

Towards higher educational performance in secondary education

28 February 2011

In this report, the Education Council responds to the Minister for Education's announcement of an *Action Plan for Better Performance* for secondary education. The Education Council argues that there is scope to raise the standard of learning of all pupils in secondary education. To utilise this scope will require a drive for quality as well as high standards. The Education Council has formulated four recommendations to achieve an improvement in the quality of education with the aim of raising the educational performance of all pupils.

Recommendation 1: promote the quality of the educational offering by tightening the focus

The quality of the educational offering will benefit from clarity about the goals to be achieved and the subject knowledge that will be covered. The Education Council proposes that schools should introduce a tighter focus in their offering by using reference levels to map out learning progress in the core subjects of Dutch, English and arithmetic/mathematics, which are crucial for progression and transfer, at the end of the second learning year. For the other subjects, the Education Council is in favour of increasing the focus by defining a common core. A review of the upper years of secondary education is desirable and must be done in consultation with the higher education community.

Recommendation 2: improve the quality of the school through an outcome-oriented approach

An outcome-oriented approach leads to better pupil performance. It is therefore important that the efforts to bring about a more outcome-oriented culture continue undiminished. The Education Council believes that all schools should have a system which is able to track the progress of students and can fine-tune the teaching at the individual student level. Using the target qualities set out in the reference levels will provide a stimulus for the ambitions of pupils and teachers. In addition, outcome-oriented education benefits from clear benchmarking related to the pupil population. This is particularly important for the critical core subjects. An annual survey would supply the information for this benchmarking and also provide a snapshot of the state of Dutch education in this area.

Recommendation 3: strengthen the quality and professionalism of teachers and school leaders

The quality of teachers and school leaders is of crucial importance if schools are to be enabled to work in a more outcome-oriented way on the basis of a good educational offering. The Education Council therefore recommends that in-service training should be made compulsory for school leaders and teachers. The Education Council also proposes that the level of educational attainment of teachers should be increased. For new teachers in the lower years of secondary education, the initial teaching qualification should be a programme at the bachelor's degree level. And they should subsequently have to complete a programme of training at the master's degree level within a further five years. Competence requirements should be developed for school leaders in secondary education.

Recommendation 4: reward quality

When quality is encouraged at all levels, better performance is expected as a result. To ensure that this is properly expressed, it is important that the objectives are ambitious and that performance achievements are also rewarded. This includes the performance of the pupils as well as that of excellent teachers, and the performance of schools that achieve excellent results.