This summary of main conclusions is drawn from OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Netherlands. The full report is available on the project’s website:
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Executive summary

Compared internationally, the Dutch education system achieves very good results. It has made progress on many fronts and has a high standing on international assessments. Yet, there is a general appreciation that the system must continue to improve and strive for the next level. The nature of that next level, however, has not yet been specified. According to various groups interviewed by the OECD review team, it could mean further improving the country’s standing on international assessments, with particular focus on increasing the proportions of students in the highest category; or enhancing general academic achievement and responding better to the learning needs of different student groups; or turning attention to “21st century skills” such as creativity, collaboration and ICT literacy. Evaluation and assessment can play an important role in supporting the attainment of whatever educational goals are decided upon.

In many ways, the evaluation and assessment policies developed in the Dutch school system are in line with the principles identified by the OECD to develop a comprehensive and balanced evaluation and assessment framework. The Dutch evaluation and assessment approach stands out internationally as striking a good balance between school-based and central elements, quantitative and qualitative approaches, improvement and accountability functions and vertical and horizontal responsibilities of schools. Building on recent reforms and developments already underway, this report suggests a range of policy options to further develop and integrate the overall evaluation and assessment framework while maintaining its balanced approach.

Embed the evaluation and assessment framework with broader learning goals

A crucial aspect for the successful implementation of evaluation and assessment is their alignment with student learning objectives. Thus, it seems essential to begin as soon as possible a broad-based consultative process to build consensus on a set of long-term learning goals for Dutch students that will prepare them well for the mid-21st century. A national conversation on how traditional learning goals should be augmented to meet the challenges of the 21st century will help identify the changes that must be made to the evaluation and assessment framework to support innovative, future-oriented and reflective teaching and learning. To make the evaluation and assessment system coherent, it is important that the learning goals to be achieved are placed at the centre of the framework and that all other evaluation and assessment activities align to work towards these goals. For example, approaches to student assessment, competency descriptions for school professionals and quality indicators for school and system evaluation should reflect the broad set of learning goals that the school system is aiming to achieve.

Integrate teacher appraisal into the evaluation and assessment framework

As the most important school-level factor in student achievement, teachers are key to improving education outcomes. The OECD review team commends the current focus of the Dutch government to build on and further develop teacher professionalism in the Netherlands. Defining and rethinking the framework for evaluation and assessment also provides an opportunity to place teacher professionalism firmly at the heart of the evaluation and assessment agenda. The development of a comprehensive appraisal and feedback system for teachers could help increase the focus on teaching quality and continuous professional learning while also bringing recognition to effective teachers and spreading good practice more widely. To this end, the teaching profession in the Netherlands could benefit from a revised and refined set of teaching standards; strengthened school-based appraisal processes linked to professional learning opportunities, especially for beginning teachers; and an
enhanced registration system that could be linked to teacher career development. To build synergies between different aspects of evaluation and assessment, teacher appraisal and professional development should also be linked to school development priorities, and the external review of schools should comprise the monitoring of school-based practices to review and enhance teaching quality.

**Continue to adapt school evaluation to emerging needs**

Given the multi-actor nature of school evaluation in the Netherlands, the Inspectorate should continuously map the environment in which it operates at both the national and local level, and take into account the potential impact of the other partners when designing its school evaluation approaches. The current move towards the introduction of differentiated inspections provides a good opportunity to reconsider the relationship between internal and external school evaluation, and self-evaluation could gain a greater role in school inspections. To evaluate and further stimulate schools that have developed innovative approaches, external evaluators need in-depth knowledge of innovative learning environments and an understanding of how to evaluate practices that are not yet widely proven as resulting in good quality. The policy focus on teacher professionalism means that external evaluators will need to understand the complexities of internal human resource management and development practices in schools. Further innovations may be required, for example, modifying the Inspectorate’s classroom observation framework or involving teachers as part of inspection visits. In light of the general concerns regarding the use of value-added models (VAM) for accountability, the Inspectorate should move cautiously in formally incorporating VAM estimates into the school indicator system. The current focus should be on helping participating schools to use such information as a component of more comprehensive self-evaluation efforts and improvement strategies, while enlisting a larger sample of schools to participate in future pilot studies.

**Strengthen evaluation and assessment competencies across the education system**

In the context of freedom of education, the successful implementation of evaluation and assessment in the Netherlands crucially depends on the competencies of school professionals. Teachers are responsible for student assessment and need to build strong competencies in this domain. To this end, assessment-related competencies should be reflected in teacher standards, appraisal and registration, and be addressed in a coherent way across initial teacher education and publicly funded professional development. School leaders and their teams at the school level are responsible for both teacher appraisal and school self-evaluation and would benefit from a comprehensive strategy to support them in these tasks. This could include: considering the implementation of mandatory training for school leadership; ensuring that school leaders receive adequate appraisal and feedback from their employers; promoting peer evaluation, professional networks and partnerships among schools; and allowing greater access for school leaders to participate in external reviews and development work with other schools. School governing boards also share responsibility for human resource management and school quality assurance and could benefit from professional learning opportunities to enhance their capacities to appraise school leaders and monitor school quality.
Conclusions and recommendations

School system context

The Netherlands combines strong school autonomy with central steering, inspections and support

The Netherlands has one of the OECD’s most devolved education systems, with schools enjoying a high degree of autonomy. School autonomy is grounded in the principle of “freedom of education”, which gives the right to any natural or legal person to set up a school and to organise teaching. This constitutional arrangement puts public and private schools on an equal footing, with all schools receiving public funding, provided that they meet the requirements for schools in their sector. While “freedom of education” implies that schools are free to determine the content and methods of teaching, the central government sets learning objectives and quality standards that apply to both public and private schools. The Inspectorate of Education monitors school quality and compliance with central rules and regulations. There is also a large infrastructure of school service providers, most of them private companies, offering advice, instruments and support for school organisation, quality management and development.

The Dutch education system achieves good results internationally and is aiming to go further

The Dutch education system achieves very good results by international standards. Attainment rates of the Dutch population are similar to the OECD average and show positive trends. Dutch students have consistently shown above average performance in the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), with fewer low performers and more high performers among 15-year-olds than the OECD average. However, although the Dutch education system has a high standing on international assessments, there is a general appreciation it should continue to further improve the quality and equity of education. The performance of Dutch students in PISA since 2003 has decreased in mathematics and remained unchanged in reading and science. There are also marked performance differences across Dutch schools. National data indicate that the distribution of students across different education programmes is closely related to parental income and origin. There are also concerns about high levels of grade repetition, a large performance gap between immigrant and non-immigrant students and an increasing number of students being diagnosed as having special educational needs.

National priorities relate to promoting excellence among schools, enhancing teacher professionalism and supporting “results-oriented work”

The Dutch government has launched a general policy emphasising excellence in education. This includes a focus on providing better support to gifted and talented students and stimulating schools to aim for higher levels of achievement. In this context, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has implemented a prize for excellent schools, and the Inspectorate of Education is developing a differentiated inspection approach with the intention of helping schools that already provide basic quality education to further improve towards excellence. The Inspectorate has also conducted pilot studies to measure the “value added” by schools. As a cornerstone to promoting
excellence in education, the Dutch government has made the enhancement of teacher professionalism a priority for education policy. Recent developments in this area include the definition of competency standards for teachers, a requirement for school boards to monitor their teachers’ competencies, the establishment of a teacher registration system and a voluntary teacher peer review project. A key element of this agenda is to strengthen teachers’ capacity for “results-oriented work”, using various assessment approaches to enhance student learning outcomes. Recent laws on student assessment make it mandatory for primary schools to implement regular student monitoring systems and a standardised end-of-primary test.

Strengths and challenges

Evaluation and assessment approaches in the Netherlands are highly developed, but some elements need further attention

The Netherlands has a strong tradition of well-developed evaluation and assessment systems. Central mechanisms for student assessment, school evaluation and education system evaluation have been in place for several decades, along with requirements for schools to assure their own quality. This long-standing focus on developing reliable evaluation and assessment systems has allowed the central actors to experiment with different approaches and develop and deepen their expertise over time. The country’s longstanding tradition and expertise in educational evaluation and assessment provides the Netherlands with a strong basis to further develop and integrate the evaluation and assessment framework. While most components of evaluation and assessment are well developed, this report finds there is room to further strengthen approaches to classroom-based student assessment, teacher appraisal and school self-evaluation, and to embed these with the broader evaluation and assessment system.

A balanced evaluation and assessment approach, which relies on the involvement of multiple stakeholders

The Netherlands is characterised by a complex system of governance with multiple actors shaping evaluation and assessment practices. In addition to the three traditional actors (the Ministry, the Inspectorate and the schools) a broad range of stakeholder organisations, private educational service providers and educational research institutions also have an important influence on evaluation and assessment in the country. The involvement and continuous negotiation among these different groups has supported the development of a comprehensive and balanced approach to evaluation and assessment in the Netherlands. It combines school-based and central elements, quantitative and qualitative approaches, improvement and accountability functions, and vertical and horizontal responsibilities of schools. However, assuring coherence when several actors are pursuing different goals and following different approaches requires intensive cooperation, as well as the continuous development of shared goals and principles to guide evaluation and assessment practice.

Schools have broad autonomy in evaluation and assessment, which creates both opportunities and challenges for the system

Schools have broad autonomy in the area of evaluation and assessment. School autonomy and self-management create good conditions for school leader and teacher professionalism and continue to be strongly valued by school agents. This governance structure recognises that schools know their contexts best and allows school professionals to adopt diverse practices, thereby creating conditions for innovation and system evolution. At the same time, in such a system, characterised by a high level of school autonomy, school-based innovations related to evaluation
and assessment are usually neither documented nor disseminated. This may result in schools spending a lot of time on reinventing practices, some of which may be sub-optimal. In the context of freedom of education, individual schools can be relatively isolated and may have limited opportunities for learning from effective practice implemented elsewhere. Without a strategy to effectively support, leverage and disseminate school-based innovations, many promising ideas will remain localised or even fade away for lack of external support.

**Evaluation and assessment are policy priorities in the Netherlands, but they are not embedded in a broader vision or strategy for Dutch education in the 21st century**

The national authorities regularly launch new priorities or initiatives related to evaluation and assessment in education, but they typically do not provide a narrative of how such policy priorities fit together into a coherent plan. Several stakeholder groups, including the professional organisations of teachers and school leaders, voiced concerns about the absence of a common vision for schooling in the Netherlands. By extension, at the time of the OECD review visit, there did not seem to be an articulated overarching vision or strategy for how evaluation and assessment should fit within broader educational improvement strategies, and which role they should play in achieving system goals. If evaluation and assessment are to be tools for improving learning, rather than the drivers of education in the Netherlands, it is critical that efforts are made to achieve a national consensus on the education goals for future generations. Among others, the Education Council advocates the need to re-focus the education system on broader learning goals, such as creative thinking, problem-solving and collaboration. Defining such learning goals for the 21st century would allow key stakeholders to engage in reflection and dialogue on how evaluation and assessment should evolve in order to support a future-oriented education system.

**The focus on teacher professionalism is commendable and has potential to become a central element in the Dutch evaluation and assessment framework**

The commitment of the government to boost teacher professionalism is a key contextual factor for evaluation and assessment, and there is room to further promote it as a central element in the Dutch evaluation and assessment framework. Concerning student assessment, although there is a good balance between school-based and standardised student assessments, there is a challenge in the Netherlands to build the competencies of all teachers to fully exploit the potential of assessment to transform and improve classroom practices. Regarding teacher appraisal, there is room to develop more systematic appraisal and feedback processes to ensure that all teachers receive adequate feedback on their performance along with relevant support for improvement and recognition of their professional achievements. The emphasis on teacher professionalism also creates new challenges for the design of school evaluation, as it requires the Inspectorate to monitor more closely the internal capacity of schools to foster teacher professionalism, manage human resources and create professional learning communities.

**Standardised assessments provide reliable measures of student learning but there are risks that they are becoming too dominant**

The Netherlands stands out internationally with regards to the development of high-quality standardised assessments at key stages of education. Major advantages of external standardised assessments include their high reliability and low cost of administration. They also help to clarify learning expectations for all schools and motivate teachers and students to work towards high standards and steer their teaching and learning strategies towards common goals. At the same time, there is a risk that the high visibility of standardised assessment might lead to distortions in the education process. In the primary sector, the end-of-primary test developed by the Central Institute
for Test Development (Cito) uses only multiple choice items, with all the accompanying constraints on what skills can be adequately measured. Because of the role of the test results in determining placement in the secondary sector, and their use in the evaluation of schools, there is pressure on both students and teachers to concentrate on the specific content and format of the tests, which can lead to a narrowing of the delivered curriculum. Similar issues pertain to the assessments administered at the end of secondary education. Although schools have substantial autonomy in developing the school-based part of the examination, teachers interviewed by the OECD review team indicated that they tended to align their own assessments to the formats used in the central examination.

**The newly introduced reference levels provide greater clarity on expectations for student learning, but they are only available for a sub-set of learning goals**

The Dutch education system is organised around national “core objectives”, which describe in very general terms the knowledge and skills that students should achieve at the end of primary and secondary education. Additional reference levels for Dutch language and mathematics were recently published to provide more clarity about instructional objectives at the primary and secondary level. Greater clarity should help teachers create syllabi at each grade level that better represent national learning goals, as well as develop assessments with improved coverage of those learning goals. Ideally, this will result in more equality in students’ opportunity to learn and better alignment of instruction across different year levels and sectors of education. However, the reference levels cover only a sub-set of learning goals and some stakeholders expressed concerns that they remained quite vague. In the absence of clear and specific central expectations, learning goals in many areas are set with reference to existing assessments, in particular the Cito end-of-primary test and the national examinations at the end of secondary education.

**The focus on “results-oriented work” is a good policy but requires further investment in capacity building**

The government is promoting “results-oriented work” work in schools, which involves helping educators to more fully exploit student monitoring systems and, by analysing the information generated, to design appropriate teaching and learning strategies. Student monitoring systems, such as Cito’s student monitoring system (LVS), are important tools that support results-oriented work at the school level. They can provide signposts for teachers and students by indicating the learning goals that are expected nationally and they offer timely data that may inform teaching strategies. At the same time, there is evidence that many teachers have difficulties in interpreting and effectively using the information generated by such assessments to improve teaching and learning and to provide effective feedback to students. It is likely that these challenges are shared by school leadership teams and that the information provided by student monitoring systems could be better utilised for decision-making at the classroom and school level. Teachers also face challenges in developing their own classroom-based formative assessment approaches to identify and respond to their students’ specific learning needs, and to ensure that students are engaged in their own learning and assessment.

**Summative student assessment relies on a good balance between central and school-based elements, although there are some concerns**

Overall, there is a reasonable balance at key decision points between the use of school-based results and central examination scores. In the transition from primary to secondary education, for example, the school’s recommendation is as important as the standardised test results in determining the school and the track most suitable for the student. At the end of secondary school,
A subject assessment consists of both a centrally prepared examination and a school-developed examination. The fact that schools have some flexibility in deciding the content of their examinations is a mark of educators’ professional autonomy, and can lead to improvements in the coverage of the syllabus. This flexibility, together with the integral role that teachers play in the construction and scoring of the central examinations, is likely to account for the general credibility that the secondary examination system has among teachers. While the involvement of teachers in this aspect of the final examinations is commendable, it requires substantial training of teachers and systematic moderation processes to build teachers’ assessment competencies and ensure reliability of marking. There is also some concern about teachers designing the school-based part of the examination to resemble the central part, which may reduce the scope of material covered in examinations, with potential adverse consequences on teaching and learning.

**Professional standards for teachers exist, but they are not widely used in schools**

There has been considerable reflection in the Netherlands around what is considered “quality teaching”. The Education Professions Act includes a description of teacher competencies, which functions as a professional standard for teachers. In addition, the Inspectorate’s classroom observation framework provides guidance on aspects of good teaching and the Education Council provides advice on how to develop teachers’ “personal professionalism”. Professional standards are an important element in any teacher appraisal system, as they provide a common reference to effectively review teacher competencies and offer the potential to frame and align the organisation of key elements of the teaching profession, such as initial education, teacher appraisal and professional development. However, while the competency requirements are a mandatory element of initial teacher education, they do not appear to be carried forward into the appraisal and professional development planning of teachers in schools. The lack of common reference standards for teacher appraisal is likely to limit the capacity of schools to effectively review their teachers’ competencies and risks weakening the alignment between different elements of teachers’ professional practice and development.

**There are school-based approaches to teacher appraisal, but no guarantee that all teachers receive regular feedback on their performance**

There are a range of channels through which teachers may receive school-based feedback, including through performance interviews with the school leader, internal coaching systems and informal peer learning within teacher teams and departments. However, while some teachers receive extensive feedback and support from their peers and school leaders, there is no mechanism in the Netherlands to ensure minimum standards for teacher appraisal and no guarantee that every teacher receives proper induction, appraisal and professional feedback. Most school boards delegate responsibility for the appraisal of teachers to the school leaders. As there is no mandatory school leadership training for principals, the preparation and competencies of principals vary across schools. Even though examples of school leaders exemplifying strong pedagogical leadership and human resource management certainly exist, there is a challenge for the Dutch system in building up the role and capacity of their full cohort of school leaders. School boards are responsible for ensuring that their schools have functioning personnel and appraisal policies in place, but there are large variations in the degree to which school board members have the background, capacity and commitment to do so in a systematic manner.

**Teacher professional development is encouraged, but not sufficiently linked to teacher appraisal**

The importance of professional development is clearly recognised in Netherlands and the introduction of the registration system further emphasises the expectation that all teachers engage
in ongoing professional learning. Informal mentoring arrangements within schools also appear to be common practice. However, there are indications that teachers’ choices of formal professional development are only rarely linked to a thorough evaluation of their strengths and areas for development. The Dutch Inspectorate of Education found that schools vary widely regarding the support they provide teachers to facilitate their professional development and that training is often too discretionary and lacking in focus on the actual teaching and learning process. There is also scope to better link teacher professional development to school development and improvement.

The introduction of a teacher register is positive and has potential for further development

The Education Cooperative (Onderwijscoöperatie), a teacher professional organisation created in 2011, maintains a voluntary registration system for teachers. To be registered, teachers need to meet criteria regarding the amount and content of professional development they have undertaken. However, teachers’ actual practice and use of the new skills in the school and classroom are not evaluated as part of the registration process. Although the registration system has potential to become a key element in supporting teacher professionalism, it is still in the early stages of development and its role in the teacher career has not yet been clearly defined. Registration and registration renewal do not grant teachers access to a higher career step. The award of senior teacher positions is not typically linked to an appraisal of teachers’ performance in relation to the competency requirements and there does not seem to be a formalised career path for teachers. The further development of the teacher registration system may provide valuable opportunities to further develop the teacher career in the Netherlands and it could help establish a link between teacher appraisal and teacher career development.

School self-evaluation relies on increasingly well-developed instruments and capacity, but it would benefit from further support

School self-evaluation is an important component of school evaluation in the Netherlands, and there has been considerable investment in building tools and capacity for this at the school level. At the same time, school self-evaluation and school inspection are conducted as parallel rather than cooperative activities. Hence, there is a risk that the methods, language and used criteria are not well aligned, which may diminish the developmental function of school evaluation. In addition, recent changes in the educational legislation and the Inspectorate’s Supervision Framework indicate that the Inspectorate’s attention in inspection visits has shifted away from school leadership and more towards school governing boards. However, most aspects of internal quality management and self-evaluation can be undertaken effectively only by the leadership teams at the school level, and it is therefore important that they benefit form external review and feedback on their practices. Many school boards rely on the information provided to them by school principals, but there is little evidence that school boards conduct regular appraisal and review of their principals’ work.

Inspections have been successful at helping underperforming schools improve, but new inspection approaches appear necessary to stimulate the progress of all schools

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education is a highly structured and professionalised institution whose operations follow clear goals and are guided by well elaborated and transparent rules. This is an important strength of the Dutch approach. The Inspectorate operates a risk-based approach, whereby schools at risk of underperformance are evaluated more frequently and more thoroughly than others. Its capacity to detect risks and launch effective interventions is well illustrated by the success of the risk-based approach to stimulate improvements in weak and unsatisfactory schools. Several studies conducted in the Netherlands confirm the positive impact of inspections on schools
identified as providing weak or unsatisfactory quality. However, there are some doubts about the nature and strength of the impact of risk-based inspection on other schools. To further stimulate improvement in all schools including those that are already achieving basic quality, the Inspectorate will develop a “differentiated” approach to school inspection, adapting external inspection to the situation of individual schools. This is likely to create a more complex evaluation environment for inspectors, and will require ongoing development of their professional competences, quality criteria and inspection approaches. Inspectors will have to maintain a balance between the current data-oriented approach and new trends towards evaluating aspects of quality that are not easy to measure.

The availability of reliable information on learning outcomes is a strength but concerns exist that assessment results are increasingly put to multiple uses

A major strength of the Dutch school evaluation system is the highly developed system of collecting, managing and analysing student-level data, including in time series format, and the availability of such data in an aggregated form at school level. A related significant development has been the creation of user-friendly online information systems which connect different existing databases, summarise information about each school and grant opportunities for institutions to share information with each other and with a wide range of stakeholders. However, concerns exist that student assessment results are increasingly being put to multiple uses. In particular, the Cito end-of-primary test and the secondary school examinations, which were developed to identify the level of proficiency attained by individual students, are also used as key indicators of school quality. The high stakes for schools associated with these scores exert pressure on schools to improve test performance through a focus on the specific item formats employed by the test, and other strategies that may lack educational value.

The introduction of value-added modelling brings both opportunities and new challenges for school evaluation

While school-level information on student test results has been publicly available in the Netherlands for a long time, there is a general recognition that evaluating schools on the basis of their pupils’ performance can be problematic because it does not take into account their status upon entry. Therefore, a range of pilot studies have been conducted to review the utility of value-added models (VAM) in judging school quality. VAM take into account the differences in intake among schools, so as to better “isolate” the contributions of schools to their students’ progress. The development of value-added modelling is intended to address concerns regarding the potential misinterpretation of school league tables and to provide a more useful and credible identification of schools with high relative efficacy. Although the use of VAM addresses some of the concerns with conventional league tables, it does raise other issues. First, it is unlikely that the covariates employed in the regression model fully capture the differences among schools in enrolled students. These covariates are also subject to measurement error. Second, Dutch research found that differences in value-added among schools were relatively small and the (estimated) uncertainty associated with the estimates of school value-added were quite large. Thus, value-added analysis is a somewhat crude tool for accountability. Third, the complexity of the statistical models involved in VAM makes such approaches difficult to understand for teachers, parents and the general public. Unfortunately, the superficial, and often sensationalist, treatment of test results in the media often adds to the confusion.
The Inspectorate operates as an advanced “knowledge organisation”, whose success also depends on effective collaboration with multiple actors.

The Inspectorate of Education has many features of an advanced knowledge organisation. It has a dedicated knowledge directorate responsible for data collection, analysis, research and internal knowledge management and it maintains close cooperation with the Dutch educational research community. Thanks to its research-intensive operation, the Inspectorate seems capable of foreseeing a number of future challenges and of identifying appropriate responses, as illustrated by ongoing innovation efforts to (i) make inspection more differentiated, (ii) integrating pedagogical-didactical and financial inspections and (iii) strengthening value-added approaches. However, in the Dutch multi-stakeholder environment, many school evaluation activities happen outside the formal activity sphere of the Inspectorate, for example through self-evaluation, supervision by school boards, school development programmes containing evaluation components and horizontal accountability mechanisms. Not all actors in this multi-actor landscape are equally prepared, which calls for heightened attention to clarifying responsibilities and building the capacity of those involved.

Education system evaluation receives considerable attention in the Netherlands but would benefit from clearer national education goals.

The monitoring of the education system is a well-developed component of the Dutch approach to evaluation and assessment, which involves the collaboration of a wide range of players. The capacity for system evaluation is significant and the actors involved operate with a substantial degree of independence. The importance accorded to system evaluation in the Netherlands is reflected in the establishment of comprehensive information systems, sample-based national assessments, longitudinal surveys and programme evaluations; in the transparent reporting of system-level information in online databases and annual publications; and in the regular monitoring and evaluation of education policies and programmes to inform future educational planning. However, the government does not typically express its priorities for educational policy and the associated indicators in a single document which could provide a framework for policy development. This raises challenges in establishing both a solid foundation on which to build the evaluation and assessment framework, and a set of benchmarks against which the results of the overall system evaluation can be compared.

There is a good ability to monitor learning outcomes at the national level, but measures of student learning could be broader.

The Netherlands collects a wide range of data on student learning outcomes in relation to core learning objectives and reference levels. Information on student learning outcomes is collected from sample-based assessments (PPON, JPON) in primary education, longitudinal cohort studies, end-of-primary-education tests, national school-leaving examinations and international student assessments. However, as other OECD countries, the Netherlands faces challenges in designing measures of education system performance that are broad enough to capture the whole range of student learning objectives. The national monitoring surveys rely on paper-and-pencil tasks, which are based on curricula of single subjects. In primary education particularly, standardised assessments rely heavily on multiple choice assessment formats, and this creates challenges to monitoring students’ performance in more cognitively demanding areas. As a result, there is limited information regarding aspects such as creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, project development and team work.
There is room to further learn from the practices and perceptions of school professionals

While freedom of education enables schools to undertake their own experiments in relation to evaluation and assessment, these are typically not documented and collaboration among schools tends to be local. Dutch schools also have considerable freedom in deciding whether to participate in reform initiatives or research studies supported by the Ministry. Consequently, it is often problematic to obtain the representative samples of schools and students that are essential to high quality research. This can delay both innovation and a shift to more evidence-based policy making. There is also relatively limited information at the national level regarding the practices and perceptions of school professionals. While surveys of teachers and school leaders are occasionally organised to inform specific policy initiatives, the Netherlands does not administer a regular survey of school staff. As teacher registration becomes increasingly common among teachers, more information regarding the teacher workforce will also become available through this channel. There is potential to use the registration system as a way to share knowledge on teachers’ professional development and practices and to analyse the aggregate information with a view to informing future policies in support of teacher professionalism.

Policy recommendations

Embed the evaluation and assessment framework with broader learning goals for the 21st century

A crucial aspect for the successful implementation of evaluation and assessment is their alignment with student learning objectives. Thus, it seems essential to begin as soon as possible a broad-based consultative process to build consensus on a set of long-term learning goals for Dutch students that will prepare them well for the mid-21st century. In the Dutch governance context, this will need to involve multiple stakeholders, and negotiations are likely to be difficult given the principle of schools’ freedom of education. However, a national conversation on how traditional learning goals should be augmented to meet the challenges of the 21st century will help identify the changes that must be made to the evaluation and assessment framework to support innovative, future-oriented and reflective teaching and learning. To make the evaluation and assessment system coherent, it is important that the learning goals to be achieved are placed at the centre of the framework and that all other evaluation and assessment activities align to work towards these goals. For example, competency descriptions for school professionals and quality indicators for school evaluation should reflect the learning goals that the school system is aiming to achieve.

Draw up an overarching strategy to further develop and integrate the evaluation and assessment framework

While the Dutch evaluation and assessment system benefits from strong central expertise, sophisticated measurement instruments and a range of targeted policy initiatives, it could benefit from a clearer overarching strategy linking its different elements and providing the rationale for its further development and implementation across the country. The process itself would help to identify gaps, missing links and potential imbalances to be addressed in future policy development. As elaborated further below, this report finds that there is room to further develop: research-based approaches to classroom assessment and the use of assessment results for improvement; systematic teacher appraisal linked to professional and school development; and effective school self-evaluation that is well articulated with external inspection. Taken together, these elements would contribute to strengthening the school-based components of evaluation and assessment, which would help maintain a balanced approach to evaluation and assessment. Such processes actively involving students, teachers and school leaders have strong potential to produce
results that will be useful to shape future teaching and learning and have an impact on actual classroom practice.

**Continue to build on teacher professionalism**

As the most important school-level factor in student achievement, teachers are key to improving education outcomes. The OECD review team commends the current focus of the Dutch government to build on and further develop teacher professionalism in the Netherlands. Defining and rethinking the framework for evaluation and assessment also provides an opportunity to place teacher professionalism firmly at the heart of the evaluation and assessment agenda. Further work to enhance teacher professionalism can take place at different levels of the education system. Channels that are likely to reinforce the professionalism of teachers and to build links to classroom practice include: an emphasis on teacher appraisal for the continuous improvement of teaching practices; ensuring teaching standards are aligned with student learning objectives; involving teachers in collaborative school self-evaluation processes; preparing inspectors to understand the complexity of school-based human resource management and professional learning; ensuring that teachers feel the ownership of student assessment and accept it as an integral part of teaching and learning; enhancing teacher capacity to use assessment results for improvement; and building teachers’ ability to assess students in relation to national goals and reference levels. As teacher professionalism is not yet appropriately reflected in the evaluation criteria of the Inspectorate, special emphasis could be given to these aspects in the next round of revisions.

**Engage stakeholders and build networks for system learning**

Effective implementation seeks to strike the right balance between top-down and bottom-up initiatives, which is generally believed to foster consensus. Given the traditional autonomy accorded to schools, any top-down imposition of innovative evaluation and assessment approaches is likely to be problematic in the Dutch context. It seems more feasible to develop evaluation and assessment policies through the co-operation of different stakeholders towards a common goal. This calls for practitioners, such as school leaders and teachers, to be engaged in the design, management and analysis of evaluation and assessment policies. New projects to develop innovation in evaluation and assessment should involve partnerships between evaluation and assessment organisations and groups of schools where pilots would take place. The Inspectorate should also play a key role in recognising and disseminating promising innovations developed at the school level. In addition, developing more deliberate improvement networks among practitioners can be a powerful organisational tool. The central authorities can contribute to creating an ambition-friendly and innovation-friendly environment, by providing funding and support for schools and networks of schools to accelerate their work and showcase their efforts to a broader audience.

**Consider developing learning progressions to complement curriculum goals**

Research-based learning progressions describing the way in which students typically move through learning in each subject area can provide a picture from beginning learning to expertise and help provide teachers, parents and other stakeholders with concrete images of what to expect in student learning, with direct links to the final learning objectives and reference levels. Such learning progressions can provide a clear conceptual basis for a coherent assessment framework, along with assessment tools that are aligned to different stages in the progressions. They could be promoted as voluntary resources that teachers use as signposts in their assessment. They can help raise aspirations and communicate a focus on excellence and continuous improvement. In line with the government’s focus on teacher professionalism, such guidance could help teachers design their
instructional plans and classroom assessment strategies in alignment with national objectives and progressions. Teachers should also be encouraged to share and co-construct intermediate learning goals and assessment criteria with students so that they understand different levels of work quality. Such common work on goals and criteria can promote both student learning and reflective teaching practice with shared national goals in mind.

**Develop an assessment strategy in line with 21st century learning goals**

Although some 21st century skills are already incorporated in national learning goals in the Netherlands, it is likely that a broader set of these skills and competencies will become part of the goals that are set at the national level. Current paper and pencil tests with their limited item formats will not be able to appropriately assess these skills, neither for formative nor for summative purposes. Thus, there will be a need to develop the expertise and technical capacity to design, develop, deliver and evaluate more complex assessments. Given the novelty of 21st century skills for most teachers, formative assessment should be the primary focus, as it can contribute directly to improved learning. Ideally, a coherent set of formative assessments (across grades, within a sector), along with the corresponding scoring rubrics and exemplars of student work, will help to provide illustrations of both the learning goals and the expectations for student performance. In parallel, work needs to be done both to develop the assessment infrastructure and the expertise that will facilitate the introduction of the new forms of assessment demanded by new curricular goals.

**Strengthen teacher competencies for effective development and use of assessment**

In addition to further developing the assessment infrastructure, it is equally important to continue to build assessment competencies among both teachers and school leaders. To this end, assessment capacity, including the ability to use results for improvement, should be reflected in teacher standards and be addressed in a coherent way across teacher preparation programmes and publicly funded professional development programmes. Eventually, assessment-related competencies should become part of the teacher registration system and teacher appraisal approaches. This report identifies priorities for professional learning in the following areas: classroom-based formative assessment; assessment of complex student competencies; interpretation and use of assessment results for improvement; and reliable summative assessment and marking of examinations. This human capital development agenda will also require professional development of teacher educators and of providers of in-service teacher training. Fortunately, teacher education programmes can draw on the rapidly expanding resources available internationally. Inducements and support from the Ministry will be essential in this regard.

**Review and refine teaching standards**

A framework of teaching standards is an important reference point for teacher appraisal. While competency requirements for teachers exist in the Netherlands and are widely used in initial teacher education, their use for regular appraisal and professional development in schools appears limited. To ensure coherence between initial teacher education, registration, appraisal and professional development, it would be helpful to promote the wider use of the competency requirements as a working document in schools underlying all of these processes. The current co-existence of several types of references for the evaluation of teaching call for their consolidation into a single set of standards, to develop a shared understanding of what counts as accomplished teaching in the Netherlands. The consolidated standards should also build on practice-based expertise and could be informed by a thematic review on the use of teacher appraisal standards and criteria by schools. Another helpful adjustment could be to develop clearer descriptions of
competency requirements for different roles and career steps of teachers, with appraisal criteria specific to distinct career levels.

**Strengthen school-based appraisal for teacher professional development**

School-based formative teacher appraisal takes place in many schools across the Netherlands, typically with senior teachers, team leaders or department heads conducting classroom observations, and principals holding performance conversations with their teachers. However, further steps are necessary to ensure that all teachers across the country benefit from meaningful appraisal and feedback, pursue relevant professional development, and are able to implement improvements in the classroom. To make developmental appraisal processes more effective and consistent across the country, the OECD review team recommends that it should be (i) school-based but underpinned by common reference standards, (ii) firmly rooted in classroom practice, (iii) carried out by qualified internal evaluators, and (iv) externally validated by school governing boards and the Inspectorate. In addition, the Dutch education system could benefit from the introduction of more systematic school-based induction and feedback systems for new teachers.

**Further develop the teacher career structure and link career development to a revised registration system**

There is room to further develop the teacher career structure in the Netherlands in order to recognise and reward teaching excellence and allow teachers to diversify their careers. The revised teacher career structure could comprise a number of key stages, with access to each stage being associated to a more formal appraisal process, which could potentially be organised through the teacher registration system. Registration processes that are linked to career development could help provide incentives for teachers to perform at their best, bring recognition to effective teachers, support professional learning, and help recognise and spread good practice more widely. Registration and registration renewal processes at certain key stages in the teacher career could also provide useful information for accountability, hiring and tenure decisions, professional development and promotion opportunities, or, in particular circumstances, responses to underperformance. Such appraisal for registration/career advancement would be more summative in nature than the regular appraisal for professional development, and it would need to be ensured that processes are fair and the same standards are applied across schools. Given the stakes attached to appraisal for registration, decisions should draw on several types of evidence and multiple evaluators, and encompass the full scope of the work of the teacher.

**Enhance the evaluation capacities of school boards and school leadership teams**

As responsibility for self-evaluation, internal quality management and human resource management is shared between the school boards and school leadership teams, special attention should be paid to whether both of these partners assume their related responsibility appropriately. The management capacity of school boards could be improved through supporting the professional development of their permanent staff. There is a need to develop a differentiated approach to deal with school boards of different size and capacities, taking into account that some boards are highly professionalised organisations while others are more loosely coupled formations of volunteers. Research on the operation of school boards that reveals their capacities, possible shortcomings and potential should also be supported. At the same time, the capacities and actions of the school leadership teams within each school should remain a strategic aspect of external evaluation. Efforts aimed at improving the capacities of school leaders should be continued through targeted development interventions, peer evaluation, professional networks and school partnerships. Such
support should also be targeted at teachers to promote the involvement of teacher teams in analysing student performance data and developing school-level pedagogical strategies.

Continue to adapt school evaluation to emerging needs

Given the multi-actor nature of school evaluation in the Netherlands, the Inspectorate should continuously map the environment in which it operates at both the national and local level, and take into account the potential impact of the other partners when designing its evaluation approaches. The current move of the Inspectorate towards the introduction of differentiated inspections provides a good opportunity to reconsider the relationship between internal and external school evaluation, and self-evaluation documents could gain a greater role in school inspections. To evaluate and further stimulate schools that have developed innovative approaches, external evaluators need in-depth knowledge of innovative learning environments and an understanding of how to evaluate practices that are not yet widely proven as resulting in good quality. The policy focus on teacher professionalism means that external evaluators will need to understand the complexities of internal human resource management and development practices in schools. Further innovations or pilot experiments may be required, for example, modifying the classroom observation framework or involving teachers as part of inspection visits. The current initiatives to integrate financial and educational inspection and to enhance the evaluation of school level human resource management practices should be realised in this context, taking stronger teacher professionalism into account. This could also lead to the creation of broader and more diverse inspection teams.

Further explore the formative use of value-added information for school evaluation

Given the general concerns regarding the use of value-added models for accountability, as well as the challenges revealed by studies conducted in the Dutch context, the Inspectorate should move cautiously in formally incorporating VAM estimates into the school indicator system. More empirical work is required before a reliable decision can be made on the choice of the statistical model. Further, the complexity of the statistical models employed in value-added analysis results in a lack of transparency that is likely to meet with strong opposition. Consequently, the current focus should be on helping participating schools to use this information as a component of a more comprehensive self-evaluation effort, while enlisting a broader and much larger sample of schools to participate in future pilot studies. The current focus of the Dutch education system on promoting results-oriented work and encouraging the analysis of student growth and learning gains at the school level has potential to contribute to building schools’ capacity in analysing trends and devising adequate improvement strategies.

Develop and communicate clear national goals for the education system

Education system evaluation could benefit from a clearer and more comprehensive set of education policy priorities and targets with the associated indicators, covering a larger set of education system objectives and a longer time span than is currently the case. Such goals could respond to social and economic needs and reflect perspectives and views from outside the education sector. There should also be particular attention given to equity in the provision of education services, and the need to improve educational outcomes for particular student groups. One option would be for the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to conduct an exercise to map out key objectives for the education system, followed by a set of specific goals or targets to be realised. Bringing together the goals articulated in different Action Plans into a single document could help provide a broader vision and strategy for the education system. To ensure that education policy is not driven by the availability of data, there should be a regular review of
education system objectives and available measures within a meaningful and nationally agreed education system framework. This could be the foundation of strategies to prioritise further measurement development and/or refinement. Such an exercise will contribute to reminding all stakeholders of the full spectrum of national priorities, while also communicating that not all of these are currently measured or measurable.

**Consider monitoring a broader range of student competencies**

With respect to education system evaluation, consideration should be given to further developing the national assessments for system monitoring (PPON) by introducing a greater variety of tasks to assess a broader range of student outcomes. For example, the national monitoring assessments could include performance-type tasks where students are assessed on elements such as reasoning processes, problem-solving and oral communication skills. The range of competencies covered by sample-based assessments could also be extended to cover cross-curricular skills such as civic and citizenship skills, ICT literacy and learning-to-learn skills, and a range of personal and interpersonal skills and attitudes. Performance tasks are often seen as being more strongly aligned with learning goals that emphasise the development of higher-order thinking skills and the capacity to perform complex tasks, although they require a great deal of investment to ensure the comparability of scoring, for example through the development and provision of scoring guides and rubrics as well as through training of scorers. While the training of scorers implies higher costs, it can be a good source of professional development.

**Incorporate information on school professionals, school practices and perceptions in system evaluation**

An important aspect of knowledge management at the system level is to set up systematic processes to identify best practices within the school system and ensure that they are spread and shared across schools. In line with the government’s emphasis on teacher professionalism and excellence, there should be a reflection about how to best monitor the quality of professional environments in schools. As teacher registration becomes more common in the Netherlands, this opens opportunities to tap the potential of this system to support knowledge management and system-wide learning. The Education Cooperative, together with key stakeholders and the national authorities, should engage in a reflection on the degree to which aggregate information from the teacher register can best be used and analysed to feed into future policies to support teacher professionalism. In addition, to further expand the areas covered by education system evaluation, consideration could be given to establishing a mechanism to collect information from school professionals on a regular basis through a regular survey of teachers and/or school leaders.