



Centre for Education Systems

INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE REVIEW

ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

Summary of country report (3 pages)

Authors: AI generated with human checking
November 2025 v1.0

Netherlands

A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner consisting of several overlapping, curved segments in shades of dark blue, light blue, and light green, resembling a stylized arc or a partial circle.

Authorship. This AI generated summary has been created and checked by the CES team (see ces.partners/resources/methodologies). It is based on the original Country Reports created by EPPI. The author of the full report has not made final checks for accuracy.



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The Netherlands – AI generated Accountability Policy summary

RQ1: Purposes, Values and Aims

The Dutch Inspection Framework for secondary education 2021 defines three core aims for accountability: ensuring schools meet a basic standard threshold and encouraging them to surpass it; monitoring compliance with legal regulations; and promoting continuous educational improvement. The overarching vision, set out in the 2021 framework, is to enhance the overall quality of education in the Netherlands. Key values assessed include providing equal opportunities through promoting inclusivity and accessibility, requiring schools to cater to the diverse needs of all students, including those with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds. Accountability is necessary as it helps assess quality, enhance transparency, and encourage continuous improvement. A recent trend, building on the shift toward greater school board autonomy since 2017, involves balancing accountability through inspections occurring at both the school and school board levels.

RQ 2 – Levels, measures, and mechanisms of accountability

Accountability in the Netherlands is structured into four levels: the system level, the network level (specifically, the *samenwerkingsverbanden voor passend onderwijs* or VO-raad), the school board level, and the individual school level. The system level, managed by the Ministry of Education and the Dutch Inspectorate, monitors the overall quality of education, addressing key issues such as inequality of opportunity and declining literacy.

School boards are granted high autonomy and are responsible for the overall quality of education in their institutions. Specific responsibilities include budget plans, personnel management, assessing school and student performance, and accountability to stakeholders. Approximately 35% of secondary school boards oversee just one school. Schools, while decentralised, are held accountable for safety, school climate, the educational process, and educational outcomes, conducting self-evaluations reported to the board and Inspectorate.

Quality measures assessed by the Inspectorate for both school boards and schools cover multiple dimensions, including the educational process, school climate, educational results, quality assurance, and ambition. Key standards evaluated include teaching strategies, safety, learning outcomes, vision, implementation and quality culture, evaluation, accountability, and dialogue. Accountability relies significantly on standardized testing, where final exam results (composed of a school exam and a national exam) are used for annual reporting. Financial management is also rigorously monitored through an 'automatic risk detection procedure' on key financial indicators to detect financial risks.

Mechanisms for ensuring compliance involve both scheduled and unscheduled inspections. Sanctions are applied for non-compliance with educational standards or legal requirements. These range from less severe "recovery orders" that provide suggestions for improvement to more serious enforcement sanctions, such as a formal warning. In cases of extreme failure or ongoing non-compliance, the Minister of Education may temporarily suspend funding (listed as "Closure: no funding") or permanently withdraw funding, which involves removing the school's right to operate as a recognised educational institution ("Permanent no funding"). Poor educational results, financial mismanagement, or complaints and reports from parents and the public can trigger sanctions. Information transparency is a core mechanism; since 2000, school inspection reports have been publicly available, which assists government accountability, aids parents and students in choosing schools, and supports schools' self-evaluation and improvement processes. The Inspectorate's reporting function thus directly supports its regulatory duties.

RQ 3 – Managing change and policy processes

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education, an independent body within the Ministry of Education, governs accountability policy. Change management involves the Advisory Council for Inspection and the Onderwijsraad (Dutch Education Council), which provides advice on quality and performance. Reforms are developed via consultations with stakeholders and academics, promoting evidence-informed changes. Major revisions to the Inspection Framework occur every four years; the most recent comprehensive revision was in August 2021, with the next planned for 2027. The Inspection Framework for secondary education 2021 increased the emphasis on inclusion, equity, and mandated stronger self-evaluation by school boards, assessing student well-being alongside academic outcomes.

RQ 4 – Assessments of effectiveness and evaluation

The Inspectorate periodically assesses the accountability system through internal evaluations and commissions external research. Regular assessments include an annual satisfaction survey and a fairness study to ensure the reliability and quality of inspectors' judgments. The Inspectorate uses various internal and external measures to monitor unintended consequences, such as changes in school quality, board experience, and satisfaction with the inspection approach. However, policy experts state that no specific success metrics are generated solely to assess the system's effectiveness. Evaluation informs policy change; current research on the effects of board supervision is intended to guide the development of the 2027 Research Framework.

RQ 5 – Historical, cultural, and political influences

The constitutional right to freedom of education (Article 23) institutionalised a pluralistic system, granting schools and school boards high autonomy balanced by centralised Inspectorate oversight. However, this structure creates tension between local flexibility and national equity goals. High transparency and parental school choice reinforce segregation,

as middle-class families strategically select schools, exacerbating socio-economic disparities. Politically, public pressure regarding underperforming schools can legitimise central intervention while upholding the principle of school autonomy. Economic inequalities are reinforced by private investments like tutoring, despite weighted funding for disadvantaged students.

RQ 6 – Impact on outcomes and workforce

Research on the effects of the accountability system yields mixed results concerning both intended and unintended consequences. Risk-based inspections impacted student attainment in literacy (Dutch language) in weak schools, though effects were limited in other subjects and tracks. Student satisfaction initially declined following a negative inspection but recovered by Year 3.

For the teaching workforce, high-stakes testing increases stress for educators. Furthermore, a less principle-based approach to inspections correlates with experiencing a greater administrative burden through checklists and protocols. Accountability mechanisms drive improvement primarily by setting expectations, effectively motivating schools to enhance internal self-evaluation and capacity-building efforts.

Conversely, adopting a principle-based inspection style is more likely to result in a culture of improvement, openness, pride, and professionalisation, as inspectors are perceived as attuned to the school's context. However, the same mechanisms driving improvement also cause substantial negative unintended side effects. These consequences include narrowing the curriculum, discouraging new teaching methods, and promoting strategic compliance, such as principals misrepresenting data (reported by at least one in 10). Additionally, using unadjusted raw outcomes, like dropout rates, for accountability unfairly penalises cities with disadvantaged populations, undermining the intended improvement effect.

Timeline - recent accountability reforms

- **Pre-1997:** Inspection reports were confidential, intended only for schools and boards.
- **2000:** Policy shifted to make inspection reports publicly available, increasing transparency and social control.
- **2002:** The Education Inspection Act established the Inspectorate's statutory duty to promote educational quality.
- **2008:** The principle of 'proportionality' was introduced, directing more frequent inspections toward higher-risk entities.
- **2017:** The Inspection Framework mandated that school boards should be inspected.
- **2021 (August 1):** The Inspection Framework was comprehensively revised, strengthening the focus on inclusion, equity, and board quality assurance.
- **2023:** Accountability shifted implementation to include inspections within schools alongside board scrutiny.