

The Dutch National Education System.

Compulsory education under Dutch law applies to children of all nationalities residing in The Netherlands from five to eighteen years old. Schools are divided into public and private schools (with both religious and non-denominational options) Most schools are government-funded and are thus paid for via taxes, however parents will be requested to pay a set fee per year for "extras" such as outings and special projects.

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Dutch primary school education starts at the age of four and includes both general education as well as special education for children with learning and behavioral difficulties.

The primary schools consist of eight grades, usually based on age groups, however some schools also group children of different ages and of different learning levels together. Obligatory subjects are: sensory co-ordination, Dutch, arithmetic, English, art and music, social sciences, science and nature, and if applicable religious or moral issues. Schools are required to not only teach knowledge but also impart social skills and insights. Attention is also given to the fact that The Netherlands is comprised of different ethnic groups.

Some two-thirds of all Dutch children attend private schools, of which the majority are Roman Catholic or Protestant, but there are also Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and non-denominational private schools, that use different educational methods such as the Montessori, Steiner, Jena Plan, Dalton or Freinet systems of education. The child's capabilities and an examination in the last year of primary school (around age 11), called the Cito test (*Cito toets*), will assist children of all primary schools to decide which level of secondary school will be most suitable.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

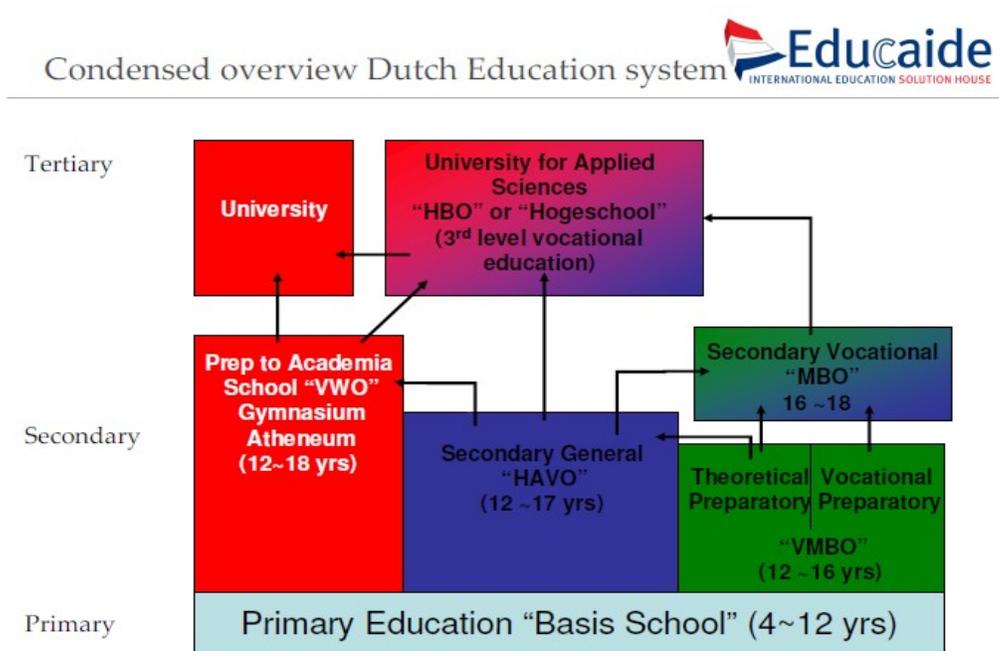
Students of 12 – 18/19 years old attend secondary education

- *Pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO)* consists of general education, focused on learning a trade, in combination with preparing the students for the secondary vocational education (MBO). It takes four years to complete the VMBO school, and comprises engineering and technology, economics, agriculture, and care and welfare. The theoretical VMBO stream prepares the students for the MBO or HAVO.
- *Secondary general secondary education (HAVO)* lasts five years and qualifies students to enter third level vocational education (HBO). Some students can also choose to enter pre-university secondary education VWO or MBO education.
- *Pre-university education (VWO)* lasts six years and prepares students for academic studies at university level (WO), but some students also decide to take HBO courses.
- *Secondary Vocational Education (MBO)* lasts 2 to 4 years for more information check <http://www.mboraad.nl/>, and may prepare the student for 3rd level vocational education (HBO).
- A fifth and less common type of secondary education is a six-year practical training education (PRO).

Both HAVO and VWO schools offer course streams in Science and Technology, Science and Healthcare, Economics and Society, and Culture and Society. At Middle School level all secondary schools have to offer a compulsory core curriculum of subjects spanning Dutch and other languages (including English), Mathematics, Sciences, Geography, History, Physical Education and Arts for several years before allowing students to bridge off into their respective study paths.

BILINGUAL SECONDARY EDUCATION

Select Dutch secondary schools offer a bilingual programmes (Dutch-English schools are most common, however French-Dutch, German-Dutch and Spanish-Dutch bilingual schools are also present), based on the Dutch HAVO and VWO-curricula. In this programme, non- language subjects as Sciences, Humanities, Art and PE are taught through the non-Dutch language. Upon entrance students should practice the Dutch language at a proficient level



Secondary schools that are government-funded are paid for via taxes, but parents partly cover book and materials costs and pay a yearly fee for additional activities (*ouderbijdrage*).

SUPPORTING DUTCH LANGUAGE COURSES

If your child will attend a regular Dutch primary school, you may have a choice in opting for a transition year in which the focus is primarily to learn the Dutch language, or the primary school of your liking might offer to teach extra hours of Dutch language in addition to the regular curriculum.

Regarding the extra support for the children needed: many schools have a remedial teacher, who

usually gives extra attention to new foreign children. For additional tutoring, there is an extra fee involved.

Note for employers: It is my experience that if the children are happy at school and they can integrate in an easy way, the partner will be happy as well, giving the expat-employee ample opportunity to focus on his/her job which ultimately benefits the company. This is the reason that I always advise to first find the appropriate school for the children, and after that arrange for the housing of the family, and not the other way around.

In order to assist adults in finding good Dutch language courses, you can check the following link: www.delfsemethode.nl/uk/home.

On a very different note: There are also other excellent Dutch language courses advisable for Dutch children who will be expatriated, and after a few years come back to the Netherlands. If the company invests in that, ultimately the company saves the cost of expensive international schools upon the return of those families.

If you need additional information, do not hesitate to contact Educaide at info@educaide.nl .