

education in the caribbean netherlands

part a: conclusions and
recommendations

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onder

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foreword

Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have been part of the Netherlands for more than fifteen years, since 10 October 2010 (10-10-10). From that date, education on the islands was incorporated into the Dutch education system under the responsibility of the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW).

Once every five years, the Dutch Education Council publishes a Status Report on Education in the Netherlands (*Stand van educatief Nederland*), looking at long-term trends in education, describing the current status of education and making a number of guidance statements. The focus this time is on education in the Caribbean Netherlands. In this edition the Education Council explores what is needed to guarantee the delivery of good education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius within the frameworks of the Dutch education system.

A great deal of effort has been invested since 10-10-10 in improving education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. However, the focus has mainly been on individual measures to address the most urgent problems, with no holistic view being taken of the education system as a whole. In this publication the Council offers such a holistic view. The report is divided into three parts: background information (part C); a thematic analysis based on perspectives and experiences of people on the islands (part B); and in this part A, the Council's conclusions and recommendations aimed at safeguarding the rights of students on the islands to a good education.

The Council finds that the Dutch education system is insufficiently aligned with the practical situation in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, which is characterised by small scale and great physical distance from the European Netherlands and The Hague. Schools in the Caribbean Netherlands do not have the same access to resources and support that schools in the European Netherlands enjoy, and their situation is therefore different from that of contraction zones in the Netherlands or the Wadden Sea Islands, for example. The Caribbean Netherlands thus presents a unique context within the Netherlands, which demands a unique approach.

By and large, Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are forced to be self-reliant. That creates vulnerabilities, but is also a valuable asset. People on the islands are heavily invested in their communities and are used to collaborating in and around education. However, this is no substitute for the duty of care of the national government. In fact, the structural vulnerabilities facing education in the Caribbean Netherlands demand extra efforts and a targeted approach from government, with sufficient attention for the differences between the islands.

Many of the Council's recommendations are therefore aimed at the Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW). But good education requires engagement from a wide range of stakeholders, such as sectoral councils, trade unions and umbrella organisations, and Parliament. It is vital to include education in the Caribbean Netherlands in debates around education policy and legislation - something that in fact also applies for the advice given by the Education Council itself.

This publication was only possible thanks to the great commitment of the members of the Island Committees, who contributed their thoughts and shared their insights throughout the entire process. The Education Council would also like to acknowledge the openness and valuable reflections during the many discussions around education on the islands with students, parents, teachers, school principals, school boards and education professionals. Many interviews were also held with stakeholders in the European Netherlands. The insights that emerged from these discussions contributed to the comprehensive analysis of the functioning of the education system in the Caribbean Netherlands. In presenting its insights and recommendations in this publication, the Education Council is seeking to contribute to ensuring good education for all students in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

Louise Elffers
Chair

Mirjam van Leeuwen
Secretary-director

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 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 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 quality and quantity of school board members and school principals on 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 role, position and working methods of government agencies to island contexts

Adapt government approach to 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 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.

Creation of this publication

The publication 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 publication consists of three parts:

Part A: Conclusions and recommendations

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

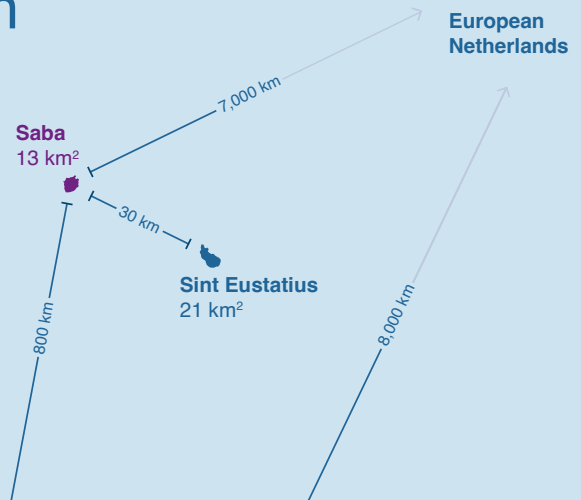
Part C: Background information

Part B was created in close collaboration with Island Committees established for this purpose, consisting of people working in education on the islands. The descriptions in Part B are based on the viewpoints and experiences of stakeholders in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The Council uses six themes to highlight the functioning of the education system. This forms the basis for the general conclusions and recommendations in Part A. Part C contains background information on education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, including a description of the applicable legislation and regulations and the education institutions on the three islands.



Sint Maarten

Education in the Caribbean Netherlands 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

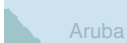
language of instruction:
English

partly Caribbean curriculum (CXC)

4 primary schools:
328 pupils**

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

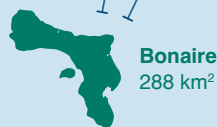
no universities of applied sciences or academic universities



Aruba



Curaçao



Bonaire
288 km²

* as at 1 January 2025
** in October 2025



back ground

1

**Fifteen years after constitutional reform,
time for analysis education system Bonaire,
Saba and Sint Eustatius**

Education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius was absorbed into the Dutch education system more than fifteen years ago. To what extent is it possible to deliver good education on the islands within the framework of that system?

Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have formed part of the Netherlands since 10 October 2010,¹ and education on the islands was integrated into the Dutch education system from that date. This means that young people in the Caribbean Netherlands have the same right to good education as their peers in the European Netherlands. The Dutch government is responsible for safeguarding that right.

More than fifteen years have now passed since the constitutional reforms. Most of the changes that needed to be made to education as a result of this have now been made. However, a comprehensive analysis of the functioning of the education system in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius has yet to be carried out; most of the attention given to education in the Caribbean Netherlands in recent years has been focused on solving urgent, isolated problems.

Approach: a properly functioning education system as a precondition for good education

In this publication the Education Council focuses on the Dutch education system, as a well-functioning system is a crucial prerequisite for good education. An education system consists on the one hand of the different education sectors, such as primary and secondary education and the various types of schools and education programmes, the transitions between them and the laws and regulations governing them. On the other hand, there is the educational infrastructure, comprising the organisations which provide education and the organisations and government agencies involved in that process: everyone who is involved in the implementation, support, governance and development of education and education policy, and the collaboration between all these actors.

1.1 Dutch government has been responsible for good education in Caribbean Netherlands since 2010

On 10 October 2010 (10-10-10), the Netherlands Antilles ceased to exist and Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius became an integral part of the Netherlands, carrying the status of public entities (see textbox below). Since that date the Dutch Constitution has applied in full for the Caribbean Netherlands, including the principle of equality (Article 1) and the government's duty of care for education (Article 23). The Dutch government accordingly has the same responsibility for providing a good education to young people on the islands as for their peers in other parts of the Netherlands.

Putting this equal responsibility into practice sometimes requires a differentiated policy approach. In implementing its education policy, the government takes into account the specific circumstances in the Caribbean Netherlands, such as the smallness of scale and geographical location.² These differences in approach are intended to ensure equal educational opportunities and must not lead to a dilution of Constitutional safeguards or to an arbitrary approach.³

¹ Since then the islands are also regularly referred to as the Caribbean Netherlands or the BES islands. To reflect the differences between the islands, in most cases the Education Council uses the names of the individual islands, only using the term Caribbean Netherlands when comparing the European and Caribbean parts of the Netherlands.

² Article 1 in conjunction with Article 132a, para 4 of the Constitution.

³ Raad van State, 2019.

Embedding of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius in the Netherlands

Since 10-10-10 Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have formed part of the country of the Netherlands. The islands were given the status of public entities within that country, and became subject to the Dutch Constitution. The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) assumed responsibility for education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. With effect from that date, Antillean legislation was replaced by Dutch legislation.⁴

Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are an integral part of the Netherlands, and the national government in The Hague has a duty to ensure equality between the European and Caribbean parts of the Netherlands.⁵ All Dutch children have a right to education, a right that is enshrined in numerous human rights treaties to which the Kingdom of the Netherlands is a signatory.⁶ Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution has also applied for the islands since 2010, imposing a duty on the government to ensure a properly functioning education system⁷ with a system of educational provisions.

1.2 Mixed picture of education quality in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

Education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius has improved since 2010 (see textbox below). This is largely thanks to improvement actions taken by the education organisations on the islands, the efforts of staff, school managements and self-organised training.⁸ But the embedding of the islands in the Dutch education system also offered opportunities to improve education on the islands, for example through higher and more stable funding by the Ministry of OCW than prior to 10-10-10, more links with knowledge organisations and new policy aimed at quality improvement.⁹

Inspectorate of Education observes sharp improvement in quality between 2011 and 2019

In 2008 the Dutch Inspectorate of Education noted that almost all schools in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius¹⁰ were failing to meet basic quality standards.¹¹ This led to the launch of an improvement programme aimed at achieving an adequate standard of education by 2016.¹² Major improvements were visible as early as 2013, although only one school met the basic quality standards.¹³ In 2016, 18 of the 26 schools in the Caribbean Netherlands (including the secondary education units in Bonaire) had achieved this standard.¹⁴ According to the Inspectorate of Education, this was due mainly to the motivated staff in primary schools, the deployment of primary school coaches and a governance coach, and training programmes to boost expertise, largely organised by the schools themselves. In 2019, all schools in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius met the basic quality standard.

⁴ See *Part C: Background information* for a description of the changes in educational governance.

⁵ Cf. Commissie Sociaal Minimum Caribisch Nederland, 2023.

⁶ Such as Article 2 of the First Protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 13 IVESC and Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These treaties already applied for the islands during the era of the Netherlands Antilles. Since 2010 the Dutch government is responsible for compliance with these treaty obligations.

⁷ Onderwijsraad, 2019.

⁸ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2017.

⁹ Ibid; Van Buiren, Nanne & Buys-Trimp, 2025.

¹⁰ Only the primary school in Saba was achieving a reasonable basic quality standard, both compared with primary schools in the Netherlands, and especially primary schools on the other islands.

¹¹ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008.

¹² Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2011.

¹³ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2014.

¹⁴ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2017.

Notwithstanding these improvements, there are concerns about the fragility of educational quality. In recent years, the improvement in educational quality that began after 10-10-10 appears to have ground to a halt. At the end of the 2023-2024 school year, the sole primary school in Saba no longer met the basic quality standard,¹⁵ while at the end of 2024 the secondary and vocational school on the island also failed to meet this standard, mainly due to governance issues. On Sint Eustatius, the one school for secondary and vocational education no longer met the basic quality standard, and neither did the pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) unit in Bonaire. On the other hand, both a primary school in Bonaire and two primary schools in Sint-Eustatius managed to meet the basic quality standard again after a prolonged period of failing to do so.

Based on previous inspection reports, the Minister of OCW took the view that the quality of education on the islands faces structural vulnerabilities due to the small size of the islands and the concomitant structural staff shortages.¹⁶ The Inspectorate of Education reached a similar conclusion, also highlighting the social problems on the islands, such as poverty, “to which, without support, schools do not always have a suitable educational answer.”¹⁷

Perceptions among island residents vary. Some see great advantages in embedding education on the islands in the Dutch education system. Others argue that educational quality on the islands still lags too far behind the quality in the European Netherlands.¹⁸

1.3 Lack of understanding of how education system works in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

To date no comprehensive analysis has been carried out of how the Dutch education system functions on Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. Attention around 10-10-10 was devoted mainly to the extent to which Dutch education legislation and regulations could be implemented unchanged on the islands and where they needed to be adapted to the local situation.¹⁹ Thereafter, government agencies and education organisations devoted their attention mainly to addressing isolated, urgent issues. That is understandable, given the capacity needed to achieve a rapid improvement in quality. The flipside is that changes in the system resulted from an accumulation of small, isolated measures, with no insight into the relationship between the various problems and interventions. As a result, underlying problems remain unresolved, and contradictions sometimes arise within policy and regulations.

Now that the main changes have been implemented it is a good time to reflect on how the education system as a whole functions for the Caribbean Netherlands.²⁰ Children who entered the Dutch education system in 2011 in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have almost all completed secondary school. There have also been three rounds of the Education Agendas,²¹ in which education organisations, the island governments (public entities) and the Minister of OCW set out joint agreements

¹⁵ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2025.

¹⁶ Ministerie van OCW, 2019.

¹⁷ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2017.

¹⁸ Den Heyer & Zwart, 2025.

¹⁹ See *Part C*, section 1.4.

²⁰ The Council has previously cited a period of between five and fifteen years for the implementation of education policy. See: Onderwijsraad, 2021a.

²¹ The Education Agenda Caribbean Netherlands is a policy agenda with agreements for the improvement of education in the Caribbean Netherlands. See *Part C*, Section 1.6, for more information on the Education Agendas.

and objectives. The improvement plans after 10-10-10 have been completed and experience has been gained with delivering education and pursuing policy within the framework of the Dutch education system.

1.4 Education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius receives too little attention in European Netherlands

The European Netherlands pays relatively little heed to the specific challenges facing education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. This frustrates island residents, because they are dependent on policy, legislation and regulations promulgated by government agencies in the European Netherlands. Topics that are on the policy agenda in the European Netherlands also determine what happens on the islands.²² Education in the Caribbean Netherlands is rarely on the agenda in the Dutch House of Representatives in The Hague. This dependence, coupled with the lack of attention from the European Netherlands, causes many islanders to feel they are 'second-class citizens'.²³ The shared colonial history adds extra weight to these feelings.²⁴

Within the Ministry of OCW, a small group of people work intensively on policy and legislation for the Caribbean Netherlands. The Inspectorate of Education also has a special team for the Caribbean Netherlands. These Ministry and Inspectorate staff are in direct contact with the education organisations on the islands. The Ministry of OCW sets a good example here for other ministries.²⁵ Despite this, attention is still limited to a small group of committed staff.

The public debate in the European Netherlands also rarely focuses on education in Bonaire, Saba or Sint Eustatius. People in the European Netherlands generally know little about the Caribbean part of the Netherlands.²⁶

1.5 Central question: to what extent is it possible to deliver good education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius within the framework of the Dutch education system?

Young people in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have a right to good education, just like their peers in the rest of the Netherlands. The Minister of OCW is responsible for making this possible. The small size of the islands, and their location between over 7,000 and 8,000 km from The Hague, raise questions about how the Minister can best fulfil this responsibility.

Question and scope

At the request of the Minister of OCW, the Education Council addressed the question: *To what extent is it possible to deliver good education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius within the framework of the Dutch education system?*

²² See e.g. Commissie Sociaal Minimum Caribisch Nederland, 2023; Raad voor de Leefomgeving en Infrastructuur, 2025.

²³ See e.g. Slagt, 2024.

²⁴ Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2022. See also Part C, section 1.1 for more information on this colonial history.

²⁵ Commissie evaluatie uitwerking nieuwe staatkundige structuur Caribisch Nederland, 2015.

²⁶ Veenendaal, 2025.

The Council's findings and recommendations are aimed in the first instance at the Minister of OCW, who bears system responsibility for education throughout the entire Netherlands, thus including in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. In addition, this publication is aimed at other stakeholders in education, such as government agencies and school boards on the islands – after all, their actions dictate how the system operates in practice.

This publication covers the entire education system on the islands, from preschool education up to and including lifelong development, with an emphasis on education for young people of compulsory education and qualification age, as well as the education system in a broad sense. In doing so, the Education Council looks at Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius both individually and collectively. The Council makes no pronouncements regarding the quality of education at individual schools in the Caribbean Netherlands.

Creation of this publication

Once every five years, the Education Council publishes a Status Report on Education in the Netherlands (*Stand van educatief Nederland*), describing long-term trends in education and issuing guidance for the further development of the system. In this edition, the central focus is on education in the Caribbean Netherlands.

In the publication *Education in the Caribbean Netherlands*, the Council presents a comprehensive analysis of the functioning of the Dutch education system in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. Education in the European Netherlands is left out of consideration in this publication.

The publication 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.²⁷ 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 publication consists of three parts.

- Part A contains the Education Council's conclusions and recommendations.
- Part B highlights six themes to shed light on the functioning of the education system in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.
- Part C provides background information on the education system in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

Part B was created in close collaboration with Island Committees established for this purpose, consisting of people working in education on the islands. The descriptions in Part B are based on the viewpoints and experiences of stakeholders in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The Council uses six themes to highlight the functioning of the education system. This forms the basis for the general conclusions and recommendations in Part A. Part C contains background information on education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, including a description of the applicable legislation and regulations and the education institutions on the three islands.

The Appendix contains a more detailed explanation of the process.



con clusion

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

The Council concludes that the Dutch education system is insufficiently attuned to the situation in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. As a result, the right to good education on the islands is insufficiently guaranteed.

The Education Council notes that good progress has been made in recent years in strengthening education in the Caribbean Netherlands, but also observes that the Dutch education system is insufficiently attuned to the situation in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

The Council sees major vulnerabilities in three parts of the education system: ensuring students are adequately equipped for the different future pathways they may follow; empowering education organisations to respond adequately to diversity and changes in student populations; and enabling school boards to fulfil their responsibility adequately.

2.1 Finding one: students are insufficiently equipped for different future pathways

The limited further education and employment opportunities on the islands mean that many students pursue their education or careers in the wider Caribbean region or in the European Netherlands. These diverse future pathways place differing demands on education, particularly in terms of language skills and teaching content.²⁸ The education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are not able to equip students adequately for all the various future pathways. Students do not always acquire the skills they need to be able to play a full part in society, further education or the labour market on the island, in the Caribbean region or in the European Netherlands.

Different future pathways require different approaches

Young people in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius relatively often look to regions beyond their own island for work or a particular study. After completing secondary and vocational education on the islands, students broadly follow one of three pathways: work or continued study on the island, in the region (other countries in the Kingdom and elsewhere in the Caribbean region, North and South America) or in the European Netherlands. Each of these pathways requires students to be equipped in a different way.

First, language skills: a (basic) command of Dutch is essential on all three islands; Dutch is after all the language of the (national) government. Further education in the European Netherlands requires a command of the Dutch language at advanced level. A good command of English is also essential in Saba and Sint Eustatius, and of Papiamentu in Bonaire, as these are the most widely used languages in daily life, politics, business and the media.²⁹ Young people who go to the United States or Canada also need a good command of English.

Second, each of the possible future pathways demands different teaching content. Knowledge of their own island and the region is indispensable for everyone, but especially for locally orientated students. Young people wishing to go to the European Netherlands must also have a knowledge of Dutch society. Equipping students broadly for the different future pathways imposes heavy demands in terms of the configuration and design of education (see textbox below).

Three-way orientation in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

The Education Council sees a three-way orientation in the communities on Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. First, Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have a strong focus on the community and culture of the island. There is also a bond with other islands within the Kingdom and the Caribbean region. This region is linked by a shared feeling of a (Caribbean) identity, a shared history, family and friendship ties, shared languages and shared cultural views and values. The small size of each island means it is usual to use facilities on other islands. Third, the islands are linked with the European part of the Netherlands. There are partnerships with organisations there, and formal contacts with national government agencies. Moreover, residents of the Caribbean Netherlands are subject to policy and laws that are made in the European Netherlands. This three-way orientation means that education has to equip students for three different 'worlds' and bring together the traditions and customs of each island, of the region and of the European Netherlands.

Equipping students for different future pathways difficult for small organisations

It is difficult for the education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to organise education in such a way that students are adequately prepared for the various future pathways they may follow. Each island has only one secondary and vocational school which is responsible for preparing students to go on to further education or into work. That one institute has to provide an education that is varied enough to equip students with what they need to take the next steps in different directions. Schools cannot offer all subjects, profiles or curricula.³⁰ This limits the opportunities for students to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need for their next step.

The configuration of the system also plays a role here. For example, the emphasis in the teaching content is on the European Netherlands (see textbox below). And of the three main future pathways, the Ministry of OCW primarily facilitates the route to the European Netherlands by offering direct admission to secondary vocational training and higher education (the transfer right), financial support, guidance and information. Tuition fees are relatively low and students receive a start-up allowance when enrolling for a secondary vocational training programme at level 3 or higher in the European Netherlands. However, the CXC curriculum³¹ taught in Saba and Sint Eustatius is not well aligned with further and higher education in the European Netherlands; as well as passing the CXC subjects, students in Saba and Sint Eustatius also have to successfully complete an Advanced Dutch course in order to be directly admitted to secondary vocational training and higher education in the European Netherlands.³² The schools for secondary and vocational education in Saba and Sint Eustatius offer extra teaching content to help bring their education more into line with further education in the European Netherlands.

³⁰ See also Part B, chapter 3 on education provision.

³¹ The Saba Comprehensive School and the Gwendoline van Puttenschool in Sint Eustatius provide education based on the syllabuses and examinations developed by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). See Part C, section 1.3.

³² See also Part B, chapter 7 on educational transitions.

Emphasis in teaching content on European Netherlands

Primary education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius closely follows the Dutch principles and rules concerning curriculum content,³³ although the core objectives developed for the European Netherlands are adapted to the island contexts. Schools are also free to add their own content on island or regional situations, but in practice this proves difficult to organise.³⁴ Their small scale means it is expensive in terms of the limited time and resources available to education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. There are however a number of initiatives to give the island and regional contexts a more prominent place in citizenship education at primary school.

The emphasis in secondary education in Bonaire is also on European Dutch content – logical given that Dutch examinations are used. Here too, it is difficult for the school to develop its own teaching materials. Vocational education in Bonaire is an exception to this focus on the European Netherlands, and is therefore better able to reflect the local setting. For example, a subject was recently developed in the first years of pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) focusing on the history of Bonaire, while the secondary vocational education unit (MBO) works in close partnership with employers on the island to gear the curricula to the world of work on the island.

As Saba and Sint Eustatius provide CXC education, secondary and vocational education on these islands is in principle geared towards the English-speaking Caribbean region. The CXC curriculum on both islands is supplemented to align them better with further education in the European Netherlands, for example building in extra internships and using guides from the National Expertise Centre for Curriculum Development (SLO) to enrich the teaching content. Dutch is also a compulsory subject. Yet despite these efforts, it is still difficult for students to acquire a sufficient command of Dutch to enable them to go on to further education in the European Netherlands.

The routes to further education in the region and on students' home islands are less well facilitated than the routes to further education in the European Netherlands. The opportunities for young people who stay on their island are limited in any event.³⁵ Roughly a quarter of young people from the Caribbean Netherlands who go to the European Netherlands to study drop out prematurely, often because of language difficulties;³⁶ this compares with an average of 10-15% among European Dutch students.³⁷ Even young people who go on to further education within the region relatively often face challenges. For example, it is more difficult for youngsters from Saba and Sint Eustatius to follow a vocational programme in Dutch or Papiamentu at the MBO unit in Bonaire, because they often have a poorer command of those languages. On the other hand, if they opt for an English-language further education in the region, they complete it successfully more often than their peers who opt for further education in the European Netherlands. However, students who follow the regional routes do not receive a start-up allowance, and less information is available regarding the opportunities for studying in the region and the requirements that have to be met for this. There is also less support to help them choose from the many possibilities.

³³ Article 12 WPO BES.

³⁴ See Part B, chapter 3 on education provision.

³⁵ See Part B, chapter 7 on educational transitions.

³⁶ Nationale Ombudsman, 2020.

³⁷ <https://www.ocwincijfers.nl/sectoren/hoger-onderwijs/toegankelijkheid/gelijke-kansen/uitval-en-switch>

Different situation on each island

The future pathways open to students in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, and the chances of following them successfully, differ from island to island, owing to the different orientations of the communities on each of the islands. For example, the island community in Bonaire is orientated principally towards Aruba and Curaçao in the region, and more recently also towards the Spanish-speaking countries in the region, in addition to the United States and Canada. Saba and Sint Eustatius, by contrast, are focused more on the English-speaking Caribbean countries, such as Sint Maarten and Barbados, in addition to the United States and Canada.

These differing orientations are also reflected in the backgrounds of teaching staff. Teachers in Bonaire relatively often hail from Curaçao, Suriname and the European Netherlands, while teachers in Saba are mainly drawn from the European Netherlands and English-speaking countries that also work with CXC education, such as Barbados, Trinidad and Jamaica. By contrast, teachers in Sint Eustatius are relatively often Statians or from the European Netherlands.

To familiarise themselves with further education, secondary school students following senior general secondary (HAVO) and pre-university (VWO) education, as well as students on CSEC³⁸ programmes, undertake study trips to the European Netherlands. Students on junior general secondary (MAVO) programmes in Bonaire, for their part, make study trips to Curaçao, while CVQ³⁹ students in Saba go on study trips to Sint Maarten and CVQ students in Sint Eustatius go to Barbados. Yet the majority of students who have completed junior secondary and vocational education (VMBO, MAVO and CVQ) remain on the island after obtaining their diploma. This means that there is a relatively high proportion of young people without a basic qualification (MBO level 2/CVQ-2, HAVO/CSEC or VWO/CAPE).



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

Broadly speaking, two notable changes are evident in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius: an increase in the number of students with special educational needs, and a larger intake of students from outside the islands. Teachers and school principals thus have to cope with greater diversity in their classes than previously. The small scale of the education organisations means they do not always have the necessary expertise and (buffer) capacity for this, and the funding and legislative frameworks are not always aligned with the changed student population.

Changing student populations place extra demands on organisations with limited capacity

The student populations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are highly diverse in terms of origin, first language and educational needs. The populations are moreover changing, and there are clear differences between the islands.⁴⁰ Bonaire has seen a sharp rise in student numbers in recent years. The primary school population has risen from 1,678 to 2,236 (+33%), and the secondary and vocational school population from 1,246 to 2,459 (+97%). Student numbers in Saba have remained more or less stable, with a slight fall in primary education from 160 to 159 (-1%), and a slight increase in secondary and vocational school numbers, from 105 to 109 students (+4%). In Sint Eustatius, by contrast, the school population has fallen, from 378 to 328 in primary education (-13%) and from 296 to 236 secondary and vocational school students (-20%).⁴¹ The number of Spanish-speaking students has increased on all islands. There are also signs that the number of students with special educational needs has grown. Poverty is a contributory factor on all the islands.⁴² Young people growing up in poverty encounter obstacles to participating in education to the full. Those obstacles are not all material in nature: growing up in poverty is often accompanied by stress, health problems and social exclusion.⁴³ The island communities have also become more multilingual, meaning schools have to provide education for students with different linguistic backgrounds.⁴⁴

The small scale and geographical isolation of the islands means that schools encounter structural limitations in delivering good education to all these students. The isolation of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius means these islands are far removed geographically, economically and infrastructurally from the European part of the Netherlands and from their surrounding areas. Their geographical isolation means taking advantage of instruments such as those offered in the European Netherlands is complex. For example, their lack of critical mass makes it difficult for schools on the islands to organise separate classes or specialist facilities. This presents teachers with an additional challenge in dealing with the wide diversity of students in their classes. Schools on all three islands also have to manage without much support, and the distances and isolated location means it is often difficult to recruit people with specific expertise. This makes education vulnerable: changes in the student populations have a rapid and major impact on the relatively small organisations. As a result, not all students receive the support they need, and teaching staff are placed under extra pressure, potentially impacting the educational quality.

⁴⁰ Staatscommissie Demografische Ontwikkelingen Caribisch Nederland 2050, 2024.

⁴¹ See also Part C.

⁴² Ombudsman & Kinderombudsman, 2020.

⁴³ Cf. Onderwijsraad, 2025a.

⁴⁴ See Part B, chapter 2 on multilingualism.

Funding and legal framework failing to keep up with changes

The way the system is configured also makes it hard for education organisations to respond adequately to changes in the student population. Funding and the legal framework lag behind the changing situation; for example, there is no specific funding for teaching children of newcomers, despite increased migration.⁴⁵ Responsibility for providing education to mature newcomers without a basic qualification has also not been specifically assigned or taken up (see textbox below).

Who is responsible for adult newcomers with no basic qualification?

Education on the islands is not yet geared to the growing group of young adults moving to the islands without a basic qualification. It is also unclear who is responsible for these young adults. Unlike local authorities, the public entities (island governments) do not have a statutory duty regarding civic integration.⁴⁶ A growing number of these young adults in Bonaire enrol for secondary vocational training without being genuinely motivated. Nonetheless, their enrolment means the school is responsible for them, thus increasing the pressure on the school.

Funding to educate newcomers is included in the basic funding. This means that schools with high numbers of newcomers are treated in the same way as schools with fewer newcomers. Too little distinction is also made between Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, whereas there are wide differences in the numbers of newcomer students moving to the different islands.

A further issue is the funding of education for students with special educational needs.⁴⁷ No differentiation is made in that funding between different types of needs. This can make it impossible for schools to offer adequately tailored support to students with (severe) educational needs.

Different situation on each island

The secondary and vocational student population in Bonaire has almost doubled between 2009 and 2026.⁴⁸ This places heavy demands on the education organisations, such as recruiting extra teachers and arranging staff and teaching accommodation. The multilingualism of the population has also changed: in 2014, only 1.2% of people in Bonaire had a first language other than Papiamentu, Dutch, English or Spanish; that figure had risen to 15% in 2022.⁴⁹ These include Mandarin and Haitian Creole. This increased and changed multilingualism in the community presents a challenge for schools.⁵⁰ In Sint Eustatius roughly half of all students now require additional educational support,⁵¹ and the nature of that support has also changed, with more and more students needing support because of some form of autism. And a growing number of students have difficulty with English because they have only recently moved to the island or because they do not speak English at home.⁵² The number of students with special educational needs in Saba has also increased.

⁴⁵ Van Buiren et al., 2025.

⁴⁶ Article 4 Wet inburgering 2021.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Cf. Staatscommissie Demografische Ontwikkelingen Caribisch Nederland 2050, 2024.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See Part B, chapter 2 on multilingualism.

⁵¹ Expertisecentrum Sint Eustatius, 2025.

⁵² See Part B, chapter 6 on inclusive education.

2.3 Finding three: school boards have too little scope to fulfil their responsibility fully

At the time of the constitutional reforms, it was decided to apply the same governance structure as in the European Netherlands when designing the education system in the Caribbean Netherlands. This meant that responsibility for education was placed largely with school boards,⁵³ which have the power to take decisions that are appropriate for the island context. However, the infrastructure and enabling conditions to fulfil this responsibility adequately are absent in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, making the school boards structurally vulnerable.

Governance structure in Caribbean Netherlands same as in European Netherlands since the constitutional reforms

Since the constitutional reforms in 2010, the same governance structure has applied for education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius as in the European Netherlands. Among other things, this means more responsibility is given to school boards. They now decide within the legislative frameworks on matters such as the configuration of their own organisation, spending of financial resources, salaries, staff policy, education and labour law, procurement, maintenance of school buildings, the quality assurance system, curricula, didactics, pedagogical approaches and testing.

The role of the public entity (island government) has at the same time reduced compared with the federal system in the former Netherlands Antilles. At that time, all major expenditure had to be coordinated with the island governments, which also paid teachers' salaries. Since 2010, the public entities perform only a few specific tasks, such as enforcing compulsory education, providing school buildings and reimbursing the costs of food, clothing and transport for primary school pupils.⁵⁴

Governance structure assumes enabling conditions which are largely absent in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

The conditions needed to enable school boards to take on this substantial responsibility are present to a lesser extent in the Caribbean Netherlands than in the European Netherlands. The current governance structure requires the availability of sufficient professional school board members, who are able to fulfil the various roles independently and in rotation. However, the islands lack a large pool of candidates from which to recruit these school board members. Moreover, this governance structure is relatively new, and training sufficient people takes time. Efforts have been under way since the 1980s in the European Netherlands to professionalise school boards, and there are therefore now generally sufficient professional candidates available for recruitment. This professionalisation process has not yet been completed in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

The legal requirements for education organisations are moreover based largely on the European Dutch context. To meet these requirements, education organisations in the European Netherlands have often been merged to derive benefits of scale, with some secondary and vocational schools in particular becoming large organisations. The smallness of scale means there is a lack of merger partners in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

Other forms of collaboration are also difficult to organise on the islands. It is for example a challenge to coordinate the education provision, to share facilities or to

⁵³ See Part C, section 1.2.

⁵⁴ See also Part B, chapter 6 on inclusive education.

form regional school partnerships in order to share staff. School boards in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius also have only limited access to resources and support. There are virtually no training institutes, consultancies, administrative service-providers, educational publishers, test developers, trade unions, sectoral councils or umbrella organisations. Schools in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are not affiliated to collective bargaining structures for teaching staff between employers and employees in the European Netherlands, which means establishing terms of employment is a complex and laborious process.⁵⁵ There are also no conferences, training programmes or professional learning networks. This makes it hard for school boards to professionalise themselves and staff, or to achieve benefits of scale. School boards and school principals in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius also have to balance the island reality with a complex legal framework that is largely based on the situation in the European Netherlands, and which does not always fit the situation on the islands. Knowledge of education law is also not always readily available on the islands. Conversely, specialists in the European Netherlands often have limited knowledge of the island contexts.

Educational governance on the islands is vulnerable without support

The lack of essential enabling conditions and infrastructure on the islands makes school governance vulnerable. A pattern can be discerned in many education organisations, in which periods of stable governance alternate with periods in which school boards and school principals have difficulty fulfilling their tasks. The heavy dependence on individuals is a factor here: in these small organisations, the departure of a single skilled school principal or board member can have a major impact on the functioning of the organisation.

Given the specific circumstances in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, it is important that school boards are able to take decisions based on knowledge of the situation on the island.⁵⁶ It is therefore appropriate to place a good deal of responsibility with these boards. However, it does demand more structural support from the national government in establishing and maintaining the enabling conditions to mitigate the islands' vulnerabilities.

Different situation on each island

The three islands differ in the way their school boards are structured. In Bonaire, one primary school board has had a one-tier governance model since 2014,⁵⁷ with an overarching board and four school principals. The other primary school boards in Bonaire operate a two-tier governance model,⁵⁸ with a combination role of director-executive and a supervisory board. Until mid-2025, the two school boards in Saba consisted of volunteers, operating a one-tier governance model. The two-tier model has since been introduced, with a paid director-executive and a volunteer supervisory board. The five school boards in Sint Eustatius apply a one-tier model with a volunteer school board and a paid school principal. The school for secondary and vocational education in Sint Eustatius is considering moving to a two-tier model.

⁵⁵ Klein, Kloppers, Middelbeek, Donker van Heel & Sacré, 2025.

⁵⁶ Cf. Onderwijsraad, 2023b.

⁵⁷ In a one-tier (monistic) governance model, the executive board and non-executive board form one board.

⁵⁸ In a two-tier (dual) governance model, there is a separation between the executive board and non-executive board, also known as supervisory board. The executive board, often combined with a director's position (director-executive) is responsible for the day-to-day management, overseen by a supervisory board.



advice

Develop targeted approach for good education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

The Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) is responsible for good education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, as in the rest of the Netherlands. To achieve this, the government approach needs to be based more on the specific situation on the islands.

Emphasising a harmonised government approach in the European and Caribbean Netherlands fails to take into account the specific situation on the islands. Those specific circumstances (small scale, island character and geographical isolation from the European Netherlands) mean the enabling conditions to deliver good education within the frameworks of the Dutch education system are lacking. The Minister of OCW therefore needs on the one hand to make additional efforts to compensate for the lack of those enabling conditions, while on the other hand making full allowance for the specific situation on the islands. The Education Council describes these two aspects together as a ‘targeted approach’. The Dutch Constitution allows scope to develop such an approach.

3.1 Differentiation needed between European and Caribbean Netherlands to achieve good education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

The Education Council notes that the Ministry of OCW has started placing greater emphasis on harmonising the legislative and regulatory frameworks in the European and Caribbean Netherlands. This drive for harmonisation is understandable, but in practice means that too little account is taken of the contexts in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. A more differentiated approach is needed to safeguard the equal right to good education.

Ministry of OCW generally tries to harmonise legislation and regulations

Since the constitutional reforms, a debate has been under way on whether the government should adopt the same approach to the European and Caribbean Netherlands as far as possible, or whether a differentiated approach would be better.⁵⁹ Recent governments have acknowledged the importance of this judgement, but have failed to make sufficiently clear whether they favour harmonisation or differentiation.⁶⁰ Ministries are free to make their own judgement here, and in recent years the Ministry of OCW appears to have come down on the side of more integration of legislation and regulation. The Ministry is seeking to develop a single overarching system for the Caribbean and European Netherlands.⁶¹ The specific education laws that used to apply for the Caribbean Netherlands are being absorbed into education laws that apply for the entire country, with a separate section on their application in the Caribbean Netherlands (see textbox below). The idea is to avoid a situation where two systems are created in practice.⁶²

⁵⁹ Cf. Commissie evaluatie uitwerking nieuwe staatkundige structuur Caribisch Nederland, 2015.

⁶⁰ De Jong, 2025.

⁶¹ Tweede Kamer, 2024.

⁶² See e.g. Ministerie van OCW, 2026.

Variation over time in degree of differentiation by government

The degree to which the government differentiates between the European and Caribbean Netherlands appears to vary over time. Shortly after the constitutional reforms, the emphasis was on integrating education in the Caribbean Netherlands into the Dutch system. The European Dutch education laws governing primary, secondary and vocational education were immediately transposed into variants for the Caribbean Netherlands. These variants were largely the same as the laws applying for the European Netherlands. Subsequently, a greater distinction was made in the policy. In recent years the emphasis seems to have shifted more towards harmonising the organisation and governance of education in the Caribbean and European Netherlands. For example, in 2022 the BES Secondary Education Act (WVO BES), which applied specifically for the Caribbean Netherlands, was integrated into the Secondary Education Act 2020 (WVO 2020), with a chapter being added setting out exceptions for the Caribbean Netherlands, for example on CXC education in Saba and Sint Eustatius. There is currently also a specific Primary Education Act for the Caribbean Netherlands (WPO BES) and a BES Compulsory Education Act (Leerplichtwet BES).

The Ministry is currently working to create a single legislative framework for vocational education, adult education and premature school drop-out, to cover both the Caribbean and European Netherlands. This will replace the separate BES Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB BES), which applies specifically for the Caribbean Netherlands. The most recent government Coalition Agreement also appears to place the emphasis on harmonisation, stating that the fundamentals of the new policy in the European Netherlands will also be introduced in the Caribbean Netherlands, “unless there are pressing grounds for not doing so”.⁶³

Minister must more often take differentiation as a starting point for education

The motivation behind harmonisation of policy and legislation is understandable from the perspective of equality, but the practical reality is often different from the intention. There is a ready tendency to take the European Netherlands as the starting point; policy or legislation is developed for the European Netherlands, after which consideration is given to the question of whether it can also be applied in the Caribbean Netherlands. That question is often only considered in the latter stages of the legislative or policymaking process, by which time fundamental deviations are rarely possible. Too little account is taken of the circumstances on the islands which demand a different government approach. The result is that the structural challenges are insufficiently recognised and good education cannot be adequately guaranteed.

The Education Council thus advises introducing more differentiation in education. The starting point is guaranteeing equal rights to good education, with the legislator being required to consider what is needed to achieve this on the islands. In practical terms, this means two things. First, it is key that the situation on the islands is more often taken as the starting point. The Minister of OCW must have a structural overview of developments and sticking points in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius which require policy, legislation and regulations or other forms of control. This will enable the Minister to make proper allowance for the unique issues on the islands. Second, where legislative and policy processes cover the whole of the Netherlands, the Minister of OCW must take the specific situation on the islands into account at an earlier stage. Currently, the Ministry of OCW involves the islands via the OCW outpost in the Caribbean Region (OCW CG) and through written consultations with

the schools, but these efforts have limited impact on policy and legislative processes that apply for the whole country. At the start of each process, the Minister of OCW must therefore state explicitly what is needed for good education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. This judgement is currently often made too late in the process, so that the specific situation on the islands is not properly taken into account.

3.2 Extra effort needed from Ministry of OCW to facilitate right to good education

The Ministry of OCW needs to look systematically at what education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius need in order to deliver good education, given the challenges that typically face a small, isolated island. This may lead to higher costs, but the equality principle requires that those costs be met.

Structural vulnerabilities demand structural government support

The education organisations on the islands cannot be expected to meet the challenges described in chapter 2 on their own. The Education Council considers it important that structural vulnerabilities must not be turned into problems for an individual school or education organisation. The Minister of OCW must configure or modify the system in such a way that it compensates for the enabling conditions which are absent in the Caribbean Netherlands, but which are essential to enable good education to be delivered within the framework of the Dutch education system. Examples include exploring partnerships with other education organisations, creating institutions with sufficient students to offer a broad-based education, and sufficient staff to cope with changing student populations.

Resilient forms of support must be created, so that education organisations and other stakeholders are able to fulfil their responsibility to deliver good education. At present, there is an excessive tendency to reach for rapid, isolated and temporary measures and resources. A pattern can also be discerned in which support is provided temporarily, then withdrawn and later proves to be needed again. This needs to be replaced by a focus by the Ministry on sustainable improvement.

Equality principle justifies higher costs of targeted approach

The Education Council is aware that a targeted approach will entail higher costs. These extra costs are justified by the equality principle. Students in the Caribbean Netherlands have the same right to good education as their peers in the European Netherlands. The fact that it costs more to achieve this must not be a reason for settling for less.

The extra costs relate in the first place to providing adequate funding for education organisations. Providing good education on a small, isolated island is more expensive than in the European Netherlands (see textbox below). The government must compensate for this by increasing the basic funding, not through isolated or temporary grant or subsidy schemes. Structural tasks demand sufficient, structural funding. Moreover, isolated or temporary grant schemes create an extra administrative burden for the small education organisations on the islands, in the form of constantly applying for funding and rendering account for how it is spent.

Higher costs of education in Caribbean Netherlands

Delivering education on a small scale by definition costs more per student; schools still have to meet their fixed costs for things such as accommodation, digital systems and quality assurance, regardless of the number of students.⁶⁴ This requires structurally higher funding per student. There are extra costs over and above this for Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius because of their specific circumstances, for example a lack of special needs education, high staff costs and the fact that schools have to develop curricula and teaching materials themselves.⁶⁵

Research: funding of education in Caribbean Netherlands is inadequate

In 2025 the Ministry of OCW commissioned a study to determine whether schools in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius receive enough funding to enable them to deliver good education.⁶⁶ The findings showed that the existing funding for education in the Caribbean Netherlands is not enough to enable schools to meet their actual costs. The aggregate shortfall in 2023 was 12.2 million US dollars (or 4.9 million if temporary subsidies are included). The report findings stated that the shortfalls, rising costs and temporary subsidies combine to put the quality and continuity of education on the islands in jeopardy.

The other forms of structural government support recommended by the Education Council also lead to higher expenditure. This is needed to facilitate the equal right to good education. The interventions required are not always large or costly; some problems can be resolved with a minor intervention, for example providing better information for students on education in the Caribbean region, overarching induction programmes for school staff and more knowledge-sharing between government agencies to ease the burden on school boards. Interventions such as these may in time even deliver cost savings, because structural improvements mean it is no longer necessary to continually scale the support up and down.

3.3 Diligent government approach requires attention for context and differences between islands

The Ministry of OCW needs to make a careful judgement as to what is needed to accommodate the specific context of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. In doing so, the Ministry must as a minimum take into account the rootedness in the island communities, ensuring clear relationships and responding to differences between the islands.

Island roots in education important for reflecting society

It is important that the Ministry of OCW allows scope for the rootedness of education organisations in the island community. By this the Education Council means that education is linked to the community setting on each island. In the first place, this has practical advantages: seeking partnership opportunities on the island and making use of the available expertise and experience on the island will strengthen education organisations.

Being more strongly embedded in the island community can also bring more fundamental benefits. It reflects differences between the communities in the European and Caribbean Netherlands, but also between the different islands –

⁶⁴ Van Buiren et al., 2025.

⁶⁵ See Part C, section 1.5.

⁶⁶ Van Buiren et al., 2025.

differences in history, identity and outlook on life, and differences in the physical and social environment.⁶⁷ This rootedness needs to be strengthened, because at the moment the European Dutch perspective dominates. According to many parents, school boards and teachers on the islands, the islands' own culture – including views on education and upbringing – is insufficiently reflected in education on the islands.

Greater rootedness in the island community can also have a positive impact on educational quality. Government agencies based in the European Netherlands do their best to keep up with developments in education in the Caribbean Netherlands, but the distance involved means this is always a challenge. Signals regarding developments in education on the islands arrive in the European Netherlands with a delay or are incomplete, and are interpreted based on frameworks that are based on the European Netherlands. Strengthening the island rootedness could lead to a more island-specific quality assurance system, in which conversations are held on each island about education, with more scope for their own views on what constitutes good education, alongside the opinions of the Inspectorate of Education.

Good educational governance requires clarity in roles and responsibilities

Good educational governance requires clarity regarding who is responsible for what and to whom a teacher or parent, for example, can turn if things are not going well. This means limiting duplication of roles, agreements about conflicts of interest if duplication cannot be avoided, and ensuring clear agreements are in place if several organisations or employees have a role.

This is difficult to achieve in small island communities, and clarifying the governance relationships can be a tricky process. The division of responsibilities that is usual in the European Netherlands is not always automatically the same in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The small scale of the island communities means different roles and relationships can rapidly become intermingled. Teachers and parents may for example turn to the person or body they expect to offer help, whereas that person or body may not always be authorised to offer the help they need, for example a Commissioner on the Executive Council of the public entity whose portfolio includes education policy.

Differences between islands demand differentiated approach

There are clear differences between the islands of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, and this requires a specific approach for each island. The student populations differ in terms of size, background and development, and this influences their education needs and the speed with which innovations can be implemented. The available facilities also differ; one island may have more support, infrastructure or specialist roles, while another island has only limited resources. The labour markets and communities on each island are also different, and this too needs to be taken into account.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Onderwijsraad, 2021b.

⁶⁸ See Part C, chapters 2, 3 and 4 for more information on the individual islands.

3.4 Constitution permits different approach for Caribbean Netherlands

The Education Council recommends introducing more differentiation in education policy, legislation and regulations between the European and Caribbean Netherlands. There is a legal basis for such a differentiated approach. The Act Public Entities Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba (WolBES) allow specific rules to be set and different measures to be taken “in view of the specific circumstances whereby these public entities differ essentially from the European part of the Netherlands”.⁶⁹ However, a difference in policy and regulation must not lead to a watering-down of the Constitutional guarantees or to an arbitrary approach. The need to make a distinction in policy and regulation must always be demonstrated (comply or explain),⁷⁰ as far as possible based on clear, consistent criteria (see textbox below).

Circumstances justify differentiation between European and Caribbean Netherlands

The Dutch Constitution does not list the circumstances which justify differentiation between the European and Caribbean Netherlands.⁷¹ However, it is generally assumed that the Constitution is referring to the following specific circumstances: the economic and social circumstances; the great distance from the European part of the Netherlands; the island character; the small area and the size of the population; the geographical circumstances; the climate; and other factors which means these islands differ essentially from the European part of the Netherlands.⁷²

The islands in the Caribbean Netherlands show essential differences with municipalities in the European Netherlands due to their small size and population, and to the high degree of cross-border traffic and multilingualism. The Caribbean Netherlands is also characterised by an accumulation of factors. For example, the impact of their small size is reinforced by their location a long way from the European part of the Netherlands. The echoes of the disadvantaged position during the Netherlands Antillean period also still linger. This is not the case for small municipalities in the European Netherlands.⁷³

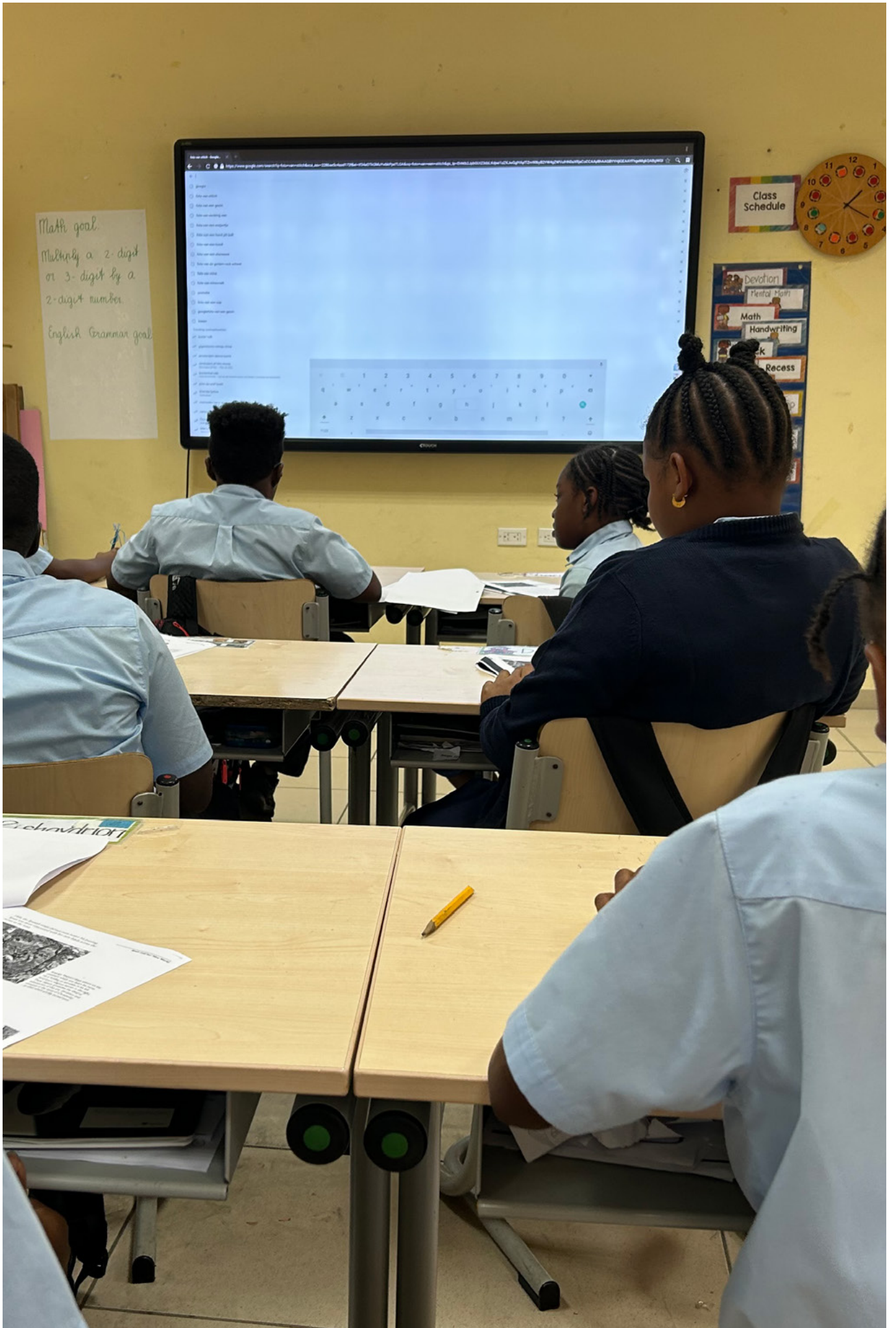
⁶⁹ Article 132a, para 4 of the Constitution deals with the distinction between the Caribbean and European Netherlands; Article 137 of the WolBES deals with the distinctions within the Caribbean Netherlands.

⁷⁰ Ministerie van BZK, 2009. See also Part C.

⁷¹ Tweede Kamer, 2024.

⁷² Ibid; see also Article 132a, para 4 Grondwet; Article 137 WolBES.

⁷³ A distinction is sometimes also drawn within the European Netherlands, for example the Act on Extraordinary Measures for Urban Problems, the National Programme for Heerlen-Noord, the difference in minimum enrolment standards for schools between (parts of) municipalities and supplementary funding for schools in exceptional circumstances.



recom mendation one

Ensure students in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are sufficiently equipped for different future pathways

Young people in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius must be better equipped for the different future pathways they may follow. This requires a broad-based education with scope for specialisation, strengthening of Dutch language teaching and better transfer routes.

Young people in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have a right to good education. Among other things this means their education must prepare them to participate fully in further education and the jobs market. Education on the islands currently fails to align adequately with the diverse future pathways that students may follow.

Addressing this requires an additional, targeted effort from the Minister of OCW. The Education Council has three recommendations in this regard. First, offer a broader education provision which is more aligned with the different future pathways of young people. Second, strengthen Dutch language teaching in the multilingual contexts of the islands. And third, expand the transfer routes within the Caribbean region, as well as the opportunities to return to Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

4.1 Equip students for different future pathways

First, the curricula need to be modified to better equip students in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius for the different future pathways they generally follow. This means a broad-based preparation with opportunities for specialisation or supplementary preparation at the end of their secondary or vocational education. The Ministry of OCW must provide the support, access to knowledge and regulatory scope to facilitate this. The Education Council also draws attention to the need for better alignment of the CXC education in Saba and Sint Eustatius with primary education and an adequate transition pathway from CXC to further education in both the European Netherlands and the Caribbean region. Finally, the Education Council calls for adequate education provision for all young people on the islands up to age 18.

Provide broad basis with opportunities for specialisation

The present education provision on the islands needs to be modified to better equip students for the different future pathways they may follow. At present, there is a heavy emphasis on the European Netherlands, in primary, secondary and vocational education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, in terms of both language and teaching content, at the expense of preparation for other future pathways, such as work and further education either on the islands or in the region. Giving students a broad-based preparation for different routes will enable them to develop a solid basis for flexible and successful development. Thereafter they can specialise and prepare for the specific future pathway of their choice.

The Education Council is not advocating a fuller curriculum, nor an increase in teaching hours. Rather, the key is to design the teaching in such a way that it aligns better with the world and future pathways of young people on the islands. The textbox below sets out a proposal for further operationalisation.

Possible operationalisation of specialisations in basic education

Specialisations or preparatory courses can be built in in several ways, for example as specific programmes at the end of a student's school career, or as options. The attainment targets can vary for each specialisation, for example the envisaged degree of command of a language, with appropriate diplomas and certificates, as currently happens in Saba and Sint Eustatius. Students can also receive help in each specialisation in the form of careers advice and information on specific forms of further education.

It is important that choosing a specialisation does not tie a student to a particular route. It must be possible to switch or to choose an extra specialisation at a later date. It is also important that schools inform students and parents at an early stage of their school career about the possibilities and specialisations.

The Education Council realises that the small size of the education organisations makes it difficult to build in multiple options into their curricula, especially where student numbers are small. It is then useful to explore which parts of specialisations or supplementary programmes could be offered together. How can the schools for secondary and vocational education on the islands work together? And could Bonaire seek closer collaboration with Aruba and Curaçao? In the case of Saba and Sint Eustatius, establishing links with Sint Maarten would be more logical.

In addition, the Minister of OCW should work with school principals and school boards in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to identify where there are legal obstacles to making curricula more appropriate to the island contexts, and to seek ways of eliminating those obstacles. Education organisations also need support and access to knowledge, for example to enable them to develop suitable teaching materials.

Give more thought to alignment with CXC education

The Education Council calls for more thought to be given to CXC education in secondary and vocational education in Saba and Sint Eustatius. At present there are numerous obstacles in the transition from primary education and into different transfer routes. The core objectives in primary education are insufficiently aligned to the CXC curricula in secondary and vocational education in Saba en Sint Eustatius. These students next encounter issues in going on to further education in the European Netherlands, due to differences in the language and teaching content of the CXC education. There are also formal obstacles, such as the timing of the announcement of the CXC examination results.⁷⁴ CXC education does align well with the transfer route to further education in the Caribbean region, but lack of information and financial support mean this route is less well facilitated. In both these cases, the alignment needs to be improved. As regards introducing specialisations, a determination needs to be made of precisely what is needed to prepare students adequately for their future choices, and to provide adequate support for this. After completion of CXC education, transfer routes to further education, in both the Caribbean region and the European Netherlands, need to be accessible. For the latter, this means equipping students to successfully complete a course of study in Europe.

It is also important that CXC education is anchored in legislation (see textbox below). This requires parliamentary consent, and therefore a debate in the House of Representatives. That debate could be used to structurally improve the match between CXC education and further education within the Kingdom (Aruba, Curaçao, the Netherlands and Sint Maarten). An evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of CXC education as this is applied within the Dutch legislative frameworks could also give direction to improving the links to further education for young people in Saba and Sint Eustatius.

Inadequate legal regulation of CXC education

CXC education is governed by an Order in Council (AMvB). That is different from the situation in Bonaire and the European Netherlands, where the main elements of the education system are enshrined in law. That is a requirement of the Constitution, which assigns a central role to the legislator in determining the main outlines of the education system. In reality, choosing CXC education is insufficiently democratically grounded and there is no adequate legislative basis. The Council of State of the Netherlands has already referred to this previously, but the Ministry of OCW has not yet taken action.⁷⁵

Provide adequate education for all young people aged up to 18 on each island

Finally, the Education Council argues that young people in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius should be able to follow education until age 18, only having to leave the island to pursue further education. This will make education more accessible, given that the proximity is an important factor for minors in deciding whether or not to continue studying. At present, after completing secondary and vocational education, young people often have to leave the island whilst still minors. This throws up legal and financial obstacles: for example, they are not yet able to sign a tenancy agreement and are not eligible for student finance. Moreover, they are often not yet ready to stand on their own two feet.

The Education Council is not advocating extending the mainstream secondary or vocational education. Rather, alongside existing routes such as pre-university education (VWO), CAPE⁷⁶ in CXC education and a comparable custom variant, a supplementary curriculum or work placement programme could be introduced in partnership with companies and civil-society organisations. Fundashon Forma in Bonaire, Saba Reach Foundation in Saba and the New Challenges Foundation in Sint Eustatius could also play a role in this. Another option would be to extend the Caribbean Academic Foundation Year (CAFY)⁷⁷ by the Strategic Education Alliance (SEA).⁷⁸ This programme, launched in 2025, offers a one-year programme – partly online – to prepare young people for the transition to further education outside the island.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Raad van State, 2021.

⁷⁶ Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations, comparable with VWO. See Part C, section 1.3.

⁷⁷ See <https://strategiceducationalalliance.org/cafy/>

⁷⁸ Strategic Education Alliance (SEA) is a partnership programme between government and education stakeholders in all four countries within the Kingdom.

⁷⁹ See Part B, chapter 7 on transitions.

4.2 Raise standard of Dutch language teaching

There are major concerns on all three islands regarding the Dutch language skills of students. As well as a command of English, Papiamentu and/or Spanish, a good (basic) command of Dutch is important to be able to participate in Dutch society. Many students go on to study at Dutch-speaking further education institutes, and civil service jobs on the islands also require a good command of Dutch. It is a challenge to improve Dutch language teaching on the islands. It is rarely used in day-to-day life, the media or social media, limiting the opportunities to master the language. Moreover, Dutch is hardly used in the rest of the region, making it difficult to recruit qualified teachers of Dutch. There is also a lack of adequate teaching materials.⁸⁰

In the European Netherlands, the Minister of OCW is responsible only for formulating the task of language teaching; the practical implementation is left largely to schools. By contrast, in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius a more active role for the government is called for.⁸¹ The structural vulnerability of Dutch language teaching requires targeted and long-lasting support. Education organisations need help in recruiting and the (financial) facilitation of teachers of Dutch in Bonaire, and of teachers of Dutch as a foreign language (NVT) in Saba and Sint Eustatius, who are able and willing to work on the islands. Investments are also needed in developing suitable teaching materials, multi-year learning pathways and suitable forms of testing and examination. The small scale means the market cannot be expected to meet these needs. The Education Council stresses that these investments must be structural in order to prevent quality improvements being merely temporary.

The configuration of education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius also requires a different approach from the European Netherlands,⁸² for example bilingual or trilingual teaching, with parts of the curriculum being taught in Dutch and others in English or Papiamentu. Research has shown that multilingual teaching can reinforce the development of all the languages taught.⁸³ Digital sharing and joint teaching projects with Dutch-speaking schools in Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten and the European Netherlands also contribute to a richer language environment. The Education Council sees a clear role here for the Minister in terms of facilitation and funding.

Finally, the Education Council suggests investigating whether the Inclusive Language Teaching in Bonaire project (iTOB), which was launched in 2024, could be rolled out in modified form in Sint Eustatius and Saba.⁸⁴ This would build on the existing expertise and lead to a lasting strengthening of Dutch language teaching throughout the whole Caribbean region.

4.3 Simplify transfer routes within Caribbean region

Third, the Education Council recommends strengthening the transfer routes within the Caribbean region. For many young people in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius wishing to continue studying after completing secondary education, the almost automatic choice is to do so in the European Netherlands. The Caribbean region (including Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten, but also Barbados, Jamaica

⁸⁰ See Part B, chapters 2 and 5 on multilingualism and teaching staff.

⁸¹ Onderwijsraad, 2022.

⁸² For the use of multilingualism in language acquisition, see also Onderwijsraad, 2025b.

⁸³ Jenniskens et al., 2020; Verspoor, De Bot & Xu, 2015.

⁸⁴ For more information on iTOB see Part B, chapter 2 on multilingualism.

and Trinidad, for example) are rarely chosen as a destination. This may be due to unfamiliarity with this option, but also to a negative perception of the quality of that education and the value of the qualifications. Financial obstacles can also be a reason for not choosing further education in the region.

Yet an English-language further education in the Caribbean region can offer distinct advantages, especially for students from Saba and Sint Eustatius, because of the alignment with the CXC education they have followed and their command of English. Young Bonaireans have also been showing more interest in English-language studies in recent years. Moreover, the drop-out rates in the Caribbean region are lower than in the European Netherlands. The Education Council accordingly advises the Minister of OCW to simplify the transfer routes within the Caribbean region.

Expand facilities for studying in Caribbean region

The Education Council calls for better facilitation of the transfer routes to further education in the Caribbean region, and sees several options for achieving this. The Minister of OCW can encourage schools for secondary and vocational education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to set up a number of transfer routes in partnership with regional education institutes. Specific information could be provided about those routes, both regarding the content and the practical aspects. At present, information and financial support focus mainly on the route to the European Netherlands.⁸⁵ Young people must be able to exploit the opportunities on the island or in the Caribbean region if this matches their ambitions and capabilities. Moreover, if more young people remain on the island or the region, that has a positive knock-on effect on the labour market and the island community. Well-educated young people are badly needed on the islands, while those who leave for the European Netherlands often do not return.

Steps can also be taken to guarantee that qualifications retain their value on a return to the islands. Nuffic can play a coordinating role here. The education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius would then not have to build up contacts individually. The Minister of OCW can also provide better financial support for students who choose to follow further education in the region, for example through a modified start-up allowance.⁸⁶ The Minister of OCW could also work with colleagues in Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten to seek solutions for funding study in other countries within the Kingdom.

Strengthen educational collaboration within the Kingdom

The Education Council recommends that the Minister of OCW and education organisations further strengthen the educational collaboration within the Kingdom – between the governments of the four countries of the Kingdom and between education institutes. There are logical transfer routes for future students in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. There are already several collaborative programmes within the Kingdom, such as the Kingdom-wide Strategic Education Alliance (SEA). There is also a network of teacher training providers and schools offering teaching practice placements, currently covering Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao (Kibrahacha).⁸⁷ These are however temporary programmes, with temporary funding to match. They need to be strengthened and reinforced. The Education Council calls for extra attention be given to the provision of secondary vocational education within the Kingdom.

⁸⁵ See Part B, chapter 7 on transitions.

⁸⁶ The start-up allowance is intended to help with the costs incurred by young people from the Caribbean Netherlands to enable them to study in the European Netherlands. See also <https://www.rijksdienstcn.com/onderwijs-cultuur-wetenschap/studiefinanciering/opstarttoelage>

⁸⁷ See Parts B and C.

Representatives of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius can also join the formal Dutch delegation for the Four-Country Consultative Meeting organised by the Ministry of OCW. It is also important that the three islands are involved in the preparations at official level. At present, the Caribbean Netherlands as a whole is represented by the Minister of OCW. Including people from the islands in the delegation would make it possible to tailor education on the islands more effectively, for example, and enable questions around transfer routes to be discussed.

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

The future pathway of young people who choose to stay on the islands currently receives little attention. Education that takes into account the different future pathways also presupposes good educational opportunities for young people who stay on the islands or return to them.

Explore opportunities for expanding education provision on islands

The Education Council suggests exploring the possibilities for expanding the education provision in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius for young people who stay on the islands. They must be able to obtain a qualification on the island which enables them to work. This could be achieved through initial vocational programmes or higher education courses. Another option would be easy-access, affordable (re)training and lifelong learning opportunities at a later point in their career. Organisations such as Fundashon Forma in Bonaire, Saba Reach Foundation in Saba and the New Challenges Foundation in Sint Eustatius could play a role here. Given the small scale of the islands, hybrid forms and e-learning for initial and further training are also relevant options.

The Minister of OCW could examine together with the Strategic Education Alliance, the Council of Education and Labor Market for the Caribbean Netherlands (ROA CN) and the schools for secondary and vocational education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius how vocational programmes, work experience placements and lifelong development programmes could be configured and expanded. They could do this in partnership with the island governments and employers on the islands.

You dream it we accept it
and together we build it!

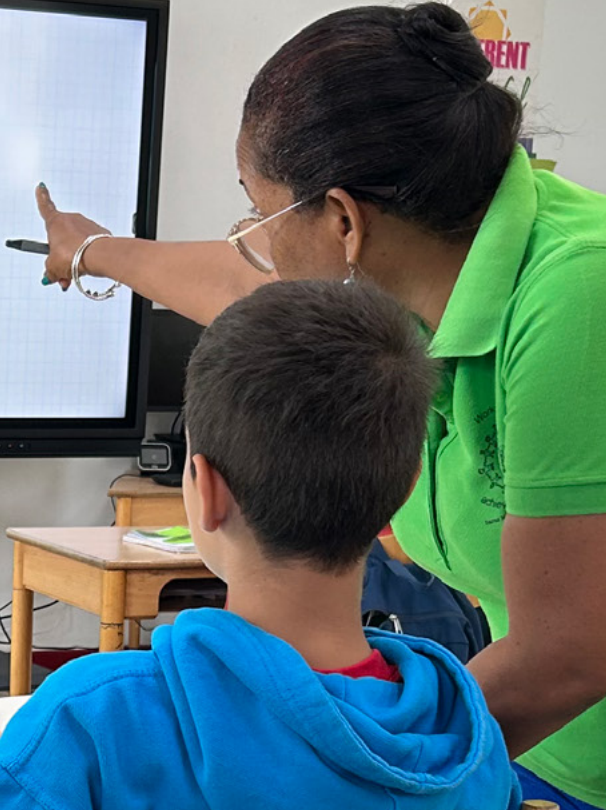


one whole $\frac{1}{1}$ out of one \rightarrow vinculum \rightarrow denominator - below

3. $\frac{1}{2}$ = one half or one out of two equal parts

4. $\frac{1}{3}$ = one third

5. $\frac{1}{4}$ = one fourth or one quarter



recom mendation two

Enable education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to deliver good education for everyone

Education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius need more support from the Ministry of OCW for adequate staffing, skilled leadership and cross-sector collaboration.

The Ministry of OCW needs to give better support to education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to help them secure sufficient, well-equipped teachers. School boards and principals must also be given help with developing skilled leadership, rooted in the islands, and collaboration between education organisations and other civil-society actors must be promoted.

5.1 Ensure sufficient good-quality teachers

To enable education organisations to fulfil their responsibilities, they must have sufficient, well-trained staff. They need structural support with the recruitment and induction of new staff; targeted training and knowledge-sharing within existing teams; and strengthening the position of teaching staff within the education organisations.

Provide structural support for recruitment and induction

The high staff turnover means education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius regularly have to recruit staff, and have to tap into diverse labour markets located a considerable distance from the islands.⁸⁸ This places heavy demands on the education organisations. The Ministry of OCW needs to take a greater role in combating these chronic staff shortages.

The Ministry of OCW can create a staff rotation pool from which teachers can be recruited from the European Netherlands. This is particularly useful for specific subjects where recruitment is especially difficult, such as Dutch. Efforts to retain teachers within the staff rotation pool would also be useful, so they become well acquainted with the island context. Creating such a stable recruitment pool requires fixed ties with education organisations in the European Netherlands which are willing to contribute to education on the islands, partly out of solidarity and also because it offers their own staff an opportunity to gain experience in a different context and boost their professionalism further.⁸⁹ It is not feasible for the education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to set up such a pool over such a distance. The Education Council sees a role for the Minister of OCW, in collaboration with the sectoral councils, in setting up partnerships and facilitating a rotation pool.

The Minister of OCW could work in a comparable way to build lasting relationships with the European Netherlands to create internships for teachers.⁹⁰ This would also offer education organisations an opportunity to establish contacts with potential new teachers and to benefit from the latest insights from teacher training providers. In time, specific modules could also be developed within teacher training programmes for teaching in the Caribbean Netherlands.

For teachers who begin working in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, the Education Council recommends creating an island-based, school-overarching induction programme. The Ministry of OCW and the public entity can provide joint support here. At present, each individual school has its own induction programme, which is very time-consuming for school principals. As a consequence, these programmes are regularly scrapped or shortened.

⁸⁸ See Part B, chapter 5 on teaching staff.

⁸⁹ Onderwijsraad, 2023a.

⁹⁰ In Bonaire, work is already under way on linking to the partnership of Kibrahacha.

It could also be helpful to work on joint information activities and creating access to vacancy platforms. Although Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius are part of the Netherlands, a link on the vacancy site of the Foundation for Dutch Education Worldwide (NOB) or a similar platform could be useful. This could offer teachers interested in working in a different context from the European Netherlands a way to find vacancies in the Caribbean Netherlands.

Provide structural support for knowledge-sharing and team training

The Minister of OCW, In collaboration with school boards, could ensure better facilitation of training and knowledge-sharing within and between school teams. This would require a (limited) increase in basic funding, because professionalisation on the islands costs more than in the European Netherlands. The Dutch National Education Institute⁹¹ could play a bigger role for the islands, for example by devoting specific attention to them in the so called Kennisrotonde.⁹² It would also be helpful to encourage the formation of professional learning communities (PLGs) (see textbox below).

Professional learning communities

A professional learning community (PLG) allows a group of teachers to meet regularly, physically or online, to share expertise and reflect together on situations in their own teaching practise. The aim is to learn together with a view to improving their professionalism and their teaching practice.⁹³ A PLG can be organised within a school, or between several schools – island-wide, across the islands or with education institutes outside the Caribbean Netherlands.



⁹¹ <https://www.nko.nl>

⁹² The Kennisrotonde is an information hub for questions about education and young people, using knowledge from research. See <https://www.kennisrotonde.nl/>

⁹³ See e.g. Verbiest, 2022.

Strengthen position of teaching staff within education organisations

The professional freedom and contribution of schools and teachers are determining factors in the resilience of the education system.⁹⁴ More shared responsibility at team level can reduce the vulnerability caused by high staff turnover and the dependence on a small number of individuals. Where social changes affect education, it is essential to take into account the professional knowledge of education professionals' end to base decisions partly on their knowledge of the specific situation in which the education organisation and students work.⁹⁵ It is important that this is properly supported.⁹⁶

The Education Council calls on school boards in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to give teachers a greater voice and more influence over the content and organisation of their work, and to actively support them in carrying out their tasks.⁹⁷ This could be formally enshrined in a professional charter. It would also give teachers the time and freedom to talk with other members of their team about educational matters. An active participation culture needs to be nurtured within education organisations, in which participation councils are closely involved in making policy choices. Education organisations on the islands must create a culture in which such participation can be put into practice. Teachers themselves have a key responsibility here.

The Minister of OCW needs to harmonise the legislation on formal staff participation in school policy and administrative decisions between the islands and the European Netherlands. At present, the participation councils in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius have no right of advice or consent, which means the law on participation for the Caribbean Netherlands deviates from the Participation at Schools Act in the European Netherlands (Wet medezeggenschap op scholen - WMS) and the Works Councils Act.⁹⁸ Precisely because of the great physical distance to government agencies in the European Netherlands, it is important that staff, parents and students are able to have a voice. This reinforces the rootedness of education on the islands and creates more scope for island-specific views on what constitutes good education (see also section 3.3).

5.2 Raise quality and quantity of school boards and school principals on islands

The Education Council advises the Ministry of OCW and the education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to equip school boards and school principals better, and to aim to increase the number of school board members and school principals who are islanders. This could be done by actively seeking candidates on the islands and guiding them towards management and governance functions, and by continuing to invest in equipping them for the task. It is also recommended that incumbent school board members (including supervisory board members) be professionalised.

Scout and support candidates on islands

At present a large number of school board members and school principals in the Caribbean Netherlands hail from outside Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, mainly from the European Netherlands. These professionals are generally familiar with

⁹⁴ Onderwijsraad, 2014.

⁹⁵ Onderwijsraad, 2020.

⁹⁶ See also Onderwijsraad, 2016.

⁹⁷ Cf. Onderwijsraad, 2024.

⁹⁸ See Part C and <https://www.rijksdienstcn.com/onderwijs-cultuur-wetenschap/onderwijspersoneel/medezeggenschap>

the Dutch system and find it easy to communicate with the Ministry of OCW and the Inspectorate of Education. They often also possess some legal knowledge. The downside is that these externals often stay only temporarily in Bonaire, Saba or Sint Eustatius. Regular staff changes increase the vulnerability of education organisations, which lose experience, knowledge and ‘corporate memory’. By contrast, school board members and school principals who are from the islands can still be readily contacted after leaving their post, and can share their knowledge and experience. A predominance of school board members and school principals from the European Netherlands also carries the risk that school boards and school managements will be focused mainly on the European Netherlands. It is therefore important that, as a minimum, a substantial proportion of supervisory board members school board members and school principals are rooted in the islands.

The Education Council realises that these people cannot be found overnight; they must possess the right experience and capabilities. The key is to give people on the islands the opportunity to develop these skills. It is important to scout out people early, to train them, guide them and take any necessary intervening steps. A management development programme, possibly set up in partnership with the public entity and organisations from other areas of civil society, could help do this systematically. These programmes could also offer trainee placements on supervisory boards, school boards and school management teams. A small number of education organisations on the islands already use this system, and this could be expanded. Scouting and guidance would give potential school board members and school management who are rooted in the islands more chance of success when a vacancy arises for a school board or school management function.

Keep working to adequately equip school management and school board members

A first step in equipping school principals and school board members would be to create better induction programmes, with knowledge of the Dutch education system and the associated task divisions as a key component. Better induction programmes can also help counter the high turnover among school principals and school board members. As well as induction programmes, peer reviews could also be used to support incumbent school principals and school boards. These could be organised as online sessions and could span several schools or islands. Collaboration would also be possible here with Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten.

The geographical isolation of the islands from the European Netherlands means school principals and school boards are less able to keep up with the latest developments in Dutch education policy and teaching practice. They have limited opportunities to participate in conferences and activities organised by trade unions, umbrella organisations and the sectoral councils.⁹⁹ This could be partly accommodated by making knowledge from conferences and other activities available for education professionals on the islands, for example via video reports, vlogs, podcasts, streams and rewatch options, a newsletter with links or written reports. The sectoral councils and trade unions could organise this.

As regards structural development, the Education Council favours more mutual knowledge-sharing with other education organisations in the European Netherlands and the other countries in the Kingdom, for example through twinning programmes, buddy-schools and embedding in online learning networks with potential sparring partners.

5.3 Collaborate more intensively to achieve benefits of scale

In the Dutch system, school boards share responsibility for providing accessible, good-quality education for every young person. To achieve this, it is often necessary or helpful to work with other organisations.¹⁰⁰ The Education Council accordingly calls for an intensification of the collaboration between education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius and with organisations from other fields – on each island, but also between the islands. This is of particular importance in the Caribbean Netherlands owing to the extra challenges and limited size of most education organisations, coupled with a greater scarcity of people, expertise and resources. Intensive collaboration can partly mitigate this scarcity.

To achieve this, the Minister of OCW, in liaison with school boards, could set up and co-fund one or two permanent support centres.¹⁰¹ These would be separate organisations which possess expertise in areas such as HR, terms of employment, legal matters, finance, accommodation and quality assurance. They could take on some of the operational tasks of the education organisations and support them with advice, saving them having to employ specialist staff themselves. The support centres could also help disseminate knowledge among teachers, school principals and school boards. Doing this at an overarching level would also offer benefits of scale.

The Education Council recommends that education organisations seek more collaboration on their own island with organisations outside the education system, such as childcare providers, cultural organisations, sports and youth work organisations, and libraries, for example through joint projects and by sharing teaching and non-teaching staff or facilities. This would go some way to mitigating the limited governance capacity and scarcity of resources and to making better use of opportunities to enrich education on the islands. A library worker could for example play a role in Dutch language teaching, while schools and out-of-school care providers could reinforce each other.

Finally, support organisations in the European Netherlands could collaborate more with schools in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, for example in the collective procurement of digital systems via SURF and online training courses via the sectoral councils.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Onderwijsraad, 2023b.

¹⁰¹ The Council is referring here to what are sometimes known as *shared service centres*.



recom mendation three

Adapt role, position and working methods of government agencies to island contexts

School boards in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius and government agencies need to be more aligned with each other and with the specific context of the islands. This will enable education organisations to function better.

The Education Council advises the Minister of OCW to adapt the roles, positions and working methods of government agencies to the specific context of the islands. The legislation and legislative process should also be better aligned with the island contexts. It is also important that the public entities are able to function as a link between education, other domains and the island communities.

6.1 Adapt government approach to situation in which education organisations operate

Although direct contact between the Ministry of OCW and the education organisations is often necessary and useful, this contact needs to be carefully organised to ensure it is effective, appropriate and supportive for the island contexts and to avoid overburdening the small education organisations.

Devote explicit attention to mutual relationships

The Minister of OCW must devote explicit attention to the relationship with the education organisations on the islands. Communication and decision-making should be attuned to the island contexts, cultures and language differences. There is regular friction between the island circumstances and customs on the one hand and the ‘Dutch lens’ or ‘government logic’ on the other.¹⁰² For example, there is a discrepancy between the most widely spoken languages in Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba and the language that is used in formal communications between the islands and national government agencies. Important documents are frequently shared in Dutch, whereas Papiamentu is the most widely spoken language in Bonaire, and English in Saba and Sint Eustatius. The constitutional reforms of 10-10-10 resulted in more diverse island communities, including new residents from the European Netherlands, who fulfil roles as senior civil servants, management and administrative positions.¹⁰³ This requires an awareness of the shared colonial history and how this works through into the present day, as well as differences in background and perspectives, and requires adaptation to island needs and customs.¹⁰⁴

There are also feelings of distance, dependence and inequality between Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, which are exacerbated by the limited opportunities for travel between the islands. These feelings impede mutual collaboration and make adaptation and shared decision-making complex.¹⁰⁵ Although Saba and Sint Eustatius are only 30 kilometres apart, there are no daily ferry or flight connections. Bonaire is roughly 800 kilometres further away and has more facilities, which can help foster a sense of inferiority among residents of Saba and Sint Eustatius and to perceptions of an imbalanced basis for policy and services.¹⁰⁶

Create more structural contact from national government agencies

For national bodies such as the Ministry of OCW and the Inspectorate of Education, contact with the education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius is a matter of combining sufficient proximity with appropriate distance. It is also important to involve the education organisations on the islands enough but also not to overburden them. This will always be a balancing act. In practice, the key is to develop a routine with easy-access, practicable forms of consultation and involvement in policy preparation and implementation.

¹⁰² Pullen, Zwiers & Dankers, 2024.

¹⁰³ Veenendaal, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2022. See also Part C, section 1.1, for more information on the shared colonial history.

¹⁰⁵ Pullen et al., 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Veenendaal, 2018.

At present, school boards and school principals on the islands face a considerable burden because all manner of national bodies separately solicit information and pay working visits to the islands. It is very time-consuming for school boards and school principals to receive delegations and hold physical or online meetings, especially given that they often feel they are having to provide the same information over and over again. Although the outpost of the Ministry of OCW in the Caribbean Netherlands (OCW CG) already works with dedicated contacts who coordinate visits, in practice this is insufficient. Not all national agencies work through the same contacts, for example because they do not fall under the aegis of the Ministry of OCW, but still want to visit schools and then make appointments independently or via different contacts. The Education Council calls on national agencies to share more knowledge and experiences with each other. Sharing insights from directorates within the Ministry, the Inspectorate of Education, other government agencies and sectoral councils could provide a more complete picture and enable signals to be picked up sooner. This would ease the burden of school principals and school boards on the islands.

Tailor role of OCW CG more closely with needs of education organisations

The role of OCW CG has changed considerably over the last fifteen years. Initially, this department focused mainly on supporting stakeholders in implementing the Education Agenda for the Caribbean Netherlands. OCW CG also acts as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the Ministry of OCW on the islands, and conveys the situation on the islands to The Hague. With its headquarters in Bonaire, an outpost in Sint Eustatius and, since January 2026, an employee in Saba, it has a clear physical presence on the islands.

Today, OCW CG also fulfils a substantive policy role and develops proposals for adapting and improving education policy in the Caribbean Netherlands. Despite this, education organisations on the islands often turn directly to the Ministry in The Hague for substantive questions and matters relating to policy. They feel it is cumbersome to have to go through OCW CG first, because their questions will ultimately still end up in The Hague. In practice, OCW CG is often referred to as RCN, a reference to the National Office for the Caribbean Netherlands, which supports the outposts of the various ministries, while OCW CG fulfils a different substantive and policy role. This mixing of names adds to the confusion among education organisations about what OCW CG can do for them. The Education Council proposes that the role of OCW CG be more clearly aligned with the needs of the education organisations.

6.2 Align education legislation more closely to island context

The Education Council advises the Minister of OCW to keep the Caribbean Netherlands clearly in mind when developing legislation and regulations and to take the islands more into account in legislative processes that apply for the whole country. Accessible consultation and clarity of the prevailing legislation and regulations are also important.

Allow more differentiation in legislation and regulations

The recommendation to take differentiation as a starting point (see section 3.1) also applies for the legislative process. When preparing legislation or legislative amendments, the question of what is needed for education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius should much more often be the starting point. Which problems in education on the islands required regulation? And what freedom do education

organisations on the islands need to be able to respond to the context in which they operate? At present, the legislative agenda is dominated primarily by the needs of educational practice in the European Netherlands. Those needs are often different or irrelevant on the islands. An example is the proposal to create a specific law for the Scholengemeenschap Bonaire (SGB). This legislative proposal defines SGB as a vertical school community, in which both a secondary school and a secondary vocational school (MBO) are overseen by a single school board. The status of vertical school community means that SGB will be subject to changes in the future regarding responsibility for accommodation, a task which currently lies with the Public Entity Bonaire.¹⁰⁷

The Caribbean Netherlands also needs to be considered earlier in the process of developing legislation and regulations which apply for the whole country, weighing how context-specific the problem analyses and proposed solutions are. At present, this judgement is often made too late and too incidentally in the process, so that changes are no longer really possible or can only be marginal. Specific questions pertaining to the three islands consequently receive too little attention and the focus remains on the European Netherlands. This adversely affects the quality of the legislation, whereas the ‘comply or explain’ principle offers scope to differentiate (see textbox below).

‘Comply or explain’ principle

The national government has applied the comply or explain principle since 2019 for the development of legislation and regulations.¹⁰⁸ This means that when creating new and amending existing legislation and regulations, consideration is always given to whether and how it can be applied to the Caribbean Netherlands or whether differentiation is necessary or desirable. Previous governments have formulated criteria for this, such as their island character, their small scale and their geographical distance both from the European Netherlands and within the Caribbean Netherlands. However, these criteria are formulated in general terms and are not formally laid down in legislation and regulations.¹⁰⁹ It is therefore not clear whether harmonisation or differentiation should be the starting point; each ministry appears to have to make its own judgement on this.¹¹⁰ What is clear is that the choice of whether or not to differentiate must lead to ‘an equivalent level of provision’.

The Ministry of OCW seeks to liaise with the islands in various ways, including through written and verbal consultations. In practice, however, this has limited effect. The input gathered from the islands has too little influence on the policy and legislative processes in The Hague, so that new government initiatives do not always align with the specific context of the islands. In addition, actors on the islands need to be involved more structurally, so that they have sufficient time to make a substantive contribution.

Consideration also needs to be given to the implications of legislation in other policy domains for education organisations in the Caribbean Netherlands, for example the rules on immigration procedures (which apply for education staff and their families) and rules around social security.¹¹¹ For teachers from the European Netherlands, working in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius counts as ‘working abroad’, because the

¹⁰⁷ Tweede Kamer, 2026.

¹⁰⁸ Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2019.

¹⁰⁹ De Jong, 2025.

¹¹⁰ Tweede Kamer, 2024; Aanwijzingen voor de regelgeving, aanwijzing 2.16.

¹¹¹ See Part B, chapter 5 on teaching staff.

islands have their own Caribbean Dutch social security system,¹¹² which excludes unemployment insurance, and a different system of pension accrual.¹¹³ Teachers from outside the islands – including those from the European Netherlands – also have to go through the immigration procedures for the Caribbean Netherlands. Schools therefore spend a great deal of time arranging residence permits, a process which generally takes several weeks for each application.¹¹⁴

Ensure that applicable legislation is accessible and practicable

The prevailing legislation must be accessible for those working in education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius. Here again, the principle is equivalence: legislation and regulations must be just as clear for the Caribbean Netherlands as for the European Netherlands. The Minister of OCW is required to provide accessible and good-quality legal support on the islands and can arrange for this to be provided by the envisaged support centres (see section 5.3) or by OCW CG.

The limited availability of education law specialists or for example a knowledge centre on the islands, makes it more difficult for school boards and school principals in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius to thoroughly understand legislation and regulations. This means that legislation and regulations must be formulated more clearly for the Caribbean Netherlands than for the European Netherlands. At present, it is actually more complex because of the specific laws and rules applying for the Caribbean Netherlands within the general national legislative framework. Although exceptions are made on some points, these are positioned at the end of the legislative text and can be understood only if they are read in conjunction with the rules for the European Netherlands. To be able to follow the legislation and regulations for the Caribbean Netherlands, it is therefore necessary to understand the legislation and regulations that apply for the European Netherlands, too. In principle, therefore, the legislation for the Caribbean Netherlands does not meet the required standards of clarity for legislation.¹¹⁵

There is also a need for a clear overview of the legislation and regulations that apply for the Caribbean Netherlands. At present, this is hard to find. On the one hand there are few known, specific rules applying only for education on the islands, while on the other, integrating laws that apply specifically for education in the Caribbean Netherlands into the sectoral legislation that applies for the whole country leads to lack of clarity. The applicable rules are not set out in a separate list or section, but have to be found by puzzling between the chapter on the Caribbean Netherlands and other parts of a legislative text.

The Inspectorate of Education also needs to give more detail for its updated 2027 Inspection framework¹¹⁶ concerning its rationale for the Caribbean Netherlands. The Inspectorate could explain in more detail how much it differentiates between the European and Caribbean Netherlands. To what extent does the Inspectorate interpret the legal provisions in the same or a different way for the European and Caribbean Netherlands? Although the comply or explain principle formally only applies for legislation and regulations, the Education Council believes it is important that implementing bodies and supervisors should also act in the spirit of this principle. They too can respect the ‘special position’ of the islands as laid down

¹¹² <https://www.rijksdienstcn.com/sociale-zaken-werk>

¹¹³ <https://www.rijksdienstcn.com/sociale-zaken-werk/ouderdomspensioen-ao>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.rijksdienstcn.com/immigratie-naturalisatie>

¹¹⁵ See Aanwijzingen voor de regelgeving, aanwijzing 2.6.

¹¹⁶ The Inspectorate of Education inspection frameworks are updated annually and subjected to a more thorough evaluation once every few years. The next major change based on the evaluations is scheduled for August 2027. See also: <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/onderwerpen/toezicht-2017/onderzoekskaders/onderzoekskader-2027>

in law. At the very least, this means they must follow the legislation strictly where it contains an exception for the Caribbean Netherlands, and must state how they differentiate where the law allows for this.

Make it easier to consult on new legislation

The islands should be consulted as a matter of course when preparing new legislation. For example, the insights of education organisations in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius and of the island governments should be sought when making the 'comply or explain' judgement. School boards and school principals are often consulted (too) late or in a way that makes it difficult for them to respond to a legislative proposal. The consultation is often ad hoc, unfocused and poorly coordinated with other ongoing legislative processes.

Other forms besides written consultation can help secure more input from the Caribbean Netherlands. Instead of emailing a legislative proposal in the expectation of written responses, the Ministry has recently begun using more verbal presentations around the content of the proposal and its background, followed by opportunity for discussion. This gives stakeholders on the islands an insight into which legislation is in the pipeline, and makes it easier for them to share their thoughts on it. Such forms of consultation can be structured by scheduling them at fixed intervals.

6.3 Make use of position of public entities

The public entities can be a source of input for the islands' views on education and can contribute to domain-overarching collaboration. However, the Education Council is emphatically not suggesting that island politicians should have control over the internal organisation of schools, teaching content, pedagogical or didactic approach. It is important to keep the formal separation of powers intact.

Exploit role of public entity as a local government and discussion partner

The Ministry of OCW and the public entity both encounter limitations if they seek to take responsibility for education on an island. They can partially compensate for those limitations through better collaboration. The Ministry of OCW can compensate for the lack of island capacity and expertise at the public entities, for example in arranging student transport or constructing a new school building. The public entity, for its part, can input the island perspective into national policy. As the island government, the public entity has the advantage of proximity and being keyed into the island community and the Caribbean (regional) orientation of the population.

In practical terms, the Minister of OCW could consult more with the public entity on national education policy and legislation, for example by empowering the public entities to make proposals or giving them a right to be heard. The public entity in Bonaire could for example, also be given a right to have a say before the core objectives for Papiamentu are adopted or before the Minister takes a decision. The law already requires this for starting new vocational courses.¹¹⁷ This must also be possible in situations where the preferences of the islands are different from the policy of the Ministry.

The public entities in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius may also foster links between education organisations and organisations in other civil society domains on the islands. They could for example take practical initiatives to pool strengths. A public entity could for example allow school principals to take part in training courses it organises for its own middle management. More of a joint approach could also be adopted for themes which go beyond education alone. That would require more control by public entities over issues where there are interfaces between education and other domains, for example in the form of LEA roundtables (see textbox below). The Kingdom Representative, who oversees the island governments in the Caribbean Netherlands on behalf of the Dutch government, could play a role in coordinating a joint policy for the three public entities.

Possible Caribbean variant of LEA roundtables

The Education Council proposes a model in which the public entity and the school boards work together to coordinate the alignment between education, other domains and social issues. This must be separate from consultations with OCW or OCW CG on alignment of national policy. This could be done by developing a Caribbean variant of the consultation on Local Education Agendas (LEA) in the European Netherlands.¹¹⁸ During the LEA roundtables, municipalities, education organisations and often also organisations from related domains such as childcare and youth care, discuss issues such as combating educational disadvantage and the interface between education and social problems. A variant for the Caribbean Netherlands could serve as a regular platform for periodic consultations at both the administrative/strategic and operational level. The public entity could then coordinate the creation, gradual adaptation and monitoring of a common island vision for education and overarching themes.

To adequately reflect the specific island situation, the Minister of OCW could define the role of the public entity differently for each island, something for which the Constitution provides scope. This obviates the need to create a single model that has to serve for all three islands.

Keep division of formal responsibilities intact

The Dutch Constitution offers limited scope to assign education-related responsibilities and tasks to public entities.¹¹⁹ It is important that the role of the public entity remains within that scope, and it is therefore key to maintain the distinction between the role of the public entity as a local government and a role in the governance of a state school.¹²⁰ The island politicians acquires no power over the internal organisation of schools, teaching content, pedagogical approach or didactic methods. Nor does the public entity gain any influence over the day-to-day governance or functioning of schools. Education must function independently of political developments or changes on an island.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ If there is already a periodic consultation on an island in which the education organisations and the public entity participate, this could be expanded.

¹¹⁹ See Articles 23 and 132a of the Constitution.

¹²⁰ Where public education is provided on an island, the Island Council does have a role provided by law in the case of a public education foundation.

¹²¹ Cf. Onderwijsraad, 2017.



abbreviations

10-10-10:	10 October 2010, the date of the constitutional reforms
AMvB:	Order in Council
BES:	Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba
CAFY:	Caribbean Academic Foundation Year (twelve-month programme following secondary school)
CAPE:	Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (comparable with pre-university education (VWO))
CSEC:	Caribbean Secondary Education Certification (comparable with senior general secondary education (HAVO))
CVQ:	Caribbean Vocational Qualification (comparable with MBO levels 1 and 2)
CXC:	Caribbean Examinations Council (provides syllabuses, examinations, certificates and services to educational institutions in the examinations' administration)
iTOB:	Inclusive Language Teaching in Bonaire (Inclusief Taalonderwijs Bonaire, partnership between education organisations in Bonaire to develop an inclusive language environment)
LEA:	Local Education Agenda
NOB:	Dutch Education Worldwide (Nederlands Onderwijs in het Buitenland, foundation for Dutch Education Worldwide)
OCW CG:	The outpost for the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) in the Caribbean Netherlands
OCW:	Education, Culture and Science (Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap)
PLG:	Professional learning community (group of teaching staff who regularly share knowledge and expertise)
RCN:	National Office for the Caribbean Netherlands (Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland)
SEA:	Strategic Education Alliance (partnership between stakeholders in government and education in the four countries within the Kingdom)
SLO:	National Expertise Centre for Curriculum Development
WEB BES:	BES Adult and Vocational Education Act
WMS:	Participation at Schools Act
WolBES:	Act Public Entities Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba
WOR:	Works Councils Act
WVO 2020:	Secondary Education Act 2020
WVO BES:	BES Secondary Education Act

appendix

Creation of this publication

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 is the result of a literature review, analysis of policy and legislation, and a large number of interviews with stakeholders in and around education on the islands of 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 and school boards, employers and public entities.

The publication is made up of three parts.

- Part A contains the Education Council's conclusions and recommendations.
- Part B highlights perspectives from Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius regarding the functioning of the education system, based on six themes.
- Part C provides background information on the education system in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

Collaboration with stakeholders in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius

Following a preliminary study involving a literature and documentation review, plus a number of interviews, a delegation from the Education Council visited Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius in the spring of 2024, meeting the various stakeholders and discussing themes that are relevant for education on the three islands.

Following this visit, the Education Council established an Island Committee on each island. Each Committee comprised five members, including teachers, school principals, school boards and directors of the expertise centres for education care (except for Sint Eustatius). Like the members of the Education Council, the members of the Island Committees contributed their expertise and perspectives in a personal capacity. During the project (2024-2026), the Island Committees met online on a monthly basis. The Island Committees helped determine the content and contributed to the creation of the island-specific chapters in Part B of the publication. Two central themes were addressed for each island.

Analysis based on six themes

The Island Committees contributed the following themes.¹²²

- Bonaire: multilingualism and education provision.
- Saba: school boards and teaching staff.
- Sint Eustatius: inclusive education and educational transitions.

A delegation from the Education Council visited the islands again in the autumn of 2024 to discuss the selected themes in more depth with a wider group of stakeholders. The delegation also visited schools and organised workshops with teachers, parents, students, school principals, school boards and employers.

Between these visits, the Education Council carried out a further literature and documentation review, analysed applicable education legislation and regulations and conducted interviews with a number of stakeholders in the European Netherlands. Several workshops were organised, including with policy staff from the Ministry of Education Culture and Science (OCW) and education inspectors. Education Council staff also attended a number of conferences and symposia.

A delegation from the Education Council travelled to Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius once again in the spring of 2025 and shared the preliminary findings on the themes for each island with numerous stakeholders. The central question at all times was to what extent the findings for the three islands were recognised by stakeholders. Stakeholders subsequently joined in discussions about possible ways to address the identified problems and challenges, and who should do what. This was done among other things in two workshops on each island – one with teachers, teaching assistants, staff of the expertise centres for education care and the organisations for social opportunity programmes, and with school attendance officers, and the other with school principals, school boards, supervisory board members, directors from the expertise centres for education care and the organisations for social opportunity programmes. The Education Council also talked to organisations in Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten which are involved in education in Bonaire, Saba or Sint Eustatius.

In the autumn of 2025, members of the project team on the islands discussed the preliminary findings and recommendations with a number of stakeholders and requested additional information. During the same phase, several government agencies supplied missing information and independent proofreaders sharpened up the publication.

This entire process culminated in the three-part publication *Education in the Caribbean Netherlands*:

- *Part A: Conclusions and recommendations*
- *Part B: Featured themes in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius*
- *Part C: Background information*

Part C contains background information on education in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, including a description of the applicable legislation and regulations and of the education institutes on the three islands.

In Part B the Education Council and the three Island Committees present a picture of the functioning of the education system in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius based on six themes, taking as a central focus the perspectives and experiences of people living in the Caribbean Netherlands.

Part A presents the Education Council's independent conclusions, advice and recommendations regarding the functioning of the Dutch education system in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, with the Minister of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) as the first point of contact.

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information

In *Education in the Caribbean Netherlands*, the Education Council presents a broad analysis of how the Dutch education system functions in Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

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Part A: Conclusions and recommendations

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

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