



# Community Schools in the Netherlands

This factsheet provides information about the development of community schools in the Netherlands

## Introduction

Youth policy is a key issue on the political agenda in the Netherlands. Dutch youth policy is remarkable for a number of reasons. Firstly, in the late eighties, a large number of tasks that used to be managed by the central government were transferred to local and provincial administrative levels. Through this decentralisation a greater variety of policy instruments became available for local and provincial authorities, enabling them to deal with the total scope of local issues, needs and demands. Secondly, the policy distinguishes a general and preventive youth policy ruled by the local authorities on the one hand, and the youth care system, which is a provincial responsibility, on the other hand. Local preventive youth policy includes education, leisure, health care, but also specific preventive tasks, such as access to care and support and care coordination at a local level (with special focus on parenting support). The community school is one of the main instruments of the local youth policy and designed to offer the best possible education and (community) care for children and young people.

## What is a community school?

In the community school concept a large number of community-based activities and services are integrated. It is a practical implementation of the integrated youth policy in which the school has a central role. The community school links education to various important children and parents' services like parenting support, child day care, health centres, etc. By combining services in a network or in a shared building, they become more accessible. Also, the various services can join forces and adjust their services to match and complement each other as well as meet the needs of the children and parents.

The community schools concept is mostly based on participation, of children and parents. Parents are stimulated to be actively involved and pupil input is encouraged. The activities at the community school are aimed at enabling children and the people around them to enhance their social skills as well as to learn interactively through participation. The community school promotes active participation in society through education, recreation and work. It is open to children of all ages: from pre-school through primary school and secondary education.

### Network or building?

A wide range of activities for children, parents, neighbours and other specific target groups determines the contents and organization of community schools. Community schools team up with



as many partners as possible to develop activities. Each community school chooses its own organizational structure:

- Complete day-programmes or periodical after-school activities for children and young people;
- Combinations of educational activities within and outside the school;
- Various and diverse activities for parents and the community;
- Partners in different locations or most in one building
- Different ways to organize staff, management and board functions.

Most important is that the structure should be designed to serve the contents and targets.

### Common principles

Although methods and details differ from location to location, community schools are governed by a set of common principles:

- The school aims to develop children and parents' social skills as well as offer cognitive education
- Although the school offers a daily context which encourages social commitment and responsibility, it cannot succeed without the educational input of others (pedagogical professionals, volunteers, parents etc.)
- Collaboration between schools and other institutes and facilities should benefit the children, young people and their parents as well as the organizations involved
- The geographical location of the service providers and facilities is an important decisive factor in terms of accessibility. Furthermore, joint efforts between the different services should be promoted (for example by moving into one building)
- In a community school it is relatively easy to combine various opening hours and staff working hours in order to meet the needs of the attending children and parents as much as possible
- Integrating services in a traditional school setting or its immediate vicinity seems only natural, since children attend school every day.
- Parents are encouraged and motivated to have regular and close contact with the school, which will not only increase parent participation but also promote community school activities

### What's in a name?

There have been a number of similar initiatives in the Netherlands. There's a local variety in names of community schools (brede scholen), to express the local content and initiatives: 'Window Schools', 'Open District' or 'Neighbourhood Schools' and 'Integrated Schools'.

Despite their different names, they are all based on a common concept: to combine current and available good designs, practices and projects in education, youth work and related areas. This has resulted in, for example, collaborations between schools and pre-school facilities, neighbourhood networks for child and youth care and close links between the 'extended school day' or 'out-of-school day care' and traditional community work. For many years before this, these activities and projects existed as more or less solo operations. The community school is an instrument to structure and organize services, to achieve better and durable results.

### Where are community schools located?

Community schools are found in urban as well as in rural areas. Data have been gathered at schools, school boards and municipalities by means of questionnaires and telephone interviews.

The motivation for starting community schools has shifted from underprivileged-related to development of talents and the realisation of day arrangements. Also, there is more and more attention for quality development. Two-thirds of the community schools in primary education engage in self-evaluation through quality criteria community schools. Subsequently, community

schools indicate that cooperation, vision development and exchange of expertise with partners are increasing.

Municipalities appear to play a major part in the development of community schools in terms of coordinating and directing pre-conditions.

Identified as main objectives for primary and secondary education are first of all: the increase of optimal development opportunities for youth, followed by responding to developments within society. Examples of goals on the level of the individual child are: extending the activity offer, improving social skills. For parents goals are, for example: increasing parental involvement and providing parenting support (in primary education) and goals for the community are: enhancing social cohesion and security. A goal in secondary education is: improving cooperation with partners in the community.

#### Partners

The top three of collaboration partners in community schools for primary education are, in addition to tuition: kindergarten for toddlers, children's day care and social work. For secondary education they are: the municipality, (local council) the sports association and the centres for arts and culture.

## Facts and figures

As of 2001 the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has been commissioning the yearly publication of a survey of community schools in the Netherlands. The annual report of 2009 shows that there has been a considerable increase in the number of community schools both in primary education. In 2009 88% of all primary schools were involved, whereas in 2007 it was 76%. The total absolute amount of community schools in primary education was 1200, involving 1700 schools (as in some community schools more than one primary school is a partner).

## Historical development

The trend towards closer links between services for children, young people and their families started in the 1970s, as it became clear that the available services were, indeed, fragmented and uncoordinated.

In fact, in those days (social) workers and other services would often be working on the same cases, with the same families, at the same time without knowing it or consulting each other.

Neighbourhood networks were set up and became exemplary of successful close collaboration between different services: professionals from various care institutions in a community or neighbourhood aimed to identify problems in children and young people at an early stage in order to prevent abuse and/or delinquency later in life. One person, the so-called key worker, was appointed to coordinate the services of the participating organizations.

Around the same time that the above-mentioned fragmentation of the care services was revealed, research and experience identified several major differences in the educational achievements of different groups of children. Children from black and other ethnic minority groups were doing less well than their Dutch counterparts. Another discrepancy was evident between children of working-class parents and children of higher and highly educated parents, often with better-paid jobs.

Changes were implemented through the Education Disadvantages Policy, as part of the Education Priority Policy in the early 1980s. The EDP was a two-track policy aimed at the prevention and decrease of educational disadvantages. One track focused on extra staff for schools with a high number of pupils from risk groups, known as the 'Staff Component'. The other track focused on extra resources for schools in areas with a relatively high percentage of children from risk groups, mostly referred to as the 'Area Component'.

In September 2006 the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science introduced a new measuring scale. In this scale, (original) ethnicity and social class are no longer leading factors. Instead, the educational level of the parents is decisive. Also, the main responsibility for policies on educational disadvantages is now with the schools. According to the Minister for Education, the professionals from the field of education are the most capable and best-equipped parties to solve disadvantages. Therefore, schools have been granted more freedom to decide how they wish to spend their budget. In addition, school boards are involved in the "integral approach of solving educational disadvantages."

The municipality supports this approach by promoting a local cohesion amongst the general youth policy services, including school attendance, early dropout, reporting and supervision. Furthermore, municipalities are responsible for the implementation of the local VVE-policy (Pre-school educational programmes for very young children from risk/disadvantaged groups). For this, the municipalities confer with different field parties to draw up a so-called Local Educational agenda.

## **Policy and funding**

The central government has no specific policy on community schools. Instead, they feel that local initiatives and fast decision-making should be facilitated and encouraged as much as possible, and strict national regulations would unnecessarily complicate this approach. Youth policy, educational (disadvantage) policies, urban policies and policies on associated themes like combining work and care, sports and culture and problem areas (Ministry of Housing and Integration) all affect the development of community schools, especially in terms of available funding.

As it is, temporary stimulating measures directly or indirectly support the development of the community school concept, for example: improving and altering community school buildings, development and coordination of combined services in community schools (in education, sports and culture), temporary pilots and research on extended school time. The application and implementation of these (temporary) measures are mostly a local responsibility.

The community school policy is linked to local rather than national policy, also with regard to funding. However, at a national level there are several supporting policies to stimulate the development of the community school concept. These include Early Childhood Education, the Education Disadvantages Policy, Youth Participation and the Urban Areas Policy as well as policies to combine work and care and to improve disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In this set-up community schools are partially and indirectly financed by the national government. The activities and buildings are managed and funded by the municipality, school boards and other bodies, such as social work, child day-care, and sports and cultural organisations.

## The role of the government

### National

The task of the government is to provide resources for support, research and communication. For example, a community school report containing facts and figures is published every year. In addition, a website (Dutch) provides general and extensive information about community schools ([www.bredeschool.nl](http://www.bredeschool.nl)). These activities are coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and conducted by the National Supporting office community schools (Landelijk Steunpunt Brede Scholen, since 2009). The Ministry established the supporting office to support primary and secondary schools in the development of community schools for three years. The office's main activities are: informing the public on community schools ([www.bredeschool.nl](http://www.bredeschool.nl)), actively visiting schools that are or are interested in becoming community schools and connecting people and organizations to exchange experiences and expertise on community schools and related subjects. Effectiveness and efficiency have become increasingly important criteria for community schools. In 2009 several national researches were initiated to investigate these qualities.

The ministries of Education, Culture and Science and of Social Affairs and Employment join and support associated organizations, boards, management teams and professionals in schools and child care to investigate the possibility of full-day programmes. This means that schools and child care services will have to have more flexible opening and working hours. A comparative study is being prepared on the educational criteria of different models, the possible effects of different school hours on academic results and on the biological body rhythm of children.

### Local

Directly responsible for the reinforcement of the social infrastructure are the local authorities. This is where policies are drawn up and geared to the capabilities, wants and needs of the districts and neighbourhoods. As of yet, not all Dutch municipalities abide by this notion but they are strongly encouraged to do so. Connecting local care, welfare, educational and recreational facilities can only succeed at district or neighbourhood level.

Developing a coherent network of facilities at a local level requires the joint effort of a multitude of professionals and volunteers, like:

- teachers (including remedial teachers) and nursery school teachers;
- parents, school contacts and neighbourhood mothers;
- school social workers and school doctors (Area Medical Officers);
- community centre workers, library staff, workers at creative or sports clubs;
- nanny's, day-care, youth workers and volunteers;
- workers from parenting support agencies and toy exchange services;
- police, neighbourhood community workers, playground committees;
- general practitioners and other care workers;
- caretakers and wardens.
- doctors and nurses at infant welfare centres (district nurses, public health nurses),

Collaboration between these people and their services is the key to success. The municipality can choose to direct, coordinate or co-develop the process.

## **The community school in action**

The community school model is highly flexible. The structure and shape depends on the local potential and needs. For example, the local authority of Groningen decided to locate the Window Schools from deprived neighbourhoods in the city into a newly developed building which was to house all the participating organizations. This enhanced the social cohesion and after some time the building even became a community centre for children, parents and other local residents. Currently, there are different types of community schools in different areas: Window Schools (in the same building) and Window Areas (collaborating organizations from the same area). Furthermore, Window Schools have been introduced in new-housing areas and neighbourhoods with mainly double-income families.

The community schools in Rotterdam (since 1996) have always made use of the existing facilities and services in their vicinity and have therefore developed differently due to neighbourhood history, the available budget and services and the people. In 2002, focus shifted to quality improvement and in 2004 this resulted in some strong key values to achieve and uphold: more structure, clear vision and joint efforts towards mutual goals.

Currently, in Rotterdam 160 primary schools and 45 secondary school sites and their 'partners' are working on a continuous educational roster, including pre- and afterschool activities. The municipality has formulated a short list of criteria to evaluate the ambitions and funding for the community school concept.

Since the start of the first community school in Amsterdam, in September 2000, other community schools have been established in almost every part of the city. The Amsterdam city council has invested considerably in combined functions within the municipality to promote the development of community schools.

The national government has budgeted 26 million euro in 2010 to be spend on additional combined functions within community schools. This expansion will enable community schools to create more combined functions, wherein the staff will be joining in sports and cultural activities within- and outside the school as well as in educational programmes. In addition, the government supports local ambitions to have 1500 community schools running in 2011. Furthermore, by then the government aims to have established 460 community schools in secondary school settings as well.

## **Participation of parents**

Parents are very important players in the community school, especially in primary education. Firstly, they are the main supervisors of their children at home and essential sources of information for professionals. Next to this, they can also become active as supervisors of other children within the community school. Obviously, parents need to be well informed about the background and methods of the community school before they can decide if and how they would like to participate or contribute. A special role is reserved for parents supporting other parents in the shape of school contact persons (connecting parents and school) and neighbourhood mothers (who encourage parents to become more involved in their children's education and development). The school also provides opportunities and accommodation for parents to come together for support and information, for example by organizing a parent room, an open house, or a conference room. To successfully work with parents the team of professionals will have to acknowledge and appreciate

the parents' efforts as well as accept the openness of the institution. Active parent support and participation will enhance the accessibility of the community school for other parents and children. In fact, a number of community schools offer traineeships for unemployed parents around themes like labour market preparation programmes, support for interest groups and community centre activities.

## **Who benefits from the community school?**

The community school concept focuses on many target groups:

- all the young people from a specific school, city, neighbourhood, or district;
- specific age groups;
- specific target groups e.g. based on ethnic, gender or socio-economic background;
- parents and community/neighbourhood;
- specific high-risk areas.

The community school's ideal target group consists of all youth (0 – 18 years and even further up) and their parents. The added value of a broad and comprehensive approach like this is clear. With more restrictive approaches there is always a risk of merely accentuating the differences between groups of children and thus create stigma's. In the Netherlands the community school concept has grown explosively. Next to the original philosophy of decreasing (academic) disadvantages it also aims to provide a general integrated offer for young people and their families (in time and contents). Nowadays, most community schools offer a diverse menu of activities: educational (within and outside the school), organized or spontaneous leisure activities and early morning, lunchtime and afterschool facilities.

In summary, the community school remains a viable opportunity to reduce disadvantages and increase the social competence of underprivileged or high-risk children. Therefore, all parties should be actively involved, including young people and their parents, in the defining of the community school's objectives.

In reality, however, priorities for underprivileged groups are often determined by the available funding from public sources, which is often strictly reserved for specific target groups.

## **Activities**

The pedagogical point of departure of the community school concept is to develop children and young people's skills to the point that they can seize the right mix of development opportunities in their own social environment (at school, at home, and in their free time). There are various tools and activities to achieve this, but they all relate to the key-principle of cohesion.

There are four key areas of action:

- promoting social competence;
- promoting participation through day-care and recreational facilities;
- contributing to high-quality living conditions (at school, at home, and in the neighbourhood);
- promoting care and service on a broad scale (care services, parenting support, preschool facilities).

Clearly, the activities in these areas overlap considerably. This is why it is essential that care and educational services join forces, work together and integrate. Another important discussion in this respect is the allocation of tasks between teachers and other professionals and volunteers.

Apart from their educational tasks, the social role of community schools is increasingly recognized. Schools have a strong influence on the social development of children and young people, but it takes more than the school to raise a healthy child. One of the community school's major objectives is to mobilize the input of all available services.

## Background information on Dutch youth and educational policies

In the Netherlands, the terms 'youth' and 'young people' refer to people up to the age of 24, i.e. approximately one-third of the total population. One-fifth of this group is of a non-Dutch ethnic background. The vast majority (80 to 90%) of these young people present no major problem in society. They come from balanced, harmonious families, they are physical and mentally sound, they perform well at school and have promising career prospects.

Young people differentiated by age (specified) and gender (general)

Age	Number	Male	Female
0 - 4	738,345		
4 - 12	1,598,434		
12 - 15	586,270		
15 - 18	605,183		
18 - 23	1,006,873		
23 - 25	395,330		
Total 0 - 24	4,930,444	2,516, 210	2,414,234

(Source: Statistics Netherlands, 2009)

Education is a key responsibility of the central government, which is carried out by the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science. Next to preparing students for a professional future, education helps young people to develop a personality as well as cultural and social awareness. The Ministry is responsible for the funding, structuring, supervision and examinations of the educational institutions in the Netherlands. The local authorities are in charge of the local administration and are authorized to manage and monitor state education. The local authority is also concerned with the management of adult education and language and cultural education for ethnic minorities. The province has a limited advisory role.

Children in the Netherlands are obliged to attend school full-time (five days a week) from the age of 5 until the end of the school year in which they turn 16.

However, children may enter elementary school (nursery and primary) from their fourth birthday. Indeed, 98% of them do. The compulsory school career consists of eight years in primary education, followed by a minimum of three years in secondary education. After the age of 16, education is partially compulsory up to the age of 18.



## **The Netherlands Youth Institute**

The Netherlands Youth Institute is the Dutch national institute for compiling, verifying and spreading knowledge on youth matters, e.g. youth care, parenting support and child education. The Netherlands Youth Institute's main aim is to improve the physical, cognitive, mental and social development of children and young people by improving the quality and effectiveness of the services provided to them and to their parents or caretakers. As an expert centre, the Netherlands Youth Institute translates scientific research to the practitioners' need for knowledge. It supports the youth sector by advising on policy, programmes and implementation, and by training professionals in evidence-based methods. The Netherlands Youth Institute / NJi started work in 2007 as a result of an unbundling of several institutes engaged in issues on care and welfare .

The Netherlands Youth Institute has always been actively involved in the development of community schools in both primary and secondary education. NJi works closely with hands-on professionals and develops and publishes knowledge and information.

NJi specializes in knowledge on educational activities for children and young people during and after school hours, organized by the school and partner organizations (mainly youth work). NJi has published several publications and videos on these themes (a few with English subtitles). NJi advises municipalities, school boards and (welfare) organizations on the development of policies and visions on the community school concept. In addition, NJi provides training for professionals and organizes expert exchange groups and expert meetings. Various organizations have commissioned NJi to conduct a research for on the feasibility and evaluation of community schools and on the needs and wants of young people, parents and professionals within the community school.

NJi works with municipalities and schools to help them (self)evaluate community schools according to the national quality criteria for community schools. In addition, NJi works on the improvement of the cohesion and consistency of general educational and pedagogical facilities.

Finally, the Netherlands Youth Institute is internationally active. NJi takes part in an international network around community schools, the International Centre of Excellence for Community Schools ([www.icecs.com](http://www.icecs.com)). This network provides NJi with the mandate to implement the international criteria for community schools in the Netherlands. Therefore, NJi hosts or contributes to international meetings, seminars and study visits on themes like community schools, local youth policy, youth work and other associated topics.

## Useful Addresses

Ministry of Education, Culture, Science  
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Ministry for Youth and Families  
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