Steering documents and types of activities

There is no prescribed national curriculum as such in childcare provision, but providers are obliged to draw up policy on child development and learning opportunities, in consultation with parents’ committees. The policy must include a vision on interacting with and caring for children. The various initiatives in the Netherlands concerned with child development policy frameworks aim primarily to supervise the implementation of child development policy plans. These plans set out policy as regards:

- the methods used, the maximum size and age distribution in groups;
- how children’s emotional security is ensured, what opportunities are provided for personal and social development, and how children are taught rules and social values;
- the opportunities for activity and play outside the group room;
- the type of assistance given to professional child carers by other adults.

Children participating in a preschool education programme must attend at least four half-days a week. From the age of four, children can go on to primary schools, where attainment targets apply. In the Netherlands, the compulsory school-starting age is five. Dutch is the language of communication in both day nurseries and out-of-school care in childcare centres. In places where Frisian or another regional language is widely spoken, this language may be spoken alongside Dutch. Children from a non-Dutch background may likewise be spoken to for part of the time in their own language to aid comprehension.

In order to ensure continuity of learning, children who have participated in a preschool programme should ideally, at the age of four, transfer to a primary school with a special early childhood education programme. Continuity of learning also depends on municipal authorities, playgroups, day nurseries and schools making agreements on early childhood education.

Teaching methods and materials

There are different programmes for early childhood education in the Netherlands.

- Some are used throughout the country, others - such as Taalrijk, Speeltaal and Kinderklanken - only locally. Programmes are usually carried out at day nurseries, playgroups or primary schools (years 1 and 2). These are called centre-based programmes.
- By contrast, home-based programmes are provided in the child’s home environment, usually by volunteers, and often include parenting support as well as activities to boost the child’s development. Opstapje is an example of a Dutch home-based programme for preschool
Some early childhood education programmes focus on only one developmental domain, usually language (narrow programmes). Broad programmes address multiple developmental domains and require parents' active participation.

Two organisations in the Netherlands are authorised to recognise early childhood education programmes: Erkenningscommissie Interventies [1](the NJI committee for the recognition of child intervention programmes) (website only available in Dutch) and Panel Welzijn en Ontwikkelingsstimulering (the panel on welfare and developmental stimulation). Programmes must satisfy strict conditions in order to attain national recognition. So far, only five programmes are nationally recognised:

- Piramide,
- Kaleidoscoop,
- Startblokken/Basisontwikkeling,
- KO Totaal, and
- the Reggio Emilia approach Sporen.
