

Checklist Primary school Leiden



New2NL

Dear Reader,

When selecting a primary school for your child there are certain things to consider. In this checklist you will find a list of practical questions you could ask the school, ranging from topics such as opening hours, pedagogical approach, to fees, and what is included in the price. Besides that, there will also be some questions which you as a parent can think about before choosing a primary school for your child.

ORIENTATION PHASE

1. Your starting point are the websites of the Expat Centre, <https://www.expatscentreleiden.nl/en/essentials/essential-information/education>, the Municipality (Gemeente) of Leiden: <https://gemeente.leiden.nl/english/education> and the 'Guide to choosing a school', a digital guide where you can find all primary schools that are available in Leiden, together with some generic information. See www.expatscentreleiden.nl/uploads/tekstblok/1603472_ecwd_engelse_versie_schoolekeuzegids_2016_en.pdf. An update will be published on the Expat Center website soon.
2. Every municipality has their own rules and procedures. If you live outside of Leiden, search for CJG + <name of your municipality> + Basisschool. (CJG = center for youth and family)
3. You will also receive a letter from the Municipality explaining the school application procedure in Leiden.
4. You can apply from your child's **third** birthday.
5. As some schools fill up quickly, you are advised to apply as soon as you can.
6. If the school of your preference is already full for your child's age group, you will unfortunately have to find another one.
7. Has the school of your interest established a catchment (postcode) area? Do you live in the catchment area of the school? Check this separately with all the schools you are interested in.
8. Does the school apply any other priority criteria, such as siblings first, or an equal balance between boys and girls?
9. Do they have a waiting list? If so, what position will your child be on the list? How much chance would he or she have of getting in?
10. Or will there be a lottery to get in? If so, what happens to the children who lose out in the lottery (=uitgeloot)?
11. Does the school work together with a preschool (=voorschool or peuterspeelzaal)? Do children of the connected preschool have priority (=voorrang) if there is a lottery or waiting list?
12. Is the school of your interest a regular (**openbare**) or **special** (=bijzondere) school? Regular schools are run by a foundation which has been set-up by the government, whereas special schools have their own board (=bestuur), usually consisting of a group of parents, or a foundation.
13. Is it a **religious** school (Catholic, Protestant, generic Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, etc.)? If yes, how is that manifested? Which religious activities/celebrations do the children participate in? (Usually Protestant schools are a bit stricter than Catholic schools, but in general the religious schools are all pretty relaxed). Please note that 'Openbaar' always means non-religious, as does 'Algemeen bijzonder'.

14. What **educational principles/philosophies** is the school based on: Montessori, Dalton, Waldorf/Vrijeschool, Jenaplan? How do they apply this philosophy in daily practice? How much classroom education (=klassikaal onderwijs) do they teach? And how much room do they leave for learning by discovery?
15. How many **pupils** does the school have? How many classes in total? And how many pupils per class?
16. How much is the **parent contribution** (=ouderbijdrage) and how do you pay it? What does the school spend this money on? It is usual for special (=bijzondere) schools to ask for a slightly higher parent contribution than regular (=openbare) schools. In the Netherlands there are only a few private elementary schools. These ask for a (much) higher fee.
17. How is the school rated according to the **school inspection** officers (=Onderwijsinspectie)? Has the quality changed in recent years? See also www.onderwijsinspectie.nl. Tip: go for a school with 'basistoezicht'. The rating of the school inspection is displayed by means of a traffic light system, where green is the best rating, and red the poorest.
18. What **kind of children** attend the school? Tip: Go to the school at the end of the school day to observe what kind of parents and children you see and how they behave and interact with each other. Maybe you would like to talk to some of the parents about their experiences with the school. Would they recommend this school to your family?
19. Do you like the **atmosphere** in the school?
20. Does the school look **well-maintained**, organized, clean and tidy?
21. Do they have an **anti-bullying policy** (=pestprotocol)?
22. How do they **discipline** (reward/punish) the children?
23. How **diverse** are the pupils? How about the teachers?
24. Has a **parent initiative** (=ouderinitiatief) taken place in recent years to mix and improve the school? This is especially relevant in upcoming neighborhoods.
25. In which group do they **start teaching English**? Please note that all schools are obliged to start teaching English in group 7 (age 10) at the latest, but recently more and more schools have decided to start earlier. These schools are called **early foreign language** (=VFTO) schools. Often they make use of the Early Bird program - see also www.earlybirdie.nl.
26. Do they have any experience with **non-Dutch children**?
27. Does the school provide **extra care**, e.g. extra Dutch classes for non-Dutch children, a remedial teacher, advanced lessons for gifted children (=plusklas), or workshops for parents?
28. What is the average (CITO) **test score** of their group 8 pupils, and how does the school explain this score? Has this score changed over time? If so, in what way?
29. Which **pupil monitoring system** (=leerlingvolgsysteem) do they use? In which group do they start testing? How important are the results of these tests for the school? What does the school do with the test results? How do they inform the parents about the outcome of the tests?
30. How many group 8 pupils usually get a **recommendation for VWO** (highest level of secondary education)? How does the school explain these results? You can find these and other scores on www.scholenopdekaart.nl.

31. Do they **combine pupils** of different age groups in one class? This is usually the case for groups 1&2 (=kleuterklas) and common practice for Montessori and Jenaplan schools.
32. **How many teachers** do they have per class? Please note that many elementary school teachers work part-time, and it is very common to have two fixed teachers per class. Do they have an assistant teacher? What happens when the teacher is sick?
33. How many **male and female teachers** do they have? What is the **average age** of the teachers? You can also find this information on www.10000scholen.nl.
34. Do they work with a **stable** group of teachers? Is every class always taught by the same teachers?
35. Does the school have a full-time **IB'er** (=intern begeleider)? An IB'er is similar to a school mentor.
36. Do the pupils get **homework**? How much and from what age? Most schools only give homework in the higher classes, or no homework at all, but this varies per school.
37. What **assessments** of the children are done? Are they graded or do they get descriptive reports?
38. How often do they teach **art, sport, drama, culture, IT, science, and technology**? Do they work with dedicated teachers (=vakleerkrachten) for these subjects?
39. Do they have a **lunch break** (=overblijven) or a `continuous schedule`? Do all children stay at school for lunch? How much do you have to pay for `overblijven`? How long is the break? What does your child need to bring for lunch? Who supervises the children during the break?
40. How often do the children play **outside**? What happens when it is raining? Do they have an enclosed and safe playground? Do the smaller children have their own area where they can play?
41. Do they often go on **excursions**? What type of excursions do they offer?
42. What **extra-curricular activities** do they offer? How often?
43. Is the school sited over **multiple locations**? If yes, which building would your child go to?
44. How is the **after-school care** (=BSO/naschoolse opvang) arranged? Is it a `Brede school`? At a Brede school, the after-school care, preschool and daycare usually take place in the same school building, and they follow the same teaching style or philosophy as the school.

It is important to remember that if you need after-school care, you have to sign up with one of the BSOs connected to the school separately, and also pay separately.

ONCE YOUR CHILD HAS A PLACE (Congratulations!):

1. What day will be the first day your child will attend school? It is usually the day after their 4th birthday, unless this is just before the summer holidays.
2. How does the adjustment period work? Make enough room in your schedule as it sometimes takes about 2 weeks before your child goes to school for full days.

3. What are the school times (=schooltijden)? Wednesday is usually a shorter day (sometimes also Friday), but not always.
4. Where do you say goodbye to your child in the morning? For example, outside, in the hallway, or in the classroom? In groups 1&2 it is often common that the parents stay in the classroom for the first 15 minutes to read a book with their child and briefly talk with the teacher. See below in the 'please note' section for more info.
5. Where do you pick up your child at the end of the school day?
6. How do you inform the school if your child is sick or late?
7. When are the school holidays? What other days is the school closed (=studiedag/margedag/lesvrij)? Usually the BSO is open all day when the school is closed. The national school holidays can be found here: www.schoolvakanties-nederland.nl. Please note that Leiden belongs to the central region (Midden).
8. What should you do if you have arranged for your child to be picked up from school by someone else (not by a parent/guardian)?
9. How does the teacher inform you about your child's progress?
10. What should you do if you think your child is performing above or below average?
11. How do they inform the parents about possible issues and changes? Do they have an online communication portal and/or newsletter?
12. Who are the 'class parents' (=klassenouders) and how will they contact you? Do they have a mailing list? (see below for more info on the class parents)
13. What items does your child need to bring to school? For example, school bag, sandwiches, fruit, milk, sports clothes, flip-flops, slippers, toys from home on Friday afternoons, and objects related to the current theme of the lessons. Don't forget to mark everything with your child's name!
14. What else do they expect from the parents? For example, to assist with excursions, story reading, library help, 'lice-parents', 'lunch teacher', traffic controller, or gardening?
15. What should you do if you have a question or complaint? (see below for more info)
16. How does their formal complaint procedure (=klachtenprocedure) work?
17. Ask for a recent copy of the school guide (=schoolgids) that contains all the rules and regulations (usually also available online).
18. Please be prepared for the numerous playdates that your child will have! Make sure you have the correct phone numbers and addresses of the parents. Of course playdates are not obligatory, and you can easily say "no" when it doesn't suit you. Often children want to have a playdate with the same child they have been playing with at school. Playdates are rarely arranged by parents.
19. Please note: most schools organize a parent information evening (=ouderavond/ouderkring) at the beginning of the school year for all parents of the children of a particular class. Often they also invite the parents of the children who are not yet 4 but already have a place at the school. This is an opportunity to meet the teachers and the other parents so you get a better understanding of what they do and how things work.

20. It is usual that two parents volunteer to be a 'class parent' (=klassenouder). They keep the other parents updated (usually by email) about what is going on in the class and what is expected from the parents. Make sure that you get to know these parents and that you are on their mailing list.
21. If you don't speak Dutch, you could ask the class parents to regularly explain to you what is happening, so stopping you from missing anything.
22. At most schools it is common that you can talk with the teacher about small things in the morning at drop-off time. If you have something bigger to discuss, they normally prefer that you make an appointment. Usually teachers appreciate it if you tell them right away if you don't agree with something or if you have misunderstood something, rather than letting it escalate into a more serious issue.

Do you need more information on the Dutch education system?

Check our website for the next seminar on the Dutch education system. Please also inquire about our individual, personalized Dutch school assistance services (including local options for international schools), and bespoke Company Packages.

You can purchase the following documents via the New2nl website:

- Checklist Basisschool for various cities (e.g., Amsterdam, Amstelveen, The Hague, Leiden, Haarlem, Utrecht, Almere)
- Checklist newcomer/Dutch immersion class
- Checklist international schools
- Summary of the Dutch education system
- Glossary Dutch Education System
- Dutch school rules template

Some further reading, videos and podcasts:

• **3 tips on moving to the Netherlands** - Word Up - Annebet van Mameren - New2NL
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AmPsjyNlt4&t=3s>.

• I have made a Doodly video about the **difficult choice between Dutch and international education**: <https://youtu.be/iVrnZPuqO8Q>. Maybe that helps your family as well. Do you prefer to read? The written text you can find here: <https://new2nl.com/international-school-or-go-dutch>.

• The **Dutch education system** works well in general, but can be rather confusing for international families. In this article I explain the basics: <https://new2nl.com/the-basics-of-the-dutch-education-system>.

• Relocate Global (UK) article on **Education in the Netherlands**: <https://www.relocatemagazine.com/education-schools-international-guide-2017-education-in-the-netherlands.html>.

- In this **video** I explain how the **lottery system in Amsterdam** works: Dutch education FAQ - pt1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hg6lKmVh6u8&mc_cid=10f9ee43e7&mc_eid=2be7801d50.
- More and more international families choose a Dutch school for their children. In this video I explain how the process works when your child is 6 years or older. Dutch education FAQ pt2 - newcomer/Dutch immersion class. <https://youtu.be/TMYhRRaFBDc>.
- The Dutch **school attendance law** is very strict, and the same for all. In this article for the Amsterdam American Business Club (AABC): I explain the do's and don't's: <https://aabc.nl/the-dutch-school-attendance-law>.
- **Expat overview: moving to and living in the Netherlands** - my article published in the Good Schools Guide International, <https://new2nl.com/expat-overview-moving-to-and-living-in-the-netherlands>.
- Information package for the Municipality and Expat Centre **Leiden**, but also interesting for international parents in other cities: <https://www.expatscentreleiden.nl/en/essentials/essential-information/education>.
- Choosing a school is even tougher if your child needs some **extra support in school**. In this article for XPat Media, Annebet van Mameren from New2nl explains how to find your way in this unfamiliar world. <https://www.xpat.nl/uncategorized/special-needs-education-netherlands/>.
- Annebet van Mameren from New2NL joins the podcast by Lana and Anna from Amsterdam Families to help you understand a lot more about **schools in Amsterdam**: <https://broadcastamsterdam.nl/podcast/amsterdam-families-annebet-mamaren-31-aug-2019-s01e01/>.
- I explain in this podcast with the Amsterdam Mamas how to **choose a secondary school** in the Netherlands: www.amsterdam-mamas.nl/articles/choose-your-own-adventure-navigating-dutch-secondary-school-system.
- The **Dutch education system** is very different from most other countries, but overall works very well. Here is a newspaper article published in The Telegraph (UK) on the high scores of Dutch students in the OECD education report—you'll find a familiar name in there too 😊 www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/netherlands/10489496/OECD-education-report-Dutch-system-puts-premium-on-quality-standards.html.
- Million Female Founders - **Insightful interviews with female entrepreneurs**; among others with me: http://bit.ly/Sonder_interview (short video).