waiting list end up staying at their original school. A worrying 4% of pupils do not attend school and do not receive any form of education. The time frame within which a place will become available for the pupil is often unclear. Expanding the provision may provide a short-term solution but in the long term this type of intervention undermines efforts to achieve a structural solution (Stellaard, 2023) and the move towards more inclusive education.

Conditions under municipal responsibility must be properly arranged

Ensuring the necessary links between education and youth welfare support is a statutory task for both the education sector and municipalities. The inter-institutional partnership presents the special needs support programme to the municipality and the municipality presents the youth welfare support plan to the inter-institutional partnership. The purpose of this exchange is to ensure that educational policy and youth policy are properly aligned. However, this alignment is adversely affected by the fact that schools, governing boards and inter-institutional partnerships are (sometimes overly) dependent on how municipalities operate. For example, aspects such as pupil transport and sufficient and appropriate youth welfare support are the responsibility of municipalities. These provisions are essential conditions for education, and more specifically the education of pupils with special educational needs. If these conditions are not in place, this has a widespread and direct impact, especially on the education of pupils with special educational needs.

Shortage of well-qualified teachers a barrier inclusive education

Well-qualified teachers are crucial to providing inclusive education. However, these teachers must be available. There are serious shortages in specialised education (see also Chapter 6). Teachers are not always fully able to adapt their teaching to the differences in pupil development (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b). In their lessons, teachers do not always create a pedagogical and didactic learning climate that is sufficiently inclusive and stimulating. Both aspects are important conditions for educating pupils with special educational needs. On the positive side, teaching staff are currently working on their professional skills in this area or have expressed the intention to do so (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). This professional development focuses on monitoring and evaluating pupil development and offering guidance to pupils who have special educational needs. Governing boards must continue to encourage this professional development with a focus on inclusive education.

Professional skills are also a focal point in MBO and higher education, where 28% of teaching staff state that they do not have sufficient knowledge to develop inclusive and accessible lessons (ECIO, 2023).

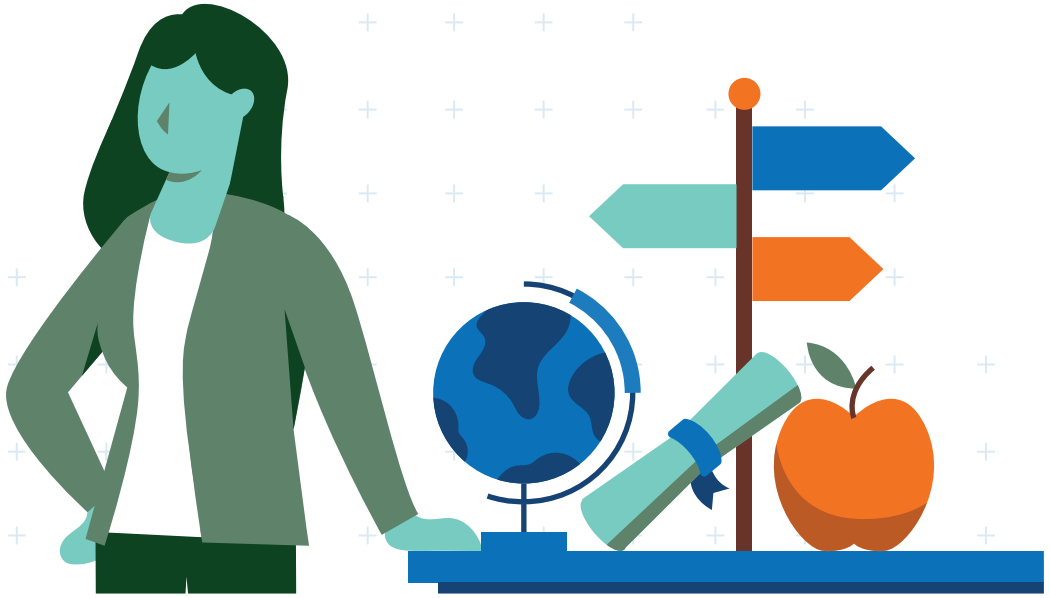

Materialen en middelen inzetten
Tuin

CHAPTER 6

Teaching professionals

6.1 Key points

Many of the challenges mentioned in other chapters depend on having a sufficient number of fully trained teaching professionals. For pupils and students, it is vital that such teachers are available. These professionals should have the opportunity to develop in ways that reflect the needs of pupils, students, schools and educational programmes.



Major staff shortages

Everyone working in education is a vital part of our efforts to improve the quality of education. This means we need at least enough teachers and school leaders. However, the shortages in primary education, secondary education, special education and special secondary education are major and will not decrease over time. It gives great cause for concern that the primary schools with challenging pupil populations are also those with the biggest staff shortages, and that special education and special secondary education are also affected by major shortages. At schools for primary education with the highest school weighting in the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht and Almere (known collectively as the G5) the shortage is 24%, but the shortage at schools outside the G5 is also high. Yet the pupils at these schools have an even greater need for a sufficient number of good teachers.

Shortages have serious consequences

For some of the schools, the shortages have serious consequences. School leaders in primary education are more notably affected by this than school leaders in secondary education, special education and special secondary education. Some school leaders indicate that the shortages are having a negative impact on areas such as pupil support, the mentoring of new teachers and teaching time. Educational development and improvement have also become a problem at some schools. During our randomised inspection of schools, we had the impression that quality and quality assurance, or some aspects of these activities, are insufficient in schools which have a serious shortage of teachers. This is especially evident in secondary education. These schools need help to improve the quality of education and that is difficult to achieve without enough teachers.

Measures to reduce pressure of work appear effective

Job satisfaction in education is high but pressure of work is a reason for teachers and school leaders to leave the sector. This kind of pressure can also discourage teaching staff from continuing to professionalise. Schools are taking measures to address the reality of the shortage of teachers and school leaders. School leaders indicate that measures focusing on wellbeing and on reducing pressure of work are the best way to help recruit and retain teachers. The school leader's role is crucial in this regard. School leaders suggest that measures aimed at stimulating their own professional development are the most effective way of ensuring that they do not leaving education.

Almost all education professionals undergo training

Professional development is important in retaining teachers and school leaders. Most education professionals are given every opportunity for training activities and almost all are actively engaged in further development.

Teachers mainly seek to develop their pedagogical-didactic skills. Teachers, school governors and school leaders in primary education, secondary education, special education, special secondary education and MBO primarily express the need for training in inclusive education and in offering guidance to pupils who have additional learning needs.

Professional development can offer more

The professional development process can be made more effective to strengthen the impact of these activities on the quality of education. This can be achieved by bringing professional development activities more in line with school targets and by evaluating the activities. The knowledge acquired can be shared and anchored more structurally in schools and educational programmes. At present, this is far from the case. To bring about improvements in education, the professional development process needs a higher priority and a more structured approach. According to teachers, school leaders and school governors, a stimulating learning environment and supportive management enhance the effectiveness of professional development. By pursuing a clear policy, governing boards can facilitate and firmly anchor the professional development process within schools and educational programmes.

Devote more hours to professional development of teachers in higher education

Teaching staff in higher education also need continuous professional development. Most of these professionals have already obtained a teaching qualification or are currently doing so. More hours need to be devoted to further professional development, but this time is not available to a large proportion of teaching staff. Institutions should find more effective ways to facilitate and stimulate the need for professional development among teaching staff.

Universities need to value teaching more highly

In university education, lecturers experience little appreciation for their teaching. Many argue that research is given precedence over education. Universities could do more to foster a culture that values teaching. Institutions should express greater appreciation for staff who devote a significant portion of their time to education, regardless of their job profile. This is also in line with collective labour agreements.

Recommendations:

- Scholen: neem maatregelen gericht op het • Schools: take measures to promote teacher wellbeing and reduce pressure of work.
- Schools: take the structural nature of the teacher shortage into account and work to develop sound, structural solutions.
- Governing boards and schools: pursue a clear policy to create a more consistent and stimulating culture of learning.
- Universities: provide a culture in which there is greater appreciation for teaching and educational development.
- Government: continue working to improve the image of the teaching profession, as salaries have increased and teachers have a high level of job satisfaction.

6.2 Shortage of teachers and school leaders

6.2.1 Shortages

No reduction in significant shortage of teachers

The shortage of teachers in primary education, special education and special secondary education amounted to 9,800 FTE in October 2023. This shortage is 9.4% of the total workforce in mainstream primary education, 12.1% in special primary education and 10.6% in special education and special secondary education (Adriaens et al., 2023). The estimated teacher shortage in secondary education is 3,800 FTE. This is approximately 5.8% of the total workforce (Den Uijl et al., 2023). In the cities of the G5, the teacher shortages in primary education, special primary education, special education and special secondary education are much higher than in the rest of the Netherlands: 18.0% as opposed to 8.0% elsewhere. The shortage in the G5 increased compared with 2022, when it amounted to 15.2%, whereas the shortage in the rest of the Netherlands fell by half a percentage point (Adriaens et al., 2023). In secondary education, shortages in the major cities are still comparable to those in the rest of the Netherlands.

Increasing inequality in shortages

The number of primary education, special education and special secondary education schools with no shortage of teachers has increased, both in the G5 and in the rest of the

Netherlands (Adriaens et al., 2023). Outside the G5, 49% of schools have no shortage of teachers. This was 37% in 2022. In the G5 this percentage rose from 11% to 14%. Despite this positive trend, there is a rise in the number of schools with an extreme shortage of 30% or higher. Outside the G5, 4% of schools fall into this category, compared to 3% in 2022; in the G5, 19% of schools indicate that they have a shortage above 30%, compared to 13% in 2022. Primary schools with a high school weighting experience higher shortages than schools with a lower weighting. In the G5, schools with a high or extremely high weighting have an average shortage of approximately 24%, compared to approximately 13.2% outside the G5. Schools in the G5 with an extremely low weighting have an average shortage of 8.9%, compared to 8.6% elsewhere. The major shortages at schools with a high school weighting mean that schools where many pupils are at risk of educational disadvantage are the worst affected. Schools in secondary education with a higher average risk of educational disadvantage per pupil are also experiencing major shortages (Den Uijl et al., 2023).

Across the border: teacher shortages and policy interventions in Finland

The shortage of teachers is also a worsening problem in Finland, especially in pre-school education and nursery classes. It is estimated that by 2030, 2,500 new teachers will be needed in Helsinki alone. At present, approximately 11% of positions are vacant in pre-school and early childhood education in Helsinki. Vacancies are also proving hard to fill in primary and secondary education, particularly in geographically remote towns and villages. The main reason for the shortage is the mass retirement of large post-war generational groups. Until 2015, shortages were extremely uncommon. Teacher training programmes have not expanded in line with the demand for teachers. The shortage is also caused by the sudden expansion of pre-school education. Other relevant factors include declining job satisfaction and wellbeing, with teachers reporting higher levels of work-related stress and tension than before, and a lower appreciation of the profession. Lastly, socio-economic segregation between neighbourhoods and schools affects recruitment in the larger cities, in addition to geographical distances. Solutions for the teacher shortage at national level include better information systems and evidence-based policies (discussions on implementing a new teacher register are underway) and expansion of teacher training at universities, including opportunities to retrain and improve existing qualifications. Needs-based funding schemes for pre-school, early childhood education and schools are also easing the workload in deprived neighbourhoods. However, it should be noted that in Finland teachers are employed by local municipalities, and many policy initiatives are therefore formulated at local level. These include solutions such as wage increases and plans for local training programmes (particularly programmes to improve qualifications).

Major shortage of school leaders

Relatively speaking, the shortage of school leaders is even greater than the teacher shortage in primary education, special education and special secondary education. In these types of education combined, the shortage of school leaders equates to 1,270 FTE (Adriaens et al., 2023). In primary education, the school leader shortage is 15.8% of the total workforce, 16.2% in special primary education and 9.2% in special education and special secondary education. As in the teacher shortage, the school leader shortage in primary education, special education and special secondary education is much higher in the G5 than in the rest of the Netherlands: 21.2% of the total workforce. The school management shortage in secondary education is approximately 4.3% of the total workforce, namely 125 FTE (Den Uijl et al., 2023). School leaders in primary and secondary education also indicate that their schools have shortages in support roles, particularly teaching assistants (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i).

Future concerns about teacher shortage

Forecasts regarding the size of the teacher shortage are not encouraging. All things being equal, the shortage in primary education, special education and special secondary education will fall slightly in the coming years but is expected to rise above the current level thereafter. This is partly due to developments in pupil numbers. In secondary education, the shortage in the next ten years will remain at around the same level (Adriaens & De Vos, 2023). Over a quarter of school leaders are very concerned or extremely concerned about the shortages. Only 15% of school leaders say they are not concerned about these developments (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i).

Developments relating to entry into the profession

The number of admissions to career-switch programmes is increasing. In 2023, 916 grants were awarded for career-switchers in primary education, 1,018 in MBO and 351 in secondary education (OCW, 2023b). Grant applications for career-switchers in primary education are relatively common in the G5, where the teacher shortages are also most acute. In secondary education, career-switchers are more common in subjects with teacher shortages. These career-switchers are needed, as admissions to second

degree teacher qualification programmes have been falling for years, particularly in subjects such as Dutch, mathematics, German and French, where teachers are in short supply. Admissions to teacher training programmes at universities for secondary school teachers also fell in 2022. Admissions to primary education teacher training have been stable for several years, but the percentage of satisfied graduates is falling. Primary education teacher training graduates are particularly dissatisfied about the level of the training they receive, with satisfaction figures varying between institutions (De Vos et al., 2023). Those graduating from second degree teacher qualification training programmes and graduates of university training programmes for secondary school teachers are generally more satisfied with the training they received.

More teaching graduates work in education

The number of graduates from teaching programmes who proceed directly to work in education has increased in recent years (OCW, 2023b). In 2013, 75% of primary school teacher training graduates had a teaching job one year later; this figure was 89% in 2021. An increasing number of second degree teacher qualification training graduates also find a job in education, rising from 60% in 2013 to 75% in 2021. Recently qualified teachers are also more likely to find a steady job instead of doing supply teaching, with an increasing number being given a permanent contract at an earlier stage in their career (De Vos et al., 2023). In 2018, 65% of recently qualified teachers in primary education had a permanent contract or a contract leading to a permanent appointment, and this increased to 88% in 2023. In secondary education, these percentages rose from 75% to 87%. A good level of support in the workplace is crucial to ensuring that new teachers remain in education (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b).

Pressure of work causes teachers to leave the profession

According to school leaders, job satisfaction at most schools is high, both among teachers and school leaders themselves (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i). At the same time, they assess the pressure of work as too high. Teachers in the Netherlands experience more pressure of work than the average Dutch employee: 45% of primary school teachers and 42% of secondary school teachers say they often or always have to work very hard (TNO, 2023), compared to 27% for the average Dutch employee. Teachers from primary education, secondary education and MBO who left the profession attributed their decision to pressure of work (47%), lack of personal challenges and professional development (41%), and dissatisfaction with management and/or the school governing board (37%) (ResearchNed, 2023b). The majority of former teachers said they reflected positively on their time in education and would not rule out a return to education.

Working more hours under certain conditions

One possible option to address the teacher shortage is increasing the contract hours of some teachers who currently work part-time. In primary education, 68% of teachers have a contract for less than 0.8 FTE, 57% in secondary education and 59% in MBO (OCW, 2023TRARB). Eleven per cent of primary school teacher training graduates who currently work part-time say they are willing to work more hours. A further 33% of this group express a willingness to work more hours under certain conditions. The main conditions mentioned include a higher salary, agreements on workload and the chance to combine extra work with caring duties (De Vos et al., 2023). Teachers in primary education, secondary education and MBO who said they were probably or definitely not inclined to work more hours in the next five years were asked whether they would consider doing so if they were paid a bonus. For a net monthly bonus of €400, more than one third said they would be willing to work one extra day a week (ResearchNed, 2023a). Alternative incentives, such as the ability to maintain a good work-life balance or free childcare, would also possibly have an impact.

6.2.2 Measures taken by schools

Research into shortages

The Inspectorate conducted research into teacher and school leader shortages in primary and secondary education. School leaders at 188 schools were asked about the scale of the shortage at their school, the measures they are taking to prevent or reduce shortages, the obstacles they encounter and the direct consequences of the shortages on the day-to-day running of the school. The survey was held at schools where randomised quality inspections were conducted (see also Chapter 1). We examined the results of the randomised surveys for schools with large and small teacher shortages (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i).

Measures to address shortages

Teachers and school leader shortages do not directly mean that classes cannot go ahead. Schools take emergency measures to avert this. These are situations in which classes go ahead but the school indicates that they would have preferred another solution. In such cases, a teaching assistant might be asked to take over

the class or an external teacher is brought in. In primary education, special education and special secondary education, 75% of shortages were addressed using an emergency measure; in secondary education this figure was 59% (Adriaens et al, 2023; Den Uijl et al., 2023). Schools also deploy other measures in an effort to find structural solutions to mitigate teacher shortages. These focus on recruiting and retaining teachers, on employment conditions and on alternative approaches to organising teaching. In this regard, it is important to note that shortages can only partly be addressed by deploying measures at school level. Measures at system level are also necessary in order to attract more teachers.

Measures focus primarily on recruitment and retention

Schools are more inclined to use non-financial measures to address teacher recruitment and retention than measures that focus on employment conditions or the organisation of teaching (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i). More than 60% of schools deployed a range of measures that focus on teacher retention, including encouraging continuous professional development, an increased focus by the school leader on wellbeing, other wellbeing-related interventions, support aimed at reducing the workload and opportunities to create career progression. Over 50% of schools implemented measures focused on recruitment, including advertising and actively recruiting and reaching out to both new teachers and qualified teachers who have taken an alternative career path. Over 50% of schools also took measures designed to offer improved job security. To organise teaching differently, more than 75% of schools said they opted to use teaching assistants or other professionals in the classroom to support the teacher. School leaders indicated that they used some measures more often than others (Table 6.2.2a).

Table 6.2.2a Comparison of measures taken more and less often by schools in primary education, secondary education, special education and special secondary education to mitigate teacher shortages (n primary=87, n secondary=71, n special education and special secondary education=30)

	Primary education	Secondary education	Special education and special secondary education
Used more often	• Creating options for continuous professional development	• Offering a higher salary for vacancies that are difficult to fill • Reducing teaching time • Deploying other professionals outside the classroom for teaching preparation/support	• Bonus for introducing new teachers • Active recruitment/appealing to qualified teachers by offering an alternative career path
Used less often	• Giving teachers a say in the work schedule • Interventions with a focus on wellbeing • Promoting the school through advertising	• Offering an internship allowance and training allowance • Involving other professionals to provide an alternative approach to educational components (while adhering to core objectives) • School management raises awareness of/puts stronger focus on teacher wellbeing	

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024i)

Reducing workload works best

School leaders believe the most effective way to prevent or reduce teacher shortages is extra support designed to reduce teacher workload. This is the top priority for school leaders in primary education, special education and special secondary education. Many school leaders also indicate that a stronger focus on teacher wellbeing works well. In primary education, special education and special secondary education, this mainly involves the school leader raising the profile of and demonstrating a focus on teacher wellbeing; in secondary education it mostly takes the form of interventions to promote teacher wellbeing. These interventions may include coaching, peer review sessions or stress management training. School leaders in primary and secondary education also mention intensification of mentoring programmes for new teachers as an effective way to reduce teacher shortages.

Deploying other professionals to reduce workload

In the day-to-day organisation of education, school leaders regarded the deployment of teaching assistants or other professionals to support teachers as the most effective approach (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i). This view is shared by school leaders in primary

Most effective measures to recruit and retain teachers, according to school leaders.

Primary education

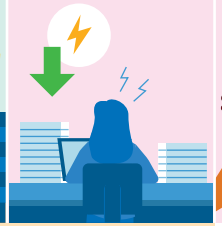
2. School leader paying extra attention to teacher wellbeing

1. Reducing teacher workload

3. More intensive support and mentoring of new teachers

Secondary education

2. Reducing teacher workload



1. Interventions on teacher wellbeing

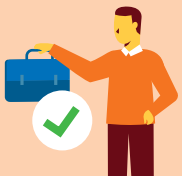
3. More intensive support and mentoring of new teachers

Special education and special secondary education

2. School leader paying extra attention to teacher wellbeing

1. Reducing teacher workload

3. Additional job security



What else helps, according to school leaders?

Organising teaching differently:
Using teaching assistants or other professionals to support teachers in the classroom

To address school leader shortages:
Stimulating continual professional development

education, secondary education, special education and special secondary education. These support tasks include supervising small groups of pupils in carrying out a task or providing support to individual pupils. School leaders in primary education, special education and special secondary education also stated that bringing in other professionals such as PE or art teachers also helps. In secondary education, school leaders noted that other professionals can provide support beyond the classroom, including helping with data entry in the pupil monitoring system, simple marking, invigilation or playground duties. Such measures can provide a practical contribution in terms of reducing teacher workload.

School leader important in retaining teachers

Although school leaders play a key role in teacher retention, it should be noted that there is also a significant shortage of school leaders. The work of a school leader is essential, as demonstrated by the finding that dissatisfaction with the school management was one of main reasons for teachers to leave education (ResearchNed, 2023b). School leaders make a conscious effort to retain teachers, with two thirds indicating that they exchange knowledge with other school leaders on the effectiveness of measures designed to prevent and/or reduce teacher shortages (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i). Professional development or additional training for school leaders is not often available with respect to teacher retention.

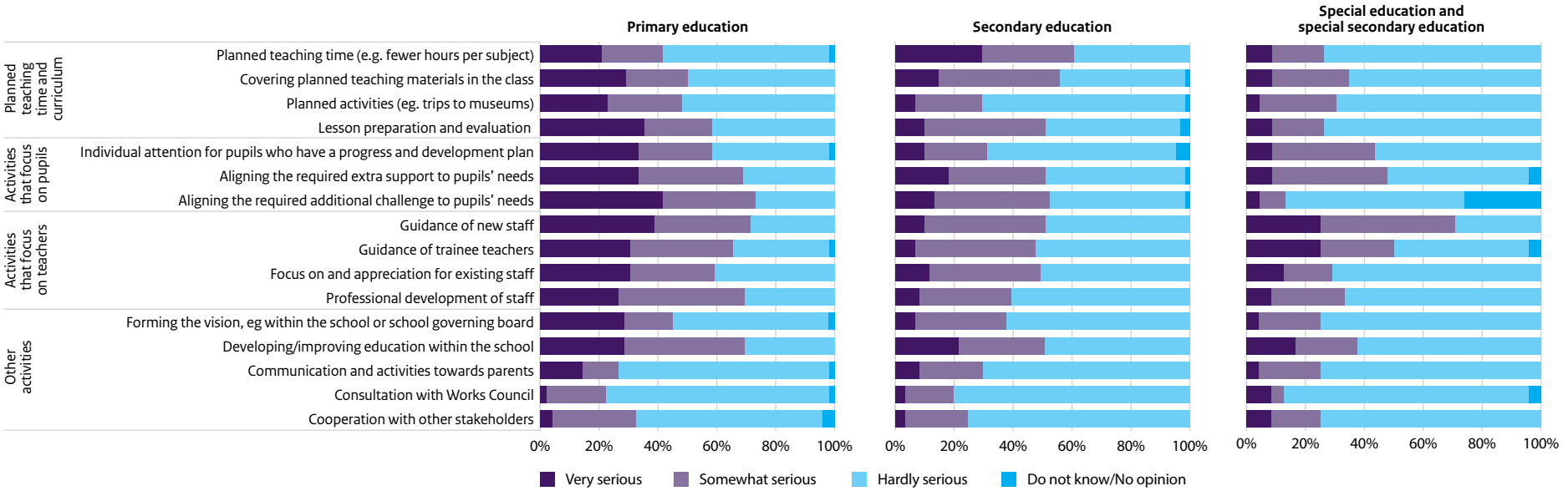
Measures to address school leader shortage

Schools also take measures to address school leader shortages, with a particular focus on school leader retention (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i). Frequently mentioned measures in primary education include cooperation among governing boards to recruit school leaders and promoting their continuing professional development. The latter is also mentioned relatively often in secondary education, special education and special secondary education, along with interventions that focus on wellbeing. According to school leaders themselves, promoting professional development the best way to retain school leaders but they also endorse the other measures listed. School leaders also cited development opportunities, having a say in the work schedule and higher salaries as being useful measures.

Obstacles to taking measures

Measures to resolve the shortages do not always prove effective, as school leaders encounter various obstacles when attempting to implement them (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i). They mentioned the image of the profession as the most significant obstacle. In primary education, special education and special secondary education, they see the preconditions for employment as problematic, not least the availability of childcare and housing. School leaders in secondary education, special education and special secondary education also mentioned statutory certification requirements as an obstacle, while secondary school leaders also felt hindered by statutory requirements relating to teaching time and the curriculum.

Figure 6.2.3a School leaders' estimate of the direct consequences of the shortages (in percentages, n primary education=87, n secondary education=71, n special education and special secondary education=30))



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024i)

6.2.3 Consequences of the shortages for education

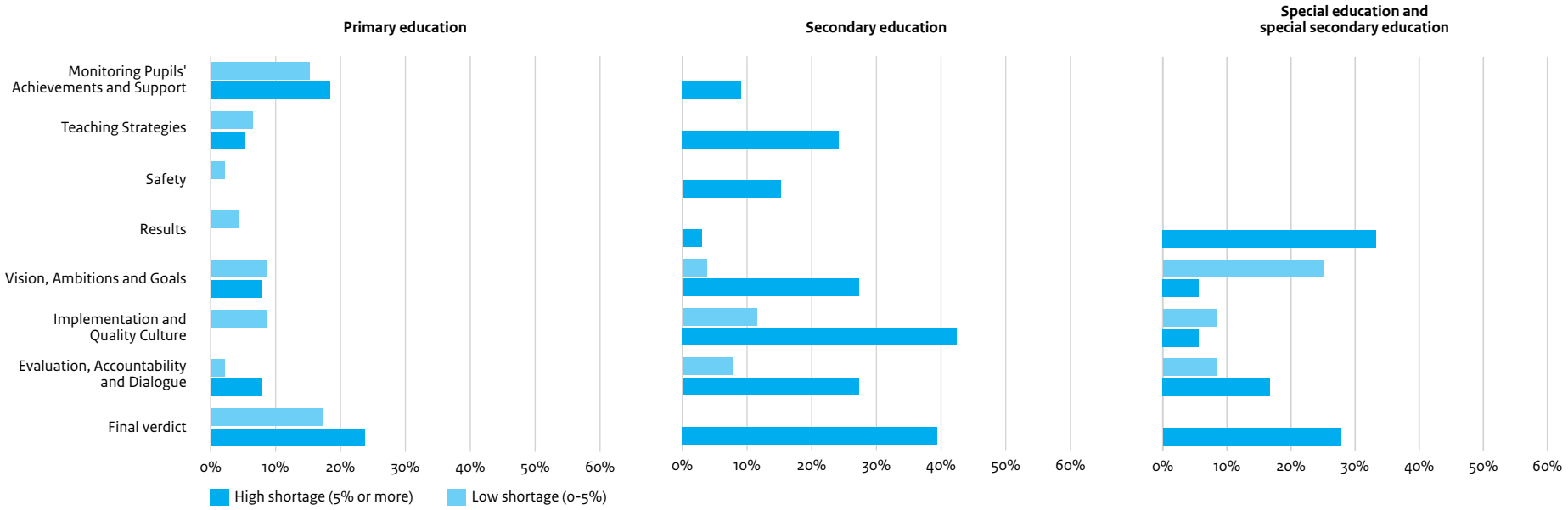
Many school leaders see consequences as serious or very serious

The schools and departments confronted by shortages indicated that these shortages have direct consequences for teaching time, the curriculum, pupil activities, teacher activities and other activities (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i). They stated that the shortages resulted in considerable constraints on many activities. Of the 47 school leaders at primary schools with staff shortages, 40% stated that the capacity to mentor new staff and offer pupils additional challenges were significantly compromised (Figure 6.2.3a). A lack of guidance for new teachers can lead them to leave the teaching profession. However, other activities, including those that focus on supporting and challenging pupils, are also affected by staff shortages. In special education and special secondary education, a quarter of the 23 school leaders at schools with shortages stated that this had a serious or very serious impact on guidance for trainee teachers and new staff. In secondary education, approximately 30% of the 61 school leaders at schools with shortages indicated that their planned teaching time is significantly compromised as a result. An even greater cause for concern is the view expressed by some school leaders at schools with staff shortages that the shortages were jeopardising developments and improvements in education.

Differences in quality between schools with high and low teacher shortages

The randomised sample of schools that inspectors visited in late 2023 were all experiencing teacher shortages to varying degrees. Of the 84 schools with a low shortage (less than

Figure 6.2.3b Percentage of schools with unsatisfactory performance per standard for schools with high (>5%) and low (<5%) teacher shortages (n primary education=78, n secondary education=48, n special education and special secondary education=23)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024i)

5%), 9.5% received an unsatisfactory overall judgement, compared with 30.3% of the 89 schools with a high shortage (5% or more) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024i). This concerns a small group of the schools inspected and the matter of cause and effect is unclear. While a shortage of teachers could have consequences for educational quality, the opposite could also be true, with low educational quality resulting in higher shortages. Various factors impact the relationship between teacher shortages and quality of education, such as teachers' classroom experience, school quality and the composition of the school population (Gambi & De Witte, 2023). Across the sectors, inspectors' assessment on the standards Teaching Strategies and Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue also differed considerably between schools with high and low teacher shortages (Figure 6.2.3b).

Quality differences mainly affect secondary education

or most of the standards inspected, no differences between primary schools with high and low teacher shortages emerged. Only for the Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue standard were more schools with high shortages assessed as unsatisfactory than those with low or no shortages. In special education and special secondary education, only the inspected schools that had high shortages received an unsatisfactory overall judgement, due to more unsatisfactory scores for the Results standard and, to a lesser extent, for Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue. In secondary education too, the only inspected schools to receive an unsatisfactory

overall judgement were those with a high shortage. These schools also had a higher proportion of unsatisfactory assessments across all standards. The initial outcomes of the randomised sample of inspected schools suggest that there is a considerable threat to the quality of education at schools with high teacher shortages, particularly in secondary education. This is a particular concern given that teacher shortages are mainly concentrated in schools where pupils experience greater challenges.

Across the border: No teacher shortage in Estonia

School leaders and teachers have a high status in Estonia and there are no shortages. This is partly due to the policy on teaching staff that Estonia introduced in 2003. They developed competencies and a professional support system and implemented policy to promote the status of teachers. This policy has since been subject to ongoing evaluation and adjustment. There is a four-stage career structure: new teacher, teacher, senior teacher and master teacher, with professional standards aligned to these career stages. Teachers can only progress to the next stage if they meet certain statutory requirements, and a sophisticated feedback and formative assessment system has been developed for this purpose. In Estonia, 96% of teachers have a professional development or training plan and various continual professional development programmes are also offered. Most training focuses on high-level teaching skills such as diagnosis, reflection, analysing pupil needs and assessing the impact of various teaching approaches. An induction programme is available for new teachers, including a trained mentor who is responsible for supervision and feedback and assists the teacher with self-evaluation and producing an individual development plan. Almost all Estonian teachers (95%) are university educated and have considerable autonomy compared to other countries. They also have a say in developing their school's vision and objectives. A large proportion of teachers (87%) indicate that their school offers them the opportunity to participate actively in school decisions. School managers appear to stimulate this participation, with 83% reporting that teachers are responsible for the majority of tasks relating to school policy, curriculum and instruction. This is almost twice as high as the average in OECD countries (42%).

6.3 Professional development in primary education, secondary education, special secondary education and MBO

Research on professional development activities

Professional development enables people who work in education to improve their performance, which can lead to a better quality of education and higher learning outcomes for pupils and students. This applies to teachers (Sims et al., 2021), but also to other education professionals, including school leaders, educational programme managers and school governors (Schenke et al., 2022). In spring 2023, we asked a range of education professionals to complete a questionnaire on their professional development activities since autumn 2021: 719 school leaders and educational programme managers, 2,336 of their teaching staff and 329 associated governing boards in primary education, secondary education, special education, special secondary education and MBO. Inspectors then held interviews with teachers, school leaders, educational programme managers and school governors at 59 schools and educational programmes (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n).

6.3.1 Choice and content of professional development activities

Almost all teachers follow continuing education and training

It is important that teachers continue to learn and develop. The extent to which education professionals engage in these activities contributes to factors such as job satisfaction and quality of education (Stevenson et al., 2016). Despite constraints including workload and time, almost all teachers attended in-service training and team-based courses (primary education: 98%, secondary education: 94%, special education and special secondary education: 98%, MBO: 95%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). Approximately three quarters of teachers received individual continuing education. In special education and special secondary education, 33% of teachers attended a teaching conference; this figure was 61% for MBO. A small proportion pursued an educational programme to obtain a teaching qualification (primary education: 5%, secondary education: 12%, special education and special secondary education: 5%, MBO: 20%). In an eighteen-month period, teachers generally spent ten days on all these formal training activities, slightly more in primary education and MBO than in secondary education, special education and special secondary education.

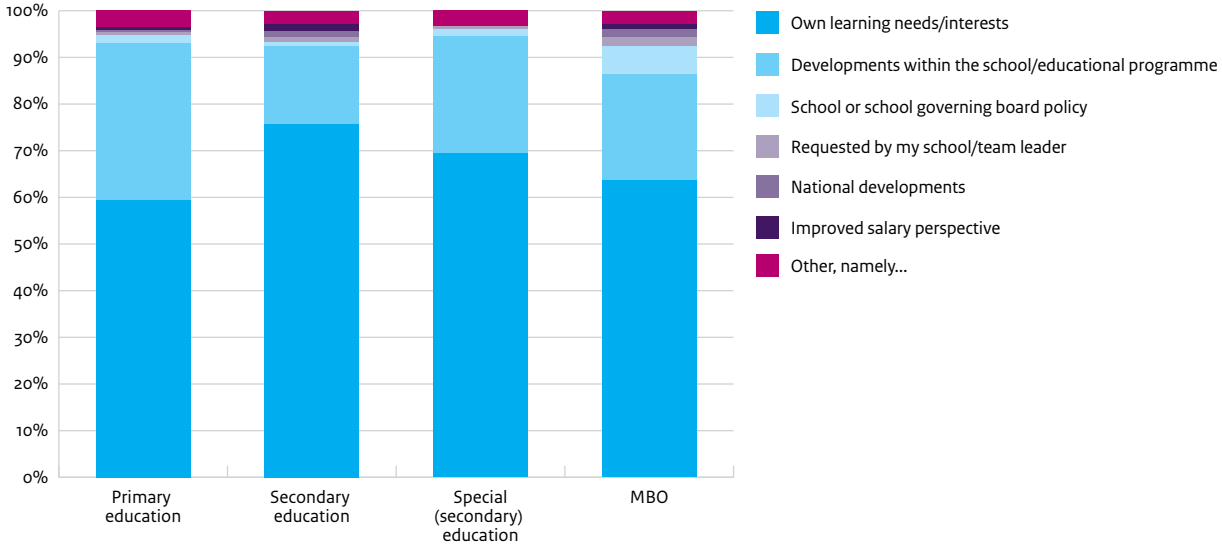
Teachers enjoy considerable autonomy in choosing training

For most teachers, their own learning needs or interests are the main factor in selecting a specific professional development activity (Figure 6.3.1a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). Secondary school teachers had even more autonomy in this regard than teachers in primary education, special education, special secondary education or MBO. Developments at school or in the educational programme are also reasons to undertake a training activity, particularly for primary school teachers. In interviews, MBO teachers gave developments in trade and industry as another a reason to undergo training. Teachers enjoy considerable freedom when selecting an activity and the initiative to participate in training seldom comes from the school management. In general, teachers indicated that the frameworks and agreements for participation are broad and form no barrier to participation in a professional development activity. In 2013, we also observed that teachers at most schools are given the scope to determine their own professional development (Inspectorate of Education, 2013). This may be the reason why training does not always reflect the school's ambitions or those aspects of teaching quality that are most in need of improvement (also see Inspectorate of Education, 2023b).

Workload and time are obstacles

Teaching staff mentioned a number of factors that motivate them to engage in professional development

Figure 6.3.1a Most determining factor for teachers to take part in professional development activities, in percentages (n primary education=686, n secondary education=860, n special education and special secondary education=147, n MBO=623)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024n)

activities, including autonomy, supportive management and a stimulating working environment (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). However, they also identified too much autonomy as a possible drawback that may encourage people to view professional development as optional and make them less likely to take part. Workload and lack of time are seen as the main obstacles. Secondary school teachers are most likely to cite a heavy workload as an obstacle to professional development (see also Section 6.2). It would be helpful to reserve time for professional development as part of the working schedule, perhaps several hours every week or month.

Almost all school leaders and governors engage in professional development activities

Almost all school leaders and educational programme managers also engaged in professional development activities over an eighteen-month period. This included 94% of school leaders and school governors signing up for courses or further education with the team, as well as frequently attending teaching conferences (74%), and over a third of school leaders attending a formal educational programme (32%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). In an eighteen-month period, school leaders generally spent sixteen days on formal training activities, more so in primary education and MBO than in secondary education, special education and special secondary education. School governors also engaged in similar activities, mainly attending educational conferences or seminars (84%) and courses or training days with their peers (82%). Over a fifth of school governors attended a formal educational programme with a focus on management or governance.

Similar obstacles experienced by school leaders and school governors

As with teachers, school leaders' own interests were a key factor in determining their participation in professional development activities, as indicated by between 63% of those in special education and special secondary education and 78% of those in secondary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). For around 15% of school leaders, developments in the field of governance determined their choice. The positive experiences of other school leaders also played a role. Motivating factors for school leaders include an intrinsic desire for professional development, a wide range of options, autonomy and time. As with teachers, the majority of school leaders considered workload and a lack of time within the working schedule to be the main obstacles, although a quarter of school leaders said they experienced no obstacles to professional development. For school governors, both their own interests and developments in the field of governance were decisive factors in selecting a professional development activity. In the interviews, school governors said their choice reflected the needs of the governing board, the organisation and/or the field. They also referred to specific personal and professional areas for development in their role as governor, such as addressing a lack of teaching experience or other gaps in their knowledge or personal qualities. Over a third of school governors experienced no obstacles to engaging in professional development activities, a view shared by half of MBO school governors.

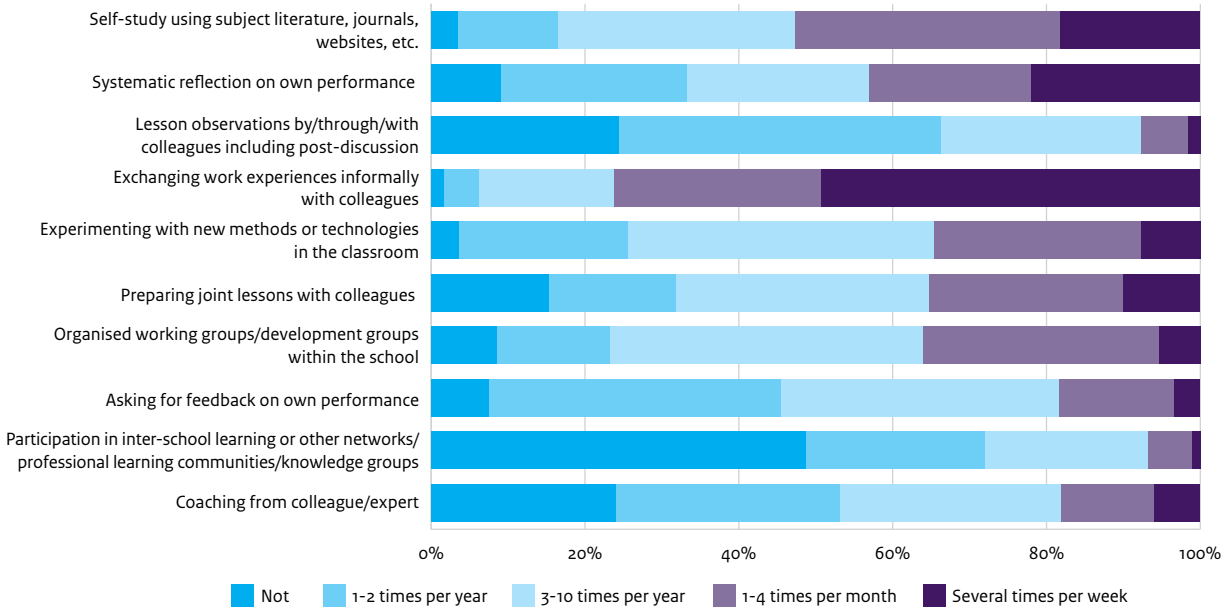
Wide range of informal learning alongside formal learning

In addition to formal professional development, education professionals also gain knowledge in other ways. Teachers in primary education and MBO engaged in informal professional development activities more often than their counterparts in secondary and special secondary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). Approximately half of teachers exchange experiences with colleagues on a weekly basis (Figure 6.3.1b). A quarter of teachers spent no time on observing lessons and a quarter received no coaching from a colleague or expert. CPB (2020) found that teachers could improve their interaction with pupils by incorporating feedback from a colleague or coach who observed their lessons (CPB, 2020). Almost all school leaders frequently exchanged experiences on an informal basis and 25% engaged in independent study (22% did so several times a week).

High demand for training in special educational needs

In all education sectors, between 80% and 90% of teachers are engaged in professional development activities relating to teaching strategies (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). In addition, teachers in primary education mainly opted for literacy and numeracy training (content and/or teaching methodology), while teachers in secondary education took training in assessment and examinations, and in supporting pupils with special educational needs. Teachers in special education and special secondary education generally opted for professional development in learning about supporting pupils' social-emotional development and tailoring their teaching to address behavioural and/or psychiatric issues. Guidance for students with special educational needs is also frequently mentioned as a training topic in MBO, in addition to subject-specific training and teaching methodology. Few teachers expressed a need for further training with respect to basic skills (8% to 25%).

Figure 6.3.1b Frequency of teacher participation in informal professional development activities in primary education, secondary education, special education, special secondary education and MBO (in percentages)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024n)

The need for training geared towards supporting pupils who have special educational needs is considerable: teachers in primary education, secondary education and MBO all said they would like to develop their professional skills in this area. Over half of teachers in primary education expressed a desire for such training, over a third in secondary education and almost half in MBO, though considerable attention had been devoted to special needs training in the preceding eighteen months (primary education: 75%, secondary education: 67%, MBO: 83%). New teachers had previously indicated that they felt insufficiently prepared to teach pupils with special educational needs (Inspectorate of Education, 2023), but experienced teachers also expressed the need for training in this area (see also Chapter 5). In special education and special secondary education, the need for training focuses most on tailoring teaching to behavioural and/or psychiatric issues.

School leaders and school governors mainly train in leadership

Professional development among school leaders mainly focuses on increasing their personal insight, developing their vision, educational topics and professional development of staff (Schenke et al., 2022). This also emerged from school leaders' responses to our questions, with vision or policy development (94%), personal leadership (91%), quality assurance (87%) and organisational skills (81%) as the most common answers given (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). The area in which they expressed the greatest need for further training was organisational skills. A majority also took training in HR policy, finance, lesson quality, diversity, inclusive education and basic skills.They indicated no great need for further training in these areas. For instance, only 7% of school leaders said they needed further training in basic skills. School governors engaged in a similar level of leadership-related training, with a majority developing their professional skills in inclusive education, buildings and IT. Approximately 40% expanded their knowledge of teaching quality and basic skills, yet expressed no need for further training in these areas.

6.3.2 Perceived effectiveness of professional development

Teachers often apply what they learn in practice, but no structural monitoring

Professional development activities are not always implemented systematically, which reduces their added value (Van Geel et al., 2022). Almost all teachers indicated that they applied what they had learned in

Professional development

A major focus on training, but learning from colleagues and learning by doing are experienced as more effective. Management, evaluation and adjustment are needed here

practice (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). Teachers stated that the application of knowledge and its effect on their teaching was generally not monitored. Some 40% of teachers put what they had learned into practice without guidance from a coach, expert or manager. Teachers indicated that they are often left to decide for themselves whether a new working method or approach is effective. Teachers who did express satisfaction with the evaluation of their professional development are those with a manager who works closely with the team and who regularly checks how they are getting on or occasionally visits their classroom.

No structural approach to sharing and maintaining knowledge

In general there is no structured system for ensuring that any knowledge and skills acquired are shared and maintained for the benefit of the organisation. Teachers who do share knowledge say they do so spontaneously and in an informal setting (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). Structured opportunities to exchange knowledge and experience with the team on a particular topic are difficult to schedule due to lack of time, although some schools did reserve time for such activities. Teachers also indicated that a high staff turnover among team leaders or team members can also undermine efforts to maintain knowledge. Schools and educational programmes can develop policy geared towards maintaining acquired knowledge to prevent knowledge gaps from occurring when teachers leave.

School leaders and school governors apply knowledge informally

School leaders and school governors report that, where possible, they put the knowledge they have acquired into practice without delay (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). A few school leaders say they take a systematic approach to applying new knowledge but in most cases this is done informally. School governors also indicate that they apply knowledge autonomously. According to school leaders, maintaining knowledge mainly takes the form of ongoing discussion of learning outcomes. School leaders indicated that they often

initiate discussions informally, but some also said they take a planned and consistent approach to knowledge application so that it becomes part of their daily practice. Some school leaders ensure that valuable knowledge is maintained within the organisation by incorporating learning outcomes in a school plan or an annual plan. A relatively high number of school leaders indicated that no evaluation of professional development activities occurs.

Learning together in the workplace is perceived as effective

The effectiveness of many professional development activities in education remains unproven (Sims et al., 2021). Teachers mentioned various success factors that they perceived as being effective (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n). One such factor is tailored professional development, in which training is designed to build on their existing level of knowledge, with content that can be put directly into practice. Other success factors included learning by doing, clear communication about the purpose of the training activity beforehand and learning with colleagues so that experiences can be shared. Teachers also mentioned learning by adopting other perspectives, which included visits to other schools or institutions, observing a colleague or discussing issues with someone from another field. School leaders and school governors generally cited the same success factors for effective professional development. School governors also mentioned inspiration and insight: an activity should lead to self-knowledge with a view to recognising and avoiding personal pitfalls or utilising positive qualities.

A stimulating learning culture is needed

Training and knowledge sharing need to be effective throughout school or educational programme to improve the quality of education. According to teachers, key elements for achieving this include creating time and scope for professional development by setting priorities and ensuring that activities are followed up (Inspectorate of Education, 2024n).

Teachers also viewed the learning culture within the team and management support as vital to achieving these aims. School leaders pointed out the need to make professional development a long-term priority. Almost all school leaders emphasised how the effectiveness of professional development depends on providing a stimulating working culture. By developing a clear policy in this area, school governing boards can facilitate the professional development process within schools and educational programmes and help create a safe learning culture (Schenke et al., 2022, Van Geel et al., 2022).

Across the border: continuous line in professional qualifications in England

A number of years ago, England developed an empirically structured framework for teacher training and the two-year early career phase. As teachers gain experience and progress along their career path, they can select from a menu of professional qualifications. There is a clear line from the initial teacher education (ITE), through the early career framework (ECF) to the national professional qualifications (NPQs). This includes an educational programme for mentors who are then given time in their working schedule to undertake various mentoring activities.
The English inspectorate monitors teacher training programmes and the providers of training for new teachers. Inspectors assess these institutions and contact the schools and teachers to verify whether the training has had the desired effect. Through observations and interviews, they assess the training curriculum, the quality of the lessons and the effect (whether teachers are sufficiently competent after training).

6.4 Teaching professionals in higher education

6.4.1 Teaching qualifications and professional development

Research into professional development in higher education

The Inspectorate sent a questionnaire to teaching staff in government-funded programmes in higher education, which was completed by 7,047 respondents (Inspectorate of Education, 2024j). The aim was to obtain a better insight into the professional development activities of teaching professionals in higher education and the factors that motivate them or stand in their way. We also wanted to know more about the teaching culture in universities and universities of applied sciences.

Teaching qualifications in higher education

Teaching staff in higher education generally do not undergo specific teacher training before they start teaching students. However, qualifications have been developed in higher education to provide a record of teaching competency, to stimulate the professional development of teaching staff and provide greater accountability for the quality of their teaching personnel. A basic teaching qualification has been introduced for new teaching staff at universities of applied sciences, which includes a focus on assessment (including a basic qualification in examination), and the universities have an equivalent in the form of the university basic teaching qualification. These qualifications focus on implementing and designing education, giving guidance to students and carrying out assessments. Advanced qualifications exist for more experienced teaching staff: a senior examination qualification and a senior teaching qualification.

Many lecturers in higher education have a teaching qualification or are obtaining one

It is positive to note that 94% of teaching staff in higher education have obtained or are currently obtaining a basic or senior teaching qualification (Inspectorate of Education, 2024j). Of teaching staff in higher education, 11% have a senior examination qualification; this figure is 24% for senior university lecturers and 18% for professors. Teaching staff without a basic teaching qualification are more frequently in need of further professional development on the themes covered by the qualification than those with a qualification. Especially teaching staff with a senior qualification have less need for training on these basic themes. In total, 1% of teaching staff in higher education say they do not need professional development on any of these themes. Most teaching staff indicated that they had spent fewer than seven days on professional development over the two preceding academic years (Inspectorate of Education, 2024j). This is however in line with collective labour agreements in the higher education sector. In addition to the basic themes, teaching staff in higher education are interested in professional development with regard to new teaching concepts and use of educational apps. Teaching staff in higher professional education are interested in learning about teaching methodologies in their own subject matter and in flexibility in organizing education; university teaching staff express a greater interest in diversity, inclusion and teacher-student interaction.

Table 6.4.1a Percentage of higher education teaching staff with a permanent contract, percentage of contracted time allocated to teaching duties and percentage of teaching staff who spend more time on teaching duties

	n	% with a permanent contract	% of contracted time for teaching duties	% by which contracted time for teaching duties is exceeded
HBO teaching staff	3.623	84	69	50
HBO professor	179	88	52	47
University teaching staff, level 3/4	718	47	84	47
University teaching staff, level 1/2	205	91	79	45
University lecturer	1.200	78	54	61
University senior lecturer	610	97	48	56
Hoogleraar	488	97	40	35

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2024j)

Teaching staff are motivated but have too little time for professional development

Personal interest is the most important motivating factor for teaching staff in higher education when it comes to engaging in professional development activities (Inspectorate of Education, 2024j). A majority also said they want to pursue professional development to improve their teaching skills and feel motivated when training opportunities are tailored to meet their needs. Obstacles to pursuing professional development include lack of time due to other work commitments, having to use their own time for professional development, training that is insufficiently tailored to their needs or not having enough allocated hours to complete a full course or pathway. University teaching staff in particular believe that they are not given sufficient time for professional development: this view was most common among lecturers (52%), followed by senior lecturers (48%), university teaching staff (44%), professors (39%) and teaching staff at universities of applied sciences (27%). Most teaching staff indicated that they spent more than the allotted time on their teaching tasks, with university lecturers and senior university lecturers indicating this most often.

Level 3/4 teaching staff at universities in a vulnerable position

At universities, 47% of teaching staff at level 3/4 have a permanent contract (Table 6.4.1a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2024j). Among this group, the number who indicate that they do not have a university teaching qualification (13%) or are in the process of obtaining one (26%) is higher. However, teaching duties account for most of their working hours (80%), while university teaching staff with research duties are contracted to spend between 40% and 50% of their time on teaching. Level 3/4 teaching staff also have limited career prospects. Improving the career prospects of junior teaching staff is a stated aim of the collective labour agreement and includes offering them the option to obtain a university teaching qualification or undertake a PhD. A level 3/4 teaching position is supposed to be the first step after graduation. However, of the level 3/4 university teaching staff surveyed, 35% said they already had a PhD. In other words, higher education institutions do not always treat level 3/4 teaching positions as the first step in an academic career. The Inspectorate calls on institutions to conduct a critical review of the career prospects they offer level 3/4 teaching staff.

6.4.2 Teaching culture

Sufficient professional space for higher education teaching staff

In the questionnaire, 85% of higher education teaching staff indicated that they had the chance to share experiences of difficult situations with each other and 81% said that the institution has a clear educational vision (Inspectorate of Education, 2024j). According to 79% of teaching staff, they experience sufficient professional space to develop new teaching methods and 79% also said that teaching staff in their own department know what is expected of them with respect to their teaching duties.

University teaching staff experience less weight is given to teaching than to research

considerable proportion of higher education teaching staff do not feel valued in terms of the institution's policy. A majority of university teaching staff (56%) who only have

teaching duties agreed with this statement (Inspectorate of Education, 2024j). A large proportion of other teaching staff shared this opinion: university lecturers (45%), university senior lecturers (41%) and HBO teaching staff (32%). At universities, 61% of teaching staff indicated that the department ultimately considers research to be more important than teaching. Among HBO teaching staff, 11% agreed with this statement. Similarly, 35% of university teaching staff indicated that their manager gives less priority to teaching duties than to other duties. Among HBO teaching staff, 13% agreed with this statement. University teaching staff are also more negative than their HBO counterparts with respect to professional development: 46% say no time is reserved for professional development, compared to 27% among HBO teaching staff.

Teaching is a core task for universities

Universities could do more to foster a culture that values teaching. The intentions that universities have formulated in their own Recognition and Rewards programme have not yet been sufficiently realised. Teaching is a core task for universities. These institutions should show greater appreciation for teaching staff who devote a significant proportion of their time to teaching, for every job profile. Some institutions are making a concerted effort in this regard. In interviews with the executive boards of 20 universities and universities of applied sciences, they stated that they promote a culture with a sufficient focus on professional development by ensuring sound guidance of new teaching staff, setting conditions for the level of teaching skills, incorporating educational professional development in the institution's educational vision and showing clear appreciation for teaching staff at both a team and an individual level. Yet the teaching staff who completed our questionnaire indicated that guidance of new teachers and appreciation of teaching staff leave needs to be improved. According to 44% of teaching staff, new teachers are not given sufficient guidance (Inspectorate of Education, 2024j), a problem that affects both universities and universities of applied sciences.

6.4.3 Professional development in non-publicly funded higher education

Professional development in non-publicly funded institutions

Unlike government-funded institutions, non-publicly funded institutions often employ the services of freelancers and self-employed teaching staff, which complicates professional development within the education sector. Freelancers are generally employed on short-term contracts and for fewer hours. These institutions only have a limited overview of the educational and teaching background of freelancers compared to the background of their permanent staff, who are requested or obliged to obtain the appropriate teaching or examination qualifications for higher education. According to reports on the working activities at non-publicly funded institutions, a range of educational and teaching courses are available alongside opportunities to obtain a teaching or examination qualification (Inspectorate of Education, 2024l). These institutions state that they actively promote participation in these development opportunities. For permanent staff, professional development is part of the staffing policy. A training budget is often available and, according to reports on working activities, time is reserved within the schedule to enable teaching staff to obtain a higher education teaching or examination qualification. Permanent staff are obliged to share with colleagues the knowledge and experience they gain from their professional development activities.

Time and money are main bottlenecks at non-publicly funded institutions

Time and money are reported as being bottlenecks for the professional development of teaching staff at non-publicly funded institutions. This is especially true for freelancers, who are often required to undertake professional development in their own time and at their own expense, while they are only contracted to work a limited number of hours. Another factor is that certain fields place a higher value on subject knowledge than on knowledge relating to education or teaching. Executives also suggested that in some cases freelancers are not interested in training because they lack the motivation or do not see the relevance (Inspectorate of Education, 2024l). Some institutions argue that the Assessment of Employment Relationships (Deregulation) Act does not allow non-publicly funded institutions to offer free or reduced-rate professional development to externals (freelancers). Other executives, however, indicated that they do sometimes offer training free of charge or at a reduced rate. It is in the interest of students that teaching staff continue to develop as professionals throughout their career.

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Abbreviations

A
amv unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
aoc agricultural training centre

B
bo primary education
bbl apprenticeship-based vocational learning pathway
bol education-based vocational learning pathway

C
coa Collective Labour Agreement
CAOP Centre for Labour Relations for Government Personnel
CE central exam
Cito Central Institute for Test Development

F
fte full-time equivalent

H
havo senior general secondary education (HAVO)
hbo higher professional education (HBO)
ho higher education
hr (policy) human resources (policy)

I
ICCS International Civic and Citizenship Education Study
ISK international bridging class
ITK Institutional Quality Assurance Assessment

J
JJI Youth Detention Centre

L
LEA Local Educational Agenda
LOB career orientation and guidance

M
mbo senior secondary vocational education (MBO)

N
nbi non-publicly funded institution
NCO National Cohort Study for Education
NPO National Education Programme
NVAO Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders

O
OC Programme Committee
OCW Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPDC orthopedagogic-didactic centre
opp progress and development plan
oza special needs care arrangement

P
pabo primary school teacher-training college
PISA Programme for International Student Achievement
po primary education
PTA Testing and graduation programme

R
roc Regional Training Centre

S
sbo special primary education
so special education
swv inter-institutional partnership for inclusive education

V
vmbo preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO)
vmbo-b vmbo basic vocational pathway
vmbo-g/t vmbo mixed/theoretical pathway
vmbo-k vmbo advanced vocational pathway
vo secondary education
vso special secondary education
vsv'er early school leaver
vve pre-school and early childhood education
vwo pre-university education (VWO)

W
WEB Adult and Vocational Education Act
wo university education / research-oriented education
WVO Secondary Education Act

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