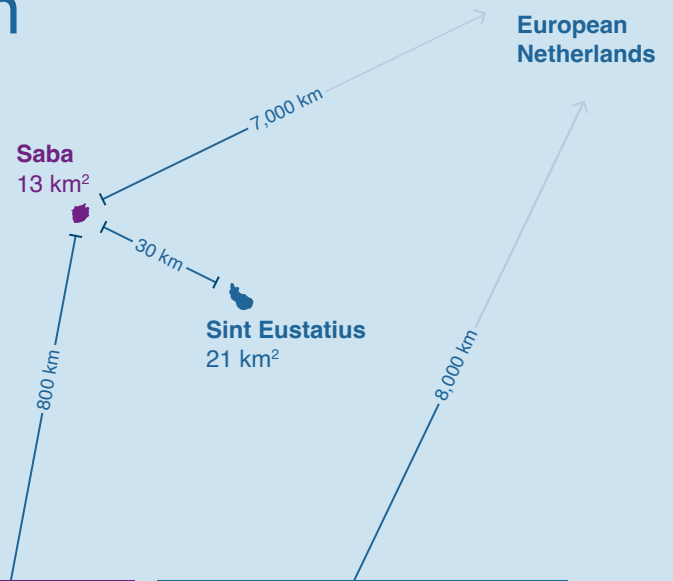


education
in the
caribbean
netherlands
concise summary

..raad
wijs
onder

Part C

Background information



Bonaire
Leeward Island



26,552 inhabitants*

official languages:
Papiamentu and Dutch

language of instruction:
Papiamentu (year groups 1 and 2) and Dutch (year group 3 and up)

Dutch curriculum

9 primary schools:
2,236 pupils**

1 school for secondary and vocational education:
2,459 pupils and students**

no universities of applied sciences

a branch of the University of Curaçao

Saba
Windward Island



2,158 inhabitants*

official languages:
English and Dutch

language of instruction:
English

partly Caribbean curriculum (CXC)

1 primary school:
159 pupils**

1 school for secondary and vocational education:
109 pupils and students**

no universities of applied sciences

private American university medical school:
125-150 students**

Sint Eustatius
Windward Island



3,270 inhabitants*

official languages:
English and Dutch

language of instruction:
English

partly Caribbean curriculum (CXC)

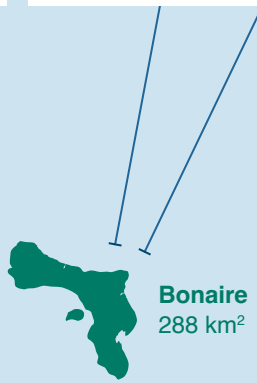
4 primary schools:
328 pupils**

1 school for secondary and vocational education:
236 pupils and students**

no universities of applied sciences or academic universities

Aruba

Curaçao



* as at 1 January 2025
** in October 2025

contents

In the publication *Education in the Caribbean Netherlands*, the Education Council presents a comprehensive analysis of the functioning of the Dutch education system in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The publication consists of three parts:

Part A: Conclusions and recommendations

Part B: Featured themes in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

Part C: Background information

This booklet presents a concise summary of the publication. You will find a summary of Part A on pages 3 to 8, under the heading 'Conclusions and recommendations'. The content of Part B is illustrated in visualisations on pages 9 to 12. You will find a number of facts and figures from Part C in the adjacent 'Background information' infographic.

The publication *Education in the Caribbean Netherlands* is the result of a literature review, analysis of policy and legislation, and more than 360 interviews with stakeholders in and around education on Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The Council also attended a number of education institutes during working visits and organised workshops with teachers, parents, students, school principals, school boards, employers and public entities.

The complete text of Parts A, B and C of the publication has been published in three languages at www.onderwijsraad.nl.



a

conclusions and recommen dations

In brief

It is now more than fifteen years since education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius became part of the Dutch education system. In the publication *Education in the Caribbean Netherlands*, the Education Council presents a comprehensive analysis of the functioning of the Dutch education system in those islands and examines what is needed to enable good education to be delivered on the islands within the frameworks of that system.

Like their peers in the rest of the Netherlands, children and adolescents in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have a right to a good education. The Education Council notes that major progress has been made in recent years in strengthening education on the islands. At the same time, however, the Dutch education system is insufficiently attuned to the specific circumstances on the islands. In practice, this means that the right to a good education is not sufficiently guaranteed. Individual schools and education organisations are confronted with structural vulnerabilities in the system. The Council advises the Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) to develop a targeted approach which is better aligned with the specific circumstances in which education is delivered in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

Background: fifteen years after constitutional reform, time for an analysis of the education system in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

On 10 October 2010 ('10-10-10') Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius became part of the Netherlands. The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) accordingly assumed responsibility for education on the islands. Education on the islands is fully integrated into the Dutch education system, and the Dutch government is now equally responsible for good education in both the European and Caribbean parts of the Netherlands.

In the years since the constitutional reforms on 10-10-10, government agencies and education organisations have devoted a great deal of attention to resolving isolated, urgent issues which demanded short-term adjustments. The biggest adjustments have now been made, and experience has been gained in delivering education and pursuing education policy on the islands within the framework of the Dutch education system. Now, more than fifteen years after the constitutional reforms, it is time to review how the education system as a whole functions on the islands of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

At the request of the Minister of OCW, the Education Council explores the extent to which it is possible to deliver good education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius within the frameworks of the Dutch education system.

Conclusion: Dutch education system insufficiently attuned to situation in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

The Council notes that major progress has been made in recent years in strengthening education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. However, education on these islands faces specific vulnerabilities, which are insufficiently accommodated within the present frameworks of the Dutch education system. This means the right to a good education is not always fully guaranteed in practice. The Council describes three key vulnerabilities in education on the islands.

Finding one: students are insufficiently equipped for different future pathways

Secondary and vocational education prepares students to participate fully in further education, society and the labour market. Given the limited further education and employment opportunities in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, many students leave their own island to study elsewhere in the Caribbean region or in the European Netherlands. The different future pathways followed by students from Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius place differing demands on their education, especially as regards their language skills and substantive preparation. Having a (basic) command of Dutch is important for all students on the islands, while English is essential in Saba and Sint Eustatius, as is Papiamentu in Bonaire. Dutch-language further education programmes, as well as government jobs on the islands, require a good command of Dutch.

The small scale of the education organisations on the islands makes it difficult to equip students for all the different future pathways they may follow. Moreover, the content of (primary) education on the islands heavily emphasises the European Netherlands, and transfer routes within the Caribbean region and between the islands are less well facilitated than those to the Netherlands in Europe. This is despite the fact that local and regional routes offer a promising alternative for young people on the islands, and generally see lower drop-out rates.

Finding two: schools are unable to adequately respond to growing diversity in student population

The number of students with special educational needs in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius is increasing, as is the influx of students from outside the islands. This is leading to an increase in diversity in the classroom. Schools need to respond to this trend, and school principals and teachers are encountering more, and more complex requests in relation to education care and support. The small scale and the physical distance from the European Netherlands means the necessary expertise and (buffer) capacity is often lacking. As a result, not all students in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius receive the support they need, while the pressure on teaching staff increases.

The Council observes that the Dutch education system is failing to adequately equip the education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to find appropriate solutions to these problems. Funding and legislation lag behind the reality in some cases; for example, it is unclear who is responsible for teaching adult newcomers who do not hold a basic qualification. The funding for inclusive education on the islands is moreover structurally inadequate.



Finding three: school boards have too little scope to take on their full responsibility

As in the European Netherlands, school boards in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius carry a great deal of responsibility within the legislative framework, for example for the configuration of the organisation, the spending of resources, staff policy, quality assurance and the design of curricula, didactic methods and testing. School boards in the European Netherlands carry this responsibility embedded in an environment of partnerships, supporting infrastructure and access to knowledge and expertise. This infrastructure is largely absent in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

These structural vulnerabilities impede the ability of education organisations on the islands to deliver good education. Their small scale and geographical isolation means they are heavily dependent on key individuals: the departure of one experienced school principal or board member can have far-reaching consequences for the continuity and quality of the education organisation.

Advice: develop a targeted approach for good education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

The Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) is responsible for ensuring good education in both the Caribbean and European Netherlands. To fulfil this responsibility adequately, the national government needs to take more account of the specific circumstances in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The islands face a complex challenge stemming from their small scale, the fact that they are islands and their geographical isolation from the European part of the Netherlands. Their isolation means it is virtually impossible for them to make use of instruments designed for the European Netherlands. Education organisations on the islands do not have the same access to resources and support as schools in the European Netherlands. The enabling conditions to allow them to deliver good education within the current frameworks of the Dutch education system are not present. The principle of harmonising policy and regulations for the European and Caribbean Netherlands is unable to fully meet the needs of the islands. The Education Council therefore advises the Minister of OCW to develop a targeted approach specifically for Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The Minister will need to make extra efforts to accommodate the specific circumstances and to compensate for the structural limitations on the islands, if the same education quality is to be achieved as in the European part of the Netherlands. The Dutch Constitution allows scope for the government to exercise its responsibility in a context-specific way.

In practice, policy and legislation are often developed with the situation in the European Netherlands in mind, after which consideration is given to whether they can be applied in the Caribbean Netherlands as well. Too little account is taken of the specific context and structural challenges faced by the islands, thus exacerbating the vulnerabilities. The Minister of OCW should continuously assess what education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius need to enable them to perform their tasks adequately. The structural vulnerabilities must not continue to weigh as a burden on the shoulders of individual schools or school boards. This calls for solid support in the form of higher basic funding and targeted, practical measures, such as better information about study opportunities in the region, joint induction programmes for staff, and better knowledge-sharing between government agencies and education organisations across the whole of the Netherlands. The Minister must also at all times consider carefully how well new policies align with the specific context of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, whilst paying attention to differences between the islands and to ensuring clear relationships between public entities, organisations and individuals on the islands.

Recommendation one: ensure students in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are sufficiently equipped for different future pathways

Equip students for different future pathways

The Council recommends that the Minister of OCW and the education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius adapt educational programmes in a way that better equips students for the different future pathways they may take. This will require broad preparation, giving them options at the end of secondary and vocational education for specialisation and targeted lessons. The CXC curriculum in Saba and Sint Eustatius also needs to be more closely aligned with primary education and to lead to opportunities for further education both in the European Netherlands and in the Caribbean region. Finally, it is key to ensure that the education offered on the islands is adequate and cohesive, so that all young people up to age 18 are able to complete their education without having to leave the island.

Raise the standard of Dutch language teaching

There are wide concerns on all three islands regarding students' command of the Dutch language. A good (basic) command of Dutch – in addition to a command of English, Papiamentu and/or Spanish – is important to be able to participate in (further) education and in Dutch society. The Minister of OCW should provide greater support to schools in the Caribbean Netherlands for strengthening Dutch language skills, for example by investing in and offering support with recruiting Dutch language teachers in Bonaire and teachers of Dutch as a foreign language in Saba and Sint Eustatius, and also by helping in the development of adult teaching methods which align with the island contexts. The small scale of education on the islands means the market is unable to meet these needs. In addition, schools can themselves inject more differentiation into their Dutch language teaching, for example by offering extra lessons for students wishing to go on to further education in the European Netherlands.

Simplify transfer routes within the Caribbean region

The Education Council calls on the Minister of OCW to work with education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to make it easier for students to transfer to further education in the Caribbean region. These transfer routes can be relevant and offer promising alternatives to studying in the European Netherlands. However, the opportunities in the Caribbean region (including in Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten, but also islands such as Barbados, Jamaica, or Trinidad) are often unknown or are hamstrung by financial impediments. The Minister of OCW must provide better financial support for studying in the region, for example through a modified Start-up Allowance. This would also require stronger collaboration within the Kingdom, both between the governments of the four countries (Aruba, Curaçao, the Netherlands and Sint Maarten) and between the education organisations on the islands.

Widen opportunities for studying in and returning to Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

The Education Council calls for attention to the position of young people who remain on the islands or who return after following further education elsewhere. Ideally, young people should be able to obtain a qualification on their island which enables them to work, but at present this is not always possible. The Council recommends that the Minister of OCW work with the Council of Education and Labor Market for the Caribbean Netherlands (ROA CN) and the secondary and vocational schools in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to explore how vocational training programmes, work placements and opportunities for lifelong learning can be designed and expanded in partnership with the public entities and employers on the island.

Recommendation two: enable education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to deliver good education for everyone

Ensure sufficient good-quality teachers

The Education Council recommends that the Minister of OCW offer structural support for the recruitment and induction of teaching staff in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The high staff turnover means education organisations regularly have to recruit new staff, often on labour markets located a considerable distance away. The Council suggests creating a staff rotation pool of teachers from the European Netherlands, establishing lasting relationships with organisations in the European Netherlands with a view to creating internships for teachers, and introducing an island-overarching induction programme for new teachers.



The Council also calls on the Minister to improve the facilitation of training and knowledge-sharing within and between school teams, and for strengthening the position of teachers within the education organisations on the islands. More shared responsibility at team level mitigates the vulnerability that stems from high staff turnover and reduces the dependence on a small number of individuals. The legislation and formal participation rules on the islands differ from those in the European Netherlands; the Council suggests harmonising them so as to strengthen the position of teaching staff within the education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

Raise the quality and quantity of school board members and school principals on the islands

The Ministry of OCW and the education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius could equip school boards and school principals better to perform their tasks. The Education Council recommends that the education organisations work towards deploying school boards and school principals who hail from the islands. They can do this by actively seeking potential candidates on the islands and guiding them towards management and governance functions, as well as by investing structurally in the professional development of school management and boards, for example through professionalisation programmes, improved induction programmes and peer review.

To make the education organisations more resilient to staff turnover, the Council also recommends intensifying the collaboration between the education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius – with other education organisations on their island, with organisations from different domains, with organisations on different islands, as well as overarching collaboration across all the islands. To help with this the Ministry of OCW, in liaison with school boards, could establish and finance one or two permanent support centres.

Recommendation three: adapt the role, position and working methods of government agencies to the island contexts

Adapt the government approach to the setting in which education organisations operate

The Education Council recommends that the Minister of OCW play a bigger role in coordinating the contact between national government agencies and education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. For the Ministry and the Inspectorate of Education, it is a matter of striking a balance between proximity and appropriate distance. It is important that school boards and principals on the islands are not disproportionately burdened with receiving delegations and engaging in (online) dialogue. The Council therefore advocates further streamlining of the knowledge-sharing between the organisations, and coordination by national bodies, whilst paying attention to the mutual relationship, and an awareness of the shared colonial history and its impact on the present day. It is also important to align the role and positioning of the Caribbean Netherlands Department of the Ministry of OCW (OCW CG) more closely with the needs of the education organisations on the islands.

Align education legislation and legislative process more closely to island context

The Education Council advises the Minister of OCW to take Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius more explicitly into account when developing legislation and regulations and to consider the situation on the islands at an early stage of the development of legislation that applies for the whole country, including the islands. The Minister should strive for accessible consultation and clarity of legislation and regulations, and aim to improve the legal support for schools on the islands and provide a clear overview of applicable legislation and regulations. The Inspectorate of Education could be more transparent in its updated inspection framework for 2027 regarding the considerations that influence educational supervision in the Caribbean Netherlands.

Make use of the position of public entities

Better use could be made of the public entities (the island governments of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius) as links between education, other domains and the island communities. The Education Council advises the Minister of OCW to consult more with each island administration on national education policy and national legislation, for example by giving the public entities the power to make proposals or giving them a right to be heard. The role of the public entities can be varied in order to take account of the specific situations on each island, whilst leaving intact the division of formal responsibilities between school boards and public entities.

b

featured themes in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

Visualisations

In Part B the Education Council uses six themes to shed light on the functioning of the Dutch education system in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. This forms the basis for the general findings and recommendations in Part A. Part B was created in close collaboration with Island Committees set up for this purpose, consisting of people who work in education on the islands. The contents of this part of the publication are based on the perspectives and experiences of people living in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

multilingualism

education provision

challenges for education

education embraces multilingualism, but...

dealing with difference between language of instruction and first language causes inequality in educational opportunities



people achieve a lot with scant resources, but...

education provision does not always align well with needs



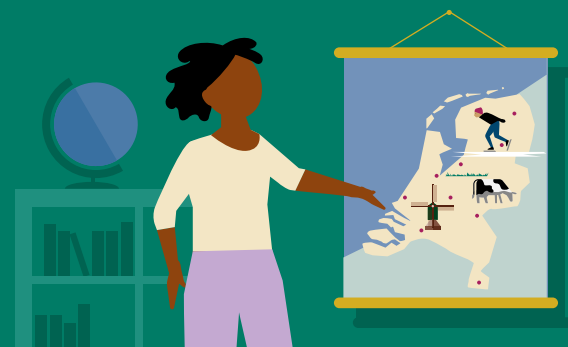
education must be able to provide for pupils with different first language



limited education provision hinders inclusive education



education provision is not always well aligned with life in Bonaire



challenges for education

people work unbelievably hard to do what is needed, but...

vacancies are hard to fill



high turnover of teaching staff



mixing of formal and informal roles



teaching staff often have to come from overseas



European Dutch frameworks are not aligned with local situation



organising further and refresher training is difficult and does not fully align with needs



inclusive education

educational transitions

challenges for education

there's a place for everyone in education, but...

great pressure on care coordinators and teachers



limited numbers of specialists available



funding is inadequate



education organisations work together closely, but...

education has to prepare for different future pathways

...on the island



...in the region
(Caribbean and United States)



...in the European Netherlands



Information

About the Education Council

Good education for everyone: that is the goal which the Education Council of the Netherlands is committed to helping achieve. For more than a hundred years the Council has been advising successive governments, parliaments as well as local authorities on education policy and legislation. It provides this advice both on commission and on its own initiative. The Council's work culminates in evidence-based studies and advisory reports focused on offering solutions for the long term. They deal with all aspects of the education system, from pre-school provision right through to post-university education and lifelong learning and development.

The Education Council is independent, focusing on developments and attitudes in society and education. Its advisory reports are based on scientific knowledge and insights, fed by the knowledge and experience of those working in the field, and also draw on education policy and legislation. The Youth Education Council (JongerenOnderwijsraad), is made up of pupils and students across a range of ages and school types who support the Council with experiences and ideas about Dutch education and a range of linked topics on which the Council provides advice.

Composition of the Council

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Things To Make And Do

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