



Education Inspectorate
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

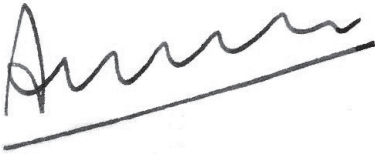
The Dutch Inspectorate
of Education

The State of Education in the Netherlands

Education Report 2009/2010

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

Mrs. drs. A.S. Roeters

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Senior Chief Inspector of Education
May 2011

The State of Education in the Netherlands 2009/2010

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The State of Education in the Netherlands

In this first chapter of the Education Report 2009/2010 the Education Inspectorate describes how many schools comply with basic quality standards. Favourable and worrying developments in the system come up for discussion, including opportunities and improvements.

Safeguard and Encourage The Inspectorate intends to guarantee that all pupils receive education of a satisfactory quality. This is achieved by identifying weak and unsatisfactory schools and drawing the attention of school boards to their responsibilities. In addition, the Inspectorate wants to encourage improvement in quality across all educational levels, including at schools and for courses that are weak or unsatisfactory. This is achieved by researching developments in the educational system based on representative samples and analyses of national databases. In this chapter both of the Inspectorate's roles are highlighted in describing the favourable and worrying developments in education, as well as the opportunities for improvement.

Favourable Developments The most notable favourable developments are:

- in most sectors there are fewer weak and unsatisfactory schools;
- pupils in primary education are performing slightly better;
- more pupils enroll in a higher form of education resulting in an increase in the level of education;
- more young people obtain a basic qualification and there are fewer dropouts;
- schools and school boards are becoming more aware of the importance of good performance.

Reasons for Concern The most notable reasons for concern are:

- precisely those pupils that really need good education, are often attending weak or unsatisfactory schools;
- compared to a few years ago pupils in secondary education are getting lower grades for national examinations for maths, Dutch and English;
- schools and courses do not guarantee the quality of diplomas sufficiently;
- schools and courses differ widely in their achievements, so pupils at one school are much better off than pupils at another;
- pupils have a right to good teachers, but a proportion of teachers fall short.

Improvements in Education To improve education, school boards and principals need to take action and teachers need to become more professional. Like last year, the Inspectorate advocates an outcome-based approach: increased focus on performance by setting clear goals and systematically checking if they have been achieved. Furthermore, educational sectors must gear their curricula better to one another to create continuity for pupils.

This chapter describes the most important favourable developments in education (1.1 and 1.2), the reasons for concern (1.3 - 1.5) and the most important opportunities for improvement (1.6 - 1.8).

1.1 More Schools with Sufficient Quality

On 1st January 2011 more schools complied with inspection standards for adequate quality than on 1st January 2010. This applies to primary education, pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo), secondary schools for practical training (praktijkonderwijs) and special schools. A total of 137,000 pupils attend weak and unsatisfactory schools in primary education; compared to 145,000 pupils last year.

Practical Training Practical training in particular has shown very marked improvements: two years ago one in five practical training schools was weak or unsatisfactory. On 1st January 2011 there were no longer any unsatisfactory practical training schools and the percentage of weak schools is the lowest of all sectors.

Faster Improvement One new development is that the Inspectorate re-evaluates weak and unsatisfactory schools after one year, as it is the intention that schools improve quickly. If re-evaluation is successful, the Inspectorate adjusts inspection arrangements.

- Unsatisfactory schools can change into weak schools after a year. At very least, they must have sorted out their educational processes or their outcomes.
- Weak schools can be judged satisfactory, provided their outcomes are at the right level.

As a result of this new approach the number of unsatisfactory schools is declining. Luckily there are also fewer new unsatisfactory schools. School boards and principals are more focused on outcomes and intervene more quickly if they decline. Nevertheless, depending on the sector, there is still a quarter to a third of school boards that have to deal with weak to unsatisfactory schools (diagram 1.1).

Decline in Special Primary Education Schools, General Secondary Education (havo) and Pre-university Education (vwo)


Special Primary Education Schools In recent years the Inspectorate has sharpened assessment standards in special primary education schools in the area of working with development and transition goals. In 2010 there was specific focus on visiting schools that demonstrated sufficient quality four years ago. A third of this group did not achieve the new standards. This does not detract from the fact that in the meantime, another group of schools, that was weak or unsatisfactory four years ago, has improved considerably in response to pressure from the Inspectorate.

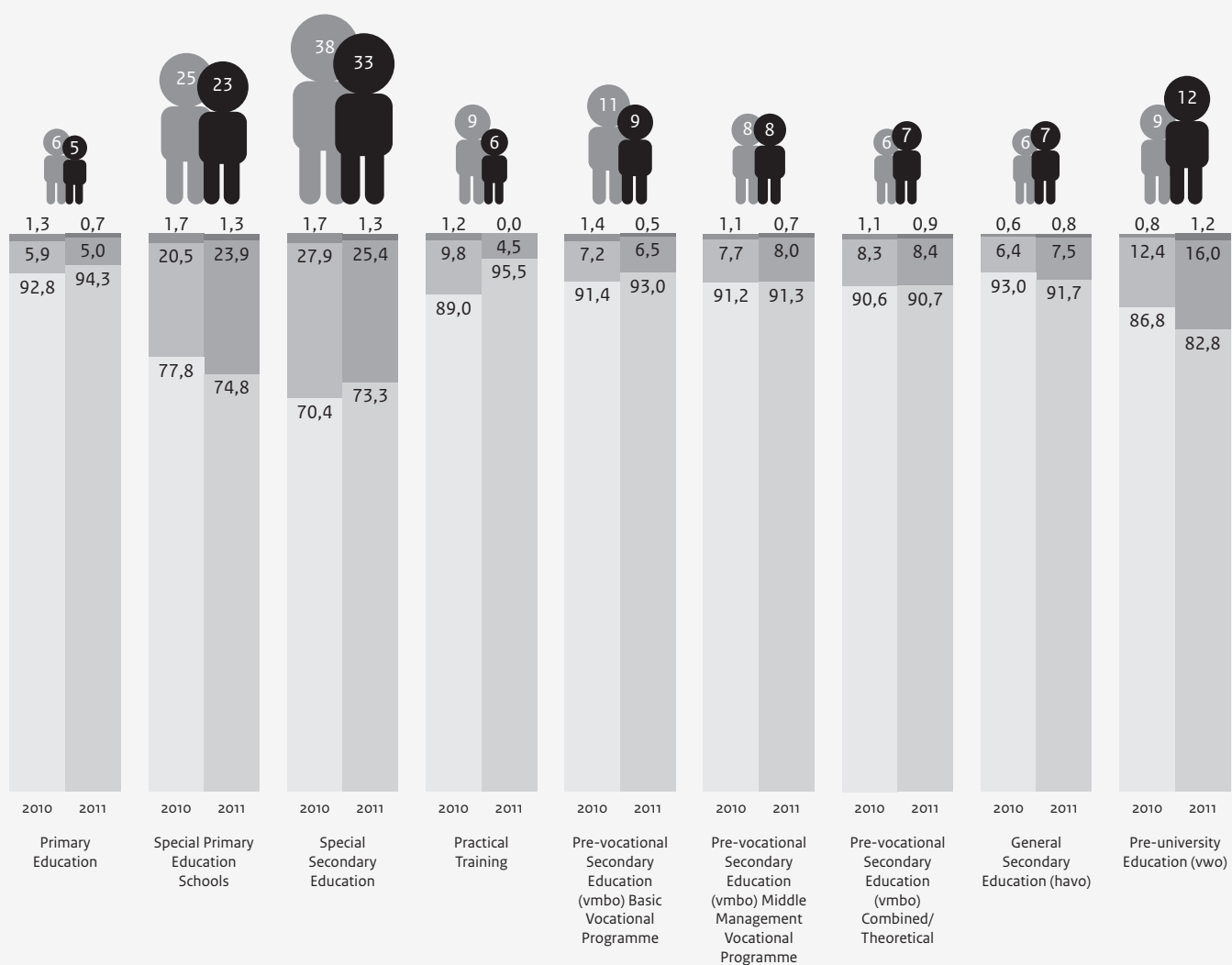
General Secondary Education (havo) and Pre-university Education (vwo) In general secondary education (havo), but particularly in pre-university education (vwo), there are more weak and unsatisfactory schools compared to 2010. These schools often have too large a discrepancy between the grades for school exams and national exams, in addition to one or more unsatisfactory scores for other performance indicators (the outcomes of the senior or junior year groups, or the grades for the national exams).

Diagram 1.1
Percentages of schools with basic inspection, weak and unsatisfactory schools, pupils concerned and school boards involved per sector (as of 1st January 2010 and 1st January 2011)

- Basic Inspection, 1st January 2010
- Basic Inspection, 1st January 2011
- Weak Schools, 1st January 2010
- Weak Schools, 1st January 2011
- Unsatisfactory Schools, 1st January 2010
- Unsatisfactory Schools, 1st January 2011

Percentage of school boards per sector involved with weak or unsatisfactory schools		
	1 st January 2010	1 st January 2011
Primary Education	25	23
Special Primary Education Schools	26	31
(Special) Secondary Education	38	40
Practical Training	12	6
Secondary Education	30	37

 Percentage of pupils at weak and unsatisfactory schools (between 1st January 2010 and 1st January 2011)



A Different Approach in Secondary Vocational Education (mbo)

Judgement per Course On the 1st January 2010 there were 44 unsatisfactory and 411 weak secondary vocational education (mbo) courses. On 1st January 2011, these figures had dropped to 20 and 226 respectively (or 0.4 and 4.2 percent of the total, not including courses with fewer than 12 students). The decrease is partly due to a different approach taken by the Inspectorate. Previously groups of courses were clustered and assigned the same inspection arrangement if one of the group was judged weak or unsatisfactory. Now, only the course identified as weak or unsatisfactory gets this form of inspection. The weak and unsatisfactory courses encompass more than 21,000 students (four percent of the total). Of the 66 secondary vocational education (mbo) institutions, 10 have one or more unsatisfactory courses, 36 have weak courses.

Vulnerable Pupil Groups Hit Hardest

Care Pupils A quarter of schools in special primary and (secondary) special education achieve insufficient quality. Pupils attending these schools need specialist help, but a proportion of schools can not provide this adequately. The intention is to stop the fast growth of (secondary) special education by introducing Appropriate Education (Passend onderwijs). Regular and special schools will have to work together to ensure that each child gets the appropriate education. By doing this schools in special education will have more peace, making it possible for them to improve quickly. Compared to a few years ago, when half of schools demonstrated insufficient quality, the situation has improved considerably. But this does not help the pupils that are currently attending weak and unsatisfactory schools.

Disadvantaged Pupils Like last year, many of the weak and unsatisfactory schools are in the northern provinces and large cities. Relatively high numbers of disadvantaged native and immigrant pupils attend these schools and they really need good education to be able to develop. Local authority and provincial improvement campaigns appear to have had some degree of success, but the same applies here, pupils currently attending weak and unsatisfactory schools do not yet profit from these improvements.

Students Following Secondary Vocational Education (mbo) Level Two Secondary vocational Education (mbo) courses at level two are relatively often weak or unsatisfactory, whilst it is especially important for students at this level to get their diploma (and thereby their starting qualification).

Pupil Population No Excuse The dogged nature of this situation could create the impression that the Inspectorate is making demands that are too high or that certain disadvantages simply can not be resolved. This impression is not justified. Most schools and courses do indeed offer basic quality standards. For every unsatisfactory school with disadvantaged pupils there is a school nearby that performs well, even though similar pupils attend. Pupils are never an excuse for bad educational quality, as poor performance is not due to the pupils, but to the schools themselves.

School Board Partnership Necessary in Regions of Population Decline

Smaller Schools Are Often Weak In the coming years the number of pupils in primary education could decline in some regions by 12 percent (Vrieling, Jacobs and Hogeling, 2010). In Groningen, Friesland, Drenthe, Zeeland and Limburg – the provinces that are already experiencing population decline – the number of very small primary schools (less than 50 pupils) has increased from 180 last year to 201. In relative terms the quality of these small schools is behind: one in six is weak or unsatisfactory. These schools often have combined classes of three age groups. For many teachers it is difficult to teach such classes.

Consultation Necessary Whether it is always desirable to keep very small schools open is questionable, particularly when there is another school in the neighbourhood, as in nearly half the cases. Some school boards have already joined hands and are working together on up-scaling, or have decided to spread their schools across villages. In any case, school boards need to ensure that parents and pupils are not the victims of a lack of consultation and collaboration at school board level.

1.2 Increase in Educational Level

A growing number of pupils enroll in higher forms of education, increasing the educational level of the population. Girls do better than boys. Immigrant pupils still have a disadvantage compared to native pupils, but are gradually catching up.

Improved Performance in Primary Education In recent years the average pupil score for the final test in primary education has increased slightly. In 2010 the average score (535.4) was slightly higher than in 2009 (535.1; Cito, 2010). The performance in language and numeracy in year group four is also increasing (Hemker, Kordes and Van Weerden, 2011).

More Pupils in Senior General Secondary Education (havo) and Pre-university Education (vwo) In 2009, 44 percent of pupils in the third year of secondary education attended general secondary education (havo) and pre-university (vwo) education, compared to 51 percent in pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo). In 2000 the figures were 39 and 58 percent respectively. The remaining pupils attend practical training (praktijkonderwijs) and secondary special education (OCW, 2010a). Secondary special education has grown significantly since 2000.

Increased Flow from Pre-vocational Secondary Education (vmbo) to Senior General Secondary Education (havo) More pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo) pupils move on to general secondary education (havo) having obtained their pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo) diploma. In 2004 this concerned roughly 4 percent of pupils in the combined programme and 15 percent in the theoretical programme. In 2008 these were 8 and 21 percent respectively (Van Esch and Neuvel, 2010; CBS, 2007; 2010).

More Secondary Vocational Education (mbo) Students with Diplomas More students obtain their diploma in secondary vocational education (mbo). Of those students that leave this education, 30 percent still do not have a diploma, but this was 40 percent in the early years of this century (OCW, 2009).

Increased Flow from Secondary Vocational Education (mbo) to Higher Professional Education (hbo) Thirteen percent of secondary vocational education (mbo) students move on to higher professional education (hbo), a slight increase compared to five years ago, when ten percent moved on to higher professional education (hbo) (OCW, 2010a).

More Students in Higher Education Higher education grew from 466,900 students in 2000 to well over 630,000 in 2009. The proportion attending university increased from 34 to 37 percent. However, the success rate in higher education remained unchanged. In higher professional education (hbo) it has been around 73 percent for years, in university education around 70 percent. Because of this the need for improvement in return remains undiminished.

Girls in the Lead Girls do better in education than boys. The female professional population under 35 is now better educated than the male professional population (Hartgers and Portegijs, 2009). There is no clear explanation for this. Some think that boys fall behind due to the second phase in secondary education: they are said to be less capable of working independently (Coenen, Meng and Van der Velden, 2011). However boys are also behind at other types of school than senior general secondary education (havo) and pre-university education (vwo) and furthermore this is not specifically a Dutch phenomenon (Driessen and Van Langen, 2010).

Immigrant Pupils Still at a Disadvantage Non-western immigrant pupils are slowly catching up. Nevertheless their language skills remain behind those of native pupils, even when both groups of pupils have parents with a comparable level of education (Driessen, Mulder, Ledoux, Roeleveld and Van Veen, 2009). Immigrant pupils are still underrepresented in senior general secondary education (havo) and pre-university education (vwo), the higher secondary vocational education (mbo) levels and higher education.

1.3 Performance Decrease in Secondary Education

It is true that more pupils enroll in higher forms of education, but performance in secondary education for mathematics, Dutch and English is declining. International comparative research has already made this evident and grades for national exams now show the same.

Lower Scores in International Research The scores of 15 year old Dutch pupils in secondary education have fallen in international comparative research, although they remain above the international average. For mathematics the decline for 2003 was significant (Gille, Loijens, Noijons and Zwitser, 2010; Diagram 1.3a). As the performance from other countries is stable or improving, the Netherlands' position in international rankings has also gone down. In 2003, the Netherlands was in fourth place for mathematics, in 2009 it was in eleventh place. For literacy the Netherlands went from ninth to tenth place.

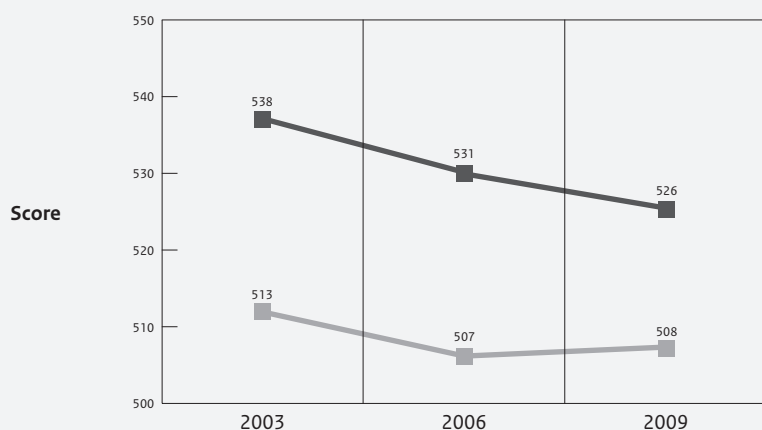
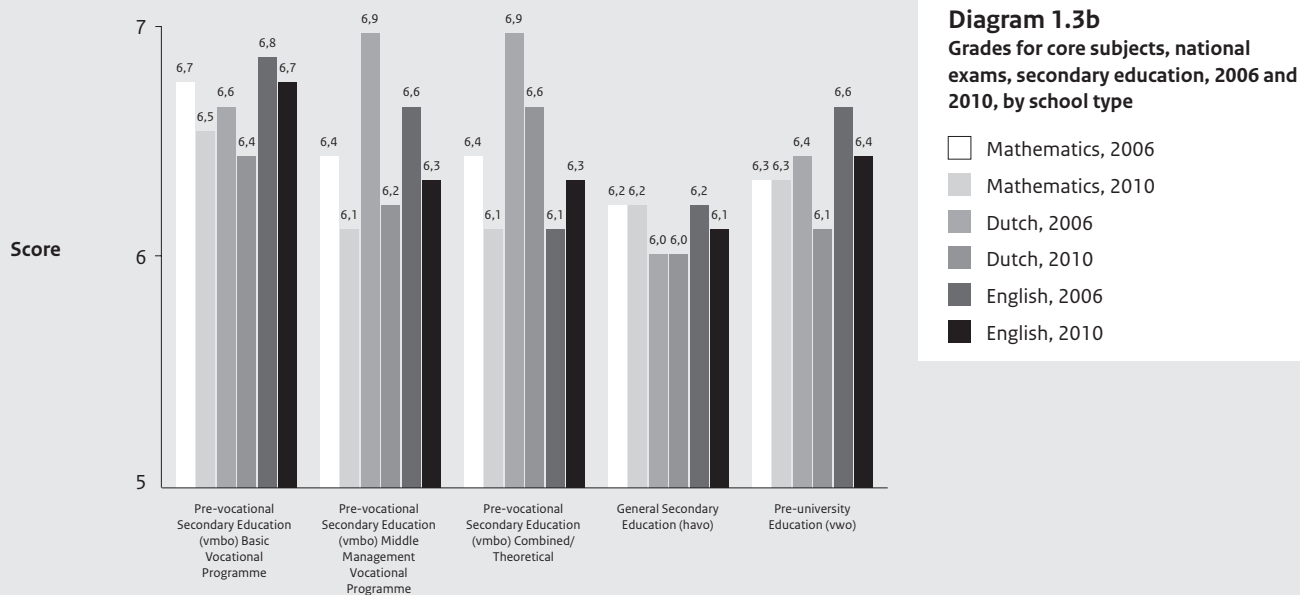


Diagram 1.3a
Performance of Dutch 15 year olds in secondary education in the period 2003-2009, PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)

■ Literacy
■ Mathematics

Lower Grades for National Exams The grades for core subjects in national exams in secondary education have declined (Diagram 1.3b). The diagram shows the average grades, but for both boys and girls the performance level was lower between 2006 and 2010.

- In comparison to 2006, 2010 pre-vocational education (vmbo) pupils got lower grades for mathematics and Dutch. English has also taken a downturn (in the vocational orientation pathways).
- General secondary education (havo) students get lower grades for English, pre-university (vwo) students for Dutch and English.
- Only the exam grades for English in the combined/theoretical programme for pre-vocational (vmbo) education have increased a little.



Source: Education Inspectorate, 2011

Grades Could Have Been Even Lower in 2010

Pre-vocational Secondary Education (vmbo) The examination candidates for 2006 are not entirely comparable to those from 2010. The four years in between has seen secondary education refer a lot of pupils (above all pupils with behavioural problems) to secondary special education, which has grown from 27,100 to 34,100 pupils. If these pupils had participated in the exams, the grades for pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo) (where the most referrals have been made) would probably have been even lower.

General Secondary Education (havo) and Pre-university Education (vwo) The grades for senior general secondary education (havo) and pre-university education (vwo) would be lower if pupils taking exams in general secondary adult education (vavo) had been included in the calculations. Compared to 2006 this group has grown significantly: from 1700 to over 4000 pupils for general secondary education (havo) and from 700 to 2500 pupils for pre-university education (vwo). Eight percent of all general secondary education (havo) exam candidates come from adult general secondary education (vavo) and six percent of pre-university (vwo) candidates.

The average grades of adult general secondary education (vavo) pupils are much lower than those of pupils in standard education. Pupils in non-funded general secondary education (havo) and pre-university (vwo) also perform worse, but with only 1800 pupils they are far fewer in number than adult general secondary education (vavo) pupils.

School Recommendations Do Not Explain Low Performance

No Big Changes The decline in performance in secondary education does not appear to be linked to the higher recommendations given in primary education. Schools for secondary education can send pupils to a lower school type if it turns out that the recommendation made by the primary school was too high, but this has not happened more frequently than in previous years. . On the contrary, more pupils are moving from a lower to a higher type of school in the junior grades of secondary education. Nor have recommendations changed significantly. For example, in 2005, 40 percent of pupils were recommended for general secondary education (havo) or pre-university education (vwo), compared to 44 percent in 2009. Between 2006 and 2010 the flow of pupils going on to general secondary education (havo) after the pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo) exams has increased. But these pupils can only influence general secondary education (havo) examination grades, which have remained reasonably stable.

The Quality of Secondary Education Can Improve

Tackling Problems The decline in performance may be related to a decline in the quality of secondary education. No matter how, school boards and schools must tackle existing problems to prevent any further decline (also see 1.6 and 1.7).

- Vacancies must be filled. Of all the open vacancies in secondary education 16 percent concerned Dutch, 9 percent English and 7 percent maths (third quarter of 2009). These percentages are higher than for other subjects and increase the chances of lesson cancellation. (Brukx, Hogeling, Jacobs, Kurver, Vrielink, Van der Boom en Vlasakker, 2010).
- Teachers must be qualified, preferably all teachers. In practice this is not actually the case with increasing frequency. The percentage of lessons given by unqualified teachers in secondary education has risen to more than 18 (OCW, 2006; 2010b). This can have detrimental consequences on student performance (Dronkers, 2010).
- Teachers must give good lessons. Inspectorate lesson observations actually show that one in ten teachers in secondary education does not give good tuition and that one in five teachers does not make efficient use of lesson time. Half of teachers can not gear the lesson to pupil differences.
- Pupils must receive the sufficient amount of lesson time. More schools than ever are time-tabling sufficient lesson time, but nevertheless one in five schools is still not doing so. Even at schools where sufficient time is planned, a lot of lessons are cancelled. For example, more than five percent of timetable time is cancelled at one third of pre-university education (vwo) schools.
- Schools need to handle behavioural problems better. Unfortunately this would appear to be achieved with decreasing frequency: many pupils “disappear” in rebound institutions or relief projects, sit at home or are referred to (secondary) special education (Education Inspectorate 2009; 2010b; National Ombudsman, 2011).

Higher Demands Getting rid of these problems is important, because school boards and schools will be faced with higher demands in the coming period. They will have to adjust their methods, tests and learning paths to the new, statutorily established reference levels (which describe what pupils have to know and be capable of in the areas of language and numeracy/mathematics). In addition they will be faced with sharpened examination demands and Appropriate Education (Passend onderwijs). Secondary education is the gateway to secondary vocational education (mbo) and higher education. It must be able to perform this role properly in the coming years if efforts for a more highly educated population are not to falter.

1.4 Exam Quality Insufficiently Guaranteed

secondary education, secondary professional education and higher education do not safeguard exam quality sufficiently. This not only has consequences in society, but also damages mutual trust between sectors.

School Exams in Secondary Education The quality of national exams in secondary education is guaranteed at national level, but schools are individually responsible for the quality of school exams. If grades for school exams deviate significantly from grades for national exams – and the deviation differs from school to school – this leads to inequality amongst pupils. At some schools pupils compensate national exam grades with school exam grades much more easily than at other schools.

- The difference between grades for school exams and national exams is too large at nearly a quarter of schools for management vocational orientated and combined/theoretical pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo) and at more than a third of pre-university (vwo) schools.
- This problem is present at an even greater scale in non-funded education and in adult general secondary education (vavo). In regular pre-university education the average grade for national exams is 6.3. The average grade for school exams is 0.4 above that. The average grade in adult general secondary education (vavo) - pre-university education for national exams is 5.6. The grade for school exams is 0.7 above that. This is an unacceptable situation (Education Inspectorate, 2009).

Secondary Vocational Education (mbo) Exams The exam quality for a third of secondary vocational education (mbo) courses from a representative sample is unsatisfactory. This is partly related to purchased exams that are not good enough and that are not improved by schools before students take the exams.

Higher Education Exams Guaranteeing educational quality and course completion levels in higher education also needs improvement. This is chiefly about strengthening the position of examination and course committees.

Taking Responsibility The Inspectorate has frequently highlighted the importance of reliable exams (Education Inspectorate, 2009). As convincing improvements fail to occur, it is highlighting once again and with emphasis, that schools and school boards must take responsibility for reliable exams. This is also of importance in light of the increase in educational level: as this level must be sufficiently guaranteed.

1.5 Differences Between Schools; Unequal Opportunities for Pupils

The preceding paragraphs have given a picture of the average quality of education. Behind these average grades, there are large discrepancies between schools and institutions. This means that for pupils, where they go to school can make a real difference.

Benchmarks Variation in outcomes occurs in all education sectors. The Inspectorate brings attention to a small part of this, by identifying weak and unsatisfactory schools. It is true that the remaining schools perform above a minimum level, but one school is further above it than the other. The Inspectorate can chart this more clearly in the future on the basis of measures for educational profit and excellence. School boards and schools can already determine where they are, as each sector has benchmarks, although too little use is made of these.

Small Interventions, Large Improvements The differences between schools leave a lot of room for improvement. If a proportion of the schools below average improve, the performance level of the whole system goes up. This improvement then increases if schools that are currently average also improve. Furthermore, it is important to be aware that educational improvement does not have to be a long-term, complex activity. At weak and unsatisfactory schools the Inspectorate sees that often simple, goal focused interventions (such as keeping an eye on lesson time and making consistent use of the model for direct teaching) quickly have big effects. These sorts of improvements are both possible and necessary at many schools.

Examples of Differences

Primary Education On average the performance level for schools with high numbers of disadvantaged pupils is lower than schools without disadvantaged pupils. There are, nevertheless, schools with a lot of disadvantaged pupils that are well over the national performance average and there are schools without disadvantaged pupils that are well below the average (diagram 1.5a).

Secondary Education

- Some pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo) schools allow 95 percent of pupils in the basic vocational orientation to move on to secondary vocational education (mbo) level two, at other schools it is only 75 percent.
- At some schools just as many pupils with a recommendation for general secondary education (havo) ultimately go to a higher type of school (move up) as go to a lower type of school (move down). Nevertheless there are schools where movement up is 25 percent higher than movement down and there are schools where the reverse is true.
- There are general secondary education (havo) schools where 26 percent of pupils fall behind in the upper grades, but also schools where that percentage is 48.

Secondary Vocational Education (MBO)

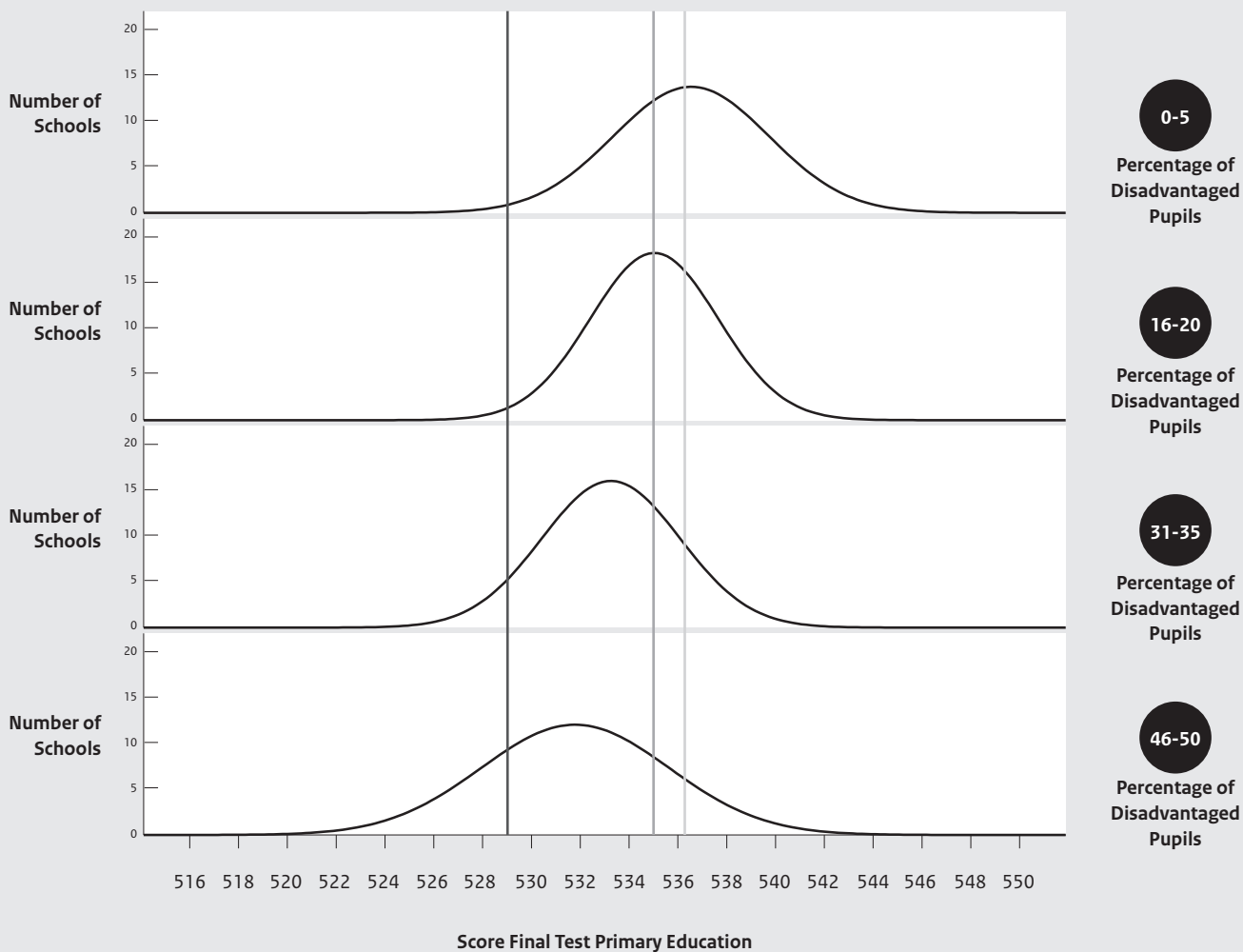
- At some regional community colleges (ROCs) 53 percent of students leave the institution with a diploma, at others this is 86 percent.
- For level one courses in the economy sector, 39 percent of students get a diploma, in the agricultural sector this is 73 percent.
- There are branches where only 35 percent of students at secondary vocational education (mbo) level three leave with a diploma (sport), while there are branches where this percentage is 94 percent (construction and infrastructure).

Disadvantaged Pupils and Performance Levels in Primary Education

This diagram shows performance for the final test in primary education for four groups, each made up of 100 schools. The groups differ from one another in the percentage of disadvantaged pupils. The purple line is the average school grade for the final test in primary education. The dark pink line is the performance level achieved by 75 percent of all pupils (reference level 1F). The light pink line is the level achieved by 50 percent of pupils (reference level 1S). Each of the four groups has schools that achieve this level, whilst each group contains schools for whom this is not achieved. As the diagram makes clear, the performance of each school is therefore not solely dependent on the percentage of disadvantaged pupils. It is related to the quality of the school.

Diagram 1.5a
Distribution Final Tests Primary Education 2008-2010 by Groups of Disadvantaged Pupils

- Average grades 2008-2010
- Basic level (1F)
- Target level (1S)



Source: Education Inspectorate, 2011

Higher Education

- On average, 14 percent of students in higher professional education (hbo) stop after one year of study, but for healthcare the percentage is 13 and for teacher training courses 18. So one course is better at retaining students than the other.
- At one institution 49 percent of students in higher professional education get a diploma after five years, compared to 76 percent at another institution (www.hbo-raad.nl). The expected success rate varies from 58 (for teacher training courses) to 66 (agriculture; OCW, 2010a).
- In university education seven percent of students stop after a year, but for healthcare this is four percent and for language and culture eleven percent. The expected success rate varies from 43 (language and culture) to 80 (agriculture OCW, 2010a).

1.6 Improvement by Professionalising School Boards

School boards are responsible for the quality of their schools. For good education schools boards need to ensure that their schools are outcome-based. They have to retrieve the right information about quality from their schools and make good use of it, the finances must be in order and comply with legislation. School boards can improve on all these points.

Higher Demands As has already been stated, the future will demand a lot of school boards. Not only will they have to safeguard and improve the quality of their schools, but also comply with higher demands, absorb cutbacks and prepare themselves for falling pupil numbers. Developments around Appropriate Education (Passend onderwijs) will also demand a lot of school boards. Greater professionalism is necessary to complete these tasks successfully.

Outcome-based Approach: The Key to Success

School Boards and Principals In 2010 the Inspectorate stated that an outcome-based approach is the most important key to educational improvement. School boards, but particularly principals play a crucial role in this, as they have to guide the process at their schools. An outcome-based approach means that schools:

- set clear objectives;
- ensure that teachers know what they have to teach their pupils;
- gear education to what the pupils need in order to perform;
- analyse problems for students who do not achieve the objectives;
- resolve problems with good pupil care;
- verify how student groups and the school as a whole are performing on an annual basis;
- improve quickly if performance falls short (Education Inspectorate, 2010a).

No Increase The field of education is paying more attention to performance and educational quality and projects are being undertaken in the area of an outcome-based approach. Yet not even a third of schools in primary education works in this way and compared to last year this percentage has fallen. Schools for secondary education work even less frequently with an outcome-based approach. Across all education sectors this approach is even less common from the perspective of social outcomes.

Setting Ambitious Goals The lack of progress being made with the outcome-based approach is due to the fact that school boards set too few goals or set them too low. The Inspectorate sees that school boards often aim for the Inspectorate standards, but these are indications of the lower performance levels. Most schools can perform way above this. School boards that use the target level or basic level of the reference levels for language and numeracy as standards, are making the same mistake. School boards and directors must realise that their pupils can often achieve much more, if they receive good education.

Requesting and Using Information on the Quality of Schools

Responsibility for Quality The Inspectorate holds school boards responsible for the quality of schools. Attention for this task is growing (Hofman, Van Leer, De Boom and Hofman, 2010). Sector councils and board organisations promote it using initiatives such as “Windows for Responsibility” in secondary education.

Quality Assurance School boards must know how their schools are performing. A quality assurance system can deliver this information. Most principals do something towards quality assurance, but developments are slow. Less than half of primary and secondary schools get a pass on all quality assurance indicators. The same is true for secondary vocational education (mbo), barely half of the courses get a pass on this point. This shows that the educational leadership of many principals leaves a lot to be desired and that school boards accept this too easily.

Sufficient Information School boards are also failing: they do not always ask for the right information. Primary school principals deliver information on the performance of year group eight, but often boards do not ask for details concerning earlier years or the quality of teachers. Secondary vocational education (mbo) often has a lot of performance data at its disposal, but does little with it. This is because institutions set no clear quality standards. The information is forgotten about and does not serve as a stimulus for improvement (Education Inspectorate, 2010a).

Finances Have To Be In Order

Risk Management Good education demands that school boards have their finances in order. 58 boards financially at risk:

- nineteen boards in primary education;
- four boards in special schools;
- nineteen boards in secondary education;
- fifteen secondary vocational education (mbo) institutions;
- one school for higher professional education (hogeschool).

The issue is comparatively most significant for secondary vocational education (mbo), because 15 institutions encompasses approximately 20 percent of the total. Last year 51 boards had financial problems. About half of these still have the same problem.

Poor Policies School boards in the risk category possess inadequate planning and control, lack long-term perspective, have insufficient control of their costs if income falls short, invest too much or keep unprofitable courses going. The coming period will be particularly difficult for school boards in regions experiencing population decline. They have to be timely in their anticipation of decreasing income streams and general cutbacks.

Wealthy School Boards A preliminary investigation of fifty school boards with very high assets made clear that the majority did not have a good long-term budget forecast and that half invested too little in education. The school boards have agreed to change this. The Inspectorate will check that this is done. Research is being continued with a larger group of school boards.

Compliance with Legislation

Last year the Inspectorate paid particular attention to the degree to which schools and school boards comply with legislation. Insufficient compliance is serious if it is damaging to pupils. This is the case in some circumstances.

Plan Teaching Time Eighty percent of schools in secondary education achieve the new standards of 1000 hours of teaching time. The situation has improved compared to a couple of years ago, but a proportion of schools still offers pupils too little teaching time. The Inspectorate investigated 129 secondary vocational education courses (mbo) in institutions where it had previously been confirmed that they did not meet the requirements. A quarter had once again scheduled insufficient time. Agreements have been made with these schools and courses to get the teaching time in order. A proportion of the funding will be reclaimed where there is a large short-fall in secondary education and where there is short-fall in secondary vocational education (mbo), when even having been offered the opportunity to recover the courses have failed to get rid of the problem. Where it recurs in secondary vocational education (mbo), the course license will be revoked.

Discourage Absence Unauthorised absence is a predictor of dropout. Therefore every secondary vocational education (mbo) institution must have its absence policy in order. Of the 23 secondary vocational education (mbo) institutions investigated by the Inspectorate, there was actually only one that had everything well organised for every department. Even after three repeat checks 16 of the 23 institutions continued to fall short. The Inspectorate has made agreements with these institutions to finally get things in order. In the future an administrative fine can be imposed.

Asking for a Certificate of Good Conduct A quarter of school boards does not have a Certificate of Good Conduct for every member of staff, even though this is mandatory. The Inspectorate has informed the school boards that they must get this in order and conducts checks.

Establishing Pupil Weighting School boards in primary education make so many errors in the data needed to determine pupil weighting, that an estimated 26 million Euros has been improperly received. This is six percent of the total 450 million Euros for the weighting regulation. Nearly all school boards that made a mistake last year, did so again this year. The Inspectorate has proposed to the ministry that the process surrounding pupil weighting be simplified to prevent mistakes in the future.

1.7 Improvement by Professionalising Teachers

Good education starts with good teachers. In 2009/2010 the Inspectorate observed nearly 2000 lessons given by teachers in primary education and well over 1100 general secondary education and pre-university lessons in representative samples. These have shown what points teachers need to improve.

Develop Basic Competencies Most teachers can maintain order, deliver good instruction and involve pupils in the lesson. Approximately one in ten primary school teachers can not. In secondary education that number is even higher. Teachers in training, teachers who had another profession before become a teacher and unqualified teachers have not developed these competencies to the same degree, but there are also teachers with more than thirty years experience who fall short.

Gear Education to the Pupil A third of teachers at primary schools and half of teachers in general secondary education and pre-university education do not gear teaching to differences between pupils. This has been the Achilles heel of education for years (Van de Grift, 2011). It is not due to the curricula: they often offer teachers the opportunity to break pupils into a middle group, a group that needs additional teaching and a group that can cope with more. But even if pupils are clearly different from one another, teachers often do not gear education accordingly. One example is in year group three of primary school, where some pupils can already read, while others do not yet know any letters. Another example is education in Frisian in classes where some pupils always speak Frisian and others never (Education Inspectorate, 2010c).

Better Management of Care Pupils Two years ago the Inspectorate established that the quality of education for care pupils was often inadequate and did not deliver enough. (Education Inspectorate, 2009). This is related to a lack of gearing, meaning that pupils who need extra attention get trapped. This can be pupils who have fallen behind, but also highly gifted pupils. Schools are getting better at detecting which pupils have specific educational requirements, but do not adjust the curriculum sufficiently in accordance with those needs. This is also the case for special education. Appropriate Education (Passend onderwijs) will put both regular and special schools in a better position to give good education to care pupils. This is not only about performance but also about tackling behavioural problems. Many teachers will need training for this.

Training and Guidance

Improve Teacher Training Last year the Inspectorate established that courses leading to a Bachelor of Primary School Education (pabo) pay little attention to the outcome-based approach. Projects are now running to change this (Primary Education Council, 2010). Graduates from teacher training courses are not satisfied: 40 percent do not consider the course a good basis for commencing employment, partly as it offers too little depth (ROA, 2010). One third of students stops within a year or transfers to another course.

Support New Teachers New teachers in secondary education are entitled to 20 percent lesson free time, intended for guidance and preparation. For a full-time employee that amounts to one working day a week. Data from the Inspectorate show that in reality barely six hours a month is spent on guidance. Less than half of new teachers is happy with the guidance (Van Leenen and Berndsen, 2009). There is too much attention for the new teacher's well-being and not enough attention for professional development (Kessels, 2010).

Further Training for Experienced Teachers Teachers in the Netherlands, as in most countries, are entitled to further training, but it is not obligatory (Hovius and Van Kessel, 2010). This can result in particularly motivated teachers follow further training (Van der Steeg, Van Elk and Webbink, 2010). A professional register is planned linking registration to the obligation to follow further training periodically. In the future the Inspectorate will include the professionalisation of teachers more expressly in inspections.

The Role of the School Board and the Principal

Professionalisation of Personnel School boards and principals can make a better job of tackling the professionalisation of their personnel. They are obliged to keep records of competence, but these are lacking at a quarter of schools for secondary education. Group discussions and internal classroom visits at schools are simple ways of achieving professionalisation, but are seldom used. If they are used, there is sometimes the problem that directors and colleagues do not dare to criticise one another (Education Inspectorate, 2011).

Hallmark for Supervisors School boards can choose from a host of supervisors and consultants: particularly for weak and unsatisfactory schools. Inspectors see a wide range in the quality of supervisors. Sometimes they do good work, sometimes they come little further than copying Inspectorate reports. School boards must ask themselves if it is always necessary to hire in an external expert and they must check what qualifications the person in question has. A hallmark for supervisors is desirable to separate the wheat from the chaff. Sector councils can take the lead in this.

Selection of Personnel Strict selection of (future) teachers and principals can, in addition to the professionalisation of current personnel, accelerate educational improvement (Mourshed, Chijoke and Berber, 2010). There is little attention paid to this in the Netherlands.

1.8 Improvement by Paying More Attention to the Curriculum

The professionalisation of school boards, principals and teachers can improve performance in education, but more is needed. The Inspectorate points out the importance of a good curriculum and of curriculum continuity for achieving ambitious goals.

Framework for Improvement: Reference Levels

Information on Pupil Handover On 1st August 2010 the Act on Reference Levels for Dutch Language and Numeracy came into effect. The act describes the knowledge and capabilities pupils must acquire in primary, secondary and secondary vocational education (mbo). It intends to improve the tie-up between sectors and the handover of pupils, including better information exchange. This is necessary: the Inspectorate established earlier that primary schools do not always use data from the pre-school period, that secondary education does little with information from primary schools and that secondary vocational education (mbo) sets information from secondary education to the side (Education Inspectorate, 2009).

Get Rid of Gaps

Continuity In addition to better provision of information for handover, sector programmes must also make room for curriculum continuity. Otherwise pupils get too little opportunity to acquire missing knowledge and capabilities or to maintain the level of the knowledge and capabilities they already have.

Attention for Reading Pupils that have not learnt how to read well enough at primary school, do not learn it in secondary education, unless they can rely on a good curriculum to help them bridge the gap (Mijs and Vernooy, 2010). Because there is no reading curriculum in many secondary schools, the Netherlands still has 14 percent functional illiteracy, for the most part in pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo). These pupils do not understand simple texts about everyday events (Gille, Loijens, Noijens and Zwitser, 2010) or can barely read their text books on their own (Educational Inspectorate, 2006).

Attention for Numeracy Nor do pupils improve their numeracy skills in secondary education. A specific curriculum is advisable for pupils to catch up, for example in the form of extra lessons, though it ought to be possible for all pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo) pupils to get more attention for numeracy/mathematics. Initial results from tests in secondary vocational education (mbo) show that in the first year students have more problems with numeracy/mathematics than with language (Bureau ICE, 2010).

Gear Methods and Levels Methods for language and numeracy/mathematics in primary education have a different content than in secondary education, by which pupils can lose skills. Van de Gein (2010) established that pupils in primary education spell better than at the end of secondary education. This is partly due to the fact that in secondary education spelling is not a recognised subject. The level of the language curriculum in methods for the upper years of primary school are sometimes higher than in the lower years of pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo) (Ekens and Jager, 2009).

Complaints from Higher Education Higher education is complaining about the students' grasp of basic skills. This also makes focus on the curriculum in secondary education imperative.

A Good Curriculum for Everybody

Specific Educational Requirements The lack of appropriate methods for pupils in special primary education schools and (secondary) special education is a daily hindrance. Even highly gifted pupils often do not receive an appropriate curriculum. In addition, immigrant pupils need better teaching materials to catch up on their language disadvantage (Bonset and Hoogeveen, 2010).

Teachers Must Offer the Content However good the methods may be, in the end pupils can only get something from them, if they are actually offered the content by their teachers. This would seem to be stating the obvious, but it does occur that teachers skip a section or do not work through methods to the end (Vernooy, 2010). In primary education six percent of schools fail to give pupils in year eight the curriculum that is intended for that year group, because they are behind in the method.

Autonomy In the Netherlands the curriculum is rarely the subject of discussion or the object of research. If outcomes in international tests fail, the finger is immediately pointed at the teacher, but the curriculum remains undiscussed. That is probably because the Netherlands is "the world champion in school autonomy" (Scheerens, Lijten and Van Ravens, 2010). The government gets involved with examination programmes, not with the design of education and teaching content.

Guidelines Necessary Performance in core subjects needs to improve, certainly in secondary education. The reference levels can help with this, but objectives and tests are not enough. School boards, schools and teachers also need guidelines for a good curriculum, as well as guidelines for the time that is needed to work through the curriculum. There is still a lack of clarity on these points. The government and educational sectors must bring about change quickly.

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Colophon

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ISBN 978-90-8503-255-7

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