Inspectorate of Education
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

The *State* of *Education* 2026

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Foreword

This year, we pause to mark a special occasion: 225 years ago, the Inspectorate of Education was established. The law set out that the government is responsible for good education and that quality must be subject to supervision.

Taking a broad sweep through history, we can see how profoundly the meaning of education has changed. In the 19th century, attending school was a privilege and not every child had that opportunity. In the 20th century, education became a duty, with the introduction of compulsory schooling. And today, we increasingly speak of a right to education, precisely because we see that for some children, access to education is still far from guaranteed.

Education as a collective process

In recent decades, education has evolved into a space where the maximum must be drawn out of every individual. That ambition is understandable and valuable, but I also see what it demands: of teachers, of school leaders, and perhaps most of all of pupils themselves. The pressure to perform and to constantly deliver personalised approaches is considerable.

Education is, above all, a collective process and more than the sum of individual journeys. School is a community where pupils learn that the world is larger than themselves, where they encounter different perspectives and learn to live and learn together.

In my view, the school leader embodies that collective: someone who gives direction, creates space, and keeps the shared interest in mind time and again.

Give school leaders the space they need

The school leader is the lynchpin between the governing board and the team, embed priorities, and is crucial to the quality of education. But what does the average school leader's day look like in 2026? It begins with finding cover for an absent teacher and working through a backlog of administrative tasks. It is interrupted by parents with concerns about their child, and continues with consultations with the local authority and many other stakeholders on practical matters. Questions of funding, regulation and staffing press in on school leaders every single day.

In this State of Education, we find, regrettably, that the necessary quality improvements in the priority areas of literacy, numeracy and citizenship continue to stall. The school leader is essential in this regard. School leaders are the driving force behind educational development and quality improvement, yet they are currently unable to devote sufficient time to this core task.

School leaders themselves are clear about what is needed: less administration and regulatory burden, and more time and space for educational leadership. Their wishes deserve the explicit support of governing boards. Governing boards create the right conditions and bear responsibility for achieving quality. When school leaders are given the space, they can drive improvement, for instance in the coherence of civic skills and values education and integrated language education.

In my view, this is one of the key opportunities for working together towards good education.

Regional disparities

This State of Education reveals an uncomfortable finding that we must not accept. Where you happen to be born in this country still makes a difference. The fact that this is a persistent challenge in socio-economic terms is, unfortunately, nothing new. But the issue also has a regional dimension. The region where a child grows up too often determines the opportunities they receive.

Toddlers in the largest cities, for instance, are less likely to attend pre-school education. In the Randstad, a pupil's recommendation for secondary education is more likely to be revised following the continuation assessment (doorstroomtoets) than in the north and east of the country. And if you live in the Gooi en Vecht region, you are more likely to continue from VMBO to HAVO than if you live in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen or East Groningen.

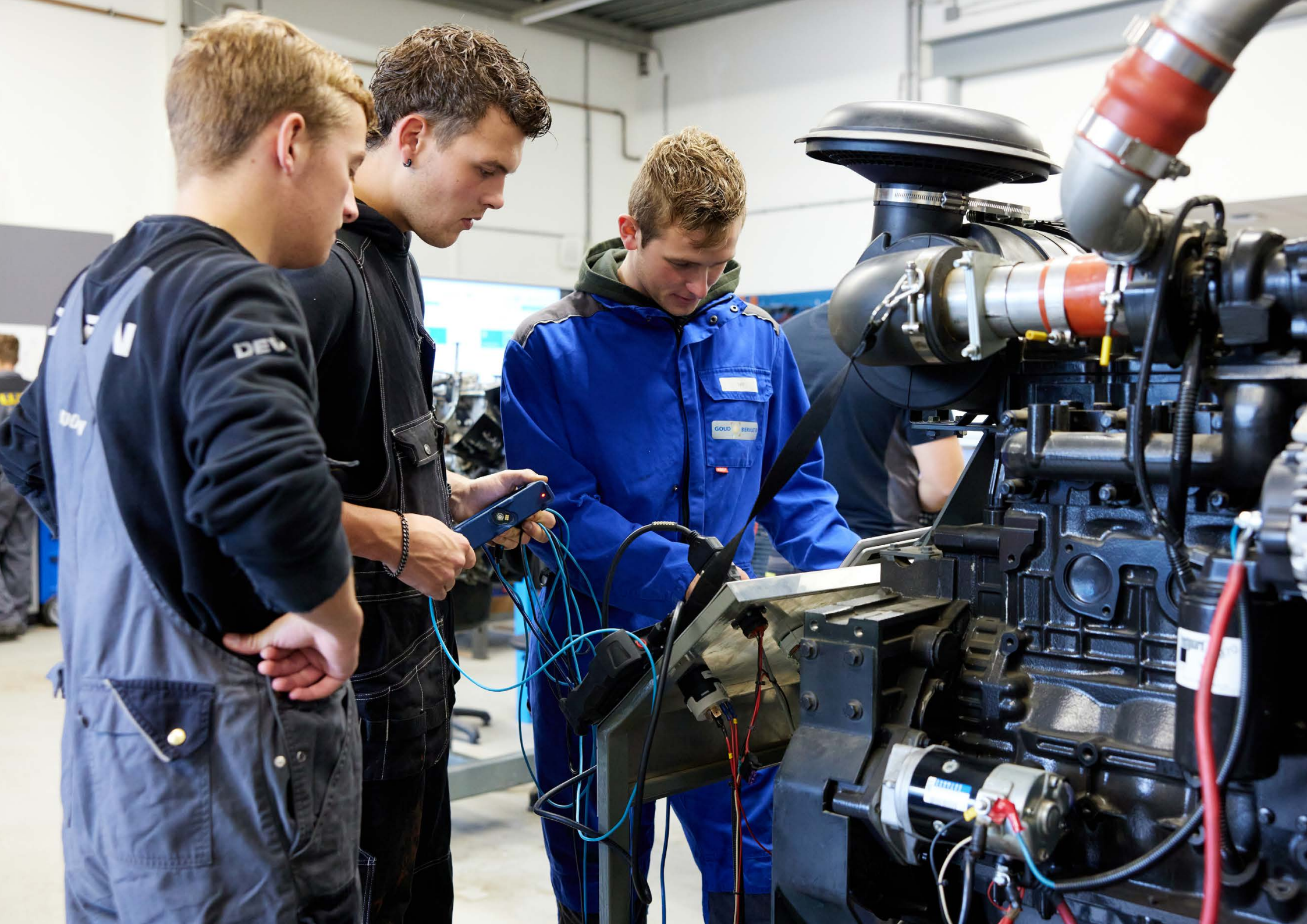
This is certainly not an argument for 'higher is better'. We want the talents of all pupils to be developed to the full, and for every pupil to find the right place for them. That will be different for everyone, and that is as it should be, because we need everyone: from the skilled tradesperson to the academic. What should not matter is where you happen to be born or which region you grow up in.

Working together

This is not something that can simply be resolved, but it does deserve our attention. Raising awareness can be the first step towards change. Let us place the potential of pupils and students at the centre, hold high expectations, and remain alert to possible unconscious bias. And let us, as the Inspectorate, policymakers, governing boards, teachers and parents alike, work together towards a strong collective in which every person's talent is nurtured from an early age. Given sufficient time and space, the school leader can play a key role in this.

We are, after all, jointly responsible for preparing our pupils and students for a bright future. Because across all those decades, one thing has proven true: good education is something we build together.

Alida Oppers
Inspector General for Education



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CHAPTER 1

The Quality of Education

Key points

The Inspectorate of Education supervises the quality of education. We do this at 3 levels: randomised sample inspections and risk-based inspections at schools and educational programmes, quality inspections at governing boards, and thematic school visits at system level. This chapter focuses primarily on the outcomes of inspections at school and governing board level.

The Inspectorate visits schools and governing boards more frequently again
Since 2024 the Inspectorate has once again been conducting annual randomised sample inspections to assess the quality of primary education (PO), special (secondary) education ((V)SO), secondary education (VO) and vocational education (MBO)[1]. We have temporarily suspended the four-yearly quality inspections at governing boards in order to create more time for school inspections. We are therefore unable to provide a reliable and systematic picture of quality development across all sectors at school and governing board level. In 2026, we will resume the periodic governing board inspections.

Nevertheless, we can make a number of general observations about the development of education. There is widespread awareness among governing boards and schools that education in basic skills must be a priority. At the same time, many teachers have been struggling for many years with differences between pupils. And a significant proportion of schools and governing boards still have difficulty implementing quality assurance effectively. The result is that new unsatisfactory and very poor schools continue to emerge, and recovery does not always succeed in time. In the coming years, the Inspectorate will visit schools and governing boards more frequently. Not only to inspect and assess, but also to encourage schools and governing boards to work in a targeted way on improvement, and to focus on prevention. Good quality assurance provides not only insight into development but also into risks. This can help prevent unsatisfactory and very poor education from occurring.

1 Going forward, we use either the abbreviations or full terms for school types. See Appendix 1 for a complete reference list.

Randomised sample inspections: a substantial proportion of inspected schools and educational programmes unsatisfactory
In the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years, the Inspectorate assessed approximately 82% of schools in PO, (V)SO and VO in the randomised sample as satisfactory. In primary education, 85% of schools were satisfactory; in special (secondary) education, 81%; and in secondary education, 77%. We assessed approximately 18% of schools as unsatisfactory (16%) or very poor (2%). In VMBO, we assessed 44% of educational programmes in the 2024 and 2025 randomised sample inspections as unsatisfactory, and 1% as very poor. In almost all cases, unsatisfactory learning outcomes were the deciding factor.

Quality assurance is a relatively weak point in primary, secondary education and MBO
During randomised sample inspections in primary and secondary education, the 3 quality assurance standards frequently receive an unsatisfactory assessment: most often in secondary education (20-32%), least often in primary education (5-8%). Where quality assurance falls short, the school is not systematically monitoring and improving its education. The difficulty schools have in improving the quality of education is also evident from the fact that in 2024-2025, a high proportion, namely one third, of primary, special and secondary education schools received an unsatisfactory assessment at their remedial inspection. These schools have not managed to improve quality within one year. The proportion of schools failing to reach the basic standard of quality within a year is high and increasing. This was already the case in primary education and is now also visible in special education and secondary education.

Quality assurance is also proving to be a relatively weak point in MBO. Of the standards assessed during randomised sample inspections, the quality assurance standards received an unsatisfactory assessment most often, after Academic Success. Something must therefore change with regard to quality assurance. Primarily on the part of schools and governing boards, who are ultimately responsible. We will also pay greater attention in our conversations with schools and governing boards to what we mean by effective quality assurance. In addition, we will revise the quality assurance standards in the new assessment framework of 2027. This is not to lower the bar, but to provide greater clarity about what is required and what we expect from schools and governing boards.

Higher education programmes meet basic quality requirements
NVAO[2] accreditations show that programmes in higher education meet basic quality requirements. However, 2.8% of programmes were subject to conditions in 2024. Examination boards generally carry out their responsibilities satisfactorily. Some examination boards require improvement: in substantively ensuring that all final qualifications are assessed, in staffing composition, and in terms of adequate support from governing boards and management.

Between one quarter and one fifth of inspected governing boards unsatisfactory
In the past 4 school years, approximately one quarter to one fifth of the governing boards inspected by the Inspectorate in primary and secondary education and in MBO received an unsatisfactory assessment. This occurred more often in primary and secondary education than in special education and MBO. Governing boards, like schools and educational programmes, are usually given a one-year recovery period following an unsatisfactory assessment. We have found that, following this recovery period, sufficient improvement does not always take place in approximately one fifth of remedial inspections, quality is once again found to be unsatisfactory.

In the period 2022-2025, inspectors assessed one third (VO) to one quarter (PO) of inter-institutional partnerships as unsatisfactory. The Implementation and Quality Culture and Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue standards were often found to be unsatisfactory, or there were shortcomings in the comprehensive network of provisions. Here too, approximately one fifth of inter-institutional partnerships did not fully improve at their remedial inspection. Recovery from shortcomings also appears to be proceeding more slowly than in the 2016-2021 period.

2 Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation: https://www.nvao.net

Recommendations

This year, we are repeating, in slightly different and more concrete terms, 2 recommendations we also made in 2025. We do this to emphasise the great importance of quality assurance and differentiation in the classroom. We are too often compelled to issue remedial action orders for these areas.

- Governing boards and schools: strengthen quality assurance. Not only to enable targeted improvement activities, but also as prevention: to avoid unsatisfactory or very poor education. Monitor and improve education in a cyclical and planned way. Set ambitious, measurable goals. Implement improvement plans in full. Evaluate during and after whether goals have been achieved. Design, implementation, evaluation: these are the three aspects our inspectors examine, not primarily on paper, but in practice.

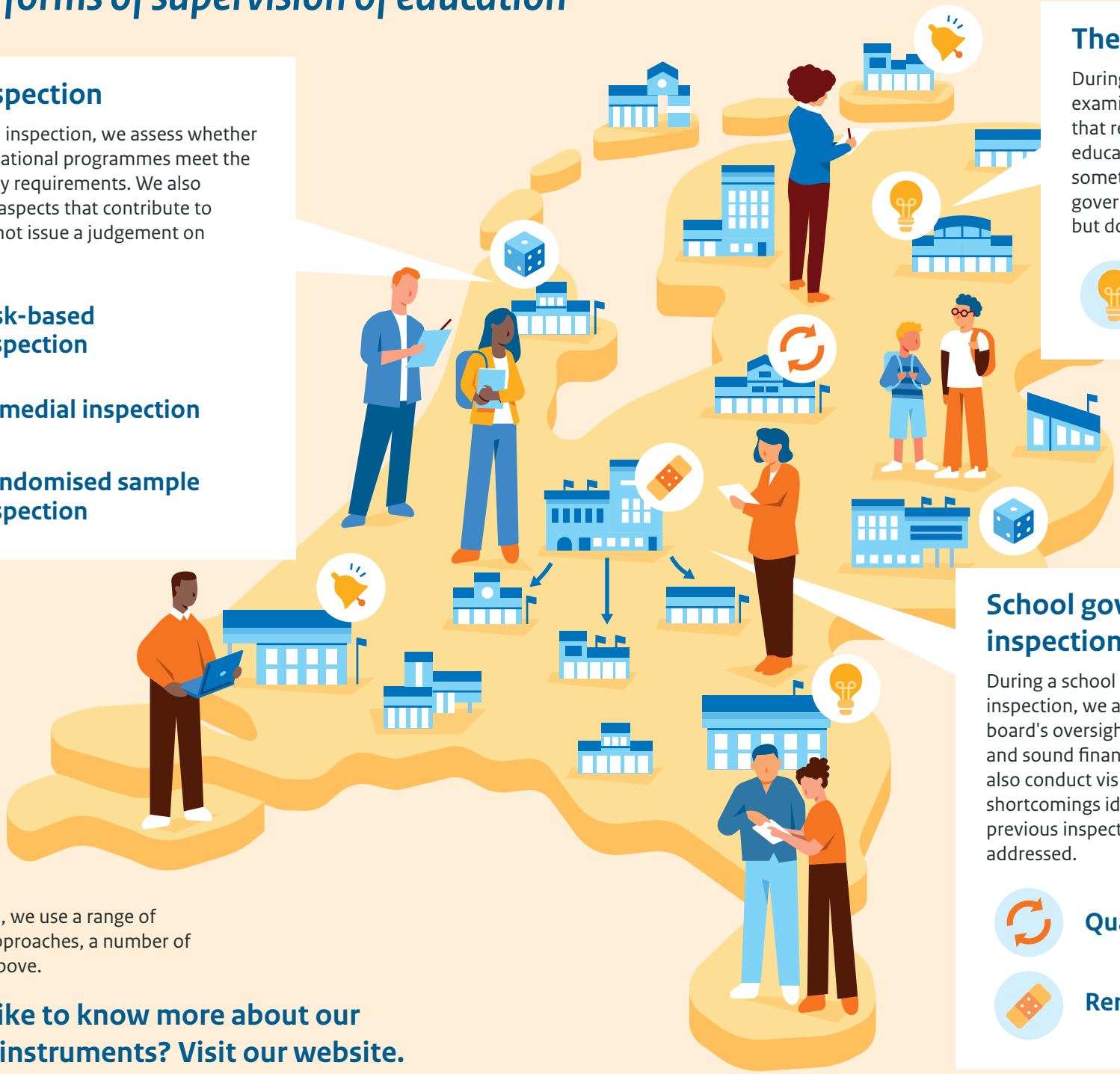
- Teachers and teaching teams: ensure that all pupils benefit from lessons. Agree within the team on an approach to differentiation. Does the teacher continually check whether all pupils understand the lesson content? Do pupils receive help or additional challenge? Do all pupils remain engaged? Small adjustments to what is on offer, a brief repetition of an explanation, and a slightly more challenging version of a task are often already sufficient to achieve this.

Different forms of supervision of education

School inspection

During a school inspection, we assess whether schools or educational programmes meet the statutory quality requirements. We also examine other aspects that contribute to quality. We do not issue a judgement on those aspects.

- **Risk-based inspection**
- **Remedial inspection**
- **Randomised sample inspection**



Thematic school visit

During a thematic school visit, we examine in greater depth matters that require attention in the education system as a whole. We sometimes visit schools and governing boards for this purpose, but do not issue any judgements.

- **In-depth investigation**

School governing board inspection

During a school governing board inspection, we assess the governing board's oversight of educational quality and sound financial management. We also conduct visits to assess whether shortcomings identified during a previous inspection have been addressed.

- **Quality inspection**
- **Remedial inspection**

For our supervision, we use a range of instruments and approaches, a number of which are shown above.

Would you like to know more about our supervisory instruments? Visit our website.

1.1 Quality of Schools and Educational Programmes

1.1.1 *Randomised Sample Inspection in Primary and Secondary Education*

In the 2023-2024 school year, the Inspectorate resumed randomised sample inspections in primary and secondary education. The purpose of these inspections is to monitor the quality of education at schools and departments and to obtain a national picture of educational quality. This section describes the outcomes of randomised sample inspections in the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years. For primary education, this provides a reliable picture of educational quality. For secondary and special education, results are currently indicative only (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). Randomised sample inspections also produce an overall judgement on the inspected schools and departments. Where there are shortcomings in compliance with statutory requirements, remedial action orders are issued; an unsatisfactory overall judgement triggers a remedial inspection.

82% of inspected schools in primary and secondary education satisfactory

In 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, the Inspectorate assessed 82% of schools in primary and secondary education (PO, VO and (V)SO) in the randomised sample as satisfactory (Table 1.1.1a). We assessed approximately 16% of schools as unsatisfactory and 2% as very poor. Within primary education, we assessed 85% of newcomers' provisions as satisfactory, 90% of special primary education schools, and 84% of mainstream primary schools. In secondary education, we assessed 90% of practical education (PRO) schools as satisfactory and 71% of VMBO-B/K departments (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). These latter findings are strongly indicative only: the numbers of schools in the randomised sample are still too small for reliable conclusions.

Table 1.1.1a Overall judgements from randomised sample inspections at schools in primary and secondary education in the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years

	Po		(V)so		Vo	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Very poor	11	2	2	1	7	2
Unsatisfactory	64	13	34	18	73	21
Satisfactory	431	85	149	81	268	77
Total	**506**	**100**	**185**	**100**	**348**	**100**

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026p)

Quality assurance a weak point, particularly in secondary education

In all sectors of primary and secondary education, the 3 quality assurance standards frequently receive an unsatisfactory assessment: most often in secondary education (20-32%), least often in primary education (5-8%) (Table 1.1.1b) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). Where quality assurance falls short, this means the school is not monitoring and improving its education in a systematic way: cyclically and in a planned manner. We again emphasise the importance of sound quality assurance. It starts with formulating measurable goals based on concrete ambitions. Only by setting measurable goals can a school work in a targeted way towards achieving them and assess whether what it sets out to achieve is actually being achieved. We previously highlighted a positive relationship between assessments of quality assurance and assessments of the teaching-learning process (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b). Effective implementation of the quality assurance system can prevent unsatisfactory and very poor education.

Not all schools are clear on what the legislator and the Inspectorate mean by quality assurance

In 2025, with the aim of preventing unsatisfactory or very poor quality, we recommended that governing boards and schools strengthen quality assurance (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b). At the same time, we asked ourselves whether governing boards and schools are actually clear on what the legislator and the Inspectorate mean precisely by 'quality assurance'. We therefore surveyed a sample of school leaders and department heads on whether they understand what is expected of schools in the area of quality assurance.

For 47% of school leaders, this is fairly clear, and 48% find it very clear. A small percentage (almost 5%) find this very or somewhat unclear, or respond 'neutral' (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). When asked about the source of the unclarity, they often said they wondered whether the Inspectorate is concerned with what happens in practice or with the situation on paper.

We also asked school leaders to describe in a few keywords what they understand by the statutory concept of 'the quality assurance system'. This produced a wide range of 'definitions'. Often, expressed in very varied wording, these conveyed that school leaders see the quality assurance system as a system for monitoring and improving educational quality, though with variation in terms of scope. Some school leaders apply a very broad definition ('All aspects that contribute to good education'), while others apply a narrow one ('Measurement instruments for assessing quality'). Although the Inspectorate does not use an explicit definition, these descriptions closely resemble the way the Inspectorate gives content to quality assurance through the 3 standards in the assessment framework: design, implementation and evaluation.

We do believe the legislator and the Inspectorate can be clearer about quality assurance and what we expect of schools in this area. It is crucial that all schools and governing boards are able to prevent unsatisfactory and very poor quality through an effectively functioning quality assurance system.

Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support falls short at 1 in 10 primary schools

In primary education, the standard Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support fell short at almost 10% of schools (Figure 1.1.1a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). In practical education, this standard was never assessed as unsatisfactory. The most common deciding factor for an unsatisfactory assessment across all sectors of primary and secondary education is that the school does not sufficiently align support with pupils' different educational needs. Other issues include shortcomings in addressing language learning delays related to characteristics of the pupil population.

Lack of alignment often decisive for an unsatisfactory Teaching Strategies assessment

In secondary education, Teaching Strategies was assessed as unsatisfactory more often than in other sectors (16%) (Figure 1.1.1a). Of VMBO-(G)/T departments, 24% received an unsatisfactory assessment; in VWO, 8% (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). The most common deciding factor for an unsatisfactory assessment across all sectors of primary and secondary education is that the school does not sufficiently align lessons with differences between pupils. In secondary and special education, an insufficiently stimulating learning climate is also frequently cited. In primary education, unclear explanations and insufficient encouragement of pupils to reflect on their own development are also often decisive.

Differentiation: are all pupils benefiting from lessons?

This is not the first time we have found that teachers struggle with differentiation. As far back as 2013, we reported that over 90% of primary school teachers master general pedagogical and didactic skills (instruction), but that only around 70% have mastered the complex skills of differentiation (Inspectorate of Education, 2013). Given the persistent nature of shortcomings in differentiation, we recommended in 2025 that more work be done on differentiation. In support of this, we also provided a broad description of what the Inspectorate means by differentiation: continually checking whether pupils understand the lesson content, helping pupils who do not understand immediately, and challenging faster learners with additional tasks (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b).

As with quality assurance, we asked whether schools are clear on what we expect of schools and teachers in relation to differentiation. Approximately one quarter to one third of school leaders said this is very clear (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). For more than half it is fairly clear, and the remainder are neutral or find it very or somewhat unclear. When asked for their own description of differentiation, a wide diversity of answers emerged. Near-synonyms such as alignment and personalised approaches come up frequently, as do the concepts of adapting and tailoring. Definitions appear to lean more towards divergent differentiation ('Being able to offer each pupil a unique lesson programme') than convergent differentiation ('The same goal, different routes to achieve it'). Divergent differentiation leads to greater differences between pupils; convergent differentiation works to reduce those differences.

The Inspectorate does not prescribe how teachers should differentiate, only that differentiation must take place. The law requires that 'education is organised in

such a way that pupils are able to follow an uninterrupted process of development, and that it is aligned with the progress of pupils' individual development'. However, differentiation must also be achievable. During lesson observations, inspectors look above all at whether all pupils are able to benefit from the lesson. That is the core question. What does the teacher do to ensure that all pupils reach the lesson objective? Are all pupils actively engaged? Small adjustments to what is on offer, a brief repetition of an explanation, and a slightly more challenging version of a task are often already sufficient to achieve this.

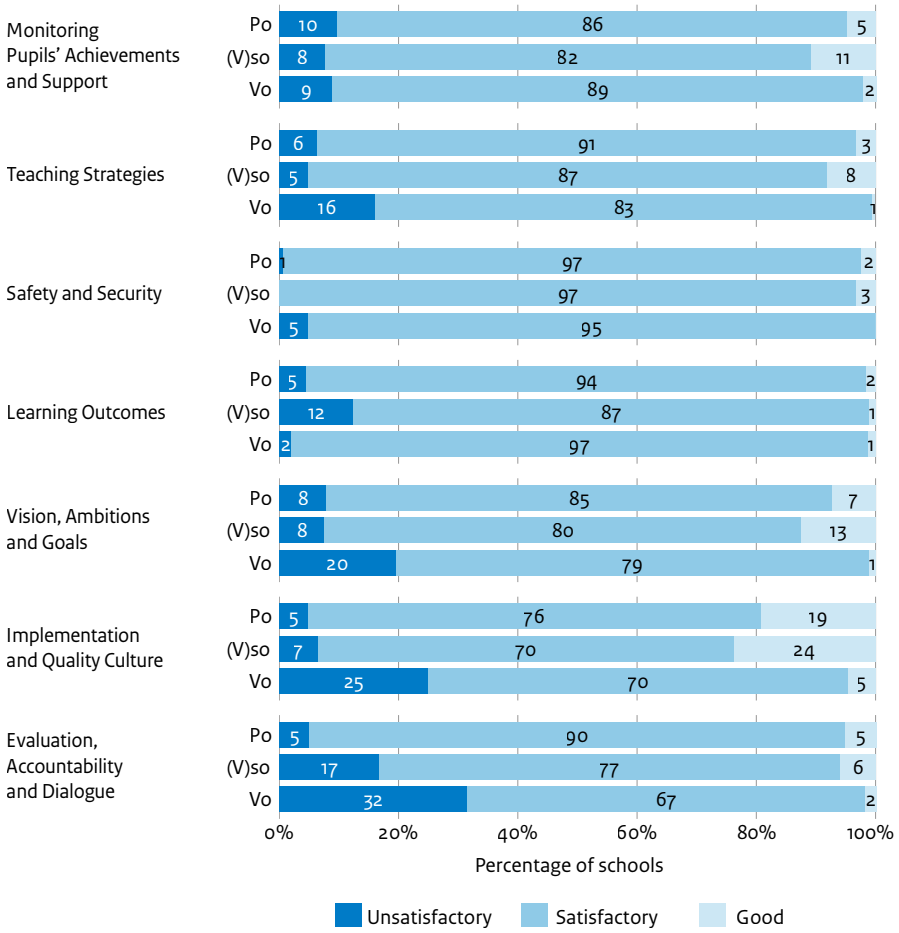
Safety policy generally in order

Under the standard Safety and Security, the Inspectorate assesses whether a school meets the statutory duty of care for social safety. This encompasses the implementation of a safety policy and the monitoring of pupils' perception of safety. We also assess whether the school takes action in cases of unsafe situations. We additionally check whether the school has ensured that a designated person coordinates the anti-bullying policy and serves as the point of contact for bullying matters. In primary and special education, this standard was rarely or never assessed as unsatisfactory. In secondary education, this occurred somewhat more frequently (5%) (Figure 1.1.1a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). When we assess safety as unsatisfactory, we act immediately and strictly: in case of the unsatisfactory assessment of te standard Safety and Security, the school or department is immediately assessed as unsatisfactory overall, and a remedial inspection is scheduled as soon as possible.

Learning Outcomes generally satisfactory

In primary and secondary education, Learning Outcomes were assessed as unsatisfactory in a limited number of cases in the randomised sample inspections (Figure 1.1.1a): at 5% of primary schools and 2% of secondary school departments. In special education, Learning Outcomes were assessed as unsatisfactory at 12% of schools (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). This does not mean that special education is performing worse than the other two sectors. In special education, Learning Outcomes are assessed differently: the assessment is based on whether the results achieved are consistent with the intended destination level of the pupils.

Figure 1.1.1a Assessments per standard from randomised sample inspections at schools in primary and secondary education in the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years (n PO=506, n (V)SO=185, n VO=372)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026p)

Most schools in primary and secondary education receive one or more remedial action orders

Following the randomised sample inspection, the large majority of schools in primary and secondary education received one or more remedial action orders: most frequently in secondary education, least frequently in primary education (Table 1.1.1b). The issuing of remedial action orders is related to the assessments of the standards. In the case of a minor violation, a standard may still be assessed as satisfactory while a remedial action order is issued within that standard. In primary and secondary education, the most remedial action orders were issued for the Basic Skills standard (the curriculum for Dutch literacy, numeracy and citizenship). The vast majority of these relate to shortcomings in civic skills and values education, which is found to be insufficiently purposeful, coherent and/or recognisably embedded in practice (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p) (see also Chapter 3).

Table 1.1.1b Percentage of schools receiving one or more remedial action orders per standard in randomised sample inspections in the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years (n PO=506, n (V)SO=185, n VO=372)

	Po	(V)so	Vo
Basic Skills	58	54	73
Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support	35	53	48
Teaching Strategies	25	15	49
Safety and Security	8	16	28
Learning Outcomes	3	28	2
Vision, Ambitions and Goals	22	18	37
Implementation and Quality Culture	8	9	33
Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue	17	48	39
No remedial action orders for any standard	27	12	10

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026p)

1.1.2 *Randomised Sample Inspection in Publicly Funded MBO*

This section describes the outcomes of randomised sample inspections in MBO for the calendar years 2024 and 2025. The outcomes provide an indication of the quality of education at the inspected programmes in 2024 and 2025. Only after 4 years of randomised sample inspections will we be able to make sufficiently reliable system-level statements about MBO. As in primary and secondary education, randomised sample inspections in MBO produce an overall judgement and, where applicable, remedial action orders.

40% of inspected MBO programmes unsatisfactory or very poor

In 2024 and 2025, the Inspectorate assessed 53% of educational programmes as satisfactory and 2% as good during the randomised sample inspections in MBO. The remaining programmes were assessed as unsatisfactory (44%) or very poor (1%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026q). The decisive factor was usually an unsatisfactory assessment of the Academic Success standard, followed by the Assurance of Certification standard. Of the other assessed standards, the 3 quality assurance standards were frequently unsatisfactory (Table 1.1.2a): most often Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue (18%), followed by Implementation and Quality Culture (10%) and Vision, Ambitions and Goals (10%).

Fewer remedial action orders in MBO than in primary and secondary education

While the Inspectorate issued one or more remedial action orders to the large majority of schools in primary and secondary education (73-90%), this was the case for more than half of MBO programmes (53%). The proportion and number of remedial action orders in MBO are also related to the assessments of the standards. In MBO, the most remedial action orders were issued for Academic Success (26%), followed by Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue (14%) (Table 1.1.2a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026q).

Table 1.1.2a Assessments and remedial action orders per standard in randomised sample inspections in MBO in the calendar years 2024 and 2025 (in percentages, n=168)*

	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Remedial action order
Basic Skills	4	96	1	3
Curriculum	3	94	3	3
Developmental Support and Supervision	1	95	4	5
Teaching Strategies	3	95	2	1
Practical Vocational Training	1	97	2	2
Safety and Security	1	99	1	2
School Climate	0	99	1	0
Assurance of Certification	8	89	3	0
Completion of Education	4	95	1	9
Academic Success	39	58	3	5
Vision, Ambitions and Goals	10	88	2	26
Implementation and Quality Culture	10	87	3	8
Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue	18	81	1	6

*47% of MBO programmes received no remedial action order for any standard

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026p)

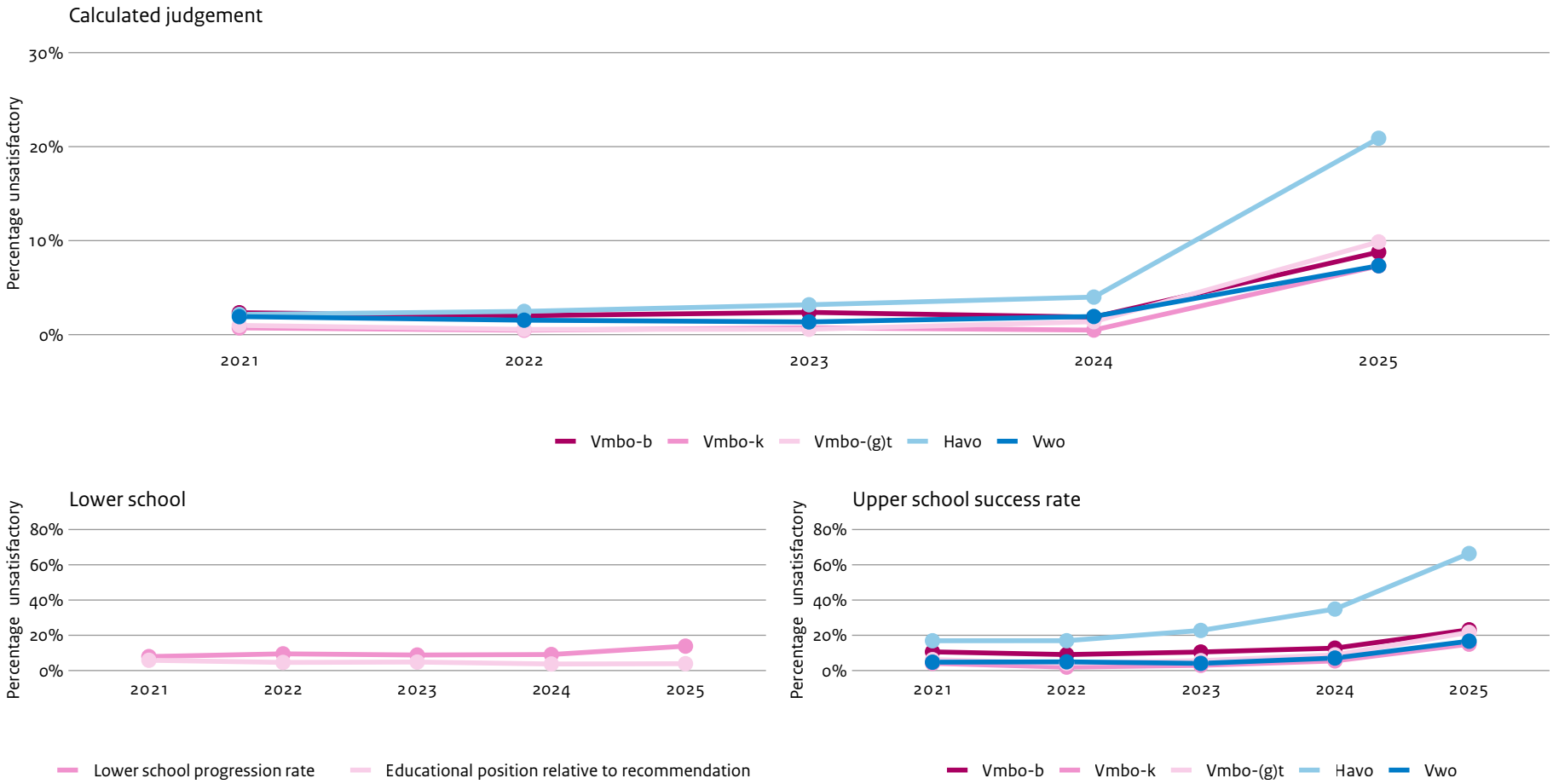
1.1.3 Risk-Based Inspection

Each year, the Inspectorate analyses whether there are risks at schools and educational programmes. We do this on the basis of available data, such as the results of schools and programmes, as well as on the basis of signals received from, for example, parents or teachers, and contacts that inspectors maintain with schools and programmes. These risks may prompt a quality inspection.

Risk detection based on results

Each year, as part of our risk analysis, we produce a calculated judgement of the results of all schools and educational programmes in primary education, special education, secondary education and MBO. This is not a definitive judgement: that follows only after any quality inspection that may take place. In primary education, we determine whether results are at risk using the attained reference levels in reading, use of language and numeracy over the most recent 3 school years. The risk analysis in secondary education covers 3 indicators of pupil progression and 1 indicator of average central examination (CE) scores.
For special education, we look annually at outcome data provided by schools on interim and final destination levels, including intended and achieved destination profiles. In MBO, we use 3 indicators: the annual results, the graduation results and the starter results.

Figure 1.1.3a Calculated learning outcomes in secondary education (in percentages)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026k)

Table 1.1.3a Percentage of publicly funded MBO programmes where academic success over 3 school years is above the benchmark

	Mbo 2	Mbo 3	Mbo 4
2019-2022	58,9	63,7	68,1
2020-2023	57,0	63,5	62,1
2021-2024	55,6	59,6	58,9

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026k)

Slightly more risks in the calculated results of primary schools

In 2025, 11.7% of primary schools had at-risk calculated results, slightly more than in 2024 (10.2%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). In 2023, this figure was much lower, at 4.2%, because at that time we were still working with correction values due to COVID-19.

Increase in calculated unsatisfactory assessments in secondary education

The percentage of secondary school departments with calculated unsatisfactory results in 2025 (a three-year average) has increased across all school types (Figure 1.1.3a). This increase is partly due to changes in how results are assessed following COVID-19. Notable is the rise in the percentage of unsatisfactory HAVO departments: 21% of HAVO departments achieved unsatisfactory results in 2025, compared with only 4% in 2024 (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). This may also be related to the tightening in 2020 of the HAVO benchmark for the upper-secondary completion indicator. It is particularly for this indicator that the proportion of departments failing to meet the HAVO benchmark (at least 82% of pupils completing successfully) has grown. At 65% of HAVO schools, too many pupils (more than 18%) are not succeeding in the upper years. Not succeeding means that pupils do not complete HAVO, or do not do so within the standard period of 5 years.

More special education schools achieving the intended destination profile for pupils

Special education schools are required to establish an individual education plan for all pupils, which includes the intended destination profile. The Inspectorate uses the benchmark that at least 75% of pupils leave at the level specified in the developmental progress plan. In 2024-2025, 99% of SO schools ensured that at least 75% of pupils left at the intended level; 93% of VSO schools did so (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k).These percentages are higher than previous years.

Examination routes and stable pass rates in VSO

In 2025, 2,472 VSO pupils sat examinations: 1,516 via the state examination, 113 via a school licence, and 843 via the external candidate arrangement (DUO, 2025e; Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). Most pupils sat the VMBO-(G)/T state examination. Examination candidates via school licence mainly sat for a HAVO diploma, and those via the external candidate arrangement mainly for a VMBO-K diploma. In addition, 3,553 pupils sat for one or more partial examinations. The large number of partial examinations is due to many VSO schools spreading their examinations over 2 or even 3 years. The pass rate for VSO pupils has been stable since 2016: above 87% for the state examination and above 90% for the other routes. This pass rate is comparable to that in mainstream education.

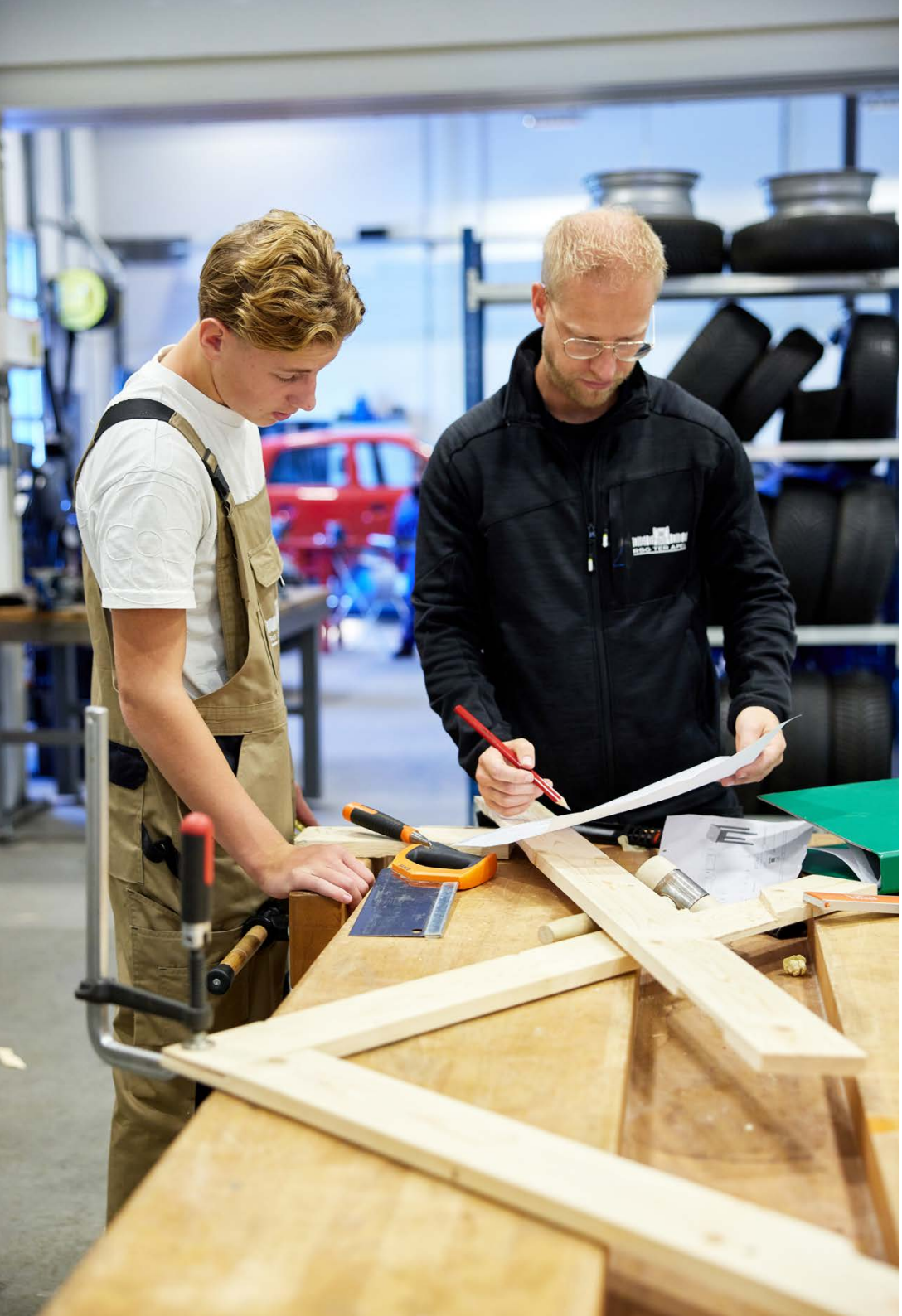
Declining proportion of MBO programmes with calculated results above the benchmark

At MBO levels 2, 3 and 4, the percentage of programmes achieving calculated results above the benchmark has declined. Over the 2021-2024 school years, this now stands at less than 60% (Table 1.1.3a), meaning that over 40% of programmes have results below the benchmark. The 3 indicators that make up academic success show no major differences: the percentage of programmes scoring below the benchmark is roughly equal for the annual results, the graduation results and the starter results (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). The cause of the declining results is unclear.

Diploma fraud in the health and social care sector

In 2025, the Inspectorate investigated the various routes to diploma fraud. This followed an exploratory study showing that criminals exploit the Dutch healthcare system via education (Inspectorate of Health and Youth & Inspectorate of Education, 2024). These criminals are well organised and have infiltrated the entire chain of education and healthcare. Their practices undermine the qualification function of education and the value of the MBO diploma, at least in the health and social care sector. Diploma fraud goes beyond the forgery of diplomas (Inspectorate of Education, 2026v). It also involves genuine MBO diplomas that have been issued on unjustified grounds. One route to obtaining a genuine MBO diploma on unjustified grounds is through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

The Inspectorate is concerned about the current Lifelong Learning (LLO) policy, of which RPL is a part, and about the supervision of it. In the case of RPL, responsibility for implementation, quality assurance and supervision rests with educational institutions,



social partners and private parties. Given the public importance of a sound healthcare system and the associated civil value of the diploma, we believe the government must take the lead on the RPL system and its supervision. It is important to take a broad view of Lifelong Learning, including consideration of fraud resilience.

Quality inspections in primary and secondary education and MBO
Where risks are identified, the Inspectorate may decide to conduct a quality inspection. If this results in an assessment of unsatisfactory or very poor, a recovery period of usually one year follows. Where quality is very poor, the Inspectorate always monitors the improvement process. For unsatisfactory schools, this happens when the Inspectorate has insufficient confidence in the capacity of the governing board and school to improve.

Quality inspections in primary and secondary education usually result in an unsatisfactory or very poor assessment
In the 2024-2025 school year, the Inspectorate conducted 414 risk-based quality inspections in primary and secondary education and MBO. In primary and secondary education, these inspections usually resulted in an overall judgement of unsatisfactory or very poor: in 64% of cases in primary education and 58% in secondary education. In special education and MBO, the overall judgement following a risk-based quality inspection was more often satisfactory (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k).

Remedial inspections in primary and secondary education and MBO
A school or department's governing board receives a remedial action order where one or more statutory requirements are not met. If a standard has been assessed as satisfactory but a specific element within it falls short, no follow-up supervision takes place: the Inspectorate then assumes that the governing board will address the shortcoming itself. For unsatisfactory standards, the governing board must account to us for its recovery, or a remedial inspection follows. A remedial inspection focuses in principle only on the shortcomings identified during the quality inspection, unless there are signals of new shortcomings. Where shortcomings have not been addressed, the Inspectorate may take an escalation step, such as imposing a financial sanction.

One third of schools fail to improve sufficiently
By no means all schools improve following the recovery period. In primary and secondary education in 2024-2025, approximately two thirds of schools received a satisfactory

overall judgement at their remedial inspection. One third received an unsatisfactory assessment or, in a small number of cases, a very poor one. In primary education, the proportion of schools that recovered fell from 65% in 2023-2024 to 60%, a decline that had also been observed the previous year. In secondary and special education, the proportion of schools that recovered also fell compared with 2023-2024. In that year, 73% and 84% respectively of remedial inspections resulted in a satisfactory overall judgement; in 2024-2025, this was 60% and 67% respectively (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k).

In MBO, a positive development appears to be taking place: in 2024-2025, 84% of programmes received a satisfactory overall judgement at their remedial inspection, compared with 73% two years ago.

1.1.4 Higher Education

In higher education (HO), assessment panels evaluate the quality of programmes and institutions. The voluntary institutional quality assurance audit (ITK) is a periodic, external and independent evaluation of an institution's internal quality assurance. Programmes at institutions with a positive ITK undergo a limited programme review every 6 years. Programmes at institutions without an ITK undergo a full programme review every 6 years. The NVAO (Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation) assesses whether the panels' judgements are well-founded, and may then decide to grant accreditation. Accreditation confirms that a programme meets basic quality requirements. Where necessary, the NVAO may impose conditions. Under the Education Supervision Act, the Inspectorate has the task of periodically investigating the functioning of the accreditation system.

Higher education programmes meet basic quality requirements

NVAO accreditations show that HO programmes meet basic quality requirements. In 2024, however, 13 accreditation decisions (2.8%) were issued with conditions for the granting or continuation of accreditation. In 2024, the NVAO took a total of 463 accreditation decisions on the basis of assessment panel reports from research universities and universities of applied sciences. These concern the accreditation of 409 existing and 54 new programmes (NVAO, 2025). In 2023, the numbers were higher: 464 existing and 87 new.

Accreditation system functioning well, requirements for panel members clarified

The Inspectorate investigated the accreditation system and concluded that it functions adequately in its basic form (Inspectorate of Education, 2024c). We did note a number of risks. In response, the Ministry of OCW states that the NVAO clarified and tightened the requirements for the selection and independence of panel members in 2024 through the revised accreditation framework (OCW, 2025g). This is intended to embed the independence of the assessment, despite the perverse incentive arising from the system in which institutions themselves bear the costs of assessments. We emphasise the importance of a judgement based on a complete picture of the programme, including all locations, variants and pathways.

Importance of closing the supervisory gap

The structure of the system, with 2 supervisory bodies for higher education, namely the NVAO and the Inspectorate, each with their own responsibilities, creates gaps. The supervisory gap is one example of this (Inspectorate of Education, 2024c). This is a risk to educational quality in the period between accreditation cycles, during which no rules are violated. Outside the 6-year accreditation cycle, neither the NVAO nor the Inspectorate has the authority to respond to signals relating to the quality of education. To embed the quality of education for all students, this supervisory gap must be closed.

No mandatory institutional accreditation

The Ministry of OCW has decided not to introduce mandatory institutional accreditation, citing the absence of compelling necessity and the significant effort such a systemic change would require. At the same time, there is a risk that the goals of greater ownership and a reduced administrative burden for HO institutions may be overshadowed. The focus is therefore on the further development of the existing institutional quality assurance audit. The Inspectorate considers it important that the accreditation system, in whatever form it takes, always meets the quality standards set out in the Inspectorate's assessment framework: independence, expertise, reliability and validity, stimulating effect, perceived burden, coverage and transparency.

Recommendation on justification of professional requirements requires follow-up

We advised the NVAO to require assessment panels to explicitly justify why a programme aimed at professional requirements also genuinely meets those requirements (Inspectorate of Education, 2024c). This advice requires follow-up. An inventory of

the curricula of pathways to primary school teacher qualification revealed that some pathways do not cover all professional requirements for teachers, the competence requirements, in the learning objectives of their programme units (Bijlsma & Bosman, 2025). We also concluded in a study of examination boards that it would help to explicitly add to the Higher Education and Scientific Research Act (WHW) a requirement that examination boards are obliged to ensure that the totality of assessments covers all final qualifications (Inspectorate of Education, 2025l).

Most examination boards fulfil their responsibilities

Examination boards in higher education have the task of guaranteeing the value of diplomas. The functioning of examination boards is therefore periodically the subject of investigation by the Inspectorate. Most examination boards give adequate expression to their responsibility for establishing that students meet the final qualifications upon graduation (Inspectorate of Education, 2025l). They make good use of their statutory instruments to embed the quality of assessments, often in productive dialogue with programme management. Most examination boards also take careful decisions regarding exemptions and fraud. Compared with 2015, however, there has been no clear progress in areas such as the resourcing of examination boards, communication with examiners, and ensuring that all final qualifications are assessed. The picture is largely one of continuity. A limited proportion of HO institutions also do not fully comply with the WHW in a number of areas: the composition of examination boards, the resourcing of examination boards by the institutional governing board, the delegation of tasks to management, and substantive rather than merely procedural assurance that final qualifications are met. The Inspectorate calls on all governing boards and management in publicly funded and non-publicly funded HO to review their institution's compliance with the WHW on these points.

Improvements desirable in the implementation of educational innovations

Furthermore, only 80% of examination boards evaluate their own functioning (Inspectorate of Education, 2025l), something that can be improved. Improvements are also desirable in the implementation of educational innovations. Some large-scale innovations are introduced hastily, without sufficient time being taken for the professional development of teaching staff, for the development of new quality assurance instruments for the examination board, and without the complete curriculum and assessment plan having been fully thought through. This creates quality risks. We also call on all examination boards and governing boards to learn from each other in how they handle generative AI. Students need clarity on the rules governing the use of generative AI in assessment, and they should be able to expect that their programme gives attention to how generative AI is to be used (see also Chapter 7).

1.1.5 *Specific Educational Provisions and Supervisory Tasks*

Ongoing challenges for schools and governing boards in the Caribbean Netherlands

The Caribbean Netherlands (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba) has 14 primary schools and 3 secondary schools. On Bonaire, MBO is also offered by 1 publicly funded and 1 non-publicly funded institution. On Saba, there is a non-publicly funded accredited HO institution with an NVAO-accredited medical programme. The educational context of the Caribbean Netherlands continues to present specific challenges (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b).

In principle, the Inspectorate conducts a quality inspection at each school every 2 years. In 2024-2025, 1 primary school on Saba and 1 on Bonaire did not meet the basic standard of quality. In secondary education, the school on Saba, the school on Sint Eustatius and the VMBO school on Bonaire did not meet the basic standard. Follow-up supervision of the governing boards of these primary and secondary schools was conducted on all islands in 2025. The results of these governing board inspections reveal major challenges in the areas of internal supervision, quality governance and financial management. Several governing boards in the Caribbean Netherlands have received additional funding from the Ministry of OCW.

Dutch education abroad: 6 schools unsatisfactory

The Inspectorate supervises Dutch schools abroad that are eligible for government support via the Stichting Nederlands Onderwijs in het Buitenland (NOB). This involves over 150 teaching locations for Dutch language and culture, 20 day schools and 12 institutions providing distance education. Over 11,000 pupils in more than 80 countries attend these provisions. In 2024, 52 of these schools received a satisfactory assessment and 6 received an unsatisfactory one. The 6 unsatisfactory schools were placed under intensified supervision. One of these schools received an unsatisfactory assessment for the second consecutive time; the Inspectorate reports this to the NOB foundation, which then withdraws the subsidy. The remaining 5 re-inspected schools received a satisfactory

assessment. Half of the 58 inspected schools received one or more remedial action orders, primarily for the standards Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support and Vision, Ambitions and Goals.

Language education performing well at European Schools, but autonomy is lacking

European Schools offer education in the mother tongue of each pupil. The primary target group is children of parents working for European institutions, and currently 45,000 pupils attend European Schools. These schools prepare students for the European Baccalaureate, a diploma that provides access to all European universities. Each European country appoints 2 inspectors for European Schools, who embed educational quality and are also responsible for curriculum content. In this context, the Netherlands, in cooperation with Flanders, is responsible for developing the curriculum and setting examinations for Dutch language. What is working well is language education: almost all pupils leave school multilingual. European Schools also provide extensive support to pupils. However, the use of ICT in education can be increased and pupils can be given greater autonomy: the standards 'A variety of teaching and learning methods are employed appropriately by teachers' and 'Pupils develop the ability to assess their own work' score relatively low.

Educational quality of first admission for non-native speakers generally satisfactory

For pupils arriving from abroad who do not yet have sufficient command of Dutch to follow mainstream secondary education, there is the first admission for non-native speakers (EOA). There are approximately 100 EOA provisions in the Netherlands. Inspectors assessed all 12 EOA provisions inspected in 2023-2024 as satisfactory. Inspection reports show that, with the exception of the citizenship component, the Basic Skills and Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support standards are often well developed in EOA provisions. Like mainstream schools, EOA provisions find it difficult to develop a citizenship curriculum tailored to the characteristics of their pupil population. Almost all inspected EOA provisions received a remedial action order for citizenship.

The reports also show that EOA provisions have a clear picture of pupils from the moment of enrolment. An intake procedure is always in place, during which they assess, among other things, pupils' language level. On this basis, they determine the expected destination level, which in turn forms the basis for the curriculum. EOA provisions monitor pupil progress using curriculum-independent assessments. The support structure is in

place at many EOA provisions, although the intensity of support and the way in which pupils are allocated support varies.

The reports also show that most teachers create a stimulating learning climate. Lessons demonstrate clear explanation and practice. Many classes are grouped by language level, but even within these groups there are differences between pupils, which teachers sometimes overlook. Finally, all inspected EOA provisions monitor school safety annually. Due to the language demands of questionnaires, they do not always do this using a standardised instrument. Some EOA provisions address this by holding conversations with pupils.

Quality of integration education pathways positive

Newcomers aged 18 or over with refugee status are obliged to participate in civic integration. To fulfil this obligation, they may follow the education pathway, which consists of language transition programmes. These programmes prepare participants for entry into mainstream MBO or higher education. In 2025, we reported that the picture of educational quality is positive (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b). Remedial action orders related primarily to the Curriculum standard, because the learning skills component did not sufficiently demonstrate development and alignment with final attainment levels could be improved. We now find that remedial action orders are being followed up effectively, leading to improved delivery of the Curriculum standard.

The growth of language transition programme provision is stagnating. By mid-2025, 34 educational institutions held diploma recognition for language transition programmes, and the uneven geographical distribution across the Netherlands is notable: the regions of Oost-Brabant, Limburg, Drenthe, Friesland and Groningen are underrepresented. There is also a national underrepresentation of institutions offering language transition programmes for entry into higher education: only 5 institutions in higher professional education (HBO), 3 in academic education (WO) and 5 institutions offering language transition programmes for MBO, HBO and WO combined.

Most initiatives for new schools receive a positive recommendation

When an application is made for a new school, the Inspectorate provides a recommendation to the minister following a quality assessment. The minister decides whether the school receives public funding and is thereby admitted to the system, partly

on the basis of this recommendation. Positive recommendations outnumber negative ones. In 2024-2025, the Inspectorate received 33 applications for new schools: 19 concerning the establishment or independence of a primary school, and 14 for secondary schools, which is double the number of previous years. The Inspectorate gave a positive recommendation for all primary school initiatives. In secondary education, 12 received a positive and 2 a negative recommendation: one due to shortcomings in the curriculum offering, and one because the application did not meet the statutory requirements regarding citizenship.

Nearly 30% of newly established primary schools in 2025 unsatisfactory or very poor

Under the Act on More Room for New Schools, the Inspectorate conducted quality inspections in 2025 at all new schools that started on 1 August 2024. We assessed 22 of the 30 schools (17 primary and 5 secondary) as satisfactory. Six primary schools and 1 secondary school received an unsatisfactory assessment, and 1 primary school was assessed as very poor. In 2025, nearly 30% of new primary schools are unsatisfactory or very poor, a higher proportion than in 2024, when 16% of new primary schools did not meet the basic standard of quality. These schools underwent a remedial inspection in 2025, at which all were assessed as satisfactory. A new school receiving fewer than 2 years of funding may be closed if it delivers poor quality in its first year and again following a one-year improvement period.

MBO: underestimating the high requirements for a new institution

In the 2024-2025 school year, the Inspectorate received 29 applications to start a new non-publicly funded MBO institution. Fourteen of these institutions were applying for the first time. Three of the 29 applications came from existing institutions relaunching under a new governing board, which requires a new institution application. The most popular sectors in which to start an institution are health and social care (15 of 29) and security (8 of 29). Of the 29 institutions, 9 received a positive recommendation and 20 a negative one. Applicants in MBO frequently underestimate the high requirements placed on a new institution: it takes far more than professional expertise and motivation.

College for Tests and Examinations meets its statutory obligations

The CvTE[3] has the task of embedding the quality of examinations and tests. This includes the continuation assessment (doorstroomtoets) in primary and special education, the central examination and state examination in secondary and special secondary education, and the central examinations for MBO. The Inspectorate supervises the CvTE by conducting an annual risk analysis and a triennial investigation into quality assurance. In 2025, we carried out the annual risk analysis, which involves a conversation with the CvTE based on information from its annual report and any signals received about possible risks and how the CvTE is addressing them. Our conclusion was that the CvTE has met its statutory obligations and that there are no indications that the quality of its statutory tasks is unsatisfactory. There are also no indications that the overall quality of the CvTE's functioning is unsatisfactory.

3 College for Tests and Examinations. https://www.cvte.nl

1.2 Quality of Governing Boards

The Inspectorate also investigates the quality of school governing boards in primary and secondary education and in MBO. Governing board inspections produce assessments of the 3 standards in the governing board assessment framework, an overall judgement based on these, and remedial action orders where there are shortcomings in compliance with statutory requirements. The overall judgement is satisfactory if all quality assurance standards have been assessed as satisfactory, and unsatisfactory if at least one quality assurance standard is unsatisfactory. Within these standards, we also examine the financial policy of governing boards, on which we report in Chapter 2.

1.2.1 School Governing Board Inspection in Primary and Secondary Education and MBO

Between one quarter and one fifth of inspected governing boards unsatisfactory

Approximately one quarter to one fifth of the inspected governing boards in primary and secondary education and MBO (publicly funded and non-publicly funded) received an unsatisfactory overall judgement in the past 4 school years (Table 1.2.1a). This occurred more often in primary and secondary education than in special education and MBO.

Since COVID-19, governing board inspections have been conducted more frequently on a risk-based rather than periodic basis, which means it is not possible to determine how governing board quality is developing. This is one reason why the Inspectorate is resuming periodic governing board inspections from 2026. In any case, given that governing boards are responsible for the quality of education in their schools, the number of governing boards whose quality assurance is not in order is too high, particularly those

for which all 3 quality assurance standards were assessed as unsatisfactory. This was the case for 40 governing boards over the past 4 school years (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k).

Table 1.2.1a Overall judgements from governing board inspections and remedial inspections of governing boards in primary and secondary education and publicly (and non-publicly) funded MBO in the 2021-2022 to 2024-2025 school years (numbers)

	Governing board inspection				Remedial inspection			
	Po	**(V)so**	**Vo**	**Mbo**	**Po**	**(V)so**	**Vo**	**Mbo**
Good	26	6	1	8	1	1	0	0
Satisfactory	236	24	64	73	81	16	28	21
Unsatisfactory	95	9	25	18	16	3	10	6
Total	**357**	**39**	**90**	**99**	**98**	**20**	**38**	**27**

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026k)

Recovery period does not always result in full improvement

Following an unsatisfactory assessment, governing boards, like schools and educational programmes, are usually given a one-year recovery period. In approximately one fifth of remedial inspections, quality assurance is again found to be unsatisfactory. Over the past 4 school years, governing boards in special education recovered most frequently, while those in secondary education did so least often. Repeated unsatisfactory assessments may result in the Inspectorate imposing a financial sanction.

1.2.2 School Governing Board Inspection for Inter-institutional Partnerships

The Inspectorate conducts periodic inspections of inter-institutional partnerships and their governing boards. We investigate 2 quality areas: Realisation of Inclusive Education and Governance, Quality Assurance and Ambition. Within each of these quality areas, we assess 3 individual standards. On the basis of decision criteria in which all 6 standards play a role, inspectors provide an overall judgement and, in the case of shortcomings, remedial action orders.

Between 2016 and 2021, we conducted a governing board inspection at each inter-institutional partnership using the 2017 Assessment Framework. In 2022, a second four-year supervisory cycle began. By the end of 2025, the quality of the delivery of statutory tasks had been assessed at least twice at nearly all inter-institutional partnerships, enabling us to look back on how they have functioned over the past 10 years.

Between one quarter (PO) and one third (VO) of inter-institutional partnerships unsatisfactory

During the second four-yearly cycle (2022-2025), governing board inspections took place at 132 inter-institutional partnerships. Approximately one quarter (PO) to one third (VO) received an unsatisfactory overall judgement. Inspectors awarded a satisfactory overall judgement 87 times and a good assessment 5 times (Table 1.2.2a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). These partnerships fulfil their statutory tasks and embed them. This does not mean that pupils in those regions always receive the most suitable education: it indicates only that provisions for additional support are available within those regions to offer inclusive education to pupils with special educational needs. It is up to schools and school governing boards to ensure that pupils actually receive the right support.

Insufficient provisions for additional support in some regions

For inter-institutional partnerships receiving an unsatisfactory overall judgement, shortcomings were found primarily in the Implementation and Quality Culture and Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue standards (Table 1.2.2a). In 16 of the 40 unsatisfactory partnerships, there were shortcomings in the comprehensive network of provisions, more often in secondary education (11) than in primary education (5) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). In these regions, there are too few provisions for additional support. Sometimes there are insufficient places or provisions across different year groups and school types; sometimes provision for a specific target group is entirely absent. It may also be the case that pupils with a statement of placement eligibility issued by the inter-institutional partnership cannot be placed, directly or at all, at a school for specialist education.

Table 1.2.2a Overall judgements and assessments per standard from four-yearly inspections at governing boards of inter-institutional partnerships in primary and secondary education in the period 2022-2025 (numbers)

	Po			Vo		
	Unsatisfactory	**Satisfactory**	**Good**	**Unsatisfactory**	**Satisfactory**	**Good**
Comprehensive Network of Provisions	5	51	10	11	50	5
Regional Cooperation	0	47	19	0	51	15
Advice and Assessment of Eligibility	0	55	11	1	59	6
Vision, Ambitions and Goals	4	56	6	10	50	6
Implementation and Quality Culture	11	44	11	14	46	6
Evaluation, Accountability and Dialogue	9	55	2	16	50	0
Overall judgements	17	45	4	23	42	1

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026k)

Nearly half have been satisfactory or good for an extended period

Now that quality has been assessed at least twice at nearly all inter-institutional partnerships, we can sketch a picture of developments over time. There are 58 inter-institutional partnerships (44%) that received a satisfactory or good overall judgement in the second cycle and also received at least satisfactory for every standard in the first cycle. These are the partnerships that have consistently met the basic standard of quality over the years. More partnerships in primary education (50%) than in secondary education (38%) received at least satisfactory for every standard in both periods. Of the 40 inter-institutional partnerships that received an unsatisfactory assessment for at least 1 standard in the second period, 18 had also received an unsatisfactory assessment for at least 1 standard in the first cycle (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). This represents 14% of all inter-institutional partnerships: those with persistent difficulty bringing and keeping quality to the required standard.

Nearly 80% recover, but recovery from shortcomings is becoming more difficult

When an inter-institutional partnership is assessed as unsatisfactory, we conduct a remedial inspection, usually after one year. Over 80% of partnerships that underwent a remedial inspection in the past 10 years met the basic quality standard (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). For the comprehensive network of provisions, all partnerships with shortcomings in the first period had resolved these by the remedial inspection.

In the second cycle, not all managed to do so. Inspectors noted improvements, such as additional or different provisions, but the overall provision was not yet fully comprehensive, leaving some pupils without an appropriate educational placement. Despite the efforts of partnerships and their affiliated school governing boards, creating a comprehensive network is taking longer than before. Shortcomings in quality assurance and accountability are also frequently not resolved in a single attempt. Partnerships with multiple unsatisfactory standards often address some shortcomings but not all: they may put a quality assurance system in place but not yet implement it fully or effectively.

Inter-institutional partnerships more often satisfactory after intensified supervision

Of the 132 inter-institutional partnerships inspected in the 2022-2025 period, 39 had received a remedial inspection in the first period due to shortcomings. During the inspection in the 2022-2025 period, 28 of these partnerships (72%) received at least a satisfactory assessment for all standards. For partnerships where supervision had not previously been intensified, this figure was lower, at 69% (Inspectorate of Education, 2026k). The capacity for recovery appears to be somewhat greater among secondary education partnerships than among those in primary education. At the same time, the results of primary education partnerships that had not previously undergone a remedial inspection are better than those of comparable partnerships in secondary education.


X10
X6

CHAPTER 2

Financial Management

Key points

Sound finances are a prerequisite for good education. Without funding, education is not possible. The effective and purposeful use of financial resources is important for achieving intended educational goals. Financial management is therefore an inseparable part of the responsibilities of school and institutional governing boards.

Financial situation stable
The 2024 annual figures show that, for that year, the education sector as a whole remained financially healthy. At the aggregate sector level, liquidity and solvency were predominantly stable. In 2025, a very small number of governing boards were subject to enhanced financial supervision. Small and new governing boards in particular face heightened risk in terms of financial continuity. In the coming years, financing in education may come under pressure as a result of announced spending cuts (by the previous government) and the projected decline in pupil and student numbers. The additional funds from the National Education Programme have been largely spent.

There is currently no direct threat to the financial continuity of universities, despite the structural spending cuts announced in 2024. Should these cuts proceed, given the new coalition agreement, they will create financial pressure that forces higher education institutions to make difficult strategic choices with consequences for students, staff and programmes. Through annual continuity analyses, the Inspectorate closely monitors financial developments across all sectors.

Policy-driven budgeting: a powerful instrument for purposeful spending
Policy-driven budgeting is a valuable tool for spending education funds purposefully. It also enables the internal supervisory board to use the policy-driven budget in its oversight of how funds are spent. In policy-driven budgeting, there is a clear link between the goals a governing board aims to achieve and the resources required to achieve them. Most governing boards report that they practise policy-driven budgeting, but this process is often not well embedded within the organisation. A number of factors influence the implementation of policy-driven budgeting: a shared approach, the knowledge available within governing boards, and the support on offer.

Temporary funds valuable but structural impact uncertain
The total amount of possible excessive public capital reserves declined further in the 2024 reporting year. This decline indicates that the temporary funds the education sector received in recent years have largely been spent. On the one hand, governing boards value temporary funds for improving educational quality. On the other hand, they question whether subsidies can actually deliver structural improvements.

Excessive capital reserves unevenly distributed
Every governing board needs reserves as a financial buffer against setbacks. Governing boards determine the appropriate level of reserves themselves in principle, aligned with their specific risk profile. An effectively functioning risk management system contributes to this, but is not in place at all governing boards. The alert threshold for possibly excessive public capital reserves also provides a reference point for determining the appropriate reserve level, particularly in discussions with the participation council and the internal supervisory board. The total amount of possibly excessive capital reserves is not evenly distributed across governing boards: half of it is held by just 7% of governing boards in primary and secondary education (PO and VO), and 13% in special education ((V)SO)[4].

New school governing boards financially vulnerable
New school governing boards are financially vulnerable in their early years. Small, newly established governing boards in particular have yet to build up sufficient financial buffers, while confronted from the outset with fixed costs, uncertainty around pupil numbers, and a lag in funding. This translates into insufficient solvency and liquidity, even when the operating result is generally positive. The combination of complex start-up challenges and a funding system that does not adequately match the growth phase increases the risk of

4 special education refers to both special primary and special secondary education

financial strain. Without realistic multi-year forecasts, timely funding and well-structured governance, new governing boards remain vulnerable, with possible consequences for the continuity and quality of education.

The financial supervision framework
Financial continuity, compliance and purposeful spending are the 3 pillars of the financial supervision framework. This supervision is directed at both governing boards and the system as a whole. Supervision of governing boards means the Inspectorate conducts investigations into governing boards' financial management. We also analyse governing boards' annual figures to check for financial risks that might jeopardise the continuity of education. Where such risks are identified, we may decide to place the institution under enhanced financial supervision. System-level supervision encompasses thematic school visits and supervision of the quality of work carried out by accountants. In a thematic school visit, we focus on a theme requiring additional attention, such as policy-driven budgeting, or on a specific target group, such as the higher education sector (HO).

Recommendations

We have been asking governing boards to practise policy-driven budgeting for a number of years. Policy-driven budgeting means that educational goals are the determining factor in financial decision-making: available resources are linked directly to strategic goals, enabling governing boards to steer financially towards educational quality. Policy-driven budgeting also assists internal supervisory boards in their oversight of how education funds are spent, a task for which they frequently receive remedial action orders. Our call for policy-driven budgeting remains as pressing as ever, and we set it out here in more concrete terms.

- Governing boards and schools: strengthen quality Governing boards: take your strategic educational goals as the starting point when drawing up the annual budget and the multi-year budget. Determine what resources must be allocated to achieve the goals you have set. Incidental funds can also be used for this purpose. Remember to set out in the budget how allocations on staffing relate to the achievement of your goals. And structurally involve all stakeholders, so that policy-driven budgeting becomes more firmly embedded in the organisation.

- Governing boards: maintain an up-to-date picture of income and expenditure to avoid surprises, and to respond effectively when surprises do occur. Setbacks identified earlier can be absorbed earlier. Unexpected incidental funds find a more appropriate use when plans extend over several years.

2.1 Financial Supervision of Governing Boards

2.1.1 Remedial Action Orders

122 financial remedial action orders

In the 2024-2025 school year, the Inspectorate issued 122 remedial action orders relating to finances and financial accountability (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). These remedial action orders were directed at school governing boards, inter-institutional partnership governing boards and supervisory bodies in primary and secondary education.

65% of all remedial action orders directed at the internal supervisory board

The internal supervisory board plays an important role in supporting and advising the governing board. It also supervises the governing board's purposeful and lawful use of government funds. The internal supervisory board is required to account for how it fulfils these tasks in a dedicated section of the annual report. Inspectors issued remedial action orders to internal supervisory boards on 2 subjects. The first concerned the absence of information on the actions of the internal supervisory board and how it had supported and/or advised the governing board (43 times) (Table 2.1.1a). The second type of remedial action order was issued 36 times and related to accountability for the supervision of the effective use of government funds (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). In total, two thirds of all financial remedial action orders were directed at the internal supervisory board.

Table 2.1.1a Number of remedial action orders on finances and financial accountability in the 2024-2025 school year

	Po	Vo	Inter-institutional partnerships
Internal supervisory board report (results, support/ advice)	14	2	27
Internal supervisory board on effective use of funds	15	1	20
Presence and functioning of risk management system	14	1	9
Risks and appropriate risk mitigation measures	3	0	2
Compliance issue	6	0	0
Other accountability requirements	3	0	5

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026j)

2.1.2 Collaboration between Education and Childcare

Widespread collaboration between education and childcare

During governing board inspections, inspectors increasingly find that governing boards are collaborating with childcare organisations. They also encounter more intensive forms of collaboration, such as integrated child centres (IKC). Some municipalities actively encourage this, for example by aiming to realise an IKC in new residential areas (Andersson Elffers Felix & DUO Onderwijsonderzoek en Advies, 2025). Collaboration between childcare organisations and primary schools is widespread and stable: approximately 85% of primary schools collaborate with one or more childcare organisations. The collaboration focuses primarily on shared accommodation and the alignment of pedagogical and organisational processes. A small proportion of schools (8%) have fully integrated collaboration under a single umbrella.

Unlawful spending due to insufficient separation of funds

These forms of collaboration may entail risks regarding financial compliance. Sharing premises, staff or other resources with childcare organisations can result in public funds flowing to private parties. Incomplete cost allocation or insufficient separation of public and private funds can lead to unlawful use of government funds. During inspections in the 2024-2025 school year, inspectors identified 6 occasions with issues of unlawful use of government funds in collaborative arrangements. In 5 of these cases, financial resources between education and childcare were insufficiently separated. In 1 case, education for toddlers was being funded from government funds earmarked for schools. Governing boards must ensure that the financial side of after-school care on school premises is kept separate from education funds. This includes the correct allocation of costs from educational organisations to childcare organisations, for example costs related to accommodation or volunteers. Education and after-school care must be clearly separated in the financial administration. Loans from education funds are also not permitted.

2.1.3 Enhanced Financial Supervision

When inspectors identify signs that a school's financial continuity may be at risk in the foreseeable future, the Inspectorate may place the institution under enhanced financial supervision. This occurs, for example, when an institution is at risk of being unable to meet its financial obligations in the short term. Another example is when an institution has been recording structural losses over an extended period without sufficient reserves to absorb these deficits. In such situations, we ask the governing board to draw up a concrete recovery plan, and we monitor the institution's financial position closely.

8 governing boards under enhanced financial supervision

On 1 August 2025, 8 governing boards were under enhanced financial supervision, 1 fewer than a year earlier. These include 4 governing boards in primary education, 2 in secondary education and 2 in higher professional education (HBO). In 2025, 2 governing boards (1 in PO and 1 in HBO) were again placed under enhanced financial supervision, as payment problems could emerge at very short notice. For 3 governing boards, enhanced financial supervision was lifted. Through measures such as improvements to the planning and control cycle, 1 HBO governing board strengthened its financial position. The other 2 PO governing boards merged with another governing board.

Most governing boards with financial difficulties are relatively small

Financial difficulties are mostly concentrated among small governing boards. In primary and secondary education, 5 of the 6 governing boards currently under enhanced financial supervision are single-school governing boards (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). These are schools that operate independently and are not part of a larger governing board, which can make them more (financially) vulnerable (see also Section 2.2.1). The 2 HBO governing boards currently under enhanced financial supervision are also relatively small compared to other HBO governing boards.

Financial difficulties sometimes coincide with unsatisfactory educational quality
In primary and secondary education, inspectors assessed educational quality as unsatisfactory or very poor at at least one school under 4 of the 6 governing boards subject to enhanced financial supervision (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). The combination of financial shortfalls and educational shortcomings makes recovery particularly difficult for these governing boards.

2.1.4 New Governing Boards

Financial risks at new governing boards, income generally sufficient
In 2024, 6 new school governing boards were established (2 PO; 4 VO). In 2023, there were 4 new governing boards (3 PO; 1 VO). A considerable proportion of these 10 new governing boards, 8 of which are single-school governing boards, face financial risks. For 6 of the 10 governing boards, solvency fell below the alert threshold in 2024 (see Section 2.2.1) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). Of these, 3 even had a negative capital reserve, indicating a very vulnerable financial position (negative solvency). For 5 of the 10 governing boards, liquidity was below the alert threshold.

The financial result is positive for most governing boards: only 2 recorded a negative result. Both of these also have a negative capital reserve. This shows that although income is generally sufficient, limited financial buffers and vulnerable solvency or liquidity make these governing boards susceptible to financial setbacks.

Development in the first year since establishment gives a mixed picture
For the 4 governing boards established in 2023, development in the first year presents a mixed picture. Two governing boards started with a negative capital reserve; for one, the capital reserve declined further in 2024, while for the other, figures are unavailable to assess development in 2024 (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). The remaining 2 governing boards started with a positive capital reserve, which improved further in 2024. For 3 of the 4 governing boards, solvency and liquidity were below the alert thresholds at the start, while 1 governing board started with both indicators above the alert thresholds. By 2024, one additional governing board achieved this, but another remained below the alert thresholds after 1 year. For the fourth governing board, recent figures are unavailable, making it impossible to assess progress.

Challenges and risks in establishing a new governing board
Conversations between inspectors and new governing boards show that the start-up phase can be accompanied by organisational, financial and governance challenges. These challenges are not always individually problematic, but they can reinforce one another and thereby pose a risk to the continuity and quality of education. According to the new governing boards, the challenges are as follows:

- Limited experience and capacity building: new governing boards sometimes start with little experience. Governors must rapidly acquire knowledge of funding systems, financial accountability, governance requirements and supervisory relationships. This requires time and capacity. There is a risk that regulations are only partially complied with, or that important signals are recognised too late.
- Vulnerable financial position: the financial position is often vulnerable in the early stages. Frequently, no financial buffer has been built up. Shortfalls in pupil numbers, delays in funding or unforeseen costs can therefore lead to liquidity problems. Multi-year budgets and balance sheets are not always realistic or fully worked out, which increases the risk of financial shortfalls.
- Uncertainty about pupil numbers: pupil projections are difficult to make in practice. Optimistic assumptions can lead to excessive expenditure, while lower-than-expected enrolment has an immediate impact on funding. This uncertainty makes it difficult to pursue responsible long-term policy.
- Establishing governance and supervision: putting governance in order takes time and attention. The division of responsibilities between the governing board and the internal supervisory body is not always immediately clear or well worked out. This can result in insufficient counterbalance, limited strategic direction, or conversely, excessive operational involvement.
- Start-up funding: governing boards report that start-up funding is often made available too late and is insufficient. This leaves not enough room in the first year to build the organisation properly. Several governing boards experience start-up funding as structurally too low, particularly in relation to the costs that must be incurred before and during the first school year. In some cases, additional funding has been received from the local authority. Inspectors do note, however, that these funds are not always used effectively.
- Lagging growth funding: governing boards report that growth funding is by definition lagging, as the previous year is used as the reference point. When that reference year

has no or very few pupils, the formula, in their view, does not adequately reflect actual growth. In practice, this means funding lags months behind the actual growth in pupil numbers. Liquidity comes under pressure as a result, and this is difficult to absorb given the absence of financial buffers.

2.1.5 *Policy-driven Budgeting*

Thematic school visit on policy-driven budgeting
In 2025, the Inspectorate carried out a thematic school visit on the subject of policy-driven budgeting. In policy-driven budgeting, the substantive educational goals are central to the budget. This means that educational goals determine financial choices. By linking available resources directly to strategic goals, governing boards can steer financially towards maintaining and improving educational quality. A representative group of governing boards in primary education, secondary education, special education[5] and vocational education(MBO) completed a questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire was to identify what enables governing boards to practise policy-driven budgeting. A sounding board group of governors then helped to interpret the results of the questionnaire. For more information, see Inspectorate of Education (2026h).

Governing boards consider policy-driven budgeting desirable
Almost all governing boards (95%) consider policy-driven budgeting desirable. The most commonly cited reason is that it helps them achieve their strategic goals, use resources purposefully and make policy choices. It also contributes to sound accountability for spending. Governing boards find that policy-driven budgeting has a positive impact on financial and organisational steering. It provides a clear direction within the organisation, which also increases engagement and professional ownership at all levels of the organisation in the pursuit of goals (Inspectorate of Education, 2026h).

Process not always embedded in the organisation
Almost all governing boards (98%) report that they practise policy-driven budgeting, either partially or fully. In secondary education, governors somewhat more often than in primary education, special education and MBO report that this is done only partially. Policy-driven budgeting, however, is not always well embedded within the organisation.

5 special education refers to both special primary and special secondary education

Only a small majority of governing boards (53%) report having a complete process for policy-driven budgeting. And fewer than half (40%) fully document their policy-driven budget in an accountability document. This suggests that governing boards perceive themselves as practising policy-driven budgeting, but that this is not always visible in processes and documents (Inspectorate of Education, 2026h).

Funds perceived as difficult to steer

Practical implementation is sometimes challenging. Governing boards experience limited control over resources as an obstacle to policy-driven budgeting, both for structural and incidental funds. Structural funds are perceived as less easy to steer, as they are largely locked into staffing costs. Incidental funds are seen as temporary and unpredictable, making them difficult to link to long-term goals (Inspectorate of Education, 2026h). As a result, governing boards often see policy-driven budgeting as an instrument for funds that are not spent on the fixed staffing allocation, but on specific projects.

Policy-driven budgeting is possible with both structural and temporary funds

According to the sounding board group, policy-driven budgeting is indeed possible with structural funds. On the basis of conversations about strategic workforce planning, training needs and staffing allocation development, governing boards can link structural staffing funds to strategic goals. Governing boards can then set out in the budget how spending on staffing relates to achieving those goals. Incidental funds can also be deployed strategically by spending them on matters that contribute to the goals set. Plans that extend over several years provide the space to find a suitable use for unexpectedly received incidental funds (Inspectorate of Education, 2023a).

Policy-driven budgeting is a shared endeavour

Alongside the steerability of funds, a shared approach influences the implementation of policy-driven budgeting. Everyone within the educational institution can contribute from their own role. Next to governors (97%), school leaders (88%) and financial controllers (83%) are most frequently involved. At 67% of governing boards, the internal supervisory board is also involved. To strengthen the process, it is important for governing boards to actively involve and equip all layers of the organisation with the necessary knowledge, with clearly defined responsibilities and a structured working process for both budgeting and accountability. The structural involvement of stakeholders embeds policy-driven budgeting more firmly in the organisation (Inspectorate of Education, 2026h).

Knowledge needed and a need for clarity

According to governing boards, clarity and knowledge are also needed to enable shared ownership of policy-driven budgeting responsibilities within a governing board. A prerequisite for policy-driven budgeting is knowledge within the school organisation of how to link concrete goals to resources at every level. Governing boards can facilitate and strengthen this professional capacity and co-governance, for example through training and thematic meetings, possibly with support from sector councils. Governing boards also express a need for clarity about what the Inspectorate expects from a policy-driven budget. They also call on the government for greater consistency and predictability, both in terms of goals and resources (Inspectorate of Education, 2026h).

2.2 The Financial Situation in Education

In the coming years, education will receive lower government contributions. In 2025, COVID-19 funds could be deployed for the last time, and all education sectors faced spending cuts. According to the 2025 budget memorandum, government contributions to all education sectors will decrease in the period 2026-2030, in part due to declining pupil and student numbers and approximately €1 billion in cuts by the previous government (Ministry of Finance, 2026).

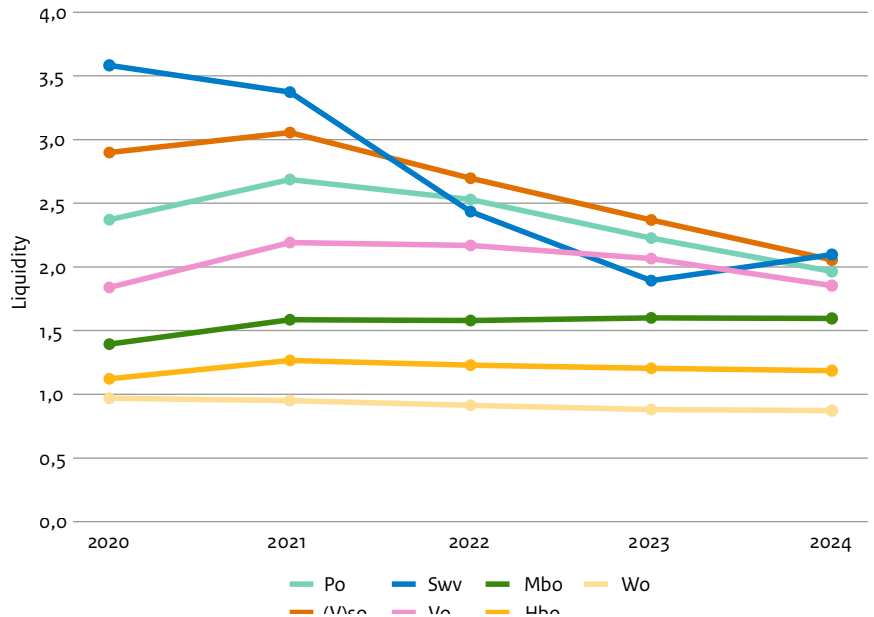
2.2.1 Solvency and Liquidity Indicators

To identify possible financial risks at educational institutions, the Inspectorate uses, among other things, the financial indicators of liquidity and solvency. Liquidity indicates the extent to which governing boards are able to meet their short-term payment obligations. Depending on the size of the governing board, the Inspectorate uses an alert threshold (an indicator for identifying financial risks) ranging from 0.5 to 1.5. Solvency indicates the extent to which governing boards are able to meet their long-term liabilities. The Inspectorate uses an alert threshold of 0.3 for this, regardless of the size of the governing board. The alert thresholds are not norms, but may prompt us to examine a governing board more closely.

Liquidity above alert threshold

Liquidity in 2024 was well above the alert threshold in all sectors. At the aggregate sector level, there were sufficient current assets relative to short-term liabilities. Sector-level liquidity was stable in MBO (1.6), HBO (1.2) and academic education (WO) (0.9) (Figure 2.2.1a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). In primary education, special education[6] and secondary education, sector-level liquidity fell compared with 2023 (PO: from 2.2 to 2.0; (V)SO: from 2.4 to 2.1; VO: from 2.1 to 1.9). In these 3 sectors, short-term liabilities rose while at the same time total current assets fell. As a whole, these 3 sectors were slightly less able to absorb short-term obligations. The total liquidity of inter-institutional partnerships rose slightly, from 1.9 to 2.1.

Figure 2.2.1a Liquidity developments by sector

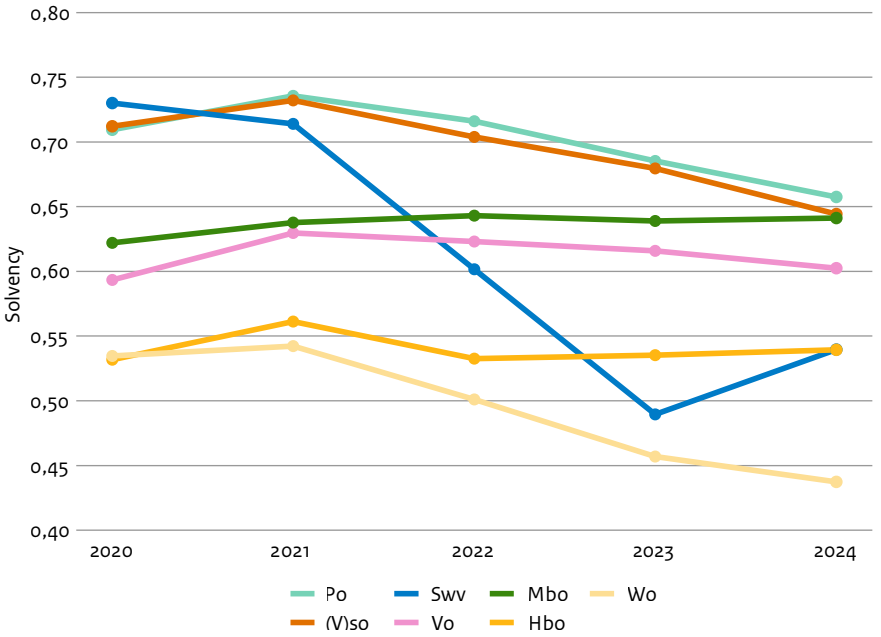


Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026j)

Solvency largely stable

Solvency in most sectors was virtually unchanged in 2024 compared with 2023. In PO (0.7), VO (0.6), MBO (0.6), HBO (0.5) and for inter-institutional partnerships (0.5), solvency remained constant (Figure 2.2.1b) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j), indicating a consistently solid equity position. In special education[7], solvency fell slightly from 0.7 to 0.6, and in academic education from 0.5 to 0.4. Financial resilience declined slightly in these 2 sectors, but remained above the alert threshold.

Figure 2.2.1b Solvency developments by sector



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026j)

6 special education refers to both special primary and special secondary education

7 special education refers to both special primary and special secondary education

Number of governing boards below liquidity alert threshold varies

In 2024, the sectors were financially healthy at the aggregate level. However, the proportion of governing boards falling below the liquidity alert threshold varies by sector. In PO, (V)SO and MBO, the percentage of governing boards below the alert threshold remained almost unchanged from 2023. The number of VO governing boards with liquidity below the alert threshold rose from 5 (2.1%) to 9 (3.8%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). Conversely, in HBO, this number fell from 5 (14.3%) to 2 (5.7%). In academic education, all governing boards remained above the alert threshold.

More governing boards below solvency alert threshold in secondary education

The picture regarding solvency is also varied when examining individual governing boards. In PO, the number of governing boards below the alert threshold fell from 20 (2.5%) in 2023 to 16 (2.1%) in 2024 (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). In (V)SO, MBO, HBO and WO, the situation remained stable, with no governing boards in MBO, HBO or WO falling below the alert threshold. Secondary education is the exception: the percentage of VO governing boards with solvency below the alert threshold rose from 9 (3.7%) to 12 (5.1%).

Single-school governing boards more frequently below alert thresholds

Single-school governing boards are disproportionately represented among governing boards with possible risks to financial continuity. Nationally, fewer than 40% of governing boards are single-school governing boards (OCW, 2025a; VO-raad, 2026). Of the PO and VO governing boards that in 2024 had possible difficulty meeting their short-term obligations (a liquidity ratio below the alert threshold), more than half had only 1 school under them (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). Of those governing boards potentially unable to repay their short-term and long-term debts (a solvency ratio below the alert threshold), half were single-school governing boards. Single-school governing boards are also disproportionately often subject to enhanced financial supervision (see Section 2.1.3). Collaboration with other governing boards can reduce their (financial) vulnerability. They can strengthen their financial resilience by joining a larger network in which governing boards share knowledge, expertise and resources. Such collaboration can help ensure that schools have the stable financial foundation needed to embed the continuity and quality of education.

2.2.2 Financial Continuity in Higher Education

No direct risks to financial continuity in HBO

Inspectors analysed the 2024 annual reports of 40% of HBO institutions to identify possible financial risks. No direct risks to financial continuity were found at any of the institutions examined. However, over 70% could improve their annual reporting, particularly regarding the accountability section of the internal supervisory board and the risk paragraph (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). For half of HBO institutions, for example, it was insufficiently clear how the internal supervisory board oversees the purposeful use of government funds and what effects its supervision achieves. In addition, over 40% provided limited accountability for internal risk management. Institutions can improve their reporting on these points.

Thematic school visit: financial exploration of academic education

The Inspectorate investigated all institutions in academic education to map out financial continuity. The investigation included an analysis of 2023 annual reports, multi-year budgets for 2025-2029, supplemented by conversations with all universities, UNL and OCW, and consultation of public data. For more information, see Inspectorate of Education (2026d).

Spending cuts not a direct threat to the continuity of universities

The structural spending cuts to academic education announced in 2024, which may be reversed by the new government, do not pose a direct threat to the continuity of universities (Inspectorate of Education, 2026d). They do, however, create financial pressure, requiring institutions to make strategic choices with consequences for students, staff and educational programmes. Universities are attempting to limit the impact on education and research through gradual and balanced cuts, but acknowledge that this approach will not be sufficient in the long term. Structural measures, such as the merging or discontinuation of certain educational programmes, are seen as unavoidable.

Demographic decline is the greatest financial challenge

The greatest financial challenge lies in the projected demographic decline. By 2034, it is estimated that there will be 10% fewer students than there are today (OCW, 2025f). As universities receive funding per student, this will reduce their income. At the same time, universities report that their range of responsibilities remains the same or is growing, including additional attention for knowledge security, digital resilience and social safety. This combination puts pressure on the organisation and strategy of universities, making difficult choices feel unavoidable (Inspectorate of Education, 2026d).

Collaboration the key to future resilience

Universities and the Ministry of OCW see collaboration with one another as the key to addressing these challenges (Inspectorate of Education, 2026d). Through better coordination, pooling support services and collaborating strategically, they can deploy resources more efficiently and preserve the public value of higher education.

2.2.3 Reserves

Alert threshold for possibly excessive public capital reserves

To encourage the reduction of excessively high reserves, the Inspectorate developed an 'alert threshold for possibly excessive public capital reserves'. This threshold calculates a capital reserve ratio based on a governing board's assets and income. The ratio serves as a reference for assessing public capital reserves. Our website features a calculation tool that enables governing boards and their stakeholders, such as supervisory board members and participation council members, to calculate the alert threshold for their governing board[8]. On the basis of this calculation, they can discuss with the governing board the appropriate level of public capital reserves. The alert threshold is therefore a reference point, not a norm. The guiding principle should be that as much money as possible goes towards education, and that no unnecessary reserves are held.

Negative financial result at 739 of 1,164 governing boards

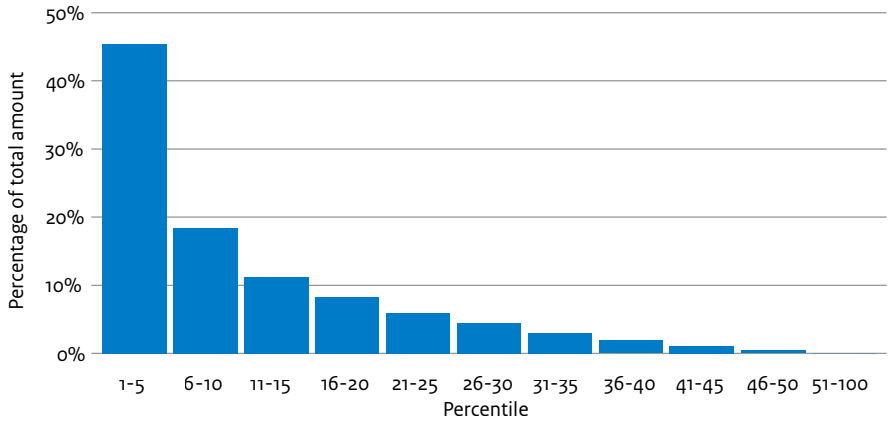
All sectors, with the exception of MBO (and inter-institutional partnerships, see Section 2.2.5), recorded a negative financial result in 2024: at the aggregate sector level, more was spent than received that year. In total, 739 of all 1,164 school and institution governing boards recorded a negative financial result (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). A negative result is not inherently negative: it can have a positive effect, for example where more money flows towards education. This then represents a reduction in capital reserves which, particularly in the case of excessively high reserves, is precisely the intention.

8 https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/onderwerpen/toezicht-2017/toezicht-op-financieel-beheer/toezicht-op-publiek-eigen-vermogen/rekenhulp-signaleringswaarde

Further decrease in possibly excessive public capital reserves

As a result of the negative financial results, the total amount of possibly excessive public capital reserves declined further in 2024. In MBO, HBO and WO, there is virtually no possibly excessive capital reserve. In primary and secondary education (excluding inter-institutional partnerships), the total amount fell by €314.4 million to €992.4 million (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). The amount of possibly excessive capital reserves is not evenly distributed across governing boards (Figure 2.2.3a): approximately 45% is held by 5% of governing boards.

Figure 2.2.3a Distribution of excessive capital reserves across governing boards



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026j)

Justification of risk buffer requires improvement

In principle, governing boards determine the appropriate level of reserves themselves, aligned with their specific circumstances. Governing boards always need reserves as a buffer against financial setbacks. An effectively functioning risk management system helps to determine the appropriate level of reserves, but is frequently not in order. In the 2024-2025 school year, inspectors issued a remedial action order on this point to 24 of the 98 governing boards inspected (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). Five governing boards also received a remedial action order for failing to include an overview of relevant risks and risk mitigation measures in their annual report.

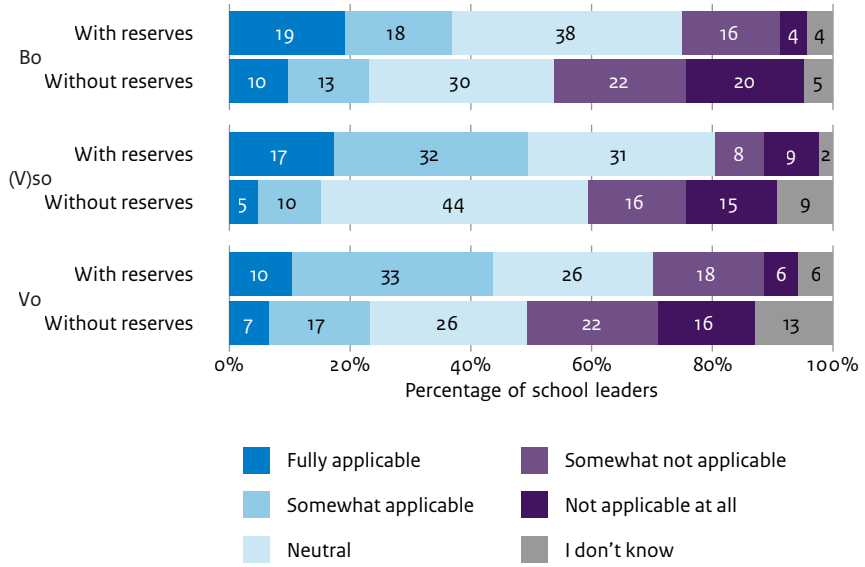
Accountability for possibly excessive public capital reserves generally in place

Since 2020, governing boards have been required to include an justification of their reserve level in the annual report when public reserves exceed the alert threshold. This accountability means that other stakeholders can also see the rationale behind the level of reserves. Most governing boards with possibly excessive public reserves that we inspected in the 2024-2025 school year complied with this requirement. Inspectors issued a remedial action order for non-compliance on one occasion (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j).

Presence of high reserves not always known to school management

The spending of reserves above the desired minimum amount should be discussed between governing boards and school management. The accountability section in the annual report can assist with this. However, far from all school and department leaders are aware of whether their governing board holds possibly excessive public capital reserves (Figure 2.2.3b) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j).

Figure 2.2.3b School leaders' estimates of the level of financial reserves held by their governing board / Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026j)



Reserves ease financial concerns

School leaders under governing boards with high capital reserves appear to experience somewhat more financial breathing space. School leaders under a governing board with possibly excessive capital reserves far more frequently report that their school receives sufficient funds to provide pupils with good education, compared with school leaders under a governing board without possibly excessive capital reserves (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). They also worry less frequently about whether the funds allocated to their school for the 2025-2026 school year will be sufficient, and worry less frequently about the school's financial viability in the future.

2.2.4 *Looking Ahead*

Forecasts show a budget dip once again

We expect total capital reserves to decline further across all sectors. For 2025, the financial result is budgeted as negative across all sectors. Forecasts for 2026 and 2027 are slightly less negative. Once again, there is a budget dip: the coming budget year consistently shows a more negative outcome than the years that follow. In practice, the actual result for the first budget year frequently turns out to be more positive than forecast. When a governing board then has no designated use for the financial windfall, this again has an unexpectedly positive effect on the capital reserve (Inspectorate of Education, 2023a).

Pessimistic outlook for the future

Unlike in previous years, the expected financial result is predominantly negative even in the long term (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). Only PO and (V)SO expect income to cover expenditure in 2027. Other sectors expect expenditure to exceed income. It is by no means certain that these negative forecasts will materialise: governing boards tend to budget more pessimistically than they ultimately achieve, as was also the case in 2024. Over 70% of PO and VO school leaders report that things are always dropped during the preparation of the annual budget due to a lack of funds. A less pessimistic approach to budgeting may help to prevent this. A multi-year policy-driven budget also assists in deciding how to use any additional funds received, both in advance and during the year.

2.2.5 Temporary Funds in Primary and Secondary Education

Share of temporary funds relatively limited

The share of temporary (incidental) funds in PO, VO and (V)SO is limited compared with the structural funds that governing boards receive. Temporary funds refers to additional money that is available for a specific period for particular purposes or projects. This money is not structural: once the period ends, the funding lapses unless a new scheme is introduced. Secondary education receives proportionally more temporary funds than primary and special education. In 2024, 11.6% of the funds received by VO from the government were temporary (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). In PO this was 6.8% and in (V)SO 2.9%. In 2021 and 2022, the share of temporary funds rose, after which it fell again in 2023 and 2024.

Dependence on temporary funds varies between governing boards

Dependence on temporary funds also varies within sectors. In PO, the largest share of governing boards (63%) receives relatively little temporary funding, namely less than 5% of their total income. Some 26% of governing boards have a share of temporary funds between 5 and 10%. At 3% of governing boards, the share exceeds 20% (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). In (V)SO, 80% of governing boards receive less than 5% in temporary funds. Governing boards in (V)SO are the least dependent on temporary funds and are funded primarily on a structural basis. In VO, the distribution of temporary funds is most varied: over 38% of governing boards have a share of temporary funds between 5 and 10%, followed by 33% with a share between 10 and 20%. At 5% of VO governing boards, the share of temporary funds exceeds 20%. At VO and (V)SO schools where the share of temporary funds is higher, school management more frequently reports that temporary funds contribute positively to improving educational quality.

School leaders find temporary funds valuable but see structural improvement as difficult

Approximately half (51%) of school leaders disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that temporary funds make it possible to achieve structural improvements (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). Some 30% of school leaders agree with this statement, and 19% respond neutrally. School leaders do find that temporary funds can add value for improving educational quality: 67% agree or strongly agree with the statement that temporary funds contribute positively to improving educational quality, while 20% disagree or strongly disagree. Inspectors regularly hear that managing temporary funds involves administrative burdens and pressure. This deserves attention: if governing boards spend too much time and energy on administration, less space remains to put the funds to work for what truly matters, namely improving education.

2.2.6 Inclusive Education Funds

Increasing accountability for the use of inclusive education funds

Accountability for the use of inclusive education funds is desirable in order to gain insight into whether these funds are being used purposefully. In 2024-2025, approximately 70% of BO and 82% of VO school leaders were required to account to their governing board for the use of financial resources for basic support and extra support (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). In (V)SO, 81% have this requirement with respect to funds for extra support. A proportion of school leaders report having no accountability obligation for these funds (BO: 22%; VO: 13%; (V)SO: 19%). In 2023-2024, that figure was still almost half.

Many remedial action orders for internal supervision of inter-institutional partnerships

In 2024-2025, inspectors again issued a large number of remedial action orders (20) to the internal supervision of inter-institutional partnerships, requiring them to account in their annual report for the oversight of the effective use of inclusive education funds (Table 2.1.1a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). Inspectors also issued 27 remedial action orders to internal supervisory boards for failing to adequately account in the annual report for results and support/advice provided to the governing board.

Slight increase in possibly excessive public reserves

Compared with 2023, a lower percentage of inter-institutional partnerships recorded a negative financial result (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). Following a sharp decline in the period 2020 to 2022, the weighted average capital reserve ratio did not decline further in 2024. The total capital reserves of all inter-institutional partnerships combined stood at €151.4 million at the end of 2024. At 58.3% of inter-institutional partnerships, the total amount of reserves exceeds the capital reserve alert threshold. In total, 88 inter-institutional partnerships hold €59.2 million in possibly excessive capital reserves, which is €0.4 million more than in 2023.

Justification of reserves essential

Inter-institutional partnerships also need reserves to remain healthy financially. The amount of possibly excessive reserves in this sector cannot simply be labelled as excessive. What matters is that governing boards are able to provide sound justification for any possibly excessive capital reserves. Governing boards are required to include a justification of possibly excessive capital reserves in their annual report, enabling stakeholders to see what happens to inclusive education funds that are not passed on directly. In 2024-2025, inspectors found on one occasion that this justification was missing.

Legislation and regulations an obstacle to realising inclusive education

A large proportion of school leaders in BO (51%) and VO (62%), and most governors of inter-institutional partnerships (66%), find that legislation and regulations governing the use of inclusive education funds make it difficult to offer every pupil an appropriate solution. In (V)SO, 42% of school leaders share this view (Inspectorate of Education, 2026j). In addition, many school leaders in both mainstream and specialist education encounter the problem that legislation and regulations require spending on education and on care to be distinguished, while the two cannot easily be separated. This is confirmed by 93% of inter-institutional partnership governors. (V)SO school leaders and inter-institutional partnership governors also emphasise that spending that is genuinely needed is not permitted under current legislation and regulations. Finally, regulatory burden also plays a role: legislation and regulations require records to be kept for which schools say they do not have the time.

The governing board and school remain responsible, including for education at external locations

In 2025, inspectors conducted investigations into the lawfulness of spending on education provided at external locations. The funding of education at external parties is only permitted under specific conditions: the pupils must be enrolled at the school and temporarily unable to attend due to medical or psychological reasons, and the school must have applied for and received dispensation from the Inspectorate for a reduction in instructional time for the pupil (see also Chapter 6). The school governing board and the school always remain responsible for the content, format and delivery of the personalised programme. This means that outsourcing a pupil to a non-publicly funded educational provider, including private education (known as B2/B3 education), is never permitted. Purchasing external provision, bringing in expertise, or collaborating with third parties such as youth support providers is, however, permitted. Not all inter-institutional partnerships comply with these conditions. In such cases, the education funding has been spent in an unlawful manner.


Geestelijk leven
Religie
juf Lisa
meester Burak
STINKIE BOM

CHAPTER 3

Basic Skills

Key points

Good basic skills are indispensable. For a successful continuation of pupils' and students' school careers and for full participation in society, it is essential that they have a sufficient command of the basic skills of literacy, numeracy, citizenship and digital literacy.

No trend reversal yet in the development of basic skills
For a number of years, the Inspectorate has been drawing attention to basic skills in the State of Education. We have repeatedly expressed our concerns about declining basic skills in primary and secondary education and in vocational education(MBO). Partners in education share these concerns, recognise the importance of basic skills and feel the urgency to raise the level of basic skills. The efforts of schools, governing boards and the government to reverse the trend are not yet clearly visible in the results. Structural improvement in learning outcomes probably requires more time.

In primary education, the results of pupils in Years 3 to 7 for literacy and mathematics were reasonably stable between the 2018-2019 and 2024-2025 school years, returning to their pre-pandemic levels. The results on the continuation assessment (doorstroomtoets) in 2024 and 2025 are also comparable. In the lower years of secondary education, there continues to be a sustained and substantial decline in reading proficiency and vocabulary across all school types compared with the pre-COVID-19 period. Mathematics also shows a negative trend since that time, particularly in VMBO. Compared with 2023-2024, there is no longer a decline in every year group and school type. In mathematics, some improvement is visible particularly in VWO. In MBO, results on the central Dutch language examination (CE) are also declining, with the result that one third of MBO level 2 graduates do not achieve reference level 2F in Dutch. These students leave education or progress within MBO with an insufficient level of literacy. Results are also declining in MBO level 4: of MBO level 4 graduates in 2024-2025, 38% had insufficient reading and/or viewing and listening proficiency at reference level 3F.

Gaps in the continuity of reference levels between secondary education and MBO
The reference levels for literacy and numeracy were developed to facilitate smooth transitions from primary education and special education to secondary education, special secondary education and vocational education. Clarity about what pupils must know and be able to do at the transition to continued education, and careful monitoring of whether they actually reach that level, contributes to an uninterrupted process of development for every pupil and student. Last year we already indicated that in practice, examinations in secondary and special secondary education provide insufficient insight into mastery of the reference levels. As a result, we have less visibility on the continuity from secondary and special secondary education to continued education. We now observe a new gap at MBO level. In MBO, the reference levels have been replaced by numeracy requirements and will soon likely also be replaced by literacy requirements.

Although the reference levels have been the starting point for the numeracy and literacy requirements, the alignment between them is limited. One reason for this is that the practical numeracy and literacy requirements were developed exclusively for the MBO context. The limited visibility of reference levels in secondary and special secondary education and MBO exposes the urgency of providing the reference levels with a new foundation based on the new core objectives, alongside an appropriate monitoring instrument. For as long as MBO cannot determine, on the basis of a VMBO diploma, what reference level a student has achieved across the full breadth, the programme itself will need to determine the entry level. Only then can literacy and numeracy education in MBO genuinely align with students' educational needs and thereby be goal-oriented.

Improvements possible in the didactic process
The remedial action orders issued by inspectors to schools during randomised sample inspections in primary and secondary education show that improvements are possible in the didactic process. The alignment of the literacy, numeracy and citizenship curriculum with the pupil population, and the goal-oriented nature of the citizenship curriculum, need to improve at many schools. A positive development is the move by primary, secondary and special education towards integrated language education. This offers

opportunities to stimulate language development. Collaboration, joint development and embedding of this new approach are essential for achieving a coherent curriculum.

The new core objectives for primary education, special education and the lower years of secondary education, the new literacy and numeracy requirements, new legislation and regulations for citizenship in MBO, and the revision of the reference frameworks all offer schools opportunities to update and critically review their curriculum, and thereby further raise the level of basic skills.

Strengthening schools' development capacity needed for the citizenship mandate
Schools do not always find it easy to fulfil the citizenship mandate. Formulating concrete learning objectives remains challenging, as does linking learning objectives to learning activities. More than half of school leaders in primary and secondary education say that further development of their own education is needed. This aligns with the large number of remedial action orders for the citizenship curriculum. Schools do not always appear to be clear on what the law requires, or how statutory requirements can be met. We again emphasise that on this point, strengthening schools' development capacity is necessary.

Focus on implementation
For sustainable school development, sustained and targeted attention to the implementation of policy in the classroom is needed. At some schools, quality assurance can be improved (see Chapter 1). For complex changes such as the introduction of integrated language education, the design of thematic education or working from high expectations, the connection between vision, policy, classroom practice, evaluation and embedding requires attention. This should also be the focus of school development trajectories and of the quality assurance cycle. The PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act), concrete goals and action plans are, however, primarily tools rather than ends in themselves, intended to bring about this connection. Ultimately, these must lead to good teaching practice. It is essential to listen to what teachers need. Time, good examples, joint development and feedback help teachers to support implementation in the classroom.

Recommendations

The recommendations we made in 2025 for strengthening basic skills remain relevant in 2026. The call to pay attention to students' literacy in the entrance programme and MBO level 2 continues to apply. Attention to language education in VMBO must also remain a top priority, given the low reading results. That said, the attention paid to language-aware teaching does appear to be growing. We wish to give teachers, schools and governing boards the following 2 additional recommendations for 2026-2027:

- Teachers in PO, VO, (V)SO and MBO: reading proficiency is a key to success in education and beyond. Work on this, for example by opening the day with half an hour of reading aloud or silent reading, with the aim of making children and young people enjoy reading again and become better at it.
- Governing boards, schools and educational programmes: for VMBO-B/K pupils, place explicit emphasis on numeracy/mathematics alongside attention to language education. And for MBO examination boards: given the grade adjustment system, be alert to applications for exemption from Dutch 2F for MBO level 2 students progressing to MBO level 3. Do not grant these automatically.

3.1 Literacy and Numeracy/ Mathematics in Education

3.1.1 *The Teaching-Learning Process: the Curriculum*

Goal-oriented, coherent, recognisable and/or balanced

In our assessment framework, we place emphasis in primary education, secondary education, special education and MBO on a goal-oriented, coherent, recognisable and/or balanced curriculum that is aligned with the pupil and student population. A curriculum works purposefully towards the mastery of goals: core objectives, final attainment levels, reference levels, numeracy requirements or vocationally oriented core tasks (see box, Section 3.1.2). Coherence within a curriculum is also important. Vertical coherence, for example a logical progression within a subject area from Year 1 to Year 8, and horizontal coherence, between subject areas or between subjects and, for example, practical vocational training.

Curriculum coherence is important, but teachers need time and support

Primary school teachers of social studies subjects said in interviews that they consider a well-reasoned and coherent progression in the subject matter (what must be learned) important. At the same time, they find it difficult to give concrete examples of working towards the goals of geography and/or history in combination with other subject areas, such as language education and citizenship education. They need time, examples, support and training to organise a suitable, comprehensive and well-reasoned curriculum offering. Experts consulted in the field of social studies indicated that combining social studies subjects with basic skills is in principle a sound approach, but only when it stems from a well-considered vision (Inspectorate of Education, 2025f). Furthermore, specificity in prescribed goals appears to be important. Too few concrete learning objectives can lead to confusion among teachers, a higher workload, greater differences between schools and more difficult transitions between educational levels (Crehan et al., 2025). This was also one of the reasons for updating the core objectives.

Thematic school visit on broad and coherent curriculum

In a qualitative study at 8 primary schools, we examined how schools have introduced coherence between language and knowledge and arts subjects in their curriculum and how they give attention to this within their quality assurance cycle (Inspectorate of Education, 2026c). This study connects with the Basic Skills (horizontal coherence in the curriculum) and Quality Assurance standards in our assessment framework.

An integrated curriculum requires vision and collaboration

The 8 primary schools interviewed work in an integrated way, guided by a vision through which they seek to connect pupils' language development with expanding their knowledge of the world. They use thematic units to do this. The language domains of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and oral and written language proficiency are often taught in an integrated way. The conversations revealed that integrated language education requires knowledge of what pupils already know, what they want to know and what they need for this. This generates greater engagement and motivation among pupils and leads to the acquisition of broader and more in-depth knowledge. Teachers also reported that results in technical reading, reading comprehension, vocabulary and language awareness improve through integrated language education. Designing a coherent curriculum is a process of experimentation. It requires personalised approaches tailored to the school and its pupil population. Collaboration and co-creation are essential for a coherent curriculum to succeed. This demands time and professional development for teachers, and facilitation of this by school management. The embedding of agreements made remains a challenge for schools (Inspectorate of Education, 2026c).

Present in the classroom, but not yet embedded

Integrated language education occurs regularly in primary and special education. Classroom practice appears to be ahead of school policy in this regard. In the national assessment study on oral language proficiency (Inspectorate of Education, 2025g), most primary school, special primary education and special education teachers said they give attention to oral language proficiency in language-related teaching in other subjects, working from pre-formulated objectives. However, a large proportion of primary school leaders indicated that their school has not documented or embedded the integration within the school and is not working towards an action plan: not for integration in other language domains (PO: 41%; SBO: 28%) and not in subject areas other than language (PO: 47%; SBO: 33%). A smaller proportion of schools has documented and embedded

integration with other language domains (PO: 25%; SBO: 30%) and with other subject areas (PO: 17%; SBO: 23%). In special education, most school leaders indicated that their school is working towards an action plan for integrating oral language proficiency education with other language domains (11 of 19 school leaders) and with other subject areas (9 of 19 school leaders).

Targeted attention to integration of language and subject teaching, especially in VMBO

According to school leaders, 62% of VMBO departments gave attention in their curriculum in 2024-2025 to the integration of language and subject teaching. In HAVO/VWO departments, this was 57%. Some 80% of VMBO school leaders said they formulate goals for the integration of language and subject teaching; in HAVO/VWO departments, this figure is approximately 60%. At more than 60% of both VMBO and HAVO/VWO departments, this theme is part of the professional development plan. At approximately 40% of VMBO departments and at more than a quarter of HAVO/VWO departments, school leaders reported that teachers in other subjects are actually working in a targeted way on language-related learning objectives, that integrated language education is a topic of discussion, and that there is consensus among teachers on this point (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i).

Collaboration across subject departments is challenging

Although Dutch language teachers appear to find collaboration with other subject departments useful for writing education, they indicated in interviews that this rarely or never occurs. Dutch language teachers in secondary education dedicate approximately one quarter of lesson time in the second year specifically to writing. They assign writing tasks to pupils that connect with their world and experience. Linking writing education (and its goals) to other subjects can be mutually reinforcing, but this happens rarely in practice, even though more than half of school leaders report having incorporated this into the curriculum (Inspectorate of Education, 2025h). In secondary education, many different teachers teach the same class. Collaboration across subject departments makes the integration of language into other subjects challenging. This requires support and direction from school management across departments.

Language-aware teaching increasingly on the agenda in MBO and adult education

In MBO and adult education, there is increasing attention to language across the curriculum (Wolf et al., 2025). In practical lessons, subject-specific language receives attention, and in vocational assignments there is, for example, explicit attention to formulating and presenting. However, students in MBO are not always motivated for language learning, and subject teachers do not always feel confident in their language teaching capacity. Good language education in MBO demands a great deal: taking account of large differences in language level, stimulating and supporting students without lowering the bar. The new literacy requirements align with this (Expert Group on New Literacy Requirements in MBO, 2025). In addition to integrating language and vocational content, institutions use other interventions to raise students' language levels, such as support for students with low literacy or multilingual backgrounds, or a focus on reading promotion and language policy (Wolf et al., 2025).

Goal-oriented teaching on the rise

Goal-oriented teaching is important for an uninterrupted learning development aimed at achieving an expected destination level. Clarity about the goals of the curriculum gives teachers greater guidance and enables the (textbook-based) curriculum to be aligned with what pupils need right now. Our inspectors observe a trend in schools away from textbook-following education towards objectives-led teaching, either without a textbook or with the textbook as a foundation, aligned with pupils' development. More than half of primary school leaders believe that teachers in their school teach in this way. One quarter of primary schools had not yet made this move in 2024-2025, but had considered it. Primary school leaders whose schools have been practising objectives-led teaching for more than a year (35%) see the greatest advantage in the greater autonomy teachers have over the content of their lessons and the ability to better align lessons with what pupils need. Objectives-led teaching does, however, require expertise from teachers: knowledge of learning progressions and subject-specific pedagogy, and the ability to accurately assess where pupils are in their development, as well as time to design lesson content to a greater or lesser extent themselves. These school leaders also identify this as the vulnerability of objectives-led teaching (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i).

Ambition: high school-level goals and individual choices

High and realistic ambitions and objectives-led teaching reinforce one another. Teachers who have high expectations of pupils also set high targets when determining lesson goals and results to be achieved. At 20% of primary schools, teachers are, according to school leaders, receiving professional development specifically aimed at enabling as many pupils

as possible to achieve reference level 1S; in special education, this is the case at 5% of schools. For special education pupils, 1S is less often a realistic ambition than for primary school pupils, but they too benefit from high expectations.

More commonly, schools make school-wide agreements about achieving 1S. According to 85% of primary school leaders, they set school-wide goals for the minimum proportion of pupils reaching 1S. In special education, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) is primarily the guiding framework (approximately 75% of special education school leaders). Collegial discussion about the intended final level can help teachers keep school-wide goals in view and articulate reasons for the intended final level. This creates the connection between the aspirational goals at school level and those at teacher level. Just under a quarter (SO) to 30% (PO) of school leaders report that at their school, the support committee or a specialist is consulted in making the choice between a final level of 1F or 1S. In special education, nearly 10% of teachers make that decision independently; in primary education, this applies to more than 20%. In those cases, school-wide goals and unconscious biases or blind spots may remain unaddressed. More than half of primary school leaders find that the distinction made in teaching materials between 1F and 1S helps in enabling as many pupils as possible to achieve 1S by the end of Year 8 (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i). However, placing pupils in fixed levels of 1F or 1S at an early stage can also be counterproductive, depriving pupils of the opportunity to access curriculum content at least at 1S level and thereby also of the possibility of progressing to 1S or higher. Regularly evaluating whether the curriculum offering is still appropriate, or whether it needs adjustment, can ensure that high expectations remain in view while individually realistic final goals are set.

Tailored basic skills where reference levels are not attainable

For some pupils in special education, special primary education and practical education, the reference levels do not apply as an obligation of result. Components of 1F will often be attainable and require well-considered choices in the curriculum and a suitable, sometimes more practical approach. For many pupils with severe (multiple) intellectual disabilities, the reference levels are entirely inapplicable, and the focus is on developing communicative self-reliance. The Inspectorate expects that schools can explain, for these pupils too, how the goals chosen by the school and the educational approach contribute to the greatest possible degree of independence in later life.

Renewed focus on knowledge

In the search for ways to improve learning outcomes, we increasingly encounter the knowledge-rich curriculum in educational practice and in research. A knowledge-rich curriculum also appears to offer opportunities for meaningful education, equal opportunities and more inclusive education. A focus on rich and broad substantive knowledge in the curriculum can ensure that all pupils, regardless of their background, have equal access to fundamental knowledge. Knowledge makes it easier to make connections or identify the meaning of a text: children who know more about a subject are at an advantage. There are tentative indications that a knowledge-rich curriculum contributes to improved learning outcomes (Crehan et al., 2025; Surma et al., 2025).

3.1.2 *Quality of the Curriculum*

Updating (functional) core objectives for primary education, special education and secondary education

The core objectives for primary education have been finalised for the subject areas of Dutch language, numeracy/mathematics, citizenship, digital literacy, social studies, natural sciences, modern foreign languages, arts and culture, and physical education and sport. For special education, functional attainment targets have been produced for Dutch language, numeracy/mathematics, citizenship and digital literacy. The functional core objectives for the remaining subject areas will follow in 2027.

Updating secondary education examination programmes

Many examination programmes are overdue for renewal after more than 25 years. In 2022, 3 subject renewal committees were established to update the examination programmes. The final committees (for computer science, and for social studies and social sciences) are still working on the draft examination programmes for VMBO, HAVO and VWO. Implementation of the new examination programmes is expected to begin in 2027 and be completed by 2031

.

New numeracy and literacy requirements and citizenship qualification requirements in MBO

As of 1 August 2022, new numeracy requirements apply at each MBO level. No separate requirements have been formulated for the entrance programme. The starting point for the new requirements is the reference levels, which describe the minimum that a pupil

or student must know and be able to do. However, the new numeracy requirements are more functional, that is, more application-oriented. The aim shifts from learning math to training numerate professionals and citizens. All students who began their first year in 2022-2023 sit their examinations under the new numeracy requirements, and for them numeracy counts towards the pass/fail regulations (with the exception of entrance programme students).

In 2025, the Expert Group on New Literacy Requirements in MBO published advice on new literacy requirements within the bandwidth of the reference levels. In formulating these, the expert group drew on literacy requirements in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the Dutch language framework for VMBO/MBO, and the Standards and attainment targets for adult education. At the time of writing, the new literacy requirements have not yet been adopted by the minister.

A separate expert group has formulated new qualification requirements for citizenship in MBO. This expert group also advises that citizenship be examined through an institution examination. At the time of writing, the new qualification requirements have also not yet been adopted by the minister.

Uneven attention to updated mathematics core objectives

From the 2025-2026 school year, schools can begin working with the core objectives for Dutch language, numeracy/mathematics, citizenship and digital literacy. From August 2027, all updated (functional) core objectives will be legally in force. Effective implementation of the core objectives requires timely preparation by schools. The updated core objectives place, among other things, greater emphasis on mathematical thinking processes, such as mathematical reasoning and problem-solving. Mathematical thinking processes involve pupils acquiring knowledge that goes deeper than knowledge of procedures, definitions and properties, and extends beyond the execution of standard procedures. As this aspect of numeracy/mathematics received less attention in the past, it requires greater alertness from schools.

Approximately half of primary school leaders and approximately 45% of special education school leaders report that changes in the core objectives concerning mathematical thinking processes have not yet received attention. In VMBO and HAVO/VWO, school leaders report that at approximately half of departments the change is already a topic of discussion. At 26-29% of VMBO and HAVO/VWO departments, mathematical thinking processes have already been incorporated into the curriculum. Professional development on this topic is receiving limited attention in primary education, secondary education and special education: 8-13%.

Literacy curriculum generally in order

In 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, the Inspectorate assessed the curriculum for the basic skills of Dutch language, numeracy/mathematics and citizenship during sample based-inspections (see also Section 3.3). We did not issue an assessment of the Basic Skills standard, but did issue remedial action orders for statutory shortcomings in the curriculum. The number of inspections in primary education is now large enough to provide a reliable picture of the basic skills curriculum. For special education, secondary education and MBO, we can only provide an indication.

At the majority of the inspected primary, special and secondary education schools, the Dutch language curriculum met the statutory requirements. Some 28% of secondary education schools received a remedial action order for Dutch language (Table 3.1.2a), with HAVO departments receiving the most: 27 of 78. In primary and special education, fewer schools received a remedial action order: approximately 18% of mainstream primary schools and 21% of special primary education schools. In newcomers' education, where emphasis is placed on Dutch language, 11% of provisions received a remedial action order. In almost all primary education cases, and in more than half of special and secondary education schools and departments, the remedial action orders for Dutch language concerned shortcomings in the degree to which the Dutch language curriculum is aligned with the characteristics of the pupil population (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). Schools have insufficient insight into the educational needs of their pupil population and/or the curriculum is insufficiently aligned with these needs. In MBO, only 3% of the 171 inspected programmes received a remedial action order (Inspectorate of Education, 2026q).

Table 3.1.2a Percentage of schools and programmes for which one or more remedial action orders were issued per basic skill (n PO=506, n (V)SO=185, n VO=372, n MBO=171)

	Po	(V)so	Vo	Mbo
Dutch language	18	15	28	3
Mathematics	6	14	23	3
Citizenship	53	49	65	3

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026p, 2026q)

numeracy/mathematics curriculum: mostly in order

Among the basic skills, schools and departments received the fewest remedial action orders for the numeracy/mathematics curriculum. In secondary education, this concerned approximately 23% of departments (Table 3.1.2a). In primary and special (secondary) education, the proportion of schools with a remedial action order was 6% and 14% respectively. As with Dutch language, schools and departments with a remedial action order for numeracy/mathematics frequently display a shortcoming in the degree to which the curriculum is appropriate for the pupil population: the characteristics of the pupil population are insufficiently taken into account and/or the curriculum is insufficiently aligned with these. As with language, 3% of inspected MBO programmes received a remedial action order for the curriculum.

3.2 Literacy and Numeracy/ Mathematics Results

3.2.1 Literacy and numeracy/mathematics in Primary Education and Special Education

Caveats regarding the continuation assessment

The continuation assessment (doorstroomtoets) was administered for the second time in 2025. The comparability between the different continuation assessments remains a concern, as it was last year (CvTE, 2025; Inspectorate of Education, 2025b). If it continues to prove impossible to compare assessments with one another, the introduction of a single continuation assessment should be considered.

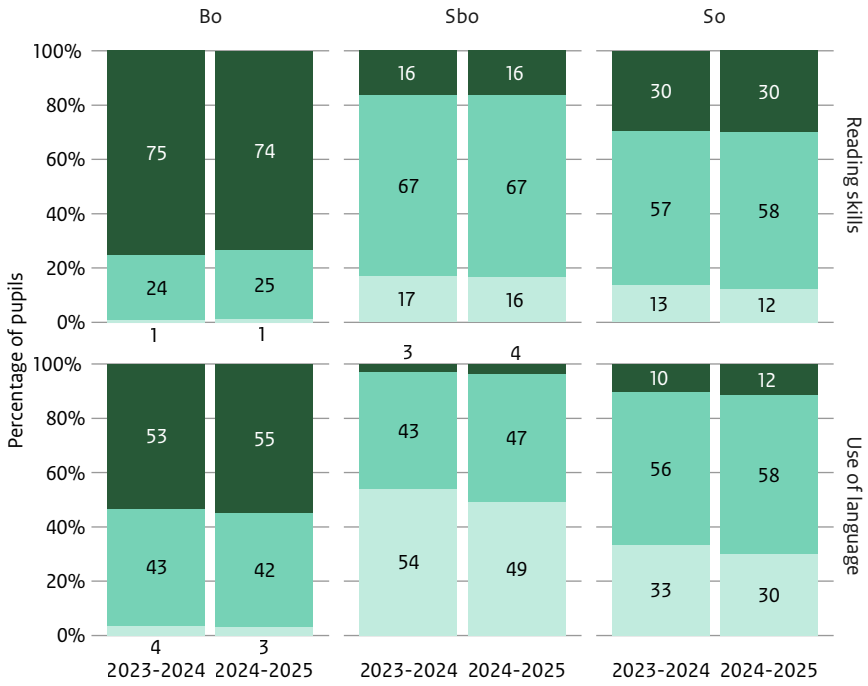
Continuation assessment results for reading and use of language

The percentage of primary education and special education pupils achieving reference levels 1F and 2F for reading and use of language in 2025 is reasonably comparable to 2024 (Figure 3.2.1a). Special primary education pupils sitting the continuation assessment show progress in use of language, but continue to lag behind mainstream primary school pupils and the special education pupils who sat the continuation assessment.

Reading comprehension and spelling: level relatively stable since 2018-2019

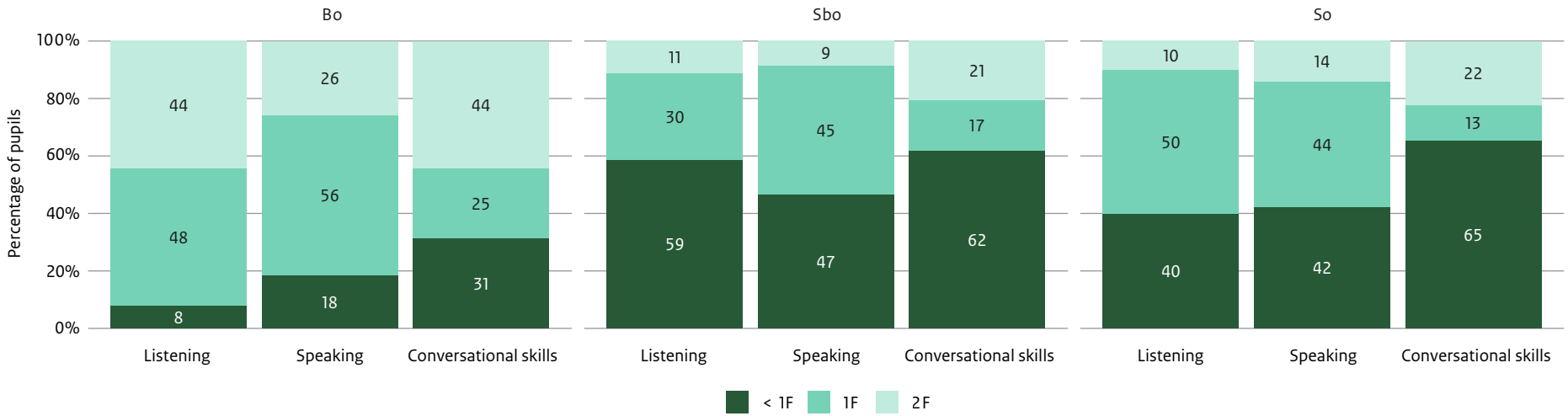
Between 2018-2019 and 2024-2025, proficiency scores on the Cito end-of-year tests for reading comprehension and spelling were relatively stable. Year 3 stands out positively: the level of Year 3 on the end-of-year reading comprehension test and the mid-year spelling test was higher in 2024-2025 than at the start of the series. At the end of Year 7, the percentage of pupils mastering reference level 1F (93%) in 2024-2025 was equal to 2018-2019, while the percentage also mastering 2F (49%) was slightly lower (Van Vugt et al., 2025b).

Figure 3.2.1a Percentage of mainstream primary, special primary and special education pupils by reference level achieved for reading and use of language in 2024 and 2025 (n 2025 mainstream primary=162,627; n 2025 special primary=5,459; n 2025 special education=3,050)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026i)

Figure 3.2.1b Percentage of mainstream primary, special primary and special education pupils by reference level achieved for listening (n=1,751), speaking (n=2,138) and conversational skills (n=2,139)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2025g)

Declining trend in oral language proficiency

Oral language proficiency is necessary for communication and learning. For most components of oral language proficiency, there is a declining trend compared with 2017 (PO) and 2018 (S(B)O). The listening proficiency of mainstream primary pupils has improved compared with 2017, but in special primary education listening proficiency has remained the same, and in special education it has declined slightly compared with 2018. However, compared with 2018, the 2023-2024 cohort in special education also includes former cluster 3 pupils. Speaking proficiency has declined in mainstream primary, special primary and special education, and conversational skills have also declined in mainstream primary and special education. In special primary education, these remained the same. For conversational skills, the proportion of pupils not yet meeting reference level 1F is the greatest (Figure 3.2.1b) (Inspectorate of Education, 2025g).

National assessment study on oral language proficiency

The 2023-2024 national assessment study on oral language proficiency (listening, speaking and conversational skills) provides insight into the oral language proficiency of mainstream primary Year 8 pupils, school leavers in special primary education, and school leavers in clusters 3 and 4 of special education (Inspectorate of Education, 2025g). Differences in development between school types may be the result of different comparison methods being used for the 3 school types.

Targeted attention to oral language decreases from Year 3 onwards

In primary education, teachers in Years 1 and 2 devote relatively substantial time to oral language and monitoring of oral language proficiency: approximately half of the scheduled language teaching time is dedicated to oral language proficiency. In Years 3 to 8, this is approximately one third. In the upper years, oral language education may more frequently be integrated into other language domains and/or other subject areas (see also Section 3.1.1). A majority of mainstream primary and special primary school leaders (66-78%) report that in the early years teachers structurally monitor oral language proficiency across the 3 sub-domains. In the remaining years, 24 to 41% do this. In special education Years 1 and 2, 12 to 13 of 20 school leaders report structurally monitoring learning progress. In Years 3 to 8, this applies to 8 to 9 of 21 school leaders (Inspectorate of Education, 2025g). As a result, many schools in the upper years lack visibility on the development of pupils' oral language proficiency.

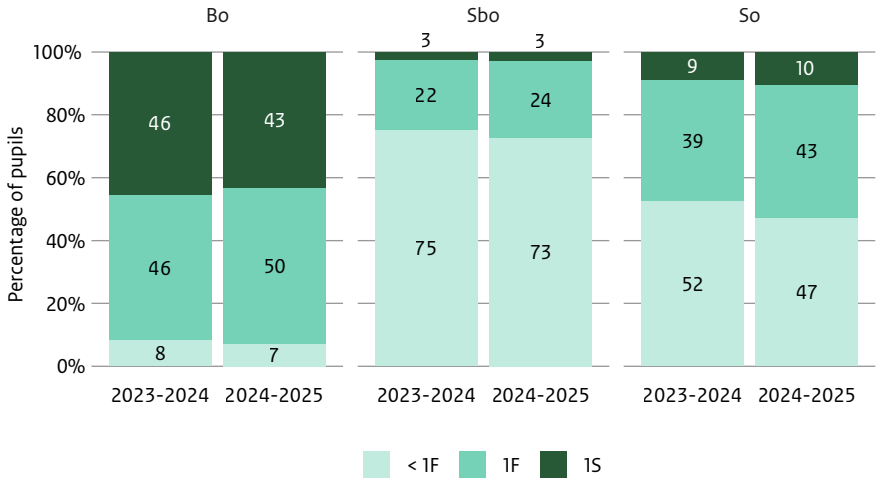
Opportunities to strengthen the oral language proficiency curriculum

More than half of school leaders in mainstream primary and special primary education find that governing boards have insufficient visibility on pupils' performance and the quality of oral language proficiency education at their school (Inspectorate of Education, 2025g). This may result in less direction being given towards achieving the reference goals for oral language. To improve pupils' oral language proficiency, for example through integration in other language subjects, professional development for school teams and clearer goals, specific instruction and structural monitoring are needed. The updated core objectives give greater attention to oral language proficiency. For schools, this is therefore a good moment to review their oral language proficiency curriculum and strengthen it further where necessary.

Numeracy/mathematics: no major changes

Using the reference levels as the basis, the level of mastery in numeracy/mathematics is lower than for literacy. This applies to mainstream primary, special primary and special education pupils who sat the continuation assessment (Figure 3.2.1c). Mainstream primary pupils performed comparably on the continuation assessment in 2024 and 2025. In special primary and special education, the proportion of pupils mastering reference levels 1F and 1S increased slightly (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i).

Figure 3.2.1c Percentage of mainstream primary, special primary and special education pupils by reference level achieved for mathematics in 2024 and 2025 (n 2025 mainstream primary=162,627; n 2025 special primary=5,459; n 2025 special education=3,050)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026i)

Numeracy/mathematics: stable over time

As with reading and use of language, pupils' proficiency scores in mathematics were reasonably stable between 2018-2019 and 2024-2025. It is notable that Year 3 has been performing increasingly well since 2022-2023, and that by the end of Year 7 the percentage of pupils not achieving the fundamental reference level 1F fell by 2 percentage points in 2024-2025 compared with 2018-2019, now standing at 25%. The percentage of pupils achieving 1S has risen by 3 percentage points to 26% (Van Vugt et al., 2025a).

3.2.2 Literacy and numeracy/mathematics in Secondary Education and VSO

Continuing decline in Dutch reading proficiency and vocabulary in the lower years of secondary education

Sufficient literacy is a prerequisite for participation in society and, for pupils, for being able to learn. Compared with the pre-COVID-19 period, there is still a substantial decline in reading proficiency and vocabulary among pupils at all test moments in the first 3 years of secondary education. Comparing proficiency scores in 2024-2025 with those from 2023-2024, the downward trend continues, particularly in VMBO. The results of some assessments are almost equal to those of 2023-2024. The decline is also visible in the mastery of reading proficiency reference levels: compared with pre-COVID-19, more pupils score below 1F and fewer pupils achieve 2F/3F, particularly in VMBO (Seton et al., 2025).

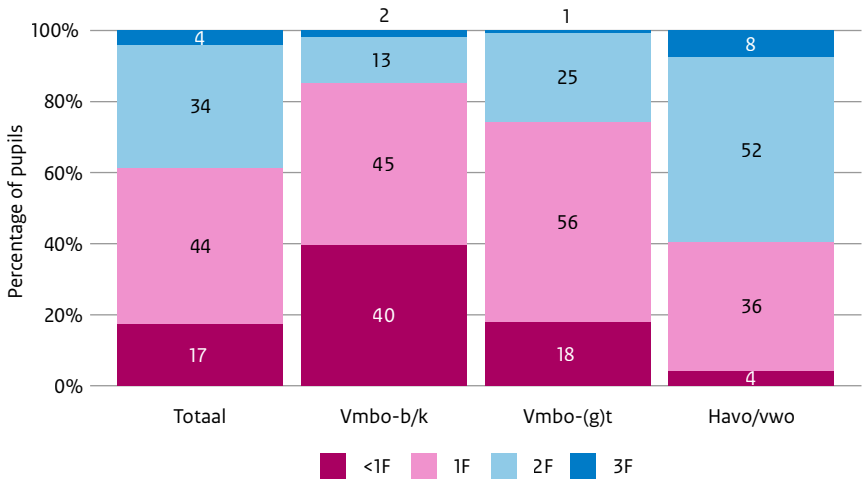
Writing proficiency: 83% of secondary education pupils in Year 2 achieve 1F or higher

All pupils must receive language education that helps them successfully navigate continued education and function in society. In Year 2 of secondary education, 83% of pupils master the fundamental reference level 1F for writing proficiency or higher, and 39% also master level 2F or higher (Figure 3.2.2a). Some 4% also master level 3F. A proportion of pupils, often from VMBO (17%), perform below the fundamental reference level 1F (Inspectorate of Education, 2025h). There is no separate reference level defined for Year 2 of secondary education. The performance of VMBO-(G)T and HAVO/VWO pupils is consistent with the expectation that pupils at this stage are progressing from reference level 1F towards 2F, or from 2F towards 3F (Ekens et al., 2021). The performance of VMBO-B/K pupils lags behind this expectation: 40% of pupils perform below reference level 1F.

Less pronounced decline in numeracy/mathematics proficiency in the lower years of secondary education

Numeracy/mathematics shows a negative trend since 2018-2019, as does Dutch reading proficiency and vocabulary. However, this decline is less pronounced than for Dutch language and is not equally strong across all year groups and school types. Compared with 2023-2024, the most pronounced further decline in 2024-2025 was in VMBO, while the proficiency of pupils at the start of the first year of secondary school was also lower. In VWO, and to a lesser extent HAVO, some recovery is taking place in Years 2 and 3 (Figure 3.2.2b) (Seton et al., 2025).

Figure 3.2.2a Distribution of reference levels achieved by school type (n VO total=2,989; n VMBO-B/K=744; n VMBO-(G)/T=767; n HAVO/VWO=1,408)*



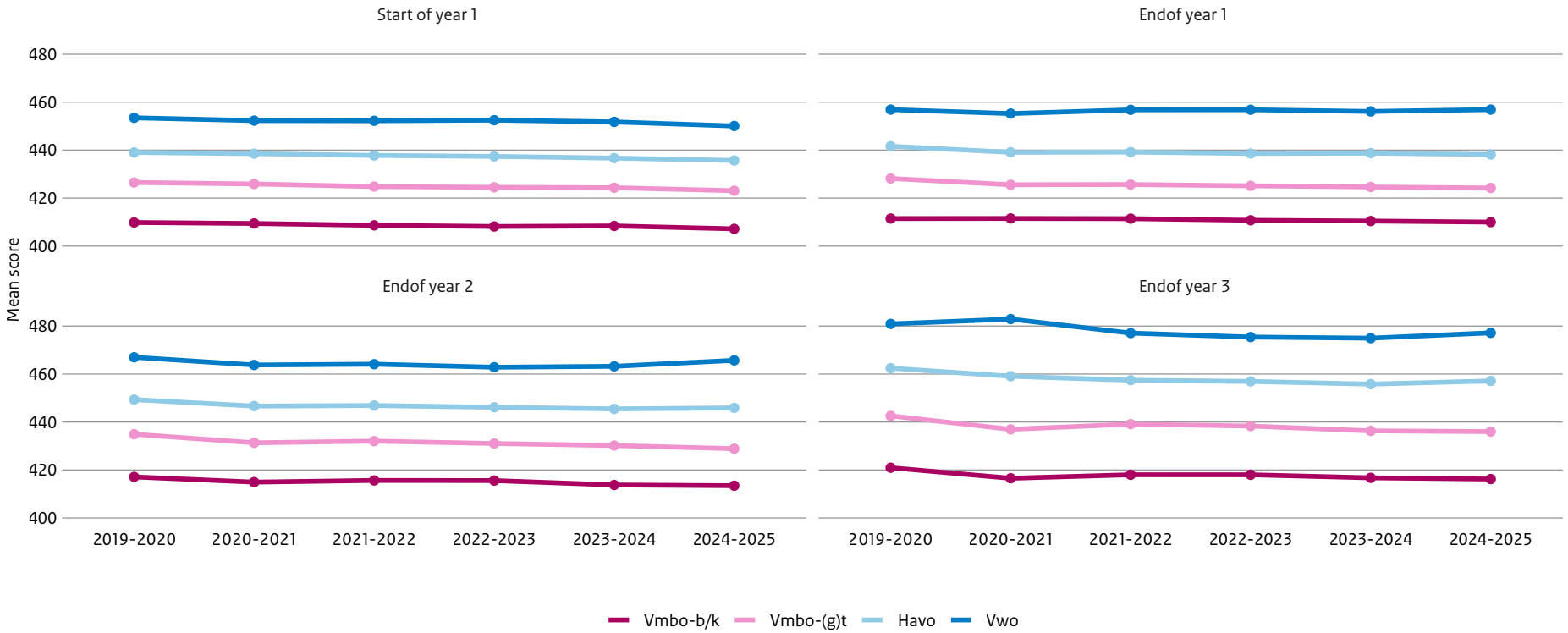
* Including pupils from practical education

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2025h)

Secondary education Dutch language examination results give a mixed picture

The average final grade for Dutch language ranges from a minimum of 6.4 for VMBO-K pupils to a maximum of 6.5 for VMBO-B and VWO pupils. VWO pupils achieve the highest school examination (SE) grades; VMBO-B pupils the highest central examination (CE) grades (DUO, 2025b). Due to adjustments in the marking standards following COVID-19, central examination grades (Examenblad.nl, 2025) and pupils' actual Dutch language proficiency are not directly comparable across years (Cito, 2025). VSO pupils who sat the Dutch state examination achieved an average CE grade of 6.3 (DUO, 2025e).

Figure 3.2.2b Average proficiency scores in mathematics in secondary education, by test moment



Source: Seton et al. (2025)

Secondary education mathematics examination results: from 6.2 to 6.7

The average final grade for mathematics at VWO was 6.7 in 2025; HAVO pupils achieved an average mathematics grade of 6.3. In VMBO, the average final grade was 6.3 (VMBO-(G)T), 6.2 (VMBO-K) and 6.5 (VMBO-B). In general, the proportion of unsatisfactory grades is higher in the CE than in the SE, but the differences in mathematics are less pronounced than in Dutch language. VMBO-K pupils most frequently received an unsatisfactory SE grade in 2025; VMBO-(G)T pupils most frequently received an unsatisfactory CE grade (DUO, 2025b).

Unsatisfactory CE mathematics result appears to affect success in the first year of MBO

An unsatisfactory result on the mathematics CE in VMBO appears to affect success in the first year of MBO. Approximately 15% of students with an unsatisfactory mathematics CE grade in 2021 were no longer at the MBO level at which they had started after one year. This percentage is approximately the same for students who did not sit a mathematics CE at VMBO. For comparison: 91% of pupils with a satisfactory mathematics CE grade and a satisfactory Dutch language CE grade were at least at their starting level one year after

beginning MBO. A satisfactory mathematics grade also appears to be a better predictor than a satisfactory Dutch language grade: students with an unsatisfactory Dutch language grade and a satisfactory mathematics grade were more often at or above their starting level after one year than students with a satisfactory Dutch language grade and an unsatisfactory mathematics grade (Inspectorate of Education, 2024d).

Considerable number of unsatisfactory grades on the numeracy school examination
With the abolition of the national numeracy test in 2020, numeracy was integrated into mathematics and is now assessed as part of the mathematics examination. Pupils without mathematics have therefore been required to sit a separate numeracy school examination (SE) since the 2020-2021 school year (VMBO at reference level 2F, HAVO at 3F). The result of this examination does not count towards the diploma result, but is recorded on an annex to the grade list.

The percentage of satisfactory grades on the numeracy SE at reference level 2F was 72% in VMBO-(G)T in 2025, 58% in VMBO-K and 42% in VMBO-B. The percentage of satisfactory grades on the HAVO school examination at reference level 3F was 54% (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i). The fact that the examination does not count towards the diploma may influence the result. It does mean that a large proportion of pupils leave secondary education with an unsatisfactory level of numeracy. VMBO and HAVO pupils who progress to an MBO programme receive a new opportunity there to develop sufficient numeracy: they receive education in numeracy and are required to sit an examination that counts towards the diploma. It is important that MBO programmes pay attention to the numeracy result during the intake process, so that students can receive additional support where needed.

3.2.3 Literacy and Numeracy in MBO

Mastery of Dutch reference level for VMBO pupils entering MBO is unknown
Pupils moving from VMBO to MBO are in principle expected to have mastered reference level 2F. This means that an MBO institution only needs to maintain the language level of MBO level 2 and 3 students and guide MBO level 4 students towards 3F. However, the results on the Dutch language CE at secondary school level do not allow us to reliably establish whether pupils have mastered the intended Dutch language reference levels by the end of secondary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b). In autumn 2026, we

will conduct a national assessment of reading proficiency in the first year of MBO. This will provide insight into the reading proficiency level at which students enter MBO.

More unsatisfactory grades for MBO level 2 and 3 graduates on the Dutch CE at reference level 2F

Students in MBO sit a CE for Dutch language covering reading and viewing and listening. Depending on the MBO level, this examination is at reference level 2F or 3F. The productive skills of writing, speaking and conversational skills are examined through an institution examination (IE). The final grade for Dutch language is a whole number and is the average of the CE grade and the IE grade.

The percentage of graduating MBO level 2 students with a satisfactory grade (5.5 or higher) on the Dutch language CE at reference level 2F declined in 2024-2025 compared with 2023-2024. Over a longer period (from 2018-2019 onwards), a declining trend is also evident. The same applies to graduating MBO level 3 students. In 2024-2025, 85.5% of graduating MBO level 2 students and 92.2% of MBO level 3 students achieved a satisfactory grade, compared with 86.2% and 92.4% respectively in 2023-2024. The trend towards more unsatisfactory grades is not visible in the IE: the percentage of satisfactory grades there remained almost unchanged at 98.3% (MBO level 2) and 97.8% (MBO level 3) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i).

Grade adjustment

Since 2015-2016, grade adjustment has been applied in MBO level 2 and in the entrance programme. This means that students in these programmes receive 1 additional grade point on their Dutch language results, for both the CE and the IE at reference level 2F. Entrance programme students receive this only if they sit the full Dutch language examination at reference level 2F. This measure was introduced in 2015 because VMBO-B pupils also received an additional grade point on their Dutch language CE, as achieving reference level 2F would otherwise never have been possible for some pupils, resulting in too many pupils and students failing to obtain their diploma (OCW, 2015). Only students achieving 6.5 or higher have therefore genuinely mastered reference level 2F. Students with a grade between 5.5 and 6.5 have not mastered 2F. When literacy requirements are introduced, grade adjustment will cease, as each MBO level will then have its own literacy requirements.

One third of MBO level 2 graduates do not achieve the Dutch language CE at reference level 2F

Because MBO level 2 students receive an additional grade point on their CE (and IE) result, they only achieve reference level 2F from a grade of 6.5 upwards. In 2024-2025, as a result, 32.4% of graduating MBO level 2 students left their programme without having achieved reference level 2F in Dutch (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i). These students left education or progressed within MBO with an insufficient level of literacy.

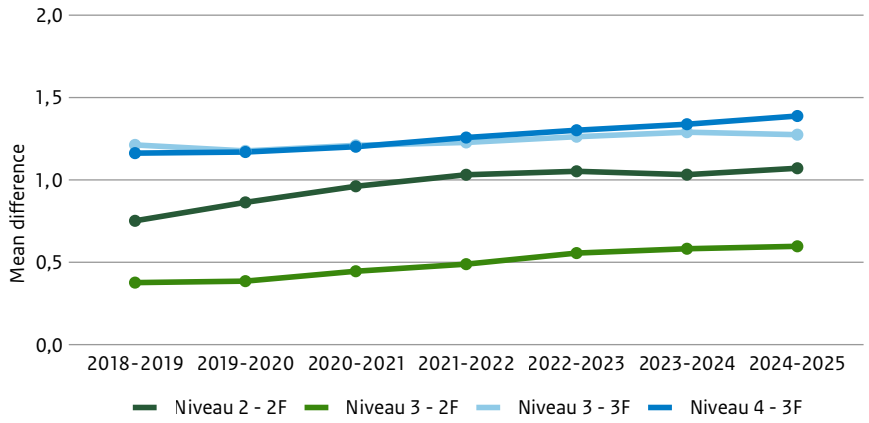
Graduation results for Dutch language CE at reference level 3F in MBO level 4 are declining

The percentage of satisfactory grades among graduating MBO level 4 students on the Dutch language CE at reference level 3F stood at 61.9% in 2024-2025, and this percentage has also declined in recent years: in 2023-2024 it was 63.8%, and in 2018-2019 it was still 76.4%. Of graduating MBO level 4 students in 2024-2025, 37.9% therefore had insufficient reading and/or viewing and listening proficiency at reference level 3F. The percentage of satisfactory grades (5.5) on the Dutch language IE at reference level 3F for graduating MBO level 4 students is stable over time: 96.7% achieved a satisfactory grade in 2024-2025, compared with almost the same figure of 96.9% in 2018-2019 (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i).

A large gap between average Dutch CE and IE grades

The IE grade of graduates for Dutch language is on average considerably higher than their CE grade. The average gap between the IE grade and the CE grade has moreover been growing for years (Figure 3.2.3a). In MBO level 4, the gap was the greatest in 2024-2025, at an average of 1.4 grade points (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i). For comparison: in secondary education, a full grade point difference between the SE and CE is considered a very large difference. We again call on governing boards and programmes to examine how this can be the case. It also requires alertness from examination boards, who can investigate the causes and subsequently draw up improvement plans to reduce the gap between the IE and CE grades.

Figure 3.2.3a Average difference between CE and IE grades for Dutch language in MBO

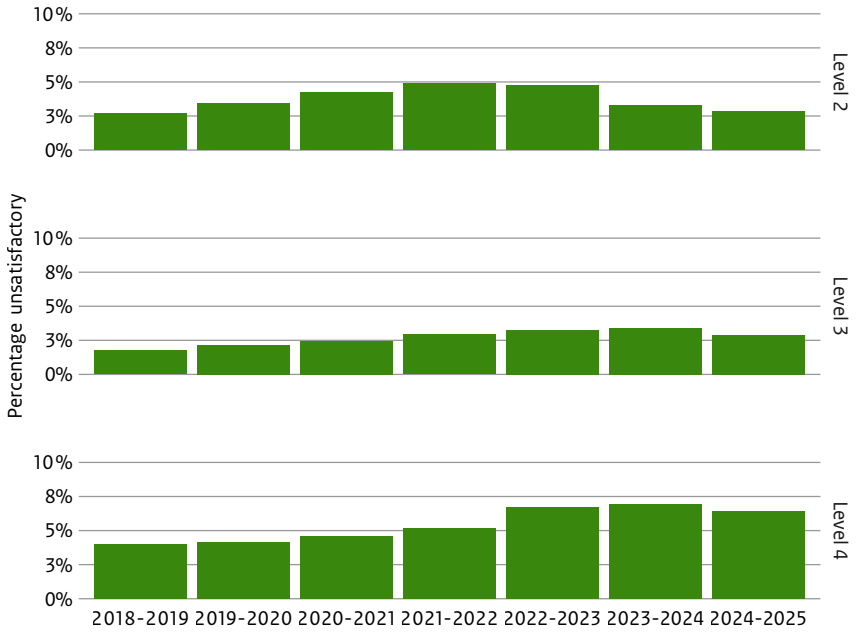


Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026i)

Fewer students achieved a 5 for Dutch language on their diploma

Students do not need to achieve the reference level on the CE in order to obtain a diploma, as a CE result may be offset by the IE result. In addition, depending on the applicable pass/fail regulations, the rounded grade may be a 5, making it possible to achieve an unsatisfactory grade on both the IE and the CE. The percentage of MBO level 2 students receiving a grade of 5 for Dutch language on their diploma declined in recent years (Figure 3.2.3b). In 2024-2025, this percentage also declined among graduating MBO level 3 and MBO level 4 students (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i). This may be a consequence of the pass/fail regulations for students who, from the 2022 cohort onwards, must meet the numeracy examination requirement.

Figure 3.2.3b Percentage of graduates receiving a grade of 5 for the generic Dutch language examination in the years 2018-2019 to 2024-2025



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026i)

Mastery of the reference level Dutch in MBO: a distorted picture

A diploma is valuable to a student, but not if it comes with an insufficient level of language proficiency. The Dutch language examination system in MBO is not really suitable for providing a judgement on mastery of the reference level. First, students can offset their CE Dutch language result with their IE result, and an unsatisfactory final result (5) for Dutch language can be offset by a satisfactory grade for numeracy (and English at level 4). Moreover, students sit the examination at different points during their programme and there is no statutory limit on the number of examination attempts. We also do not conduct structural supervision of the quality of institution examinations or of the gap

between CE and IE results. Many programmes do purchase institution examinations from a validated supplier, but we have no supervisory role in relation to this. Furthermore, grade adjustment applies to MBO level 2 students, who receive 1 additional grade point on their Dutch language results in both the CE and the IE. Students may also apply for an exemption when progressing from MBO level 2 to MBO level 3. We therefore ask examination boards to scrutinise these applications carefully. Has the student genuinely achieved a satisfactory result at the Dutch language reference level? An examination board is not obliged to grant the exemption.

Increasing number of students with a numeracy result on their diploma

Students who begin the first year of an MBO programme from the 2022 cohort onwards sit an IE for numeracy. The proportion of graduates with a numeracy examination result, in addition to a Dutch language examination result, on their diploma increased further in 2024-2025. Of graduating MBO level 2 students, 96.0% now have a numeracy result; 78.7% of MBO level 3 graduates and 62.4% of MBO level 4 graduates (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i).

Mastery of numeracy at the new levels

MBO numeracy levels 2, 3 and 4 replace reference levels 2F and 3F and stem from the so-called new numeracy requirements (OCW, 2022). The reference levels were taken as the starting point, but in practice MBO numeracy levels and the reference levels are not easily interchangeable. The cross-sector continuity of reference levels is thereby abandoned, and it is no longer transparent whether MBO students have mastered reference level 2F or 3F by the end of their programme.

The substantive requirements are the same for all MBO programmes, but the manner of examination may differ. There is no longer a CE, which means the role of the College for Tests and Examinations and the associated quality assurance disappears. A cooperative exists through which institutions can purchase numeracy examinations, and most programmes use these. This does not mean, however, that the IE grade on the diploma is solely based on these examinations, or that, where it is, the conditions under which the examination was administered were equivalent. An examination regulation should provide clarity on this point.

3.3 Citizenship

The importance of promoting citizenship

Schools in primary and secondary education are required to actively promote active citizenship and social cohesion. A robust and resilient society that is equal to the pressures it increasingly faces does not arise of its own accord, and depends on citizens with democratic values. Schools can make an important contribution to promoting these values. For full participation in work and society, social and civic skills are also indispensable at the individual level.

The place of citizenship in the curriculum in primary education, secondary education and special education

Almost all school leaders in primary, secondary and special education report integrating civic skills and values education into other subject areas. In primary education, this often takes the form of thematic subjects such as world orientation. Project weeks, excursions and guest lessons are also used. Secondary education schools also make use of these last 3, and frequently also mention the social internship.

Outcome-focused working to fulfil the citizenship mandate

Through an outcome-focused approach, schools can fulfil the citizenship mandate. To do so, they must formulate concretely what knowledge, attitudes and skills pupils must develop, organise their education in a planned way, and map the citizenship skills pupils possess. Monitoring of citizenship skills is an important component of this. Half of primary and secondary school leaders report mapping these skills for all or some of their pupils. School leaders of special education schools report that this occurs somewhat more frequently at their schools (70-80%). Schools use standardised measurement instruments, conversations with pupils, portfolios or pupil participation in projects for this purpose (Inspectorate of Education, 2026i).

School leaders generally satisfied, but see need for further development

When asked about the quality of education at their own school, 1 in 3 school leaders reports being sufficiently or very satisfied. More than half of school leaders say they are satisfied, but are also working on the further development of their education.

Depending on the type of education, 10-20% of school leaders report not being satisfied and that considerable improvement is still needed. When asked about the possibilities for delivering civic skills and values education as planned, school leaders identify the availability of external support and available time as areas for attention (Table 3.3a). Satisfaction with other factors, such as expertise, direction within the school, support within the school or insight into the statutory requirements, is clearly higher.

Table 3.3a Assessment by school leaders in PO, (V)SO and VO of the possibilities for delivering civic skills and values education as planned (in percentages, n PO=153, n (V)SO=173 and n VO=231)

	(Somewhat) unsatisfactory	Neutral	(Somewhat) Satisfactory	Not applicable
Expertise within the school to develop this education (further)	4	9	87	0
Time available to develop this education (further)	23	13	64	0
Support within the school to develop this education (further)	6	11	83	0
Guidance within the school to develop this education (further)	3	6	91	0
Facilities available within the school to develop this education (further)	9	11	80	0
Insight into how we as a school wish to shape civic skills and values education	5	7	88	0
Insight into what the law expects of us as a school	9	9	82	0
External support in developing/ shaping this education	13	23	48	16

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026i)

Remedial action orders for the absence of goal-oriented, coherent and recognisable civic skills and values education

The Inspectorate assesses the quality of civic skills and values education on the basis of the statutory requirements. Where schools do not meet the statutory requirements, the Inspectorate issues a remedial action order. During randomised sample inspections in

2023-2024 and 2024-2025, 53% of primary schools, 49% of special education schools and 65% of secondary school departments received a remedial action order for citizenship (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). The remedial action orders show which areas require development. In recent years, the Inspectorate has focused primarily on the conditions for achieving good education: education that is goal-oriented and coherent, recognisably embedded in practice, aligned with the pupil population, and in which at least the minimum statutory content requirements (fundamental values, social and civic skills) are visible. In particular, the requirements of being goal-oriented and coherent, and alignment with the pupil population, frequently fall short. Both of the first two requirements are found to be lacking at all schools where a remedial action order was issued. The requirements relating to content, such as attention to promoting fundamental values, are generally met.

Schools struggle to align content and approach with learning objectives

Schools are posing increasingly complex questions to the National Citizenship Education Centre (Expertisepunt Burgerschap) for clarification or support, for example relating to the aspects of goal-orientation and coherence and the formulation of policy plans. Schools have difficulty formulating concrete learning objectives and linking learning objectives to learning activities. What is needed is a well-considered curriculum in which content and approach are aligned with one another and which flows from what the school aims to achieve. This is a fundamental step and the foundation of effective education. In the evaluation of the citizenship legislation (Day et al., 2026), schools indicate that they do have sufficient insight into the statutory requirements, but do not always see the connection between the requirements and our supervision on the presence of concrete learning objectives and coherence. Our concern that schools continue to be confined to activity-driven education, in which citizenship certainly receives attention but a goal-oriented and well-considered approach does not genuinely come about, therefore remains unchanged. This is all the more striking when one considers that the aspects experienced as more complex, such as a sound picture of pupils' citizenship skills, have not yet been included in the evaluation.

Invest in school development

To achieve quality improvement, strengthening of school support is needed, encompassing both the strengthening of development capacity within schools and the availability of high-quality support that can be drawn upon for extended periods where necessary. It also seems advisable to consider whether the development work required always needs to be carried out at individual school level, as this places significant demands on schools' capacity for educational development. From the perspective of both efficiency and avoiding overburdening the capacity of many schools, centralised development in certain areas is worth considering.

3.4 Digital Literacy

The importance of digital literacy

Digital knowledge and skills are important for functioning effectively in the digital society and contribute to equal opportunities for pupils and students. Digital literacy is becoming increasingly important and is a basic skill. In 2023, Dutch secondary education pupils in Year 2 performed below the international average in computer and information literacy. Dutch pupils achieved an average of level 1; level 2 is regarded as the basic level for effective participation in a digital society. Dutch pupils therefore possessed, on average, only the elementary skills needed to work with computers and to find, evaluate and produce digital information (Krepel et al., 2024).

Supervision from 2027

Digital literacy encompasses knowledge of digital technology and digital media and the skills to use them. It also encompasses the interplay between digital technology, digital media, people and society, and the ability as an individual to adapt to the digitalised world and to maintain control over it (SLO, 2025). In 2025, the SLO produced final draft core objectives for digital literacy and functional core objectives for digital literacy (draft). The core objectives for digital literacy are divided into 3 domains: the digitalised world, designing and creating, and practical knowledge and skills. These domains are interconnected. Schools now have the task of reflecting on their curriculum, leading to an aligned curriculum offering. From August 2027, the core objectives for digital literacy will be legally in force. From that point, the Inspectorate will also supervise them, initially in a supportive role and from 2031 also in an enforcement role.

CHAPTER 4

School Careers

Key points

An important task for education is to enable pupils and students to follow a school career that matches their abilities and talents, as well as the needs of the labour market. This means, among other things, that there must be no barriers regarding the progression at transition points and the continuity within (inclusive) education.

Regional disparities appear early in school careers
In 2024, pre-school education reached 76% of toddlers whom municipalities consider to be at risk of educational disadvantage. In approximately two thirds of municipalities, the reach percentage was above this national average, meaning that, on average, more toddlers attend pre-school education there. In highly urbanised and sparsely urbanised municipalities, said reach is lower. This results in regional disparities concerning participation in pre-school education.

At the end of primary school, continuation assessments (doorstroomtoets) were again administered in 2024-2025. Schools of which fewer pupils achieved the target levels for literacy and numeracy in 2023-2024 sometimes switched to a different assessment tool often leading to better results. In 2024-2025, fewer pupils received a revised recommendation for secondary education following the results of the continuation assessment. In highly urbanised areas such as the Randstad, schools revise recommendations more often based on the received advice from the assessment outcome rather than schools in less urbanised areas. Outside the Randstad, it more frequently occurs that pupils are eligible for a revised recommendation but do not actually receive one.

Regional disparities carry through into school careers
Disparities in the recommendations issued by primary schools are not automatically corrected in secondary education but carry through into pupils' position in Year 3. Added to this, pupils in the north and east of the country in Year 3 are relatively more often placed at the lower level of their dual placement recommendation, and less often at the upper level. Stacking qualifications (progressing to a higher secondary school type after obtaining a diploma) also occurs more often in the Randstad than elsewhere, among pupils from socioeconomically stronger neighbourhoods and at schools offering a broader range of school levels. As a result of these regional disparities, pupils with similar capabilities in the Randstad often follow a different school career than pupils elsewhere in the country.

More early school-leavers in secondary education
In vocational education(MBO), the number of early school leavers has been declining for 2 years, standing at almost 22,500 in 2023-2024. In secondary education, however, the number of early school leavers has risen both in absolute and relative terms. This concerns primarily pupils in the lower years and in the upper years of VMBO. In 2023-2024, 2,360 pupils left the lower years of secondary education early, and over 2,100 left from the upper years of VMBO. An increasing number of pupils are dropping out at a young age, which can have serious consequences for their later opportunities in life.

Rising number of newcomers in special primary education and special education
The intake of newcomers in mainstream primary and secondary education has declined but has risen in special primary education and special (secondary) education. The question is whether specialist education better aligns with the educational needs of newcomers, or whether mainstream education does not feel sufficiently equipped to tailor its provision to newcomers. The lodging of children in emergency asylum accommodation is, given the conditions there, undesirable. It leads to frequent additional moves with harmful consequences for access to education, safety, mental health, continuity of care and the right to an uninterrupted process of development.

Entrance programme offers opportunities to vulnerable groups within education
In 2024-2025, more students were enrolled in the MBO entrance programme than in 2015-2016. Compared to 10 years ago, more students with a migration background and more newcomers are entering. Pupils who leave VMBO without a diploma and progress to MBO also end up in the entrance programme to a considerable extent. All in all, the

entrance programme serves a diverse and changed target group, requiring personalised approaches from programmes and teachers. When pupils progress from VMBO to MBO, good guidance from both VMBO and MBO is needed to make this transition successful. The entrance programme is a stepping stone to a subsequent programme in MBO and thereby offers opportunities to more vulnerable groups. However, MBO level 2 graduates who previously completed the entrance programme are found to have worse labour market outcomes than MBO level 2 graduates with a different prior education, despite holding the same diploma.

Different school career routes carry through to the labour market

Depending on their previous school career, people with the same diploma show differences in labour market outcomes. Those with a more vulnerable position and those who have stacked more qualifications have less favourable labour market outcomes than others. Not only MBO level 2 graduates with the entrance programme as prior education have less favourable labour market outcomes, but also MBO level 3 graduates with VMBO-B as prior education: they less frequently have a (full-time) job and more frequently have a lower hourly wage. Among graduates of a WO master's programme, having an HBO bachelor's degree as prior education is associated with less favourable labour market outcomes than having a different prior qualification. Young people without a basic qualification are also in a weaker position on the labour market compared with those who have obtained a basic qualification at MBO level 2 or 3: they less frequently have a (full-time) job, more frequently receive a benefit, and their hourly wage is lower than that of people who have completed an MBO level 2 or 3 programme. In light of labour market outcomes, obtaining a diploma therefore matters. Beyond obtaining a diploma, the route to a diploma also makes a difference.

Recommendations

In 2025, the Inspectorate made a number of recommendations regarding school careers, some of which we repeat here. Municipalities must continue to work towards a sufficient supply of pre-school education and to reach parents, so that all children get a promising start at an early age. The recommendation that the government must embed the right to high-quality education for newcomers, including good progression to mainstream and continued education, remains equally valid. It continues to be important that less advantaged groups receive good support, and we wish to reiterate that message:

- Schools and governing boards: consider removing barriers to enrolment and progression. Be aware of unconscious bias and regional disparities and act on this to facilitate equal opportunities for all pupils. Clear differences between regions are still visible with regard to the coverage of pre-school provision, school recommendations, and selection and placement in continued education.

- Schools, educational programmes and governing boards: continue to work together across sectors to give vulnerable groups the best possible opportunities. Align education and guidance with specific educational needs, with a view to promising school careers. This applies in particular to target preschoolers, early school leavers, new entrants to MBO, and pupils in special education and practical education (PRO).

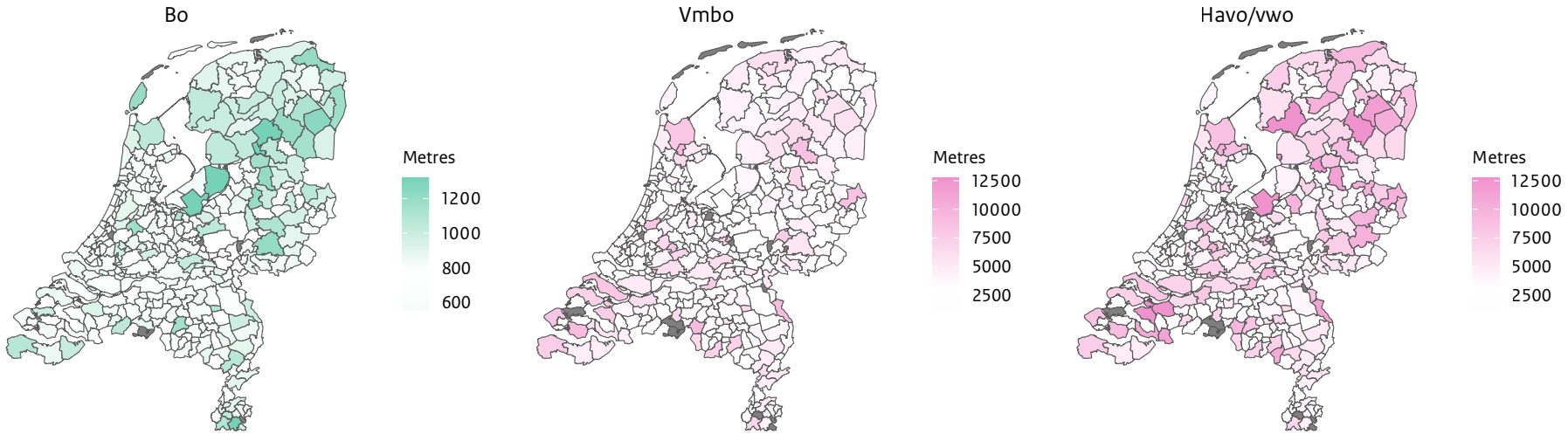
4.1 Enrolment, Progression and Departure

A note on language
Providing equal opportunities to pupils and students sometimes requires unequal approaches. Inherent in this is the language associated with unequal opportunities, such as describing a 'higher' or 'lower' level. As inspectorate, we are ultimately aware of the discourse around stigmatising language. At the same time, we wish to use appropriate terminology that does not cause confusion. This means we sometimes need to use terms from legislation and the assessment framework (for example, high/low), professional terminology (for example, practical/academic) or related terms (lower/upper) in order to avoid ambiguity.

4.1.1 *Regional Disparities in Provision*

Regional disparities in accessibility of primary and secondary education
The accessibility of educational provisions varies by region. In 2025, we already noted that some inter-institutional partnerships for inclusive education have a full range of special education schools. At other partnerships, the range is less complete, meaning pupils must attend schools in other regions and travel greater distances to school (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b). In mainstream primary and secondary education too, travel distances to school are greater in some regions than in others (Figure 4.1.1a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026o). These disparities mean that pupils in some regions structurally have less access to (inclusive) education.

Figure 4.1.1a Distance in metres to the nearest mainstream primary, VMBO and HAVO/VWO school, by region



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026o)

4.1.2 Pre-school and Early Childhood Education

Disparities between municipalities in the reach and provision of pre-school places
Good and accessible pre-school education is needed for children's language development and individual needs. The reach of pre-school education (that is, the extent to which toddlers considered by municipalities to be at risk of educational disadvantage are reached) was 76% in 2024. Moderately urbanised municipalities have the highest average reach (80%). Approximately two thirds of municipalities (64%) have a reach percentage above the national average. Highly urbanised (74%) and sparsely urbanised municipalities (75%) are below the national average. Two thirds of municipalities have a sufficient supply of pre-school places. Municipalities generally have legitimate reasons for making fewer pre-school places available than the number of target preschoolers: for example, because they take into account the non-reach in their municipality. However, municipalities also report that too few providers in their area offer pre-school education, or that they themselves have insufficient financial resources to provide enough pre-school places (Inspectorate of Education, 2025d).

4.1.3 The Continuation Assessment and Recommendations in Primary Education

Switching continuation assessment often led to better results
In 2025, continuation assessments were administered for the second time in primary and special education. More than 7% of schools administered a different assessment than in 2024. Schools where fewer pupils achieved reference levels 1S/2F in 2023-2024 were more likely to switch to a different assessment. They often subsequently achieved better results in 2024-2025, though this was not the case for all schools that switched (CvTE, 2025).

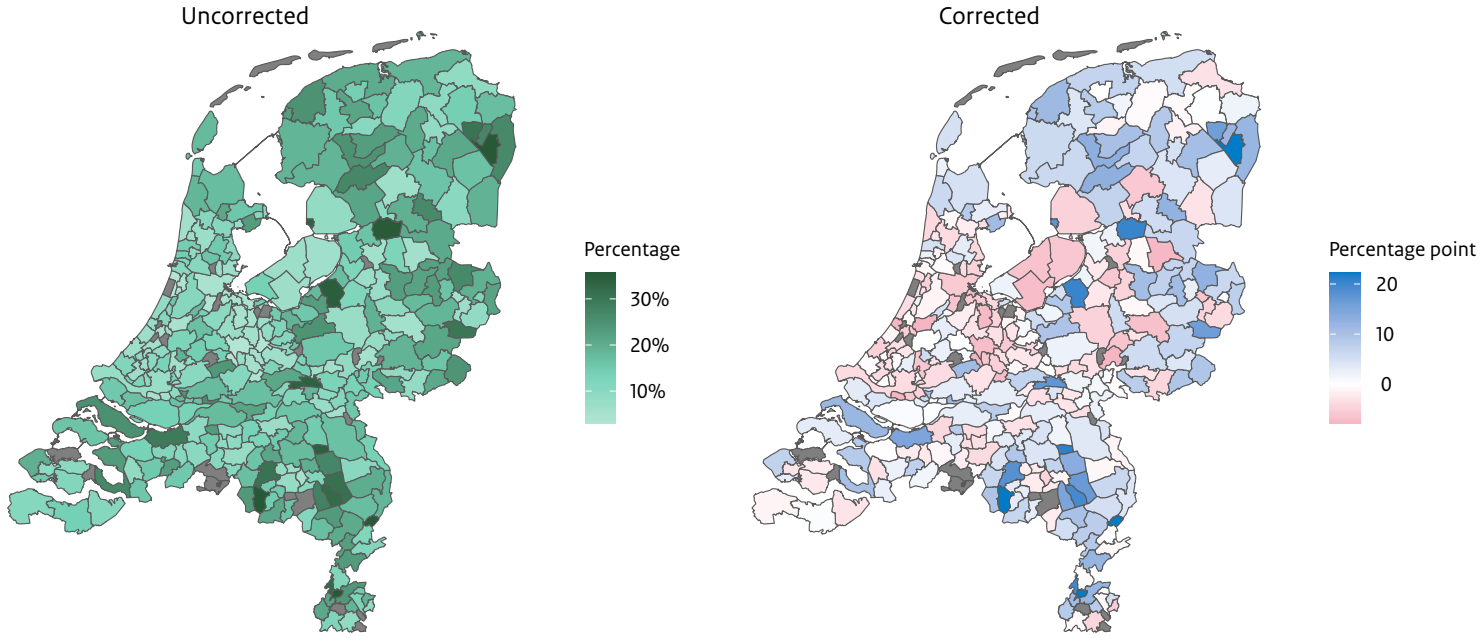
Distribution of recommendations stable
In 2025, primary school pupils received an academic secondary school recommendation somewhat more frequently and a practical provisional one somewhat less frequently when compared to 2024. Teachers also gave a dual placement recommendation more often, which is a recommendation covering 2 school types. Fewer school recommendations were revised than in 2024. Fewer pupils were eligible for a revised school recommendation following the continuation assessment, which is probably related to the higher proportion of dual placement recommendations. Ultimately, the final recommendations in 2025 are virtually the same as in 2024 (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l).

Socio-economic background and gender carry through into recommendations
Primary school pupils whose recommendation was not revised despite being eligible for revision relatively often live in neighbourhoods with a lower average socio-economic status, based on prosperity, level of education and recent employment history. These pupils also relatively often live in neighbourhoods with fewer residents with a migration background. At schools with few pupils with a migration background, there may be less attention to aspirational recommendations. Reformed (Protestant) schools most frequently issue a final recommendation that was not revised despite pupils being eligible for this (Inspectorate of Education, 2026o).

Since 2018, girls, on average, receive a provisional HAVO or VWO recommendation less frequently than boys. Yet on the end-of-primary and continuation assessments, they perform slightly better. The difference between boys and girls in the likelihood of receiving a (provisional) HAVO or VWO recommendation is smaller when pupils in special primary and special education are also taken into account, as the proportion of boys in those settings is higher (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l).

Schools in the Randstad issue the most aspirational recommendations
Primary school pupils in the Randstad receive more aspirational recommendations than comparable pupils in the north and east of the country. In the 2023-2024 school year, schools in highly urbanised areas such as the Randstad revised an average of 88% of recommendations that were eligible for revision. In non-urbanised to sparsely urbanised areas, this figure was 68%. In 2022-2023, these percentages were 42% and 23% respectively (DUO, 2025c). In the 2024-2025 school year too, this pattern holds for pupils who left primary education with a final recommendation that was not revised despite being eligible (Figure 4.1.3a). In regions outside the Randstad, it more frequently occurs, even after the introduction of the Primary Education Continuation Assessment Act, that pupils are eligible for a revised school recommendation, but this does not actually take place. This difference persists even when taking into account pupils' background characteristics, such as parents' level of education, household income and migration background (Inspectorate of Education, 2026o). The differences may be rooted in regional cultural differences.

Figure 4.1.3a Percentage of pupils per region in 2024-2025 eligible for a revised school recommendation but who did not receive one (left: uncorrected; right: corrected)**



*The right-hand map shows how much the percentages deviate from what we would expect based on pupils' background characteristics in a municipality.
**Municipalities with fewer than 100 Year 8 pupils or fewer than 3 primary schools have been excluded.
Source: Inspectorate of Education, eigen bewerkingen op basis van CBS-microdata (2026o)

4.1.4 *Placement in Secondary Education and Stacking Qualifications*

Regional disparities in placement in Year 3

Regional disparities in recommendations carry through into pupils' position in Year 3 of secondary education. Pupils in the north and east of the country more often follow the lower school type of their dual placement recommendation in Year 3, and less often the upper school type. This means that pupils in the north and east with, for example, a VMBO-(G)T/HAVO dual placement recommendation more often end up in VMBO-(G)T, while pupils with the same dual placement recommendation in the Randstad more often go to HAVO. In the Randstad, relatively few pupils in Year 3 are placed at least one full school type below their dual placement recommendation (for example in VMBO-K with a VMBO-(G)T/HAVO recommendation), and relatively many are placed at least one full school type above it (for example in VWO with a VMBO-(G)T/HAVO recommendation) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026o).

Regional disparities in recommendations persist in secondary education

Regional disparities in recommendations do not disappear over time in secondary education. In some regions, a larger proportion of Year 8 pupils received a school

recommendation that was not revised despite being eligible for revision (for example a single VMBO-(G)T recommendation despite a VMBO-(G)T/HAVO dual placement recommendation). In those regions, 3 years later, a larger proportion of pupils are also educated at maximum the lower school type of their dual placement recommendation (Inspectorate of Education, 2026o). This may be partly due to the difficulty pupils face in changing school type once placed in a particular class, whether because they wish to stay with their friends or because of strict conditions for changing between school types.

Mixed-ability transition classes beneficial for disadvantaged pupils and late developers

In 2025, we noted that some pupils benefit from early selection, but that for example VMBO-T and HAVO pupils where there is doubt about the appropriate school type benefit from a deferred selection moment in the form of a mixed-ability transition class. Early selection is particularly disadvantageous for pupils from less advantaged backgrounds and late developers, who can specifically benefit from a delayed transition to a single school type. More research should therefore be carried out into the coexistence of mixed-ability and streamed transition classes within a single school. This would make it easier for pupils to switch to a more appropriate school type at a later stage. In any case, it is important that schools continue to monitor accessibility and progression opportunities for all pupils (Inspectorate of Education, 2024a).

Stacking of qualifications is declining

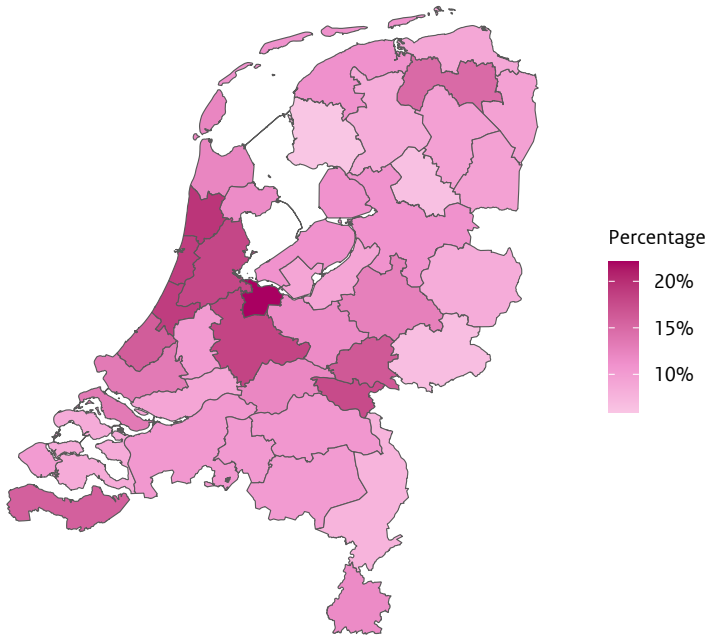
Schools are in principle not permitted to refuse pupils with a VMBO-(G)T or HAVO diploma from participating in HAVO or VWO respectively, provided they meet the statutory conditions. Following the introduction of this statutory right of progression, the percentage of stackers reached a peak in 2022. Since then, the percentage of stackers has declined (OCW, 2026).

Stacking occurs more often in the Randstad, in more advantaged neighbourhoods and at broader schools

Pupils in the Randstad make the most use of the possibility of stacking qualifications. In the Gooi- and Vecht region, for example, over 20% of VMBO-(G)T graduates progress to HAVO, while in some regions in the north and east of the country this figure is less than 10% (Figure 4.1.4a). Progression from HAVO graduates to VWO also occurs most frequently in the Gooi- and Vecht region. Stackers from VMBO-(G)T more often live

in neighbourhoods with a higher socio-economic status, even when considering the characteristics of the pupils themselves. They also more often, like stackers from HAVO, live in neighbourhoods where the majority of residents have a European background. VMBO-(G)T graduates stack more often when their school also has a HAVO department (Inspectorate of Education, 20260), suggesting that the threshold is lower for pupils when they can stack qualifications without changing schools.

Figure 4.1.4a Percentage of VMBO-(G)T graduates in 2023-2024 who progressed to HAVO, by region



Source: Inspectorate of Education (20260)

4.1.5 Progression to MBO and Higher Education

More progression from secondary education to MBO and higher education

In 2024, over 105,000 secondary education pupils progressed to MBO, over 8,000 more than in 2023. Until 2023, the number of secondary education pupils progressing to MBO declined annually. In 2023 this number rose slightly, and in 2024 there was a notable increase, in both qualified and unqualified progression. More secondary education pupils also progressed to higher education in 2024 than in 2023, an increase of approximately 3,000 pupils. The total number of students in MBO and higher education did, however, decline in 2024 compared with a year earlier, due to demographic developments (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l).

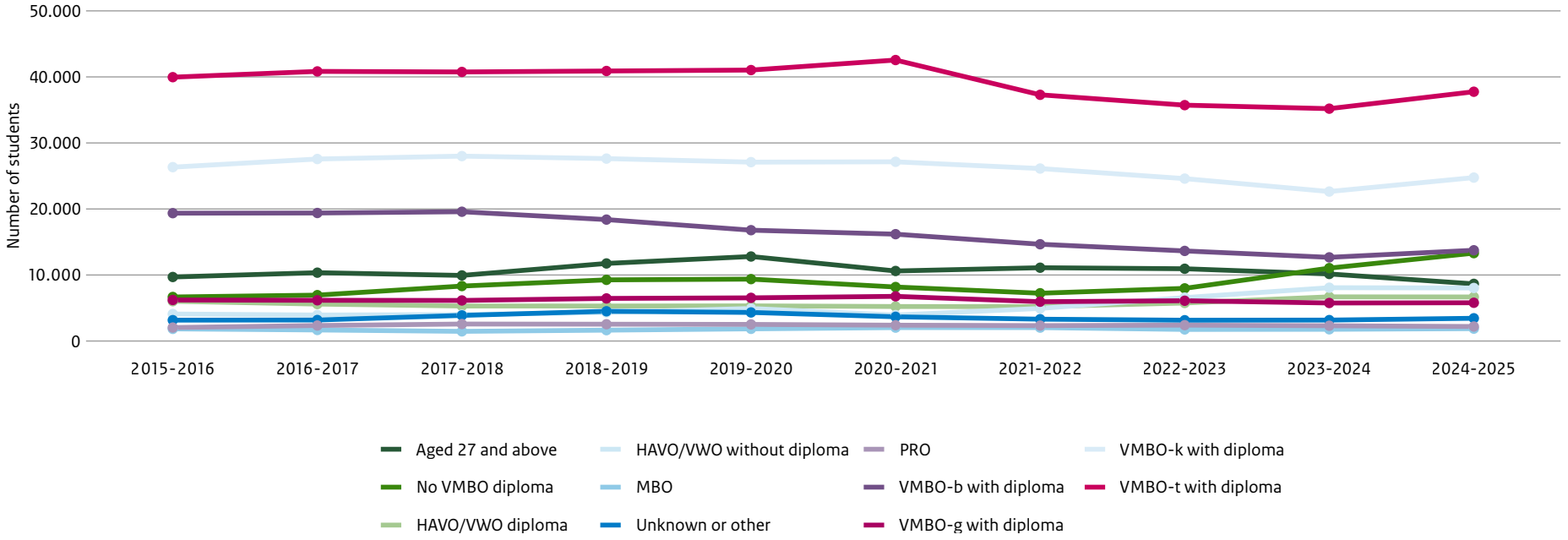
Increasing enrolment in MBO without a secondary education diploma

A proportion of new enrolments in MBO consists of pupils from VMBO without a diploma. In 2024-2025, this share rose to 10.5%, compared with 5.3% in 2015-2016. The share of HAVO and VWO pupils without a diploma in new enrolments also rose from 3.3% in 2015-2016 to 6.4% now (Figure 4.1.5a). The largest proportion of students without a VMBO diploma enrol in the entrance programme or an MBO level 2 programme. Students without a HAVO or VWO diploma most often enrol in an MBO level 4 programme (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l). The fact that almost 17% of new enrolments in MBO consists of pupils who left secondary education without a diploma calls for appropriate guidance from both secondary education and MBO.

Entrance programme is growing and attracting different students

In 2024-2025, 11.4% of new enrolments started in the entrance programme, compared with 7.2% in 2015-2016. In the school-based pathway (BOL) entrance programme, 1 in 5 students has no migration background, compared with 1 in 3 in 2015-2016. Almost half of new enrolments consists of students with a migration background from outside Europe. In the work-based pathway (BBL) entrance programme, half of students have no migration background. In 2024-2025, the share of students of European origin rose in both pathways, probably due to the influx of Ukrainian students. The share of newcomers in the BOL entrance programme has risen and now stands at 42.8% (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l), while in the BBL entrance programme it fluctuates year to year. The target group is changing, calling for personalised approaches: newcomers need greater emphasis on Dutch language, while students without a VMBO diploma may require different pedagogical support and guidance.

Figure 4.1.5a New enrolments in MBO by prior education (in percentages)



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026l)

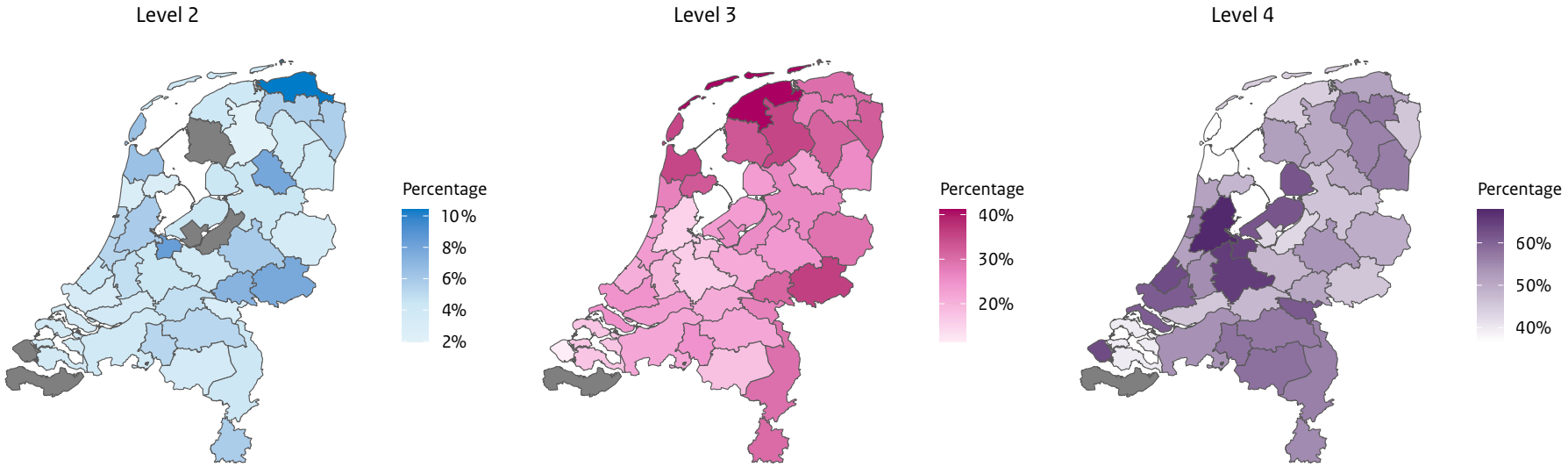
Increasing progression from MBO level 2 to MBO level 4

The entrance programme primarily attracts students who are new to MBO. MBO level 2, 3 and 4 programmes are different in this respect. Approximately one quarter (MBO level 2) to almost half (MBO level 4) of students in BBL programmes are not new to MBO: these are people who are retraining or upskilling after previously completing MBO education. Students also progress directly from another MBO level into BBL programmes. Compared with 2015-2016, direct enrolment in BOL programmes has increased in MBO level 2 from the entrance programme and in MBO level 4 from MBO level 2 (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l). Although students have the right to progress from MBO level 2 to MBO level 4, it is important for institutions to recognise that these students do not always have a command of Dutch language reference level 2F (see Chapter 3).

Regional disparities in progression to MBO BOL

Regional disparities also exist in the progression of secondary education graduates to different types of continued education. In the Randstad, VMBO-K graduates more often than in other regions progress to an MBO level 4 programme in the BOL pathway. In the north and east of the country, these pupils more often go to an MBO level 3 or sometimes an MBO level 2 programme (Figure 4.1.5b). VMBO-(G)T graduates in certain rural regions, particularly the Oosterschelde region and the Achterhoek, also relatively often progress to an MBO level 2 or 3 programme. The proportion of HAVO Year 4 pupils without a diploma who progress to MBO varies by region from 6 to 14%, occurring most frequently in the Oosterschelde region and in Flevoland (Inspectorate of Education, 2026o).

Figure 4.1.5b Percentage of VMBO-K graduates in 2023-2024 who progressed to an MBO level 2, 3 or 4 BOL programme, by region*



* Regions with fewer than 100 VMBO-K graduates, fewer than 3 VMBO-K schools or fewer than 10 VMBO-K progressors have been excluded.
Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026)

More progression to BBL in certain regions

In some more rural regions, VMBO graduates relatively often opt for a BBL programme (Figure 4.1.5c) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026). This may be related to the many family businesses in these regions, making it easier for students to start working immediately. Travel distances for students also play a role, and in certain regions there is high demand for staff in some sectors, such as hospitality and tourism in Zeeland.

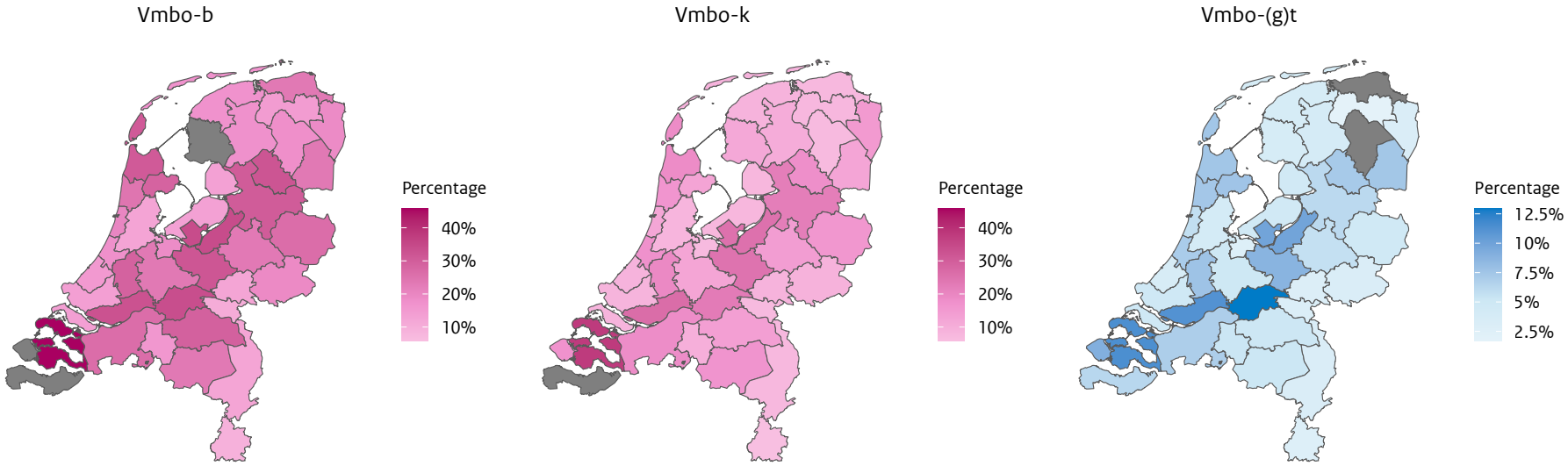
Regional disparities in progression to HBO and WO

The great majority of HAVO graduates go on to HBO (with or without a gap year), and most VWO graduates go on to WO. A small proportion of HAVO graduates go to MBO. This occurs relatively often in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and East Groningen. In Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and in regions in the north and north-east of the country, progression of VWO graduates to HBO is also relatively common, at up to more than 20% (Figure 4.1.5d) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026). All in all, secondary education graduates in regions outside of the Randstad more often opt for a vocationally oriented programme than those in the Randstad.

Associate degree students come from MBO level 4, HAVO and other HBO programmes

In 2024, there were 277 Associate degree (Ad) programmes. The number of students in publicly funded programmes increases annually, reaching approximately 27,000 students in 2024. Enrolments in non-publicly funded education are stable at approximately 1,500 students. Most Ad programmes in publicly funded education are offered in the Technology (30%) and Economics (29%) sectors.

Figure 4.1.5c Percentage of VMBO-B (left), VMBO-K (centre) and VMBO-(G)T (right) graduates in 2023-2024 who progressed to a BBL programme, by region



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026o)

Of the students who began an Ad programme in 2024, 53% were enrolling in HBO for the first time. Of this group, the majority (69%) were MBO level 4 graduates and a quarter came from HAVO. Compared with 2020, more students are now entering an Ad programme from another HBO programme. The Ad programme appears to be an attractive alternative for HBO bachelor's students with a HAVO or VWO background (Inspectorate of Education, 2025a).

Selection in numerus fixus programmes

The selection process for numerus fixus (restricted enrolment) programmes consists of several steps:

1. Applying to the numerus fixus programme
2. Completing the full selection process
3. Selection: being admitted to the programme
4. Starting the programme

Disparities in selection at numerus fixus programmes

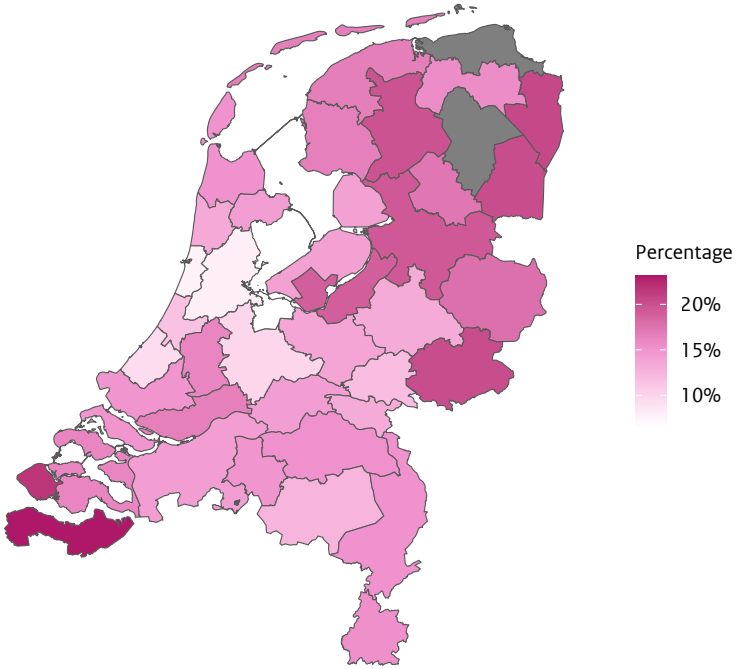
Higher education programmes that admit a maximum number of students per programme (a fixus) are permitted to determine their own selection criteria, provided they use at least 2 qualitative selection criteria. Since the 2023-2024 academic year, a lottery is again permitted as a selection instrument. Of the group of higher education applicants with a non-European migration background, 56% successfully complete the selection procedure after applying, which is less than the group with a European migration background (70%) or no migration background (73%). The group of HBO applicants with a non-European migration background is subsequently least often admitted to the programme (26%) and least often actually starts the programme (15%). Academic education (WO) shows more or less the same pattern, although the differences between groups are smaller there.

When controlling for other factors associated with progression through the selection process, such as differences between fixus programmes or the average school examination grade of the applicant, the differences between applicants with and without a migration background decreased but did not disappear. It is therefore important to distinguish between the different steps in the process from application to starting the programme: all these steps influence the final composition of the fixus programme's student population. Decentralised selection is just one step in this process. It is difficult for institutions to influence the other steps. Nevertheless, the differences between groups of applicants in the decentralised selection step are considerable. Programmes therefore have a responsibility to further optimise their selection procedure (Inspectorate of Education, 2026f).

OECD: inequality in the Netherlands in international perspective

Compared with other countries, the Netherlands has on average a more academic level of educational attainment and accessible education. There are socio-economic differences in educational opportunities and learning outcomes. Only 32% of young people from low-educated families in the Netherlands obtain a diploma for a tertiary programme. For young people from highly educated families, this figure is 73%, comparable to the neighbouring countries of England, Flanders and Denmark, and better than Germany, which scores considerably lower. The Netherlands performs better than the OECD average, but the gap remains large. Compared with other countries, the Netherlands invests strongly in pre-school education and in smooth transitions between HBO and university, so that pupils from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds have a greater chance of entering the labour market with a diploma (OECD, 2025a; 2025b).

Figure 4.1.5d Percentage of dropout after 1 to 6 years among MBO students who were new in 2018-2019



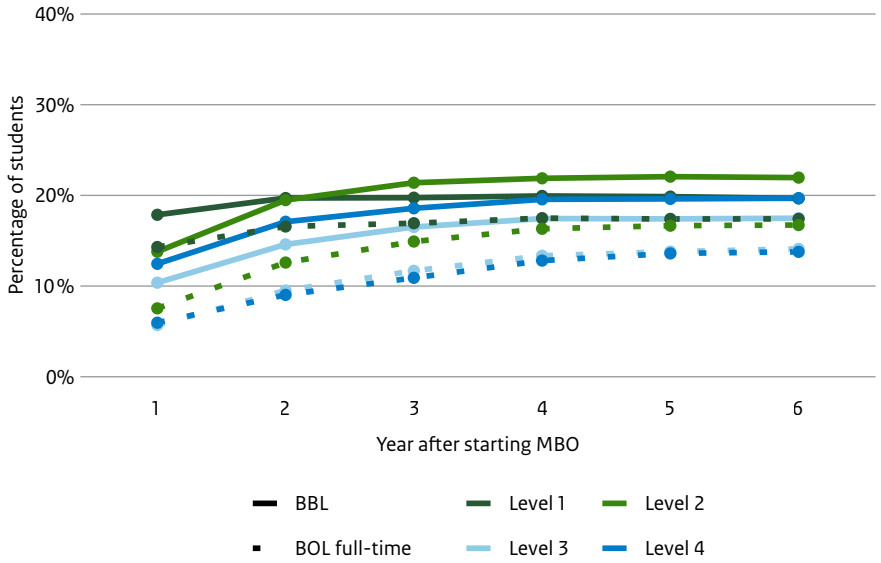
Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026o)

4.1.6 Dropout and Departure

Most MBO dropout occurs in the first and second year

A proportion of students who begin an MBO programme drop out. Most students drop out in the first and second year (Figure 4.1.6a). Depending on the type of programme, 6 years after starting, 13.8% to 22.0% of students who entered MBO for the first time have dropped out. In MBO level 4 BOL, dropout rates are comparatively lowest; in MBO level 2 BBL, they are highest. Dropout from BBL programmes is higher than from BOL programmes (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l).

Figure 4.1.6a Percentage of dropout after 1 to 6 years among MBO students who were new in 2018-2019



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026l)

Differences in dropout by background characteristics

The percentage of MBO students dropping out in the first 2 years varies by background characteristics. In general, dropout rates among men are higher than among women. In MBO levels 2, 3 and 4, students with a non-European background drop out more often than students without a migration background. In entrance programmes, the reverse is true. Newcomers in entrance programmes, who usually follow the BOL variant, also drop out less often than non-newcomers. The likelihood of dropping out is lower for students in entrance programmes with a background in practical education (PRO) than for students who enter the entrance programme after leaving VMBO without a diploma. Household income also makes a difference: students whose parents are in the lowest income group have a greater likelihood of dropping out than students whose parents are in the highest income group (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l). Not everyone who begins an MBO programme therefore has the same chance of remaining in MBO.

Early school leaving in MBO has declined; in secondary education it has risen

A specific group of dropouts are early school leavers: pupils or students under the age of 23 who leave education without a basic qualification. From the 1st of January 2026, this applies up to the age of 27. In 2023-2024, the percentage of early school leavers from MBO was 6.1%, slightly lower than in the preceding 2 years, amounting in absolute terms to almost 22,500 young people.

The percentage of early school leavers from secondary education was approximately 0.7% in 2023-2024, representing almost 6,000 young people. Both in absolute and relative terms, this has risen in recent years. In the lower years of secondary education, the number and percentage of early school leavers nearly doubled in one year, to 2,360 (0.5%) in 2023-2024. In the upper years of VMBO, the figure was 1.11% of pupils, representing over 2,100 young people, approximately 300 more than in 2022-2023. The percentage of early school leavers from the upper years of HAVO/VWO declined slightly (0.6%, almost 1,500 pupils). In general, secondary education for adults (VAVO), the share of early school leavers also declined (9.6%), although the absolute number remained almost unchanged (more than 700). Approximately half of early school leavers from secondary education are still early school leavers 2 years later. Approximately 30% have re-entered education and more than 1 in 5 is working. In MBO, almost 40% are still early school leavers after 2 years. Approximately 20% have re-entered education and around 40% are working (DUO, 2025a).

Influenceable factors in dropout

There are both influenceable and non-influenceable factors associated with dropout and early school leaving. Influenceable predictors of academic success include motivation, school belonging, time investment and confidence in one's own academic success (Van der Gaag et al., 2020). A programme that matches students' interests, abilities and goals creates a sense of belonging. Less interest and limited attendance are associated with a greater likelihood of dropout. Schools can invest in these factors, including providing good information about the programme and its associated professional field, and by monitoring students' attendance.

Share of diplomas at level 4 and entrance level has grown

In the 2023-2024 school year, almost 150,000 students obtained an MBO diploma. Almost half obtained a diploma at level 4; more than 1 in 5 at level 3 and more than 1 in 5 at level 2. More than 8% left MBO with an entrance programme diploma. The share of students obtaining an entrance programme diploma or an MBO level 4 diploma has risen over the past 10 years. Specifically for graduating newcomers in MBO, 64% obtain an entrance programme diploma (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l), which may for them be a stepping stone to following a programme at one of the other MBO levels and thereby obtaining a basic qualification.

Dropout from higher education healthcare programmes lower than average

The Inspectorate sometimes receives signals about high dropout rates or study delays among students in higher education healthcare programmes. In a sector with significant labour shortages, this would be undesirable. It turns out, however, that students in full-time healthcare programmes in publicly funded higher education are more likely to continue their programme than students in other programmes. Healthcare programmes have fewer dropouts or students transferring to other programmes. In addition, students in healthcare programmes more often obtain their diploma within the standard study duration plus 1 year (Inspectorate of Education, 2025m).

Academic success of Associate degree students

Students who start an Ad programme switch in their second year to a different programme less often (9%) than HBO bachelor's students (20%). They do, however, drop out slightly more often in the first year: 19% of Ad students compared with 15% of HBO bachelor's students. Approximately half of Ad students obtain their diploma within 3 years (the standard study duration plus 1 year). Students with an MBO level 4 background obtain their diploma within 3 years slightly more often than students with a HAVO background (Inspectorate of Education, 2025a).

4.2 Labour Market Transitions

Young people without a basic qualification are more vulnerable on the labour market

The labour market position differs between those who obtain a basic qualification at MBO level 2 or 3 and those who do not. Of the population of 25-year-olds who did not obtain a basic qualification, 37% have a job for at least 12 hours per week. Approximately 1 in 5 has a full-time job (35 hours per week or more). Of the population of 25-year-olds with an MBO level 2 or 3 diploma, more than half have a job for at least 12 hours per week and approximately one third have a full-time job. Those without a basic qualification more often receive a benefit (Table 4.2a). Those with a diploma more frequently work as self-employed or as employees, and more often continue in education, than those without a basic qualification. The median hourly wage is lower for those without a basic qualification than for those who have obtained one (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l).

Young people without a basic qualification are vulnerable on the labour market. They have often dropped out due to an accumulation of factors, preceded by changes in programme or level and negative experiences in education (Veenstra et al., 2025). The Act on School-to-Sustainable-Work Transitions, which has been in force since 1 January 2026, aims to better guide young people up to the age of 27, including early school leavers, towards the labour market. Municipalities and schools have a statutory obligation to collaborate through Transition Support Points (Doorstroompunten) to help these young people obtain a basic qualification or to guide them towards employment.

Table 4.2a Socio-economic position of 25-year-olds with or without a basic qualification*

	Employee or self-employed	In education	Benefit recipient	Other
No basic qualification	59,7	2,2	27,5	10,7
Basic qualification, MBO level 2 or equivalent	80,9	3,9	9,3	6,0
Basic qualification, MBO level 3 or equivalent	80,9	10,8	4,0	4,4

*Residents of the Netherlands who were 24 years old in October 2022, 2023, or 2024 and obtained at most MBO level 3

Source: Inspectorate of Education, own analysis based on CBS microdata (2026l)

Differences in MBO labour market outcomes by prior education

Labour market position varies depending on the MBO programme followed. The previous school career also matters. People who obtain an MBO level 2 diploma have worse labour market outcomes if they previously completed the entrance programme than people with a different prior education: they least often have a (full-time) job and more often receive

a benefit. Differences by prior education also exist for other MBO diplomas. The median hourly wage at MBO level 3 is lowest for people with VMBO-B as prior education. People with a HAVO background, whether with or without a diploma, have a higher hourly wage 5 years after graduation than people with a different prior education. This is different for people who have obtained an MBO level 3 diploma via the BBL pathway, where hourly wages are lowest for people with a VMBO-B or VMBO-K background. In BBL programmes, it is notable that the median hourly wage for those with a VMBO-K background, at €19.05 (MBO level 4) and €17.22 (MBO level 3) 5 years after graduation, is clearly lower than for people with a different prior education (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l).

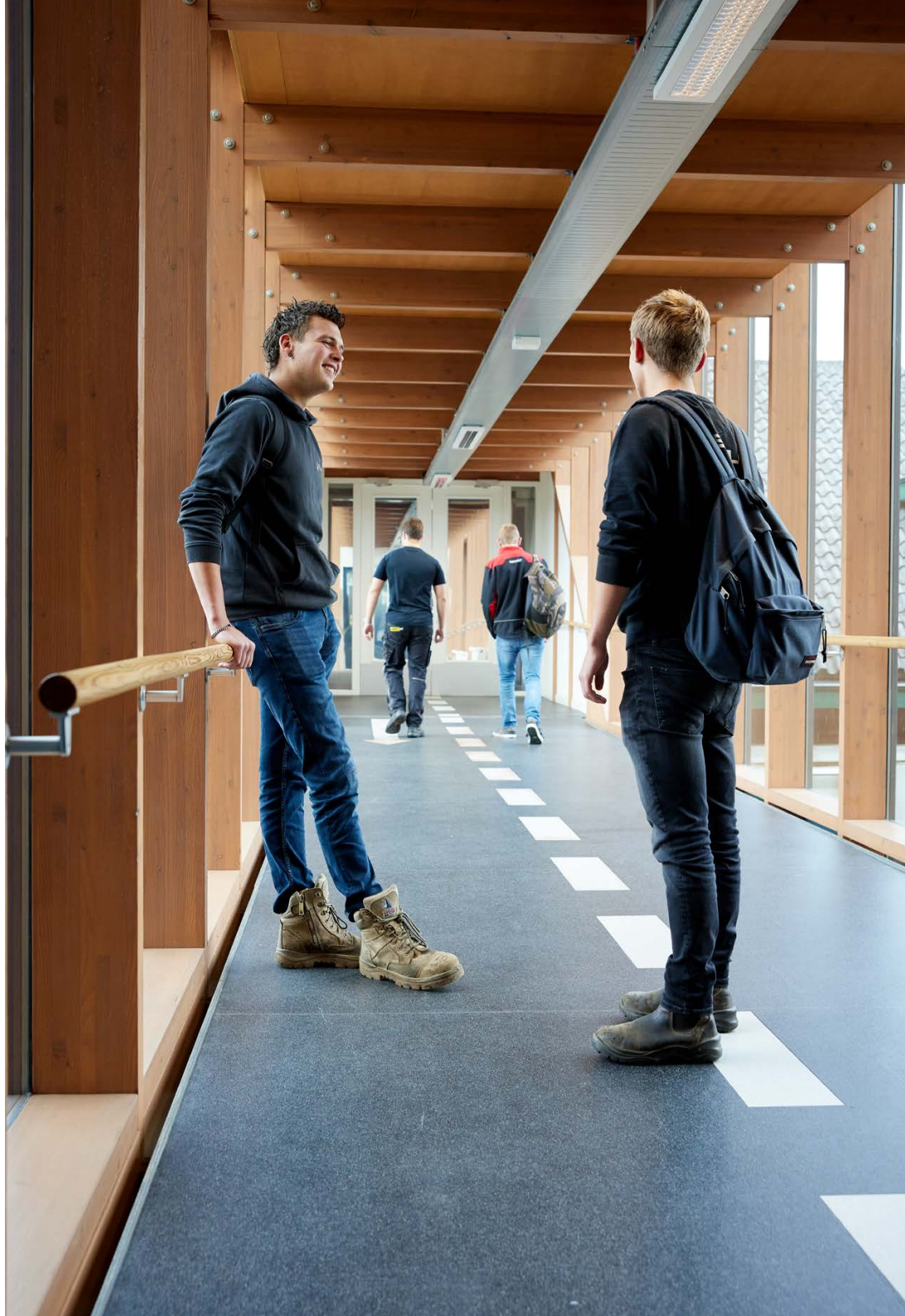
Differences in HBO and WO labour market outcomes by prior education

Around 40% of people completing an HBO bachelor's programme find a full-time job in the year they graduate. Of those who went directly from secondary education to HBO, approximately half have a full-time job 5 years after obtaining their diploma. For those who completed another HBO programme before their HBO bachelor's, this figure is 38.6%. Those who completed an HBO bachelor's programme via a route other than a secondary education diploma less often have a full-time job, which may be related to age and changed family circumstances. Approximately 4 in 5 people have a job of at least 12 hours per week 5 years after obtaining their diploma. This is least often the case for those who had VWO, VMBO-(G)T or an MBO programme other than level 4 as prior education.

After obtaining a WO master's degree, approximately half of people find a full-time job in the year they graduate. Differences by prior education are small here. One year after graduation, approximately 70% of those who had a WO or HBO bachelor's degree before their WO master's have a full-time job. Among those who previously obtained a WO master's diploma, this figure is more than 60%. Five years after graduation, fewer people have a full-time job, ranging from 55.5% for those with a previous WO master's to 65.6% for those with a previous HBO bachelor's. Age and changed family circumstances may play a role here as well. There are also differences in the median hourly wage: people who obtained an HBO bachelor's diploma before their WO master's programme earn less in the year of graduation and 5 years afterwards than people with a WO bachelor's as prior education (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l).

Differences in labour market position by sector

In MBO, HBO and WO alike, there are differences by labour market sector. In MBO, BOL



students who obtained a diploma in 2024 within the sector chambers of Health, Welfare and Sport (86%) and Mobility, Transport, Logistics and Maritime (85%) most frequently had paid employment in October of that year. Students who obtained a diploma within the sector chambers of Entrance, Specialist Craftsmanship or cross-sectoral (cross-over programmes) least often had paid employment (OCW, 2025b). Those who obtained an HBO diploma in 2024 most frequently found immediate work related to their field of study in education (92%), healthcare (86%) or behaviour and society (86%). Least frequently (49%), those with a diploma in language and culture found work (OCW, 2025c). People who obtained a WO diploma in 2024 most frequently had immediate paid employment with a degree in education (92%) and least frequently with a cross-sectoral degree (56%) (OCW, 2025d).

Differences in median hourly wage by sector

The median hourly wage one year after graduation was €16.45 for MBO students in 2023. The highest median hourly wage was for MBO students with a diploma in Health, Welfare and Sport (€18.43) or Technology and Built Environment (€17.76). The median hourly wage was lowest for MBO students with a diploma in Food, Green and Hospitality (€14.60), Entrance (€14.77) or Trade (€15.13) (OCW, 2025k). The median hourly wage of HBO graduates was €20.97 in 2023, highest in education (€25.00) and healthcare (€24.00), and lowest in language and culture at €16.64 (OCW, 2025i). WO graduates had a median hourly wage of €23.32 in 2023, highest in healthcare (€26.92) and education (€25.98), and lowest in language and culture at €20.73 (OCW, 2025j).

Differences in labour market outcomes for PRO and VSO pupils

In the medium and long term, the labour market outcomes differ between VSO pupils with a labour market destination level and PRO pupils. Immediately after leaving school, VSO pupils less often have a job than PRO pupils: approximately one third compared with approximately 60%. After 2 years, approximately 60% of VSO pupils have had at least one job, compared with approximately three quarters of PRO pupils. In addition, VSO pupils leave their jobs more quickly and more often than PRO pupils, meaning their job security is lower. Although the difference is small, VSO pupils do find a new job slightly faster than PRO pupils (ROA, 2026). This may be because VSO pupils more frequently have sheltered work while the PRO pupils tend to have regular jobs, meaning the support in finding a job is better organised. For both groups of young people, guidance after leaving school and entering the labour market remains essential for offering them a stable position in society.

4.3 Newcomers

Fewer newcomers entering mainstream primary and secondary education; more entering special primary and special education

The number of mainstream primary school pupils who have been in the Netherlands for fewer than 4 years (newcomers) rose from 38,253 (2.8%) on 1 October 2020 to 60,046 (4.4%) 4 years later. In secondary education as well, the number of newcomers increased, from 20,403 in 2020 (2.2%) to 36,010 in 2024 (3.9%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026l). In mainstream primary education, both the number of incoming pupils overall and the number of incoming newcomers has been falling since 2023. In special primary education, the total number of incoming pupils is also falling, but the number of incoming newcomers is rising. The same applies to special and special secondary education. The question is whether specialist education better aligns with the educational needs of newcomers, or whether mainstream education is insufficiently equipped to tailor its provision to this group. The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum explicitly emphasises the right of access to integrated education that matches the pupil's level. This also aligns with the general aspiration towards inclusive education by 2035, calling for reflection on the current, often separately organised, education for newcomers in the Netherlands.

Across borders: education for newcomers abroad

International guidelines, such as those of UNESCO, emphasise the importance of access to schools, safe and appropriate learning environments of good quality, smooth transitions within education, and access to certification and higher education. These elements form the basis for a sustainable school career for newcomers and connects with the conditions for successful newcomer education that European inspectorates shared with us.

Combining inclusive education and intensive language training

Portugal and the Czech Republic combine inclusive reception and support with intensive language lessons. Newcomers can in theory be distributed evenly across schools without overburdening individual schools, as schools are not permitted to refuse newcomers. Language lessons in Portugal align with the national curriculum to accelerate entry at subject level. In addition to language acquisition, Bavaria and Portugal give explicit attention to the inclusivity and cultural sensitivity of the curriculum.

Alternative examinations

Standard examinations providing access to continued education are an obstacle for many newcomers. In the Czech Republic, newcomers can sometimes sit examinations orally or in Ukrainian and may use dictionaries and additional time. In Portugal, several variants of the final examination for Portuguese language exist: as a first language, a second language and for non-native speakers.

Entry to vocational education with language support

In Bavaria, work has been done to improve accessibility of vocational education, including language support, for newcomers up to the age of 21. Germany sees this as a means of integration and a potential solution to labour market shortages. In Finland, newcomers can more easily be admitted to vocational education and take 1 year of preparatory lessons.

Social support programmes

Many countries invest in broad social support programmes. Portugal invests in extra-curricular activities open to all pupils to promote successful integration. The Czech Republic and Portugal work with buddy programmes, in which pupils help newcomers find their way in the new school setting and make contact with other pupils.

National expertise centres

Many countries consider high-quality language lessons taught by well-trained teachers who are also able to work in an intercultural and trauma-sensitive way to be essential for successful newcomer education. Support for teachers and schools from experts such as psychologists and knowledge networks is of great importance in this regard. Luxembourg has an integration service that supports families in navigating the education system.

Education passport

In Serbia, many pupils reside temporarily before travelling on to other countries in Europe. The country has developed an education passport for newcomers to better track the school career of these transiting pupils. It records the level of educational competencies the newcomer achieved during their stay in Serbia.

No guarantee of an uninterrupted process of development for pupils

Many municipalities, school governing boards and teams make efforts to prevent waiting lists for newcomers, so that they can start school quickly. Uncertainty about which children are staying where, and for how long, makes it difficult to set up sufficient school places for pupils in a timely manner. The Inspectorate has previously pointed to a lack of guarantee by the Dutch state of an uninterrupted process of development for newcomers (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b; 2024a; 2025b) and does so again now. Together with the Inspectorate of Health and Youth, the Inspectorate of Justice and Security and the Netherlands Labour Authority, we have long been drawing attention to the concerning conditions for children in emergency asylum accommodation. In 2023, we made a joint call for accommodation facilities to once again comply with the applicable statutory standards, such as national legislation, the Reception Directive and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Inspectorate of Justice and Security, 2023). In 2025, a further call for improvement measures followed (Inspectorate of Justice and Security, 2025). The House of Representatives has meanwhile adopted several motions asking the government to improve conditions for children in emergency asylum accommodation.

Emergency asylum accommodation potentially harmful for children and young people

During follow-up visits to emergency asylum accommodation in 2025, our inspectors heard from all chain partners that staying in emergency asylum accommodation harms children's development. Children and young people are in places that appear to be unsuitable, inappropriate or insufficiently safe for them. The continual moves also represent a major risk, in their view: children miss instructional time and are unable to build stable relationships with teachers, fellow pupils and support workers. This, combined with the lack of prospects for some groups such as Syrians and some unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (AMVs), affects their motivation to learn and develop. School changes are also said to take place too often without appropriate preparation and transfer of information. No single party is responsible for collecting information on instructional time missed due to moves within the asylum system. It is essential that the field and the relevant ministers map out how often newcomers move and what this means for their uninterrupted process of development, both at the individual and system level.

Lack of coordination

During the follow-up visits and conversations with stakeholders, it became clear that no party claims full responsibility for guiding children into education and for the ongoing development of children in emergency asylum accommodation. Everyone does their best and contributes a small part. The guidance of children into education is therefore dependent on circumstances and individuals. Clear agreements about who is responsible for what, and who can be held accountable for guiding pupils into education, are essential.

Most municipalities hold annual consultations with school governing boards

The Temporary Newcomer Provisions Act requires municipalities to consult with school governing boards in primary and secondary education at least once a year. Almost all municipalities report conducting this annual consultation. At 97% of municipalities, the realisation of sufficient school places for newcomers is on the agenda. School enrolment (92%) and a continuous learning progression (86%) are also frequently discussed. The conversations that inspectors had with municipalities yielded a number of recommendations for municipalities, school governing boards and other partners, such as making clear agreements and improving visibility on newcomers and their intake (Inspectorate of Education, 2025d).

Structured collaboration between chain partners promotes rapid access to education

The Social Domain Supervision (Toezicht Sociaal Domein) (2026) spoke with 3 municipalities about collaboration regarding care and support for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (AMVs), to ensure timely and appropriate access to education. This shows that it is crucial for municipalities to collaborate with organisations such as COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) and Nidos (the youth protection organisation for unaccompanied minors), and with schools. It helps when the municipality takes the lead in coordinating consultations with all parties involved, and when there is clarity about tasks, roles and responsibilities. Short lines of communication, embedding and transfer of information are needed to prevent truancy and disruptive behaviour.

Our inspectors heard a similar message during the follow-up visits to emergency asylum accommodation. Where educational institutions collaborate in a structured and planned way with municipalities, regional newcomer education coordinators from the Ministry, and chain partners such as COA and Nidos, access to education appears to be established more effectively and quickly, waiting lists occur less frequently, and there are fewer obstacles to guiding pupils into education.

Vulnerability of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers

The wellbeing of AMVs is highly vulnerable, partly due to the unsafe situations they have experienced. It is therefore important to ensure that education, care and support better align with what AMVs need, and to involve them more actively in what does and does not work. It is essential that organisations collaborate across domains and are attentive to cultural sensitivity, so that they can better align with the needs of AMVs (Social Domain Supervision, 2026).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CHAPTER 5

Safety

Key points

For most pupils and students, their school or institution is a safe space where they learn, socialise with peers and continue to develop. Yet there are also pupils and students who are not doing well, who are being bullied or who are feeling low. The intertwining of the offline and online worlds can affect the wellbeing of pupils and students and disrupt the digital resilience of institutions.

Safety in education: not an open-ended mandate
Most pupils feel safe at school. This is evident from the annual safety monitoring of pupils in primary and secondary education. Most students also feel safe at their institution. The Inspectorate assesses the statutory requirements around safety, and these are generally met. However, the way in which schools and institutions fulfil this safety mandate is not static: it evolves alongside societal and technological developments. The current statutory frameworks, from the duty of care for safety to information security and privacy protection, provide direction, but the daily practice of education demands more. Schools and institutions must embed safety in a hybrid reality in which boundaries blur between inside and outside, between offline and online, and between fact and fiction. Children and adolescents grow up while exposed to a constant stream of online content and sometimes disturbing images. This makes the educational mandate multifaceted and difficult to demarcate: it no longer stops at the school gates, and it is often unclear whether unsafe situations originate inside or outside the educational setting. A ban on social media for adolescents under 15 could set a clear boundary and thereby help education protect the safety of pupils.

Concern about the increase in physical violence in schools
The number of reports received by the Inspectorate in 2024-2025 concerning a suspension or exclusion due to physical violence in primary and secondary education increased compared with 2022-2023. Confidentiality inspectors also received more reports of physical violence. Although a greater willingness to report may play a role, physical violence is always a cause for concern due to its impact on the sense of safety felt by pupils and staff. Physical violence can have an online cause or online consequences beyond school walls. Schools and institutions must be alert to this and must have a clear picture of which adolescents face heightened risks. This requires collaboration and information sharing between the school and safety partners such as parents, the police, youth workers and the local authority. In secondary education, consistent enforcement of behavioural rules for pupils also requires attention. Safety policy only works when everyone knows it, acts on it and reflects critically on it. Schools and institutions must therefore continually discuss, update and supplement their safety arrangements.

Psychological and social safety requires connection with all pupils and students
The mental health of most pupils and students is sound, but worldwide a proportion of adolescents experience anxiety and stress. Certain groups, such as LGBTQIA+ pupils and students, face a heightened risk of feeling psychologically unsafe and being bullied, including online. This places great demands on the protective space that education can offer for all adolescents, with the fundamental values of a democratic constitutional state as the foundation, including the principle of equality and tolerance. To remain alert to bullying, schools and institutions must have an interest in and knowledge of the online world of adolescents and the digital platforms on which they are active. Although school leaders in primary and secondary education unanimously indicate that bullying is not tolerated, schools are not always entirely clear on how to act in situations involving bullying or negative expressions about particular groups or individuals. This shows that school teams need to engage in more dialogue with each other on this topic, or to pursue training, so that a greater shared vision and consistency of action can develop. This dialogue connects with the necessary further development of civic skills and values education (see Chapter 3), which forms a foundation for education as a safe space for learning and living together.

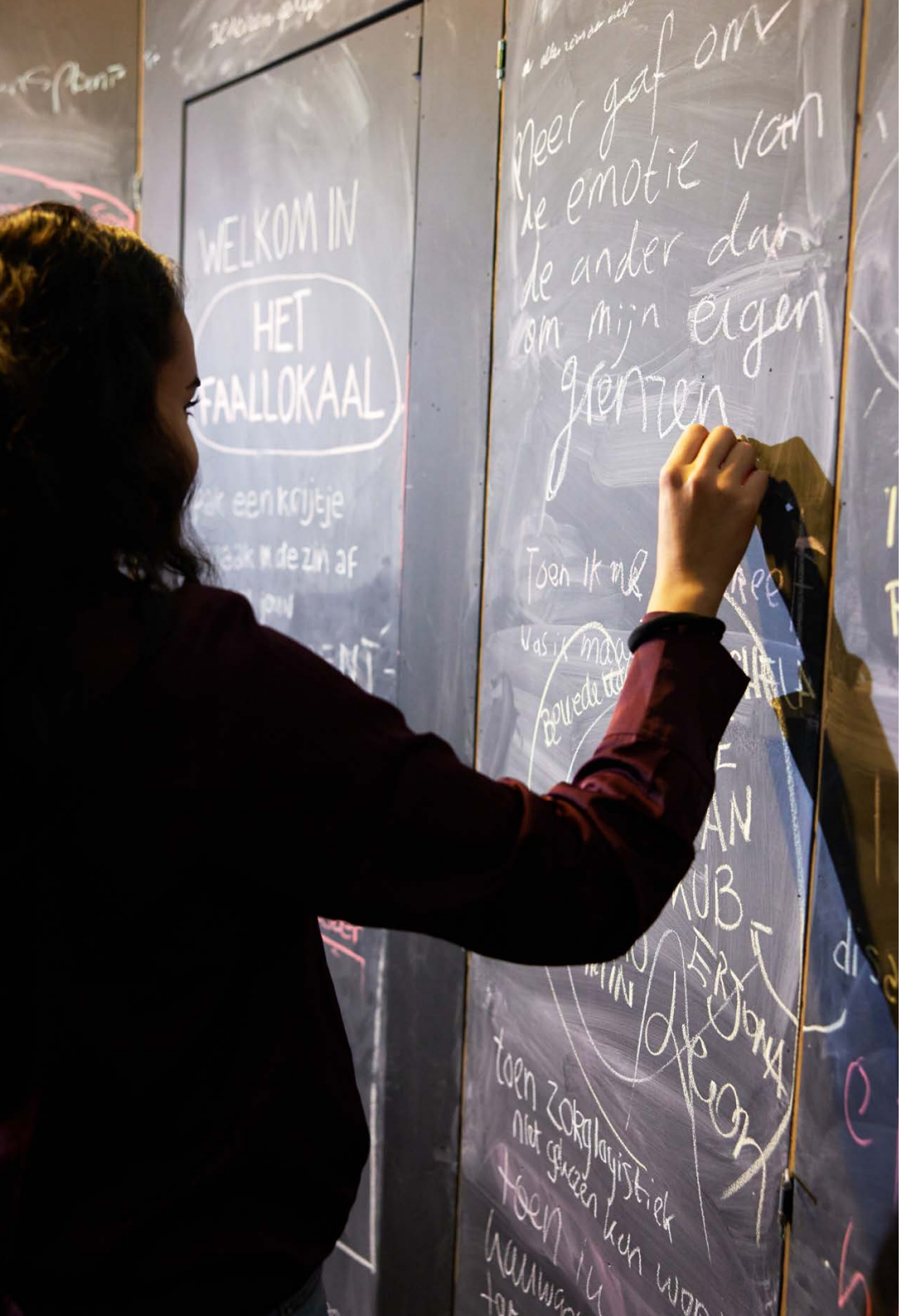
Higher education (HO) experienced tensions in 2024-2025 related to the war in and around Gaza. On several universities and universities of applied sciences, demonstrations have taken place on multiple occasions calling for an end to ties with Israel.

Digital resilience increasingly determinative for a safe learning environment
Intertwining digital and physical worlds affects not only pupils and students. Digital disruptions, data breaches or cyberattacks can abruptly disrupt educational processes, expose personal data and damage trust in an institution. Educational institutions are becoming increasingly dependent on digital systems. Embedding digital security therefore demands both technical measures and careful conduct based on a clear risk assessment. This presupposes awareness, expertise and sufficient organisational capacity, prerequisites that are particularly under pressure at smaller institutions. Almost all governing boards now report on this theme in their annual reports, but the depth of these accounts varies. Cyber incidents occur regularly; most are intercepted in time, but some disrupt education. With the introduction of the Cybersecurity Act for higher education, digital resilience and security will also be given a statutory basis. Digital security also requires digitally skilled users, particularly now that AI is transforming the information environment and bringing new risks with it. The new draft attainment targets for digital literacy in primary and secondary education help schools to make pupils aware of the possibilities of digital technology and media, and of the risks and consequences of irresponsible use.

Recommendations

In recent years, we have emphasised the importance of an ongoing dialogue about safety with staff, pupils, students and parents. It begins with genuine interest in how the pupil or student is doing. Safety policy only works when everyone knows it, when it encourages safe behaviour in pupils and students, and when it supports staff in ensuring safety. Schools must thoroughly analyse the state of safety and adapt their policy where necessary, even when only a small group feels unsafe. These recommendations remain important. This year, we focus in more depth on safety risks in the online world of pupils and students, and on what education can do to promote safe online behaviour. We also address the digital resilience of schools and institutions. Digital resilience means that the school or institution adequately protects the data it manages and is able to withstand cyber threats or attacks. Our recommendations are:

- Governing boards: incorporate digital resilience into safety policy. Not all risks are manageable, so safety policy should not focus exclusively on detection, but also on response, recovery and collaboration with other governing boards.
- Government: explore a ban on social media for children under 15. A statutory ban can support parents and schools in protecting children.



5.1 Safety in Intertwined Worlds

Feeling safe at school helps pupils learn effectively (Van de Pol et al., 2024). However, the world in which pupils and students live has changed profoundly. Digitalisation and social media mean that the boundaries between home, school, the street and the online world are constantly overlapping. What happens outside the school or institution can have almost immediate consequences for education, and vice versa.

Case study: from video to school closures
On Friday 12 September 2025, 5 secondary schools and an MBO institution in Beverwijk and Heemskerk closed for a day due to escalating tensions between youth groups in the region. A secondary school in Haarlem also stopped its lessons halfway through the day. False messages and images of assault and threats were circulating on social media. This had an impact not only on the sense of safety in and around schools, but also at sports associations and in other parts of the municipality. As a precaution, the mayor decided to close the schools and an emergency order was issued to embed safety in the municipality. "Order was quickly restored, but the impact on the sense of safety was considerable. Media literacy is a permanent feature of our curriculum, and we also invest heavily in conversations with parents and pupils about safe online behaviour," said one of the school governors involved.

In the academic literature, this intertwined dynamic is described as context collapse (Koltai, 2025) and hyperconnectivity (Brubaker, 2023): social contexts that were previously separate converge into a single shared space, making incidents more visible, faster-moving and harder to contain. Schools are thereby confronted with risks that partly originate outside their direct sphere of influence, but which can contribute to unsafe conditions within the school.

5.1.1 *Physical Safety*

Schools and institutions must ensure the social, psychological and physical safety of their pupils and students. Primary and secondary education already has a statutory duty of care in this regard; legislation for MBO and higher education is in preparation. Physical safety means that pupils and students are protected from accidents and physical violence, such as hitting and kicking. Violence can also take more serious forms, such as incidents involving weapons and explosives. Physical incidents can gain a wider reach almost immediately through digital channels: images, messages and rumours spread quickly and can amplify tensions or trigger new unrest. What was once confined to a small group of pupils or students is now visible to a larger audience and can escalate within a short time.

More reports of physical violence by pupils

Primary and secondary education schools are required to report to the Inspectorate when suspending a pupil for more than one day. Suspension is permitted for a maximum of 5 days. In secondary education, there is additionally a reporting obligation for exclusions. The total number of reported suspensions rose by just under 5% over the past 2 school years, from 6,585 to 6,907. This increase, primarily in secondary education, may reflect a higher rate of suspension, but may also be related to greater familiarity with the reporting requirement. The number of reports of a suspension or exclusion due to physical violence by pupils increased compared with 2022-2023 (Table 5.1.1a). The number of reports related to possession or setting off of fireworks, or attempted arson, doubled (Inspectorate of Education, 2026g).

Confidentiality inspectors also received more reports in 2024-2025 (2,916) than in 2022-2023 (2,152). Here too, a greater willingness to report may be a factor. The number of files relating to physical violence rose by well over a quarter compared with 2022-2023. Of the 715 files on physical violence in 2024-2025, the majority (417) concern pupils in primary education. In secondary education, Confidentiality inspectors more often encounter serious forms of physical violence than in primary education (Inspectorate of Education, 2025c).

Table 5.1.1a Number of suspension and exclusion reports due to physical violence by pupils

	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
(Involvement in) physical violence against fellow pupils	2.467	2.778	2.754
Intimidation/threats of physical violence against fellow pupils	653	1.018	1.099
(Involvement in) physical violence against staff	684	806	745
Intimidation/threats of physical violence against staff	947	729	736
Weapon possession	248	223	252
Vandalism (e.g. buildings or furniture)	370	412	420
Possession or setting off of fireworks and/or attempted arson	109	133	242

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026g)

Interest, alertness and collaboration to prevent escalation

Violence among adolescents more often than before has an online component (Mehlbaum et al., 2025). There are also indications that adolescents are increasingly involved in online criminal behaviour, such as sexual transgressive behaviour, drug trafficking, threats, intimidation and cybercrime (Social Domain Supervision, 2026). The online component sometimes takes place in closed environments on social media platforms and is therefore only occasionally visible to schools and parents. Nevertheless, it is important that staff and parents talk with adolescents about this, and above all about what adolescents encounter online and how they respond to it. Adults do not always feel the urgency to engage with the online world of adolescents, while adolescents do need guidance. Youth workers can play a role here, as a non-judgmental party for adolescents (Pantazidis & Pechtelidis, 2025; Dijk et al., 2023). A sound collaborative structure with partners in the school's or institution's environment, including the local authority, police, youth workers and youth care services, also increases alertness to safety risks. This requires cross-domain, sustainable collaboration that is currently still insufficient (Social Domain Supervision, 2026).

Collaborating against online youth crime

Toezicht Sociaal Domein[9] investigated collaboration between parties involved in preventing online youth crime in the municipalities of Assen, Hilversum and Purmerend, including schools, adolescents, parents, the police, Bureau Halt[10], youth enforcement officers, school attendance officers, GGD[11], youth consultants, neighbourhood teams and youth workers. The investigation (Social Domain Supervision, 2026) shows that (educational) professionals can support parents in the following ways:

- interactive, accessible parent evenings, workshops and webinars;
- activities aimed at primary school parents, as they are more closely involved;
- reassuring messages: guide your child as you would when they are learning to cycle: With curiosity and without judgement.

Scale of youth crime and exploitation difficult to estimate

Although public debate often focuses on the hardening and rejuvenation of serious crime, this is not reflected in national statistics (CBS, 2025b; Weijers et al., 2021). The perception that adolescents more often carry weapons, particularly knives, is also not confirmed by the figures on recorded criminal offences. The number of offences that go undiscovered and unrecorded is, however, higher. In 2023, 16.5% of adolescents aged 12 to 18 reported having committed at least 1 offence in the past year. Violence-related and online offences were reported most frequently (9%), with the latter consisting primarily of cyberoffences (7%) (Tollenaar et al., 2024). The risk of criminal exploitation of adolescents, such as being forced to hand over their bank card or to deposit explosives somewhere, is also likely to be much higher than the number of reports suggests (Adamse et al., 2023; Van den Broek, 2024). Pupils in practical education and special secondary education appear to face a heightened risk of criminal exploitation (Üstüner-Tüfekci et al., 2023). Research by the Researchcentrum voor Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt[12] (2026) also shows that these pupils have a heightened risk of contact with the justice system.

9 Social Domain Supervision. https://www.toezichtsociaaldomein.nl

10 Bureau Halt offers educational programs for first-time youth offenders as an alternative to prosecution in the Netherlands. https://www.halt.nl

11 GGD (Municipal Health Service) is the Dutch regional public health organization responsible for preventive healthcare and disease control. https://www.ggd.nl

12 The Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market. https://www.roa.nl

5.1.2 *Psychological Safety*

Ensuring psychological safety means that pupils and students do not experience undue psychological pressure, threats or manipulation at their school or institution. More broadly, it means being attentive to the wellbeing of pupils and students: that they can be themselves, feel free to ask questions, admit mistakes, express concerns and develop into healthy, social and independent people (Edmondson, 2018; Rombouts et al., 2023).

The national youth strategy

What do adolescents themselves see as their greatest challenges? This was the question the National Youth Council addressed over the past year, at the request of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the House of Representatives. The outcomes reveal 3 overarching challenges (Nationaljeugdstrategie.nl):

- Financial security: adolescents struggle to make ends meet, more often have flexible jobs, high housing costs and debts.
- Deteriorating mental health: the mental resilience of adolescents is declining, the number of suicides is rising and the demand for youth care services is high.
- Lack of future prospects: insecurity around housing, climate change and wars make the future of adolescents uncertain.

Most adolescents are doing well, but there is significant (school-related) stress

Over 80% of adolescents aged 12 to 25 reported feeling mostly happy in 2025 (RIVM, 2025a), which is not significantly different from 2023. However, the percentage of young adults who feel happy or satisfied has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels (CBS, 2025c). The mental health of students in higher education did improve slightly in 2025 compared with 2021 (RIVM, 2025b). Adolescents experience considerable stress, with stress from school or their study programme and from the many demands placed on them scoring highest. Adolescents also have concerns about the consequences of the housing shortage, war and the rising cost of living (RIVM, 2025a). The Education Council points out that many measures aimed at improving wellbeing in education are approached from an individual-diagnostic perspective. Education is, however, a collective process in which pupils and students, supported by their teachers, learn new things and sometimes have difficult experiences. Teachers are not care workers, but they do have pedagogical and didactic skills that enable them to provide a solid foundation for a group of pupils or students (Education Council, 2026). A good citizenship curriculum can play an important role in this.

Protect children from the risks of social media

Children are spending increasing amounts of time on digital media from an ever younger age: children between 9 months and 6 years of age spend an average of one and a half hours per day on digital media (Nikken & Tuijnman, 2024). Parents and teachers are often unaware of the risks and lack knowledge about harmful content, addictive algorithms or warning signs of potential problems. The (excessive) use of digital or social media can affect mental wellbeing. Problematic social media use is associated with more stress, anxiety and lower life satisfaction (Buijzen & Rozendaal, 2025). The pressure to always be connected and reachable can cause restlessness and concentration problems (Siebers, 2024). Particularly young teenagers aged 10 to 15 who spend relatively large amounts of time on social media appear to be vulnerable to the negative consequences of social media use (Orben et al., 2022). Clear boundaries and a positive parenting climate have a protective effect (Geurts, 2025). The debate about far-reaching restrictions on social media use is topical in various countries, but has so far only led to a complete ban on social media for children under 15 in Australia. Other countries, such as France, have introduced restrictive measures or are preparing them. In the Netherlands, there is only a guideline for healthy and responsible screen and social media use. A statutory ban on social media for children under 15 could support parents and schools in setting a clear boundary and protecting children from risky or excessive social media use. Alongside any statutory restriction, developing digital skills from an early age remains important, such as online etiquette, recognising fake news and protecting privacy.

A proportion of pupils and students are not doing well

There are persistent signals worldwide that adolescents are struggling with mental health problems and psychological complaints. A contributing factor is likely that the current generation of adolescents are better able and more willing to articulate mental struggles that are partly inherent to growing up. This can lead to 'ordinary' forms of stress being interpreted and experienced as mental health problems (Van Dam, 2025; Education Council, 2026). In the second quarter of 2025, adolescents visited their GP for anxiety 19 percentage points more often than in the same period in 2019 (RIVM, 2025a). The number of adolescents aged 12 to 25 who had contact with their GP due to suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts was 70 percentage points higher than in 2019.

Certain groups of pupils and students face a heightened risk of feeling psychologically unsafe. This applies, among others, to LGBTQIA+ pupils (GGD-GHOR, 2026; Lodewick et al., 2023). In MBO, this additionally applies to women and students with a disability (Cuppen et al., 2023). In HO too, female students, LGBTQIA+ students and students with a disability experience poorer mental health (RIVM, 2025b).

Good practice: Caring Universities

Caring Universities, a consortium of 9 universities and universities of applied sciences, works to improve student wellbeing. Using an annual Health Check, the consortium investigates how students are doing so that help can be offered in good time. The institutions also offer accessible, online self-help modules for students dealing with stress, anxiety, low mood or study-related problems (moodlift.nl).

MBO institutions report increasing support needs among students

Our investigation at 10 publicly funded MBO institutions into students' personal support needs showed that, according to the institutions, the number of support requests is increasing in volume, complexity and severity. The institutions identify the aftereffects of the COVID-19 crisis, parenting difficulties and social media as major causes, alongside the increased recognition and openness around mental health issues. Institutions observe that a proportion of the current student population has reduced executive functioning skills (such as planning, organising and regulating emotions), is more easily overwhelmed, and faces many expectations and responsibilities. Many students are dealing with mental health issues, low mood and anxiety. Addiction problems and student homelessness are also regularly mentioned. MBO institutions offer personalised approaches and individual programmes, but encounter limitations in doing so due to waiting lists in care services or poor collaboration with school attendance officers. The transition to a broader, preventive base offering within institutions is still under development (Inspectorate of Education, 2026a).

5.1.3 Social Safety

Social safety concerns the safety of pupils and students in their interactions with each other and with teachers and others. Schools and institutions provide a space for practising the development of social and societal skills, by modelling behaviour and engaging in dialogue about norms and values. This takes place within a context of school rules and behavioural agreements such as anti-bullying policy.

Positive experiences with smartphone ban in primary and secondary education

The national agreement on the smartphone ban has applied to secondary schools since 1 January 2024 and from the 2024-2025 school year also to primary and special education. At the majority of Dutch schools, smartphones are not permitted during the entire school day (Table 5.1.3a) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026s). Secondary and special secondary education schools are positive about the smartphone ban, particularly regarding its effects on concentration and the social climate (Braakman Carrión et al., 2025). The effects in primary and special education are less pronounced, which the researchers attribute to the fact that smartphones are often only used by pupils in the upper years and their use was not seen as a significant problem there. At secondary schools where smartphones may not be used during breaks, many staff members report a substantial reduction in problems with social media and associated bullying behaviour since the introduction of the smartphone policy (Braakman Carrión et al., 2025).

Table 5.1.3a Agreements on smartphone use at school in 2024-2025 according to school leaders (in percentages, n PO=151, n SO=93, n VSO=80, n VO=231)

	Bo	So	Vso	Vo
Smartphone use is not permitted during the entire school day	97	87	65	66
Smartphone use is not permitted during lessons but is permitted during breaks	1	7	22	32
Smartphone use is permitted during some lessons	1	3	8	2
None of the above	2	2	5	1

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026s)

Smartphone use in MBO and higher education varies

MBO institutions have also made agreements about the use of smartphones during lessons. Of MBO students surveyed on this, two thirds report that agreements are in place about use during lessons and that use is permitted in some lessons. According to well over 20% of MBO students, smartphone use is prohibited in all lessons. In higher education, the majority of students surveyed report that no agreements have been made about smartphone use during lectures or tutorials (Inspectorate of Education, 2026s).

More reports of (online) bullying

The social safety of pupils and students can be seriously undermined by (online) bullying. Confidentiality inspectors received more reports of (online) bullying in 2024-2025 than in previous years (Inspectorate of Education, 2025c). The number of reports of bullying is highest in primary education (421). International research among teachers shows that bullying in primary education is actually relatively uncommon (Buisman et al., 2025), and the Netherlands does not deviate from other countries studied in this regard. In secondary education, bullying does occur more frequently than in other countries. Bullying occurs most often on the basis of gender or sexual orientation, clothing, appearance or ethnic background. At larger schools, at schools with more than 10% of pupils with special educational needs, and at schools in medium-sized municipalities, teachers more frequently identify forms of bullying. Of adolescents themselves, 5% of those aged 15 to 18 report having been a victim of online bullying (CBS, 2025c).

How to act in situations involving bullying, negative expressions, discrimination and polarisation?

When asked about difficult situations relating to social safety, most school leaders in primary, secondary and special education report that bullying occurred in the 2024-2025 school year (Table 5.1.3b). Physical violence is also frequently mentioned in secondary and special education. Half of secondary school leaders encountered negative expressions about LGBTQIA+ individuals in 2024-2025. A third of secondary school leaders also encountered other forms of polarisation and discrimination. According to approximately 80% of school leaders in primary, secondary and special education, it is very clear how to act in situations involving physical violence (Inspectorate of Education, 2026s). Inspectors note that schools often have a protocol for this specifying how to act. For other types of safety incidents, the proportion of school leaders who say it is very clear how to act varies. In these situations, such as Islamophobic or homophobic expressions, differences

in norms, values and political views may play a role. These often originate outside the school and are sometimes based on different news sources than those teachers rely on. This does not always make it easy for schools to respond adequately. In addition to conversations within the school, this also requires training.

Table 5.1.3b Percentage of school leaders reporting the prevalence of safety incidents in 2024-2025 (n PO=151, n SO=93, n VSO=80, n VO=231)

	Bo	So	Vso	Vo
Bullying (online and offline)	76	75	94	97
Physical violence	31	68	76	77
Sexual transgressive behaviour	4	13	34	28
Antisemitic expressions	1	9	16	18
Islamophobic expressions	3	4	18	18
Negative expressions about LGBTQIA+ individuals	7	12	36	53
Polarisation	9	5	14	36
Other forms of discrimination	17	23	35	33
Other extreme expressions	11	20	26	16
None of the above	21	10	0	2

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026s)

Case study: tensions in higher education
Universities and universities of applied sciences have faced tensions related to the war in and around Gaza. A proportion of students and staff are demanding that governing boards disclose and sever ties with Israeli higher education institutions, organisations and companies. Many institutions have established committees to assess their collaboration with Israeli institutions. A number of institutions have actually suspended their cooperation agreements with Israel and/or decided not to enter into new forms of collaboration. At several universities and universities of applied sciences, demonstrators have repeatedly protested against these ties with Israel, and at some locations, particularly universities, buildings have been occupied by activists.

Limits on the autonomy of education

Occasionally, the views or behaviour of pupils or students clash with those of the educational institution. When pupils are confronted with contradictory or confusing messages, this can be painful and affect their psychological safety. The freedom of education gives schools and institutions space to express their own identity and the ideas associated with it. However, this freedom is bounded by law: education must not conflict with the fundamental values of a democratic constitutional state, and must actively promote these values. The autonomy of the school or institution is also bounded in part by the statutory citizenship mandate, which proceeds from the importance of peaceful coexistence and citizens who respect core democratic values.

5.1.4 *Digital Resilience*

Digital resilience refers to the capacity of educational institutions to manage risks in the digital environment, by preventing cyber threats, detecting them in a timely manner, limiting damage and achieving recovery, thereby embedding the continuity of education and the protection of data and users. Digital resilience also encompasses the capacity of users to act safely and responsibly within that digital environment. After all, digital risks arise not only from technical shortcomings, but also from human error, insufficient awareness or incorrect use of digital tools and information such as that generated by AI. This requires media literacy, awareness and the ability to interpret digital signals and avoid risks (Rathenau Institute, 2022).

Governing board accountability is mandatory

Educational institutions are highly dependent on digital systems for education, assessment, communication and administration. Failures, misuse or attacks on these systems affect not only continuity but also the sense of safety felt by pupils, students and staff. Governing boards are responsible for the digital resilience and security of their organisation. Good digital resilience is necessary to ensure that education can continue. Secure storage of educational data is also essential, as it embed the quality of education and of the diplomas issued by educational institutions. Governing boards must demonstrate in their annual report how digital resilience and security are organised, but no substantive requirements have been set for this accountability.

Most governing boards report on digital resilience and security

The proportion of governing boards reporting on information security and privacy in their annual report increased substantially between 2021 and 2024. In 2021, 65.4% of governing boards reported on this; by 2024, this had risen to 94.0%. This increase is associated with the introduction of the accountability obligation in primary and secondary education, where the total proportion of reporting governing boards rose from 61.3% in 2021 to 93.7% in 2024. Within primary and secondary education, the largest increase was in primary education: from 57.0% to 93.1%. In MBO and higher education, this percentage was already high in earlier years and remained virtually stable in 2024. Nevertheless, 6.0% of all governing boards still did not provide accountability in 2024, which may indicate vulnerabilities in the embedding of digital security.

The scope and depth of the accountability sections differ, however. In 79.0% of these sections, elements of the PDCA cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) are visible, often in the form of concrete measures or policy intentions to limit risks. Only in 5% of the sections does the full cycle, covering trigger, measures, evaluation and adjustment, explicitly appear (Inspectorate of Education, 2026e).

Reporting of digital incidents

In 2024, 19.5% of governing boards reported one or more cyber incidents in their annual report. Larger institutions reported incidents more often than smaller governing boards (Inspectorate of Education, 2026e). Large-scale disruptions to the continuity of education are relatively rare, but each year incidents do occur that lead to temporary disruption of education or assessment. Governing boards do not always report impactful incidents to the Inspectorate. Reports can, however, contribute to system-wide knowledge sharing and the strengthening of measures that better embed the continuity of education and assessment (Inspectorate of Education, 2025e).

The majority of non-publicly funded higher education institutions (59%) indicate in their activity report that there have been reports of, for example, phishing, but that no actual incidents occurred. In addition, 11% of non-publicly funded higher education institutions report that an actual cybersecurity incident took place in recent years.

Structural resilience: interconnected factors
Digital incidents highlight how dependent educational institutions are on a coherent combination of technology, behaviour and organisation. The structural resilience of schools and institutions is associated with 3 interconnected factors (Dialogic, 2024; Dialogic et al., 2023; SURF, 2024): the insight of governing boards and staff regarding digital risks (awareness); the knowledge and skills available to manage these risks (expertise); and the available time, resources and personnel (capacity) to implement measures. We mapped the development of governing boards on these factors through a questionnaire among a representative group of 176 governing boards, of which 97 were in primary and secondary education and 79 in MBO and higher education (Inspectorate of Education, 2026b). We also surveyed non-publicly funded institutions about how they organise cybersecurity.

Awareness often reactive

Most governing boards in primary and secondary education consider digital resilience essential (88%) and are concerned about digital threats (60%). In MBO and higher education, the picture differs: 59% of governing boards there consider digital resilience essential, while 78% are concerned about digital threats (Inspectorate of Education, 2026b). Nevertheless, digital risks are regularly underestimated or experienced as burdensome in practice (Dialogic, 2024; Dialogic et al., 2023). Awareness tends to grow only after incidents (Data Protection Authority, 2025).

Insufficient expertise

Many institutions, particularly smaller ones, lack sufficient expertise to assess digital risks or manage supplier dependencies. Responsibilities around information security sometimes fall to staff without a relevant background. Of governing board members in primary and secondary education, 49% feel that more specialist knowledge is expected of them than is appropriate to their role. Of MBO and higher education governing board members, 21% feel this way. According to 68% of governing board members in primary and secondary education and 59% of those in MBO and higher education, developments in the area of digital threats are moving faster than they are able to keep up with (Inspectorate of Education, 2026b).

Capacity often limited

Governing boards often find that they have insufficient staff, budget and support to organise digital security on a structural basis. In primary and secondary education, 40% of governing boards find resources inadequate; in MBO and higher education, 36%. In addition, 76% find the standards framework for information security and privacy unrealistic within lump-sum funding, and 72% say they finance ICT resources from their own capital reserves; in MBO and higher education this figure is 75%. In primary and secondary education, 80% of governing boards have staff employed who are equipped to implement digital resilience measures. Digital resilience is often organised at multiple levels: 88% (partly) at governing board level and 77% (partly) at school level, while 63% of governing boards outsource elements (partly) to commercial parties (Inspectorate of Education, 2026b).

Digital security, behaviour and the risks of AI

Digital security is closely linked to user behaviour. Many students do not know what measures their institution takes to ensure safe online studying. Students who are aware of these measures most commonly cite secure software, two-factor authentication and careful handling of sensitive data (Inspectorate of Education, 2026s). Inspectors observe that institutions, including non-publicly funded higher education institutions, see the cyber threat posed by the arrival of AI as a major challenge. Students and educational professionals must already act consciously to limit digital risks. They now also face AI-specific risks, such as entering sensitive information, relying on incorrect or misleading output and the widespread distribution of AI-generated material. This makes it harder to assess the reliability of information and underscores the importance of digital literacy in education: not only to make pupils and students aware of the possibilities of digital technology and media, but also of the risks and consequences of irresponsible use.

Future statutory embedding

With the entry into force of the Cybersecurity Act, higher education institutions will be required to report significant digital incidents. This reporting obligation will come into effect in the course of 2026 and is intended to improve visibility of digital risks and to enable timely deployment of support. In addition, the Act introduces a duty of care that requires institutions to take appropriate measures to structurally manage digital risks. The further elaboration of this duty of care is expected to be developed and phased in over the coming years. Separately, digital literacy will be incorporated into the new attainment targets for primary and secondary education (see also Chapter 3).

5.2 Safety in Practice

The school or institution is the place where safety is given shape on a daily basis. Here, the physical, psychological, social and digital aspects of safety come together: in the classroom, in the school or institution, and in the (online) life surrounding it. Schools and institutions generally comply with their statutory obligations around safety, but the daily task of ensuring safety requires much more.

5.2.1 Safety in the Classroom

Teachers ensure safety in the classroom, but a safe school climate is a matter for the whole team. A safe school climate refers to the clarity and fairness of rules and (behavioural) expectations, and to consistency in their application. An inclusive school climate means an environment in which all pupils feel supported and a sense of belonging is fostered (Van de Pol et al., 2024).

Disruption in the classroom is also a cause of insufficient lesson quality in secondary and special education

The quality of Teaching Strategies was assessed as satisfactory at the majority of schools and institutions over the past 2 years (see also Chapter 1) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p; 2026q). At primary schools where lesson quality was unsatisfactory, the cause lies primarily in insufficient alignment of education to handle differences in pupils' development. This is also the case in secondary and special education, but here an inadequate learning climate is equally often a contributing factor. In practice, this means that pupils cannot engage effectively with learning, for example because teachers spend a great deal of time responding to disruptions, because pupils have to wait a long time for explanation or help, or because the lesson does not invite pupils to participate actively. In MBO, an unsatisfactory assessment for the quality of Teaching Strategies was given on only 5 occasions.

Insufficient shared school culture in secondary education

In the classroom, the teacher plays a key role in creating a safe learning climate. In a safe learning climate, a pupil or student dares to ask questions, make mistakes and speak up (Hardie et al., 2022). Safety in the classroom rests on, among other things, good classroom

management (including behavioural rules and clear expectations), supportive relationships between teacher and pupil and among pupils themselves, based on respect (Van de Pol et al., 2024). Primary school teachers report fewer disruptions in the classroom compared with their secondary school colleagues. Of secondary school teachers, approximately 30% experience maintaining order as stressful. Compared with countries around us, primary school teachers in the Netherlands are very positive about a shared school culture: 80% of these teachers experience a culture of collaboration and mutual support, consistent enforcement of behavioural rules, and shared beliefs about teaching and learning. Secondary school teachers are less positive about the school culture, including compared with reference countries. Only 41% recognise consistent enforcement of behavioural rules for pupils (Buisman et al., 2025). This is an important area for improvement.

5.2.2 *Safety Policy*

Schools in primary, secondary and special education must have and implement safety policy, monitor the safety of their pupils and have an anti-bullying coordinator or point of contact in place. Like MBO and higher education institutions, they must identify and report domestic violence and child abuse, and must consult the confidentiality inspector and, where necessary, report and file a complaint in the event of serious suspicions of a sexual offence. Additional requirements will apply with the planned introduction of the Free and Safe Education Act in 2027. In MBO and higher education, a statutory duty of care for safety does not yet exist, but legislation to regulate this is in preparation.

Free and Safe Education Act
The Free and Safe Education Act will extend the safety requirements for primary and secondary education. Upon its introduction, schools will be required to:

a. evaluate the safety policy annually and share it with the participation council, incorporating information on staff's perception of safety, the pupil safety monitor, incident records, and the advice and annual report of the confidential counsellor;
b. extend the role of the anti-bullying coordinator to cover the entire safety policy;
c. register incidents as a statutory obligation;
d. report serious incidents to the Inspectorate;
e. comply with the duty to report, consult and file complaints also in cases of suspected sexual abuse and sexual harassment involving pupils of age and students (also in MBO and partly in higher education);
f. appoint an internal and external confidential counsellor;
g. affiliate with a national complaints committee.

A General Administrative Order (AMvB) is also in preparation to regulate that the safety monitor be expanded in content and administered to all pupils who can reasonably be expected to participate.

Over a quarter of secondary schools have a shortcoming in their safety policy
Most schools have a safety policy and comply with their obligations around bullying. The Inspectorate assessed the Safety and Security standard as satisfactory at the majority of schools and departments in primary and secondary education during randomised sample inspections (see also Chapter 1). Schools do, however, receive remedial action orders: in secondary education, this applies to more than a quarter of schools (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). The shortcomings concern primarily the safety policy itself, which is, for example, not tailored to the pupil population, not coherent, or not based on safety monitoring data. In MBO, fewer statutory requirements apply and we therefore issued no remedial action orders.

Safety policy must be more embedded in and beyond the school
Now that safety incidents are changing in character and can quickly escalate online, it is especially important that safety arrangements are regularly reviewed and assessed for their effectiveness. Schools and institutions may encounter new safety situations and changing risks or risk groups. This may require new or adapted agreements about how staff should act and about the desired behaviour of pupils or students. Regular discussion, updating and rehearsal of safety arrangements is therefore essential. This involves not only conversations among staff, but conversations with pupils and students, parents and partners in the local environment. A safety coordinator can play an important role here. Governing boards and management must ensure that both new and existing staff are familiar with these arrangements and receive regular training. Schools can be expected to draw the attention of their staff to the safety policy: in special education, 98% of school leaders say they do this; in secondary education, this figure is only 90% (Inspectorate of Education, 2026s). Changes to the safety policy are shared primarily through digital communications (newsletters and emails) and at team meetings. Formal or required safety training occurs less frequently: according to more than 40% of primary and secondary school leaders. In special education, nearly three quarters of school leaders report this. Approximately 70% of schools have

a digital safety policy covering matters such as screen use and media literacy, as well as protection of the school's digital resilience against ICT security incidents. At the remaining 30%, this policy is under development; fewer than 5% of schools have no policy in this area yet.

Working preventively on safety

Monitoring, recording and establishing procedures around safety must not stand in the way of the importance and space for open dialogue with pupils and within the team. Incidents can, however, provide the occasion for dialogue, and schools can draw lessons from them (School & Safety Foundation, 2025). At least as important is what schools do preventively, such as creating a safe, inclusive school climate with attention and time for interpersonal relationships, both among pupils and between pupils and the teacher. Alongside teachers, school leaders have a strong impact on the school climate. Mentors, peer leaders, school pastors and buddies can also contribute to a safe school climate. Schools where safety prevails generally have a coherent, well-implemented pedagogical approach throughout the whole school (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b).

Steering through agreements and accountability

In 2025, we emphasised the importance of ongoing dialogue about safety with colleagues, pupils, students, parents and partners in the neighbourhood or region (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b). Governing boards and management are the drivers, facilitators and guardians of this. They must ensure clear agreements that are adhered to, and must, where necessary, hold staff accountable. They are also responsible for ensuring coherence and focus, so that safety policy not only connects to pedagogical agreements, but also to the citizenship curriculum and the social and civic skills that pupils develop. Governing boards and management also have a role in contributing to (preventive) safety in the environment of the school or institution, so that children and parents are supported and the risk of problems is reduced. Steering on safety requires ambitious goals for the safety of all pupils. It requires that incidents, monitoring data and new challenges are thoroughly discussed and analysed in terms of risks and risk groups, with staff and pupils, as well as in sustainable collaboration with partners in the local environment.

5.2.3 *Monitoring Safety*

Primary and secondary education schools are required to monitor at least annually whether pupils feel safe at school and to submit this monitoring data to the Inspectorate. The monitoring covers wellbeing, safety violations and the perceived sense of safety. In MBO, monitoring of students' safety (experience) and submission of data is not mandatory, but the Inspectorate does expect the institution to have insight into this and to have policy in place. In higher education, monitoring is also not mandatory. When the Inspectorate receives signals about unsafe conditions in higher education, it enters into dialogue with the institution on this.

Instruments for social monitoring differ

Almost all primary, secondary and special education schools comply with the monitoring obligation and administer a questionnaire to their pupils at least once a year. How pupils experience safety at their school varies. Average (positive) outcomes on a safety monitor can conceal underlying variation. It is therefore important that schools look beyond average scores and specifically analyse the distribution and the extremes of the monitor data. In primary and special education, there is considerable variation in the instruments used, and their popularity changes from year to year (Inspectorate of Education, 2026s). The instruments differ, among other things, in the number of questions: one instrument may have 10 questions about the perceived sense of safety, while another has only 1. The choice of a particular instrument can therefore influence the richness of information the school obtains.

The number of pupils surveyed varies

The safety monitor must provide a picture of the perceived sense of safety of all pupils at the school. Primary schools most often administer the monitor to pupils in years 7 and 8, covering an average of 92% of pupils in these year groups. In secondary education, schools administer the monitor to an average of well over 60% of their pupils. In total, there were 28 VO-departments where fewer than 20% of pupils were surveyed (Inspectorate of Education, 2026s). The Free and Safe Education Act will require primary and secondary schools to administer the monitor to a larger number of pupils, which is expected to give schools a broader picture of their pupils' perception of safety.

Greater wellbeing at primary schools in the east of the country

We also examined the characteristics of schools that consistently score high or low on the monitor over 3 consecutive years. Primary schools with consistently high scores on wellbeing and perceived safety have relatively fewer pupils at risk of educational disadvantage. Schools that consistently achieve low scores more often have a high school weighting score. Primary schools with consistently high wellbeing scores are more often located in the east of the country and are on average larger (Inspectorate of Education, 2026s).

Monitoring as a first step towards improvement and prevention

Monitoring data does not always immediately give schools the tools needed to improve safety. For that, (much) more is needed, such as conversations with pupils and parents and within the team (Inspectorate of Education, 2025k). Only then does it become clear what the causes are of pupils' feelings of or experiences with unsafe conditions, enabling the school to take effective measures. This is of course most necessary when the monitor shows consistently low average scores. In that case, the school will need to analyse the safety issues through various conversations, including with parties around the school. But even a small proportion of negative scores requires attention. Remedial action orders issued to schools show that schools do not always adjust their safety policy on the basis of monitoring data. Schools do sometimes take an additional measure, such as increasing surveillance during breaks (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). Reflection on the causes and any shortcomings in the safety policy (or its implementation) is then lacking, which means a more preventive approach fails to materialise.

CHAPTER 6

Inclusive Education

Key points

Inclusive education aims to ensure that pupils and students with additional support needs are given a place in education that matches their abilities. The principle is that, where possible, children and young people attend a mainstream school. Schools, school governing boards and inter-institutional partnerships work together to provide an appropriate placement.

Quality of additional support in primary and secondary education continues to require attention
Pupils and students are entitled to an continuous educational development. This means that schools and educational programmes must align their education with the developmental possibilities of their pupils and students. Some pupils and students need additional support to develop optimally, for example due to learning or behavioural difficulties. To provide the right additional support, schools and programmes need a clear understanding of the support needs. Teaching staff must be able to adapt their teaching to respond effectively to these support needs.

During randomised sample inspections, the Inspectorate issues a substantial proportion of schools in primary and secondary education with improvement requirement orders for the standards Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support and Teaching Strategies. This makes clear that not all schools succeed in ensuring a continuous development for their pupils, including pupils with specific additional support needs. In primary and secondary education, the quality of additional support and the associated quality assurance need attention.

In vocational education, the components of the teaching-learning process related to inclusive education are in order at almost all programmes inspected. It is unclear, however, whether this also applies to the quality of how support is implemented.

Experienced increase in the number of pupils and students with additional support needs
Teachers in the Netherlands experience an increasing number of pupils with specific educational needs in their classrooms. Vocational education also receive an increase in the number of students requiring support. In the Netherlands, relatively more pupils attend special (secondary) education compared with other countries. Over the past few years, the number of pupils in SBO declined, but this has not been the case for the number of pupils in (V)SO. Participation rates in specialist education (SBO and (V)SO) were again higher in 2024-2025 than in 2023-2024. The number of children and young people not attending school has also risen.

This raises the question of why teachers perceive a rise in pupils and students needing additional support. It may reflect something about what they expect of pupils and students in a mainstream learning environment, or about teaching staff's capacity to respond to support needs. A proportion of teachers in mainstream primary and secondary education indicate they do not feel sufficiently prepared to adapt their teaching for pupils with additional support needs. The expertise of professionals in specialist education could be used in the professional development of teachers in mainstream education.

Improvement in the quality of additional support needed to increase participation in mainstream education
To enable more pupils with additional support needs to find a suitable place in a mainstream school, the quality of additional support in mainstream education needs to improve. Inter-institutional partnerships can learn from each other about how their policies can be used to strengthen the capacity of mainstream education. This should result in fewer referrals to special education schools.

Institutions for pupils who are blind or visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, or who have a language development disorder can also serve as models. They have long been working together on targeted policy to increase the expertise of mainstream schools in the area of specific support needs. Various options already exist for adapting education

for pupils with additional support needs (for example, cross-school participation arrangements). The number of schools making use of these is growing slowly, but remains limited. By making greater use of the various options available, schools -working in partnership- can create more inclusive learning environments. In this way, more pupils can transition to (more) mainstream education.

In light of the ambition of achieving inclusive education by 2035, it is essential that schools, school governing boards and inter-institutional partnerships continue working to strengthen mainstream education and make greater use of existing provisions. This will make education more appropriate for a larger group of pupils and increase participation in mainstream education.

Continuous development
The continuous development of pupils and students is embedded in legislation, which stipulates that schools and educational programmes must align their education according the developmental possibilities of pupils and students. This process begins in mainstream schools in primary and secondary education and in programmes in continued education. Schools in primary and secondary education provide basic support to all pupils and (temporary) additional support to those who need it. Additional support may be needed when pupils have learning or behavioural difficulties. Through a comprehensive network of support provisions in the inter-institutional partnerships (SWV), school boards and regional partnerships share responsibility for ensuring the continuous development of all students and pupils. The continuous development of pupils and students is a point of attention at the transition from one educational sector to another: from primary to secondary education and subsequently to vocational or higher education. Even more critical are transitions within the support continuum itself, for example between mainstream and specialized education, temporary off-site provisions, and residential facilities. It is essential that schools and school boards take responsibility and work collaboratively to embed this continuity of development.

Recommendations

The participation rate in specialist education has not declined, but this was not expected either: strengthening and expanding additional support in mainstream education requires considerable effort. The Umbrella Network of Inter-institutional partnerships (ONSwv), supported by the Inspectorate, is working on the recommendation to improve the quality of regional support plans. The other recommendations we made last year remain fully relevant, including in the context of the aspiration towards inclusive education by 2035. This applies in particular to the recommendation that the government set concrete, realizable targets for inter-institutional partnerships (SWV), enabling a step-by-step increase in participation in mainstream education. This year we also make the following recommendations:

- Inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) and governing boards: jointly formulate concrete goals and agreements together at strengthening the knowledge and skills within mainstream education, so that it can become an appropriate placement for more pupils.
- Schools: make more frequent use of existing provisions (such as cross-school participation arrangements) working collaboratively to ensure an continuous development for pupils with additional support needs.

6.1 Continuous Development as a Foundation

6.1.1 *Inclusive Education in Primary and Secondary Education*

Teachers report many pupils with special educational needs

Compared with 2018, more teachers in primary education and the lower years of secondary education report that at least 10% of their pupils have special educational needs (2024: 86%; 2018: 50%). This percentage is higher than in other European countries. Dutch teachers also report more often than teachers in other countries that more than 1 in 10 pupils in the class have behavioral problems (PO: 36%; VO: 41%). At the same time, they less often feel well equipped to design lessons that meet the special educational needs of pupils than teachers in other countries (54% versus 62%). On the other hand, they more often report being able to collaborate well with other educational professionals to make education appropriate for these pupils (85% versus 72%) (OECD, 2025c). The question is why teachers in the Netherlands perceive that they have (increasingly) more pupils with special educational needs in their classrooms. From an international perspective, more pupils in the Netherlands attend special primary education or special education (V)SO than in other countries. Moreover, the percentage of pupils attending special education has been rising for several years (OCW, 2025e). It may reflect the expectations Dutch teachers have of pupils in mainstream education, or about their capacity to respond to the special educational needs of pupils.

More children and young people not attending school

In the 2023-2024 schoolyear, more than 19,000 children and young people were unlawfully absent from school. Both the number of absolute non-attenders (+1,272) and the number of long-term relative non-attenders (+413) rose compared with the previous school year. Various types of intervention are being used to prevent or reduce absenteeism. Over 8,000 pupils during the same school year resumed education or found a place elsewhere (DUO, 2025d). When a child or young person stops attending school, is usually the result of multiple interacting factors. These may relate to the pupil (such as a specific support need), the immediate environment (such as the home situation) and the (school) system (such as an inadequate support structure or waiting lists) (Roelofs et al., 2025). Approximately 20% of schools in special education have a waiting list with an average of 8 pupils waiting for a place. Some of these pupils are on the waiting list at more than one school (Middelbeek et al., 2024).

Interventions to prevent school dropout

This means that deploying interventions can, in some cases, help to prevent school dropout. Interventions in which schools combine a school-wide, preventive approach with targeted interventions for specific causes of absenteeism are often effective (Inspectorate of Education, 2026t). A clear attendance policy and attendance registration can help a school determine whether an intervention that has been deployed is actually effective. Inspectors observe, however, that attendance policy and/or registration are not in order at all schools. When a pupil is temporarily unable to follow the full instructional time due to circumstances, an application can be made to the Inspectorate for dispensation from instructional time requirements. This can help prevent pupils from being kept at home. Where a pupil has already dropped out, it can also enable a gradual return to education. Such deviations should be temporary and aimed at a return to (full-time education at) a school. By law, approval from the Inspectorate is required for dispensation from compulsory instructional time requirements due to physical or psychological reasons. From 1 January 2026, the procedure for this has been simplified. National insight into how many pupils are temporarily or fully unable to attend education at a school location due to psychological or physical reasons is important, as it may reflect something about the extent to which schools need other parties to make education appropriate for a pupil. Under specific conditions, a school is permitted to purchase or hire in expertise for this purpose, or to collaborate with a third party. In all cases, the school of enrolment remains responsible, under its duty of care, for the education of the pupil. According to inspectors, schools and school governing boards are not always aware of this responsibility, which sometimes leads to unlawfully expenditure (see also Chapter 2).

Many remedial action orders for standards related to inclusive education

To provide inclusive education, schools must understand the support needs of their pupils and align their teaching accordingly. This should then be visible in lessons. During randomised sample inspections, inspectors assessed the standards Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support and Teaching Strategies as unsatisfactory at a proportion of schools (see also Chapter 1) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). They also issued a large

number of remedial action orders, requiring schools to improve crucial components of the teaching-learning process. A considerable proportion of schools received a recovery order for the standard Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support (PO: 35%; VO: 48%) and/or Teaching Strategies (PO: 25%; VO: 49%). These standards are important for providing high-quality inclusive education. The legal basis for these standards lies, among other things, in the requirement that schools provide education that embed pupils' continuous development The number of recovery orders shows that many schools are not yet meeting this requirement adequately. Schools frequently struggle to align their teaching with pupils' educational needs including those with specific additional support needs. It is important that schools differentiate and align within their education provision so that they can deliver inclusive education. The better mainstream schools are able to do this, the fewer referrals to special primary education or special (secondary) education may be necessary.

Parents and pupils generally satisfied with additional support

According to support coordinators, parents and pupils in primary, secondary and special education, providing appropriate support frequently succeeds. The support offered then matches the specific needs of a pupil. Parents and pupils are generally satisfied with the support provided by schools. Schools are required to consult with parents and pupils about support and, according to all parties involved, they generally do so. Schools also report evaluating whether the support is effective (De Graaf et al., 2024). However, research by the Inspectorate found that the quality of additional support is not sufficient everywhere (Inspectorate of Education, 2024b). Since 1 January 2025, inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) are required to have a parent and youth support center to inform and support parents and pupils in the area of inclusive education and to identify developments in this area. In 2025, almost no inter-institutional partnership received a recovery order in this area. Inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) have organized these parent and youth support centers in various ways. Sometimes they have established a joint center with another inter-institutional partnership in the region. Inspectors note that both parents and schools are not always aware of the support center in their region. This is important, however, because reports received by the support center can be a valuable source of information. They help improve the implementation of responsibilities to inclusive education.

6.1.2 *Inclusive Education in MBO*

Vocational institutions report an increase in the number of students with support needs

Students sometimes face special circumstances that directly (for example ADHD or dyslexia) or indirectly (for example parenthood or poverty) affect their ability to follow their education. In interviews at vocational education institutions (MBO), educational professionals note that the number of students with support requests related to special circumstances has increased in recent years. They experience the support requests as increasingly complex and serious. More students drawing on support for special circumstances have financial implications, as the resources for additional support do not automatically increase in line with demand. In addition, teaching staff need stronger pedagogical skills to respond effectively to these support needs. Teacher training programmes should provide the foundation, ensuring that future teachers know can recognize signals, know when and how to seek support, and how to collaborate with experts to organize appropriate support. School governing boards are responsible for the continued professional development of their teaching staff and teams (Inspectorate of Education, 2026a).

Almost no remedial action orders in MBO for standards related to inclusive education

To provide support in cases of special circumstances, vocational education (MBO) programmes must also understand support needs of their students and align their teaching accordingly. This should be visible in classroom practices. During randomised sample inspections in 2024 and 2025, inspectors assessed the standards Monitoring Pupils' Achievements and Support and Teaching Strategies as satisfactory or good at almost all programmes reviewed. Almost no programme received a recovery order for either of these standards (see also Chapter 1) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026q). This indicates that the components of the teaching-learning process of which inclusive education forms a part are in order at almost all programmes.

Most students satisfied with the support provided in special circumstances

In 2023-2024, more than a quarter of students who completed the JOB Monitor reported having a support need due to special circumstances (JOBmbo, 2024). The support needs may be the result of a physical illness or condition, but may also arise from a difficult home situation or financial problems. Approximately two thirds of vocational education

(MBO) students with a support need have made agreements with their programme. These may relate to, for example, assistive tools, adjustments to the programme or additional guidance. These students may also benefit of adapted assessments, personal guidance or workplace adjustments. According to almost all vocational education (MBO) institutions, they succeed in realizing the additional support students need. Three quarters of students say that the agreements about support are (largely) being honored. Overall, Students are satisfied with the support provided. However, nearly 1 in 5 students is not satisfied, for example because they are still missing assistive tools, adjustments or additional support. Even among the students with a support need who are satisfied, more than a quarter still experiences challenges, such as issues with guidance, limited understanding and problems in communication and information provision(Kennis et al., 2024).

6.1.3 Inclusive Education in Higher Education

Most higher education students with a support need are satisfied with provisions

Approximately 1 in 5 students in higher education experiences barriers in their studies due to special circumstances. These may include ADHD and concentration difficulties, dyslexia or dyscalculia, psychological conditions or family-related circumstances. Almost two thirds of students who experience such barriers report them to their educational institution. Those who have not done so often feel they do not need support. For 2 in 3 students, provisions have been arranged following their notification. Almost three quarters of students who make use of the special provisions on offer are (very) satisfied with them (Schreurs & Bremer, 2025). Approximately a quarter of students with special circumstances say they are less able to participate effectively in online education. A small proportion of this group (HBO bachelor: 15%; WO bachelor: 14%; WO master: 0%) says they need additional tools (such as text-to-speech software, screen magnification software or speech synthesis software) to better engage with online learning (Inspectorate of Education, 2026n).

6.2 Continuous Development at Transition Points

6.2.1 Pupils in Mainstream Education

Inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) frequently collaborate on the transition from primary to secondary education

Pupils with additional support needs often require extra guidance at the transition from primary to secondary education. Inter-institutional partnerships in primary education are required to submit their regional support plan to the inter-institutional regional partnership in secondary education in their region, and vice versa, to ensure continuity. When making concrete agreements, it is important that provisions are aligned. Most primary and secondary education inter-institutional partnerships work together to ensure a smooth transition for pupils with additional support needs. The collaboration focuses, for example, on improving information transfer between schools, finding appropriate placement for the pupil, and supporting pupils and parents. The majority of inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) are (very) satisfied with the outcomes of the collaboration. Approximately one fifth of the partnerships have established a joint parent and youth support center involved in the transition to secondary education for individual pupils (Vleeskens et al., 2025). According to parents and pupils, there is still room for improvement in communication between the primary or special education school and the receiving secondary school, particularly regarding support already provided. They also indicate that schools could give better advice on how to approach a pupil (De Graaf et al., 2024).

6.2.2 Pupils in Mainstream and/or Specialist Education

Increase in the number of pupils in special education

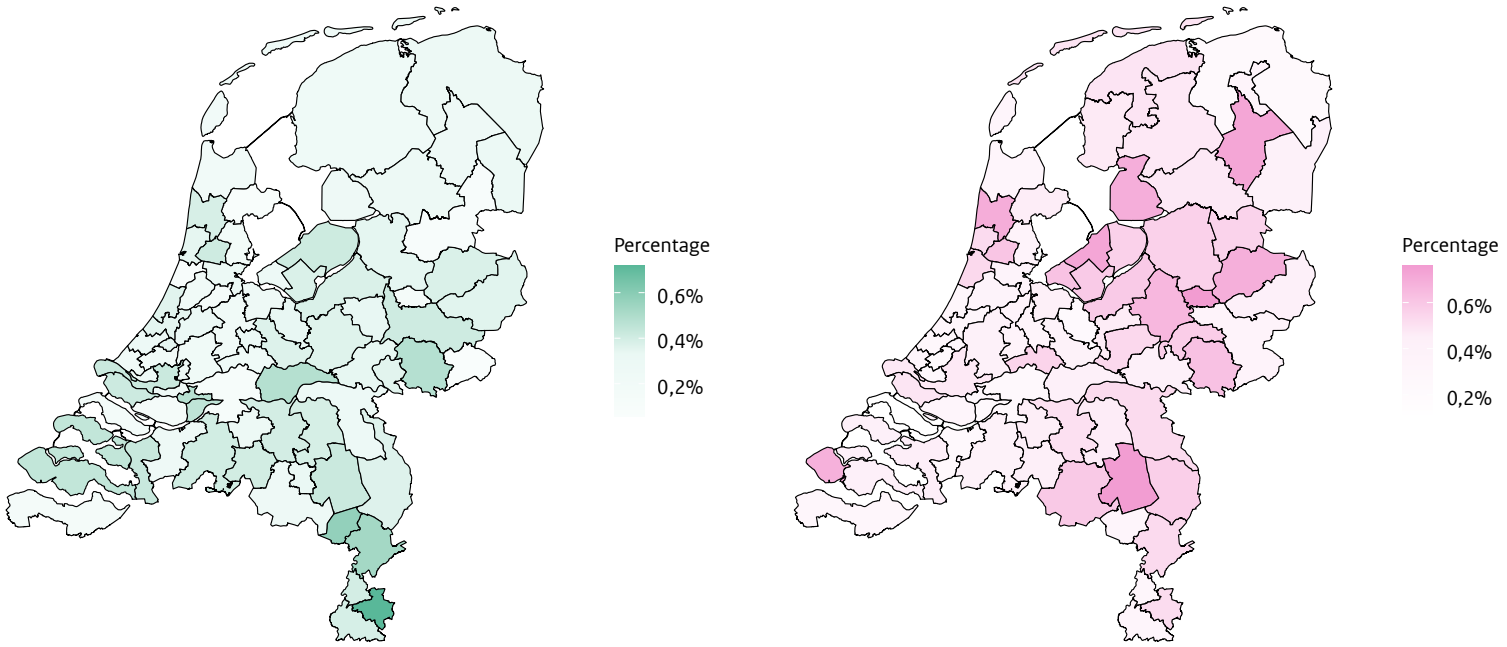
The number of pupils attending special (secondary) education rose in 2024-2025 to more than 35,000 (SO) and 39,500 (VSO), approximately 1,200 more than in the previous school year. Growth occurred exclusively among pupils attending former cluster 3 and 4 schools[13].

13 Cluster 3: primarily focused on cognitive and/or physical disabilities. Cluster 4: primarily focused on behavioural and psychiatric needs

In the 2024-2025 school year, around 3,800 pupils from mainstream primary education transferred to special primary education, and approximately 3,300 pupils from mainstream secondary education transferred to VSO. The number of pupils transferring from mainstream education to special education (secondary level, VSO) The number of pupils transferring from mainstream education to special education (primary or secondary level) has remained largely stable in recent years (OCW, 2025e).

Due to the high participation rate in (V)SO, inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) are required to transfer a large proportion of their government funding to schools for special education. This leaves less money for funding inclusive education in mainstream schools. Due to the increase in the number of pupils in special education (primary and secondary level, SO and VSO), the additional support at mainstream schools must be funded with fewer resources. A large proportion of mainstream schools find the resources they receive from inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) insufficient for delivering the additional support that pupils who need it require (Inspectorate of Education, 2026n).

Figure 6.2.2a Percentage of pupils per inter-institutional partnership referred to special education from primary education (left) and secondary education (right), average over 2021-2022 to 2023-2024

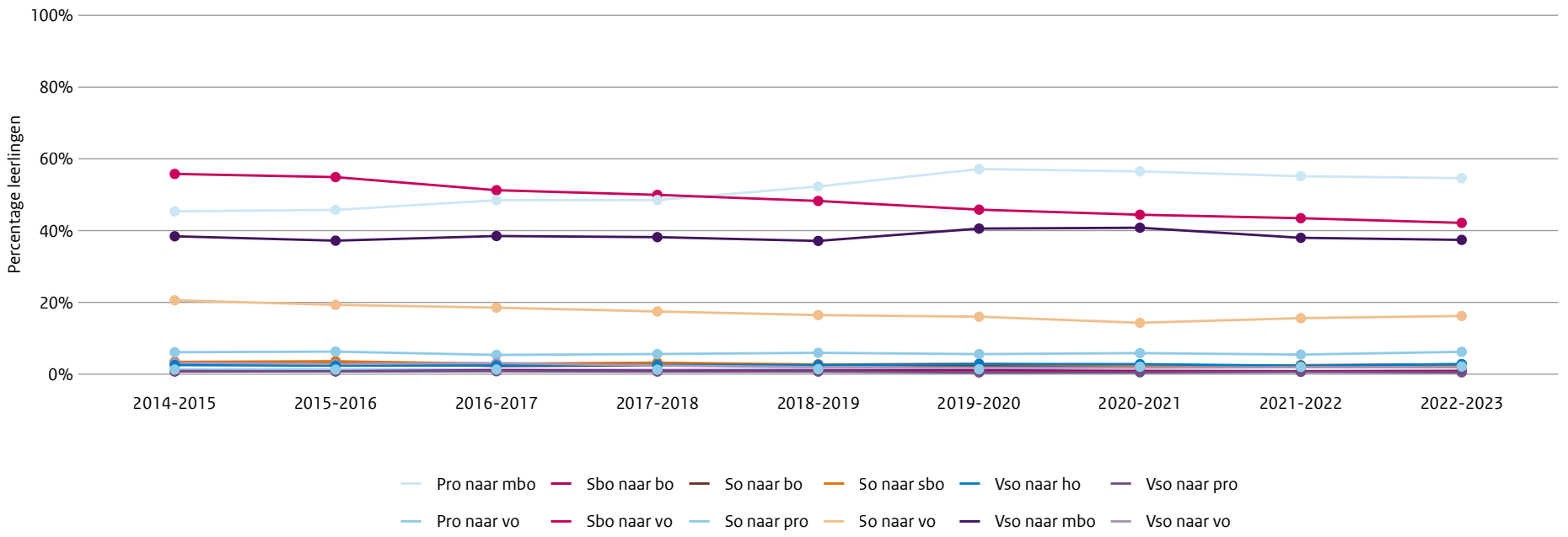


Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026n)

Differences between inter-institutional partnerships in referrals to special education

On average, per inter-institutional regional partnership (SWV), a very small proportion of pupils in mainstream education (primary: 0.3%; secondary: 0.4%) were referred to special primary and secondary education (so and vso) in 2023-2024. Pupils are on average 6.8 (primary) and 13.7 (secondary) years old when they transfer from mainstream education to a special education(primary or secondary level, SO and VSO) school. The majority of pupils transferring to special education (secondary level, VSO) are referred at the start of secondary school (Year 1 or 2). There is no difference in the percentage of referrals between primary schools assessed by inspectors as satisfactory or as unsatisfactory (Inspectorate of Education, 2026n). The percentage of pupils transferring from primary or secondary education to special education (primary and secondary level, SO and VSO) varies between inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) (Figure 6.2.2a). Inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) with a orthopedagogical-didactical centre (OPDC) make, on average, the same number of referrals as those without an OPDC (Inspectorate of Education, 2026n).

Figure 6.2.2b Percentage of pupils transferring (mid-stream) from SO, SBO, VSO and PRO to a (more) mainstream school type



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026u)

No change in the number of pupils transferring to (more) mainstream education

Pupils can transfer from special primary education, special (secondary) education and practical education (PRO) to (more) mainstream education at various points in their school career. In the 2022-2023 school year, more than 3,000 SBO and 800 SO pupils transferred to secondary mainstream education. More than 300 pupils transferred from SO to PRO at the end of that school year. Mid-stream transfer to (more) mainstream education (for example from SO to SBO or mainstream primary) are relatively rare (SBO: 0.9%; SO: 5.2%; VSO: 2.5%; PRO: 2.1%). The percentage of pupils who transfer has remained virtually stable in recent years (Figure 6.2.2b). Most pupils who transfer from special primary education, special (secondary) education or practical education to mainstream primary education or another school type in secondary education are successful there (77-92%): 3 years later they are still following education at the school type to which they transferred, or have since obtained a diploma there. For further education, these percentages are somewhat lower (68-82%). Pupils frequently obtain a secondary education diploma after leaving special (primary) education: SO (70%), SBO (77%), VSO (71%) and PRO (64%). Pupils who have not obtained a secondary education diploma have, for example, transferred to special secondary education, continued to a vocational education admittance programme or left education early. Approximately 4 in 5 PRO pupils who chose to continue to an admittance or vocational education (MBO, level 2) programme obtained a diploma there. Of special secondary education students who went on to an vocational education programme, this figure is 60% (Inspectorate of Education, 2026u).

Differences between groups of pupils in transfer

Transfer to a (more) mainstream school type is partly associated with the complexity of pupils' support needs. Pupils with greater support needs transfer to mainstream education less often. Pupils who have been in specialist education since their first enrolment, or who have attended many different schools, transfer less frequently. Pupils whose parents have at most a vocational education (MBO level 2) diploma also transfer less often than pupils of parents with a higher level of qualification. The picture for pupils with a migration background is mixed. At the end of primary school, they less often transfer to mainstream secondary education than pupils without a migration background. However, in further education, relatively more pupils with a non-European migration background progress pupils from a cluster 2 institution (pupils who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who have a language development disorder) transfer considerably more often to (more) mainstream education during and after primary school age than pupils from

former cluster 3 or 4 schools (Inspectorate of Education, 2026u). Since the introduction of inclusive education policy, the number of pupils from cluster 2 receiving itinerant support in mainstream primary education has more than doubled to almost 8,000. In mainstream secondary education, approximately 1,300 pupils received itinerant support from cluster 2 in 2024-2025, which is actually fewer than 10 years ago (OCW, 2025e).

Differences between inter-institutional partnerships in transfer

Inter-institutional partnerships differ in the extent to which pupils transfer mid-stream to (more) mainstream education, ranging from almost no pupils transferring mid-stream to 1 in every 20. These differences may be associated with differences in the pupil population in specialist education between inter-institutional partnerships and how they align their policy with this. In some inter-institutional partnerships, fewer pupils attend specialist education and practical education than in others. In primary education inter-institutional partnerships with a higher participation rate in special (primary) education, proportionally fewer pupils transfer mid-stream. In these partnerships, however, the transfer to a (more) mainstream form of secondary education is higher. Other characteristics of inter-institutional regional partnerships, such as the ratio of mainstream schools to special education and practical education schools, the number of municipalities, the number of governing boards or the number of pupils, are not associated with transfer rates (Inspectorate of Education, 2026u). Inter-institutional partnerships determine whether a pupil is reintegrated into mainstream education. They can learn from each other regarding the formulation of concrete reintegration policy, but can also learn from cluster 2 institutions, which have longer-standing experience in establishing joint polities in this area.

Symbiosis offer opportunities

Symbiosis make it possible for pupils in primary and secondary education to follow (part of) their education at a school other than the one where they are formally enrolled. For example, a pupil in special education, primary and secondary level, may attend certain lessons at a mainstream school. Conversely, a pupil at a mainstream primary or secondary school can partly attend part of their programme at a special education school, primary or secondary level. A minority of mainstream schools make use of symbiosis to provide an appropriate placement for pupils with additional support needs (Table 6.2.2a). In primary education, it is only a small number of schools. In secondary education, 1 in 10 schools made use of symbiosis with special education, secondary level in the 2024-2025 school year. The number of pupils at those schools attending some lessons in mainstream education is small (Inspectorate of Education, 2026n). Symbiosis can offer valuable opportunities for pupils to gradually adjust to (more) mainstream education. Where the rules for symbiosis do not provide sufficient flexibility, mainstream schools collaborating with specialist education can participate in the policy rule on the Experimental Inclusive Learning Environment (Beleidsregel experiment inclusieve leeromgeving)Within this framework, schools are allowed to combine pupils from different schools into a single group without a formal symbiosis agreement. The restriction that only part of the educational programme can be followed at another school does not apply. In 2025, approximately 100 schools participated in this experiment.

Table 6.2.2a Percentage of primary and special education schools and secondary education departments where a number of pupils partly attend another school

		Schools/departments		Pupils	
		n	%	Average number	Maximum
Bo	So	4	3	1	1
	Sbo	7	5	1	2
	Bo	10	7	3	10
Vo	Vso	22	10	3	7
	Pro	13	6	4	15
	Vo	67	29	2	10
So	So	1	1	1	1
	Sbo	5	5	7	12
	Bo	25	27	4	26
Vso	Vso	7	9	3	9
	Pro	16	20	2	6
	Vo	23	29	14	57

Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026n)

Example of a cross-school arrangement between a secondary and a special secondary school

A VSO school has established a satellite location in the building of a mainstream VMBO school. In so-called symbiosis classes, up to 15 pupils who need additional support due to, among other things, behavioural or learning difficulties attend lessons together. The pupils follow the general education subjects in a dedicated classroom in a separate wing with its own entrance, and may also spend their breaks in this classroom. This enables the pupils to follow their education in a calm, structured environment. Practical subjects are taught within the regular VMBO setting, enabling pupils to obtain a full VMBO diploma. The VSO pupils learn the practical subjects alongside the mainstream pupils in the same class. During these lessons, they receive guidance from both the mainstream VMBO teachers and the VSO teachers. The educational programme is adapted to pupils' specific support needs. Pupils receive coaching from a mentor and can access additional youth care if needed.

No effects of an inclusive educational setting on the cognitive development of classmates

Most forms of support in an inclusive setting have positive effects on the cognitive outcomes and social participation of pupils with additional support needs (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b). There are sometimes concerns about what an inclusive learning environment - with more pupils with additional support needs- means for the (non-) cognitive development of their peers. An international literature review of 17 studies found that the presence of pupils with an intellectual disability or pupils with social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties in an inclusive educational setting produces no to small positive differences in the academic performance of classmates. Positive outcomes were also found in attitudes towards and knowledge about special educational needs. With regard to the social participation, wellbeing, self-confidence and behaviour of classmates, the results are predominantly neutral to negative. Some studies found that classmates of pupils with additional support needs display more behavioural problems and a higher absenteeism (Kuijper & De Boer, 2025). This underlines that an inclusive educational setting requires strong guidance and support from educational professionals to ensure the development of all pupils. Our randomised sample inspections show that this is not sufficiently the case at schools reviewed (Inspectorate of Education, 2026p). The question is which elements of additional support are most effective in realizing the optimal development of all pupils. Peer tutoring appears to have positive effects (Kuijper & De Boer, 2025).

6.2.3 *Pupils at orthopedagogical-didactic centres (OPDC)*

Satisfaction with OPDC

For pupils who are temporarily unable to (fully) attend a mainstream school, a proportion of inter-institutional partnerships have at least 1 registered OPDC in the Register of Educational Institutions (RIO) (primary: 5; secondary: 35). Inter-institutional partnerships pursue different objectives with these OPDCs, including preventing absenteeism and early school leaving, observing pupils with a view to support advice when progressing to another school, and breaking persistent behavioural patterns. Almost all are (somewhat) satisfied with the extent to which OPDCs achieved their goals in 2024-2025. Almost all schools are (somewhat) satisfied with the success of cross-school provisions, including OPDCs (Inspectorate of Education, 2026n). According to school leaders, OPDC's frequently have waiting lists (De Graaf et al., 2024).

Predominantly secondary education pupils at OPDC

The total number of pupils attending an OPDC is unknown, as schools do not register this accurately. According to inter-institutional partnerships, an average of 24 primary and 67 secondary education pupils attended an OPDC in the 2024-2025 school year. The number of pupils attending an OPDC within an inter-institutional regional partnership varies considerably (primary: 12-45 pupils; secondary: 5-259 pupils). Approximately 11% of primary schools and 45% of secondary schools had at least 1 pupil temporarily attending a cross-school provision (including OPDCs) in 2024-2025. Most pupils attend for longer than 3 months. Approximately three quarters of schools maintain direct contact with the pupil during this period. In addition, a large proportion of schools remain involved by providing the individual education plan (OPP), schoolwork and/or assessments. They also frequently play a role in interim evaluations, preparing for the pupil's return, and, where necessary, finding another appropriate school (Inspectorate of Education, 2026n). The school of enrolment remains fully responsible for the pupil at all times.

Quality assurance often insufficient at OPDC

Boards of inter-institutional partnerships are responsible for the quality of education at OPDCs. Since September 2022,inspectors have conducted 21 investigations at OPDCS.

At 10 OPDCs, inspectors assessed at least 1 of the 3 quality assurance standards as unsatisfactory. Common shortcomings include a lack of clear educational policy, of defined goals and intended outcomes, and of the implementation of a structured quality assurance system. The support provided to pupils and the quality of Teaching Strategies were almost always assessed as satisfactory. At a quarter of OPDCs, the support provided to pupils was even rated as good. Inter-institutional partnerships are not legally required to have a Certificate of Good Conduct for their staff. The Inspectorate considers this a risk to the safety of pupils. We therefore advocate for legislative change.

6.2.4 *Pupils at Residential Schools*

Different types of residential schools

Pupils sometimes temporarily do not live at home, for example due to out-of-home placement or need intensive treatment. In some cases, these pupils may attend a school connected to the residential institution where they live: a so-called residential school. There are 5 types of residential placement: in a juvenile justice institutions (JJI) (VSO: 6); in a secure youth care institutions (GJI) (SO: 1; VSO: 15); in integrated (open) youth care (IJH) (SO: 37; VSO: 55); in a disability care settings (SO: 6; VSO: 6); and in youth health care settings (SO: 16; VSO: 13). There is some overlap in the types of residential placement that schools offer: secure and open youth care are often coexist, as do disability care and youth healthcare. Most residential schools (excluding juvenile justice institution JIJ also admit pupils with a formal eligibility statement from an inter-institutional regional partnership. In 2024, we assessed the quality of education at 3 schools connected to a juvenile justice institutions (JIJ) as satisfactory, while 2 were assessed as unsatisfactory, partly due to a lack of continuity in pupils' development. In the current school year, 2025-2026, inspectors assessed 8 schools connected to the secured health care (GJI) as satisfactory and 4 as unsatisfactory.

Pupils at residential schools have different intended destination levels

In the 2024-2025 school year, approximately 1,200 special education, primary level and 1,200 special education, secondary level pupils were attending a residential school. The number of pupils at a residential school has decreased by more than half since 2015 (OCW, 2025e). Pupils always stay at a residential school temporarily. Most pupils (SO: 90%; VSO: 77%) stay for more than 6 months on average. At approximately half of the schools, pupils remain for more than 1 year (Inspectorate of Education, 2026n). For the majority of special

education, secondary level schools, they have pupils whose intended destination level is vocational education. At more than 1 in 3, some pupils are intended to progress to higher education. Even where such destination levels are less common, schools are expected to make every effort to provide education at the appropriate level. In juvenile justice institutions some young people are over 18 and are (or could be) enrolled in a vocational education (MBO) or higher education (HBO). Current legislation often prevents schools connected to a juvenile justice institutions (JJI) from providing this education under their own responsibility.

Not all inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) involved in the reintegration of residential pupils

Pupils in open and secured residential institutions who (temporarily) attend special education, secondary level (VSO) must be de-registered from their school of origin after 3 months. This can complicate reintegration after the placement,, as the school of origin is no longer responsible for finding a suitable placement for the pupil. More than half of inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) indicated that in 2024-2025 they placed pupils at a residential school connected to youth care. Inter-institutional partnerships must make agreements about the return of pupils from residential institutions. However, one third says they have not done this for (all) pupils. To maintain visibility on pupils returning from a residential institution, inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) and schools are dependent on information from the residential institutions. One third of inter-institutional partnerships (SWV) say they are rarely or never involved when pupils return from a residential school, and 1 in 5 indicate they are sometimes only informed at the point when a pupil has already dropped out (Inspectorate of Education, 2026n). To prevent this, it is important to establish clear agreements are made in advance between the residential school and the inter-institutional regional partnership (SWV) of origin.

Transforming and scaling down of secured youth care leads to more pupils attending mainstream education

In 2022, the national government decided to gradually phase out secured youth care, with the aim that, by 2030, no young people will be placed in secured care. To achieve this, institutions are being transformed into small-scale provisions or closed down. New, small-scale provisions have been established to accommodate young people who were previously placed in a secured (residential) youth care institution. There is no clear overview on how many and which care providers maintain such small-scale facilities.

No school is connected to these new small-scale provisions. As a result, these pupils are expected to attend education across various schools. This makes it difficult for the Inspectorate to maintain oversight of the quality of education provided to this specific group of pupils. It is unknown whether schools have sufficient expertise to support these pupils effectively.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CHAPTER 7

Educational Professionals

Key points

Educational professionals are passionate about their work. To contribute optimally to the further improvement of education, they need a stimulating and professional working environment. The school leader plays a key role in this. It is therefore essential that school leaders are given more space to fulfil this role.

Increased intake and better preparation of teachers
A great deal has been done in recent years to retain teachers in education and attract new ones, including through more attractive employment conditions and better support during teachers' first years in the classroom. This has produced visible results: the labour market position of teachers is strong compared with other HBO graduates. Intake at primary teacher education (PABOs) increased again in 2024-2025. Newly qualified teachers in primary and secondary education feel better prepared in terms of subject content and subject-specific pedagogy by their teacher training, participate more often in induction programmes, and are satisfied with the guidance they receive. Nevertheless, there remains a shortage of teachers, and this brings additional workload. The workload of school leaders also requires attention.

Experienced workload and administrative burden among teachers remains high
Educational professionals are in agreement: They have a wonderful profession. But the experienced workload in education remains high compared with other sectors. The volume of work and administrative tasks in particular causes work-related stress. Compared with other countries, Dutch teachers spend relatively large amounts of time on administration and (team) consultations, leaving them less time for lesson preparation and marking. According to teachers, stress also arises from pupils' behavioural problems and managing the concerns of parents. Secondary school teachers in particular are troubled by disruptions to order and incidents involving verbal violence or intimidation.

More effective deployment of teaching support staff possible
In recent years, the number of teaching support staff in schools has grown steadily. To retain teaching support staff in education, it is important that they are deployed effectively and that attention is given to their professional development. Teaching assistants can relieve pressure on teachers, bring or develop complementary expertise, and make differentiation during lessons more feasible. At many schools, there is still no policy on how teaching assistants can best be deployed, and clear agreements about their responsibilities are often lacking. As a result, teaching support staff are sometimes deployed ineffectively or in ways that do not suit their role.

Investment in strong teaching teams and subject-specific pedagogy
To improve pupils' basic skills, schools can invest more in subject-specific pedagogy and in collaboration between teachers and between subject departments. Working together, the team can then work in a targeted way towards high-quality education. The foundation for this is a culture of collaboration and shared beliefs. In primary education, many teachers already experience this shared learning culture, but secondary school teachers experience it to a lesser extent. The absence of such a culture hinders the development of teaching teams that are strong both in general pedagogy and in subject-specific pedagogy. Although teachers' general pedagogical skills are generally in order, aligning lessons with differences between pupils remains difficult. The more complex subject-specific pedagogical skills of teachers can also be further strengthened.

Working with AI in education
Pupils and students are using generative AI on a large scale for their schoolwork or studies, most often to look up information, seek inspiration or rewrite texts. In higher education, examination boards have begun asking students to account for their use of AI. Educational programmes still have limited visibility on the extent to which students are aware of the risks and whether they use AI ethically. Many students say that agreements do exist about whether AI may be used, but that they receive no instruction from their programme on how AI may be used. Teachers also use AI, for example to generate lesson plans. Yet most teachers feel they do not yet have the knowledge and skills needed to

deploy AI effectively in their lessons. Many schools still lack sufficient digital tools and infrastructure for using AI. To prevent teachers from falling behind, schools need to develop professional development policy quickly.

School leaders unable to devote sufficient time to educational leadership
School leaders play a key role in addressing the above challenges: in retaining teachers at the school, deploying support staff effectively and working structurally on educational quality. But at present, school leaders have too many tasks to do their job well. They want to spend more time on further improving education and providing teachers with a good working and learning environment. In practice, however, school leaders spend a great deal of time on preconditions such as managing staffing levels, premises, finances and administration. The constantly changing requirements from government and the administration involved in managing temporary funds also contribute to an increasing regulatory burden. This causes stress and has a negative impact on the continuity of school leadership. School leaders must therefore actively engage in dialogue with their governing board and team about the support they need and how they can better delineate their tasks and responsibilities, for example by deploying support staff or by placing certain tasks and responsibilities with others in the team (distributed leadership).

Curricula of full-time PABO programmes do not cover all competence requirement categories in their learning objectives
An inventory of the curricula of full-time PABO programmes reveals that there are major differences in the Netherlands in how routes to primary school teaching are structured. The extent to which the statutory competence requirements have been translated into curricula differs. Some routes devote relatively more attention to specific subject or competence requirements, while others opt for broad integration. It also emerges that not all routes cover all statutory competence requirement categories in their learning objectives. The Inspectorate aligns with the Education Council's call to better embed the competence of future teachers and to make competence requirements more concrete. This gives institutions scope to shape the curriculum in their own way, while at the same time providing certainty that every teacher, regardless of the route followed, is sufficiently prepared to deliver good education.

Recommendations

In 2025, our recommendation to governing boards and school leaders was to invest more in strengthening school teams, so that educational professionals can collaborate more and draw on each other's expertise. In primary education, this shared team culture is present at an increasing number of schools. Secondary education and MBO still have steps to take in this regard. The school leader drives the development and professional development of the school team. But at present, school leaders are being asked too much of, and the improvement of educational quality is at risk as a result. We therefore make the following recommendations this year:

- School leaders: enter into dialogue with the governing board and the team about how they can support you more with your tasks and responsibilities, for example by deploying support staff (such as an administrative worker) or distributing responsibilities more widely across the team (distributed leadership).
- Governing boards and school leaders: the deployment of teaching support staff can be more effective. Formulate policy and make clear agreements about the responsibilities and career development possibilities of teaching support staff.

School leader has no time for educational development

Solutions?

- Defining the boundaries of responsibilities
- Reducing administrative burden
- Deploying additional staff
- Sharing tasks and responsibilities within the team.

7.1 Working Environment

Generally a strong labour market position

The National Working Conditions Survey paints a clear picture: work engagement among teachers is high. More than two thirds of teachers in primary and secondary education and MBO are enthusiastic about their job at least several times a week, more often than employees in sectors outside education. Teachers are also generally satisfied with their employment conditions, such as the pension scheme, type of contract and salary. The proportion of teachers satisfied with their salary has risen since 2019 to 86% in primary education and 83% in secondary education (Van den Heuvel & De Vroome, 2025).

Recent graduates of the PABO have a stronger labour market position than other HBO graduates in terms of their chances of finding a job, obtaining a permanent contract and hourly wage. Even 10 years after graduating, PABO graduates earn more per hour than other HBO graduates (Pritsch & Rutten, 2025). The proportion of graduates from secondary and MBO teacher training programmes who have a job and a permanent contract has also been rising in recent years (Wartenbergh et al., 2025). Although a strong labour market position is important for attracting and retaining teachers, it is of course not the only reason to choose the teaching profession: working atmosphere, safety and workload also play a role.

Satisfaction with school culture in primary education; secondary school teachers less positive

School culture largely determines job satisfaction. In primary education, teachers and management are very positive about this, including compared with countries around us (OECD, 2025c). Most teachers experience a culture of collaboration and mutual support. They experience shared beliefs about teaching and learning and consistent enforcement of behavioural rules. Secondary school teachers are less positive about the school culture (Buisman et al., 2025), and are particularly dissatisfied with the enforcement of behavioural rules for pupils at school. Only 41% find that this happens consistently throughout the whole school.

Satisfaction with school leaders

The great majority of primary and secondary school teachers are very positive about their relationship with their school leader. They find that the school leader has a clear vision, that they can count on professional support, and that the school leader has confidence in their expertise. More than 8 in 10 teachers rate their school leader positively on all these aspects (Buisman et al., 2025). There is only some criticism in secondary education regarding the extent to which the school leader encourages staff input. One third of secondary school teachers find that their school leader does this insufficiently.

Workload structurally high

Experienced workload has been high for years. One third of secondary school teachers experience burn-out symptoms (Van den Heuvel et al., 2025). Primary school teachers rank in the top 3 of professions where employees experience the most work-related stress (CBS, 2025a). Working in education is emotionally demanding compared with work in other sectors and requires continuous attention. This translates into a relatively high need for recovery after work. High workload in education is not a purely Dutch phenomenon, but is observed worldwide. The factors contributing to workload do, however, differ between countries. In the Netherlands, important causes of work-related stress according to teachers are excessive administration and being held responsible for the performance of pupils. Problems around behaviour and communication are also increasing. Compared with 2018, teachers more frequently cite as stressors: enforcing behavioural rules, dealing with parental concerns about their children, and incidents involving verbal violence or intimidation (Buisman et al., 2025).

Substantial time spent on administration

A considerable proportion of educational professionals in primary education, secondary education and MBO experience the volume of administration as (very) burdensome (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b). Continuous changes in legislation and policy contribute to this, as they constantly introduce new rules for schools. At the same time, rules that have since been abolished have already become so embedded in schools that they do not simply disappear, resulting in an accumulation of rules and procedures. Primary school teachers spend an average of 6 to 8 hours per week on administration (General Court of Audit, 2025). In secondary and special education, the average is 8-9 hours per week, amounting to a quarter of working time (Van Mensvoort et al., 2025). A large part of this administration takes place outside lesson hours. Teachers with

a full-time contract have approximately 15 hours per week for tasks outside regular lesson hours. During this time, they must also prepare lessons, mark work, consult with colleagues, organise outings and maintain contact with parents. It is therefore likely that a large proportion of teachers are unable to complete all their work within their contracted hours. In addition, a considerable proportion of teachers do not fully understand why certain information is collected or what happens with it.

Setting priorities to reduce the administrative burden

The time teachers spend on administration depends in part on how many pupils with additional support needs are in the class. At some schools, teachers record everything about these pupils, not because the law requires it, but because schools are unclear about exactly what is expected of them (see also Inspectorate of Education, 2024b). There are also differences between schools in what they do and do not record in other areas. In general, a large proportion of information is recorded 'just in case'. The Algemene Rekenkamer[14] The General Court of Audit advises the government and school governing boards to make a more considered assessment of the outcomes of a measure against the associated burden (General Court of Audit, 2025). Many administrative tasks have a rationale, but are time-consuming. School leaders can also regularly check whether teachers are not collecting unnecessarily large amounts of information. The Inspectorate in turn can communicate more clearly about what it expects from schools and that the functionality of administration must be central. The guidance documents 'Ruimte in Regels' (Room in Rules) were recently updated for this reason (Inspectorate of Education, 2025i; 2025j). Guidance documents are also available for (V)SO, MBO and higher education (Steunpunt Passend Onderwijs, 2024; OCW, 2021; OCW, 2024).

International comparison of time use

Primary and secondary education

Dutch primary school teachers with a full-time appointment work on average more hours per week than teachers in other countries (44.5 versus 40.4 hours), but spend a relatively large proportion of this time on administration. In secondary education, full-time teachers work approximately the same number of hours as in other countries, but spend relatively more time on team work and consultations. This leaves teachers less time for lesson preparation and marking. Within a lesson period, Dutch teachers are also less effective than colleagues in other countries, spending relatively more time on maintaining order and administrative tasks (30% of lesson time). Secondary school teachers in particular are relatively often troubled by disruptions to order (Buisman et al., 2025).

Academic education

The Dutch academic year, for comparable programmes, has more teaching weeks and (re)examination periods than other countries (Dialogic et al., 2025). This has didactic advantages, but can contribute to a higher workload, even though a high workload is also experienced in countries with fewer teaching weeks. In other countries, it is more common for assessments to take place twice a year at the end of the semester. In the Netherlands, there is more choice and more variation in credits per course (that is, relatively more smaller courses per year). More holiday weeks for students and teaching staff could be built into a Dutch academic year. Periods of rest around examination periods can in particular reduce workload and stress among students.

7.2 School Leaders

School leaders experiencing increasing stress

The quality and continuity of education depends on having sufficient and well-qualified school leaders (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b). The turnover rate among school leaders is high: of those who were active in secondary education in 2016, only 51% were still working as school leaders after 5 years, and only 36% after 7 years (Van Hassel et al., 2026). Work-related stress is a major reason for changing jobs. More than half of school leaders in primary education and half in secondary education experience a high level of stress, with this proportion doubling in secondary education compared with 2018. A quarter of primary school leaders and 18% of secondary school leaders are considering leaving education within the next 5 years (Buisman et al., 2025), while there is already a shortage of school leaders.

14 The General Court of Audit. https://www.rekenkamer.nl

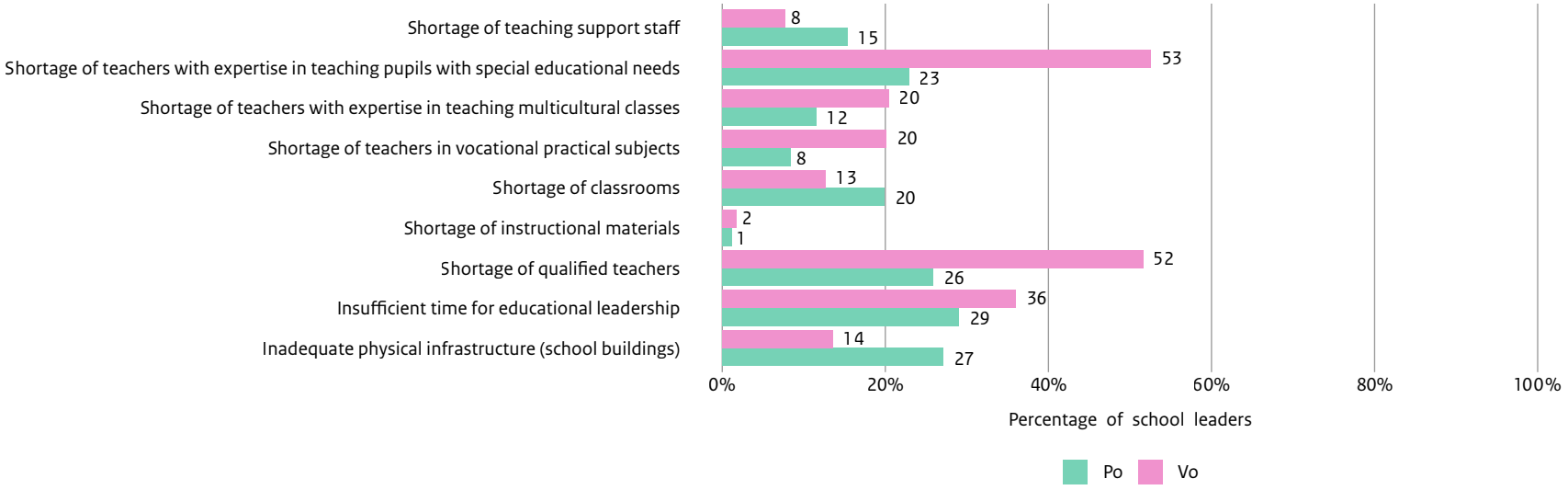
Weight of school leaders' responsibilities is increasing

Although school leaders are enthusiastic about the content of their role (Buisman et al., 2025), the majority find that their work has become less attractive over the past 5 years (Van der Aa et al., 2025). They cite above all the fact that managing staffing levels takes ever more time and attention. But the accountability burden and the administration associated with temporary subsidies also make the role less attractive for school leaders, as does the responsibility for pupils with additional support needs related to behaviour and the growing number of societal tasks being placed at schools' door. This leaves less time and attention for other tasks that school leaders say have also become increasingly important in recent years, such as investing in relationships with the municipality, inter-institutional partnerships and care institutions, stimulating renewal and innovation, developing teaching staff, and strengthening the professional (team) culture.

Insufficient time for educational leadership

School leaders are of great importance for improving education and developing teaching staff and teams. It is therefore important that school leaders have time for this. Around 1 in 3 primary and secondary school leaders is unable to devote sufficient time to educational leadership (Figure 7.2a) (Buisman et al., 2025), even though they would like to spend more time on it (Van der Aa et al., 2025; Wartenbergh et al., 2025). To be able to spend more time on the substantive aspects of the role, school leaders need support, particularly in the areas of accommodation and maintenance, finances, ICT and administrative accountability (Van der Aa et al., 2025). An organisational structure of distributed leadership can also somewhat ease the workload of school leaders, making it possible to place tasks such as personnel policy or the application for subsidies with others, such as teachers, a deputy head or the governing board (Wartenbergh et al., 2025). Governing boards must engage in dialogue with school leaders and the team about how the tasks and responsibilities of the school leader can be better delineated.

Figure 7.2a Percentage of school leaders experiencing moderate to strong barriers to providing high-quality education at their school



Source: Buisman et al. (2025)

Dissatisfaction with salary

School leaders sometimes also experience dissatisfaction with their salary (Buisman et al., 2025; Van Nuland et al., 2021). Some school leaders feel that the weight and complexity of their responsibilities are not commensurate with their salary level. The salary increase for primary school teachers was not accompanied by a proportionate increase for school leaders, meaning that the difference between what a teacher and a school leader earns is sometimes minimal. This may deter others from making the move to school leadership (Buisman et al., 2025; Van der Aa et al., 2025). Among those potentially interested in becoming a secondary school leader, the salary level is indeed a significant reason, alongside the high workload and the imposed rules and procedures that make the role more difficult (Van Nuland et al., 2021).

Continuity in leadership

Continuity in leadership is important for every team. It is therefore important not only that there are sufficient school leaders, but that they work with the same team over a longer period. School leaders change school or team on average once every 5 years. The most commonly cited reason for changing school is the desire for a new challenge. Other reasons include travel distance and dissatisfaction with the school's vision (Inspectorate of Education, 2026m). We do not know whether school leaders changed schools more or less frequently in recent years. We do know that the proportion of school leaders intending to change school has fallen in recent years: in primary education this proportion halved from 18% in 2018 to 9% in 2024, and in secondary education from 24% to 16%. The proportion of school leaders considering leaving education within 5 years is considerably higher (PO: 25%; VO: 18%) (Buisman et al., 2025). The turnover among school leaders therefore appears to be primarily associated with the overall demanding nature of the role.

7.3 Labour Market Developments

Despite a decline in primary education, teacher shortages will persist in the long term

The total teacher shortage in primary and special education stood at 5,800 FTE as of 1 October 2025, representing 6.3% of total employment (Adriaens et al., 2025a). In secondary education, the teacher shortage was estimated at 2,220 FTE, or 3.5% of total

employment (Adriaens et al., 2025b). The shortages are considerably lower than in 2024, when they stood at 8.1% in primary education and 5.1% in secondary education. This decrease is partly due to the expiry of the National Programme (NP) Education funds, which led to a reduction in employment at some schools and brought previously employed teachers back onto the labour market. In the short term, the shortage in primary and special education will probably decline somewhat further as pupil numbers fall. In the long term, however, an increase in pupil numbers is expected, bringing a rise in shortages with it (OCW, 2025h). The ageing of the working population will also have a negative impact on the number of available teachers and other education staff in the coming decades. In secondary education, the shortage will continue to rise over the next 10 years, particularly in subjects where the greatest shortages already exist. The largest shortages are expected in Dutch language and mathematics, followed by French, German, physics, chemistry, computer science and classical languages.

Unequal distribution of teacher shortages: a downward spiral

The teacher shortage is higher in the 5 largest cities (11%) than in the rest of the Netherlands (4.8%), and disparities are also growing within regions (OCW, 2025h). In primary and secondary education, shortages are greater at schools with more pupils at risk of educational disadvantage, regardless of where these schools are located. The risk is that schools with many such pupils enter a downward spiral, because staffing difficulties create a higher workload and a less attractive working environment, which in turn makes it even harder for these schools to recruit staff. In Amsterdam, for example, primary schools with a high proportion of pupils with educational disadvantage have a relatively higher teacher turnover than schools with fewer disadvantaged pupils (Reches & Van Spijker, 2023).

Teachers at primary and secondary schools with more pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds have on average 3 fewer years of work experience than teachers at other schools. However, teachers at schools with more vulnerable pupils have just as much confidence in their ability to deliver instruction or manage classrooms as teachers at other schools. They actually feel more confident teaching multilingual classes or supporting pupils with additional support needs. These teachers are also the most positive about their relationship with pupils (Buisman et al., 2025). It appears that schools with a diverse pupil population tend to have teachers in the classroom who enjoy working with this target group. Governing boards must do everything in their power to make working at these schools attractive, for example through better employment conditions, the deployment of support staff and more intensive guidance for newly qualified teachers (Inspectorate of Education, 2025b).

School leader shortage has declined

The relative shortage of school leadership in primary education has fallen compared with 2024. On 1 October 2025, 461 FTE of school leadership (heads and deputy heads) was missing, representing 6.2% of total school leadership employment, down from 9.8% the previous year. The shortage of school leaders is greater in special primary education (SBO) (9.9%) than in mainstream primary and special secondary education (Adriaens et al., 2025a). In secondary education, the school leadership shortage in 2025 is approximately 2.5% of employment, compared with 3.1% in 2024 (Adriaens et al., 2025b). A clear explanation for the decrease is lacking. A different organisation of education, whereby school leaders more often lead multiple schools or sites within a governing board, could be a factor: over a quarter (28%) of school leaders in primary education told us they are responsible for multiple schools or sites (Inspectorate of Education, 2026m). In a separate study from 2024, this figure was 16% (Van der Aa et al., 2025).

Shortage of teachers in MBO, including for Dutch language and numeracy

The teacher shortage in MBO is estimated at between 900 and 1,300 FTE, representing 3.2% to 4.5% of teacher employment (Den Uijl et al., 2025), comparable to last year's estimate. The shortages are relatively large in the generic subjects of Dutch language and numeracy, which may put pressure on the development of basic skills (see also Chapter 3). There are also large shortages in the sectors of Technology and Built Environment, and Mobility, Transport, Logistics and Maritime. In MBO, many staff will retire in the coming years, creating a need for new staff. The shortages in the private sector will also have an effect on shortages in vocationally oriented subjects (OCW, 2025h).

7.4 Deployment of Teaching Support Staff

Teaching support staff
By teaching support staff we refer to: teaching assistants, classroom assistants, teaching support assistants and instructors. Training to become a classroom or teaching assistant can be pursued at MBO level 3 or 4. At level 3, they primarily carry out care-related tasks; at level 4, they can also provide small-group supervision in educational content areas. Classroom assistants typically work in special education, while teaching assistants can work in primary, secondary or MBO education. Teaching support assistants occupy a position between teaching assistant and teacher and generally carry greater responsibility than the teaching assistant; they have obtained an Associate degree from a teacher training institution. Instructors are deployed to support teachers and supervise students in the practical component of VMBO, practical education and MBO programmes. Instructors are experts within a particular professional field and must demonstrate subject-specific, pedagogical and didactic competence (Van der Aa & Van Zijtveld, 2022).

An educational vision for deployment and responsibilities is needed

The National Programme (NP) Education funds led to an increase in teaching support staff, particularly in primary education (Van Miltenburg et al., 2023). At the same time, enrolment in the MBO level 4 teaching assistant programme also increased, reaching a peak in 2024 with 3,813 enrolled students. Enrolment in the Ad-PEP (Associate degree Pedagogical Educational Professional) also grew, although this is a small programme with 179 enrolled students in 2024. Many teaching support staff have permanent contracts, and it is expected that they will continue to be needed on a structural basis to help shape education. The effective deployment of teaching support staff is therefore important. A prerequisite for this is a clear educational vision for the deployment and responsibilities of teaching support staff, which is not always in place (Van Miltenburg et al., 2023; Van Miltenburg et al., 2025; Wartenbergh et al., 2022). When an educational vision for the deployment of teaching support staff is absent, this can lead to an ad hoc set of responsibilities and the inappropriate deployment of teaching support staff as teachers (Van Miltenburg et al., 2023; Van Miltenburg et al., 2025; Wartenbergh et al., 2022), which can cause frustration. Many support staff indicate that they could take on more or different tasks than those for which they are currently deployed. Many school leaders are not aware of research into the effective deployment of teaching support staff: in primary education, 74% are unaware of this research, and in secondary education 87% (Van Miltenburg et al., 2025). Governing boards and schools should formulate a vision for effective deployment and a clearly defined set of responsibilities for teaching support staff. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science can contribute to this by also incorporating the competences of teaching assistants and teaching support assistants into the Decree on Competence Requirements for Education Staff.

The added value of teaching support staff

The greatest added value of teaching support staff is that they make it possible to give pupils more targeted attention and guidance. In primary education, teaching assistants are primarily deployed for intensive, targeted support of small groups of pupils and for supporting pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties (Van Miltenburg et al., 2025). In secondary education, half of support staff are deployed for the targeted guidance of pupils, such as homework support. They also supervise practical assignments to ensure these run safely. Deployed in this way, teaching support staff contribute to the quality of education, reduce the workload for the teacher and build a relationship with pupils. Collaboration with teachers generally goes well: teachers report that teaching assistants contribute to their job satisfaction and reduce their workload.

Professional development opportunities for support staff often unclear

Teaching assistants are generally satisfied with their job (Van Miltenburg et al., 2025). The diversity of tasks and the one-to-one relationship with pupils are experienced as very positive by support staff, teachers and school leaders alike. Many support staff would like to develop further, for example by specialising in a particular type of pupil or taking on broader responsibilities (Van Miltenburg et al., 2025). It is not always clear what professional development opportunities are available, and the offering should be better mapped out. Additional expertise from teaching support staff is valued by teachers and can help with task division and differentiation within the group (Van Miltenburg et al., 2025). A strategic personnel policy on developing and deploying the expertise of teaching assistants is frequently lacking. Guidance documents with development possibilities and practical examples would be a helpful addition.

7.5 Teacher Training Programmes

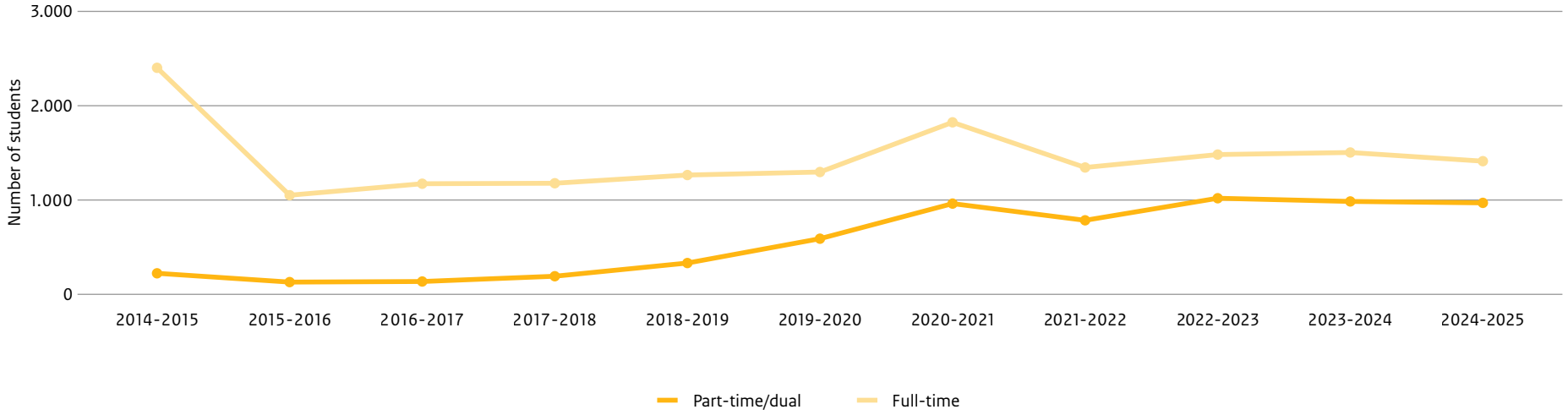
Intake of MBO students at PABO equal to that of 10 years ago

Between 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, intake at PABO programmes dropped sharply as a result of admissions tests in geography, history and physics (Inspectorate of Education, 2017). In particular, the intake of MBO students and HAVO pupils declined significantly. In the years that followed, this intake gradually increased again. In the same period, more students have been studying part-time at PABO: in 2014-2015, 15% of all PABO students were studying part-time or in a dual pathway; by 2024-2025 this had risen to 25%. Students with an MBO background are now more often studying part-time than 10 years ago (Figure 7.5a): Around 60% of former MBO students following the PABO previously completed a teaching assistant programme (Inspectorate of Education, 2026m).

Graduation rates of PABO students with an MBO background comparable to those of HAVO students

In the 2023-2024 academic year, 16% of all full-time PABO students dropped out in their first year and 21% transferred to a different programme. Dropout from the full-time programme is higher among MBO students (22%) and students who already hold an HBO diploma (23%) than among HAVO students (14%). In the part-time variant of the PABO, overall dropout is higher (28%), particularly among students with an MBO background (33%), compared with students with an HBO background (24%). For the 2019-2020 cohort, the graduation rate was lower than for previous cohorts: of students who continued after their first year, 57% obtained a diploma, compared with above 66% in earlier cohorts. The graduation rate for MBO students who continue is approximately equal to that of HAVO students (55%). Students with an HBO background more often obtain a diploma within 5 years (65%) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026m).

Figure 7.5a Amount of PABO students with an MBO background studying full-time or part-time/dual



Source: Inspectorate of Education (2026m)

Academic success in second-degree teacher training programmes lower than in PABO

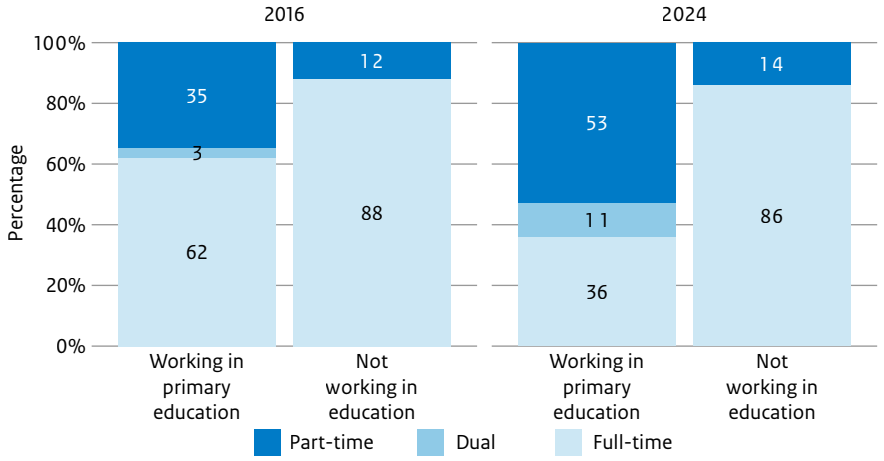
In previous years, intake at second-degree and university-level teacher training programmes declined. Compared with 2023-2024, intake in 2024-2025 has remained more or less the same. Compared with PABO figures, the proportion of students dropping out is higher at second-degree teacher training programmes (18%), as is the proportion changing programme (26%). Of the 2019-2020 cohort, 38% of full-time students who continued after their first year obtained a diploma within 5 years. For part-time students, this is higher at 51% (Inspectorate of Education, 2026m).

Concerns about students working in education early in their studies

A considerable proportion of teacher training students are already working in education during their studies (OCW, 2025h). PABO students are typically employed as teaching assistants, while students in second-degree teacher training programmes often hold a teaching appointment. The proportion of students working in education rose over the period 2016-2024 (Figure 7.5b). At PABO programmes, the percentage of students already working in education rose from 6% in 2016 to 27% in 2024. In part, this increase is accounted for by the larger proportion of students studying part-time or in a dual pathway: in the same period, the proportion of working part-time students rose from 35% to 53%, and the proportion in dual pathways from 3% to 11%. In addition, the proportion of students who were previously employed in education before starting the PABO rose from 10% to 18%, likely representing teaching assistants. Among PABO students already working in education, the majority (74%) were in their 4th or 5th year of study in 2016, whereas in 2024 this was 56%.

At second-degree teacher training programmes, the proportion of students already working in secondary education rose from 20% in 2016 to 29% in 2024. Unlike in primary education, this is not because more students are studying part-time or in a dual pathway: in 2016, 55% of working students were doing so, and in 2024, 57%. The proportion of students who are already teaching is higher in shortage subjects. Given that graduation rates are low and dropout is high, particularly among full-time students, we wonder whether students are sometimes placed in front of a class independently too early, without adequate supervision, ultimately losing them to the profession.

Figure 7.5b Percentage of PABO students working in education during their studies, by programme variant



Source: OCW (2025h)

Research into teacher training curricula

One angle in the search for the causes of declining learning outcomes is the teacher training programme. Trainee teachers acquire the knowledge and skills needed to meet the competence requirements, enabling them to stand in front of a class as qualified teachers. With this basis, they can teach subjects including numeracy, reading, spelling and world orientation. However, no systematic information is available on the curricula of teacher training programmes. An inventory was therefore carried out of how the curricula of full-time HBO and university-level routes to primary school teaching are structured at the national level. In total, 47 full-time routes from 27 educational institutions were analysed on 4 central elements: content, scope, teaching form and assessment. The content analysis was based on the statutory competence requirements as laid down in the Decree on Competence Requirements for Education Staff and the subject content areas of primary education (Bijlsma & Bosman, 2025).

Differences in teacher training curricula

The research into teacher training curricula shows that teachers acquire varying knowledge and skills during their training, and that most routes have not fully incorporated the competence requirements into the learning objectives of their programme units. When looking at the subject content areas of primary education, the most attention is given to Dutch language, numeracy/mathematics and creative arts subjects. Subject areas such as social competence and healthy behaviour barely feature in the learning objectives. The way in which the statutory competence requirements have been translated into curricula differs. Some routes devote relatively more attention to specific subject or competence requirements, while others opt for broad integration. It also emerges that not all routes cover all statutory competence requirement categories in their learning objectives (Bijlsma & Bosman, 2025).

The importance of embedding competence requirements

The research into teacher training curricula does not make pronouncements about the effectiveness or quality of curricula, but does offer valuable insights for policymakers, training programmes, schools, governing boards and accreditation panels. Because curricula differ from one another on many points and the competence requirements are not consistently incorporated into learning objectives, it is unclear with what knowledge and skills newly qualified teachers enter education. One teacher may have different knowledge and skills than another. As a result, schools and governing boards do not have a clear picture of what they can expect from their newly qualified teachers, and professional development during the induction phase cannot always be deployed in a targeted way. The Inspectorate aligns with the Education Council's call to better embed the competence of future teachers and to make competence requirements more concrete (Education Council, 2025). This gives institutions scope to shape the curriculum in their own way, while at the same time providing certainty that every teacher, regardless of the route followed, is sufficiently prepared to deliver good education.

Across the border: support for newly qualified teachers in England and Wales
The British government supports newly qualified teachers in England through the Early Career Framework (ECF), introduced in 2019 to improve the quality of education and retain new teachers. Newly qualified teachers receive support over 2 years, comprising a mentor, additional time for professional development and a structured learning trajectory based on national standards. An evaluation shows that this approach leads to better teaching practice, more self-confidence and stronger ties to the school, though workload remains a point of attention. The ECF has since been further developed and integrated with the framework for initial teacher training, and its delivery is inspected through a dedicated inspection framework.

In Wales, newly qualified teachers complete a mandatory induction period of usually 3 school terms, under the supervision of the Appropriate Body (usually the local education authority), which determines whether the induction period has been successfully completed. Various parties are involved in the process, including the Education Workforce Council for administration, the Induction Coordinator for programme coordination, and mentors for guidance. Newly qualified teachers receive support, are entitled to a reduction in teaching time, and record their professional development in an online Professional Learning Passport. The induction period must be completed within 5 years; where insufficient progress is made, additional support follows or a competence procedure may be initiated.

7.6 Teaching Practice

7.6.1 Newly Qualified Teachers

Better preparation by teacher training programmes
Recently graduated teachers in primary and secondary education generally feel better prepared in terms of subject content and subject-specific pedagogy by their teacher training programmes than 6 years ago. One third to half of these teachers even feel very well prepared. Compared with other countries, this trend is striking, as teachers in other countries are actually less satisfied than before with the preparation provided by their

teacher training. Newly qualified primary and secondary school teachers were also asked how satisfied they are with the quality of the teacher training programme they completed. The majority of newly qualified teachers (70-80%) are satisfied with the knowledge they have acquired, the balance between theory and practice, and the time available for classroom observation. In general, teachers who completed accelerated routes rate the quality of their training no differently from those who completed a standard programme, except that teachers from accelerated routes are less often satisfied with the time they had for carrying out classroom observations (Buisman et al., 2025).

Training needs: multilingual pupils and pupils requiring additional support

Although teachers are generally satisfied with their training, some topics deserve more attention, for example teaching multilingual and multicultural classes. Only one third of primary school teachers and a quarter of secondary school teachers feel prepared for this by their teacher training programme. Professional development in teaching multilingual pupils is important, as education for multilingual pupils requires a targeted approach. Another development requiring better preparation of newly qualified teachers is the growth in the number of pupils with additional support needs (see also Chapter 6). A quarter of newly qualified primary and secondary school teachers need more professional development in this area (Buisman et al., 2025). We have previously noted that (recently) graduated teachers in primary, secondary and MBO education want more training in teaching pupils with additional support needs (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b; 2024a; 2025b).

Increased participation in induction programmes

Participation of newly qualified teachers in an induction programme increased between 2018 and 2024, particularly in primary education (primary: 39%-68%; secondary: 77%-87%). The use of mentors also increased. The learning activities during such a programme focus primarily on classroom management, teaching pupils with additional support needs and supporting the social and emotional development of pupils. According to newly qualified teachers, these activities have a positive impact on their teaching and are associated with lower work-related stress (Buisman et al., 2025). Many induction activities in primary education align well with the needs of newly qualified teachers (De Bruin et al., 2025).

No high dropout among newly qualified teachers

Precise estimates of the dropout of newly qualified teachers from education are difficult to provide, as teachers sometimes temporarily interrupt their work in the classroom, for example to complete a degree or to return to a different role or sector in education. When recent graduates are asked whether they are (actively or otherwise) looking for a job outside education, only a small proportion are considering leaving (primary: 4%; secondary: 5%; MBO: 3%). The group of teachers no longer working in education after one year more often has no diploma, a temporary contract or a smaller appointment (OCW, 2025h). Some of this group are also studying and may have stopped in order to complete their degree. There is therefore some dropout among newly qualified teachers, but it is not high. The increased attention to induction programmes may be contributing to this.

7.6.2 Professional Development and Lesson Quality

Professional development of secondary school teachers focused on individual learning needs

Professional development continues actively beyond the induction period. Almost all primary and secondary school teachers participate annually in professional development activities such as courses or workshops. Primary school teachers find it important that activities connect with their own learning needs (92%), with the school's development needs (88%) and that other colleagues are involved in the learning process (69%). Secondary school teachers, by contrast, place their own learning needs first (91%), find the school's development needs less important (63%), and only 41% find it important that other colleagues are involved in the learning process (Buisman et al., 2025). Secondary school teachers therefore appear to be less open to collective professional development. This individual attitude can be a barrier to developing school-wide policy in which subject departments collaborate intensively, for example in the area of language or citizenship education (see also Chapter 3).

Lesson quality: Teaching Strategies

During our randomised sample inspections at schools, inspectors usually assess the quality of Teaching Strategies as satisfactory. However, at a proportion of schools this is unsatisfactory, particularly in secondary education (see also Chapter 1). A common reason for an unsatisfactory assessment of Teaching Strategies is that lessons are insufficiently aligned with differences between pupils. The learning climate in secondary schools is

also regularly assessed as insufficiently stimulating. We previously noted that there is still room for improvement in Teaching Strategies among teachers (Inspectorate of Education, 2023b).

Thematic study on subject-specific pedagogy in reading and numeracy
The quality of lessons depends not only on teachers' general pedagogical and didactic skills, but also on subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogy. The Inspectorate therefore conducted a system-level study into the subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogical skills of teachers in reading proficiency and numeracy/mathematics in mainstream primary, special primary and special secondary education. Inspectors observed a total of 456 numeracy/mathematics lessons and 457 reading comprehension lessons at 256 schools. The lessons were assessed using an instrument developed specifically for this study. Teachers also completed a questionnaire on the extent to which they feel equipped in terms of subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogy (Inspectorate of Education, 2026r).

Subject-specific pedagogical elements present in the majority of reading comprehension and mathematics lessons

For numeracy/mathematics and reading, it has been demonstrated that teachers' general pedagogical knowledge, subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogical knowledge and skills are positively associated with pupil performance (Hickendorff et al., 2017; Reutzel, 2018). Our inspectors observed that teachers use both general didactic and subject-specific pedagogical skills. In reading comprehension lessons they observed for example that teachers ask closed questions about the content of the text. The more complex subject-specific pedagogical skills, such as stimulating higher-order thinking about the content of the text, occurred less often, but still with some regularity (in a quarter or more of the observed lessons). In three quarters of lessons, texts were taken from the textbook; in a quarter, they were chosen by the teacher. In 38% of lessons, teachers used 'rich' texts. During numeracy/mathematics lessons, teachers in almost all lessons used relatively straightforward subject-specific pedagogical skills, such as the use of subject-specific terminology and the automatization of calculation procedures.

Almost all teachers also maintained overview of understanding and problem-solving approaches. Other more complex subject-specific pedagogical skills occurred relatively infrequently in mathematics lessons (in fewer than a quarter of lessons) (Inspectorate of Education, 2026r), such as the use of tasks requiring mathematical thinking processes and inviting pupils to share different mathematical ideas.

Greater attention to more complex thinking skills is needed

Teachers rate their own subject knowledge and skills highly on average, both in numeracy/mathematics and reading comprehension education. Teachers also have limited need for professional development. Yet teachers apply the more complex subject-specific pedagogical skills only to a limited extent. Compared with the previous core objectives, the updated core objectives give greater attention to complex thinking skills within the various domains (SLO, 2025). It is therefore advisable to take up the updated core objectives as quickly as possible. Schools can do this, for example, by further developing their curriculum. The core objectives provide a guiding framework within which schools have room for their own emphases (see also Chapter 3).

7.6.3 Use of AI

Limited use of AI by teachers

The use of generative AI by teachers in primary and secondary education is still limited. Approximately a quarter of primary school teachers and a third of secondary school teachers use AI, primarily for generating lesson plans, quickly familiarising themselves with a topic and assessing pupils' work. Compared with other countries, Dutch teachers are not outspokenly positive or negative about the use of AI. However, a large proportion of teachers (primary: 88%; secondary: 80%) feel they do not yet have the knowledge and skills needed to deploy AI effectively in teaching, a higher percentage than in other countries. A considerable proportion of teachers (31-41%) also find that their school lacks sufficient digital tools and infrastructure for using AI (Buisman et al., 2025).

AI widely used by pupils and students

According to 70% of examination board in higher education, instructions to students requiring them to account for their use of generative AI have been largely implemented, or their programmes have begun implementation. These instructions may require students to elaborate on the assignment they gave to AI or how they verified and checked the AI-generated output (Inspectorate of Education, 2025l). A survey by the Inspectorate among higher education students in 2025 found that a majority of surveyed students use AI for their programme at least weekly (HBO: 75%; academic education (WO): 69%).

Approximately 60% of WO students said they receive no instruction or training from their programme on how to use AI for assignments. Most students also said they have no need for this. There are, however, agreements about whether AI may or may not be used for assignments according to 74% of HBO students and more than 80% of WO students. Students use AI to generate ideas. HBO students often look up information (67%) and use AI for spelling and grammar checking (62%). WO bachelor's students primarily use AI for explanations of subject matter (75%) and WO master's students also use it for rewriting texts (Inspectorate of Education, 2026m). International research shows that younger pupils also make extensive use of generative AI (OECD, 2026). As pupils get older, usage increases to as much as 90%. Like higher education students, pupils often use AI to look up information, explanations and summaries, and to generate ideas.

Across the border: AI in other countries

Finland and Estonia are often cited as frontrunners in the field of AI. Both countries have been investing in the digitalisation of education for many years and see AI as a logical next step.

Finland has opted for a centralised approach. The government has established guidelines for schools and teachers. Training is available, and AI is seen as a means of personalising education. There is supervision on national agreements and the government encourages schools to deploy AI responsibly.

Estonia is known for its digital government and smart applications in the public sector. AI is also widely used in education, for example in adaptive learning programmes that help pupils progress at their own pace. Estonia is investigating how schools deploy AI and encourages the sharing of good practices.

In Sweden, AI is incorporated into the national curriculum. Schools must consider how to deploy AI to achieve learning objectives. France has produced a document with reflections and recommendations on the use of AI in various primary and secondary education subjects.

CHAPTER 8

Education in a Changing Context

The Inspectorate of Education is 225 years old. Education today looks very different from education in those early days. Compulsory schooling was introduced, the School Struggle was fought, the computer made its entry and assessment expanded enormously. These are just a few of the many developments that have often had far-reaching consequences for education and its supervision.

In this chapter, we describe some more recent trends and developments. This century too has brought developments, economic, social, societal, (geo)political and technological, that place great demands on education both in terms of content and organisation.

8.1 Important Developments for Education

The role of government in education is changing

Over recent decades, the role of government in education has gradually shifted from direct control to setting frameworks at a distance. As a result, the educational field gained greater autonomy to make its own choices. This was driven by the conviction that educational professionals, being closer to practice than government, would be best placed to realise quality. This shift took shape, among other ways, through deregulation and the introduction of lump-sum funding. This gave governing boards a high degree of discretion over how they spent public funds. With that autonomy came greater responsibility for governing boards and supervisory boards.

In the same period, the traditional collective support structure was partly dismantled. National educational support centres and school advisory services changed in role and position, on the conviction that a more market-oriented and demand-driven support offering would better meet the needs of schools and institutions. This development expanded the scope for choice and made personalised approaches possible, but at the same time led to less transparency, unequal access to support and a lack of coherence at the system level.

By now, coherence in governance in education is under pressure. In recent years, funding more often went directly to schools, which runs directly counter to governing boards' responsibility for the lawful and purposeful use of funds. A process of regionalisation in policy is under way, whereby money, tasks and responsibilities are being placed at regional level. This restricts governing boards' scope and means they are also less able to fulfil their responsibilities there, and less able to be held accountable for them. Institutions in MBO and higher education in particular are increasingly expected to serve interests that extend beyond those of the institution, for example in the context of macro-efficiency.

The introduction of the international bachelor-master structure fundamentally changed higher education. The accreditation system brought new frameworks for quality. Through performance-based funding, government sought to steer on outcomes. These instruments gave institutions strategic room, but also contributed to a growing emphasis on profile, selection and international recruitment. Higher education thereby developed into a complex playing field of choices, incentives and interests.

In response to persistent concerns about declining educational quality, basic skills and unequal opportunities, a counter-movement has emerged. Despite the formal increase in autonomy, the government has in recent years been directing primary and secondary education and MBO more directly, including at the level of the primary process, through tightened statutory requirements, national programmes, central assessment and more intensive supervision. On one hand, this has led to an enormous regulatory growth with which the Inspectorate of Education itself is also confronted, a growth of 236% over 20 years (PWC, 2025). On the other hand, there is a degree of inaction when it comes to matters that touch the core of educational quality, such as embedding the quality of educational professionals.

The result is a hybrid governance practice in which autonomy and central control coexist. This accumulation of governance instruments increases the risk that schools and governing boards are overburdened, at the expense of room for learning and sustainable improvement of education. The recent coalition agreement makes a start on changing this, including through a Simplification Act with which the coalition parties aim to abolish, simplify and continuously improve laws and regulations.

In higher education, government is actively searching for an appropriate role in steering towards major societal challenges, for example in the area of knowledge security and cybersecurity. Furthermore, the updating of the statutory framework in higher education remains urgently needed. There continues to be uncertainty, for example, about complex forms of collaboration, situations in which students can be adversely affected. We have repeatedly drawn attention to this.

The composition of the population is changing

The pupil and student population is considerably more varied than before. As a result of migration, more pupils and students are in education who do not have Dutch as their mother tongue or who do not have sufficient command of Dutch. Some newcomers have experienced significant trauma. Teachers believe they increasingly have more pupils with a support need in their class. Schools and educational programmes are dealing with pupils and students who no longer self-evidently share the same background, knowledge and experiences. This makes continuing professional development for educational professionals essential.

Cultural diversity will continue to grow (State Commission on Demographic Developments 2050, 2024), demand on the labour market will remain high due to ageing, and education will face fewer pupils and students. This brings choices for educational institutions, including the choice of scaling up. Schools and institutions are inclined to do so in order to continue offering a broad range of education and to achieve efficiency gains. However, scaling up can also lead to fewer options, particularly in areas of demographic decline. The accessibility and availability of education may then come under pressure.

Digitalisation is accelerating

Social media have become an inescapable part of daily life. Young people in particular are strongly attracted to them. Young people are constantly online and spend a great deal of time in the virtual world. Over the years, it has become clear that screen use can have negative consequences for the development and learning outcomes of pupils. From 2024, phones have therefore largely disappeared from classrooms. However, digital pupil administration systems have at the same time brought school closer to pupils outside the classroom. This can create greater social and mental pressure on pupils.

With the far-reaching digitalisation of society, digital learning materials have become standard in the curriculum. Online education, particularly in higher education, has also become indispensable since the COVID-19 period. Dependence on digital resources does, however, bring new vulnerabilities. Criminals and malicious state actors attempt to profit from digital intrusions or disrupt structures. Digital resilience is therefore of great importance for education. Higher education has been working with SURF, the ICT cooperative for Dutch education and research, for some time to increase the resilience of institutions. Primary and secondary education is also taking important steps with Kennisnet. In higher education, the security of critical technology and knowledge is increasingly becoming a matter of national importance.

The rise of generative AI confronts education with the challenge of teaching pupils and students to reflect even more effectively on the reliability of information. The ease of this accessible 'ghostwriter' is also tempting for pupils and students. Writing skills and the ability to think critically, analytically and creatively are thereby taking on a new dimension in the curricula of virtually all sectors.

Individualisation and performance pressure

A societal trend also reflected in education is individualisation, whereby every individual is responsible for their own success or failure. The performance pressure to which this gives rise carries various risks.

In recent decades, more pupils went on to HAVO and VWO, and far more students went on to HBO and university. The increased participation in HAVO and VWO now appears to have passed its peak, but it remains a challenge for government, the business community and education to make professions in which there are large shortages, such as the technical sector, and the programmes that train for them, sufficiently attractive to pupils and students.

Much more so than before, what one achieves is also seen by others as one's own merit. Increasingly vocal and well-informed parents therefore strive for the most successful possible school career for their children. They call for personalised approaches and increasingly also for help from private tutoring agencies or other paid support. The performance pressure this can generate means that 'failing' is effectively not an option for pupils and students, while failure is often an important part of the learning process as it provides feedback for further growth. Added to this, the demand for personalised approaches places great demands on teachers' skills and requires time and expertise, which are not always available at schools and educational programmes, particularly where there is a shortage of teachers or school leaders. It then becomes a matter of balancing personalised approaches with what is achievable. Reflection on what may be an excessive degree of individualisation in education, including the many rules that drive it, seems timely.

The pressure to succeed can turn 'failure' into a feeling of inadequacy and helplessness, and ultimately into dropout, with all the associated risks. Reduced wellbeing is, according to a recent advisory report from the Education Council (2026), approached in research and policy primarily as an individual mental health problem. This encourages schools towards a care-oriented, largely individual approach that overburdens education. The Education Council advocates a broader perspective on reduced wellbeing, so that the educational system's own possibilities for contributing to wellbeing are better utilised.

8.2 Developments in Supervision

There are therefore a number of major developments with which education is confronted: a government at a distance that in recent years has again been inclined to take the lead in education; the ever-increasing diversity of the pupil population; the expected decline in the number of pupils and students; the staff shortage; digitalisation bringing new challenges; and individualisation that can lead to increasing performance pressure. Challenges are of course part of every era, but it appears that many developments are converging in recent years.

To meet these challenges, it is important that school leaders, working with their team, and governing boards make choices. Time, space and attention in schools are limited, and the accumulation of tasks and responsibilities is counterproductive. What matters is that a collective process gets under way, in the knowledge that this will take time. The Inspectorate wishes to contribute to this from its own position and responsibility.

New assessment framework 2027

The Inspectorate's own supervision must also continue to develop: it is important that supervision is effective and connects with what is actually happening in schools, educational programmes and at governing boards. This requires a periodic review of our instruments. We are therefore working on continuous improvement through an inspection evaluation programme, and are developing a new assessment framework that will come into effect in 2027. This new assessment framework forms the foundation of our supervision and establishes what we look at and how we organise our investigations and the formation of our judgements.

Our aim in doing so is to place a stronger emphasis on the broad development of pupils and students and on the continuous learning pathway across school types and institutions. Learning outcomes will play a different role in the supervision of primary and secondary education: they will carry less prominence in the assessment of schools. Good education and good governance will then carry more weight.

Good education is a collective endeavour to which multiple parties contribute. By systematically gathering input from the educational field and from research, we ensure that the framework is well constructed: legally sound, substantively well-founded and evidence-informed. In this way, the framework connects with how educational quality develops in practice and with the shared responsibility of the parties involved.

The new assessment framework will make us more agile as a supervisory body: we want to be able to respond quickly to risks we identify. In doing so, we align our activities with the extent to which governing boards themselves have visibility on educational quality and finances and act proactively on this. We are developing a coherent range of interventions for this purpose, ranging from lighter forms of supervision that allow us to monitor quality and development, to more intensive forms when risks or shortcomings demand this. In this way, we are working towards an effective inspection mix, with risk-based attention for schools, governing boards and the educational system. We will also ensure that we visit all schools and institutions with a degree of regularity.

Inspection burden

Last year in this chapter we gave attention to the inspection burden. To limit this burden, in 2025 we began making more unannounced, less intensive visits, and the updated guidance documents 'Ruimte in Regels' (Room for Rules) were published for the primary education, secondary education and MBO sectors. We are also changing the way we approach governing boards, combining risk-based governing board inspections with lighter governing board visits. This may lead to a reduced (experienced) regulatory burden. Conversely, reduced (actual) regulatory burden can further limit the inspection burden. As already noted, 'simplification' now has full political attention.

In closing

We want our supervision to be as effective as possible, with a well-balanced mix of supervision at the various levels: schools, governing boards and the system. And with the most limited inspection burden possible. In this way, we aim to contribute to continuously improving education. In doing so, we will always have to make choices. For example, since last year we have been visiting schools more often. We do this primarily through short, unannounced visits, in order to maintain the intended balanced inspection mix. We simply cannot be everywhere at once, and it would not be effective to try: that expectation would reflect an inflated view of what supervision can achieve. The effectiveness of our supervision is above all served by a well-balanced inspection mix and a fundamentally risk-based approach.

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Abbreviations

A
AI artificiële intelligentie
amv alleenstaande minderjarige vreemdeling

B
bo basisonderwijs
bbl beroepsbegeleidende leerweg
bol beroepsopleidende leerweg

C
CBS Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
CE centraal examen
CvTE College voor Toetsen en Examens

D
DUO Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs

E
EOA Eerste opvang anderstaligen
EVC Erkenning van Verworven Competenties

F
fte fulltime-equivalent

G
gji gesloten jeugdzorginstelling

H
havo hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs
hbo hoger beroepsonderwijs
ho hoger onderwijs

I
ict informatie- en communicatietechnologie
IE Instellingsexamen
ijh integrale (open) jeugdhulpverlening
ITK instellingstoets kwaliteitszorg

J
jji Justitiële Jeugdinrichting

L
LLO Leven Lang Ontwikkelen

M
mbo middelbaar beroepsonderwijs

N
NOB Stichting Nederlands Onderwijs in het buitenland
NP(-Onderwijs) Nationaal Programma (Onderwijs)
NVAO Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie

O

OCW Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschap
OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ONSwv Overkoepelend Netwerk Samenwerkingsverbanden
opdc orthopedagogisch-didactisch centrum

P

pabo pedagogische academie voor het basisonderwijs
PDCA Plan Do Check Act
po primair onderwijs
pro praktijkonderwijs

R

ROA Researchcentrum voor Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt

S

sbo speciaal basisonderwijs
SE schoolexamen
so speciaal onderwijs

V

vmbo voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs
vmbo-b vmbo basisberoepsgerichte leerweg
vmbo-(g)t vmbo (gemengde) en theoretische leerweg
vmbo-k vmbo kaderberoepsgerichte leerweg
vo voortgezet onderwijs
(v)so (voortgezet) speciaal onderwijs
vwo voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs

W

WHW Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek
wo wetenschappelijk onderwijs

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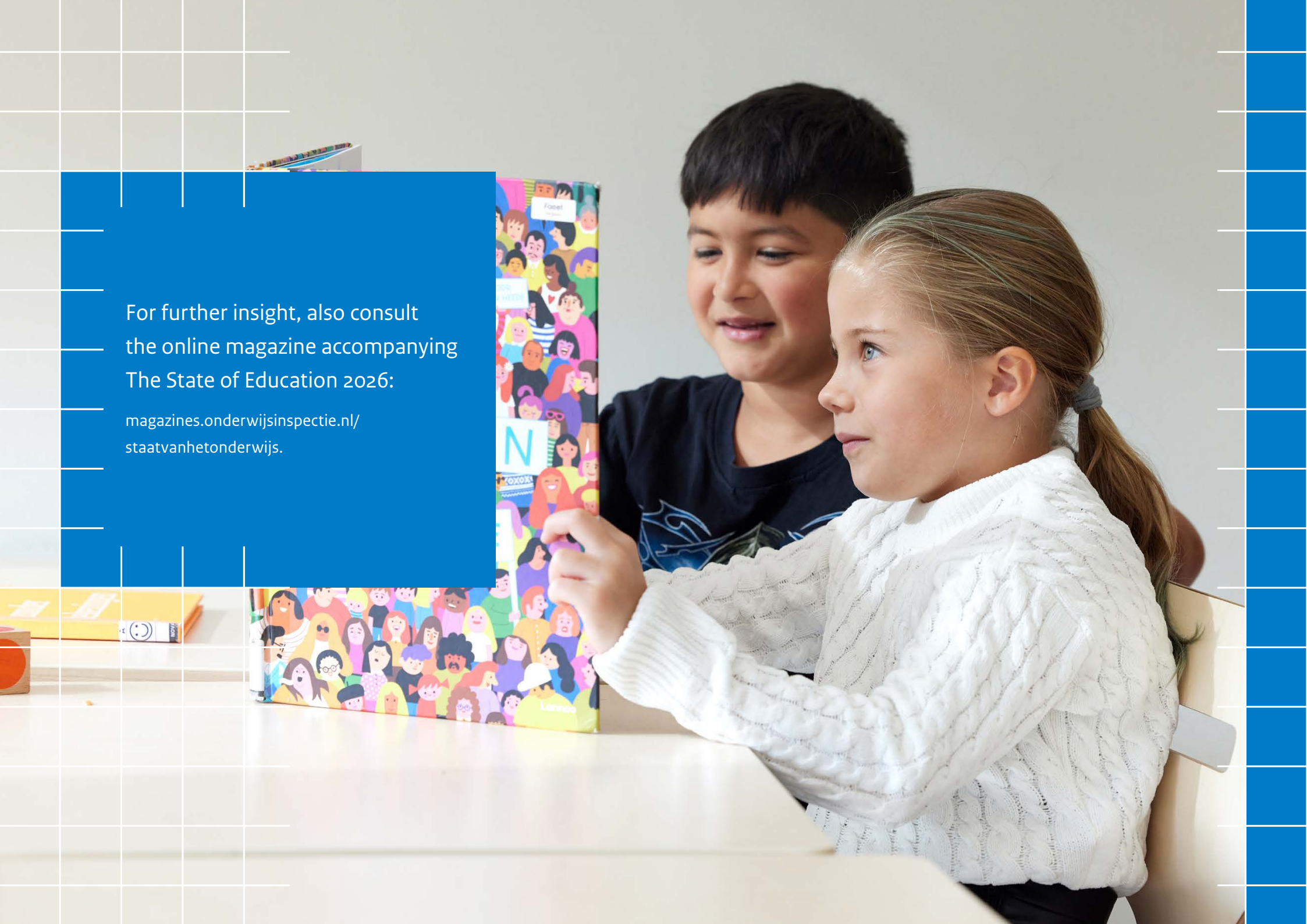

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