

## **School inspections in a polycentric context: The Dutch Inspectorate of Education**

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### **Introduction**

The quality of education is an important theme for people working in the educational field, students who are getting education, the Inspectorate of Education and all other stakeholders involved in education. Currently in the Netherlands, the structure of the management of schools considering inclusive education has been changed. Schools are now grouped into networks of schools that have to solve issues concerning inclusive education together as a network. For example, the “SWV 23-02” network of primary schools in the Eastern part of the Netherlands contains 179 mainstream schools and schools for special education, which have about 36.000 students. The main objective of this network is to arrange inclusive education.

The introduction of these new networks of inclusive education has consequences for the supervision of these networks by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. In this paper, the situation concerning networks of inclusive education in the Netherlands will be outlined first. Then, possible consequences of the new structure of networks concerning its supervision by the Inspectorate of Education will be explained and researched in more detail. The aim of this paper is to describe the extent to which the Dutch Inspectorate of Education adapts the inspection approaches to networks of schools.

### *Inclusive education in the Netherlands*

In the Netherlands, inclusive education is very important: every pupil deserves to be placed in the most suitable place in education. Because children with severe learning problems were causing big pressure on the mainstream education, it was decided around the year 1900 that these children should need separate classes and schools (Doornbos, 1987). Therefore, nowadays there are mainstream schools and schools for special education. Within an inclusive education network of schools, there are both mainstream schools and schools for special education. A network of schools receives a budget to make sure every child will have the educational support he or she needs. Within this network, there has to be decided how the budget will be divided and spent.

Every child is allowed to go to a mainstream school, but only children with special educational needs can be allowed to go to a school for special education when they have the permission based on the advise of experts (e.g. a psychologist or a remedial educationalist). Not all children who have this permission attend a school for special education; some children with special educational needs choose to attend a mainstream school. For what reason parents that have children with special educational needs prefer a mainstream school above a school for special education? What is the best place for a pupil with special educational needs? In order to answer these questions, a distinction has to be made between effects on the cognitive development and effects on the social-emotional development. Some Dutch studies on children with comparable special educational needs show that children with special educational needs make more progression in mainstream schools than children who were referred to schools for special education (Peetsma, Vergeer, Roeleveld & Karsten, 2001; Jepma, 2003). They seem to develop themselves better due to the contacts they have with children without special educational needs. However, the development in social-emotional skills seemed to be less clear. The study of Peetsma et al. (2001) concluded that

children in schools for special education were doing better in the field of social-emotional skills than children who stayed on mainstream schools, while another study did not find any significant differences (Jepma, 2003). Because of ambiguous results, for children with special educational needs, it is important to carefully consider individually in what kind of school the child will develop best.

However the choice to go to a mainstream school or to a school for special education is personal, there are some advantages and disadvantages of going to a school for special education (Kennisconsortium CrossOver, n.d.). One of the advantages is that, contrary to mainstream schools, the child receives more (personal) attention because of the smaller amount of children in one classroom, and the education is specialized to children with special educational needs. However, there also are some disadvantages of going to a school for special education. Because there are less schools for special education, they are often more far away from home than mainstream schools. As a result, contact with pupils after school time is more difficult because of the longer distance and therefore, making social contacts and friends can be more challenging. Further, the child will not get used to participate in a regular environment and it is more difficult to transfer to mainstream education or to higher education. Whether or not a child suits better in a mainstream school or in a school for special education depends on various aspects. Because of these (dis) advantages, it is important to decide individually what is best for a child who has special educational needs.

#### *Networks of inclusive education*

Because of the new inclusive education act, mainstream schools, schools for special education and local authorities have to collaborate closely in the new networks. The connection of a school with its environment seems to be an important condition for school development. According to Meijer (2004), participation of schools in various networks leads to positive outcomes considering the care for pupils in schools. The new collaboration implies new ways of communication, decision-making and the sharing of knowledge and resources.

An educational definition of a network is “groups or systems of interconnected people and organizations (including schools) whose aims and purposes include the improvement of learning and aspects of well-being known to affect learning” (Hadfield, Jopling, Noden, O’Leary & Stoll, 2006; cited by Muijs, West & Ainscow, 2010). Within a network, social capital is very important. Social capital is the actual and potential resources embedded in relationships among actors (Leana & Pil, 2006). This is about the spirit, trust and interdependence among actors within the system. When levels of trust are high, reciprocal ties are more numerous, so it is more likely that schools will exchange their knowledge and good practices. In educational networks, key components in the development of social capital are the understanding and fostering of trust between school principals.

#### *Supervision of networks of inclusive education*

As a result of the networks of inclusive education that are created, the supervision of those networks has to adapt to this new situation. Because the inspection of networks of schools and the schools participating in these networks is relatively new, inspection methods are not fully developed yet. However, based on the context of being part of a network, that can be called a ‘polycentric context’, there are some possibilities. Hague and Kirk (2003) define polycentricity as follows: “a spatial and functional form of development in which there are many centers, not just one large city/region that is dominating all the others. The centers are linked in networks and complement each other

functionally, and co-operate together (p. 7).” However this definition is originally used in the planning of cities, it can be applied to the educational field. Black (2008) gives a definition of polycentricism that suits the educational field better. She states that polycentricism signifies a structural feature of social systems and refers to many centers of decision making that are formally independent of each other. Polycentric regulatory regimes are those in which the state is not the sole locus of authority, but state and non-state actors are both regulators and regulated in highly complex and interdependent relations (Black, 2008). In education, schools that are forming a network of schools in which resources and knowledge are exchanged are polycentric networks. Ehren and Perryman (2015) define polycentricity as follows:

Polycentric school inspections evaluate and assess the quality and functioning of networks of schools and/or their stakeholders, with the purpose of validating and supporting improvement and decision-making at the local level. Examples of such approaches are:

- The agenda (e.g. standards) for inspection is (also) set by schools and their stakeholders with the purpose of analyzing, validating and disseminating good practices of how to improve student achievement by describing why the good practice worked for the host school, how the host school created process knowledge (‘this is how we did it’), and making explicit the theory underpinning the practice (‘these are the principles underpinning why we did it and what we did’).
- Inspection frameworks include standards on effective cooperation between schools/stakeholders.
- Inspection schedule includes visits to all schools/stakeholders at the same time.
- Inspection feedback is given to all schools/stakeholders in an open forum and agreements are made about a shared agenda for change.
- Consequences and interventions go beyond sanctions and rewards of individual schools and include intelligent techniques (e.g. information sharing, persuasion, targeted monitoring) to improve the functioning of the network (both in terms of structural and relational contingencies, such as strength and density of ties, quality of knowledge sharing). (p. 7)

#### *Aim of the project*

We aim to describe the extent to which the Dutch Inspectorate of Education adapts the inspection approaches to networks of schools:

- By analyzing the role that school inspectors have;
- By analyzing the working methods the school inspectors use in enabling improvement/innovation and complex problem solving in networks of schools;
- By trying to understand how the roles and working methods are related to the structure and context of the education system in which they function.

#### *Overview of the paper*

We first describe the Dutch education system, particularly the types of schools and networks of schools, and then summarize the methods used to collect data on how the Dutch Inspectorate of

Education inspects schools and networks of schools. We then discuss the role of school inspectors, the working methods they use, and how these fit into the overall education system. Finally, we will discuss the extent to which the Inspectorate has polycentric characteristics.

## **The Dutch education system**

### *Overview education system*

Every child in the Netherlands must attend school full-time from the school year the child turns five until the age of 18 (Eurydice, 2015). However, nearly all children start going to school at the age of four. Primary education lasts eight years (age 5–12), after which pupils opt for one of the three types of secondary education: pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo, age 12–16), senior general secondary education (havo, age 12–17) or pre university education (vwo, age 12–18). Most secondary schools are combined schools offering several types of secondary education so that pupils can transfer easily from one type to another. Graduated students from secondary education can take tertiary education. There are three types of tertiary education: vocational education, higher education or university. Students eighteen or plus, or graduates from pre-vocational secondary education, are not obliged to attend school full-time anymore.

### *Types of schools*

Freedom of education is a key feature of the Dutch education system. Guaranteed under article 23 of the constitution it gives freedom to found schools (freedom of establishment), organize the teaching in schools (freedom of organization of teaching) and determine the principles on which schools are based (freedom of conviction) (“Artikel 23: Het openbaar en bijzonder onderwijs”, n.d.).

The right to found schools that provide teaching based on religious, ideological or educational beliefs resulted in publicly (non-denominational) and privately (denominational) run schools that are funded by the state (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, n.d.). Publicly run schools are open to all children regardless of religion or worldview, while privately run schools can refuse admittance to pupils whose parents do not subscribe to the belief or ideology of the school (e.g. Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and anthroposophic schools). Despite this difference, both are supervised in the same way by the Inspectorate of Education and financed in the same way by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science by receiving an annual budget as block grant funding. Further, the way publicly and privately run schools are governed is comparable. Publicly run schools used to be governed by a municipal council (or a governing committee), but are currently just like privately run schools, governed by a foundation or an independent commission. Approximately 30% of school children in the Netherlands attend public (non-denominational) run schools and 70% attends privately (denominational) run schools (approximately 34% Catholic, 28% Protestant and 8% diverse, like Muslim, Jewish, Hindu or anthroposophic school) (CBS, 2012).

Both publicly and privately run schools may adapt specific teaching ideologies, such as the Steiner, the Montessori, the Dalton, the Freinet or the Jena Plan method. Freedom to organize teaching means that both public and privately run schools can decide what they teach and how. However, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science sets legal standards that apply to both

publicly and privately run schools prescribing the subjects to be studied, attainment targets or examination requirements, content of national examinations, number of teaching hours per year, and the required qualifications of teachers. The Ministry also requires schools to consult parents and pupils on specific school matters and prescribes certain planning and reporting obligations.

Because pupils differ in the amount of educational support they need, there are two categories of mainstream schools for primary education: primary schools (BAO) ['basisonderwijs'] and special primary schools (SBO) ['speciaal basisonderwijs']. The first, primary schools, are regular schools. When a pupil needs slightly more educational support than a primary school can offer, there are special primary schools. These are the former schools for children with learning and behavioural difficulties (LOM) and children with moderate learning difficulties (MLK). Both the primary schools and the special primary schools fall under the legislation of primary education (WPO) ['Wet op het Primair Onderwijs'].

Besides those two categories of mainstream schools, there are also schools for pupils with special educational needs: schools for special education (SO) ['speciaal onderwijs']. These schools for special education are regulated by the Regional Expertise Centers Act (WEC) ['Wet op de Expertisecentra'] and are divided into four categories of schools. There are schools for special education for (1) blind and visually impaired pupils, (2) deaf and impaired hearing pupils, (3) mentally handicapped pupils and pupils who are suffering from long-term illness, and (4) pupils with disorders and behavioral problems. These schools thus offer extra (educational) support mainstream schools are not able to offer. Besides the learning goals mainstream schools have, schools for special education have several extra learning goals. For a blind pupil, this might be 'The pupil has to be able to move around independently with the white cane'. Only pupils who are not able to attend one of the two categories of mainstream schools could be referred to one of the four types of schools for special education.

### *Inclusive education*

Over the years, the way schools collaborated changed. In this section, we will discuss the collaboration between schools in the past, the network approach at this moment and how these networks are developing. The focus will be on networks of primary schools.

### *The early days: 'Weer Samen Naar School' (WSNS)*

Until August 2014, primary schools collaborated in networks of schools, because of the policy called 'Weer Samen Naar School' (WSNS) ['Going to School Together Again']. This policy was created in 1992/1993 to stabilize or (if possible) even reduce the number of pupils going to 'LOM' and 'MLK' schools (Onderwijsraad, 2001). These schools were converted to special primary schools, for pupils who need a small amount of educational support. From that moment, only the most severe cases of pupils with learning problems could be referred to schools for special education. Pupils with less severe problems could be educated in special primary schools. Those schools were responsible for the care of pupils with less severe learning difficulties or other learning problems and were expected to provide such care within mainstream primary education. The mainstream schools in the Netherlands were obliged to participate in a WSNS network, based on the law of primary education

(WPO). In 2000, there were 248 WSNS networks in primary education which each consisted of approximately 30 schools (28 primary schools and two special primary schools) (Onderwijsraad, 2001). The schools for special education did not have to join these WSNS networks, and instead formed 35 Regional Expertise Centers.

However, schools and parents felt that the diagnosis and indication for extra support in schools for special education was too complicated and bureaucratic. This bureaucracy ensured that the appropriate support for pupils was offered (too) late or, in some cases, the support was insufficient. Also, there were many children who did not go to school (and did not get education) and the cooperation between schools for special education and Youth Care could be improved. For these reasons, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science decided to introduce a new legislation to regulate the education of pupils with special educational needs with a more effective approach, resulting in the new networks of inclusive education: 'samenwerkingsverbanden' (SWV).

#### *New legislation: 'Samenwerkingsverbanden' (SWV)*

The cooperation of mainstream schools and schools for special education was formalized in August 2014 with the implementation of the 'Wet Passend Onderwijs' [Inclusive Education Act]. This act arranged for new networks for inclusive education ('samenwerkingsverbanden') in which mainstream schools and schools for special education cooperate under a new education authority responsible for the provision of inclusive education provided by the schools in a region. Only schools for special education in category three (mentally handicapped pupils and pupils who are suffering from long-term illness) and four (pupils with disorders and behavioural problems) have to join the new networks for inclusive education. Within these networks, the schools are responsible for the realization of the level of basic assistance, and the SWV network is responsible for the monitoring of the realization of this basic assistance. As the SWV network is responsible for the financial budget of the network, it can influence the quality level of this basic assistance. Finally, under this new act, schools within networks for inclusive education have 'a duty of care', which means that the school is obliged to find the most suitable place in education for all pupils with special educational needs. Previously, parents were responsible for placement of their child in a school.

The previous WSNS networks were combined into new regional networks of schools: SWV networks. These networks were centrally formed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science who placed mainstream schools and schools for special education in a network according to regional proximity and existing (informal) cooperation between schools. In this process, school boards had the opportunity to express their preferences of collaborating with specific school boards in the new SWV networks and the Ministry took notice of the amount of pupils and the spread of pupils. Currently there are 77 networks for primary education and 75 networks for secondary education ("Kengetallen samenwerkingsverbanden", n.d.). As this paper focuses on the networks for primary education, the goal of each network for primary education is to realize a coherent body of extra educational support both within and between schools, so pupils can have an uninterrupted development and learning process, and pupils who are in need of extra educational support are assured of the most appropriate place in education. The new education authorities SWV networks are responsible for:

- Determining the basic assistance of all schools in the network;
- Make sure there is a covering offer of educational support in schools within the network. This makes sure that every pupil can get the educational support he or she needs;
- Arranging the allocation of extra educational support to the schools in their network;
- Determining whether a pupil can be educated in special primary education;
- Dividing the budget for extra support on schools within the network.

The education authority of the SWV network includes a representation of the school boards of all participating schools. Most networks appointed a coordinator, a secretary and a treasurer. Each network also has to put in place a committee of experts who advise on a possible referral of a pupil to a special need school on a case-by-case basis. This committee consists of at least a remedial educationalist or a psychologist. Depending on the pupil about who there has to be given advise concerning a possible referral to a special need school, a second expert like a child psychologist/psychiatrist or a social worker will be consulted. Furthermore, all SWV networks have a representative advisory body (called a 'ondersteuningsplanraad') of parents and teachers from the schools within the network. This body has the formal authority to approve the 'support plan' of the network, which sets out the realization of inclusive education. In the next section this support plan will be discussed more detailed.

#### *Support plan*

The schools in the SWV network are required to outline their cooperation and agreements on support of individual pupils in a so called 'support plan'. This plan outlines how the tasks will be implemented over a period of four years. This plan includes the level of basic support present in all schools within the SWV; the way the SWV organizes a coherent set of facilities for additional support within a school and between schools of the SWV, so pupils who need extra support can get the most appropriate place in education; the agreements (procedure and criteria) the SWV made about the distribution, utilization and allocation of resources and facilities for extra support of schools (included a multi annual financial framework); the procedures and criteria concerning the referral of pupils within the SWV to schools for special education; the procedure and policy concerning referral to schools for special education; the intended and achieved qualitative and quantitative results of education of pupils who need extra support; the way the SWV informs parents about support facilities; and which agreements are made about the transfer of financial budget to schools for special education for basic support of individual pupils who need extra support. Agreements are made on an annual basis and include a description of which tasks are delegated to individual schools.

The support plan has to be discussed with the local municipal council who has overall responsibility for youth services in their municipality, and a SWV network for secondary education. Their responsibilities are also about to be extended as the Youth Act, which is operative since 1 January 2015 and will be implemented in 2015, tasks them with the social care of children in their community. The provinces previously executed these tasks. A close cooperation between the local council and the networks for inclusive education is needed to ensure close alignment between education and social care and ensure overall high quality provision of services to pupils. School boards within the SWV networks and the local authorities are expected/required to set out

agreements for pupils going to schools for special education, particularly about the transport policy of pupils who are referred to a school for special education and provision for pupils who are not able to attend school for any period of time.

#### *Network SWV 23-02 and SPOE*

One of the networks of schools is the “SWV 23-02” in the Eastern part of the Netherlands (SWV 23-02 Primair Onderwijs, n.d.). This network comprises 179 schools: 162 primary schools, six special primary schools and eleven schools for special education, and has a total of about 36.000 students. As this SWV network comprise numerous school boards and schools, the management of this network has decided to divide the SWV network in three smaller departments that are interdependent: the district of Enschede, Hengelo and the northeast part of Twente. The three departments of SWV 23-02 are free to determine the way they obtain the goal of inclusive education, but at the same time, they are independent from each other. As the basic assistance has to be the same for all departments, agreements are made about the collaboration between the departments, so the goals of the SWV network can be achieved.

The district of Enschede comprises schools of two collaborating school boards in and around the municipality of Enschede. One school board, Consent, runs 33 non-denominational (public) schools and the other, VCO (Christian Education Association), runs 15 denominational (protestant) schools. Two of these schools are special primary schools. There are no schools for special education within the district of Enschede. Together, the school boards have founded a support center called ‘Steunpunt Passend Onderwijs Enschede’ (SPOE) [Support Center Inclusive Education Enschede], to assist the schools of the two boards in three areas: in improving reading and math skills of their pupils, improving data use of teachers, and delivering inclusive education to pupils who need some form of special education (Steunpunt Passend Onderwijs Enschede, n.d.). SPOE is run by a coordinator who is responsible for the steering of processes within the network and takes responsibility for the execution of policies. Besides, there is a management board, which is responsible for realizing the goals set by the SWV, a steering committee, and an advisory committee. Also, there is a small staff of special education specialists, consultants and remedial educationalists. The management of SPOE arranges about eight meetings a year and the steering committee and the advisory committee also meet about six times a year. Finally, SPOE arranges meetings for all members of the network in which important topics are introduced and discussed.

#### **Dutch Inspectorate of Education**

The new education authorities for inclusive education and their networks of schools are subject to school inspections. As the Inspectorate of Education only inspected individual schools until 2015, these new arrangements have a major impact on inspection methods. A new inspection framework for the SWV networks, describing the quality of networks of schools and additional sanctions for educational authorities in charge of these networks, has been developed for this purpose.

This section of the paper will describe how the Dutch Inspectorate of Education inspects the new education authorities and their networks of schools. We used document analysis and interviews to collect data to learn about the current role and working methods of the Inspectorate of Education.



Documents include the inspection framework and the white paper on risk-based inspections from the Inspectorate of Education, letters from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science about the new Inclusive Education Act, the website about excellent schools, examples of the support plan of several SWV networks and websites of several SWV networks. Finally, the coordinator of the Inspectorate of Education concerning networks of schools and the inspectors of the individual schools within the network of SPOE were interviewed.

## **Findings**

This section focuses on the supervision of the Inspectorate. It first provides a description of the current inspections of individual schools. We will then describe how the Inspectorate of Education evaluates the SWV networks of schools for inclusive education.

### *Inspection of individual schools*

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education was established in 1801. It is responsible for the inspection and review of schools and educational institutions by:

- Assessing the compliance with regulations;
- Assessing the quality of education offered in schools;
- Reporting publicly on the quality of individual institutions;
- Reporting publicly on the educational system as a whole;
- Encouraging schools to maintain and improve the education they offer;
- Providing information for policy development;
- Supplying reliable information on education;
- Financial supervision and control.

Over the years, the working methods of the Inspectorate evolved. According to the Education Inspection Act (WOT) ['Wet Onderwijstoezicht'] schools themselves are responsible for the quality of the education in their own schools and the way this quality is measured and evaluated. As a result, a school inspector will use the results of the self-evaluation the school carried out and delivered to the Inspectorate to determine the need for further investigation of the educational quality. Since 2007 the Dutch Inspectorate of Education carries out risk-based inspections of schools assessing potential problems that could affect the quality of education in due course. This system reduces the burden of inspections felt by schools and was expected to make inspections more effective and efficient. Every year, an automatic process called 'primary detection' of potential risks of failing educational quality in all schools is made based on pupil achievement results on standardized tests, self-evaluation reports and annual accounts (e.g. financial reports) of schools, complaints of parents and news items in the media. This primary detection is the first step of the risk-based analysis (see figure 1).

Based on the primary detection of the risk-based analysis, the inspectors determine whether a school is granted a 'basic supervision arrangement' or whether further investigation of the school's quality is required. When there are no risks of failing, a school has gained sufficient trust in the quality of the educational process and will be classified 'basic school quality': this school is delivering satisfactory education and results and does not require further inspection. The Inspectorate of Education will visit this school once every four years. Only at this moment, the school will be

researched based on the inspection framework. This allows the Inspectorate to focus on the rapid improvement of schools that supply poorer education and might be ending up as a failing school.

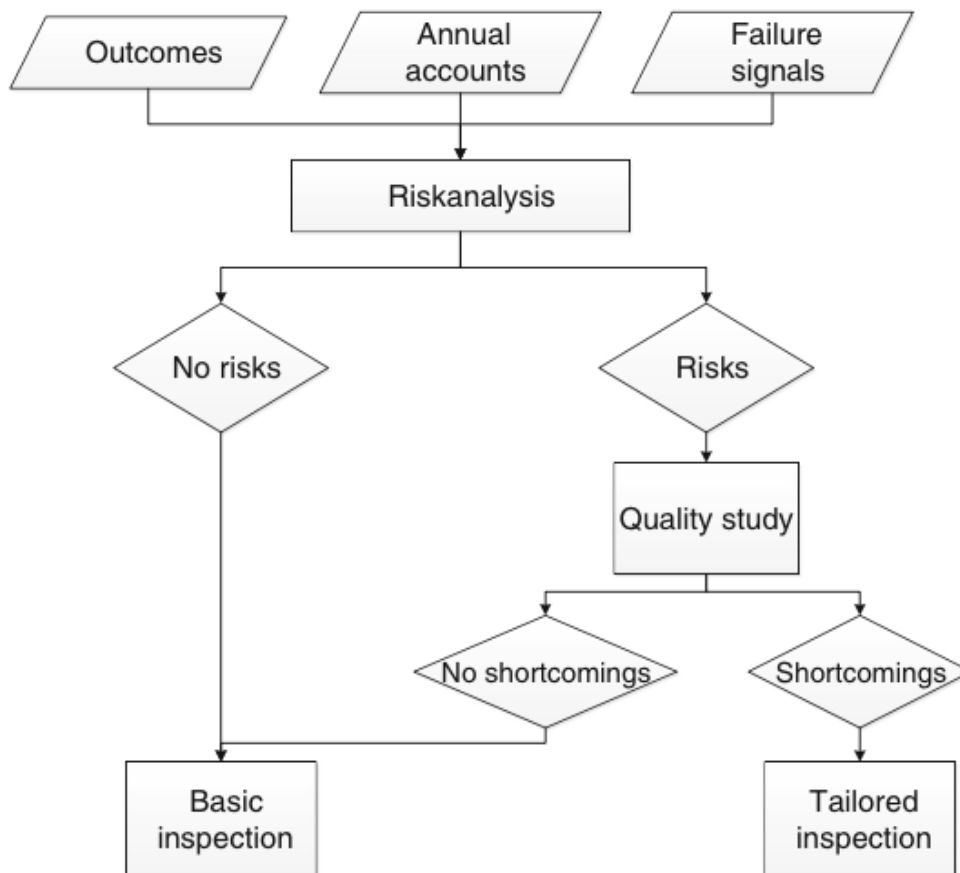


Figure 1: Risk-based inspection (Timmermans, de Wolf, Bosker & Doolaard, 2015).

When a school shows potential or high risks of failing, an ‘expert analysis’ will be initiated. This analysis is conducted by means of desk research, using information from the primary detection combined with publicly accessible information about the school and information from earlier inspection reports. Based on this information, an inspector may conclude nothing seems to be wrong, so a basic supervision arrangement will be granted. When the inspector still perceives risks of failing, the inspector can decide to inspect the school. This inspection of the school is always conducted in accordance with the school board and takes place within the school itself. At the latest, six weeks before the inspection the school will be informed. There will be an interview with the school board to determine whether the board is aware of the possible problems, and whether the board is able to solve them.

#### *Judgment of school quality*

Based on the information of the interviews, an inspector can decide to conduct a quality inspection in the school. The quality of education will then be examined using the inspection framework (Inspectorate of Education, 2010). Key features of this framework include pupil performance, teaching-learning process, special educational needs provision and guidance, quality assurance and statutory regulations. Within this framework, indicators were selected which play an important role

in determining whether a school qualifies for a customized inspection because of weak or unsatisfactory quality. An example of such an indicator for key feature pupil performance is “The results attained by pupils at the end of primary school are at least at the level that may be expected on the basis of the characteristics of the pupil population”. Further, an inspector can interview pupils, teachers or parents, and can conduct observations of lessons and other events in daily school life. Based on the analysis of the collected data, the inspector will classify the school as ‘basic school quality’ when there appear to be no shortcomings. When there are shortcomings or potential risks of failing, a school will be classified as a ‘weak school’, and a school with high risks of failing will be classified as a ‘failing school’. These schools then receive a customized supervision arrangement. The school’s problems will be outlined and decisions or agreements with the school board on how to improve the school’s quality are discussed. The school’s educational quality has to improve within two years. When a school fails to improve its quality during this period, the Inspectorate will take steps to achieve improvement of the educational quality. First, this can be a conversation with the school board and representatives of the Inspectorate, followed by appointments considering achievements about the educational quality. When there is still a shortcoming of quality, the management of the Inspectorate can warn the school and make mention of this school to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, who can impose sanctions on managerial or financial levels.

In September 2013, most primary schools in the Netherlands were classified ‘basic school quality’ (97.8%, 6868 schools) (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2014). A small amount of schools was classified as ‘weak’ schools (2.9%, 140 schools) and 0.2% was classified ‘failing’. This means that there are fourteen primary schools, with approximately 25.000 pupils, that have high risks of failing. However this is a high amount of weak and failing schools, the amount of schools with weak and failing school quality is decreasing during the last three years.

#### *Excellent schools*

Schools with the qualification ‘basic school quality’ can also get an extra qualification ‘excellent school’. Starting in 2015, the Dutch Inspectorate of Education is also involved in calling out excellent schools. A school is excellent when it is providing something extra, like outstanding music lessons or extra attention to multilingual pupils. An independent jury determines whether a school deserves this qualification. Selection is based on five criteria: learning outcomes, a clear vision on education, the school’s self-learning capacities, the circumstances in which the school operates and the way in which the school profiles itself (e.g. extra attention to excellent and highly gifted pupils). The qualification ‘excellent school’ is valid during three years. The goal of the qualification excellent school is to stimulate all schools to improve their quality and to be an example for other schools. In 2014, 106 schools received the predicate of excellent school, of which 39 primary schools (including five special primary schools), 12 (primary and secondary) schools for special education and 55 secondary schools (*106 Excellente Scholen 2014, 2015*).

#### *Reporting of individual inspections*

When a school is granted a ‘basic supervision arrangement’ during the risk-based inspection, the schools name and the supervision follow-up will be presented on the website of the Inspectorate of

Education, but there is no detailed report of this result. When the risk-based inspection and quality research both reveal shortcomings of quality in a school, this school is granted a 'weak supervision arrangement' or 'failing supervision arrangement'. This arrangement will be presented on the website of the Inspectorate in combination with a report in which the extent to which the school realizes the indicators of the inspection framework is discussed. The report starts with a general introduction about the reason of inspection, the method of the inspection process and the sources that are used. Then, the results of the inspection are discussed in detail by presenting the scores on the indicators of the inspection framework, a description of the educational quality of the school, and an explanation of the scores on the indicators of the inspection framework. Finally, the supervision arrangement is presented. All reports are publicly accessible, so everyone is able to search for the supervision arrangements of all schools in the Netherlands.

Further, all additional research carried out by the Inspectorate will be published on the website of the Inspectorate. The report of the quality research of a school that takes place once every four years will be published online. Also, the reports of periodic quality research to map the educational developments will be published. Finally, the reports of schools that received the extra qualification 'excellent school' are available on the website of excellent schools. All reports that will be published on the Internet are first discussed with the school or other representatives so they have the opportunity to react on this report.

#### *Inspections of SWV networks of schools*

To guarantee the quality and working methods of the new SWV networks of schools for inclusive education, the Inspectorate of Education inspects these networks by checking whether the network performs her tasks well, achieves its goals, whether this network divides her budget for extra guidance to pupils effectively between schools, and whether the organization of this network is transparent. To inspect those criteria, the Inspectorate developed a new framework for SWV networks (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2013). In an early phase of the construction of this framework, school boards and networks of schools were consulted by an online consultation on the standards in the framework, and adjustments were made to address their feedback. For example, the feedback resulted in adjustment in the framework considering the autonomy of the school boards and the SWV and separate responsibilities of both.

In 2013/2014, a year before the Inclusive Education Act became operative concerning the duty of care, the Inspectorate carried out a pilot study of all SWV networks to collect baseline information on the functioning of the networks, to test the framework and the methods of inspection, and to stimulate the development of the organization of the SWV networks. The pilot included desk research of documents and data from the SWV networks (e.g. its support plan, developments concerning schools for special education, and the financial situation of the SWV network), as well as visits of the SWV network in which presentations were attended and interviews were held with representatives of the network. The pilot study resulted on how the inspections of the SWV networks should be formalized and a detailed description of the new framework.

#### *Risk-based analysis*

The new framework and inspection method will be put in place from 2015/2016 onwards. Inspections of the SWV networks will, similarly to inspections of individual schools, be risk-based. The risk-based analysis for networks of inclusive education is implemented in two stages: first, an analysis of existing facts and figures, which is an automated analysis of several parameters; and second, an expert analysis, which is a desk research of several parameters by inspectors and analysts. The analysis of facts and figures includes in the first place an automated measurement of four parameters, which are expected to indicate potential shortcomings in the functioning of networks: (1) the amount of pupils who do not go to school (and do not get any education), (2) spread of pupils in schools and pupils switching between schools within the network, (3) earlier Inspectorate judgments of the schools or network, and (4) other signals like news in the media or complaints by parents or other stakeholders.

When this first stage of risk-based analysis reveals no risks, the network is granted a 'basic supervision arrangement' and the Inspectorate of Education refrains from further data analysis or visits of the network. From 2015/2016 onwards, the Inspectorate will inspect each SWV network once every year by carrying out a risk-based analysis. Part of this inspection is the compliance to several legal and statutory provisions (e.g. every school joins a SWV network and the plan of support is formulated with accordance to the local authorities), so the Inspectorate will check whether a SWV network satisfies these statutory provisions.

However, in case the analysis facts and figures indicate risks of failing quality of the network, the second stage of the risk-based analysis will be initiated. This second step includes desk research by inspectors and analysts around three parameters: (5) the support plan of the network, (6) the annual report of the network and the distribution of support facilities and special need teachers, and – similar to the analysis of facts and figures – (4) the analysis of other signals like news in the media or complaints by parents or other stakeholders. When there appear to be no risks, the Inspectorate refrains from further analysis and the SWV network is granted a 'basic supervision arrangement'. However, when the inspectors still identify risks of failing quality, the Inspectorate can decide to schedule an interview with the board of the SWV network. In this interview, the board will be asked to explain the (possible) presence of risks of failing quality. When there still appears to be indicators of failing quality, the Inspectorate will schedule a customized inspection of the SWV network and its education authority using the inspection framework for networks of inclusive education.

#### *Judgment of quality of SWV networks*

The inspection framework for networks of inclusive education used during the inspections includes standards on three quality criteria, which each consists of several indicators, eighteen in total. The three quality criteria are: outcomes, management and organization, and quality assurance. The most important criterion is outcomes: does the SWV network carry out the tasks assigned, and does it achieve a consistent set of support facilities within a school and between schools in the SWV network, so all pupils who need extra educational support get the most appropriate support? An example of an indicator of the criterion outcomes is "The SWV network realizes suitable support facilities for all pupils who need extra educational support". The quality criterion of management and organization is about the realization of the mission and achievement of goals of the network within

the borders of the Inclusive Education Act, by an action-oriented management, effective intern communication and an efficient, transparent organization. An example of this indicator is “The SWV network determined a mission, which is the basis for the organizational structure and the objectives to be achieved (vision)”. The last criterion quality assurance is about the SWV network that takes care of its quality by carrying out systematic self-evaluations, systematic quality improvement, an annual report of the realized quality and the securing of realized improvements. This criterion includes the indicator “The SWV network carries out self-evaluations”. Some indicators are influential in determining the quality of a criterion: those are norm indicators. Based on the results of the pilot study of 2013/2014, the Inspectorate will decide which indicators will be norm indicators. When all criteria are researched, the supervision arrangement of the SWV network will be determined. This can be a ‘basic’, ‘weak’ or ‘unsatisfactory’ supervision arrangement.

The inspection framework of SWV networks will also be used for sample studies. A representative sample of the 77 SWV networks will be evaluated using the inspection framework to investigate the positive and negative developments in inclusive education. Because the Inspectorate does not want to burden the SWV networks with their inspections too much, the Inspectorate starts the inspection with the first criterion: outcomes. When this first criterion of outcomes is met and there are no signals the two other criteria stayed behind, no further research is needed. When the results did stay behind, are not available, or when there are other risk signals, the Inspectorate will start to investigate the two other criteria, management and organization, and quality assurance, more detailed.

### *Reporting*

The reports of the pilot study of all SWV networks are published on the website of the Inspectorate of Education, including the most significant findings of the research, the organizational developments of the SWV network, an overview of the findings based on the support plan, an overview of (non-) compliance to legal regulations and a reaction of the board of the network. From now on, the supervision arrangement of all SWV networks will be published online. When the Inspectorate has carried out a quality research, the report of this research will also be published. This report includes the ‘basic’, ‘weak’ or ‘unsatisfactory’ supervision arrangement, the most important findings from the parameters and some recommendations of improvement.

### **Conclusion and discussion**

In this paper, we discussed the networks of inclusive education in the Netherlands and linked it with the idea of polycentric school inspections. Ehren and Perryman (2015) stated “Polycentric school inspections evaluate the quality and functioning of networks of schools and their stakeholders, with the purpose of validating and supporting improvement and decision-making at the network level (p. 7). Based on the findings from the documents and interviews concerning the Dutch Inspectorate of Education, we have gained more insight into the current situation concerning the extent to which the Inspectorate has polycentric characteristics.

In the Netherlands, schools work together to accomplish inclusive education. Other instances like local authorities, a school attendance officer and the Inspectorate of Education are also concerned with the quality of education, which can be seen as a polycentric characteristic of education in the Netherlands. Additionally, during the development phase of the inspection frameworks, the point of view of stakeholders has been taken into account. Drafts of those frameworks were discussed with many different stakeholders; for example, the development of the SWV framework took place in collaboration between the Inspectorate and the SWV network authorities by carrying out an online consultation. Another polycentric characteristic the Inspectorate of Education shows is that the Inspectorate visits schools and makes sure each school gets feedback that is summarized in an inspection report the school receives afterwards. As these inspection reports are public, all stakeholders are able to search for the quality level of schools.

However, the inspection report an individual school receives does not contain information about its functioning within the network. The inspection report, based on the inspection framework, mostly focuses on achievements of the individual school. Only one criterion, point 8.5 of the inspection framework for individual schools, concerns networking: "The school searches for structural collaboration with other educational partners when necessary interventions on the level of a pupil exceeds their own tasks". There is no criterion about the functioning of the individual school within a network. Additionally, the inspection report of a network of inclusive education does not contain information about the functioning of the schools within this network. As the inspection reports of individual schools are public, the network might use these reports to gain more insight into the functioning. However, the visits of individual schools are not planned in a way all schools within the same network are visited at the same period. Moreover, the reports of individual schools are only traceable by searching the name of the school, not by searching the name of the network it is part of. Therefore, it is difficult to gain a recent and complete picture of the functioning of schools within a network.

Also, there is little systematic exchange of knowledge between the inspectors of individual schools and inspectors of the SWV networks, as they are separate teams with separate responsibilities and separate schedules. When a SWV network is inspected, the focus of inspectors is exclusively on the role of the SWV authority, the coordinator of the network and on the legal requirements, but the inspector does not focus on the quality of the individual schools of the network or their contribution to the network. Only in the (however automated) facts and figures analysis of a SWV network, the earlier Inspectorate judgment of individual schools is one of the parameters. On the other hand, the inspectors responsible for visiting individual schools do not see those schools as a member of a certain SWV network. They seldom involve information about the outcomes of the SWV inspection into their school inspection data.

Concluding, in the Netherlands, the inspections of the Inspectorate of Education seem to have some polycentric characteristics, but there might be more possibilities considering the networks of inclusive education when using polycentric inspection approaches. A closer reflection to the collaboration between individual schools and networks of schools, and both their inspection

methods could be useful to gain more information about the functioning of a network of schools and the role the Inspectorate can play within a polycentric context.



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