

Netherlands

Blonde lady: In short my most important ambition is to make education go from good to excellent. It is good in the Netherlands, but it could be better and we have to strive for excellent education because we are already a highly educated country, and in the future we will have a knowledge-based economy. Together we will make education even better than it is today.

TITLE: Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Netherlands

TON DUIF, *Chair of School Leaders Association*: The Dutch education system is rather different from other systems in the world and that has to do with the nature of Dutch politics. In 1920, after a long political battle, the current system evolved where we now have a very independent school system in which public and private schools are in fact treated equally. The Minister of Education is responsible for both public education and what we call “special education”, which is Catholic, Islamic or other education.

HANS VAN DER VLUGHT, *Ministry of Education, Director For Teacher Policy*: Yes, the constitution of the Netherlands sets forth the freedom of education, and that means that schools have great autonomy and the government will not interfere with the pedagogical-didactical approaches of teachers. We are not involved with the “how” questions, how teachers and schools shape education but we are involved with the “what” question, what you should have achieved at the end of the course, what should be the result for students in, for example, the finals exams, or competency requirements of the staff.

TON DUIF: Children start school at age 4. After that the mandatory school age begins with elementary school, which lasts until age 12. Then the kids choose from various options of secondary education, from academic high school to vocational education and training.

WERNER VON KATWIJK, *Director of Parents Organization*: Freedom of education has created great diversity, the possibility to choose from various schools. And school choice is also an important element in the quality of the education system.

GEERT TEN DAM, *President, Education Council*: I think something complex is happening in the Netherlands. Education in the Netherlands is good. We have always been in the top group when it comes to the PISA results. But what we saw in the last PISA survey in 2009 is that the Netherlands has dropped its rankings: we are now 10th, I believe, in reading, and 11th in math and science.

TEXT SLIDE: In the 2009 PISA tests, Dutch students scored an averaged 508 points in reading, 526 in math and 522 in science. This put the Netherlands among the top 10 OECD countries in all three subject areas. Worldwide, including non-OECD participants, the Netherlands ranked 10th in reading and 11th in math and science.

TEXT SLIDE: However, one in seven Dutch students performed poorly in reading. The PISA results also showed that the impact of students' socio-economic background on learning outcomes is only around average, and immigrant students showed much weaker skills than native Dutch students.

TEACHER: *Look at this here, do you see? This stick, this stick, and this stick.*

ANNETTE ROETERS, *Inspector General of Education*: In 2012 we see relatively few weak schools, so our performance is good. We also don't see very poor, under-achieving students. So at the bottom things are ok. But we also see with average and better students and average and better schools that there is no improvement. In fact, there's stagnation. We are worried about this.

TEACHER: *Okay, what are we going to do? I'm going to divide you into three groups. Will you manage? Here are the groups: one, two, three...*

JET BUSSEMAKER, *Minister of Education, Culture and Science*: I think that most importantly we should invest more in the teachers in the classrooms. And unlike Finland, for example, where the best college graduates go on to teacher training, in the Netherlands teacher training has not been highly regarded.

TEACHER: *I want you to work in pairs now, to assess each other's writing, and see whether it can be improved.*

HANS VAN DER VLUGHT: Teachers who come out of teacher training are competent enough to start teaching, but even when you finish after 4 years, you are still not done learning, and it is very important that from that moment on you continue to develop your skills.

JET BUSSEMAKER: Learning from each other, or organizing peer reviews, in my experience in education many teachers are busy with their own classes and their own subject, and they don't go out and look in other classrooms or check out other institutions, and I think we should encourage that much more in order to see what makes a good teacher a good teacher. And how can others acquire positive qualities from this, and learn from it, and implement these at another school, and in another classroom.

TEXT SLIDE: To improve teacher skills, the ministry is encouraging the practice of peer review in classrooms. At the same time, it has launched a national register of teachers to monitor and raise teacher quality.

HANS VAN DER VLUGHT: The hope is that by 2018 all teachers in the Netherlands will be listed in the teachers register. The teachers register is intended to document that teachers are working on improving their skills.

FRANK JANSMA, *Education Cooperation*: What we want to show clearly with the register is look, this teacher is qualified, he is competent, and he really invests in his professional development. That's what the register shows. No more than that. But what's important for the registration system, are the processes that happen around that register with regard to "what is quality?" "which themes do we want to develop now?" And then for the outside world that register is a guarantee that the foundation underneath the quality is good. But that quality must be put into practice every day in the schools.

TEXT SLIDE: Teylingen College- Leeuwenhorst is a Catholic-run secondary school north of The Hague. It is a "training school" that places special emphasis on improving teacher practice by exploring the best balance between direction instruction and student-directed projects.

CEES SLATS, *Director, Teylingen College- Leeuwenhorst*: Of course the first thing we demand from our teachers is subject matter expertise, and secondly we ask them to be open to new developments. And open to discovering how to best reach the students. Because subject matter expertise is one thing, but teaching entails transferring knowledge and skills.

TEACHER: *Group one gets the computer assignment. They will do this nice and peacefully by themselves. Don't talk, you don't have time to talk because you need to finish the assignment. Group two: as a group, you are going to do an assignment. You will be told what the assignment is.*

ANNETTE ROETERS: Peer review is a very good way to develop professionally. We saw in our study that a teacher who has trouble explaining, or motivating kids, can be working at the same school as a teacher who can do those things really well. So working together, as colleagues, and learning together, is a very good way to grow professionally.

TEACHER: *Here's the second changeover. Things get more disordered. And I thought, well here the kid's don't know exactly what they need to do.*

TEACHER 2: *Yeah, that should have been clearer.*

TEACHER: *They understood the first task, you explained it and it's on the board, one, two, three, and then it goes wrong. Maybe you should have drawn a circle, or given them a piece of paper, because here the chaos starts.*

WALTER DRESSCHER, *Chair of Teachers' Union AOB*: We are especially excited about peer review, because it greatly benefits teachers in terms of ownership, the feeling that the professions is yours, that you yourself are responsible for your choices, for decisions, and for improvements. This is all against a background of a past in which teachers in this country were very much harassed from the outside by academics, educators, researchers, who were very critical of the teaching methods, while we

think that it's much better when teachers themselves evaluate their teaching methods and decide together about improvements, instead of an us vs. them situation.

TEACHER: *So what is the assignment now? Listen carefully. The tricks of propaganda. What I want you to do is look at the tricks that advertising uses, and see to what extent the tricks used in propaganda are the same as those in advertising. We can look at the first one, for example.*

CEES SLATS: I think that it's very important that students see that the teachers take their work seriously, and their lessons, and that they take the students seriously too. The students will reflect that back. Because a large part of education is of course motivating people to learn, to have them master things, to help them cross thresholds, and when you give them the example of hey guys, I am still consciously working on this stuff myself, I have not finished learning either, then you set a good example.

TEACHER: *What do you notice from this part of the film? They're all chatting. How long does it take to get them quiet. Two seconds. Yeah, two seconds. "Listen!", and there it is.*

CEES SLATS: You always get back what you put into a child. Everyone knows that if you start your lesson cheerfully and enthusiastically, then there is a very good chance that the kids in your classroom will be cheerful and enthusiastic. If you show that you think it's important that your lesson is good, to the point that you make yourself vulnerable in front of a colleague, then the kids see that too, of course. And then maybe they will start to find the lessons interesting.

TEXT SLIDE: School aan Zet is a programme sponsored by the Ministry to help school leaders raise the quality of teaching in their classrooms.

TEACHER: *What I'm curious to hear about is: imagine in a given year that a department isn't doing well, say it's the English Department and you discuss this. Does this also mean that you come up with plans for these departments to improve? Or do you do this in consultation? How do you go about it?*

TEACHER 2: *Well, for us it depends on what we expect from the teachers. We have to act accordingly. These department can develop plans for improvement on their own, but I know with some other departments, if I ask them, it will take a few months and I won't be satisfied. So I have to go about it in a different way, and guide them from the start.*

HANS VAN DIJCK, *School aan Zet*: I work for School aan Zet. School aan Zet is programme initiated by the Council for Secondary Education and the Dutch Ministry of Education. It stems from an administrative agreement between those two parties, and that agreement states that we want to try to improve the results in

secondary education. And we do that not by imposing this on the schools, but by supporting the schools and developing methods that lead to better results.

TEACHER 3: *Now my next question is, do parents see the difference between school examinations and national examinations? Do you get feedback from parents?*

OTHER TEACHERS: *No.*

HANS VAN DIJCK: In this program, School aan Zet, we ask schools to provide some documents, plans for improvement, based on results that they themselves have given us, and then we ask the schools to work on so-called “building blocks”. You could say that those building blocks are catalysts to achieve better results.

TEACHER: *Welcome everyone to this Teylingen ‘Tuesday afternoon’. The education pioneers. We all agreed that we would share our lesson plans, your plans for the next few weeks.*

JOKE WELS, *Deputy Director, Teylingen College- Leeuwenhorst*: Yesterday afternoon we had a meeting of what we call “education pioneers”. This is a monthly meeting, with teachers representing various subjects, where you can talk to each other about education in a more relaxed way. We have a drink, some nuts and stuff, so that it is more informal.

TEACHER: *Well, within our senior team we talked about drawing links between different subjects. And what you indicate time and again, is that these are just basic skills. Speaking, summarizing, writing fiction.*

JOKE WELS: And sometimes, like yesterday, and this was really fun, two economics teachers were talking about their plan, and there was a math teacher who was listening to them and he said, “Oh! That actually fits really well into my program too. I want to participate!” And then we have a subject-crossing collaboration.

In order to inspire excellence, and become a nation of lifelong learners, it is important to have the best teachers. The quality of education is largely determined by the school and the school management, but most important are the teachers in the classroom. We have to become a nation of lifelong learners together.