

The state of education
in the Netherlands 2004/2005

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EDUCATION
IN THE NETHERLANDS 2004/2005

Education Inspectorate

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1 The state of education in the Netherlands

In 2005

Anyone who takes a close look at education in 2005 sees good schools, motivated and professional teachers and pupils and students who perform averagely well. However, the same person will also see a number of thorny problems such as a growing group of pupils who leave school without an adequate qualification for the labour market, an excessively large number of pupils with reading difficulties, aggression at schools and, particularly in secondary education, rapidly ageing teaching staff.

Knowledge economy

Both national and international developments are placing enormous pressure on Dutch education. The globalization of the economy and the related increase in competition from Eastern Europe, Asia and South America in particular means our country needs a more intensive knowledge economy. This development is having an impact on our education system.

Multicultural society

From the national point of view, education bears all the hallmarks of a multicultural society. The resulting tensions and problems are noticeable and perceptible every day in our schools. Schools are having to contend not only with a multicultural school population, but also with pupils who are oriented towards multimedia, who require new teaching methods and new forms of learning.

Supervision of self-evaluations

At the same time, it is becoming more and more obvious that schools need more space in order to respond to the new challenges. The trend towards greater autonomy for schools and individual responsibility for quality, which set in decades ago,

is now being additionally stimulated by new cultural and economic challenges.

Benchmarking

It goes without saying that new types of government also require new types of supervision. This in turn will lead to a different relationship between the educational institutions and the Education Inspectorate. Autonomous schools will have to start measuring and monitoring their quality more themselves by, among other things, self-evaluation. This will not be possible without forms of benchmarking and mutual comparisons based on testing.

It is the statutory task of the Education Inspectorate to monitor the quality of education in the Netherlands and also supervise the quality of the self-evaluations of educational institutions. The NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders) is responsible for assessing the quality of the courses in higher education.

Increased autonomy

In its report entitled 'Proof of good services', published in November 2004, the Netherlands Advisory Council on Government Policy (WRR) pointed out that schools and professionals must be given more room to fulfil their responsibility for the service they provide, in consultation with the other stakeholders involved. Schools ought to be given more opportunities to interpret education as a team of professionals and together with their own group of pupils, parents, employers and others. It is only then that they will be able to generate sufficient innovative impulses and diversity to face the new challenges successfully. The government ought to respond to this diversity initially with fewer rules and later with a more restrained and selective supervision.

Internal supervision

The Minister of Education, Culture and Science used the Cabinet's vision in the memorandum entitled 'Other Government' to express the range of ideas of, among others, the WRR in the policy document entitled 'Governance'. In this document the Minister outlines the course of development she intends to achieve through her approach to supervision at schools. The approach is based on two concepts, namely independent internal supervision and horizontal accountability. Independent, internal supervision implies a separation between the board and supervision, for example in the form of a supervisory board. The idea behind horizontal accountability is to involve the parties with an interest in education, such as pupils, parents and employers, more closely in the goals and assessments of the performance of schools. At the same time, consideration is being given to the required streamlining of laws and rules which schools have to comply with.

External supervision

The system is complemented by external supervision by the Inspectorate. Risk-oriented supervision enables the Inspectorate to ascertain whether schools are taking their responsibility as regards providing basic quality, meaning requirements that have to be fulfilled in every educational situation. In addition, the Inspectorate will use a tailor-made approach to supervision in order to allow institutions more room for autonomy and diversity.

Individual responsibility

The trend towards more individual responsibility on the part of schools is not entirely unexpected. However, the detailing which was proposed last year makes more precise demands on internal supervision and on the dialogue with those involved in education. This will require considerable effort on the part of schools in the years to come.

Performance as a core element

Greater autonomy means schools will have to show what they have helped young people to achieve and how. In other words: they will have to demonstrate what educational achievements they have realised.

Educational achievements are going to be the main point on which schools are to be assessed. Good comparable and non-negotiable achievements are also an important feature of the recommendations entitled 'Vigorous Supervision of Education', which were published by the Education Council in February 2006.

What has our education system achieved during the past year? This document first examines the system achievements and then those of individual schools.

Different results

Education process results are an obvious educational achievement. The Netherlands has undertaken to fulfil the so-called Lisbon objectives to increase educational results and thus to play a leading role in the knowledge economy. School results no longer consist exclusively of diplomas or knowledge. They now have added value in other areas for both pupils/students and society. For example, they play an important role in the acquisition of social skills and in the transformation of young people into responsible citizens who participate actively in the democratic world in which they live. Schools share with others the task of working on integration and cohesion in a multicultural society. Schools do not only have to offer knowledge and social skills but also work with their pupils on an academic attitude, entrepreneurial ambition and active citizenship.

Achievements

Dutch education achievements meet high standards in certain areas such as the quality of the subject matter provision, the teaching-learning process and the school climate. This also applies from an international perspective. Moreover, all the educational sectors have remained stable during the past year.

At 88 percent of primary schools the results meet or exceed the level that can be expected on the basis of the characteristics of their pupil population. More than 90 percent of schools use methods for language, reading and arithmetic which comply with the attainment targets. Approximately half of all primary schools manage to adapt education to differences between pupils. Just as was the case last year, more than 70 percent of the primary schools have a properly functioning special needs provision and guidance system. Quality assurance is satisfactory at almost half of all primary schools.

In the academic years 2003/2004 and 2004/2005, the quality of secondary schools remained approximately constant. Taking all studies into account, almost 83 percent of schools were judged to be 'satisfactory' as regards results (efficiency and examination results). The aspects of special needs provision and guidance, the teaching-learning process and the subject matter provision were judged to be satisfactory even more often. Just like last year, quality assurance is assessed as being satisfactory at two-thirds of schools, while the quality of the subject matter provision is satisfactory at 95 percent of schools.

The quality of vocational training and adult education (BVE) is stable and even shows a slight improvement. For example, the number of poor courses has dropped. The accessibility of senior secondary vocational education (MBO) has noticeably increased, although the number of immigrant pupils who leave school prematurely is

relatively high. In addition, institutions that establish a clear link between normal management and quality-oriented control have made some interesting advances as regards quality assurance. In the case of practical training, the organisation and guidance provided by the institutions have been improved.

The number of students in university education and higher professional education has increased by 5.5 and 3 percent respectively. This is in line with one of the Lisbon objectives, namely greater participation in higher education.

High number of early school-leavers

This positive news should not blind us to the fact that there are a number of thorny and serious problems which have to be solved. For example, the number of young people who enter the labour market without a basic qualification is still very high. A lot of premature school-leavers find work but their position on the employment market remains weak in the long term. In recent years, the relevant figures were determined on the basis of various definitions and procedures. Data from Statistics Netherlands (CBS) has revealed, for example, that around 180,000 young people aged between 15 and 22 who have finished school have not completed training at pre-university education (VWO) or senior general secondary education (HAVO) level, nor at senior secondary vocational education (MBO) level 2. They therefore have no basic qualification for the employment market. Of course, this group of 15 to 20 year-olds changes composition each year and the numbers fluctuate both upwards and downwards. According to data based on information from the Regional Registration and Coordination Centres (RMC's) at Dutch local authorities, there were an additional 64,000 new school leavers in 2004. Experience has shown that some of these school-leavers return to some form of education at a later date. The introduction of the education number

means that early school-leavers can be more easily traced, and that it is no longer necessary to use different definitions and procedures. This is an important step towards solving a worrying problem.

Dropout rates in higher education

The dropout rates in higher education are also high. The total number of higher education graduates without diplomas between 2001 and 2004 is well over 25 percent. It is also noticeable that the number of unqualified immigrant students is almost twice as high as for native Dutch students. The dropout rate among native Dutch students remained more or less stable between 2001 and 2004, while the number of immigrant students who dropped out decreased by around 5 percent.

Integrated learning pathways

In many cases, students leave school prematurely due to personal problems. However, the result is a considerable financial loss on the part of society, both as lost revenue and as extra costs that have to be incurred to deal with the consequences. In this respect, the system is not sufficiently successful as regards achieving an integrated learning pathway. This also has consequences for the contribution made to social integration and cohesion. Almost a quarter of premature school-leavers come from immigrant backgrounds. The fact that they have fewer chances of finding work – which, after all, is the best way of participating in society – they run a considerable risk of being excluded.

Poor learning achievements and quality of reading instruction

In the case of many pupils, the basis for leaving school prematurely is laid early on in their school careers. A quarter of pupils finish primary education with decoding skills at the level of year 6 (9-10-year-olds). The problems often begin when they start attending

primary school. Approximately half of all schools have pupils who are already poor readers when they reach the end of year 3 (6-7-year-olds). Data from the Inspectorate itself, as well as from scientific research, makes it clear that poor achievements by pupils as regards learning to read primarily have to do with the quality of the reading instruction. See also Chapter 2 of this report on the state of education. In the case of decoding, there are only minor contrasts between the performance of pupils from different socio-economic and ethnic groups. In a society which is as linguistic as ours, struggling readers fall behind to an extent that can barely be made good later on in their educational careers.

Reading at secondary schools

The inability to make up lost ground is shown by the fact that around a quarter of pupils in basic vocational and management vocational programmes at pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) level are unable to read independently the school books which have been specially made for them. Moreover, many of the hindrances which young people experience during work experience and during employment after they have finished their vocational training have their roots in language-related problems. This applies to a lot of participants with immigrant backgrounds who, we have good reason to believe, are unjustly excluded. However, our education system also fails to teach many native Dutch pupils a proper command of the Dutch language, with the problems again starting in primary education.

Better preparation required for new teaching methods

Yields must be realised by means of a meticulous and effective teaching-learning process. Pupils, including the weaker ones, must realise their endeavours are supported and acknowledged and,

as a result, they should start enjoying learning once again. This will all help to reduce the numbers of pupils leaving school prematurely and ensure that, after the end of their initial education, they will be more inclined to carry on at school. That was the reason why the Netherlands agreed to the Lisbon objective of ensuring that, in 2010, around 20 percent of people aged between 25 and 64 are participating in educational and training activities. This situation is more likely to occur if people can look back positively on the education they have already had.

Make classroom teaching more enjoyable

In general terms, classroom teaching at schools is sufficiently meticulous. Nevertheless, there are a number of points that require attention. First of all, education cannot apparently prevent a substantial number of pupils in secondary education from leaving school prematurely. It also appears to be the case that well over half the pupils in secondary education do not evaluate the lessons positively. In fact, a quarter of them regard the lessons as boring and irritating. Moreover, a lot of pupils do not show the thirst for learning which is important for a life of learning. How do the schools deal with gifted pupils? Do the schools manage to keep pupils interested? Are pupils in fact calculating and satisfied with a six out of ten? Pupils are not being sufficiently challenged. At the final examinations stage, compensation is no longer possible for high marks and good study results are no longer rewarded with grants since they have been replaced by loans. If education is to contribute to the objectives of reducing dropout rates and increasing participation later on in life, it is important that schools make their classroom teaching more attractive to our young people. The Inspectorate is going to investigate this aspect next year.

Search for new possibilities

A noticeably large number of schools are currently looking for new ways to challenge and stimulate pupils. Their aim is to stop pupils from leaving school early. With this in mind, they are trying to increase pupil motivation by making lessons more interesting and contemporary, by placing the subject matter in contexts which are more practical and true to life and by giving young people more opportunities to make their own choices and take individual responsibility for the learning process. Schools are looking for new ways of getting the best out of each pupil, and of training each pupil to the highest possible level. They are doing so in a wide variety of ways. The use of ICT offers significant opportunities to link up with the way in which young people currently learn and communicate. A common characteristic of the different tactics is that they are intended to ensure that pupils adopt a more active approach to learning. A more entrepreneurial attitude on the part of young people ought to have a positive effect on both their initial education and their later lives.

Evidence-based

The different opinions on the innovations, both in education and elsewhere, are strongly divided and sometimes lead to serious disputes. To some it is the only way forward. Others predict it is the beginning of the end for the Netherlands as a knowledge country. Nevertheless, it is a good thing that schools are asking themselves, as autonomous, professional organisations, whether the new teaching methods are sufficiently based on proven (so-called 'evidence-based') effects and do not have any negative consequences for struggling pupils. It is important that the schools create teaching methods which link up optimally with today's social requirements and pupils. There are indeed some doubts regarding the degree of care and the preparation and implementation.

Systematic monitoring of pupils

It is, for example, not always clear whether the new teaching methods take sufficient account of all school pupils, and in particular the weaker ones. Moreover, autonomy and responsibility for your own learning process are not the same as simply leaving participants in education to their fate. The school must actively monitor and supervise pupils who have difficulties with a large degree of autonomy in order to prevent them from lagging behind and to prevent less than optimal results for both the pupil and the school. In any event, in an educational environment which is less strictly structured, it is vital to pay more attention to the systematic monitoring of pupil progress.

Careful introduction

It is also important that the process is introduced carefully. Certainly if the change is fairly drastic, it is essential that the preconditions are properly defined and that the staff are also consistent in their approach and are themselves properly prepared. The preconditions cover primarily care for the first generations of pupils to be confronted with these innovations. Moreover, in experimental situations one needs to comply with the statutory requirements used to protect the rights of participants, particularly in the field of teaching time, learning goals and assessment. The Inspectorate is going to monitor this process of educational reform in the coming years in order to keep a close watch on the effects.

Identify problems sooner and cooperate more effectively

Special needs provision is an important precondition for the generation and improvement of results, but it is also an achievement on the part of the school. The number of pupils with special needs is gradually increasing. Between 2000 and 2004, the

number of pupils in learning support departments and practical training increased by 11 percent from 108,800 in 2000 to 120,400 in 2004.

Cooperation among pupils who require extra care

Participation in practical training grew by 16 percent between 2002 and 2004. This reflects the fact that the seriousness of the problems facing these pupils is also increasing. This development is placing higher and higher demands on the special needs facilities provided by the schools themselves and on the schools' capacity to maintain relationships actively with others. Those others must, in the first instance, be the parents. After all, they are responsible for their children and, as research has shown, the preparation they give to their children is an important factor for the school's success. Good cooperation is required with other actors in the field of youth welfare to help parents fulfil that important role. Research within the framework of integrated supervision by the Education Inspectorate, together with the Youth Care, Health Care, Public Order and Safety Inspectorates, and now the Work Income Inspectorate as well, has shown the importance of early identification, harmonised chains and the will and power to continue implementing. It is precisely in the interface between provisions that gaps often appear.

Improvements are possible

Nevertheless, a lot of improvements could be made at the schools themselves. The process starts with the early identification of the needs requirement and the tailoring of the supervision to those needs of weaker pupils. In primary education this has, for years, been the Achilles heel as regards the quality of education at many schools. In secondary education, it is clear that reasonable progress is being made with regard to the identification, analysis and diagnosis of learning and behavioural problems. However, there

is a certain degree of ‘action timidity’. Teachers are not properly aware of how they should convert the analyses and recommendations of experts into an effective repertoire of actions.

Last year it was established that identification task is insufficiently carried out and that a fifth of special primary schools are not providing facilities in a sufficiently planned manner. In addition, the effects of the special needs provision were not checked.

The situation is even worse in special secondary education where, in almost half of the cases, there is insufficient systematic supervision during the pupils’ school careers. The supervision of specific educational needs was also unsatisfactory in many cases.

Care for pupils goes further

Care for pupils extends beyond assistance for pupils with very special needs. The idea is that pupils without major problems are carefully monitored as regards progress and the way in which they cope with education. In addition, certain amended measures may have to be taken. This means recognising learning problems and actually offering an effective educational provision to alleviate them. It also means pursuing, in cooperation with the attendance officer, an active policy against truancy or other behaviour which hinders the progress made at school by the pupil or others. It also means creating a safe learning environment.

Key role for teachers

School achievements are generated by the staff and primarily by the teachers, from whom a lot is expected since they have to implement the innovations in education and establish links with today’s young people. They play a key role in providing care and guidance for vulnerable young people. They have to have sufficient (specialist) knowledge and ability to

teach pupils the skills required for them to function properly in society. Above all, they have to convey inspiration and learning enjoyment.

Inspired teachers

At the same time, schools are the target of a lot of criticism in public debates, often within the framework of over-simplified discussions of VMBO, the concept of independent study in secondary schools and the insufficient mathematics skills of primary school teacher training students. Most teachers work enthusiastically and had good reason to seek a career in education. However, they need more space to invest in their profession. After all, good education is the product of a team of inspired teachers who have a good understanding of their profession.

A central role for teaching staff

It is precisely their central role in the entire process that makes the quality of teaching staff important. A clear threat to education, as regards both quality and quantity, is the increasing ageing of teaching staff and the insufficient level of interest in this profession at the teacher training institutions. In primary education, the number of teachers aged over fifty has increased from 26 to 32 percent during the past four years. In secondary education, there was an increase from 19 to no less than 42 percent. Ageing results in an imbalance in teaching staff in which the impulses of young, new teachers are reduced. At the same time, it causes a faster brain drain as large numbers of older members of staff leave the profession within a short space of time. This is the paradox. High quality education requires both the experience of the ‘old hands’ and the dynamism and youthful culture of younger teachers. Experienced teachers have more of an eye for the specific needs of pupils, offer more varied teaching methods and are more capable of activating and motivating

pupils, while it is precisely from young teachers that impulses can be expected as regards educational innovations.

Sufficient replacements available?

It is uncertain whether sufficient replacements are available for teachers who leave the profession. Intake numbers at teacher training institutions have, in fact, increased during the past four years (from 8,800 to 9,350 in primary education and from 4,900 to 5,900 in secondary education). However, these increases are insufficient, particularly in the case of secondary education, to fulfil the demand for replacements. It is always difficult to make exact predictions regarding employment market developments but the most recent expectations for 2010 are for a maximum deficit of one-and-a-half percent in secondary education, with noticeable differences between regions. Once again, the additional problem of an unequal spread across the subjects is particularly prevalent in secondary education. The expected shortages are largest in the case of economic, science and vocational subjects.

Accountability and improvement

The autonomy of schools as regards interpreting their achievements implies that they have to give account in a transparent fashion regarding their performance to the people and institutions with which they have links and to the government. In the corresponding dialogue, the school will have to determine in which areas it has to improve. It will then have to implement the improvements. At the moment, only fragmented elements of this system are operational at the majority of schools. Clear accountability as regards what the school has supplied as regards education vis-à-vis the interested parties must, in particular, be developed in more detail. While, at the moment, quality assurance is still often an activity with a strong internal

orientation, this will have to be projected outwards much more actively in the future. Schools will have to adopt a more open and interactive attitude towards the interested parties referred to.

Cooperation

In connection with this responsibility, the Inspectorate is investigating the possibilities offered by innovations in the field of supervision. Last year, for example, preparations were made for cooperation between the Audit Service, the Central Funding of Institutions Agency (Cfi) and the Inspectorate and in proper coordination with the Information Management Group. The result is that a start is to be made in 2006 with the execution of integrated supervision. In other words, a one-off questionnaire will be used for a joint analysis of the risks and research will be carried out where necessary. The supervisors also want to provide feedback on the results of the analyses in such a way that the various achievements of schools become easier to compare for the schools themselves. This will generate benefits for the schools as regards their external accountability.

Quality assurance

The actual development of quality assurance is still very dependent on the education sectors in which schools operate. Higher education and the vocational training/adult education sector have had a considerable degree of autonomy for some time now and have been involved in the development of quality assurance for longer. Such a situation is more of an innovation in primary and secondary education and has therefore not been developed as much. Other matters besides the development phase also play a role. Institutions for higher education and vocational training/adult education (and some at secondary school level) are usually larger in scale and have a more complex structure. In addition, they are

subject to much more general government regulations. This makes greater demands on the controlling capacity and the provision of information relating to the performance of the institution or parts thereof than in the case of a small primary school. The demands we make on quality assurance at vocational training/adult education institutions are therefore more stringent than those at primary or secondary school level.

Increase in scale

However, primary education is undergoing rapid development and scale increases have been taking place for several years now. These increases in scale are not leading to large schools but to large administrative clusters which sometimes comprise dozens of schools. The number of schools going it alone is rapidly decreasing. In 2005, less than ten percent of the seven thousand or so schools were run by one individual board. Forty percent were governed by boards with representatives from between two and ten schools or even more in the case of half the schools. Such large boards are faced with similar organisational issues as the management of, for example, Regional Training Centres. This makes greater demands on the administrative structure and the quality assurance. Some boards already operate according to a supervisory board model with a supra-school management team in the role of professional board.

Quality assurance and accountability

As a result, the issues relating to controlling and verifying the quality of these schools' achievements also end up at a different level. Currently, the quality assurance in primary education is reasonable, according to the established criteria. However, usually there is no integrated and coherent system oriented towards accountability. Specific steering by the board, which needs to be continually updated as regards the quality developments so that intervention can take place on time, must result in improvements. An active focus on the school's stakeholders, within the framework of horizontal accountability, can have an additional reinforcing effect. This is precisely what is important in a situation in which pupils and parents are not sufficiently able to change 'supplier'.

Self-regulation in the case of schools in special measures

Although we have already described which achievements the education system as a whole has generated, we can now also look at how the individual schools are doing.

Even without a system of governance, the management and board must still have an insight into the achievements of their schools and, in the event of shortcomings, take steps to bring about improvements. In the current circumstances, the quality assurance system should provide the information

Schools in special measures improved

required to assess performance and steps ought to be taken to solve problems. In the event of increasing horizontal accountability to the stakeholders, such as pupils and parents, as well as the participation council, pressure should be brought to bear by these parties as well in order to cause improvement. Nevertheless, there will always be a risk that a school will fail at some point in time. One consequence of this is that primary schools increasingly do not include certain pupils when determining the education results, or do not allow some pupils to take the primary school leaving examination (CITO test). The number of pupils left out by an average primary school is now 11 percent. It is important that the board notices this and has sufficient management power to solve the problem quickly. In order to ensure that schools in special measures get the right amount of attention, the Inspectorate is making the assessment of the results more stringent and inspectors now visit schools unannounced when the examinations are set.

Schools at risk and schools in special measures

In its supervision of primary education, the Inspectorate differentiates between special education and secondary education and between schools at risk and schools in special measures. Schools at risk are those which have had unsatisfactory results at the end of the school year for three consecutive years. Even if the results are satisfactory but the classroom teaching is unsatisfactory with regard to a number of aspects (subject matter provision, teaching-learning process, special needs provision and counseling), the Inspectorate will regard the school as being at risk. This means that the Inspectorate will keep a close watch on these schools and carry out a new periodical investigation after two years instead of after four.

In addition to insufficient results, schools in special measures are also unsatisfactory with regard

to a number of different aspects of the way in which classroom teaching is organised. Schools in special measures must submit a plan for improvement and will be supervised intensively for a certain period of time, which period will be concluded by an investigation into the quality improvements made.

In the large and complex institutions that operate in the vocational training and adult education sector, the focus is on institutions which are of an unsatisfactory quality. The way in which the assessment is made differs per education sector because the characteristics of the sectors also differ considerably. If schools or institutions do not comply, a period of more intensive supervision always follows, with a follow-up investigation taking place after one to two years. In that period, the board or management must implement measures to counteract the problems identified and make improvements.

A lot of schools manage to improve

In most cases schools improve. The majority of the schools assessed as very weak in the recent past have managed to sufficiently improve crucial performances. In those few cases in which that did not happen, this was reported to the Minister and a process of intensive follow-up supervision was agreed. In these instances, the supervision was apparently not enough of a motivation to bring the instruction up to the mark. At the same time, we see that the self-regulating capacity has not functioned sufficiently in those cases. Incidentally, in its 'Vigorous Supervision' recommendations of February 2006, the Education Council advocates more robust action against schools which perform unsatisfactorily.

Higher education

Another interesting point in this context are the experiences in higher education. External supervision has shown that 'good governance' at the institutions needs to be improved in order to ensure society's

lasting trust in a self-regulating higher education system. The Inspectorate has made appropriate proposals in a number of different reports. An improvement in, among other things, the control as regards issuing certificates and the granting of exemptions is essential in order to limit the risks to society's faith in the value of these certificates which the Inspectorate has observed. For a proper interpretation of 'good governance', the accountability and supervision information needs to be more transparent, easier to use and more thorough. This concerns the availability for all those involved and interested such as the participation council, professional field and external supervisors. The Inspectorate investigation at the INHOLLAND college revealed that, in addition to internal supervision, a specific, external investigation may be essential.

Conclusion

Anyone who takes a close look at education in 2005 will see good schools, motivated and professional teachers and pupils and students who perform averagely well.

However, the same person will also see a number of stubborn and thorny problems such as a growing group of pupils who leave school without a certificate, an excessively large number of pupils with reading difficulties, aggression at schools and, particularly in secondary education, rapidly ageing teaching staff.

An effective approach to the issues mentioned should be based primarily on an intensification of individual responsibility for the quality of education of the board, school management team and professionals, and more involvement of parents, pupils and other stakeholders of the school. To that end, rules should first of all be limited and supervision should thereafter be more selective. The idea is that it must be made possible for parties involved in schools

to compare their achievements. The Education Inspectorate wants to support schools in the creation of their own assessment methods, their methods to give account of the quality, and in developing ways to work on improvements, together with others. At the same time, the Inspectorate will continue to monitor the achievements actually made as regards knowledge, social skills and academic attitude.



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The Netherlands' education in themes

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2 Decoding written text

During the past year, the Inspectorate has investigated the teaching of decoding at primary schools. The reason for doing so was that various studies have shown that a large group of pupils in primary education have problems with reading (both decoding and reading comprehension). A lot of pupils appear to encounter difficulties with reading in the period after primary school as well.

Decoding performance scarcely influenced by pupils' backgrounds

The studies conducted by the Inspectorate, and other studies, show that performance in the field of decoding is scarcely influenced by pupils' social and ethnic backgrounds. Differences in decoding performance can be attributed much more to the instruction provided. There are considerable differences between schools and classes as regards reading performance. Almost fifty percent of primary schools have no pupils at risk of failure as regards decoding at the end of Year 3 (6-7-year-olds). In some Year 3 classes, pupils make more than twice as much progress in six months than in other Year 3 classes.

Differences in reading performance and the organisation of the teaching-learning process

Our research has shown that these differences can scarcely be explained on the basis of the school's specific situation, the school size or the pupils' backgrounds. The differences are related much more to the organisation of the teaching-learning process. At Year 3 level, we see that schools without pupils at risk of failure as regards reading perform better in certain aspects of teaching strategy, special needs provision and teaching content.

Decoding instruction continues for a number of years after Year 3. In addition, the teaching content in the kindergarten groups is important in the light of reading instruction. Using a written questionnaire, the Inspectorate carried out an initial survey of language and reading instruction in the pre-school groups and the reading instruction in Years 3 and 4. This study is to be followed-up in academic year 2005/2006 in the form of theme-based school visits.

Pre-school groups

In the pre-school groups the teaching content is structured in a variety of ways. Some of the schools work with packages of literacy-related content. Other schools work according to their own themes, whose content they compile themselves. It appears that a lot of schools use the packages selectively and that schools with their own themes do not really succeed in linking activities related to literacy with learning lines. As a result, it is not certain whether sufficient attention is currently paid to encouraging literacy. It should be added, however, that school visits have revealed that the teaching content in the pre-school groups is under development.

Practically all schools monitor the literacy reading development of preschoolers. However, a considerable number of schools do not have any data on all the skills related to reading among all preschoolers.

As regards the decoding instruction given from Year 4 onwards, the research focused on, among other things, the way in which schools structure the teaching content and the time devoted to reading. Around 60 percent of schools indicate that their methods include ability-based reading. In the case of approximately 40 percent of schools this is the only sort of reading instruction provided and one which,

as has now been ascertained, insufficiently benefits less able readers. However, more and more schools are opting for a different interpretation. Approximately 60 percent work with a decoding textbook.

Time for reading

The time that schools allocate to decoding varies considerably. This is an interesting fact, given that particularly less able readers benefit a lot from extra time being set aside for practice and instruction. The research shows that the number of pupils at risk of failure as regards reading in Year 4 has doubled in comparison to Year 3. There has also been an increase in poor readers in the field of reading comprehension between Years 6 and 8. For the time being, no conclusive explanation can be given for this on the basis of this research. It may be the case that the decoding skills of pupils and the textbook used play a role.

Differences between schools and classes

Sometimes, in Years 3 and 4, the differences between schools and classes as regards the performance of pupils in the field of decoding are extremely large. These differences can scarcely be explained on the basis of circumstances in the school context, nor on the basis of characteristics of the pupil population. Whether children learn to decode properly appears to depend very much on the school and the teacher. The organisation of the reading instruction and the teaching skills of the teacher are very important factors, as shown by the results of external research

in the Netherlands and abroad. Particularly those pupils who are poor at decoding benefit from a certain organisation of reading instruction at the school. In a word, this means a specific interpretation of the teaching-learning process, with a focus on letters and phonological skills in the pre-school groups, the timely identification of stagnation, extra instruction and reading time and the continuation of instruction in reading techniques after Year 3. It goes without saying that the structure of the teaching-learning process in pre-school groups must link up with the way in which these young children develop. This, for example, means elements such as play, meaningful contexts, a rich learning environment and repetition. Besides the interpretation of the teaching-learning process, there are clear indications that certain aspects of the school policy contribute positively to the effectiveness of the reading instruction. The expertise of the teachers could be raised to a higher level and, in addition, schools ought to check whether they actually work on the basis of a yield-oriented culture with clear goals for the reading results.

Further research

In the coming years, the Inspectorate is going to carry out more research into the language and reading instruction in Years 1 to 4 and into reading comprehension. This will generate a better insight into the problems that exist in the field of language and reading instruction at primary schools and into ways of solving them.

Too many pupils have inadequate decoding skills

3 Special needs provision and guidance

Problems involving pupils with special needs

Pupils with special needs present problems that are too much for a lot of schools to handle and are quickly becoming more serious and widespread. The instruction is not properly adjusted to the needs of pupils with serious behavioural problems in particular, and these pupils are at risk of falling by the wayside. It is not only at school that young people risk becoming isolated. Thankfully, the cooperation between schools and other institutions for child welfare is gradually improving. An increasing number of schools are working specifically on the quality of the care they provide and are participating in a special needs provision network in which a variety of disciplines and bodies are represented. However, a properly coordinated network of care and assistance for young people is by no means present everywhere. Wherever this cooperation does not function (satisfactorily), pupils and parents are often sent backwards and forwards from one school to another and from schools to other special needs institutions.

The quality of special needs provision and guidance

There is an urgent need in education to improve the link between schools and school types. The quality of special needs provision and guidance also needs to be improved at a lot of schools. Often, the special needs facilities have not been sufficiently adapted and attuned to the rapidly changing problems. A variety of measures in education and elsewhere are required to ensure that all pupils can benefit optimally from education. Those measures must initially lead to the shortest possible waiting times during diagnosis, placement at other schools or care by specialised institutions. In addition, pupils with special needs benefit most when all the

schools manage to create a properly coordinated and continuous special needs approach in cooperation with each other and others.

Limits to flexibility

Schools are getting better and better at identifying on time those pupils who suffer from educational disadvantages, behavioural problems and disorders. At the same time, schools are telling us that they have insufficient staff and time to give pupils what they need. Sometimes, the problems are so serious and complex that they are beyond the capacity of the school and the teachers. Cooperation with external institutions and specialists is not yet taking place sufficiently smoothly to allow these problems to be solved on the basis of a combined approach. Often there is no properly coordinated regional network of facilities aimed at schooling, guidance and assistance for young people. As a result, schools are confronted much too frequently with pupil problems for which they are unable to find a solution. Developments are underway in various parts of the country which are intended to ensure that child welfare is no longer approached from the point of view and objective of the various welfare organisations. These developments are based primarily on the concept of there being a single point of contact for youth services, with a focus on young people and their problems, and not on the institutions. The aim is to be able to identify and solve young people's problems sooner.

Conditions for a good learning process

At schools with a very problematic pupil population, teachers often fail to safeguard the conditions for a good teaching-learning process in the classroom. Paulle (2005) researched the practical situation at two secondary schools in deprived districts, one in

the Bronx in the United States and one in the Bijlmer neighbourhood of Amsterdam. These schools have what is referred to as a 'hidden curriculum' that scarcely shows any similarities with the timetable on paper. By far the majority of disruptions and acts of violence are the consequence of the actions of a small group of pupils that exhibit rather dominant and negative behaviour.

Paulle observed that, both in the United States and in the Netherlands, there is a gap between what is really going on at problem schools and what is discussed and carried out by policymakers. Neither at the schools themselves, nor elsewhere, are adults to be found who actually know what is going on in and around the schools. The essence of his message is that boys and girls from unstable families can bring a school to a standstill and that the education system often fails this kind of school. The findings from this research pose the question of whether the standard teaching strategy as regards problem schools is sufficient in secondary education.

Although the problems identified at two schools may not be used to generalise about secondary education in the Netherlands as a whole, a lot of schools will recognise elements of the findings. Primary schools in problem districts will also be confronted by older pupils who exhibit the behaviour described by Paulle. The problems that occur when transferring from primary to secondary education generate extra risks particularly for pupils at risk of failure (Inspectorate of Education, 2005b). These problems are often unsolved when pupils finish secondary education and continue into vocational education.

A broadly-based care team

A large number of schools work specifically and in a dedicated fashion on improving their special needs provision and guidance. These schools have a broadly-based special needs provision team in which various institutions and experts cooperate. Internal-

ly, the responsibilities for the special needs facilities are evenly divided between the teachers in the class or year and the special needs officials. Sound agreements have been made with other schools in the sector, the supplying schools and the further education institutions concerning pupil transfers. However, this is by no means a standard situation. The mutual linking between schools for pupils aged between four and twelve and between education institutions for pupils aged twelve and older is often insufficient. The vertical transfers from primary to secondary education and from secondary to vocational education and training also generate problems for pupils with special needs. The Education Council (2005a) summarised the problem in the following short sentence: 'The problem is really no-one's'. This summary also applies to the different institutions and organisations outside the education system that are responsible for child welfare.

In the introduction to this chapter we formulated the key question as being: How can special needs provision and guidance contribute to improving the educational opportunities of pupils and, at the same time, to limiting the number of pupils that leave regular education prematurely or remain dependent on specific help throughout their entire school careers? This chapter shows that there is a wide variety of pupils with special needs. The key question can be answered in one way in the case of pupils with educational disadvantages and in another way in the case of pupils with special handicaps or young people with serious behavioural problems. In addition, solutions should not only be sought in the education system, since a range of different measures is required, both from the field of education and elsewhere.

Shorter waiting times

To start with, waiting times and time-consuming procedures need to be reduced during diagnosis and when placing pupils at other schools. The proposals

described in this chapter are intended to accelerate these procedures and reduce waiting times for pupils. Parents must no longer be sent from pillar to post and pupils must no longer end up falling between two stools.

Properly coordinated approach

The cooperation between schools and institutions in relation to child welfare is starting to get off the ground but is still too dependent on more or less coincidental initiatives at the local level. Given the increasing extent and seriousness of behavioural problems among young people, in particular, each school must have a broadly-based special needs provision team in order to tackle this problem in an optimal manner. In addition, it is desirable to create conditions at the local level which enable schools and education institutions to manage this cooperation themselves and support them in the interpretation of their management role.

Improve links within education

We conclude that the sometimes inadequate link between school types is understandable, given the existing legislation and regulations and the differences in organisation and tasks of education institutions and school types. At the same time, it appears that those differences often imply considerable risks

for young people. As is the case in the context of cooperation with external institutions, regulations, organisation and tasks should not determine the way in which pupils with special needs are taken care of. The interest of the pupils, particularly those with special needs, must be the focus and carry more weight than the ‘individuality’ of schools and school types. In this context, we advocate a joint effort on the part of schools and education sectors in order to create a clear and continuous approach in monitoring systems and portfolios per pupil for their entire school career.

Improving the quality of special needs provision and guidance

Lastly, the organisation and the quality of special needs facilities and guidance is still deficient at a lot of schools. The special needs provision and guidance system and the daily contact with special needs pupils is still uncoordinated at a lot of schools. Ideally they should complement and reinforce each other, on behalf of the pupils. In all school types, special needs provision and guidance are still insufficiently goal-oriented. Most schools are not aware of the effects of their efforts and some schools still apply procedures and approaches which are no longer suitable for pupils with special needs today.

One-quarter of pupils
has problems:
schools unable to cope

4 School safety

Physical violence

At primary schools, physical violence between pupils is increasing, as is discrimination in pre-vocational secondary education. Special schools for pupils with behavioural problems have not become safer during the past year. The only favourable developments are noticeable in senior general secondary education and pre-university education schools, where the problems were already less serious.

Digital bullying

Digital bullying is widespread primarily in secondary education. Schools also regularly report problems with native Dutch pupils who behave in an extremist fashion, primarily at schools outside the major cities. A number of schools in the major cities are having to deal with forms of religious extremism among pupils from ethnic minorities. Incidents between Dutch pupils and pupils from ethnic minorities are no rarity. One in five schools for practical training or pre-vocational secondary education and one in three schools for special secondary education experience problems with the phenomenon of ‘loverboys’. In pre-vocational secondary education in the major cities, pupils from ethnic minorities are becoming less tolerant of homosexuality.

Social safety policy

Schools in all sectors are developing policies relating to social safety. However, there is often no solid basis in the form of a registration of incidents and research among pupils and staff. Moreover, a lot of schools do not check whether the measures which they implement are effective. As a result, it is doubtful whether the measures will have sufficient effect.

Increase

The Inspectorate has carried out research for three consecutive years into social safety in education. During that period, physical violence between pupils at primary schools increased, as did the dangers for staff in special secondary education. In practical training and pre-vocational secondary education, the situation continues to be worrying for pupils and staff. Senior general secondary education and pre-university education schools, where the safety problems are less acute, have become slightly safer. A lot of schools are taking measures to increase safety but, in comparison to last year, little progress has been made. The Inspectorate is holding schools more accountable for their safety policy with the intention of encouraging more rapid policy-making.

Analysis of the problems

Society’s focus on safety in education has not yet been translated into faster responses in schools. A lot of schools learn on a ‘once bitten twice shy’ basis. An incident takes place first and then the measures are implemented. However, these measures are generally not based on a proper analysis of the problems which pupils and staff experience nor on a registration of incidents. Instead, schools often do not check whether the measures are effective. Incidentally, this problem applies not only to improvements in this field, since quality assurance in general is not very well developed in Dutch education.

Safety measures require constant attention. There is little point in drawing up a bullying protocol in one academic year and then scarcely paying any attention to it in the following year. The effects, if there were any, will very probably vanish into thin

air. Schools must continually discuss agreements and keep checking whether everyone is keeping to them. Continual assessments will also have to be made as to whether measures need to be adjusted, for example as a result of changes in the pupil population.

Plenty of examples

Policy development relating to social safety does not have to be a huge task on the part of schools. Exemplary policy plans, instruments for monitoring the safety perception, protocols, teaching materials and projects are available in abundance and, thanks to Internet, are available to even the most remote locations in the Netherlands within a matter of minutes. A recent development is the secondary education safety monitor which secondary schools can join if they wish to monitor how pupils and staff feel. This facility has already been available for some time in the vocational education and training sector. The development of a national monitor would also be a good thing for primary and special education.

Little research has been done into the effectiveness of projects, with the exception of a couple of campaigns and bullying projects. Although the education sector is swarming with ‘good practices’, it is still unclear whether all those initiatives actually live up to that description. This is not just a Dutch problem, but an international one as well. Research into the effects in this field would give schools more opportunity to make a substantiated choice for a particular approach.

Joint goal-oriented approach

Local authorities and school boards can take a more decisive lead. A lot of schools are currently developing policies individually. Although a school-specific interpretation is required, a joint goal-oriented approach will probably lead to more rapid policy development. Joint initiatives also make it easier to involve institutions outside the school, such

as the police and child welfare organisations, in the safety policy. Local authorities in the major cities have already been doing this for years and can serve as an example to others.

While the educational world is still busy tackling familiar problems, new ones are emerging. Schools are being confronted more and more frequently with pupils involved in the digital bullying or harassment of other pupils or their teachers. A safety policy must therefore also include measures to combat this form of bullying. Digital bullying often occurs outside school, out of the sight of teachers. This does not mean, however, that the school cannot play a part in finding out whether the problem exists and, if so, who is involved. Moreover, more explicit attention can also be paid to the issue in the curriculum, so that pupils know what they can do if it happens to them. Insufficient Internet awareness among teachers must, in any case, not be used as an excuse for not tackling the problems.

Social tensions

The social tensions between native Dutch and ethnic minority population groups are starting to affect schools. In the major cities, religion-oriented (Islamic) extremism among ethnic minority pupils only occurs on a limited scale. In the rest of the Netherlands, extremist behaviour is exhibited primarily by native Dutch pupils. The problem exists primarily in the practical training sector, pre-vocational secondary education and special secondary education. Incidents between native Dutch and pupils from ethnic minorities also occur at large numbers of schools. Ethnic minority pupils are also noticeably less tolerant than native Dutch young people as regards acceptance of homosexuality.

Research in Amsterdam has shown that teachers often interpret extremist behaviour as adolescent behaviour. That is one of the reasons why they often

fail to take action, although fear sometimes plays a role as well. However, the AIVD (the Dutch Intelligence Service) emphasises the fact that the problem should definitely not be underestimated. After all, adolescent behaviour can also be very dangerous. At local level, extremist pupils can cause considerable tension between groups and cause conflicts inside and outside schools. Ignoring the problem is therefore not an effective way of dealing with the problems. Individual schools often do not have the capacity to take the appropriate action and local authorities should therefore treat the issue as more of a priority.

At the moment, most of the above-mentioned problems occur primarily in secondary education. However, according to many who work in education on a daily basis, a shift is taking place to younger age groups. Clashes between native Dutch and ethnic minority pupils are also taking place at primary schools and a few special primary schools have problems with lover boys. The measures should therefore also include primary education. Some local authorities are, for example, considering lessons about loverboys to children in the senior primary school years so that girls know in advance that they might be confronted with this phenomenon. Organisations of homosexuals are also urging information to be provided at primary schools.

Pupils at that age are, in general, more tolerant and more inclined to take in information. Information at an early age may prevent homophobic behaviour at a later stage.

Scarcely any specific policy

Homophobic behaviour is an increasing problem at schools in the major cities. The differences in tolerance between native Dutch pupils and pupils from ethnic minorities are enormous, as shown by recent studies among pupils. It seems that information on homosexuality is provided at by no means all schools or that it is left to individual teachers to decide whether such information should be given. Schools are afraid to take a stand on this issue, for fear of problems and of possibly losing pupils. This may also be a reason why schools scarcely have any specific policy on this issue. According to a statement by the Dutch Equal Treatment Commission, this is not even necessary because policy on homosexuality can be part of an integral safety policy. However, an integral policy is not much good if it is not made clear which measures the school is taking to combat specific problems and which sanctions are imposed on specific undesirable behaviour. Homophobic behaviour is one of those specific problems. Because individual schools often find it difficult to make policy in this field, a joint approach, coordinated by a board or a local authority would be a good idea.

A new problem: digital bullying

5 Drop out, truancy and school absenteeism

At a lot of secondary schools, pupils drop out of school without having acquired enough qualification for the labour market. The problem is greatest at schools for pre-vocational secondary education, at senior general secondary education schools and at special schools for pupils with behavioural problems (cluster 4, special secondary education). Within the pre-vocational secondary education sector, the problems are concentrated in the learning support departments and in the basic/management vocational programmes. Pupils at all school types play truant in large numbers. The problem is worst in the major cities of the Netherlands.

Effective approach essential

Because dropout and truancy are bad for pupils themselves and for society as a whole, an effective approach is essential. Schools are trying all kinds of measures to prevent dropout and truancy as much as possible or, if it is already happening, to counteract it. Schools with a lot of dropouts or truants are, in general, more active than schools at which the problems are not as great. Nevertheless, it seems as if schools are not yet making optimal use of opportunities to take preventive measures.

Reinforce the bond between school and pupil

In order to prevent dropout it is necessary to reinforce the bond between school and pupil, make education more attractive, improve pupil guidance and reward desirable behaviour. These measures can also be used in the battle against truancy. An effective approach to truancy requires schools to assess why pupils play truant, involve their parents in discouraging truancy, impose clear sanctions and keep a constant watch on known truants. In addition, some schools can call in the attendance officer

sooner than is currently the case.

A lot of schools, particularly in the practical training, pre-vocational secondary education and special education sectors, are confronted by dropouts and still a lot more have pupils who play truant. Schools are trying to combat these persistent problems, particularly when there are many dropouts or truants. Nevertheless, the measures do not seem to be sufficient to contain the problems.

Do not just blame pupils

In the case of dropout, schools can place the blame too one-sidedly on the pupils. They assume that pupils give up because they lack motivation or have difficulties at home. However, as long as schools do not consider dropout also as a problem of the school itself, any changes they make will be insufficient. One of the important things to remember when trying to prevent dropout is that schools should try to reinforce the bond between pupil and school, make education more attractive, improve guidance and reward desirable behaviour. Although schools are implementing measures in all these areas, according to a lot of pupils and as shown by the 'pupil monitor', improvements are still certainly possible. As long as 16 percent of pupils feel that none of the teachers at school is interested in them, the bonds between school and pupils are not strong enough.

Do pupils experience the effects of an anti-truancy policy?

When preventing and combating truancy, the issue is not so much whether there are sufficient rules, punishments and procedures. A lot of schools (but not all) have already devoted attention to these aspects. The question is primarily how many pupils actually experience the existence of an anti-truancy

policy in their daily lives. Research shows, for example, that schools cancel too many lessons and thereby increase the chance of truancy. Pupils often indicate that they are not caught when playing truant. These days there are methods for tracking down truants very quickly, for example by the school sending truants and their parents text messages. However, these potentially successful methods will only be effective if schools use them on a daily basis.

Attendance officer

Calling on the services of the attendance officer is a measure used relatively frequently by schools in the event of truancy. They refer to this measure more often than stricter rules or punishments. However, the attendance officer is primarily involved in dealing with serious truants, and not incidental or moderate ones. Schools probably miss opportunities when dealing with pupils whose problems are still minor. As a result, truancy escalates and some pupils may become dropouts. In addition, it is still debatable whether the task of ensuring compliance with the compulsory education requirement is adequately fulfilled in all local authorities. Reports by the Regional Registration and Coordination Centres (RMCs), for example, give cause for doubt. Particularly in small towns, the local authorities are sometimes insufficiently effective and not all the procedures used by attendance officers appear to be equally efficient.

Effectiveness of projects rarely investigated

Numerous projects exist in the Netherlands which focus on dropout and truancy. However, the effectiveness of those projects is only rarely investigated. In addition, a pupil only becomes aware of such projects when his problems have already assumed certain proportions. However, it is often difficult to re-interest pupils in their school careers once they have started to play truant. That is why prevention of problems is the preferred option. International research has highlighted effective measures that schools can take. It is therefore essential that schools do a lot more with regard to prevention than is now the case. As regards dropout, it is, for example, important to reinforce the bond between school and pupil, make education more attractive, improve pupil guidance and reward desirable behaviour. Similar measures also work well in the combating of truancy. In addition, schools ought to assess why pupils play truant and involve their parents in tackling the problem of truancy. Moreover, clear sanctions are necessary and schools must keep a constant watch on the behaviour of known truants. It is also important to call in the attendance officer as soon as possible.

Particularly pupils at risk of failure who need a lot of extra care) the Inspectorate is going to perform additional research into the effects that the innovations have on these pupils' learning outcomes and any dropout rates.

Measures against truancy prove ineffective

6 Social cohesion

The school's socialising task

The changes in Dutch society mean that the emphasis is once again being placed on the school's socialising task. In a society characterised by diversity, the theory is that education is one of the few remaining instruments for transferring communal culture to new generations. This idea is expressed in the expansion of the education laws to include a provision which explicitly lays down this task for schools. The education sector is expected to encourage the active citizenship and social integration of pupils. This chapter describes the situation at the end of 2005, before the new provision took effect, and provides a tentative description of the state of affairs in primary education.

Vision

Three quarters of schools have a vision of the role that they want to play as regards encouraging cohesion in society. The vision is usually laid down in a school plan and/or school prospectus. Schools describe their vision primarily in terms of respect and preparation for society. They often have visions which are not properly developed. The same also applies to the goals schools are aiming for. Most work on the basis of general goals. In 10 to 20 percent of cases, schools have not formulated any goals. As a result, the way in which primary schools interpret

the task of encouraging citizenship and social integration has often not been worked out in any detail nor structured. This also means that their interpretation is still limited or not accounted for by the school. The Inspectorate emphasises the importance of a properly developed vision. A conscious and specific contribution to society's cohesion requires schools to have a vision themselves and choose the goals they want to achieve. After all, only then will it also be possible to determine what resources and activities are necessary to achieve these goals.

Cohesion-related education

There are various forms of cohesion-related education. A lot of these forms are given at least daily or weekly attention at three quarters or more of schools. In order of importance, as referred to by the schools, these are: social skills, good manners and socialisation rules, and the practising of values ('the school as a training ground'). Then there are basic values, personal development and social development on the basis of religious and ideological values, learning about other cultures, and learning about democracy and democratic principles. With the exception of finding out about other cultures and learning about democracy (more often in the senior years) there are no major differences between the lower and higher groups.

One-quarter of schools
have no vision of integration

Teaching materials

A relatively large number of schools use no teaching materials to encourage social integration. For example, a quarter to a fifth of schools do not use support materials to learn social skills, about other cultures or about democracy and democratic principles. Schools that do use such materials generally use textbooks that already exist for related subject areas. In this context, the Inspectorate highlights the importance of the availability of good teaching materials. Proper use of the material that is available, insight into the effectiveness of approach and methods, and an investment in the development of good teaching materials is an important point for attention.

Four out of ten schools indicate that they do not experience any restrictions as regards implementing education aimed at encouraging citizenship and integration. In half of cases, there is a lack of time. Adequate teaching materials, an inadequate link between the views at home and at school, and insufficient diversity in the pupil population are regularly referred to as restrictions.

Good starting point

The Inspectorate's data shows that by far the majority of schools are, to varying degrees, already carrying out the task referred to in the 'active citizenship and social integration' provision. Schools recognise the importance of encouraging social cohesion and interpret this in all kinds of ways. Other Inspectorate data, such as the research in the region of Uden-Veghel and education supervision pilot studies relating to citizenship and integration, also show that schools are increasingly becoming aware of this task and the responsibility related to the theme of integration and cohesion that education generates.

This chapter also shows that the goals formulated by the legislator are already present at a lot of

schools in some form or other. In particular, encouraging the social competencies of pupils, such as learning to interact with others, cooperate or solve problems, is a feature of the curriculum at the majority of primary schools in the Netherlands. The fact that schools are already focusing attention on education that can contribute to integration and social cohesion is also shown by the visions that a lot of new schools have formulated in their school plan or school prospectus.

One part of the Inspectorate's message is therefore that primary education has adopted a good place to start as regards a more detailed interpretation of education that encourages cohesion. Schools recognise the problems, realise they have a task to fulfil and interpret this in the education they provide. The other part of the message is that there are a number of points which need to be developed in more detail.

Development of a vision and systematic approach

One of these points is the development by schools of a vision and policy which will enable them to work specifically on the development of education aimed at cohesion. In order to fulfil the task of encouraging active citizenship and social integration, it is primarily important that the school itself has a vision on the role it wants to play: which interpretation suits the school's pupil population, the environment in which the pupils grow up and the goals and characteristics of the school? In other words, how does the school want to elaborate its task of encouraging integration, which goals is the school pursuing and what is necessary for their realisation? As the results of the Uden-Veghel study show, vision and policy are important for the creation of a systematic approach in which goals are formulated and clarity and agreement exist regarding the way in which the school wants to realise those goals. This research also

confirms the importance of a clear analysis of the situation and the timely identification of the desirability of calling in external expertise. The Inspectorate also emphasises the importance of paying attention to these themes in the school plan and school prospectus, not only because this encourages the schools to develop their vision and approach in more detail, but also due to the necessity of giving account for the interpretation chosen by the school. The Inspectorate has observed that, at the moment, a lot of schools have only developed a vision, a systematic approach and operational goals to a limited degree. Further development of methodical and systematic education which helps to stimulate active citizenship and social integration is therefore the first step towards further interpretation of the education intended by the legislator. This is an important point for senior management teams that want to put the task of encouraging cohesion into practice.

Hindrances

Another point for which further development is important is connected to the hindrances schools experience. Although the majority of schools indicate that they are not troubled by hindrances, four out of ten schools indicate that, in their opinion, this is indeed a problem. Well over half of those schools refer to a lack of time. Other problems mentioned are the insufficient availability of adequate teaching materials, differences in the views held at home and school and the limited diversity of the pupil population. Such hindrances also require the well thought-out formulation of goals, proper embedding in the school curriculum, an approach supported by all parties and the goal-oriented and systematic execution of policy. Besides the fact that these points need the attention of the senior management team, they also require support and an active attitude on the part of all teachers.

Stimulating cohesion is something you do together, consistently and every day. You need to practise what you preach!

Teaching materials

The availability of support materials requires special attention. On the one hand, it means attention on the part of schools for material that fits in with the school's goals and the situation of the pupils. Orientation towards available teaching materials, finding out about experiences acquired elsewhere and, where necessary, the use of external expertise are then important. For example, the websites of the national educational advisory centres and other education support institutions provide information on all kinds of aspects of cohesion-enhancing education, including teaching methods, lesson packages or projects. On the other hand, the Inspectorate has also observed that the availability of good teaching materials requires further attention. A lot of material is available, some of which is of changeable quality and it is not always clear what is usable in which situation. Proper accessing of the available material and increasing knowledge on the effectiveness of materials and resources are the most important points of attention at the current time.

Development of cohesion-enhancing education

Against the background of the statutory task of encouraging active citizenship and social integration, the Inspectorate is, as has been already mentioned, developing a framework for supervising the way in which schools interpret this. The statutory provision applies to primary education, secondary education and the centres of expertise. In the case of primary education, a (draft) framework was developed which is currently being tested in practice. The data presented in this chapter was collected in that context. In 2006, supervisory frameworks for special education and secondary education were

developed. In view of this, the Inspectorate also carried out investigations in these sectors into the state of affairs as regards education aimed at citizenship and integration. At a later date, the Inspectorate will report on the situation that existed in this sectors as the statutory provision came into effect.

As of the academic year 2006/2007, as part of the regular supervision of education, the Inspectorate is going to supervise the way in which schools interpret the task relating to citizenship and integration. This supervision will focus on a number of points in the first period. As has become clear, the development and elaboration of a vision, together with the choosing of concrete goals, is a primary condition for further interpretation of cohesion-enhancing education. That is also necessary in order to account for the interpretation chosen by the school. Other essential elements include a systematic approach and insight into education results.

It is also important that schools are familiar with the situation pupils are in and attune the instruction they provide accordingly. That applies in the event of incidents and a lack of safety, but also if pupils entertain undesirable views, adopt undesirable attitudes or exhibit undesirable behaviour or come into contact with others who exhibit such behaviour. An understanding attitude towards others, tolerance, the satisfactory solving of problems or a democratic attitude are aspects that the school should actively pay attention to. The reverse is equally true. Schools should not be afraid to discuss such problems as a lack of knowledge of what motivates others, intolerance, incidents and a lack of safety or extreme views and radicalisation.

Schools should be expected to do all they can to provide a safe environment for pupils and staff (see also the chapter on 'Safety'). However, even when they are not confronted by incidents and a lack of

safety, it is important to encourage pupils actively to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to take part in society in a positive way. Where necessary, the Inspectorate will call schools to account on these issues.

But that is not all there is to it. Certainly in the slightly longer term, it is not easy to determine what exactly the goals are and how those goals can best be achieved. The more divergent or vague those ideas are about what the goals should be, the more difficult it is to achieve a consensus on the exact demands that should be made on schools. Similarly, it has already been mentioned that the insight into the effectiveness of teaching methods and approaches, in the Netherlands and internationally, is still limited. This also makes the determination of specific demands a more complicated matter. The supervision of the Inspectorate is not based on any normative points of departure, but instead on statutory requirements which are made operational on the basis of empirically validated cause and effect relationships. That is why a development perspective has been chosen for the evolution of supervision in the longer term, certainly as regards the use of resources. In this context, a consensus in the field and in society scientific, and knowledge of and insights into good practices provide a basis for far-reaching judgements on the quality of cohesion-based education.

7 Science and technology in education

Two problems

Science and technology in education are affected by two major problems:

- In comparison to other countries, few Dutch pupils opt for science or technology courses;
- the number of girls and women that opt for science or technology subjects is even fewer.

In the light of the Lisbon objectives of 2000 and the science and technology Delta plan of 2003, the importance of solving these problems should not be underestimated.

Causes

There are a number of causes for the low level of interest in science/technology among young people. Science and technical professions are not regarded as attractive and young people consider such studies as being not socially-oriented enough and too one-sided. Such studies are often viewed as theoretical and difficult. They are too ‘mind on’ and not enough ‘hands on’. Teachers are insufficiently capable of arousing pupils’ interest due to a one-sided theoretical view on the subjects. Teaching staff in primary education has too little affinity with science/technology.

Primary education

This year, the Inspectorate has observed once again that science/technology in primary education only has a structural position at a small number of schools. On average, more hours in primary education are spent on technology than in the previous year under review and a larger number of the schools fulfil the initial standard. However, the percentage of schools experiencing problems in providing good quality technology teaching has also increased. For example, the percentage of schools that is satisfied with

the text books and/or materials used has halved. These data have to be used cautiously since they reflect minor changes within a single year. It is too early for trends to be identified. Well over five hundred schools now receive a subsidy from the national VTB project [Broadening of Technology in Primary Education]. These schools are working to embed technology into their teaching programme. The question is whether this number is sufficient to promote science/technology across the whole primary education sector.

The subject of technology

The subject of technology in secondary education is oriented strongly towards technical skills. From the point of view of teaching strategy, the Inspectorate evaluates the subject as above average. The technological side (the role of technology in the environment and society) and the process side (the design process and terms of reference) play a small role. It is partly as a result of this that the subject of technology (in any event according to the schools themselves) plays a minor role in enthusing pupils for technology in general. In most cases, the subject is entirely separated from the science subjects of mathematics and physics and chemistry.

Technology in the vocational sector

With regard to the technology programmes in pre-vocational secondary education it appears that whether pupils opt for the technology sector is only determined to a limited degree by the subject of technology at lower secondary school level. Good performances by pupils play a small role and even an encouraging attitude on the part of the teacher produces few results. The role of the subject in enthusing pupils for technology can therefore be

expanded. The total number of participants in vocational education is increasing but the number of students in the technology sector is still decreasing at all levels of education. The decrease was less dramatic last year.

*Senior general secondary education/
pre-university education
and higher education science chain*

In the science chain, that is the continuous learning line of science subjects in senior general secondary education/pre-university education and higher education, the choice of pupils in Year 3 of senior general secondary education/pre-university education is important for their subject combinations. Moreover, the subject of technology scarcely plays a role in the first two school years. Good achievements in this subject do not constitute an actual element of the choice of subject combination. On the other hand, good achievements in science subjects do have a strong determining influence on that choice. In order to give pupils a positive and coherent view of science subjects, coordination between the subjects or subject integration is an important point. Initiatives such as The Technasium and the Universum Programme try to give form to a greater focus on sciences. The coordination between higher vocational education and university education on the one hand, and secondary education on the other can be improved and this can be taken into account in the examination syllabuses to be developed. The further education courses can make greater use of pupils' general skills. In a number of programmes and projects, work is specifically being carried out on improving this link.

Girls

The number of girls and women in science/technology studies is particularly low in comparison with other European countries. One possible reason is

the lack of flexibility of the entry moments. In her dissertation, Van Langen points to the fact that, in comparison to some other countries where the number of girls choosing science is higher, girls in the Netherlands are under the impression that they have to commit themselves in an early stage to science studies, at a point in time at which they do not have a positive perception of sciences. Another important point concerns the low level of self confidence of girls with regard to mathematics. Boys who get a 7 (out of 10) for mathematics seem to think, 'I knew I could do it!'. On the other hand, when girls get a 7 they seem to think, 'I was worried that was going to happen'.

Possibilities open to schools

Of course, whether pupils opt for science and technology depends primarily on the pupils themselves, their backgrounds and their talents. This does not detract from the fact that schools have clear possibilities open to them for paying more attention to profiling and to promoting science and technology. In addition, science teachers can play a role by being more on hand to offer advice in the case of subjects in which young people are especially interested. Schools can work towards imposing the same demands on all subject combinations. Schools can also avoid a situation in which the choice for science and technology becomes a race of only losers. Above all, schools can work on encouraging the self-confidence of girls towards science and technology.

The 15 percent target

The many initiatives being taken to achieve the 15 percent target of the Lisbon ambition, as adopted by the Platform for Science and Technology, are very promising.

The process starts in primary education with the development of attainment targets for science and

technology. A considerable effort is going to be needed to raise the level of focus throughout primary education as a whole. In particular, the transfer of experiences from the VTB schools to other primary schools will not take place of its own accord. The Inspectorate is therefore monitoring the entire process.

What is required

Pupils in secondary education must look at science subjects and technology as important, interesting and challenging. This requires:

- Good teachers
- Good materials/textbooks
- Good teaching learning environments
- Good structure and a certain degree of unity in the science programmes
- More choices and choice moments on the one hand, and the counteracting of fragmentation on the other
- Good employment prospects

With regard to the first three points, consultations can be held with the science teachers' trade union. Boards and school heads must also be taken accountable for a good teaching learning environment. At a later stage this role can be played by the secondary education trade union.

Improvement of the structure and more choice moments

The structure can be improved and more choice moments can be created in:

- The science and technology programmes in primary education (with corresponding schooling for teachers and at primary school teacher training colleges)
- Technology in the practical programmes of pre-vocational secondary education
- Integration into, or coordination of, technology with physics and chemistry in

lower secondary schools

- Science plus programmes in pre-university education
- (A postponement as regards) choosing Science subject combinations at senior general secondary and pre-university levels (with suitable further study possibilities)

As regards such structural issues, the government can encourage schools to use the space available to them.

The freedom of organisation of lower secondary schools as of 2006 may have negative consequences for technology in senior general secondary education/pre-university education. At the moment, the provision of the subject of technology in the basic secondary education is an 'incident' in the teaching-learning process undergone by the pupil. Within the domain of Human and Nature Studies, more schools want to integrate technology with physics and chemistry and aspects of ICT. It is also important that those aspects which can encourage pupils to opt for science/technology subjects are not overlooked. Here we mean, in particular, the hands on' activities which play an important role in the current subject of technology, and the highlighting of the breadth of the domain with all its mutual cohesion.

Technasium

The Inspectorate will monitor the results of programmes such as The Technasium and the Universum Programme and will devote special attention on the above-mentioned aspects. The Inspectorate wishes to point out that an excessively pronounced profiling of schools as science schools (Technasium, Universum school) carries with it the risk that the choice for science/technology will have to be made even earlier. This would be an extra impediment, particularly for girls. Schools must be challenged to focus explicit attention on making the curriculum more attractive for girls by selecting

suitable and mixed contexts, by taking real-life situations as the starting point, by paying more attention to broadening the perceptions of scientific professions and by using female role models.

The drop in the number of pupils in the vocational technology programmes appears to be slowing. It is nevertheless important to draw up a ‘master plan’ for the continuous line from pre-vocational secondary education to secondary vocational education and to higher professional education as soon as possible. This master plan will include details on the cohesion between the ambition programmes suggested by the Platform for Science and Technology for pre-vocational secondary education and secondary vocational education separately and the higher professional education Sprint programme. This is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Too few girls choose exact sciences and technologie

8 Teaching staff

This chapter examines themes related to the teaching profession, such as the shortage of teachers, the competence of teaching staff, the personnel policy and weak or unsatisfactory schools.

Prognoses of teacher shortages

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has adjusted the prognoses of the expected shortage of teachers. Hardly any shortages are expected in primary education until 2010. However, a further decrease is expected in the intake at primary school teacher training colleges. The Inspectorate has identified risks of a rise and fall cycle due to the combination of a decrease in the intake of students at the primary school teacher training colleges plus a possible increase in demand in around four years. By contrast, shortages are expected in secondary education, certainly when the economy picks up. According to Inspectorate data, this will primarily affect mathematics and the other science subjects.

Competences dossier

In the meantime, the Education Professions Act (Wet BIO) has been passed. From 1 August 2006 onwards, teachers must have a competences dossier which shows that, and how, they are maintaining their skills. In anticipation of this, the Inspectorate has investigated personnel policies at schools, with a specific focus on staff skills.

Personnel dossier

In primary education, the personnel dossiers appear to consist primarily of two sorts of documents, namely reports of appraisal interviews and proof of qualifications. Such things as a personal development plan, diplomas from other training institutions, information on courses attended and the like are often missing. Skills are developed primarily during team-oriented, internal study days. The personnel dossiers at secondary schools almost always contain proof of qualifications for one or more subjects. Well over half of the dossiers contain other diplomas related to the subject and reports of appraisal interviews.

In previous Education Reports, the Inspectorate reported on the competence of a specific group of teachers and the way in which their schooling is organised, namely the lateral-entry teachers. The Inspectorate investigated this group intensively and came to the conclusion that a lot of lateral-entry teachers are sufficiently competent thanks to their motivation and because those who are not suitable generally give up at an early stage.

Schooling of unqualified staff

At the start of 2005, the Inspectorate again carried out comparable research into lateral-entry teachers. The study revealed a relatively large group of unqualified teachers in the four major cities (plus

Shortage of teachers in secondary education

Almere) who are working in the second stage of secondary education. A subsidy from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science was used in 2004 and 2005 to try and ensure that as many of these teachers as possible get the necessary qualifications. The main conclusion of this study is more or less the same as in the case of the lateral-entry teachers, namely that the parties involved (schools, teacher trainers and teachers) do not always manage to organise the schooling and guidance of the unqualified staff in a structural manner. One fundamental trouble spot according to the Inspectorate is that there is (still) no generally supported vision as regards the aim, content and an efficient way of providing training and guidance.

Schools in special measures; personnel policy trouble spots

Last year, the Inspectorate reported that schools that have developed their integral personnel policy, score better in periodical quality investigations on the quality aspect of 'quality assurance'. This Education Report also highlights another issue. It appears that at weak or unsatisfactory schools there are almost always serious trouble spots in the field of the staff, the organisation and/or the management (Personnel and Organisation). The problems can manifest themselves in two ways. On the one hand, problems relating to personnel and organisation often constitute the background or cause of low quality education. However, problems with personnel and organisation also often hamper the way quality problems are tackled and, as a result, these problems continue to exist for a lot longer than is desirable.

No shortage of teachers

The predicted serious shortage of teachers has not materialised during the past year. It is even the case that more schools expect a surplus of personnel rather than a shortage. The schools only anticipate

shortages in secondary education, and in particular in mathematics and the other science subjects. If schools have a multi-year staff establishment policy, they tend to base it on the expected development in the number of pupils rather than on staff turnover.

Qualified and competent

In recent years, the theme 'qualified and competent' has been in the spotlight in a number of different ways. The Inspectorate has investigated, and reported on, a number of these projects and developments. In the Inspectorate's opinion, the systematic schooling designed to maintain and improve the skills of teaching staff has not been organised in an adequate fashion. Not even half of the primary and secondary schools use personal development plans during appraisal interviews with their current members of staff. In the case of (work-based) training of, as yet, unqualified and new teachers, the main problems appear to affect the division of tasks and substantive coordination between the schools and the teacher training colleges. According to the Inspectorate, there is still no broadly-supported, communal vision as regards training and guidance. Such a vision should relate to the various aspects of the teacher's professionalism, the way in which such teachers should be trained and supervised, and how the teacher training colleges and the schools can play a complementary role.

Relationship between educational quality and personnel policy

Lastly, there appears to be a clear relationship between the quality of education and points connected to staff, the organisation and/or the management. It seems, for example, that at schools at which the quality of education is insufficient (in particular at unsatisfactory schools), there are significant trouble spots in the field of Staff and Organisation. These trouble spots often have a dual effect. Not only are they a (partial) cause of inadequate quality, they also hamper improvements.

9 New ways of learning

Discussion on new ways of learning

During the past year, a heated discussion on the issue of ‘new ways of learning’ has been going on. Those for and against keep getting in each other’s way. The Inspectorate is monitoring this discussion closely because it goes to the very core of education by asking what do your children and young adults want to learn, how do you make sure their wishes are met and what are the results?

Trendy term

‘New ways of learning’ is a trendy and wide-ranging term. Education is constantly changing due to new insights, changing goals and modern resources. A more appropriate term, therefore, would be ‘new ways of (teaching and) learning’, which we come across in all kinds of varieties in all sectors of education. The government is also challenging schools to adjust, change and innovate, in line with the policy of giving schools the space to make their own choices.

Changes in education

New ways of learning are being devised and implemented for a number of different reasons. In vocational education an attempt is being made to apply competence-oriented education in realistic practical situations in order to reinforce the link with the employment market. A greater emphasis on planning and study skills is intended to improve the link between secondary and higher education. Changes in the social environment around education, the role of ICT and new aspects of youth culture are forcing schools to seek other ways of motivating and challenging pupils. The search for educational innovation causes some people to question whether a balance is being maintained. As a result, many argue that more attention be paid to traditional knowledge and skills.

Characteristics of new forms of learning

Research institutions such as the SCO-Kohnstamm Institute and the IVA perform literature research and compile case studies of the characteristics of new forms of learning and their effects. The Netherlands Institute for Educational Matters (NIVOZ) carries out research into other types of accountability and evaluation in innovative primary and secondary schools. The characteristics of new ways of learning referred to include an authentic learning environment with meaningful contexts, a large degree of autonomy on the part of the pupil and learning in a social setting. We would like to add the characteristic of a changing relationship between teacher and pupil.

These characteristics are not always present at the same time and to the same extent. The Inspectorate encounters a wide variety of teaching-learning situations in which a certain instructional format and context are chosen on the basis of the goals to be achieved. Neither are these characteristics as new as suggested. So-called ‘traditional innovative schools’ have been around for a long time. These schools have organisational and educational elements which are similar to those found in new ways of learning.

Integral adapted education concept

A great many schools intermittently use all kinds of new ways of learning for certain subjects or to achieve certain goals. However, there is also a (small) group of schools which have completely and substantially changed their education concept. The Inspectorate assesses these schools within the applicable assessment framework using the same quality features as for any other school. In the academic year 2004/2005, twenty such primary and secondary schools were visited. In general terms, the

basic quality was sufficient at almost all of these schools. However, the Inspectorate often observes start-up problems during the initial implementation period and that is a reason to continue monitoring a number of these schools more intensively. It is also important that schools that want to change their entire education concept plan the change carefully, involve the staff and pupils/students at all times, properly analyse the effects for the pupils at risk of failure and consistently monitor and evaluate the results.

Recommendations for the attendance office

In addition, the Inspectorate has issued recommendations intended for the attendance officer concerning the quality of non-government-funded primary and secondary schools in which new ways of learning are being applied consistently across the board. These recommendations are focused on ‘Iederwijs’ schools and schools with a related concept, and primarily relate to the statutory requirements with which this education has to comply. Negative assessments were issued for a quarter of the primary schools investigated and almost all secondary schools.

Responses to challenges

Educationalists are trying, in all kinds of ways and at all kinds of levels, to find responses to the challenges facing them. First of all there are challenges related to changes in youth culture and the increasing use of digital resources which cause old concepts of

teaching and learning to appear less and less effective and, in any event, less motivating. Pupils and students are putting more and more pressure on their teachers to take their learning requirements more seriously. The government and many social institutions are also pressurising the education sector to improve the integrated learning pathways and the link with the employment market, to train pupils for life long learning and to link up more effectively with the pupils’ own perception of the environment by creating meaningful contexts for education. Schools and teachers are responding by introducing new ways of learning in which the practical context is more central (primarily an issue in vocational education), the pupil is assigned more responsibility (primarily in senior general secondary education/pre-university education and higher education) and the teacher plays a more supervisory role.

A loss of balance

As a response to this, others criticise the loss of balance, saying that too little emphasis is placed on knowledge and that skills relating to the subject matter are being ignored. Academics reason that the new forms of learning are insufficiently effective and generate too little yield. The main fear is that pupils at risk of failure will have even fewer opportunities.

In the interest of pupils

The Inspectorate regards it as important that the different elements of the discussion on new ways of learning can be assessed on the basis of mutual trust.

Intensified monitoring of a number of schools

On the one hand, the motives of schools and teachers to make education more attractive and modern, to link up better with the employment market and further education and to apply new insights based on educational psychology are very commendable. On the other hand, schools must not overlook the interests of all pupils when looking for solutions to these challenges, they must utilise teachers' expertise and capacity to change and they must ensure that the effects are carefully monitored and evaluated. On the one hand there must, therefore, be space to implement innovations and, on the other hand, irresponsible risks must be avoided.

Inspectorate to judge and guard

In this search for the optimal balance the Inspectorate will, above all, adopt the role of guardian of that which the government prescribes to schools and of the judge of the effects of the innovative activities and the results achieved. It will do so on the basis of its guarantee function for pupils and society. All schools must be fully accountable for their goals, their quality and the guarantee thereof vis-à-vis the people and institutions connected to them and vis-à-vis the Inspectorate. Schools that introduce radical changes as regards their own organisation and the organisation of their learning processes will have to pay serious attention to this issue of accountability from the very beginning.

Adequate and proportional assessment

In cooperation with the education world, the Inspectorate is going to develop useful resources which will facilitate the adequate and proportional assessment of education in innovating schools. Within the framework of the Inspectorate's encouraging role, an analysis will be carried out of innovative educational practices.

Pupils with special needs

Lastly, for certain groups of pupils (particularly pupils at risk of failure who need a lot of extra care) the Inspectorate is going to perform additional research into the effects that the innovations have on these pupils' learning outcomes and any dropout rates.

10 Integrated learning pathways

Wherever transitions within the education system do not go smoothly, there is a risk of increasing dropout rates and reduced transfers to higher levels. That is why a great deal is invested in the creation of integrated learning pathways. This chapter focuses on the integrated pathway from primary to secondary education and on the integrated pathway within the vocational sector.

More difficult to advise

With regard to the integrated pathway from primary to secondary education, the Inspectorate has observed that the refinement of the learning pathways in pre-vocational secondary education has made it more difficult for primary schools to provide proper advice. The larger institutional freedom which schools have had since the policy document ‘The Direction of Secondary Education 2010’ (Koers VO) was published, will also lead to greater differences between schools. This will not make the mutual linking any easier. In secondary education there is usually no interim objective measurement of pupil progress, in contrast to primary education where systematic teaching method-independent testing is now generally accepted.

Link needs to be improved

It is both possible and necessary to improve the link between primary and secondary education, for example by coordinating the special needs provision levels between primary and secondary education and by determining the effect of assistance offered more effectively. Improvement is also possible through the earlier reporting of pupils who potentially require extra care and by making more specific use of the period between the primary education final test and the summer holiday for specific content-based linking activities.

In secondary education the following issues require further development:

- a systematic signalling of unsatisfactory results by means of interim testing;
- the degree to which help is provided systematically;
- a broader application of adaptive education, and;
- the consistent extension of extra help in the case of language development.

Very varied picture

With regard to the vocational sector, there is a very varied picture with considerable differences between regions and sectors. It is clear that more benefits can be gained along the whole line on certain points. This applies primarily to the transition between pre-vocational secondary education and secondary vocational education, where improvements are possible in areas such as the familiarity of the school leaving levels, reinforcing the image of the profession among young people who enter secondary vocational education from pre-vocational secondary education, increasing flexibility so that pupils can change course more easily, and intensifying the exchange of information between schools and Regional Training Centres. The application of procedures to ensure the recognition of competencies acquired elsewhere by both Regional Training Centres and colleges of higher education also offers room for improvement.

For all the schools and institutions throughout the education system, it is important to incorporate attention for integrated learning pathways in their internal quality assurance systems.

Increasing complexity

The increasing complexity of secondary education as a consequence of the introduction of learning pathways in pre-vocational secondary education and increased organisational freedom has not made the mutual link between primary and secondary education any easier. This can cause problems particularly for pupils with special needs. For this group, the link between primary and secondary education can be improved by, for example, coordinating the special needs provision levels between primary and secondary education, and by a better assessment of the effect of the help offered. In addition, specific instruments such as the Digital Transfer Dossier and the Dyslexia Protocol can play an important role. Moreover, the earlier reporting of pupils who potentially require extra care is important and more specific use can be made of the period after the primary education final test for specific content-based linking activities.

Further development is also required in secondary education with respect to:

- the systematic signalling of unsatisfactory results by means of interim testing;
- the degree to which help is provided systematically;
- a broader application of adaptive education;
- the consistent extension of extra help in the case of language development.

Communication between schools

Communication between primary and secondary schools will become more and more important when, in the near future, separate schools start making (maximum) use of the freedom of choice offered to make decisions themselves as to which aspects of the subject matter provision they wish to accentuate (for example the new organisation of lower secondary schools). There is a risk that the widening of orga-

nisational freedom will hamper the giving of advice at primary education level and will place pressure on the development of integrated learning pathways. In order to avoid this wherever possible, schools must make agreements on integrated learning pathways and special needs facilities in good time, and provide clarity regarding the choices they make in their lower secondary schools and regarding the possible consequences for the admission of pupils. Both primary schools and schools for secondary education can also improve communication by focusing on the incorporation of integrated learning pathways into their internal quality assurance systems.

Picture in the vocational sector

The picture within the vocational sector is, in practice, very rich and varied. A lot of activities are being carried out to improve the links and transfers in the vocational sector, both by vocational training and adult education institutions and from within pre-vocational secondary education and higher professional education. Nevertheless, the yield as regards gains in qualification levels has, to date, been modest.

In practice, the emphasis is placed strongly on programmatic coordination. This is a complex process, primarily due to the large number of schools which Regional Training Centres have to deal with, and due to the many changes within the constituent parts of the education system, such as the new qualification structure in secondary vocational education and the introduction of competence-oriented learning and the Bachelor's-Master's system in higher professional education. The fact that programmatic coordination is not the most important success factor for a proper transfer from pre-vocational secondary education to secondary vocational education can be deduced from, for example, the large number of pupils that enter

secondary vocational education from unrelated courses. More emphasis must be placed on a practical interpretation of the information provided with regard to choosing courses and professions and on increasing the flexibility in pre-vocational secondary education so that pupils who are not in the right place can change learning pathway more easily. The transfers can also be enhanced by increasing the flexibility at Regional Training Centres for participants who want to change course and by improving the communication process in the transfer procedures, including specific attention for career guidance.

Similarly to what was mentioned above with regard to primary and secondary schools, it is important for schools and institutions in the vocational sector that mutual communication is further improved by making the attention paid to integrated learning pathways a standard feature of existing quality assurance systems.

Transfers within
the education system
can be improved

The Netherlands' education in sectors

- 11 Primary education 60**
- 12 Secondary education 65**
- 13 Vocational education and training 73**
- 14 Higher education 75**

11 The state of primary education

Little change as regards quality

The quality of primary education is very reasonable. Parents can be confident that, at almost all schools, their children are given education that at least complies with the basic quality standards. However, this does not apply to a small number of schools. At these schools, there is a good chance that pupils will not develop to their full potential. The Inspectorate refers to these schools as unsatisfactory.

In comparison to last year, the quality of primary schools has changed little, although clear progress was still noticeable in the academic years 2002/2003 and 2003/2004. Special primary schools and special (secondary) schools, organised in the regional centres of expertise, are working hard to improve their quality. Nevertheless, our concerns still remain. These schools are, on average, insufficiently goal-oriented to allow to pupils to learn sufficiently.

Unsatisfactory school

Approximately 2 percent of Dutch primary schools are classified as unsatisfactory. These are schools at which both the level of the results and the quality of education and learning remain well short of expectations. Compared with the period 1998-2002, the number of unsatisfactory schools has clearly dropped. At the same time, it appears that unsatisfactory primary schools are now lagging much further behind other schools than was previously the case. As a result, these schools will find it more difficult and more time-consuming to make improvements. The quality of education is at risk at well over a thousand primary schools. Although

these schools are not unsatisfactory, they run a serious chance of becoming so. With a view to preventing this, the Inspectorate is intensifying supervision at these schools as well.

Quality of primary education

Compared to last year, the quality of primary education has not increased. In 2003/2004, the schools achieved gains with regard to aspects such as quality assurance and adapting to differences within the year. Seven out of ten schools have a properly functioning special needs provision and guidance system. Nevertheless, in practice, an increasing number of schools fail to offer their pupils the necessary extra care and guidance. The analysis of requests for assistance, the provision of extra guidance and the evaluation of the effects of the special needs provision fail to meet the mark in more cases than last year. The share of schools with yields which have, for a long time, been lower than may reasonably be expected, is slightly higher than last year. As regards the other quality characteristics, the quality of primary education has scarcely changed. In general, schools fulfil the statutory requirements. They have most trouble providing broad subject matter which pays enough attention to general, cross-curricular skills and attitudes and gives pupils sufficient opportunity to find out about the different cultures present in the Netherlands.

Quality of special primary education

The number of pupils waiting for placement or a placement investigation in special primary education

Too many pupils are
excluded from final testing

has declined in recent years. This trend is also continuing this year. Most of these schools are working specifically on improving their education and they are developing in the right direction in the field of special needs provision and guidance as well. One weak point continues to be the yield focus. Two out of three special primary schools have not yet specified reasoned perspectives for development for all their pupils.

Quality of special (secondary) education

After a decrease in the years 2003 and 2004, the number of pupils on a placement list for special and special secondary education did not decrease any more this year. The numbers are highest in clusters 3 and 4. The number of pupils waiting for a placement investigations in special or special secondary education is increasing rapidly. Despite improvements in the quality aspects of testing and teaching-learning process, the quality of education in special (secondary) education can still best be described as worrying. A positive aspect is that schools have managed, within a short space of time, to attune the lessons considerably better to the pupils' education needs. Quality assurance has improved slightly but is still insufficient at two-thirds of schools. As a result, it is by no means certain whether these schools have a sufficient capacity to work specifically and systematically on improving their education.

Themes

There are no indications that schools that offer multi-lingual education pay less attention to the attainment targets for Dutch. The results of pupils at the end of primary school are not lower than at comparable schools, albeit that this cannot yet be expected at schools which have only offered multi-lingual education for a few years. However, the results of the pupil monitoring system tests, which are more sensitive to changes in education, are lower than at comparable schools. Another problem is that the curriculum in modern languages at

secondary schools often does not link up with the knowledge these pupils acquired in primary education. The position of Frisian in primary education and secondary education is not strong. Schools in Friesland are often not properly informed about their pupils' (home) language situation, the parents' wishes and the teachers' skills. The subject of Frisian would benefit from a reinforcement of the cohesion between Frisian and other learning and learning and curriculum areas. The quality of primary education in the four major cities has clearly improved. There is scarcely any backlog at the average Dutch primary school. The most noticeable improvements have been achieved primarily at schools which have participated in an educational opportunities plan. Since 1995, the average class size in primary education has dropped by 2.4 pupils to 23.3 and the number of really large classes is decreasing all the time.

Quality developments

The number of unsatisfactory primary schools is dropping, possibly because the average quality of special needs provision and guidance and the curriculum has increased since the period 1998 to 2002. It may be the case that progress in the academic year 2003/2004 in the field of quality assurance has resulted in schools identifying and responding to risks earlier. Nevertheless, almost 25,000 pupils attend primary schools which offer insufficient quality. In addition, the quality of education at almost a thousand primary schools is at considerable risk. Our observations led us to conclude that one in six or seven pupils receive education at a school at which the quality of education is insufficiently guaranteed. A joint effort by school boards and schools themselves is necessary to enable unsatisfactory schools to improve and prevent schools at risk of failure from becoming unsatisfactory. External support will be essential in a lot of cases.

Special primary education

Although the Inspectorate did not carry out any periodical quality investigations at special primary schools in the academic year 2004/2005, the annual investigations show that these schools are still developing. Quality assurance is improving and positive developments are taking place in the field of special needs provision and guidance as well. However, yield focus is still (all but) absent at most special primary schools. As long as the schools have not drawn up a clear development perspective for each pupil, systematic accountability regarding the yields will continue to be unfeasible. In addition, the lack of yield data hampers quality assurance, while the lack of development perspectives is an obstacle to goal-oriented pastoral care. A lot of schools seem to find it difficult to draw up clear development objectives for their pupils. It would help these schools if a useable handbook for special primary education were available.

The Inspectorate expressed its concerns regarding special and special secondary education in the Education Report 2003/2004. That message has not yet resulted in any drastic improvement in quality. The quality of education at special and special secondary education schools still remains weak on average. The improvements in the teaching-learning process are encouraging, however. On the other hand it is disappointing that quality assurance, the motor for school improvement, is still not strong enough at two thirds of these schools. The Inspectorate expects that the 'Quality in Speciality' project will have a positive effect on the subject matter provision and the pastoral care.

Pupils with special needs

During the past academic year, most aspects of the quality of primary education remained unchanged. Wherever changes were visible, such as in the case of special needs provision and guidance and coordination based on differences between pupils, these are

mostly heading in the wrong direction. The number of schools with yields under the expected level rose this year. Given past fluctuations, this does not yet mean that there is a negative trend as far as yields are concerned.

We are concerned about two findings. First of all, the Inspectorate has observed an increase in the number of pupils with special needs and also that this development is accompanied by an increase in the seriousness of, above all, behavioural problems among pupils. A lot of schools are finding that they can barely keep their heads above water and that they have insufficient time, manpower and expertise to give these pupils the attention they need. The seriousness of this problem – and then not only in primary education – is clarified in the chapter on Safety.

Secondly, and after the positive development detected by the Inspectorate last year, primary schools do not appear to have managed to develop their own responsibility for the quality of education. The motor for school improvement is stuttering.

Autonomy and management

Schools are supposed to develop into autonomous, self-aware organisations. Autonomy is meant to make schools and the professionals who work in them optimally able to contribute to pupil development, in collaboration with their environment. Schools that become insular, do not adapt to social developments and lack support from the people and institutions connected to them, have misinterpreted their assignment. Characteristics of self-awareness are a realisation of their own professionalism, if necessary the adoption of the management role in cooperation with other organisations and giving account both internally and externally as regards their own course and quality. Autonomy and self-awareness are still in their infancy at most schools. For example, as yet unpublished research into primary schools that are leading the way as regards the introduction

of lump sum funding shows that, in the event of larger boards, the influence of the supra-schools management on the financial policy is primarily on the increase. Incidentally, very few school heads actually regret this. They have their hands full with the development of educational policy, the professionalisation of the school team and the day-to-day worries. Half of the schools have reasonably functioning quality assurance, but the Inspectorate rarely comes across a truly integral and coherent system. In addition, a lot of teachers and parents regard quality assurance as a matter for the senior management team and board.

Boards

The Netherlands has 1,609 school boards at primary education level. Since 2000, this number has dropped by almost five hundred. The percentage of boards with responsibility for a single school decreased from 51 to 47 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2005e). Boards vary considerably, not only in size, but also in methods. In addition, changes in management forms are apparent, particularly in state education. The SCO Kohnstamm Institute (Polder, 2005) fears that although the autonomy of boards has, in fact, increased, the autonomy of schools has not. We are also receiving signals which would appear to confirm this fear.

The CBOO (Contact Centre for Improving State Education) has asked itself three questions:

- What is the relationship between overheads and the instructional process?
- How great is the distance between the board and classroom teaching?
- What role does the Joint Participation Council play in terms of administration?

The answer to all these questions is that improvement is desirable. Greater transparency is required for the school management and Joint Participation

Council as regards managerial costs, in combination with a form of benchmarking for the payment of managerial costs by schools. Boards must give schools maximum autonomy in the field of educational policy and responsibilities need to be assigned as low in the organisation as possible. As a consequence, the Joint Participation Councils are facing an increasingly difficult task for which they have insufficient professionalism and too few resources.

Unsatisfactory schools

In the paragraph on unsatisfactory schools, the Inspectorate drew attention to the role of the boards. The conclusion was that these school boards ought to develop their task in more detail by providing more specific guidance. It is even more important that competent authorities keep continually up-to-date on the quality developments at the school or schools. That makes it possible to take timely action. In our opinion, a balance should exist between the distance between the board and the school on the one hand, and the extent to which the school is itself able to take responsibility for its quality on the other. A good, self-aware school deserves autonomy, not only as regards education, but also in connection with financial management and personnel policy. A first condition for this is that schools regularly give account regarding their quality and quality developments. In order to make this possible, the school must have a proper insight into education needs and pupil results. A second condition is that schools systematically and regularly evaluate the effects of their efforts to safeguard, and where necessary improve, the quality of education. On the other hand, at weaker schools, boards ought to become more directly involved. Key aspects of that involvement should be the quality of management, unity within the team and the active focus of the school on the environment in which it functions. Fulfilment of these conditions is the only way to open up the road to an autonomous, self-aware school.

12 The state of secondary education

Innovations

Schools are showing a considerable interest in innovation. This is most obvious in pre-vocational secondary education, in the organisation of more practically-oriented and modern instruction. However, it also applies to the new organisation of the lower secondary schools (school years 1 and 2). Schools want the space to decide how to get the best out of their lower years. They are setting themselves ambitious goals as regards the organisation of the learning process and the school buildings. In addition, schools are making preparations for the changes in the second stage of senior general secondary education/pre-university education as of August 2007.

Some schools are managing to develop forms of instruction which pupils need and which also motivate pupils. This breathes new life into education and makes it more modern. However, at many schools there is a discrepancy between plans or ideas on the one hand and opportunities for realisation on the other. This is troubling a lot of schools. They are striving enthusiastically to implement new developments, but often pay too little attention to the limitations in the field of material and staffing or professional possibilities. Analyses of school plans reveal that these often describe a reality which has little or no relation with existing educational practice, particularly when it comes to educational strategy. This increases the chance of failure and disappointment.

Guaranteeing and giving account

A logical consequence of increasing schools' policy freedom is the duty to give account. The situation is, in practice, often unsatisfactory. Approximately half of schools do not give account to stakeholders regarding the quality of the education they provide.

Within the group that does do so, the guaranteeing and giving account of the quality of the primary process (teaching, testing, special needs provision and guidance) is still often a weak aspect.

Number of pupils attending senior general secondary education/pre-university education is continuing to grow

The trend of recent years continued in 2004/2005 as well. The number of pupils attending senior general secondary education/pre-university education is growing while the number of pupils with special needs is stabilising somewhat. The middle category (in particular the pupils on the combined theoretical and vocational programme at pre-vocational secondary education level) is declining.

Talented pupils

In pre-university education there are selective educational tracks such as 'pre-university education-plus' classes, bilingual pre-university education and pre-university schools offering extra (internationally-oriented) instruction. The purpose of this variation is for schools to offer their gifted pupils an extra challenge.

Organisation of special needs provision

The special needs provision structure within schools is becoming clearer. Various educational activities are playing an important role, such as those of the National Association for Practical Education, and the project relating to the quality of pastoral care in pre-vocational secondary education/practical training. The special needs provision capacity of most schools is insufficient for pupils with serious problems (often a combination of learning and behavioural problems).

Personal budget intake

In 2002, the personal budget scheme came into effect. With this scheme (also known as the ‘rucksack’ scheme), the government intends to encourage the emancipation and integration into regular education of pupils with a handicap and to increase the freedom of choice of the parents of such pupils for regular or special education. The personal budget scheme is the source of a certain embarrassment at schools.

Quality

The quality in the academic years 2003/2004 and 2004/2005 has remained at approximately the same level. Extra attention is necessary for testing and teaching time. Schools are in general creating insufficient conditions to guarantee the quality of their tests. The number of schools at which the programmed teaching time does not fulfil the statutory requirements has increased.

The number of schools assessed as having unsatisfactory yields is equivalent to 17 percent. The Inspectorate regards these schools as schools in special measures and they are allocated an intensive form of supervision. This group also includes the unsatisfactory schools which are schools that not only generate insufficient yields, but also fail to meet the mark in two or more of the quality aspects of ‘curriculum’, ‘teaching-learning process’ and ‘pastoral care’. The unsatisfactory schools are subjected to even more intensive follow-up supervision. At the end of 2005, there were seven schools in this category.

Pre-vocational secondary education

Most pupils aged between 12 and 16 (approximately 60 percent) receive instruction within one of the programmes in pre-vocational secondary education. Pre-vocational secondary education is intended both for pupils who have the capacity to acquire a professional qualification at the highest level of

secondary vocational education and then transfer via secondary vocational education or senior general secondary education to higher professional education, and for pupils who, with extra care and guidance in the basic vocational programme, can find everyday employment. The prevailing image of pre-vocational secondary education is – undeservedly – determined by the behavioural problems of a small group of pupils. Of the approximately 460,000 pupils in pre-vocational secondary education, relatively few pupils exhibit serious behavioural problems.

The largest educational changes occur in pre-vocational secondary education. This applies primarily to developments in the senior years and relates to the organisation of the work places in the pre-vocational programmes, the various new and experimental courses, the apprenticeship routes, the assistants programme and portfolio work.

The changes in pre-vocational secondary education are intended to motivate pupils as much as possible to learn by offering education that is focused on the application of knowledge and skills in concrete situations (competence-oriented education). An additional aim is that, in principle, all pupils should acquire a professional qualification at their level.

The classes in pre-vocational secondary education consist of pupils with different cognitive and psychosocial possibilities. During lessons, teachers must take account of these differences. In practice most teachers do not do so in a sufficiently methodical way. In particular, pupils with ‘above-average problems’ are entitled to better specific help and guidance.

The quality of ‘green’ pre-vocational secondary education

In ‘green’ pre-vocational secondary education (i.e. pre-vocational secondary education at agricultural training centres) fewer schools were assessed as

satisfactory for quality assurance, testing and teaching time. For the other quality aspects such as the teaching-learning process and special needs provision, the levels attained in green pre-vocational secondary education are good. Yields have stayed at the same level as last year.

Second stage of senior general secondary education/pre-university education

Compared to the old situation before 1998, educational provision in the second stage has been broadened. The basic choice to broaden the curriculum has inevitably led to a certain depth at subject level. The related discussion focuses primarily on science subjects. When the second stage was introduced, a lot of attention was paid to finding a good way of teaching pupils to study relatively independently and apply the right study skills when doing so. One possibility for achieving this is 'option-based study time'. This is learning time imposed by the school during which pupils can determine themselves, to a certain degree, which study activities they are going to focus on. Schools offer option-based study time in very different ways and approximately a third of schools do not offer it at all. There are also significant differences in the time schools allocate, ranging from 45 minutes to 10.5 clock hours per week. In a number of cases, optional work time seems to be used for financial reasons (deployment of fewer teachers). All this points to an unstable situation within schools.

Examination results

Examination results are good. Since 2003, the percentage of passes in pre-vocational secondary education has varied between 94 and 95 percent. In senior general secondary education the percentage of passes in recent years was approximately 90 percent and in pre-university education approximately 94 percent. In the years before the introduction of the new 'second stage' senior general secondary

education/pre-university education (1993-1998) the percentage of passes in senior general secondary education varied between 83 and 84 percent and in pre-university education between 85 and 88 percent. The percentage of passes has therefore increased considerably since the introduction of the second stage. This is primarily due to pupils achieving better school exam results.

There are considerable differences between good and poor scoring departments and schools. In the case of poor scoring departments, the reason is usually the lack of competence of the teacher or teachers. The situation at schools with a low average figure for the central examination over a number of years is particularly worrying. Apparently, a number of schools in this group are trapped in a vicious circle which leads to the downward spiral of lots of pupils from deprived situations, often a poor image, small numbers of pupils, an over-accommodating recruitment policy, teachers with a lenient attitude, the need for combined classes and poor results. The chances of a successful school career for the pupils at these schools is smaller than for pupils at average or good schools.

Second round of marking

Examinations in most subjects or parts thereof are subject to a two-phase second round of marking, first by the teacher of the examination candidates (the first marker) and then by a colleague from another school (the second marker). Approximately two thirds of the second markers check the examination papers of all candidates completely, as if they were marking the papers for the first time. The others do not mark so intensively.

It appears that approximately a third of the markers had differences of opinion on the marking. In those cases, the markers usually reached agreement on the basis of consultation. School heads hardly ever had to intervene, although this would be

the logical solution in the event of major differences of opinion. The senior management team is sometimes insufficiently aware of its responsibility and, as a result, adopts a too distant position vis-à-vis the marking process. Moreover, it is not the norm for markers to formally account for their work vis-à-vis the senior management team, for example by signing a statement vouching for the integrity of the first and/or second round of marking. The current method of working is susceptible to flaws which can be detrimental for the pupils.

Suspensions and expulsions

Schools are obliged to report suspensions and expulsions to the Inspectorate. Not all schools comply with this obligation. Nevertheless, the number of reports of suspensions and expulsions has increased since 2003. In 2004/2005, 3,791 suspensions and 761 expulsions were reported. The increase may be due to an improvement in the Inspectorate's registration system, but also to an intensification of the behavioural problems identified at schools. This is, for example, shown by the rise in the number of pupils with special needs (pupils in learning support departments), the increase in the time-out or rebound facilities and the explosive growth in the facilities for pupils with serious psychosocial problems. The most common reasons for suspensions and expulsions in 2004/2005 were, disruptive behaviour during lessons, verbal aggression against staff and physical violence against fellow pupils (well over a third of cases). Possession of weapons was the reason for a suspension or expulsion in relatively few cases (2 percent).

Exemptions

Schools differ strongly in the extent to which they give exemptions to pupils. An example is the exemptions for the modern languages in the second stage of senior general secondary education/pre-university education. Well over 40 percent give exemptions

(primarily to dyslectic pupils). The total number of exemptions has risen substantially during the past two year. Schools apply very different criteria when granting exemptions. This situation automatically creates a difference in the chance of success for certain pupils, in particular those suffering from dyslexia.

Differences

Schools are being given more space to pursue their own policy. As a result, the differences between schools are increasing. The existence of such differences is not always in the best interest of the pupils. Examples are differences in the granting of exemptions for modern languages in senior general secondary education/pre-university education, in the imposition by schools of the obligations relating to teaching time, in the extent to which schools supervise the quality of the marking of examinations, and in the accessibility for pupils with personal budgets. These differences between schools have a detrimental effect on pupils' chances of success.

On the basis of the findings of school supervision, the Inspectorate assesses the quality of secondary education as satisfactory to good. To be 'satisfactory', the schools must comply with basic standards for good education. This is the case at by far the majority of schools. Nevertheless, numerous improvements are possible and also necessary, as mentioned repeatedly in this chapter. However, it is not certain whether the improvements at the basic level of the primary process (the further professionalisation of educational strategy and tailor-made help in the class) will be given sufficient attention in the coming years. After all, the schools have a lot to cope with. The structural changes which the schools have to implement, in particular the new organisation of the lower secondary schools and the second stage of senior general secondary education/pre-university education, will demand most time and energy.

Innovations

Innovations are a major feature of primarily pre-vocational secondary education. Influential criteria are the focus on (occupational) practice and the linking of education and guidance with the capacities of pupils with special needs. New forms of teaching methods and new ways of learning environments emerge here almost as an automatic consequence of the stronger orientation towards the practical application of knowledge and skills from the training programmes. At some pre-vocational secondary schools, innovations in the senior years also affect a number of general subjects. This means primarily the integration of aspects from the examination syllabuses for Dutch, English, mathematics and the science subjects within the work place structure. These developments in pre-vocational secondary education are positive and promising.

Teaching concepts

There is a lot less clarity regarding the usefulness of fundamentally different teaching concepts ('new ways of learning') for the general subjects, in particular in senior general secondary education/pre-university education. The Inspectorate has often observed tensions which are a consequence of different interpretations and appreciations of such concepts by teachers. Contradictions between teachers within a school can paralyse school development and therefore conflict with the interests of pupils. The professional responsibility of teachers also means they have to achieve a certain unanimity, within a department or within a group of related subjects, regarding successful teaching methods, learning environments and ways of testing. This is a task for the teachers unions.

An interesting feature is the growing attention for cognitively talented pupils. Now that the pupil population in senior general secondary education/pre-university education has increased to approximately 40 percent of the total number of pupils,

there is a greater need for differentiation in subject matter provision and depth. At an increasing number of schools, these factors are having a beneficial effect in pre-university education. Examples are bilingual pre-university education or "pre-university education plus". These are positive developments because it is important that pupils' talents are given space to grow. However, it is a shame that the differentiation is limited to pre-university education. Up to now there have been no opportunities for pupils in senior general secondary education to impress more in certain areas. In principle, the change in the law for senior general secondary education/pre-university education makes it possible, from 2007 onwards, for senior general secondary education pupils to include an unlimited number of pre-university education subjects in their examination subjects. This offers possibilities for schools to respond better to the talents of individual senior general secondary education pupils.

Intervention plans

The way in which pre-vocational secondary education schools work with intervention plans is insufficiently professional. They have an obligation to do better for pupils in pre-vocational secondary education who have been designated as needing learning support. Often there are no individual intervention plans. In so far as they are present, they are often insufficiently concrete as regards problem analysis and recommendations for action. That makes it difficult to assess whether the extra care for pupils has the intended effect. Schools must improve their professional execution of special needs provision and guidance for such pupils.

Behavioural problems

A very serious problem is the situation facing schools struggling in certain departments or certain classes with pupils who exhibit serious psychosocial and

behavioural problems. Within the framework of the traditional organisation of whole-class teaching these problems appear to be impossible to solve. Teachers are unable to motivate these problem pupils. Schools urgently need formats which enable them nevertheless to motivate pupils with serious behavioural problems for a vocational training course or further education. This requires an integral long-term approach by the education system, the business community and government (for example social work, child welfare, compulsory education, judiciary). The responsibility is that of the institutions involved at the local or regional level.

Just as problematic is the situation facing schools which have scored low average central examinations figures over a number of years. The Inspectorate carries out intensive supervision of these schools. A number of the schools in this group are trapped in a vicious circle which leads to the downward spiral of lots of pupils from deprived situations, often a poor image, small numbers of pupils, an over-accommodating recruitment policy, teachers with a lenient attitude, the need for combined classes and poor results. This situation can only be improved by means of a solid and consistent school policy and by cooperation with external institutions when tackling problems which come from outside the school. Local authority assistance is essential.

Policy freedom

Schools are using the greater policy freedom to make their own choices as regards organisation and structure. For example, they are introducing core teams and are drawing up period timetables. A lot of schools are also busy preparing their 'own' new lower secondary schools. The developments within schools are, however, not without risk. Their level of ambition is sometimes high, without the current educational practice giving any reason for this to be so. In such cases there is a discrepancy between the ideas schools are pursuing and the material and staff

possibilities which they have access to. At least a third of schools have no concrete and realistic plans. Such initiatives therefore threaten to end up in disappointment. That is why these schools have to make their plans more concrete and realistic.

Interpretation of law and regulations

The differences which exist between schools as regards interpreting the law and regulations are not always in the interest of pupils. For example, the developments relating to lower secondary schools should not lead to such large differences that the clear and continuous line from primary school to secondary school is more difficult to achieve than it already is now. Moreover, the differences sometimes cannot be reconciled with the equality of rights that should be available to pupils. This means there is a need for a clarification of criteria and rules in situations in which the differences have unintentional negative consequences.

The Inspectorate believes the following should be guaranteed:

- An unambiguousness as regards the granting of exemptions.
- The quality of the marking of examinations.
- Clarity as regards interpretation and spending of teaching time.

Taking measures which guarantee the equality of rights of pupils is a responsibility of the government.

Schools do not yet fulfil the guarantee and accountability requirements which ideas of 'good governance' assume. With regard to important aspects such as the quality of educational actions and testing, schools have not developed a system to ensure transparency, guarantees and accountability. In order to adopt the position outlined in the 'Direction of Secondary Education' policy document, schools must treat the development of a system as a priority so that they can provide an insight into and guarantee the quality of their primary process.

13 The state of vocational education and training

Stable quality

The general assessment of vocational education and training is that quality is stable and that the quality of education has improved in a number of areas. The progress in quality is shown by both the decrease in the number of weak courses and in the increase in the percentage of courses with sufficient quality per quality aspect.

Risks of changes

Nevertheless, there are a number of issues which give cause for increased vigilance. In the view of the Inspectorate, it is precisely the accumulation of changes that is generating a number of risks.

Premature school-leaving

The first risk is the permanently high number of premature school-leavers. Measurements by Sardes show that the decrease of last year has not continued. Registration-related uncertainties form a continual problem. We have observed that registrations at the Regional Training Centres are improving and, incidentally, this has the optical effect of reducing the number of people leaving the institutions prematurely. On the other hand, the regional disclosure and coordination centres have reported that, as a result of improved reporting, the extent of the problem has in fact increased. It is expected that the introduction of the education number on 1 August 2006 will help solve a lot of the registration problems, so that a more reliable picture can be obtained of the actual extent of the problem.

Change to qualification structure

Secondly, a huge change operation is affecting the qualification structure and the organisation of the instruction itself. Investigations in the first year of what were then experiments revealed that a quarter of the courses in question had been halted or were of insufficient quality. That is clearly more than is the case with regular courses. The objectives of this operation are largely endorsed in the education world. It offers good opportunities for attractive education, which can be an important resource in the fight against premature school-leaving. At the same time, the reforms are not without risk. Between now and 2008, that is in two and a half years time, the entire process of change must have been completed, and that will require a huge investment of people and resources. A massive effort will be required to ensure high quality, competence-oriented education by 2008, to ensure that, in the interim, the participants in current education receive proper training and to ensure that, at the start, the experimental courses have been prepared well enough to fulfil the participants' expectations. A particularly worrying development is that, this year, the time spent per week and per year on education has decreased for the first time.

Reduced quality of education

A third threat to the quality of vocational education and training is the changes in adult education, especially in the courses for immigrants. Although the quality of adult education is still satisfactory, it is definitely declining and for the first time in years. The uncertainty regarding future developments is largely resulting in a stagnation of further

innovation in adult education. Expertise is disappearing while the general pressure on budgets and the replacement of teaching staff in vocational training courses are having a negative effect on vocational education as well.

More attention to integration

Fourthly, more attention needs to be paid to the contribution of vocational education and training to the integration of ethnic minority participants. It appears that three in ten premature school-leavers have ethnic minority backgrounds. At the same time, ethnic minority participants are finding it more and more difficult to arrange their practical training. This is a problem that needs to be tackled by companies, institutions and the participants. It is clear that, when registering participants, institutions have a responsibility to offer a complete training programme. The vocational education and training sector plays a crucial role in generating social cohesion. Unfortunately the way this role is currently being fulfilled is not satisfactory.

Accountability according to governance principles

Lastly, in the near future, the sector wants to develop an accountability structure based on governance principles. Here too there is still a lot of work to be done. The development of quality assurance over the past few years has shown that this is a cumbersome process. Although the Inspectorate has identified positive developments as regards thinking about transparent structures of control and

(horizontal) accountability, it has also observed that their actual organisation is not going smoothly for a number of reasons. Restarts are a regular occurrence, for example after a reorganisation or merger and, as a consequence, there is often not enough time for implementation on the work floor. It is partly for this reason that the flow of accountability information relating to educational performance is still below par in a lot of areas.

It will take several years before a mature system of 'good governance' has been created in the vocational education and training sector. In the beginning, the process will be additionally hampered because the structure on which reports have to be generated, namely the courses, will still be developing in the next few years. Experience has shown that this is generally not favourable for the creation of a regulated flow of information. On the other hand, it appears that institutions that establish a clear link between their normal management system and control of quality, are able to make interesting improvements.

A lot of effort required

All in all, the quality of training and adult education is generally pleasing. However, at the same time, a lot of hard work still needs to be done in a number of fields. It is precisely the combination of problems, dropout rates, the worrying situation of ethnic minority participants, the extensive reforms affecting education, the instruction itself and the responsibilities of the institutions that constitutes a major challenge.

Discrimination at internship places

14 The state of higher education

Higher Education in figures

The number of institutions (140) and the number of courses (around 3,000) appear to have stabilised in the past two years. In the year under review, 67 higher professional education Master's programmes were registered and 25 more Master's programmes in university education than last year. The number of students in funded higher education is gradually increasing and is now at well over 0.5 million. The increase occurred primarily in university education (5.5 percent), and to a lesser extent in higher professional education (3 percent). This means a larger share of highly educated people in the working population in the long term, which is the aim within the framework of the Lisbon objectives.

Good governance can be improved

As a consequence of the government's deregulation policy and the allocation of more autonomy to the institutions, the importance of good governance has increased. The policy memorandum entitled 'Governance', which was published by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, explains the points of departure of good governance and how it can be structured. However, a number of conditions for good governance are not being met. Internal supervision needs to be improved, as shown by an enquiry by the Inspectorate into the issuing of degrees and by exploratory research into the role of supervisory boards. Moreover, the accountability function has not yet been satisfactorily developed. On the basis of these findings, plus conclusions from other studies carried out by the Inspectorate, the latter has observed that the conditions for trust-based supervision in higher education are not being complied with everywhere. The ultimate goal is to find a good balance between trust and supervision.

Accreditation operational

The Netherlands has responded dynamically to the European aim to give quality assurance in higher education an extra impulse. Since the introduction of accreditation in 2002, a system has been set up in higher education in the Netherlands which is now fully operational. The Inspectorate has found that accreditation has given new life to quality assurance, as shown by its research into the operation of the new system. For most institutions it meant an intensification of quality assurance. For a number of them it was a reason to start building up a proper system. The accreditation process demands an extra effort given that, for example, more evidence has to be supplied than used to be the case. An enquiry by the Inspectorate revealed that the costs of external quality assurance have doubled, although this doubling was, incidentally, less than some had asserted. Accreditation focuses on basic quality and that is also what institutions are trying to achieve. Education institutions have hardly used any of the image-enhancing possibilities. Moreover, the Inspectorate has observed that the space within the accreditation framework and the various methods of working of the Quality Assessment Agencies sometimes lead to differences in assessment. That can have a detrimental effect on the reliability of the judgements. After all, one has to be able to rely on judgements, no matter which Quality Assessment Agency or which panel makes them. On the other hand, the space within the accreditation framework does offer institutions the opportunity to create an individual interpretation of quality and allows the implementation of innovative teaching concepts, rather than preventing them.

From Bachelor to Master

In 2002, a law for the introduction of a Bachelor-Master structure came into effect. Because the institutions offering Bachelor's and Master's courses at university education level are independent institutions, students with a Bachelor's certificate are now able to continue studying a Master's degree of their choice. They can do so at their own university, or at another university in the Netherlands or abroad. Most institutions have now started the third year of the Bachelor's courses and the students, and then particularly university students, are choosing their Master's degrees. A crucial aspect for a properly functioning Bachelor-Master system – with a separation between Bachelor's and Master's – is a transparent procedure for the admission of Bachelor's students to the Master's courses. The Inspectorate monitor revealed that the admission regulations are unclear and rather diverse. Sometimes universities impose different admission requirements on their own Bachelor's students who wish to do a Master's than on students from elsewhere. The mobility of Bachelor's students between institutions in the Netherlands and abroad has therefore not increased as yet. A lot could be achieved through better coordination of the Master's degrees admission conditions and through the provision of proper information. Initial responses from experts in the business community showed that the newly developed higher professional education Master's degrees are regarded positively on the employment market.

Accessibility and selection

International research has revealed that Dutch higher education is one of the most accessible systems of education in the world. Although internationally, the quality of the Dutch higher education system is regarded as good, it is still desirable to monitor closely developments relating to the balance between accessibility and other relevant characteristics (quality, level, yields, final qualifications) of the

higher education system. This is necessary because, within the framework of the Lisbon policy, the Netherlands is aiming to increase participation in higher education. The government is therefore encouraging all kinds of initiatives to increase the accessibility of higher education, such as the development of short higher professional education Bachelor's programmes (known as Associate Degrees). The experiments with selection and differentiation as regards tuition fees, which were initiated during the year under review, deserve more attention within the framework of accessibility and the aim for more highly trained graduates. The same applies to participation in higher education by students from ethnic minorities. This continues to be disappointing which means that not all the available talent is being discovered and used.

Green education

The student numbers in higher agricultural education are fairly stable at slightly above 8,000 in each of the past five years. A number of programmes which have, for years, determined the sector's image have suffered a gradual decline in the number of students. This may threaten the innovative power of green education. Agricultural education institutions, both at secondary vocational education and higher education levels, have now combined forces under the name 'The Green Knowledge Partnership' with a view to making education more innovative. Unemployment among graduates in higher agricultural education is low at slightly over 1 percent. However, there are fewer and fewer paid jobs within the agricultural sector. Green education graduates generally earn less than those from other types of education.

Quality of accredited courses

In the year under review, 450 courses were accredited (full-time, part-time and dual variants counted separately). Accreditation was withheld from a very small number of courses. Analysis of the reports of

the Quality Assessment Agencies generally provides a lot of information on aspects (standards) of the quality of a certain course, but when aggregated for all accredited courses this information generates a fairly static picture. This is because there is less variation in the judgements per standard (unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good, excellent) than used to be the case. The accreditation system is different from the previous review system and this has resulted in less diversity. Almost three quarters of the judgements in the reports analysed by the Inspectorate fall into the category ‘satisfactory’, and a quarter into the category ‘good’. Despite this positive evaluation, the same standards get the lowest valuation as in the past. These are the standards ‘assessment and testing’, ‘internal quality assurance’ and ‘yield’. The standards of ‘coordination between design and content’, and ‘Bachelor-Master level’ receive the least positive assessment.

Changes in the system of Higher Education

The major system changes which were introduced at the beginning of this century - the accreditation system and the Bachelor – Master structure – are intended to encourage the internationalisation of education and to guarantee quality. High quality is essential in the light of the aim to create a high-quality knowledge economy, which in turn requires a highly trained working population. Internationalisation is structured by, for example, increased mobility among teachers, researchers and students. Both system changes have been implemented quickly. The accreditation system is operational and the first batch of students is about to finish the Bachelor’s phase. The new Bachelor-Master structure is therefore entering an important phase. The Master’s students in particular are expected to be more mobile. However, it appears that students are, for the time being, going to play it safe, with only a few actually changing location. This is partly caused by the different and sometimes unclear requirements imposed on admission to the Master’s

courses. It is important that universities, both in the Netherlands and abroad, cooperate more to make the transition clearer and, by doing so, encourage student mobility.

The quality of education is guaranteed by the accreditation system. The point of departure for the new system is that courses must comply with basic quality requirements. That is indeed the case for by far the majority of courses. The new system allows programmes to attract attention by having a certain quality characteristic validated. This possibility is still not being used enough despite ‘profiling and pluriformity’ being one of the goals of the accreditation system. Once the parties involved have become used to the accreditation process and have confidence in their own quality, they can be expected to make an effort to work on creating a distinctive profile, for example by developing a certain quality characteristic. The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) is also encouraging this and possibilities to reinforce this aspect of the accreditation process are being explored.

Accessibility and profiling

In the follow-up to its study into the accessibility of higher education, the Inspectorate again encountered the field of tension between the desire to allow a larger proportion of the population to participate in higher education on the one hand and the need for differentiation, profiling and selection on the other. The aim is to achieve a participation level of 50 percent. However, there is a risk that the exit level will drop and it may produce effects contrary to the aim of achieving higher quality, whereby quality is regarded as the exit level achieved. The enquiry into the issuing of degrees revealed indications of a lack of a guarantee for the exit level. It appeared that degrees are sometimes awarded incorrectly, or at least for unclear reasons. The light study load, often between 25 and 30 hours, is also a risk to the exit level. Politicians have acknowledged this and

the state secretary wants measures to be taken to increase the study load. This approach seems to be bearing fruit already. This shows that both the education world and policymakers have to stay alert to the risks threatening the quality of education. The accessibility of education can also suffer from the desire to create a profile and to develop honour's programmes. Education will benefit from a clear choice being made. This can also be a differentiated choice, for example a decent average and also limited space for excellence. It should also be noted that the concept of accessibility must partly be regarded with an eye on the desired educational outcomes. In that sense, combating drop-out rates may enhance accessibility. A well-reasoned and careful selection at the beginning of one's student career can help.

Good governance can be improved

The policy memorandum entitled 'Governance', which was published by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in July, stated that good governance is an essential factor for the quality of education. The same memorandum describes the points of departure and guidelines which can promote 'good governance'. Although the discussion on good governance has been going on for some time, not much evidence is available on what this means in practice. However, in the higher education sector in particular the notion of 'good governance' is being interpreted in more and more concrete ways.

The Inspectorate has carried out various investigations to analyse aspects of good governance in more detail. Although the results of these investigations show that good governance is not entirely problem-free, ways to make improvements are always found whenever things go wrong or are unclear. Good governance also appears to demand an active contribution by all the parties involved and proper interaction. As yet there is hardly any public accountability, despite the fact that society is entitled to know whether public funding is being spent effectively and legitimately.

Good governance in education increases in importance the more the government pursues its policy of deregulation and grants institutions more autonomy, as has been the case for several years now. At the moment we are passing through a period in which good governance is under development and in which a proper balance is being sought between independence and accountability.

The Inspectorate endorses the view that institutions bear full responsibility for their actions and for the quality of education. This does not release the government from its obligation to carry out supervision. After all, there is evidence which demonstrates that the time is not yet ripe to depend purely on trust, with the government only taking action when things go wrong. Trust has to be earned. The government's task is to set clear rules, to arrange everything properly from the administrative point of view and to provide good quality information.

Internal supervision requires improvement

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