

SICI General Assembly and the 210-th Anniversary Conference of the Netherlands' Inspectorate of Education

Amsterdam/Haarlem, September 27-29, 2011

STRATEGIC REPORT on the SICI GA 2011 Haarlem /Amsterdam The Netherlands

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Utrecht, October 2011



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SICI

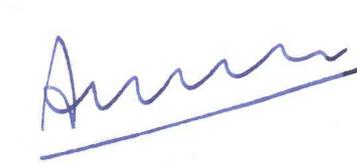
The Standing International
Conference of **Inspectorates**
Better Inspection, Better Learning

Preface

It is our pleasure to present to you the strategic report on the September 2011 SICI General Assembly in Haarlem and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) is the association of European Inspectorates of Education, established in 1996. The subject of this conference was: 'Involving the uninvolved learners - pupils at risk of underachieving'.

Education and inspection systems vary considerably across the different countries which participate in SICI. That has to do with differences in historical, political and cultural contexts and also with the level of development of the educational system as a whole in every country. SICI takes these differences as a contextual fact. Therefore the results of the conference are formulated in this report as strategic recommendations to participants, which they may wish to consider within their own context and arrangements.

The 2011 SICI General Assembly took place in combination with the celebration of the 210th anniversary of the Netherlands Inspectorate of Education. We very much appreciated the interest shown by SICI members in the subject of the conference and the constructive exchanges of views that took place. This strategic report on the major outcomes aims to support SICI members and other interested parties in developing and implementing an inspection system which helps prevent pupils from underachieving.



Annette Roeters,

Senior Chief Inspector of Education

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Summary

On 27 and 28 September 2011 the SICI General Assembly took place in Haarlem and Amsterdam in the Netherlands under the title "Involving the uninvolved learners". What can schools do to increase participation and success of pupils who are at risk of underachieving? And, especially for governments and inspectorates: what can governments or inspectorates do to enable schools to achieve this?

The conference started with a series of lectures and presentations. In their lectures, speakers stated that schools play an important role in the success or the failure of children who are underachieving, partly because of learning disabilities, partly because they are highly gifted but not enough stimulated to use their talents. Speakers argued that schools often fail in engaging these pupils. Most inspectorates have included indicators in their framework to assess the way in which underachieving pupils are cared for by the schools, but they do not use these criteria in a systematic way.

On the basis of these lectures and the contributions of the participants themselves, discussions and reflections took place in workshops on the second day. Many countries are trying to enable disadvantaged children to participate as much as possible in mainstream education. There are a few countries where there is no special needs education.

Inspectorates in the various countries operate in very different ways. Some inspectorates only investigate the results of underachieving children on a macro level. Other inspectorates assess individual schools. In these cases, results of the schools are sometimes published and, in some cases where schools get special funding for these activities, inspectorates have the possibility to cut parts of this funding.

The conference has led to several recommendations. Inspectorates need to work more evidence based instead of a rather holistic and intuitive way. This can lead to increasingly sharp judgments. Formulating national standards might be very helpful. When macro-investigations are implemented, the results of these investigations could be used to put problems with underachieving children on the political agenda.

1. What is the challenge?

All pupils and students have the right to good education. That is a broadly accepted view and is therefore part of the universal rights of children. But especially for (potentially) underachieving children, it is a big challenge for education to give them the right opportunities. This is true both for disadvantaged children and for gifted children. Government and the educational field have the responsibility for education that stimulates the learning and development of all children (including vulnerable ones) to an optimal cognitive and social level. Part of an inspectorate's role should be to evaluate how well this is achieved. At the start of the conference the chief Inspector of the Dutch Inspectorate of Education Annette Roeters posed the question: Does education do enough for all children?

The better the level of education achieved by an individual, the better are the returns for the learner and for society as a whole. The salaries of persons with tertiary education are on average¹ 40 percent higher than the salaries of those with only secondary education. The net present value of public investments for higher education of inhabitants is significantly higher in comparison to the net present value of public investments for only secondary education of inhabitants. When people (partly) fail in education through underachieving there is clear disadvantage both for the individual and for society.

There are differences among European countries, but in general it can be assumed that many children are "lost" during their educational career and do not reach the levels that might have been possible. Schools make a significant impact on the development of children. They can either facilitate or frustrate children's achievements.

Professor Robert E. Slavin states that schools can contribute to a lack of involvement with students by:

- Failure to ensure success for every child
- Putting students in passive roles
- Lack of variety and challenge
- Failure to engage peer culture

On the other hand schools can prevent the non-involvement or address it with some success by employing several measures. Very important is that they ensure reading success from the very beginning, the early years. Reading is the base for every further development. Forms of cooperative learning under certain conditions are also helpful. Teachers should teach at a rapid pace and with enough variety. Technology should be used effectively. Unfortunately too often such measures are not taken. More emphasis on the development of teachers and the evaluation of teachers' behaviour in classrooms is increasingly necessary.

The legal context around vulnerable children is often rather vague when it comes to children with disabilities that are not so easy to diagnose. There is no clear, general definition of children at risk of underachievement and the way in which they appear in legal prescriptions is mostly on certain aspects like socio-economic status or ethnicity. The measures that schools have to take from these prescriptions and that inspectorates could look after, are often formulated in very vague, conditional terms ("take care for ..." etc) or of an administrative kind. That does not make it very easy for inspectorates to judge the schools in these matters.

Professor Hans Anand Pant has analyzed the modus operandi of the Dutch inspectorate in relation to its approach to uninvolved children by studying the instruments and accompanying some inspectors in their investigations. By analysing the PISA-results of 2009 he demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between socio-economic background of students and their performance. This is no surprise, but it is interesting that in most countries this relationship is much stronger between schools than within schools (and within school it never accounts for more than 12% of the variation). This suggests that in these cases the choice of particular schools by students is a more relevant factor than the policy of the schools themselves.

¹ OECD-average.

Professor Pant intimated that the Dutch framework contains a lot of indicators (14 of 48 in primary schools and 11 of 41 in secondary) that potentially address the needs for students at risk of underachieving (only for non-gifted underachievers). In using these indicators in the investigations in schools, the inspectors should work in an evidence-based way. While shadowing the inspectors during their work, he observed that many do their work more holistically than analytically: they score the indicators within the global picture they have of the school, instead of actually searching for evidence for specific indicators. This can lead to differences in judgements between inspectors and less distinction between schools. Prof Pant stressed the importance of criterion-referenced standards for Inspectorates which are evidence based. This is an important notation. He suggested that there are some domains where it is possible to state absolute criteria.

A special group of (potentially) underachieving pupils is formed by highly gifted children. Professor Pant indicated that within the considerable number of indicators used by the Dutch Inspectorate, none refers specifically to these children. Highly gifted children are often looked on as a "luxury" problem. It is a fact, however, that many highly gifted children do not reach the potential they may actually have. The gains for them and for society are less than they could be. Dr. Tessa Kieboom showed that, just like other underachieving children, these children need challenges that fit with their capacities. They need to experience challenge and solve complex questions. When they do not experience this kind of learning, they may become lazy and unmotivated. Their needs can be better met by deepening and broadening subjects and approaches for these children.

This then is the challenge – to encourage our pupils and societies to become more prosperous than they now are by better exploiting the learning, development and achievement capacities of all learners. Schools play a crucial role in this process. Inspectorates are involved in evaluating and commenting on schools or teachers within them. How do both approach this aspect of their work and how could they improve?

2. What might schools and inspectorates do to ensure all children are involved?

The conference started with a number of short lectures and presentations of several experts on the subject for a broad audience. During these presentations there was no possibility for discussion. The rest of the conference, the next day with a much smaller audience, was organized so as to facilitate a maximum of exchange among the participating countries.

Some seventeen countries sent in a poster showing the main characteristics of their educational and inspection activities on the subject of uninvolved children. These posters were displayed in the main room of the conference. During the intermissions between workshops participants were able to walk around and read the posters. The designer of each poster was there for explanation and discussion. In the workshops themselves seven of the inspectorates made presentations about their activities on the subject of uninvolved children. These presentations were accompanied and followed by discussions among all the participants in the workshop. In that way there was the possibility to maximise the interchange.

2.1 Task of schools in the different countries

Almost every country has, beside its mainstream education, facilities for special needs education in the form of special schools or special classes. During the conference, the focus was on mainstream education only. With regard to children at risk of underachievement, all schools need to cope with diversity and provide "non-standardized" or flexible teaching approaches. The scale of work demanded in each mainstream school depends of course on the number of their learners who are in special categories. This in turn relates to the political and educational imperatives operating in each country. In Italy, for example, all compulsory education is inclusive. In most other countries specific provision for special needs education is available to a lesser or greater extent. Most often there is a combination of special needs education in special schools for a small group and additional financing and resources in mainstream education. Many countries have a policy of reducing the number of special schools or special classes.

The overall task of mainstream schools is to meet the educational (and some other) needs of all the pupils for whom they are responsible. In several cases this task is more specific. Special attention for gifted pupils is rarely mentioned in the country posters. In most of these cases provision for gifted learners is limited to general, political intentions to stimulate schools to create special measures for these pupils. In a small number of cases, concrete approaches are mentioned that could be taken by schools. These include, for example, special scholarships, allowing pupils to miss out certain classes or to move a year ahead, offering special courses and in one case providing special teachers for gifted children. The amount of attention paid to the challenge of educating highly gifted children seems to indicate that this is not seen as a major issue.

The focus in all countries is on children with fewer opportunities or at risk of underachieving. There are different ways in the countries to define these groups. The most frequently mentioned categories are:

- Mentally or physically disabled learners
- Immigrants/non-native speakers
- Learners from ethnic minorities
- Learners from (Lower) socio-economic background
- Learners with behavioural or emotional difficulties

Sometimes groups are mentioned like truants or drop-outs, but these seem more to be the consequence of problems in education than the possible cause. On the other hand schools have an important task in diminishing absenteeism and (thereby) preventing learners from leaving school early. Of course a lot of absenteeism and school leaving find their causes in problems that come with the problems of the mentioned groups.

The measures that schools take are fairly common in all countries. At first teachers should differentiate in their teaching method. To support that, several additional measures are taken. Schools can offer special guidance for the pupils, sometimes by more specialized personnel such as educational psychologists or speech therapists. Within classroom situations teacher assistants can be used to give extra support to the teacher in order to pay more attention to pupils with problems. Extra lessons can be given, especially language lessons, to groups that need these. In some cases extra classes are formed. In case of behavioural problems there can be temporary facilities to accommodate these pupils. After that they may return to their original school.

Sometimes schools have to fulfil administrative duties in accordance with the selected groups, for instance to have guidance/educational plans available for specific groups or individual students. In some countries, especially in the UK, schools have to report on the progress of these groups and individuals. In cases where self evaluation is mandatory they often have to evaluate their measures and results in their self-evaluation report. When schools get extra funding for these groups, they sometimes have to report separately about the use of this money.

Evidence-based practice

Professor Slavin stressed the importance of evidence-based working. This idea has been introduced in education with variable success for some years. The core idea is that educational practice has to be founded on a strong base of proven results of research. Research has to be well founded and has to be suitable for practical use. Referencing and publishing the overall results is a task for scientists. This is a very specialized process. Professor Slavin mentioned the website: www.bestevidence.org This is relevant not only for schools but also for inspectorates. For some quality standards of inspectorates evidence-based insights are available.

2.2 The role of the inspectorates

There are, by tradition, big differences in the role of inspectorates regarding their position in relation to schools. In some countries inspectorates are an integral part of the managing and support system between government and schools. In other countries they play a more independent role in monitoring and judging the performance of the schools. The role of inspectorates in relation to uninformed pupils should, of course, be seen within these different contexts.

When special measures for underachieving children are laid down in legal terms, it is of course the task of the inspectorates to scrutinise provision against regulations. This is especially the case when extra funding is given to the schools, often in combination with administrative duties. Sometimes inspectorates can use financial sanctions when the measures that should be taken with that funding are not satisfactory or when the administrative duties are not met. Discussions in workshop groups showed however that in reality this kind of measures is rare, if not non-existent.

More important for inspectorates than the control of administrative measures and conditions is to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures schools take to provide for underachieving children or to stimulate their progress. These are aspects of the quality of education. Attaining educational results, and in this case especially higher results with underachieving children, is the most important aspect in this context.

Most inspectorates have special ways of investigating the results of underachievers. Sometimes this is done by overall investigations with groups of schools. This method gives, on a macro level, insight into possible issues and, eventually, good practice in dealing with them. Thereby governments or other legal bodies are able to formulate general policies to address the issues that have risen. If for instance, as Professor Pant said, the variation in the relationship between socio-economic background and results is more between schools than within schools, solutions of the problem are more likely to be found at a higher level than that of individual schools. Inspection reports can then possibly be the trigger for government policies which may extend beyond the strictly educational context.

Many inspectorates conduct quality investigations to evaluate the performance of individual schools. This is done in very different ways. Some use questionnaires or do interviews with personnel of the school and with parents and students. Thereby they collect opinions of the stakeholders about the activities of the schools. Inspectorates also look at the ways in which schools organise care for underachieving children and, if relevant, the way in which they use their funding for these groups.

A smaller group of inspectorates analyses the results of different groups in the schools. If these results are unsatisfactory, they can be published and schools have to make improvements.

3. Recommendations

Education and inspection systems vary considerably across the different countries which participate in SICI. That has to do with differences in historical, political and cultural contexts and also with the level of development of the educational system as a whole in every country. SICI takes these differences as a contextual fact.

Therefore the results of the conference are formulated as strategic recommendations to participants, which they may wish to consider within their own context and arrangements. If possibilities exist for some closer look at how inspectorates tackle the issues here presented and potential change or development in procedures, SICI suggests that such changes might usefully take the following points into account.

- Deeper analyses of the issues relating to underachievers could give information as to which level the problems could best be tackled at. That is not necessarily at school level.
- Reports on the basis of macro-investigations could help to put issues with underachievers on the political agenda.
- It is very helpful to formulate national performance standards. By using these standards, it should be possible to monitor the (level of) results for every student, including those with disabilities and those at risk. They can also be helpful to monitor developments at school and at national level. Even without national standards it is recommended that an inspectorate might formulate measurable indicators for evaluating the performance of schools within the context of underachieving children.
- Evidence-based information is relevant for inspectorates and schools. Some quality standards of inspectorates are evidence-based. The core of this approach is that educational practice has to be based on a strong base of proven results of research. The standards of inspectorates should take this research into account.
- When schools get extra funding for supporting underachieving children, scrutiny of the spending and its effectiveness should be part of the investigations of the inspectorates.
- Inspectors often make their judgements on a holistic rather than an analytical basis. This can lead to a loss of sharpness, especially in the judgement of subtle differences in the education and results of several types of students. Frameworks for evaluation should lead to clear distinctions and inspectors should be trained to use such frameworks effectively.
- Hardly any inspectorate looks at care for highly gifted underachievers. It is recommended that the extent of this issue should be investigated and special indicators added to the frameworks.

ANNEX I Programme

Monday 26 September 2011

SICI EC-MEETING		Carlton Square Hotel Haarlem
Time	Programme	Location
10.30	EC-meeting	Conference room
17.00	End of meeting	
17.15	Registration (first opportunity)	Hotel lobby
19.30	Dinner EC	Restaurant Haarlem

Tuesday 27 September 2011

HISTORICAL EDUCATION VISIT		Amsterdam/Haarlem
Time	Programme	Location
08.00	Registration (second opportunity)	Hotel lobby
08.30	Departure by bus to Amsterdam	Hotel lobby
09.30	Visit to Amsterdam's Civic Orphanage, -Welcoming reception Mr Lodewijk Asscher -Lecture 'Children at risk', Dr Lodewijk Wagenaar -Guided tour Civic Orphanage	Amsterdam Historical Museum
11.00	Departure to the VU University (Vrije Universiteit)	Amsterdam

Tuesday 27 September 2011

Conference: INVOLVING the UNINVOLVED LEARNERS		VU University Amsterdam
Time	Programme	Location
11.30	Registration (third opportunity)	Lobby, VU Amsterdam
11.30	Coffee and lunch	Foyer
12.30	Welcome by the Chairman, Mr Jan Rijkers	Aula
12.35	Welcome and Opening Statement, Ms Annette Roeters	
12.45	"How do we generate uninvolved students?" Keynote speaker Professor Robert Slavin	
13.15	"Involving Uninvolved Learners" (part 1) Movie by Coldsun Productions	
13.25	"The disintegrative mechanisms in the human society and the animal kingdom", Mr Midas Dekkers	
13.45	"What we learned from years of working with less privileged girls and boys", Mr Luc Opdebeeck	
14.15	Break	Foyer
15.00	"Involving the Gifted Children in Education" Professor Tessa Kieboom	Aula

Continuation conference: INVOLVING the UNINVOLVED LEARNERS		VU University Amsterdam
Time	Programme	Location
15.30	"Involving Uninvolved Learners" (part 2)	Aula
15.35	"Five statements about the Inspection of the Uninvolved Learners in the Netherlands" Professor Hans Anand Pant	
15.55	"Reaction on the statements of Professor Hans Anand Pant", Professor Graham Donaldson	
16.15	"Dealing with Differences, a history of continuing concern of the Education Inspectorate 1801-2011" Anthology by Professor Sjaak Braster	
16.30	Final Remarks, Ms Annette Roeters	
16.45	Informal gathering with drinks	Foyer

SICI GA DINNER		Amsterdam
Time	Programme	Location
17.15	Departure from VU University Amsterdam	Foyer
18.00	Boat tour to the Restaurant	Amsterdam
19.00	Official Dinner with intermezzo	Restaurant ENVY
23.00	Departure back to hotel	Carlton Square Haarlem

Wednesday 28 September 2011

SICI GA WORKSHOPS		Carlton Square Haarlem
Time	Programme	Location
08.45	Workshops SICI Welcome by Mr Erik Martijnse 08.45 – 09.15: Introduction by Professor Slavin 09.15 – 10.15: First workshop-session 10.15 – 11.00: Break, poster viewing 11.00 – 12.00: Second workshop-session 12.00 – 12.30: Plenary session: feedback from Professor Slavin, conclusions	Conference rooms
12.30	Lunch	Hotel Restaurant

SICI GA SCHOOL VISITS		Carlton Square Haarlem
Time	Programme	Location
13.30	Departure for school visits	Hotel lobby
14.30 16.30	School visit 1: lower secondary vocational education (=VMBO): development of talents School visit 2: Gymnasium: special attention to highly skilled pupils	VMBO Calvijn Barlaeus Gymnasium
17.30	Arrival back at the hotel No official programme	Carlton Square Haarlem
20.00	Informal meeting of heads of inspectorates	Restaurant in Haarlem

Thursday 29 September 2011

SICI GA BUSINESS MEETING		Carlton Square Haarlem
Time	Programme	Location
09.00	SICI business meeting	Conference room
10.40	Coffee	Lobby
11.00	SICI business meeting	Conference room
13.00	Lunch	Hotel restaurant
14.00	End of conference/departure	

SICI EC-MEETING		Carlton Square Haarlem
Time	Programme	Location
14.00	EC-meeting	Conference room
16.00	End of EC-meeting/departure	