



Education Inspectorate
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

The State of Education in the Netherlands

Highlights of the 2011/2012 Education Report



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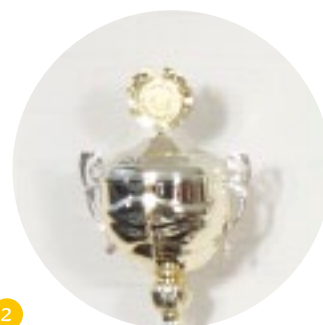
Highlights of the 2011/2012 Education Report

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education
april, 2013

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Introduction

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education monitors the quality of education in the Netherlands. The Inspectorate's Education Report provides an annual overview of the positive and negative developments in the education system. It highlights the successful aspects of pupils' and students' education as well as those areas that could be improved.

This is part I of the Education Report. It covers the most important developments in education in the academic year 2011/2012 and is divided into four different themes:

1. Quality of schools and study programmes
2. Pupils' and students' performance and opportunities
3. Teachers and professional development
4. School boards and finances

If you would like to find out more about developments in education in the Netherlands in 2011/2012, the full Education Report (in Dutch) can be consulted on the Inspectorate of Education website, www.onderwijsinspectie.nl. Parts II and III of the Education Report can be found here. Part II takes a closer look at the state of education in all educational sectors, including green education. Part III describes developments in specific educational themes: educational outcomes, teaching and support for pupils and students, the teacher, administrative issues and finances.

1. Quality of schools and study programmes

INCREASINGLY FEWER UNSATISFACTORY SCHOOLS AND STUDY PROGRAMMES



Improving quality

Many schools that were unsatisfactory have achieved significant improvements; however, a great number of schools show no signs of improvement at all.

THERE IS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT AT MANY SCHOOLS AND IN MANY STUDY PROGRAMMES

The number of weak and unsatisfactory schools is decreasing, which is encouraging news for the pupils and students at these schools. What is the situation at the schools that have the Inspectorate's confidence? Can the quality of education increase even further in these schools, and if so how?

Basic quality satisfactory, but improvement stagnating

Most schools in the Netherlands meet the Inspectorate's standards for basic quality. In primary schools and practical training programmes, this applies for 97% and 96% of total schools respectively. A high percentage of basic vocational programmes in pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) and senior general secondary education (HAVO) also meet the Inspectorate's standards. In higher education, the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) gives a positive assessment for virtually all study programmes. In all of these sectors and types of education, only a small proportion of pupils and students are being taught in a weak or unsatisfactory school, department or study programme.

A higher percentage of weak and unsatisfactory schools and study programmes are found in secondary vocational education (MBO) and special (secondary) education, where the basic quality is satisfactory in 80 to 85% of the schools and departments. The quality of pre-school and early-school education (VVE) is also disappointing.

Decrease in the number of weak and unsatisfactory schools continues

Since 2007, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of weak and unsatisfactory schools and study programmes in almost all sectors. Some years ago, these accounted for around 10 to 25% of the total. Initially, there was a decrease in the number of unsatisfactory schools only, but since 2009, the proportion of weak schools has also been decreasing¹. The strongest improvement is in practical training programmes, primary education and basic vocational programmes in secondary education. There are also clear signs of improvement in special primary education and (secondary) special education. There has been no improvement in the quality of secondary vocational education. The number of unsatisfactory study programmes in funded secondary vocational education is increasing. There is also only a slight improvement in pre-university education (VWO) and mixed/theoretical programmes and advanced vocational programmes in pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO).

¹ Wolf, I.F. de, & Verkroost, J.J.H. (2011). Evaluatie van de theorie en praktijk van het nieuwe onderwijstoezicht. Tijdschrift voor toezicht, 2 (2), 7-24.

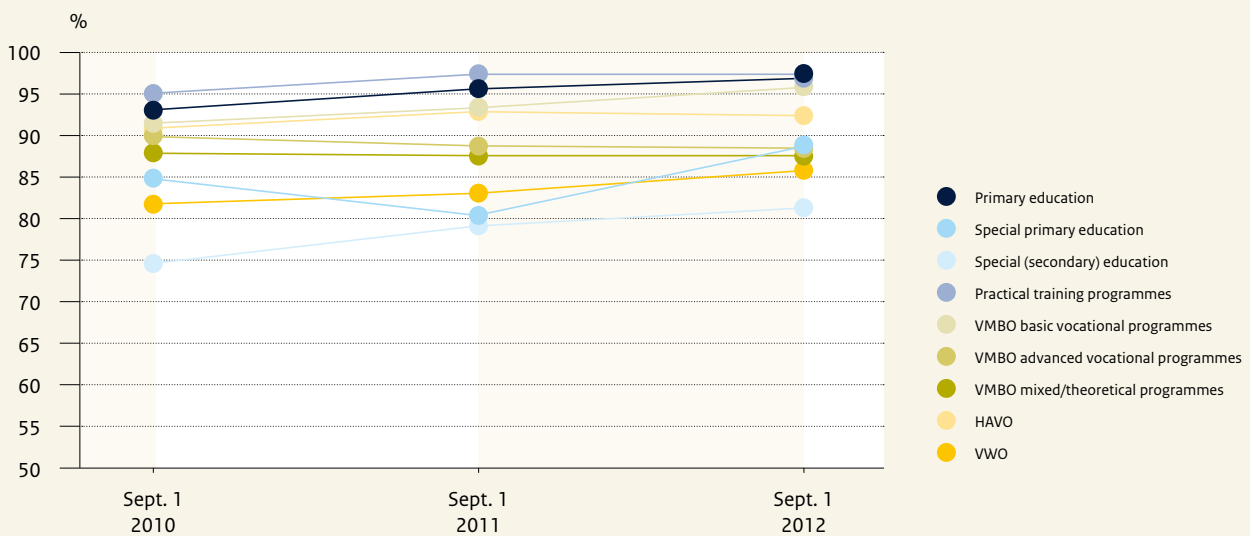


Possibilities for schools that already meet the basic standards

The schools and study programmes that currently meet the basic standards can often improve in terms of education to meet students' individual needs, care and support, quality assurance, results-oriented teaching and examination quality.

Quality improvement in education is stagnating

Percentage of schools or departments that meet the minimum standards set by the Inspectorate



Source: The Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2012

“We were very eager to become ‘green’: it really increased the workload within the organization. In order to make it a success, everyone had to give 200%.”

Underperforming schools show strong improvement

The improvement in quality seen at what previously were weak and unsatisfactory schools and study programmes can be ascribed to the efforts of teachers and school directors. In almost all schools and study programmes, they are successful in raising the quality for pupils and students to an acceptable level. In some cases, they receive support from special teams, municipal policy or other improvement initiatives. At what previously were weak or unsatisfactory schools, improvements are almost always seen in the educational process and in learning performance. These improvements are usually so significant that the schools and study programmes raise

standards to above average. The improvements also appear to be permanent. Schools that were previously weak or unsatisfactory are actually more likely than other schools to have an educational process that is up to the standard and tend to continue to have a better insight into their own quality.

Schools achieving basic quality show little or no improvement

There is a large group of schools and study programmes where the teaching and learning process is of average quality. These schools are all relatively similar in this respect. They also show few differences in terms of learning performance and value added (the improvements in performance made by pupils and students)².

² Timmermans, A. (2012). Value Added in Educational Accountability: Possible, Fair and Useful? Groningen: University of Groningen (thesis).



46%

In 46% of primary schools, the educational process is satisfactory in terms of all standard indicators.



20%

In 20% of departments in secondary education, the educational process is satisfactory in terms of all standard indicators.

In the MBO sector, there is room for improvement in terms of quality assurance for study programmes and institutions, as well as examination quality



In recent years, there have been almost no visible improvements in the educational process at these schools. Equally, test scores, examination and other results and percentage pass rates have seen little or no improvements. In other words, this group of schools and study programmes is not showing the same quality improvements as the weak or unsatisfactory schools and study programmes. The result of this is a systemic stagnation in quality development. It also means that the improvement in quality in the educational process seen in recent years is not continuing. Indeed, in some areas, educational quality is declining.

Basic quality achieved, but shortcomings still evident

In this large group of schools and study programmes of average quality, the Inspectorate almost always identifies one or several shortcomings. It is by no means the case that schools and study programmes will receive a satisfactory assessment for all of the major quality indicators. In primary education, 46% of schools are judged satisfactory

for all quality indicators in the educational process. For most programmes in secondary education, this figure is around 20%. In funded secondary vocational education (bekostigd MBO), more than 10% of the study programmes inspected had no shortcomings identified. The quality of teaching is below standard in too many lessons. For example, schools and institutions are unable to differentiate the teaching to meet individual needs in the lessons. Aspects of care and supervision, results-oriented teaching and quality assurance are also unsatisfactory in many cases. In the MBO sector, there is room for improvement in the quality of the examinations. As a result of the shortcomings, education in all of these areas is showing little or no improvement. This is despite the quality initiatives taken in most sectors and efforts to encourage results-oriented teaching.

MBO

On 1 September 2012, 22 study programmes in funded secondary vocational education were unsatisfactory. This is an increase compared to 2011.

+ 8.3%

Special primary education shows quality improvement. On 1 September 2011 19.7% were unsatisfactory, on 1 September 2012, 11.4% were unsatisfactory. There is now more results-oriented teaching.

CATEGORIES OF SUPERVISION

BASIC SUPERVISION

The annual risk analysis or quality assessment shows no risk for educational quality. Results are at the expected level and the school has the confidence of the Inspectorate.

WEAK QUALITY CATEGORY

The quality of education at these weak schools has major shortcomings. The Inspectorate intensifies its supervision to improve quality as quickly as possible.

UNSATISFACTORY QUALITY CATEGORY

The quality of education at these unsatisfactory schools has major shortcomings. Both the results and the educational processes are inadequate. The Inspectorate intensifies its supervision.

Decrease in the number of good schools

In all educational sectors, there are examples of schools and study programmes that meet all of the quality indicators: they have no shortcomings. In primary education, this applies to slightly more than half of all schools; in secondary education, it applies to one in five departments. In recent years, this proportion has not increased and is showing evidence of a downward trend

mark of 7.5 or higher. This percentage had decreased in recent years, but increased again in 2012. In secondary vocational education and higher education, the situation is similar. Here too, a large majority of institutions return only average results, while a small group shows outstanding results. There is significant variation between study programmes and subject areas.

Room for improvement

The Inspectorate concludes that the basic quality is being achieved in most schools and study programmes. Despite this, shortcomings have also been identified at most schools and quality development is stagnating across the board. There is room for improvement and the level of ambition must be raised. This particularly applies to the large group of schools and study programmes already achieving the basic level of quality. Achieving basic quality should not be seen as the final target. First and foremost, there needs to be more effective differentiation to cater for the varying needs of students and groups of students. Other areas for improvement include: pastoral care, quality assurance, results-oriented teaching and the quality of examinations. At the primary schools that score better in these areas, this is also reflected in better pupil performance.

Achieving basic quality should not be seen as the final target

in primary education. The proportion of schools performing outstandingly in primary and secondary education is even smaller. Only 9% of primary schools have an average score higher than 540 in the Final Test in Primary Education. This percentage is decreasing. In secondary education, only a very small percentage of schools have a high average final examination figure: a

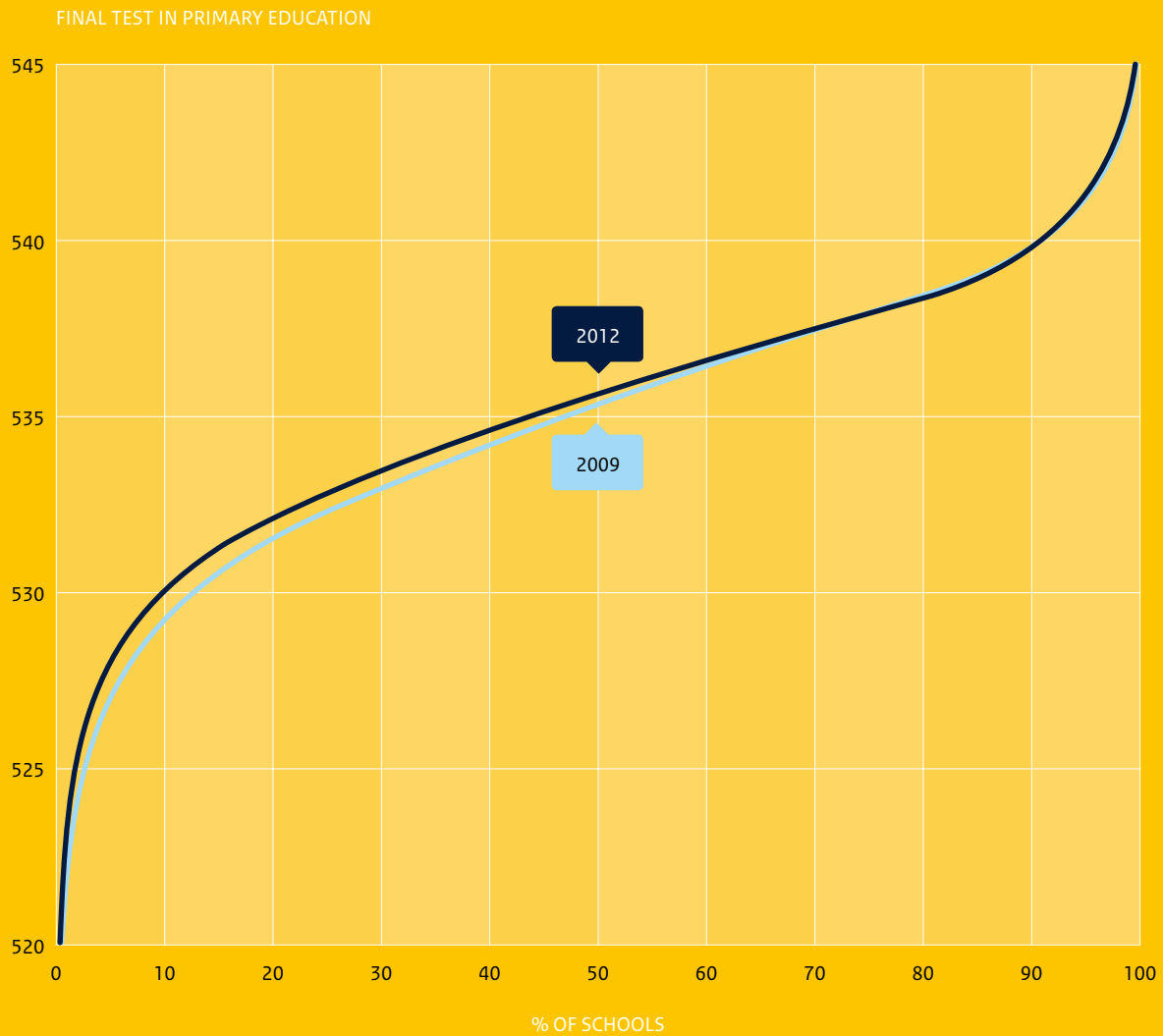
“The school has become more ambitious and better structured, a highly positive development. There have been clear improvements in the teachers’ commitment, ambition and teamwork in recent years.”

“The Inspectorate’s assessment came as a relief for many: we knew that there were problems and now we need to sort them. Of course, it was hard to take, but the team set to work on improvements straight away.”

“After the Inspectorate’s assessment, there was a feeling of disbelief that our department was underperforming. The Inspectorate’s assessment was the jolt we needed. The challenge we now face is to continue to evaluate ourselves and stay on track.”

Results for Final Test in Primary Education between 2009 and 2012

The results for the Final Test in Primary Education between 2009 and 2012 showed improvements at the lower levels, but the top half of schools remained the same.



There is improvement at the lower levels: in other words schools that have relatively low test scores. These schools have improved between 2009 and 2012. This shows that improvement is possible, but it remains limited to this group.

The test scores for the groups of schools in the middle and at the top have not changed between 2009 and 2012. The situation is stagnating and it appears that schools are satisfied with their current levels of attainment. Do they lack ambition or is it proving impossible to improve? Other countries can achieve improvements.



2. Pupils' and students' performance

SCHOOL POLICY IS A KEY FACTOR IN PUPILS' AND STUDENTS' OPPORTUNITIES



International comparisons

Compared to other countries, there is little difference in the Netherlands between students who perform well and those who do not and only 3% to 7% of students in year six achieved the highest level.

PUPILS' AND STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IS GOOD

The Netherlands has very few poorly performing pupils, but also very few who are outstanding. Are we getting the best out of every pupil? What impact does school policy have on pupils' opportunities and what role does the teacher play?

Few poorly performing pupils but also few who are outstanding

Pupils' and students' performance is good. International comparisons show that Dutch pupils are just below the best performing in the world. There are few pupils and students who perform poorly. The Netherlands has a low percentage of school dropouts and a large proportion of students continue into higher education.

Positive developments up to 2012

The relatively good educational performance is partly the result of positive developments seen in recent years³:

- the increase in performance in primary education;
- the increase in the percentage of students who go to HAVO and VWO institutions;
- the increase in the number of students in higher education;
- the improving results in funded secondary vocational education;
- the decrease in the number of early school-leavers.

³ Scheerens, J., Luyten, H., & Ravens, J. van (2010). Visies op onderwijskwaliteit. Met illustratieve gegevens over de kwaliteit van het Nederlandse primair en secundair onderwijs. Enschede: Twente University.



91%

In 2012, 91% of all final examination candidates achieved an average of more than 5.5 for all subjects in the national examination.

+7%

This is an increase compared to 2011.

+0.7%

As a result of the more rigorous demands of the examination, the percentage of failures increased only slightly.

“What has changed since the visit by the Inspectorate is that we now work in separate groups with those children who are slightly advanced and those who need more support. This is a great development because you are not held up by children who do not understand.”

“There is now a greater focus on what the individual pupil needs. This applies both in terms of pastoral care and educational performance.”

“People also became more critical and there were complaints. There were regular incidents. These are now a thing of the past. We have achieved this by creating an appropriate educational climate.”



Grade retention

There are significant variations in the numbers of students repeating years across different schools. At some schools, virtually all students move on to the next year and at some schools 30% or more pupils have to repeat the year. In VMBO schools, relatively few students repeat the year, whereas there are relatively large numbers in HAVO schools.



85%
of those in the second stage of secondary education successfully complete the school year.

Positive trend fails to continue

The increase in educational performance seen in recent years did not continue in most sectors in 2012. Results in secondary vocational education remained stable and decreased in higher professional education. The number of dropouts in higher professional education and university education showed an increase in 2012. In secondary education, the increase in students in the HAVO and VWO sectors has halted after many years⁴. The average performance levels in primary education

Improvement in educational performances fails to continue, development stagnates

were also unchanged in 2012, compared to 2011. It is still too early to tell whether this means that the upward trend of recent years has reached a standstill. The results in the national examination in secondary education proved to be a positive exception in 2012. In all streams within secondary education, these increased significantly, partly as a consequence of the new examination requirements. This marks an end to the slight downward trend in marks for the national examination in recent years.

Few poorly performing pupils and students and few who are outstanding

Dutch education serves poorly performing pupils well. According to the international PIRLS and TIMSS studies, the number of

Dutch pupils unable to complete simple tasks is exceptionally low⁵. However, the Netherlands also has few pupils who perform exceptionally well. It also appears that the proportion of pupils performing well has begun to decline in recent years. For example, the number of pupils in primary education with a score higher than 548 in the Final Test in Primary Education has decreased from 5.4% to 4.9% in the last two years. In the VWO sector, around 10% of pupils have an average mark of 7.5 or higher in the national examination. This percentage has decreased in recent years, but showed an increase in 2012, in common with other types of education.

Not all schools offer the same opportunities

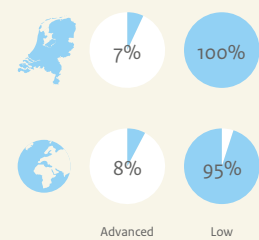
Schools and study programmes make a range of choices in terms of policy relating to students repeating a year, being placed at a higher or lower level, advice and selection. For example, whereas some schools focus on providing pupils opportunities by placing them in the highest possible level of class, other schools may opt for a stricter policy where pupils are more likely to be placed in a lower level. The differences between schools on these points are much greater than the differences in performance and results. Although these policy choices have an impact on pupils' and students' school careers, they often have no rational basis and pupils and parents may even be unaware of them.

Misplaced strategies

In order to obtain good results, some schools even make choices that unintentionally hinder pupils in their school careers. In secondary education, there are

Performance in reading

A low percentage of pupils are proficient at the highest performance level.



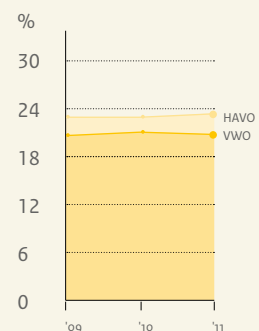
Score in Final Test in Primary Education

Percentage of pupils with score in the Final Test in Primary Education in excess of 548 has decreased slightly (from 5.4% in 2011 to 4.9% in 2012).

-0.5%

Number of pupils

The upward trend in the percentage of HAVO and VWO pupils is stagnating.

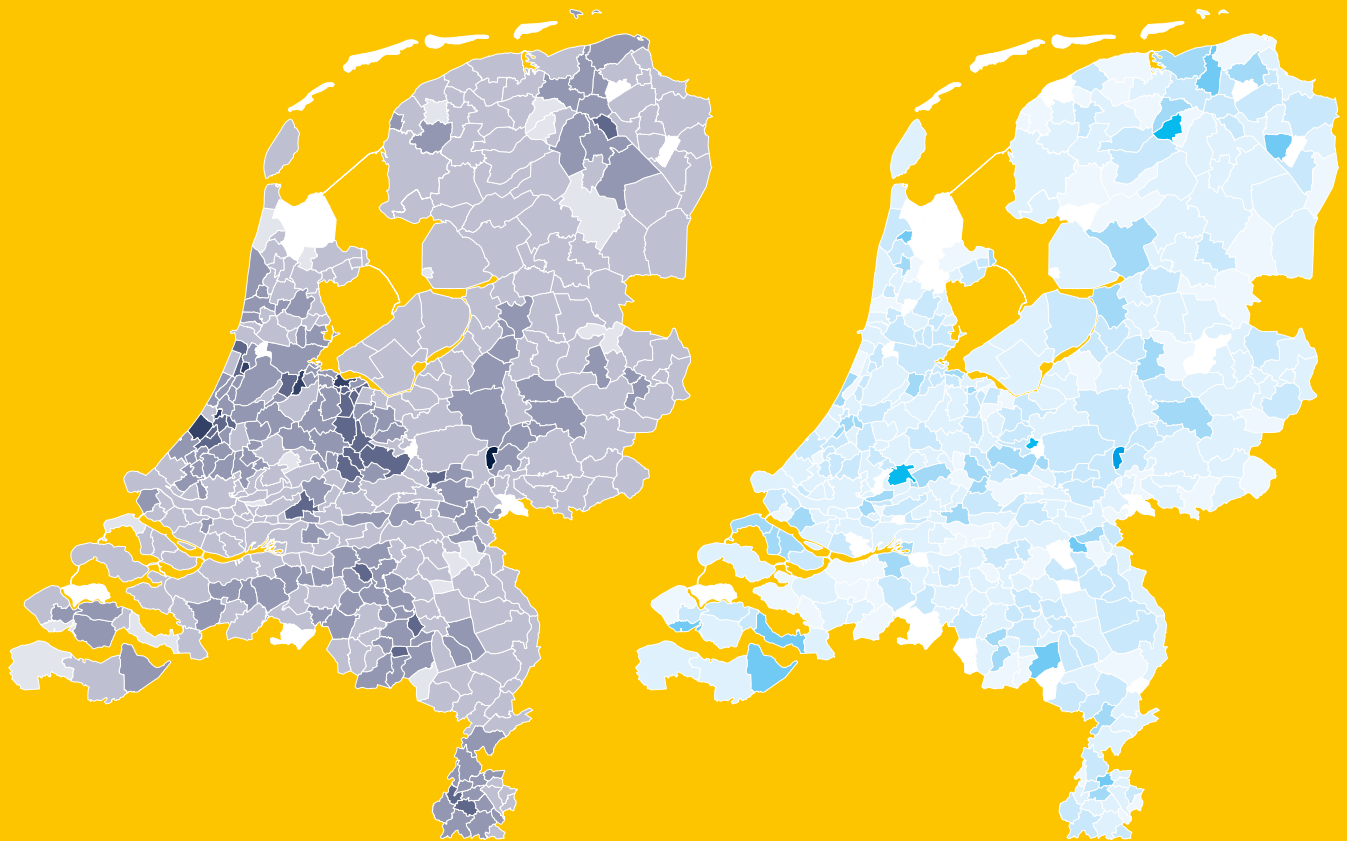


⁴ Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2012). Kerncijfers 2007-2011. Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap. The Hague: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW).

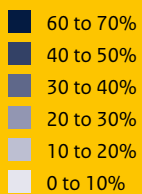
⁵ Netten, A., Droop, M., Verhoeven, L., Meelissen, M.R.M., Drent, M., & Punter, R.A. (2012). Trends in leerprestaties in Lezen, Rekenen en Natuuronderwijs. PIRLS TIMSS 2011. Nijmegen: Radboud University.

Spread of pupils performing outstandingly in the Netherlands

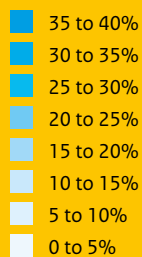
The percentage of pupils who successfully complete their VWO diploma and the percentage of VWO pupils achieving 7.5 or higher in the national examination for the core subjects, by municipality.



Percentage of pupils that pass the VWO diploma compared to all final examination candidates in secondary education.



Percentage of pupils in VWO that achieve an average of 7.5 or higher in the national examination for the core subjects.



Source: The Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2012



Special (secondary) education

In special education, alongside the focus on care, there is also an increasing emphasis on pupil development and results. The wide variations between schools in terms of pupils' progression are particularly striking. Whether a pupil progresses from special education to mainstream schooling will very much depend on his or her school.

schools that bar pupils who achieved relatively low scores in the Final Test in Primary Education. This sometimes also includes pupils who have already repeated a year. Some schools make large groups of pupils repeat the year before the examination year. Others move pupils to lower levels for strategic reasons or exclude particular pupils from participation in examinations or tests. In all sectors however, the Inspectorate encounters many schools and study programmes that achieve good results and offer pupils opportunities, without excluding any pupils.

Focus on results in special education

For the first time, there has been an assessment of the progress made by pupils in special (secondary) education: what follow-up courses do they usually take? In special education, alongside the focus on pastoral care, there is

Care and supervision outside the classroom have improved, but there is still insufficient support and care for pupils that need it in a third of all lessons

also an increasing emphasis on pupil development and results. Combined with new legislation, this has resulted in a quality boost. Clear learning objectives have been set for the pupils. The teaching is now concentrating more rigorously on the achievement of these objectives. However, there are still major differences between schools. Where a pupil from special (secondary) education ends up still depends too much on the school at which they are taught.

Care and support in the classroom

For pupils, it is important that teachers understand their specific situations and take account of these. This applies both to pupils who are performing well and can be given additional challenges and to pupils who are at risk or

require additional support. The latter group also require effective differentiation, support and supervision. Progress has been made in this area in recent years, which is a positive development. However, this primarily concerns improvements outside the classroom (the registration of pupils, for example or the operation of pastoral care and advice teams). The pupils who are most obviously at risk are benefiting from this in particular. The next step will need to be an improvement in the care and support provided in the classroom. In many lessons, this is already up to standard, but in a significant proportion (around one third) it is not. As Individualized Education (passend onderwijs) is introduced in the coming years, support in the classroom will become increasingly important.

Focus on social qualities

Pupils' social competencies also matter. Many schools do work on the development of pupils' social competencies, but do not chart the results that are achieved by education in this area. If pupils are socially competent, this is conducive to a safe school climate and reduces bullying. The vast majority of pupils feel safe at school but this is not the case for everyone. There was an increase in the number of reports of bullying made to the confidential inspector in 2011/2012, although this may be the result of the greater focus on the issue in wider society.

"The clear rules work well. Although it is difficult to keep to the rules, there is less bullying at school."

"In special education, the demands are now greater: you have to teach the pupils. Targets are set for pupils that we intend to achieve. Thanks to the records being kept, teachers have a better understanding of how a child is developing. In the past, some teachers would keep such records, but now all of us do."

3. Teachers and professional development

IN GENERAL, TEACHERS ARE TEACHING EFFECTIVELY



Professional development

Training is often too discretionary and is not always targeted at the areas in which individual teachers need to improve. Teachers are not always aware of their strengths and weaknesses. There is still little peer review involving feedback from colleagues or lesson observations.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE FOCUSED ON IMPROVING SCHOOLS

Most teachers are good teachers. But some of them can and must improve. What role can professional development play in this? Are teachers being offered sufficient opportunity for professional development and is this being used effectively?

The teacher: from good to better

Teachers are motivated to teach well and in most cases this is successful. Most teachers effectively explain the subject matter, achieve a focused working environment and actively involve students or pupils in the lesson. In other words, they are proficient in the basic skills. This applies to teachers in all educational sectors.

However, there is a group of teachers to whom this does not apply. They are not sufficiently proficient in all of the basic skills. The size of this group differs according to the sector and the type of education. It makes up 11 to 30% of the total. The group is the smallest in practical training programmes and in primary education. It is the largest in the mixed/theoretical VMBO programmes. In recent years, the total size of the group of teachers who are not fully proficient in the basic skills would appear to have been increasing slightly. For example, the percentage of primary schools that have too many lessons in which the explanation of the subject matter is not satisfactory has increased since 2004 from 2% to 11%.

Difficulties with differentiation

Most teachers are proficient in the basic skills. This is not the case when it comes to more complex skills. The majority of teachers find it difficult to differentiate, in other words to tailor the teaching to cater for the individual

differences between pupils and students and provide feedback. The teachers who can do this effectively serve the average pupil well, but also those that are less able or those who require additional challenges. Somewhere between half and two-thirds of teachers are not fully proficient in these complex skills. The percentage varies slightly between the sectors, but appears to be stable over the years. The percentage identified by the Inspectorate is similar to figures published in other studies⁶.

Starting teachers and unqualified teachers

Most schools include a wide mixture of different teachers: some are proficient in all skills, but for others this is not yet the case. New teachers and those who are unqualified have difficulties with the basic skills. They often fail to explain the subject matter adequately, are less likely to achieve a task-oriented working environment in the classroom or to actively involve pupils in the lesson. This is an important issue, as many teachers are set to retire from education as the population continues to age in the years to come. This will mean that a large number of new teachers will enter education. Otherwise, there are minor differences in terms of skills between men and women or between teachers of different ages. In all of these groups, some teachers are proficient in the basic and the more complex skills. Others are proficient in the basic skills only and a small number are not even proficient in these.

⁶ Grift, W. van de, Wal, M. van der, & Torenbeek, M. (2011). Ontwikkeling van de pedagogisch-didactische vaardigheden van leraren in het basisonderwijs. *Pedagogische Studiën*, 88 (6), 416-432.



Most teachers...

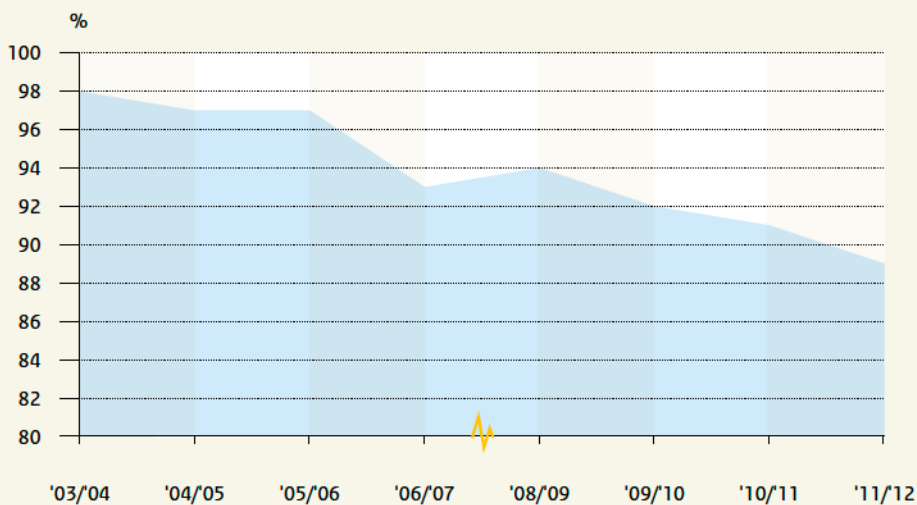
- explain the subject matter clearly;
- create a task-oriented working environment;
- keep pupils involved in the lesson.



83%
of primary school teachers are proficient in all the basic skills.

Teachers in primary education

The number of primary schools where teachers explain the subject matter clearly, in percentages



-9%
The number of primary schools where teachers explain the subject matter clearly has decreased in the last 10 years from 98% to 89%.

Source: The Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2012

Awareness of strengths and weaknesses

The teacher, the team and the school directors must all have a good insight into the strengths and weaknesses in lessons and in teachers. This is the case for a proportion of schools and institutions, but certainly not for all. The impression that good teachers have of themselves is often accurately reflected in the qualities that the inspectors identify when observing their lessons. This is not the case for weaker teachers. People in this group often have insufficient awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses. It would appear that these teachers do not receive sufficient feedback from colleagues or school directors. An inadequate understanding of one's own ability means that people find it difficult to direct their own professional development. As a result, they are rarely, if ever, successful in this. If there are lesson observations in schools or study programmes, these are generally conducted by the school directors or management. Teachers receive little feedback from colleagues, for example by observing each other's lessons.

Room for professional development and improvement

In general, teachers have sufficient independence at

schools and institutions. Most teachers use this to teach good lessons and work together to improve the school or department. Many teachers are not only involved in their own lessons and professional development, but also play a role in the development of the school as a whole. Sometimes the pressure of work can limit professional development. Schools vary widely in terms of the extent to which they provide teachers with support or facilitate their development.

Training often too discretionary

Schools and institutions have budgets for individual training courses and for team training. In primary education in particular, it is often the case that the budget and time available are used for general team training. This means that it may not always be tailored to teachers' individual needs. In secondary mainstream and vocational education, many schools leave it to individual teachers to decide on their own professional development. This means that the training becomes primarily the choice of individual teachers and is a discretionary activity. Teachers themselves state that their training often lacks any focus on improving teaching itself, the most important task.



37%
of primary school teachers are proficient in all the complex skills.



55%
of the teachers in practical training programmes are proficient in all the skills.



“We have a peer review programme in the school. It means that you observe various other teachers’ lessons several times each year. It is up to you to decide who you will work with and observe. I find that the person I work with gives me good and useful feedback.”

“Mediocre staffing policy was putting a lot of pressure on the other members of the team. People were appointed in whom we had to make a lot of additional investment rather than reducing the workload. The managers are now more effective in the selection process and the support provided to new teachers has improved. A more individualized approach is being adopted.”

“Being rated as unsatisfactory is not pleasant. It makes you want to prove that you are capable of more as a teacher, a school and a team than you have demonstrated. Work has become more enjoyable for us as a result.”

Underperforming teachers

Weaker teachers often have an insufficient understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses: this makes it difficult to deploy the right professional development to improve their teaching.



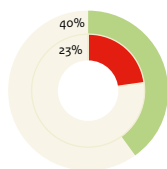
SKILLS DEFINITIONS

BASIC SKILLS

- The teacher clearly explains the subject matter.
- The teacher creates a task-oriented learning environment.
- Pupils are actively involved.

MORE COMPLEX SKILLS

- The teacher tailors the lessons to various needs.
- The teacher tailors the assignments to various needs.
- The teacher tailors the available time to various needs.
- The teacher monitors and analyses the progress of pupils (PO).
- The teacher provides specific care to vulnerable pupils (PO).
- The teacher ascertains that the pupils understand the subject matter (VO).
- The teacher provides substantive feedback (VO).



At primary schools which achieve the basic quality level, an average of 40% of teachers are proficient in the basic skills and the more complex skills. This figure is 23% for weak and unsatisfactory primary schools.

Too many new teachers are insufficiently proficient in the basic skills

Feedback from peers improves lessons

Teachers primarily need professional development activities that help them to operate more effectively and with greater ease in the classroom. A recent study conducted by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (Centraal Planbureau, CPB) shows that training that focuses on teaching quality ultimately results in better educational performances from pupils⁷. Feedback from peers can assist in this. Examples of this include peer reviews and on-the-job coaching. The differences in the quality of lessons within schools mean that there are plenty of opportunities for teachers to learn from each other, but this does not happen everywhere. School directors vary in the extent to which they enable teachers to engage in these kinds of professional development activities. Some teachers do not have the opportunity to do so because the timetable or pressure of work prevents it. For others, this presents no such obstacle. If this type of professional development activity does take place, it is often at the initiative of the more effective teachers.

Results for teacher training colleges lower than on average

The intake at the teacher training colleges for primary education (PABOs) has decreased in recent years. Because fewer students are entering PABO teacher training colleges from secondary vocational education, the nature of

the intake is gradually changing. The intake now includes more students with HAVO or VWO qualifications. At other teacher training institutions, the intake has remained unchanged. The results achieved by all of the teacher training programmes are lower on average than other higher professional education programmes. Students are also less satisfied than in other sectors. Despite this, the graduates are relatively satisfied⁸. In recent years, new undergraduate programmes for teachers have started, including the academic teacher training colleges for primary education. Student numbers are increasing gradually on these courses.

Quality of teacher training courses must improve

The teaching profession is not an easy one. It sets very high demands on teachers. The teacher training courses must therefore be of good quality. Part of this means setting the bar high for their students. Unless all new teachers are able to explain the subject matter clearly, there is room for improvement in these courses. Teachers must be able to provide additional care and support to pupils that need it. They must also be capable of challenging the most able pupils and students. This currently happens too rarely. Teacher training programmes need to place greater emphasis on these complex teaching skills. In recent years there have been significant efforts to improve quality in both kinds of teacher training institution, but it is too early to see the results. The quality of alternative training routes for teachers, such as those for transfer students, is not always adequate. Teacher training courses should provide better support to these students when on work placement⁹.

⁷ CPB (2013). Evaluatie pilot investeren in kwaliteit leraren. CPB Background Document The Hague: Centraal Planbureau (CPB). ⁸ ROA (2012). Schoolverlaters tussen onderwijs en arbeidsmarkt. Maastricht: Research Centre for Education and Research (ROA). ⁹ The Dutch Inspectorate of Education (2012). Evaluatie van het zij-instroomtraject van leraren in het voortgezet onderwijs en het beroepsonderwijs. Utrecht: The Dutch Inspectorate of Education.

The skills of teachers

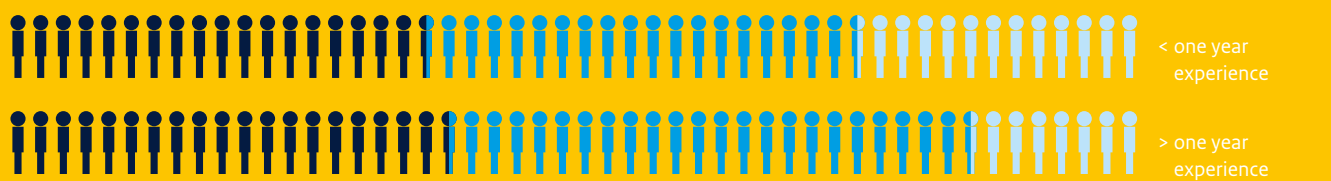
- Satisfactory in basic and more complex skills
- Satisfactory in basic skills, but not in more complex skills
- Unsatisfactory in at least one basic skill

} 2%

Quality of lessons in primary education



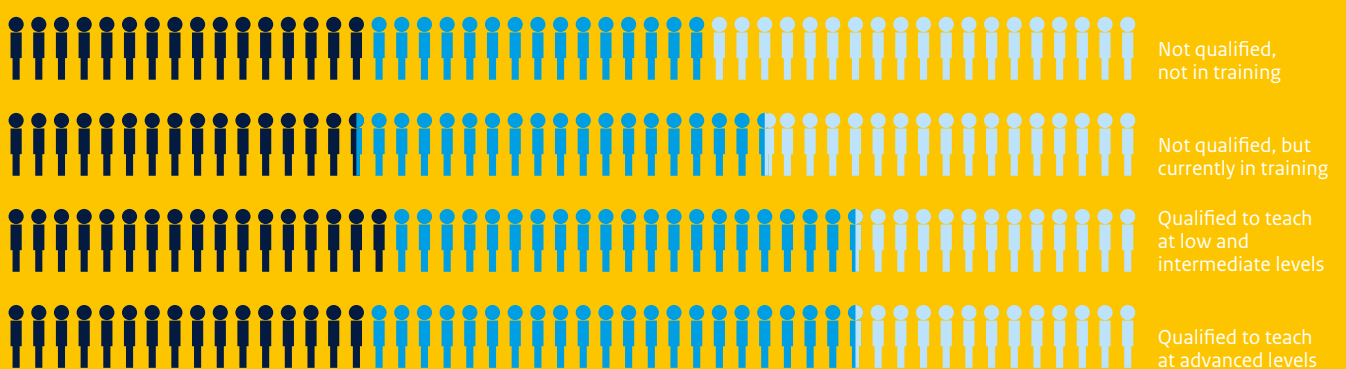
Proficiency in the teaching skills among different groups of teachers



Quality of lessons in secondary education



Proficiency in the teaching skills among different groups of teachers



Source: The Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2012

4. School boards and finances

A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL SPENDING IS NEEDED



Good practice

Some school boards have successfully improved the quality of weak and unsatisfactory schools and study programmes. School boards that are successful sometimes act independently but also often work in partnership with other boards and/or government authorities such as municipalities and provinces.

WEAK SCHOOLS ENCOURAGE BOARDS TO IMPROVE QUALITY ASSURANCE

School directors and boards bear an important responsibility for the quality of education. Do school boards focus on this sufficiently as a priority or do they mainly concentrate on the facilitating framework such as accommodation and staffing? What role is played by the financial situation?

The quality of education is a responsibility of school boards

School directors and board members play an important role in improving the teaching process. Boards that were previously responsible for weak or unsatisfactory schools have successfully turned a corner. In recent years, they have made major progress in improving the quality of education. For example, they have called directors to account for the results or used staffing policy as a mechanism to secure improvements. As a result, hardly any of these boards now have weak or unsatisfactory schools or study programmes. In cases where they do, this rarely lasts long. When improving quality, school boards sometimes act independently but also often in partnership with other boards and/or municipalities and provinces. This is how the basic quality of primary and secondary education in Amsterdam was significantly improved across the board. Similar developments can be seen in the northern provinces¹⁰. School boards in Almere are also engaged in successful initiatives. In addition, many individual school boards have responded to the emergence of weak and unsatisfactory schools by improving their quality assurance systems. At the schools run by these boards, not only has educational performance improved, there has also been a significant improvement in quality assurance.

Some school boards lack the aspiration to succeed

Some, though not many, school boards are failing to make the necessary quality improvements. They have one or more schools or study programmes that are weak or unsatisfactory over a longer period. They also have relatively large numbers of study programmes or schools that do not meet the basic quality requirements. In primary education, they make up 1% of all school boards, in secondary education 5% and in special (secondary) education 13%. Often these are boards that have schools in several educational sectors. During the last year, incidents have also occurred that make it clear that not all school boards have quality and finances under adequate control. More specifically, there needs to be an improvement in quality assurance in MBO, since it is currently below standard at least in part at two-thirds of these institutions.

Greater focus on teaching needed

The involvement of school boards in the quality of teaching has increased in recent years – most particularly if weak or unsatisfactory schools are involved. Many school boards focus their activities on the facilitating framework for good teaching, such as finances and accommodation. However

¹⁰ The Dutch Inspectorate of Education (2012). De kwaliteit van basisscholen en bestuurlijk handelen in het noorden van Nederland. Utrecht: The Dutch Inspectorate of Education.

Number of boards with underperforming schools is decreasing.



2%
of school boards in primary education have long-term unsatisfactory schools.



15%
of school boards in secondary education have long-term weak or unsatisfactory schools.



“The board started to actively monitor the department: there were weekly contacts between the school directors and the board. During this period, additional financial resources were invested to deal with the issue.”

“Following the assessment by the Inspectorate, many teachers were in denial. Subsequently, the board pushed for investment in effective assessment and in-service training for teachers and made cuts in the general budget to create a sense of urgency.”

“As a further step, specific standards were developed for the school. These are higher than the standard set by the Inspectorate. We did this to ensure that we continue to perform well and to exceed our ambitions.”



57%
of the major school boards in primary education (with more than 20 schools) do not have a single unsatisfactory school.

Boards' priorities

Many boards focus primarily on the facilitating framework such as accommodation and staffing and do not involve themselves sufficiently in the development of teachers and the educational process.

At the moment, internal supervision does not appear to be an adequate control mechanism

important these may be, the development of teachers and the quality of the educational process are equally vital. Especially at average and good schools, there is too little discussion of how and where improvements can be made. Some school boards would benefit from giving this greater priority. Ultimately it concerns the pupils and students and the quality of the education. Indeed, schools run by boards in primary education that place greater emphasis on quality also achieve better results¹¹. Moreover, performance reviews are not conducted sufficiently frequently with school directors and managers. If the basic quality is up to standard, most school boards are satisfied.

Few school boards with a financial risk

At the end of 2012, the finances at most of the approximately 4,000 school boards were in order. However, a small proportion are exposed to unnecessary financial risks. This concerns seven boards running vocational education and adult education institutions. The boards of these institutions have been placed under special financial supervision. In primary education, there are financial risks at 35 boards, at five boards in special (secondary) education and at 35 boards in secondary education. These figures broadly reflect those of last year. There appears to be a link between financial risks and deteriorating educational quality. Boards that

take an increased financial risk are slightly more likely to be running large numbers of or long-term weak or unsatisfactory schools or study programmes.

Awareness of financial risks essential

Education is also being affected by reduced funding. Economic viability is declining in all sectors. Some school boards are reserving less funding for education. During the last years, several institutions facing major problems of this nature have featured in the news. The underlying causes include decreasing numbers of students (declining population), government cutbacks or unexpectedly high outgoings for staffing or accommodation. In some cases, boards failed to take full account of future financial developments. Often they do not have long-term budgets. Boards find it difficult to make realistic forecasts. They are often too optimistic and do not properly account for the financial risks. Realistic forecasts and long-term budgets are essential preconditions for the effective running of institutions and schools.

Expenditure not substantiated

With funding under pressure, many school boards face some important choices with regard to how they should prioritize spending. For pupils and students, it is important that the choices they make are not at the cost of the quality of the education. Boards have a tendency to spend most of their money on the facilitating framework, such as accommodation. Whether this results in better education is uncertain. For many areas of expenditure, little is known about their effect on the quality of education. As a result, boards sometimes make choices that do not benefit quality and do not result in a healthy financial policy.

Financial risks in

35

primary education boards

35

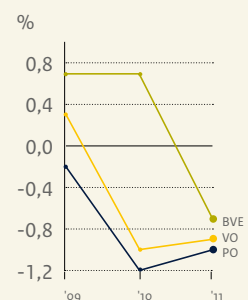
secondary education boards

Sharpened financial supervision for

7

boards of adult education (BVE)

In 2011 negative economic viability in primary education (PO), secondary education (VO) and vocational education and adult education (BVE).



¹¹ Hofman, R.H., van Leer, K., de Boom, J. en Hofman, W.H.A. (2012). Eindrapport Themaproject 1: Functioneren van besturen. Groningen: GION.

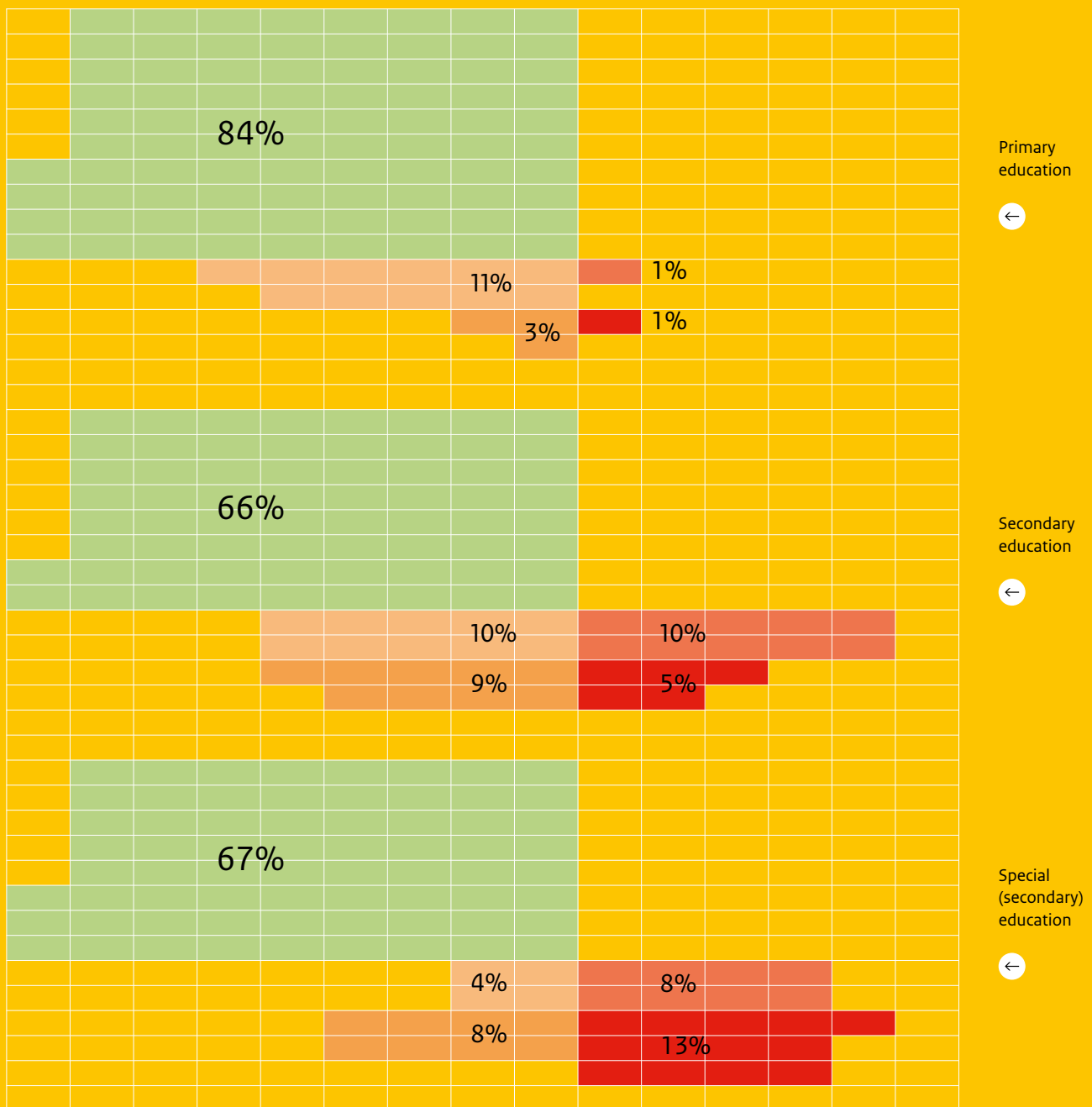
Differences between boards

Boards categorized by the number and duration of weak and unsatisfactory schools per board, expressed as percentages.

- No weak schools
- 0 - 25% weak schools or 0 - 10% unsatisfactory schools
- > 25% weak schools or > 10% unsatisfactory schools
- 0 - 25% weak schools or 0 - 10% unsatisfactory schools
- > 25% weak schools or > 10% unsatisfactory schools

No long-term weak or unsatisfactory schools in 2009-2012

Some long-term weak or unsatisfactory schools in 2009-2012



* For special (secondary) education, the duration of weak institutions was calculated over a shorter period
Source: The Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2012

Quality assurance

A small proportion of boards have large numbers of or long-term weak or unsatisfactory schools or study programmes. Equally, a small proportion do not have their finances sufficiently under control. In some cases, these two factors coincide. More generally, quality assurance is an area in which many school boards could improve.

1/3

Quality assurance is up to standard in only one third of funded secondary vocational education institutions.



DEFINITIONS FOR FINANCIAL SUPERVISION

CONTINUITY

Is the board financially healthy? Is it able to meet its short and long-term financial liabilities? Does the board use some of its resources for effective planning and control?

LEGITIMACY OF FUNDING AND EXPENDITURE

Is the board entitled to the funding it receives from government? Is the money spent in the areas intended in accordance with regulations and legislation?

EFFECTIVENESS

Does the board make effective use of the resources it receives from government? In order to identify financial risks in time, the Inspectorate assesses the annual reports of boards. If these reveal potential risks, the Inspectorate intensifies its supervision of the board concerned.

Internal supervision underdeveloped

Internal supervision is an important control mechanism in managing educational quality and finances. In education, it appears that internal supervision has inadequate control of finances in many areas. There are also very few examples of internal supervisory authorities prompting schools and study programmes to improve quality further.

School boards facing new challenges

As stated previously, the challenges that face school boards include improving the quality of education and reducing financial risks. However, there are other new developments that also demand their attention. In primary and secondary education, this involves the introduction of Individualized Education and the establishment of the associated alliances of schools. In secondary vocational and higher professional education, the most important challenge is to improve quality assurance at institutional level.

“At the start and the end of the school day, you will find me standing by the door as the director. I am there to provide overall support. Correcting when necessary. It is not possible to provide effective leadership from behind a desk.”

Concluding remarks

THE LEVEL OF AMBITION CAN BE HIGHER

Being up to standard on the basics alone is not enough

Compared to other countries, the level of education in the Netherlands is good. The vast majority of schools meet the standards for basic quality. Dutch pupils and students are performing well. Most teachers have the basic skills they need. School boards have shown that they can take decisive action when necessary. The Inspectorate takes a positive view of all of this, but also sees a great deal of room for improvement. Being up to standard on the basics alone is not enough. The level of ambition can be much higher. Teachers, school directors, boards and other actors must join forces to improve education still further.

Educational process shows room for improvement

There is a large group of schools and study programmes of average quality and only a small group that performs above average. This large group in the middle can improve in a number of areas. There needs to be more effective differentiation to cater for the varying needs of students and groups of students. Pastoral care for pupils, quality assurance, results-oriented teaching and the quality of the examinations can also all be improved.

Educational performance can improve even further

The same can be said for the performance of pupils and students: there is a large group of pupils who perform well, but only very few who perform outstandingly. A more individualized approach in the classroom can help to change this. More complex teaching skills, such as differentiation and providing targeted feedback to pupils and students are extremely important in this. Pupils that require additional challenges could be better served. For the more vulnerable pupils, good care and support, including in the classroom, are important.

Teachers can provide each other with feedback

Teachers play an instrumental role in providing an individualized approach and additional care where needed. Their contribution can be invaluable in ensuring that every pupil or student performs to the best of his or her ability. Teacher training courses can focus more attention on complex skills such as differentiation. For teachers already in the classroom, professional development activities within education, such as feedback from peer reviews, can be useful in this. However, this requires support from their team, school directors and the board.

The key focus for boards must be education

Boards need to focus more on the quality of education – and this not only applies to those with weak or unsatisfactory schools. There is too little discussion of potential areas for improvement, especially in those schools and study programmes performing at an average or good level. Staffing policy can be used more effectively, for example through more focused professional development and the deployment of school directors and teachers in different schools or study programmes in order to provide support to a team with large numbers of new teachers.

The Inspectorate will make changes to its supervision

The Inspectorate also intends to assess its own role and explore how it can contribute to improving quality among the group of schools and institutions only achieving the basic quality. Its supervision will become more differentiated: it will focus on other categories over and above basic quality.

Distribution by sector

Numbers of pupils/students, staff members and schools/institutions per sector in 2011.



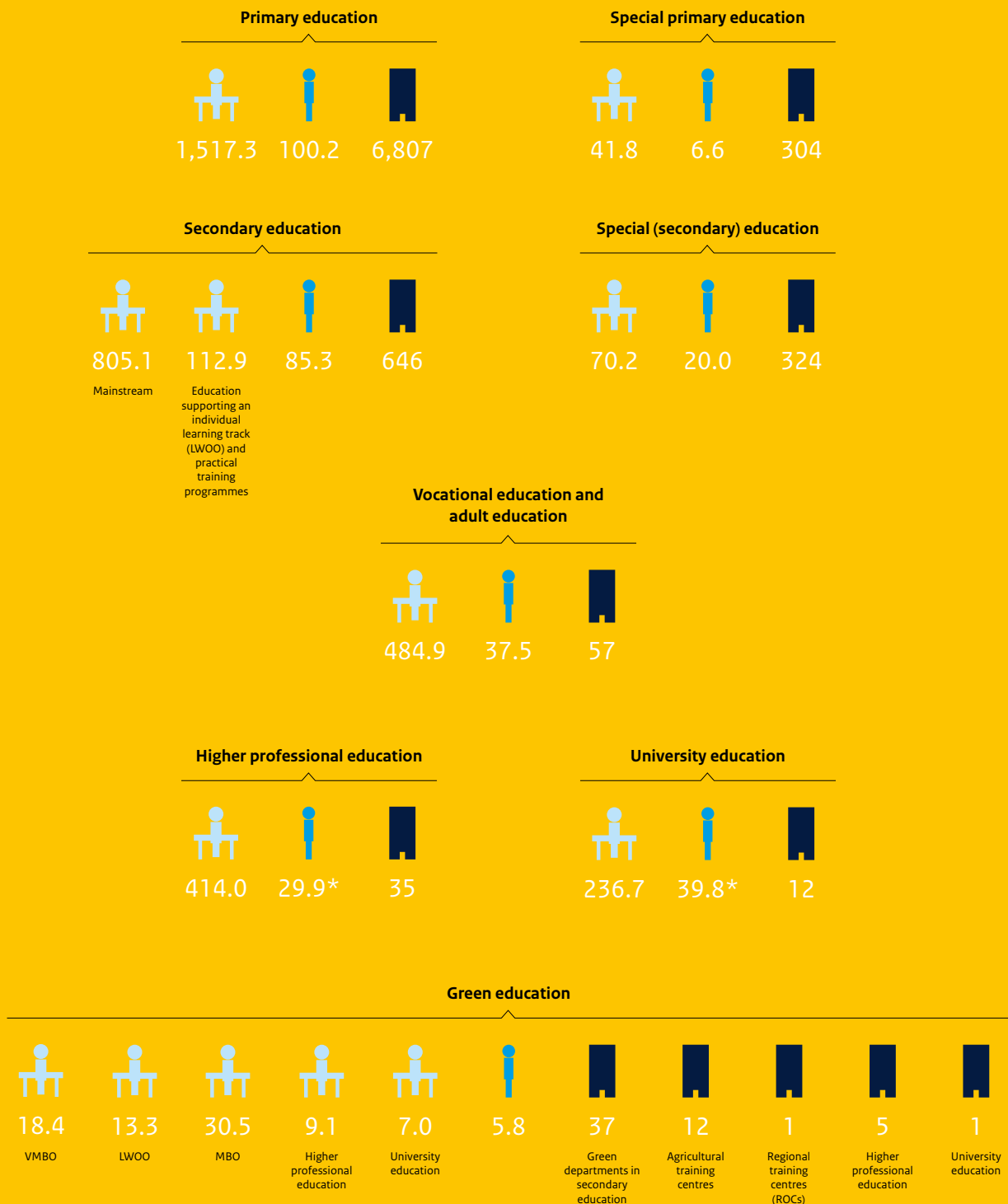
Pupils and students x 1.000



Members of staff (FTE) x 1.000



Schools



* Figures from 2010
Source: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), 2012

Ordering

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