

Checklist Primary school Leiden



New2NL

Dear Parent,

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 the school lottery procedure, 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 **Leiden International Centre**, www.leideninternationalcentre.nl/living-here/children-schools, the **Municipality** (Gemeente) of Leiden: <https://gemeente.leiden.nl/inwoners-en-ondernemers/zorg-en-onderwijs/onderwijs-2/schoolkeuze> and the '**Guide to choosing a school**', <https://assets.citynavigator.nl/kuma-leiden/uploads/media/624c4ba360596/schoolkeuzegids-2019-engels.pdf>.

The most recent update of this English guide is from 2020.

All schools in the Netherlands you'll also find on

www.scholenopdekaart.nl (in Dutch).

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. In the year of your child's **3rd birthday**, you will receive a letter from the Municipality explaining the school application procedure in Leiden.
4. You can officially **apply** for a school from your child's third birthday. As some schools fill up quickly, you are advised to apply as soon as you can.
5. Some schools will ask you to fill out a **pre-registration form** (*vooraanmeldformulier*) before your child turns 3. This is not yet the official registration form, though.
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. Don't forget to **confirm** your place at this school before the deadline mentioned in the placement letter.
13. Is the school of your interest a regular (*openbare*) or special (*bijzondere*) school? *Openbare* schools are run by a foundation which has been originally set-up by the government, whereas special schools have their own board (*bestuur*), usually consisting of a group of parents, or a foundation.
14. 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. Usually, they don't do much in the context of religion, but this varies per school). Please note that '*Openbaar*' always means non-religious, as does '*Algemeen bijzonder*'. You should know that all schools have to adhere to the core objectives (*kerndoelen*) set by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*OCW*), and take part in the obligatory transition test at the end of primary school. However, individual schools have a lot of freedom to 'fill in the details' of the curriculum and budget allocation. As a result, no two schools are the same.

15. Is the school of your interest based on an **educational philosophy**, for example, Montessori, Dalton, Waldorf/Vrije school, Jenaplan? If yes, 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?
16. How many pupils does the school have? How many classes in total? And how many pupils per class?
17. 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 primary schools. These ask for a (much) higher fee.
18. 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*', '*voldoende*', or 'Goed'. 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.
19. 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. Can you picture yourself and your child walking around in that school? 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?
20. Do you like the atmosphere in the school?
21. Does the school look well-maintained, organized, clean and tidy?
22. Do they have an anti-bullying policy (*pestprotocol*)?
23. How do they discipline (reward/punish) the children?
24. How diverse is the student **population**? How about the teachers?

25. Has a parent initiative (*ouderinitiatief*) taken place in recent years to mix and improve the school? This is especially relevant in upcoming neighborhoods.

26. 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 (= *VVTO*) schools. Often, they make use of the Early Bird program - see also www.earlybirdie.nl. Many children learn a lot of English outside of school too.

27. Do they have any experience with **children who don't speak Dutch at home**?

28. Does the school provide extra care, e.g., extra Dutch classes for non-native children, a remedial teacher, advanced lessons for gifted children (*plusklas*), or workshops for parents?

29. What is the average (CITO/IEP/Route 8) 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?

30. 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?

31. How many group 8 pupils usually get a recommendation for VMBO/HAVO/VWO (levels 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 primary school teachers work part-time, and it is very common to have two fixed teachers per class who work on alternate days. 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?

34. Do they work with a stable group of teachers? Is every class always taught by the same teachers? Do they have enough teachers?

35. Does the school have a full-time IB'er (*intern begeleider*)? An IB'er is similar to a school mentor or a care coordinator.

36. Do the pupils get **homework**? How much and from what age? Most primary schools only give some 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, gym (PE), drama, culture, IT, science, and technology? Do they work with specialized 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'/TSO? How long is the break? What does your child need to bring for lunch? Who supervises the children during the break? In most cases, the school will ask you to pay for lunch supervision (*TSO/overblijven*). The teachers have a lunch break, while the pupils eat their home-brought lunch together with a lunch supervisor in the classroom. Afterwards, they usually play outside. Often the lunch supervisors also do some activities with the children. Most schools also offer the option for the children to have lunch at home, but in practice not many children do this.

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 or school trips? What type of excursions/trips do they offer? Who accompanies the class during a school trip? Could you join in, if you wanted to?

42. What **extra-curricular activities** do they offer? How often? Do you have to pay extra for these activities? It is common for children to join a sports club, music school or other activity in their community – outside of school.

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. They often have a waiting list, so sign up as soon as possible.

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 (throughout the year), unless this is just before the summer or Christmas 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 when you want to take your child out of school during term time? You should know that the Dutch school attendance law is very strict. You will have to ask official permission and need to have a valid reason. See below for an article I wrote about the school attendance law.
9. What should you do if you have arranged for your child to be picked up from school by someone else (not by their parent/guardian)?

10. If you (the parent) don't speak Dutch, how will you communicate with the teacher? Many teachers will speak English to some extent, but this is not a given. Especially when it considers some more formal meetings and/or complicated matters, they might ask you to bring an interpreter.
11. How does the teacher inform you about your child's progress?
12. What should you do if you think your child is performing above or below average?
13. How do they inform the parents about possible issues and changes? Do they have an online communication portal and/or newsletter?
14. Who are the 'class parents' (*klassenouders*) and how will they contact you? Do they have a mailing list or a WhatsApp group? (see below for more info on the class parents).
15. What items does your child need to bring to school? For example, school bag, sandwiches, fruit, milk, sports clothes, flip-flops, slippers, spare clothes, 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! School supplies are usually provided by the school.
16. 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?
17. What should you do if you have a question or complaint? (see below for more info).
18. How does their formal complaint procedure (*klachtenprocedure*) work?
19. Where can you find a recent copy of the school guide (*schoolgids*) that contains all the rules and regulations (usually available online). I have also created an English **template** for the school rules, which you can find here: <https://new2nl.com/shop/template-school-rules>. You should ask the school to fill this out, and also share it with the other international parents.
20. 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. They are a nice way to get to know

their friends better, and also the parents. Playdates are rarely arranged by parents.

Some further comments:

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.

It is usual that two parents volunteer to be a 'class parent' (*klassenouder*). They keep the other parents updated (usually by email or WhatsApp) 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 or in their group.

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.

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 or webinar** on the Dutch education system. Please also inquire about our individual, personalized Dutch school advisory services (including local options for international schools), and bespoke Company Packages.

You can purchase the following **documents** via the New2nl website, <https://new2nl.com/documents>:

- Checklist primary school 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:

- In this Doodly video, I explain how the **start of Dutch school** works: <https://youtu.be/yrSxZdmhPzc>.
- **16 life hacks** for Dutch primary school: <https://new2nl.com/16-life-hacks-for-dutch-primary-school>.
- I have contributed to this **The Dutch Way of Learning** video, a mini documentary about the Dutch education system, www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyJ7GWyeBIY. This is a part of the 'Feeling at Home in the Netherlands' series produced by Global Business Academy for International Newcomers Amsterdam (IN Amsterdam) and the municipality of Amstelveen. More nice videos about the Netherlands on <https://globalbusiness.academy/content-creation> (scroll down).
- In this article I wrote for Expatica you can learn more about the Dutch **primary school** system: www.expatica.com/nl/education/children-education/primary-schools-in-the-netherlands-150741.
- I am very proud to have contributed to the '**THE SCHOOL OF THE OTHERS**'-series for DYNAMIS, the Journal of Philosophy and Educational Practices of the Campostrini Centre in Verona, Italy. The title of my paper is: "*The School of the Others. The Netherlands - A comprehensive overview of the Dutch education system and the challenges it is facing*" <https://dynamis.centrostudicampostrini.it/index.php/fogli/article/view/mameren/articolo5>. It has become a detailed description of the Dutch education system, and all the challenges it is currently facing.
- I have also written an article about the **difficult choice between Dutch and international education**: <https://new2nl.com/international-school-or-go-dutch>. Maybe that helps you in taking the best decisions for your family. This is the Doodly video version of this story: <https://youtu.be/iVrnZPuqO8Q>. This article for Expat Republic about the same theme is more recent and detailed: <http://www.expatrepublic.com/education-in-the-netherlands>.

- In this video I explain how the **primary school lottery system in Amsterdam** works: Dutch education FAQ: <https://youtu.be/Hg6lKmvh6u8>.
- Children aged 6 and older who don't speak Dutch are usually referred to a **newcomer class** first. In this video I explain how this works: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=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'ts: <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: www.expatscentreleiden.nl/en/essentials/essential-information/education.
- 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>.