

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Country Report: The Netherlands

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Note: Legislation is quite complex and requires a specific vocabulary. In the text you will find words as act, decree, memorandum, etc. For easy reading, those words can be interpreted as “law” or “governmental policy”.

1. Situating education in the Netherlands¹

Education in the Netherlands is oriented towards the needs and background of the pupil. The type of school depends on the age of the child and there are streams for different educational levels. Schools can be public, special or private schools. Public and special schools are government-funded and free of charge, though schools may ask for parental contribution (*ouderbijdrage*).

Education policies are coordinated by the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW: *onderwijs, cultuur en wetenschap*), together with municipal governments.

In the Netherlands compulsory education (*leerplicht*) starts at the age of five. Most schools however accept children from the age of four. Education is compulsory till the age of sixteen. After that age, education is partially compulsory (*partiële leerplicht*) till the age of 18 and up. Partially compulsory education means a pupil must attend some form of education for at least two days a week.

Public schools are controlled by local governments. Special schools are controlled by a school board. Special schools are typically based on a particular religion. There are government-financed Catholic and Protestant elementary schools, high schools, and universities. Furthermore there are government-funded Jewish and Muslim elementary schools and high schools. In principle a special school can refuse the admission of a pupil if the parents indicate disagreement with the school's educational philosophy. This is an uncommon occurrence. Practically there is little difference between special schools and public schools, except in traditionally religious areas like Zeeland and the Veluwe. Private schools do not receive financial support from the government.

There are also a considerable number of schools receiving public funds which are based on a particular educational philosophy, for instance the Montessori Method, Pestalozzi Plan, Dalton Plan or Jena Plan. Most of these are public schools, but some special schools also base themselves on any of these educational philosophies.

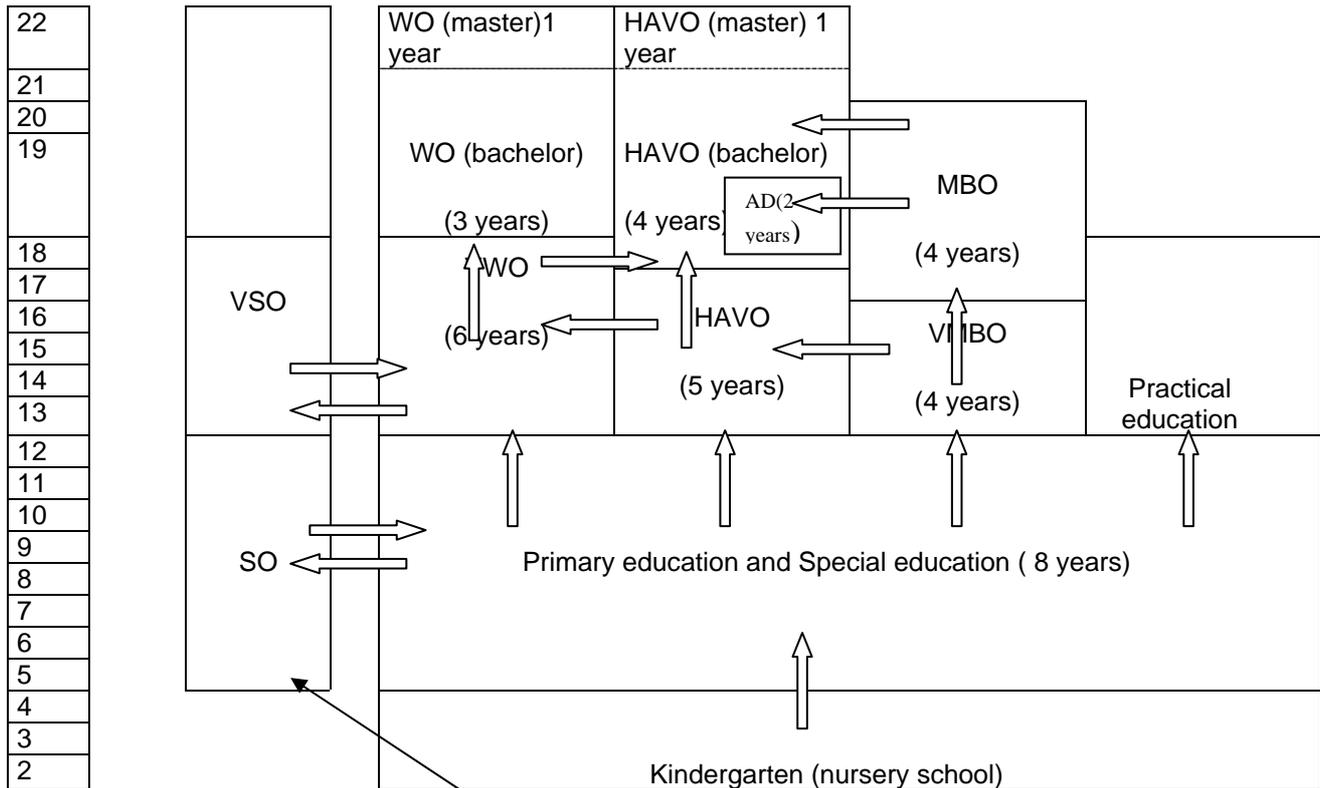
A **special school** (*bijzonder onderwijs*), in the education system of The Netherlands, is a separate category from a public or private school. It is not to be confused with special education (*speciaal onderwijs*), which refers to schools catering for students with severe learning disabilities. It is administered by an independent board, as opposed to a government authority, often based on some religion or ideology. Special schools cannot charge tuition fees over the statutory rate, and they are subsidised at the same level as public schools. They are notably distinct from private schools - of which there are a small but increasing number - which get no subsidies and can charge arbitrary tuition fees.

The special schools were created during the “pillarisation” of Dutch society, when religious and secular parties fought over religious education and reached a rather elaborate compromise.

All school types (public, special and private) are under the jurisdiction of a government body called *Onderwijsinspectie* (Education Inspection) and can be forced to make changes in educational policy or risk closure.

¹ This part of the text is based on the text found on <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education> and has been verified and adapted with data of the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences.

Structure of education in the Netherlands



Basisonderwijs (primary school)

Between the ages of four to twelve, children attend *basisschool* (elementary school; literally, “basis school”). This school has eight stages, from *groep 1* (group 1) through *groep 8*. School attendance is compulsory from group 2 (at age five), but almost all children start school at four (in group 1). Groups 1 and 2 used to be called *kleuterschool* (*nursery school*). From group 3 on, children will learn how to read, write and do maths.

Voortgezet Onderwijs (secondary school)

After attending elementary education, children aged 12 attend *voortgezet onderwijs* (high school; literally “continued education”). Depending on the advice of the elementary school and their score at the Cito test, pupils are assigned to either VMBO, havo or VWO. The first year of all levels is referred to as the *brugklas* (literally, “bridge class”), as it connects the elementary school system to the secondary education system. During this year, pupils will gradually learn to cope with things such as dealing with an increased personal responsibility.

VMBO

The VMBO (*voorbereidend middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*, literally, “preparatory middle-level vocational education”) education lasts four years, from the age of twelve to sixteen. It combines some vocational training with theoretical education. At national level Sixty percent of students are enrolled in VMBO. VMBO itself has four different levels; in each, there is a different mix of practical vocational training and theoretical education.

- *Theoretische leerweg* (Theoretical learning path) is the most theoretical of the four, it prepares for middle management and vocational training in the MBO-level of tertiary education and it is required to enter havo.

- *Gemengde leerweg* (Mixed learning path) is in between the *Theoretische* - and *Kaderberoepsgerichte Leerwegen*.
- *Kaderberoepsgerichte Leerweg* (Middle management-oriented learning path) teaches theoretical education and vocational training equally. It prepares for middle management and vocational training in the MBO-level of tertiary education.
- *Basisberoepsgerichte Leerweg* (Basic profession-oriented learning path) emphasises vocational training and prepares for the vocational training in the MBO-level of tertiary education.
- *Praktijkonderwijs* (Practical education) consists mainly of vocational training. It is meant for pupils who would otherwise be unable to obtain their VMBO-diplomas. After obtaining this diploma pupils can enter the job market without further training.

For all of these levels there is *Leerweg Ondersteunend Onderwijs* (Learning path supporting education), which is intended for pupils with educational or behavioural problems. These pupils are taught in small classes by specialised teachers.

Havo

The havo (*hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*, literally, “higher general continued education”) has five stages and is attended from age twelve to seventeen. A havo diploma provides access to the HBO-level (polytechnic) of tertiary education.

The first three years together are called the *Basisvorming* (literally, “basic forming”). All pupils follow the same subjects: languages, mathematics, history, arts and sciences. In the third year, pupils must choose one of four profiles. A profile is a set of different subjects that will make up for the largest part of the pupil's timetable in the fourth and fifth year, which together are called the *Tweede Fase* (literally, “second phase”).

These are the profiles:

- *Cultuur en Maatschappij* (Culture and society) prepares for artistic and cultural training at the HBO.
- *Economie en Maatschappij* (Economy and society) prepares for social science and economy training at the HBO.
- *Natuur en Gezondheid* (Nature and health) is necessary to attend medical training at the HBO
- *Natuur en Techniek* (Nature and technology) is necessary to attend technological and natural science training at the HBO.

VWO

The VWO (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, literally, “preparatory scientific education”) has six grades and is attended from age twelve to eighteen. A VWO diploma provides access to WO training, although universities may set their own admittance criteria (eg based on profile or on certain subjects). VWO is divided in *Atheneum* and *Gymnasium*. The former does not include classical languages, while the latter does.

MBO

MBO (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*, literally, “middle-level vocational education”) is oriented towards vocational training. Many pupils with a VMBO-diploma attend MBO. MBO lasts three to four years. After MBO, pupils can enrol in HBO or enter the job market.

Associate Degree

Associate Degree is a program that is part of the HBO-bachelor and the program leads to a legal diploma. The diploma of Associate Degree is intermediate between a MBO4 diploma and a bachelor degree. The Associate Degree links directly with the previous education (HAVO, VWO and MBO): one can continue studying for a bachelor diploma after the Associate Degree or you enter the labour market. The Associate Degree is meant for pupils who are unsure about choosing a four year HBO education and for people who are already working but who want to return in the education system.

Hoger Onderwijs (higher education)

HBO

With an MBO, havo or VWO diploma, pupils can enrol in HBO (Hoger beroepsonderwijs, literally “higher professional education”). It is oriented towards higher learning and professional training, which takes four to six years to complete. The teaching in the HBO is standardised as a result of the Bologna process. After obtaining enough credits (ECTS), pupils will receive a Bachelor’s degree after 4 years. They can choose to study longer and obtain a Master’s degree in 2 years.

WO

With a VWO-diploma or a *propedeuse* in HBO, pupils can enrol in WO (*wetenschappelijk onderwijs*, literally “scientific education”). Wo is only taught at university. It is oriented towards higher learning in the arts or sciences. As for HBO, the teaching in the wo is standardised as a result of the Bologna process. After obtaining enough credits (ECTS), pupils will obtain a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Laws degree after 3 years. They can choose to study longer in order to obtain a Master’s degree in a different field.

Special education

There are two types of special education in the Netherlands:

1. Special Education, implemented by Regional Centres of Expertise (*Regionale Expertisecentra*, REC)
2. Special primary schools (*speciale scholen voor basisonderwijs*, SBO) and special secondary schools (*speciale scholen voor voortgezet onderwijs*, SVO).

The second form of special education actually falls under regular education because of the Back to School Together (*Weer Samen naar School*, WSNS) policy (cf. infra).

In special education programmes implemented by RECs, children are subdivided into four educational clusters.

- Cluster 1: visually impaired children or multiply handicapped children with visual impairment.

- Cluster 2: auditory impaired children or children with severe speech impediments or multiply handicapped children who have one of the described handicaps.
- Cluster 3: Physically impaired children, children with severe learning disorders (*ZMLK, zeer moeilijk lerende kinderen*) or sick children with a physical impairment or multiply handicapped children who have one of the described handicaps
- Cluster 4: children who are difficult to manage and educate (*ZMOK zeer moeilijk opvoedbare kinderen*), children with chronic disease other than physical impairment and children in pedagogical institutions.

Children can attend special education from the age of 5. From 5 to 12, special education is called *speciaal onderwijs* (elementary education), from 12 to 18, it is called *voortgezet speciaal onderwijs* (“continued special education”). Not all schools have “continued education”. If they do have a department for continued education, they vary in level. Normally the HAVO level is the highest level provided.

2. How social / educational disadvantage is conceptualised

Since the beginning of the nineties educational policies have been aimed towards broadening the possibilities of going to a regular school for pupils with specific educational needs. This policy is partially based on international treaties as the Salamanca Statement (Unesco, 1994) that declares that “all with special educational needs should have access to regular schools”. The ratifying governments call upon accepting legally and in policy the principle of inclusive education, in which all pupils are placed in regular schools, unless there are urgent reasons not to.

The Dutch policy fits in a broader movement across Europe aiming towards more integration. Denmark, Austria and England are at an even further stage. But costs also play an important role. The costs of pupils in the Special Basic Education (*Speciaal Basisonderwijs, SBO*) and Special Education (*Speciaal Onderwijs, SO*) are considerably higher.

In the educational system there are different provisions for pupils who need extra care and attention because of a learning or developmental problem, a handicap, a disorder or an illness.

- In primary education “Back to School Together” (*Weer Samen Naar School, WSNS*) is a system of cooperation between primary schools and primary school for special education.

Back to School Together (WSNS) was aimed towards pupils who attend special basis educational schools. The goal was to diminish the number of pupils in SBO and to offer adequate education for pupils with specific needs in the regular school system, eg by means of a “structure for educational care” aimed at dealing with differences between children in every school for primary education. If the regular educational system cannot give an answer to the special needs of the child, the children can go to a special education school, preferably temporarily. In 1991 one agreed on the idea of WSNS. In 1992 a network of around 300 cooperations between schools for basic and special education became operative.

The number of pupils in SBO has been decreasing for a few years. The quantitative goals of WSNS are (partially) realised because of this fact. The number of SBO-pupils in the population of primary education has decreased from 3.8 percent at the start of WSNS to 3.0 percent in 2005. This means that over 48,000 pupils with special needs now attend regular schools. The goal of “fitting education and an adequate structure for educational care” is only partially realised.

- In secondary education also *VMBO*-schools function in cooperative systems. Extra care is offered in practical education (*Praktijkonderwijs*, PRO) and in “study course supporting education” (*leerwegondersteunend onderwijs*, LWO).
- Pupils with specific handicaps or disorders (regardless of age) can attend special education (implemented by RECs) or can attend a regular school and have financial support (“a backpack”). Student related financing (*Leerlinggebonden financiering*, LGF) became operative in 2003. The student related financing makes sure that pupils, that normally would attend special education, can use their personal special financial means to facilitate participation in a regular school setting. This kind of finances is often referred to as the pupil's “backpack”.

In 2005, over 35,000 pupils attended Special Education. The composition of this population in Special Education gives a clear image of the problems that are dealt with. The largest proportion of Special Education is part of cluster 4: “Children who are difficult to manage and educate” (*Zeer Moeilijk Lerende Kinderen*): 10,000 pupils are in this cluster of SO. Other substantial clusters are cluster 3: “SO for children with a protracted illness” (*Langdurig Zieke Kinderen*) and cluster 2: “Children with severe speech problems”, cluster 3: “The multiply handicapped” (*Meervoudig Gehandicaptten*), and cluster 4: “Children with very difficult problems” (*Zeer Moeilijk Opvoedbare Kinderen*). Around 4 to 5,000 pupils attend these clusters of Special Education. The number of pupils that attend Special Education has risen from 28,800 in 1999 to 35,300 in 2005, which is an increase of more than 22 percent. The Secondary Special Education has increased even more over the same period of time: from 14,600 in 1999 to 24,700 in 2005, almost 70 percent.

In the “structure for educational care” as it exists now there is little room for adapting to the individual needs of the child. The support is guided by demand (*aanbodgestuurd*). The structure for admission is very complex: each kind of institution has its own criteria for admission (*indicatiestelling*), funding and management. There is little cooperation and coordination between different institutions. If children need extra care, parents have to find out themselves in which institution their child would fit. Parents are confronted with difficult stamenting procedures, waiting lists and capacity problems in schools.

WSNS and LGF have led to additional issues: about statementing for pupils with special needs, about cooperation with regional expertise centres, about consultations and responsibilities. The growing complexity of rules and legislation contributes to the fact that many pupils do not get fitting education or get it too late. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Welfare (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Welzijn*) aims for a more effective reorganisation of the “structure for educational care” (*notitie: Vernieuwing van de zorgstructuren in het funderend onderwijs*, December 2005, see also: OCW 2006).

3. On the verge of a new educational era?

Drastic changes of the Dutch educational landscape

As an answer to the problems described above “fitting education” (*passend onderwijs*) was developed. The core of “fitting education” is that each school authority has the responsibility to develop education that fits every child’s needs. The education can be provided in their own schools or in schools from another educational authority. The school board in cooperation with the regional expertise centres (RECs) is responsible to offer each child “fitting education”.

The following measures are proposed for reaching the goals of “fitting education”:

- Clarification of the responsibilities about the referral of pupils, statementing and admittance to schools.
- Restriction of legislation about statementing and coordination between different statementing systems for SBO, SO and youth care.
- Improvement of the transition of pupils with special needs from primary to secondary education and to the BvE-sector (*Beroeps en volwasseneneducatie*, “professional and adult education”).
- Reinforcing the position of parents and pupils with special needs in order to facilitate application at a regular school.
- Improving the financial means of a regular school when they admit a pupil with an SO statement.
- Legally confirming the basic assumption of “fitting education for each pupil” and translating juridically and adequately the concept of duty of care; this legislation should be introduced by 2008/2009.
- Empowering schools for regular education.

The implementation of this policy is phased. The implementation should be finished by 2011.

The basic assumption behind the idea of fitting education is that every child has to have the best opportunities. This implies that one should consider the possibilities of the child rather than the limitations. The kind of education the child needs is carefully considered, the main goal is to create the ideal environment for a child so he or she can develop in the best way possible. It is possible that the best way to reach this goal is to attend regular education with professional help or attend special education.

To reach the goal of fitting education, the following measures have to be operative:

- The parents of a child with a handicap do not have to go from school to school to find a place for their child. In 2011, school boards (of the school where the child is registered) are responsible for finding fitting education for every child. The education authorities have to co-operate regionally.
- The quality of education for pupils with special needs has to be improved by making clear what exactly they are going to learn.
- More room for fitting education fitted to the needs of the child by diminishing the number of rules and by working with fixed budgets per region.

In the future, special care for pupils in primary and secondary education will be modernised. The ministry chooses an integral approach in which the child is the main focus. There will be more cooperation between different institutions. This means that the school board itself (instead of the parents) will have the responsibility to develop for every pupil with special needs a fitting

educational provision that fits with the possibilities and the limitations of the pupil and the school. When the school board cannot offer the appropriate education itself, the school board has to determine (in cooperation with regional networks) who can.

In 2011, a new law will be operative. The goal of the new law is:

- an adaptive (educational and developmental) offer in which the pupils with special needs (in regular or in special education) will have the best possible chances,
- a better position for the parents of these children, and
- one regional bureau for statementing.

In the new structure, there will be an infrastructure of regional networks throughout the whole country. There is a network of all regular schools from that region and of the Regional Centre of Expertise (*Regionaal Expertisecentrum*, REC) of each cluster. Every regional network will have to be able to offer education for all of the clusters of Special Education.

Preliminary research about the possibilities and limitations of the child will give an indication about which educational trajectory would benefit the child the most and which qualifications the child should be able to get at the end of the trajectory. Parents are closely involved in this process. When the indication is given, a regional network has to be able to offer the type of education that would suit the child the most.

The budget for pupil care will have to be used flexibly, so that pupils can get the support they need. Pupils may need to attend a school of special education, a regular school with extra support or both part-time depending on the needs of the child. If children are unable to follow regular programmes at school, an adapted trajectory is developed.

4. Educational approach in each thematic group

Recently the discourse about social/educational disadvantage has changed. There has been a shift in the way of conceptualizing social/educational disadvantages. Before the shift we see that for example special education was perceived as need because of a characteristic of the person themselves. The person's "disadvantages" meant that the person had to be segregated from the normal community in order to develop optimally. We now see that the starting point is no longer the disability or the specific problem of a specific target group but the individual and more importantly his or her individual needs and possibilities. One emphasises that it is more important to look at the capacities of the individual and to start from there. The problem only exists in certain contexts and it is the environment, the context that has to adapt itself to the needs of the individual.

This shift is very obvious in the idea of "fitting education". However, when we studied the projects however, we noticed that most of the projects are organised because of specific problems of specific target groups. It is likely that in time we will see a shift in the projects organised as well. When the projects evolve, we notice that the aims and the rationale for action change from dealing with specific problems to a broader approach. As said before, most of the time projects were organised for a specific target group. As projects evolve over the years, we see that projects are still organised for the same specific problems but the problems are no longer associated with a specific target group, the project is open to every individual that has this specific problem. We also see that projects pay more attention to how they can adapt the environment to the need of the individual.

Ethnic Minority groups

The table below shows that succeeding in secondary education is less likely for “allochthonous”² people (90 percent) than for “autochthonous”³ people (96 percent). Non-western allochthonous pupils (88 percent) do not succeed as much as Western allochthonous pupils (94 percent).

Table 1: Succeeding percentages in secondary education

Succeeding percentages in secondary education (1994/1995)	
Total	95
- Autochthonous	96
- Allochthonous	90
- Western allochthonous	94
- Non Western allochthonous	88
- Turkish	84
- Moroccan	89
- Suriname	90
- Antillean and Aruban	92
- other	90

Source: <http://www.cbs.nl/NR/rdonlyres/7776AD12-1045-4177-9423-1201982C8247/0/2007f162pub.pdf>

As one can see in the projects, there are concerns for minority ethnic groups in the Netherlands. Projects are organised to deal with their disadvantages (linguistic, social or even gender-related).

In the Netherlands the term “mixed school” is used for a primary or secondary school where allochthonous and autochthonous pupils are equally represented. The term “white school” means that this is a school where more than 70 percent of the pupils are from autochthonous origin. A “black school” is a school where more than 70 percent of the pupils are from non-western allochthonous origin (Such as Turkish, Moroccan, etc.). The use of these terms is much problematic and draws on possibly racist assumptions, especially as the description of “black school” is starting to get a negative connotation. The term becomes associated with language deprivation, behavioural problems and crime. An “international school” is a school where more than 50 percent of the pupils are from western allochthonous origin (such as Belgians, Germans, Russian, etc.) and where the curriculum is taught in a foreign language.

A “black school” is provided by the government with extra teachers and extra means but this does not stop “the white flight” by autochthonous parents who enter their child in a “white school”. Sometimes autochthonous parents travel a great distance to take their child to a “white school” instead of a “black school” that is closer to their home. There are even parents who prefer a special school to a “black school”. Governments try to limit this “white flight” and try to keep education as mixed as possible. In Amsterdam, for example, a “postal code policy” was introduced. This means that parents cannot enrol their children in a school outside of their region (postal code region).

Disability

Pupils with a physical handicap have five times more chance of being bullied (<http://www.onderwijsenhandicap.nl/index.cfm?pid=278>). A lot of pupils with a handicap chose to attend a special school because they were bullied too much at a regular school.

² Allochthonous: Dutch term used to describe all people that are not from Dutch origin.

³ Autochthonous: Dutch term used to describe all people that are from Dutch origin.

The shift in vision described above also applies to pupils with disabilities. Support to pupils with disabilities came sooner compared with other groups. Inclusion pilot projects were organised for pupils with disabilities so they could attend regular education. The pilot projects had satisfying results and fed the idea of “fitting education”.

Gender

The PISA-scores (2006) for literacy suggest that there is a significant difference in reading skills between boys and girls in the Netherlands

Table: Average PISA 2006-scores for reading skills in a selection of countries and regions according to sex. For each country you find the total and the mean score for boys and girls (the standard deviation is in brackets), as well as the difference between boys and girls. If this difference is significant it is printed in bold.

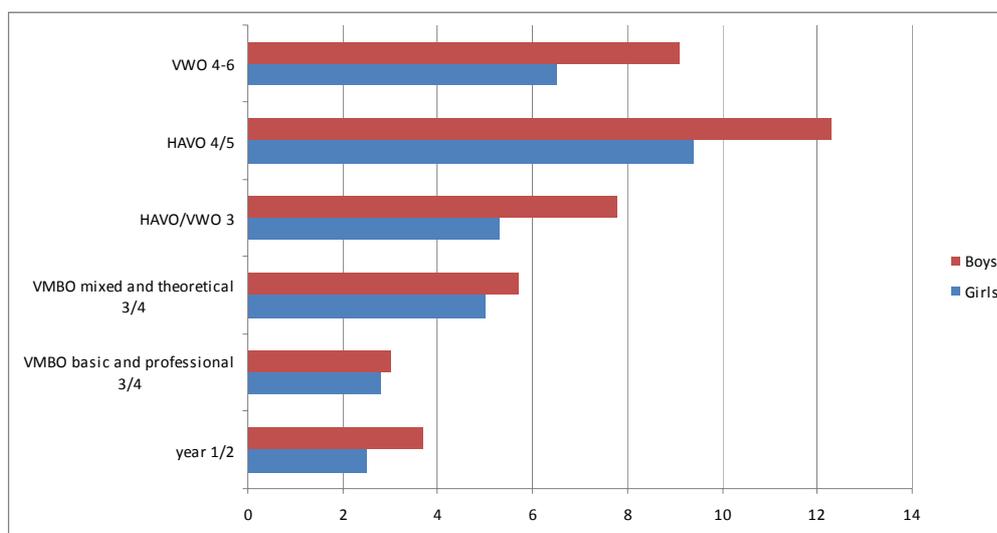
Table 2: Average PISA 2006 scores

Reading Skills				
	Total	Boys	Girls	Difference (boys-girls)
Flanders	522 (4.1)	506 (5.2)	540 (4.5)	-35 (5.3)
The Netherlands	507 (2.9)	495 (3.7)	519 (3.0)	- 24 (3.4)
England	496 (2.7)	481 (3.6)	510 (3.1)	- 29 (4.1)
Scotland	499 (4.0)	486 (5.0)	512 (4.1)	- 26 (4.4)
Northern Ireland	495 (4.4)	479 (5.5)	512 (5.1)	- 33 (8.0)
Wales	481 (3.7)	465 (4.2)	496 (4.2)	- 31 (4.0)
France	488 (4.1)	470 (5.2)	505 (3.9)	- 35 (4.4)
OESO-mean	492 (0.6)	473 (0.7)	511 (0.7)	- 38 (0.8)

Source: Vrind Hoofdstuk 5 Investeren in onderwijs, elk talent kansen geven

The table below shows that boys have a “lag” in education more often than girls in the years 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. More data to confirm the hypothesis that boys have more chance to face a lag in education than girls were not found.

Table 3: Lag in education in secondary education



Source: <http://www.cbs.nl/NR/rdonlyres/06C75EA6-3221-45B1-820D-6CEE5637007B/0/2008f162pub.pdf>

Quite a lot of attention has been given to the fact that streaming in education has often to do with gender-related choices. Therefore, several projects have been started to promote courses for the opposite gender group. No structural measures were taken to overcome gender issues in education.

A “mixed” school has a meaning in the Netherlands other than being a school where boys and girls are educated together (cf. supra). Nowadays the term co-education is used. There used to be boys’ schools and girls’ schools where girls and boys were segregated. An example was the secondary girls’ school (MMS, *middelbare meisjesschool*). The MMS was a form of education that lasted 5 years and is comparable to HAVO. The first MMS was founded in Harlem in 1867. The head teacher of the primary school decided, after consulting the parents, that girls should be given access to further education. The head teacher of the primary school had to enrol the girl in the school. Before being accepted an entrance exam had to be taken. The demands were very high and only 50 percent of the girls that had been enrolled by the head teacher of their primary school were admitted. The final exam of MMS did not allow entrance to university but it did allow entrance to a number of courses in HBO. In 1968, the “Mammoth law” (cf. infra) reorganised secondary education and the MMS were reformed into HAVO.

Co-education has been implemented since the end of the 1960s. Since education can be mixed, about 75 percent of the schools are mixed. Since 1983, admittance is mandatory equal for boys and girls in all professional courses. Nowadays, the separation of girls and boys is again applied in for example sport lessons and sport schools and is also possible in Islamic schools.

Socio-economic disadvantage

In the projects we see that a small number of projects deal with socio-economic disadvantages. Most of the time, socio-economic disadvantages are seen as an additional or inherent problem of a minority group but are not the reason for which the project started.

Indigenous minorities

In some parts of the Netherlands Roma and Sinti are present. The most urgent problem for those pupils is regular school attendance, especially for the girls. For this group, special projects are organised but with little success.

Linguistic minorities

In the Netherlands, Dutch and Frisian are the official languages. The largest part of the country speaks Dutch; in a province of the Netherlands, Fryslân, people are bilingual and speak Dutch and Frisian. The basic language used in schools is Dutch. Since 1974, Frisian is a mandatory subject in primary schools in Fryslân. Since 1993 it has also been a mandatory part of basic education in continued education in most schools in Fryslân. Some teacher training is also available in Frisian.

Religious minorities

In public schools, religion is not a mandatory subject. Special schools are typically based on a particular religion (there are some special schools based on a particular pedagogical vision such as Montessori etc.). There are government-funded Catholic and Protestant elementary schools, secondary schools, and universities. But such schools are getting more scarce. Furthermore, there are government-funded Jewish and Muslim elementary schools and secondary schools. In principle, a special school can refuse the admission of a pupil if the parents indicate disagreement with the school's educational philosophy. This is however a very uncommon occurrence, the school has to have very good reasons to refuse a pupil.

Policy of the Netherlands: important educational laws

To contextualise the conceptualisation of educational disadvantages, we will discuss the most important educational laws.

The most important educational laws are:

- 1981: *Wet op het primair onderwijs* (WPO) (Law on primary education)
- 1982: *Wet op de expertisecentra* (WEC) (Law on expertise centres)
- 1963: *Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs* (WVO) (Law on continued education)
- 2000: *Wet Studiefinanciering 2000* (WSF 2000) (Law on study financing)
- 2001: *Wet tegemoetkoming onderwijsbijdrage en schoolkosten* (WTOS) (Law on subsidies in educational contribution and school costs)
- 1968: *Leerplichtwet 1969* (Law on compulsory education)
- 1997: *Wet subsidiëring landelijke onderwijsondersteunende activiteiten* (Law on subsidising national education-supporting activities)
- 2002: *Wet op het Onderwijsstoezicht* (WOT) (Law on the supervision of education)
- 1981: *Wet op het primair onderwijs* (WPO) (Law on primary education)

1981: Wet op het primair onderwijs (WPO) (Law on primary education)

The main reason to implement this law was to merge 17,000 kindergarden and primary schools into 8,500 new schools for basic education. The old system of two kindergarden classes and six classes of primary education was replaced by 8 groups of the school for basic education. Education became compulsory from the age of 5, instead of 6.

The law of primary education had other important aims as well, such as improving care for pupils with problems, set up national core objectives and final goals.

1982: Wet op de expertisecentra (WEC) (Law on expertise centres)

This law regulates the functioning of the expertise centres. The expertise centres offer education for pupils with special needs. The education that is offered is divided into 4 clusters (cf. supra). This law also establishes who has the right to special education. The decision is based on the disability or handicap of the child, the consequences of this disability or handicap for education and the structure of educational care in regular education. If a child is considered to be eligible for special education a referral is given for a cluster and a school within this cluster. With this referral, parents can choose for regular education, in this case the child has the right to use a financial “backpack” (cf. supra).

1992: Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek (WHW) (Law on higher education and scientific research)

In 2007 the Law on higher education and scientific research will be adapted.

The changes made intended to create more flexibility and differentiation and less bureaucracy. Higher education should also become more accessible. The demands of the student become the focus. There has to be more diversity in what higher education has to offer as well. This should have a positive effect on the flow-through from secondary education to higher education. Institutions should be freer to accept and select students. There are experiments such as “Ruim Baan voor Talent” (Make place for talent) to investigate the conditions. Competencies that are obtained

elsewhere should also be acknowledged. Institutions will have more autonomy and educational care is a central point in the adaptation of the law. Normally the general rules are followed but when necessary specific rules can be developed to meet the needs of the student.

2000: *Wet Studiefinanciering 2000 (WSF 2000) (Law on study financing)*

This law intended to introduce more flexibility in the funding of higher education.

2001: *Wet tegemoetkoming onderwijsbijdrage en schoolkosten (WTOS) (Law on subsidies in educational contribution and school costs)*

This law has to do with extra costs of going to school. This law is valid for children up to the age of 18. The subsidies that are given depend on the income of the parents, the number of children in the family and the type of education. A differentiation is made between pupils who attend special education and those who attend regular education. Basically it makes sure that subsidies are divided in a fair manner so that pupils with special needs also get more financial support.

1968: *Leerplichtwet 1969 (Law on compulsory education)*

The law on compulsory education is closely related to the right to education. Anywhere in the world this is considered to be very important. Many countries find the right to education so important that they made education compulsory, like the Netherlands. This law states that every child in the Netherlands can and will participate in education. The goal is for children to gather knowledge and learn skills they will need in society. Education is compulsory from the age of 5 (the first day of the month that follows the month in which the child became 5) but most children already attend school at the age of 4. Sometimes, exceptions (the child can stay at home for 5 more hours a week) are made when a full week is too much for the child. From the age of 6 a child has to follow the regular program and exceptions are no longer possible.

Compulsory education lasts until the year in which the child turns 16. After that, there is still some qualifying compulsory education. Qualifying compulsory education has been introduced in the law since August 2007. It says that children should get a qualification by the age of 18. When the child reaches the age of 18 or obtains a qualification the rule is no longer valid. The rule was implemented to prevent drop-out.

Sometimes, an alternative learning trajectory is needed. In this case, one speaks of “substitutive compulsory education” (*vervangende leerplicht*). The law describes also exceptions that allow not attending school.

1997: *Wet subsidiëring landelijke onderwijsondersteunende activiteiten (Law on subsidizing national education-supporting activities)*

This law reformed the pedagogical centres. Since this law, the country does not just give subsidies but also sets tasks for the pedagogical centres.

The law on educational care (*Wet op Onderwijsverzorging*) regulates the functioning and funding of the pedagogical centres.

2002: *Wet op het Onderwijstoezicht (WOT) (Law on educational supervision)*

This law regulates the inspection of the quality of educational institutions. Because schools did get more autonomy, the law states that schools themselves are responsible for the quality of their education, thus also for the manner in which quality is measured and evaluated. The inspection supervises and stimulates schools to develop quality in education and self-evaluation.

5. Conclusions

The approach of educational disadvantages has currently changed in the Netherlands. With the new policy of “Fitting education” appropriate education for every pupil with a special need should be possible. According to this point of view, every child should be given the best possible opportunities in order to reach the best possible outcome. It can be that the pupil is educated in a regular school or a special school according to the needs of the child and possibilities of the school. To realise this goal, cooperation between the school, special schools, the parents and the pupils is necessary.

Under the former WSNS legislation, there were a lot of problems with the statementing of the children and funding. On top of that, parents had to look for an appropriate school for their children by their own. This was often a problem because a lot of schools had long waiting lists. As a result of that, children were kept home and did not get any education at all.

In “fitting education”, schools are responsible for any referral of children enrolled. This implies that, if a school can no longer provide for the needs of the child, the school must find another school that can meet the specific educational needs of the child. Schools can contact the regional networks to help them. In the mean time, the school must continue to provide for the child.

In theory this is a good way of making sure that

- Continuation in the education of the child is assured,
- The school cannot simply “get rid” of the child,
- The school has to communicate with other schools, parents and guidance centres in order to find the best possible education for the child.

However, in practice, it is not easy to find another (special) school because of the long waiting lists. This means that a school has to keep the child, even if it is not able to meet the specific needs of the child. The risk is that the child will finally be placed where a place is vacant, even if this is not the most suitable education to meet the needs of the child.

6. Recommendations

- Extra funding will be necessary to diminish the long waiting lists for special schools.
- Regional networks will require tight organisation and close participation of all partners. It will be important to have objective criteria to decide which child gets the vacant place.
- It will be very important that regional networks work together with parents, schools, centres for youth and family etc. It will not be easy to coordinate all partners who had a more autonomous functioning before.
- Making an accurate diagnosis is very important in the Netherlands. The diagnosis gives an indication of the kind of education that is recommended for the child. However it is not only important to make an accurate diagnosis and indication, an act directed (action based) approach is also necessary. To ensure continuity in such an approach, there has to be mutual consultation and fine-tuning between different institutions and all social instances concerned, even at didactic level.

The WSNS policy obliged parents to find a school for their child themselves. With the new policy of fitting education the school board (in cooperation with the RECs) is responsible for finding a school that meets the needs of the child. Involving parents in this process is still needed and important though, but one should be careful that parents are not the only persons responsible for the individual rights of the child.

The capacity of teachers, school, school board and the RECs has to be bared in mind.

Teachers, school, school board and the RECs have to cooperate. How will they be educated to do this?

The school board is responsible for the care for the child. RECs are responsible for organising the care for the child. They will have to find a way to make this compatible.

What about the transition from elementary to secondary education? As long as the child is registered in an elementary school, this school is responsible for the continuity of care for the child. When the child has to make the transition to secondary education, the parents have to register their child into a new school. This important point might be the Achilles tendon of the system. Could it be that schools simply will not accept the child into their school in order to avoid the responsibility of care?

The organisation of “fitting education” will be expensive. Is there enough money to make this possible?

It could be that there will be endless meetings about the child without that something actually happens for the child.

What about the responsibility for care and giftedness? What are the possibilities for underachieving gifted children?

How will PABOs (teacher training) prepare their students for “fitting education”? What will be the impact on the curriculum of teacher training?

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Appendix

Project Analyses

Theme	Project	subsidiary themes
Minority ethnic groups	Diversiteit voor het voetlicht	
	Full Colour	
	Thuiswerk- en huiswerkbegeleiding (home and homework guidance) [Case Study 2]	
	Van zwarte naar gemengde school in Rotterdam-Kralingen (from black to mixed school in Rotterdam-Kralingen)	
	ProFor Huiswerkbegeleiding (ProFor homework guidance) [Case Study 3]	
Social Economic Status	Weekendschool voor jongeren uit achterstandswijken (weekend school for youngsters from deprived districts)	
Religious Minorities	Islam en onderwijs (Islam and education)	
Linguistic Minorities	Laat je zien (show yourself)	D
	Voorleesexpress (reading to children express)	E
	Woordenschatjes (Word treasures)	E
Disabilities	Project Begeleid Leren in het MBO voor deelnemers met een psychische beperking (project guided learning in the mbo for participants with a psychological impedement)	
	Pilot Inclusief Onderwijs Almere (Pilot inclusive education Almere)	
	Linker [Case Study 1]	S
Indigenous Minorities	Samenspel op maat (playing together)	
	Alfabetisering ROMA jongeren Veldhoven (Roma youth literacy Veldhoven) [Case Study 4]	
Gender	De glazen muur (the glass wall)	
	Kenniscentrum Sekse & Diversiteit in Medisch Onderwijs Diversiteit (Knowledge centre Gender & Diversity in Medical Education Diversity)	R E
	Participatie van Vrouwen als Prioriteit voor de Wetenschap (Participation of Women as a priority for Science!)	
	Top It klas, talentvolle meisjes richting ICT (talented girls direction ICT)	
	Viking, vrouwelijke ingenieurs als gastdocent (Viking, female engineers as guest lecturer)	

Key: **E** ethnic minorities; **C** social class; **R** religious minorities; **L** linguistic minorities; **D** disability; **I** indigenous minorities; **G** gender

Project overview

Project	target age range					target theme(s)						
	pre-school	primary	secondary	higher	working life	minority ethnic	social class	religious minority	linguistic minorities	disability	indigenous minorities	gender
Project Begeleid Leren in het MBO voor deelnemers met een psychische beperking (project guided learning in the mbo for participators with a psychological impedement)				v						v		
Pilot Inclusief Onderwijs Almere (Pilot inclusive education Almere)		v								v		
Linker	v						v			v		
Diversiteit voor het voetlicht	v	v				v						
Full Colour				v	v	v						
ProFor Huiswerkbegeleiding (ProFor homework guidance)		v		v		v						
Thuiswerk- en huiswerkbegeleiding (home and homework guidance)			v	v		v						
Van zwarte naar gemengde school in Rotterdam-Kralingen (from black to mixed school in Rotterdam-Kralingen)		v				v						
Weekendschool voor jongeren uit achterstandswijken (weekend school for youngsters from deprived districts)	v	v					v					
De glazen muur (the glass wall)			v	v	v							v
Kenniscentrum Sekse & Diversiteit in Medisch Onderwijs Diversiteit (Knowledge centre Gender & Diversity in Medical Education Diversity)				v	v	v		v				vv
Participatie van Vrouwen als Prioriteit voor de Wetenschap (Participation of Women as a priority for Science!)				v	v							v
Top It klas, talentvolle meisjes richting ICT (talented girls direction ICT)			v									v
Viking, vrouwelijke ingenieurs als gastdocent (Viking, female engineers as				v	v							v

quest lecturer				
Alfabetisering ROMA jongeren Veldhoven (Roma youth literacy Veldhoven)		v	v	v
Laat je zien (show yourself)		v		v v
Samenspel op maat (playing together)	v			v
Voorleesexpress (reading to children express)	v		v	v
Woordenschatjes (Word treasures)	v		v	v
Islam en onderwijs (Islam and education)	v	v		v