

Summary

Background and questions

In this report a study is described that addresses education in juvenile justice institutions and secure youth care institutions. Education is an important part of the day program in these institutions. It is provided by special schools, operating in the institutions or at the institutions' terrain. These are schools for students with serious emotional and behavioural difficulties or psychiatric problems. Until now, a systematic overview of characteristics that are of importance to the education of these students is lacking. In the past some issues have been reported with regard to information being insufficient with respect to the school history and educational level of young people entering these institutions and about frequent changes in classes. In order to gain more insight into these matters, the present study was commissioned by the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Safety and Justice in The Netherlands.

The main question of the study is: What information is provided to schools in juvenile justice institutions and secure youth care institutions about youth entering these schools and what actions are taken by the schools to gather sufficient information to set up adequate education for these students?

Method

The main research question has been elaborated in eight subsequent research questions. In order to answer these questions several research activities were carried out. First, a survey by telephone was undertaken, in which 32 staff members participated from 36 schools that were asked for their cooperation. This group consists of 9 staff members from schools in juvenile justice institutions and 23 from schools in secure youth care. This survey provides a representative overview. Subsequently, case studies were carried out in eight schools, three of which are linked to a juvenile justice institution and five to secure youth care. The institutions these five schools are linked to, were juvenile justice institutions in the past. Because of changes in legislation, the number of juvenile justice institutions has decreased over the past years, whereas secure youth care has expanded. In the case studies relevant documents have been collected and analysed, interviews have been undertaken with staff members that are involved in the intake of students and the planning of educational activities and student files have been analysed. The number of files that have been analysed is 353 (110 in juvenile justice institutions and 243 in secure youth care institutions).

Results

In the following a short summary of results is provided for each research question.

1) What information about students entering school is needed by schools in juvenile justice institutions and in secure youth care in order to be able to provide adequate education to these students and to what extent can existing instruments provide this information?

According to schools' staff members information is needed especially about the students' preferences for practically-oriented or theoretically-oriented education, their educational level and their developmental perspective. Whether students are motivated for educational activities, whether

they lag behind and from what type of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties they suffer are considered of less importance as far as placement in class is concerned. Information about the student's IQ score is considered of less importance also, if an indication of the educational level is available. Part of the information that is needed is acquired by school staff via the school's intake. In addition, instruments like an educational report from the former school or individual education plans are useful. This applies to schools in juvenile justice institutions as well as to schools in secure youth care institutions.

2) *What information about students entering school that is of importance to the process of setting up adequate education do schools in juvenile justice institutions and in secure youth care receive from the schools that these students attended before?*

About 60 per cent of schools receive information about the educational past, the educational level, achievement, and specific learning difficulties for some students at most when they enter school. When students stayed in another residential institution previously there is often a treatment file available. However, these files do not tend to provide much information about the education the student received in the past. Only two out of three files of students in secure youth care contained relevant documents that had been provided by the school the student previously attended. In juvenile justice institutions hardly any documents from schools the students had attended in the past were included in the files. Another problem that was noted was the lack of uniformity in the information that had been provided by schools the students previously attended.

3) *What information about students entering school is collected by the schools in juvenile justice institutions and in secure youth care by means of the school's intake, what actions do schools undertake to add information that was lacking and what tools do the schools use in order to do this?*

At the school's intake staff members discuss the student's school career and interests with regard to education. In most cases the student's future perspective is discussed as well. Information that is missing may be acquired by contacting the school the student previously attended. Most school staff members pose that it takes a large effort to acquire information from other schools. Two out of five staff members feel that even after asking for additional information the information that is available still is insufficient. The staff members acknowledge that many of these students have played truant in the past, as a result of which information often is not up to date. It is common practice in many schools to administer additional tests to students in order to determine their proficiency in language and arithmetic. Administering tests is more common practice in secure youth care as compared to juvenile justice institutions.

4) *What are the characteristics of students entering schools in juvenile justice institutions and in secure youth care, what was their previous residence and educational level and what is the duration of their stay?*

The files that have been examined show that 89 per cent of students in the three schools in juvenile justice institutions are males, as compared to 62 per cent in the five schools in secure youth care. The average student age in juvenile justice institutions is 18; the average age in secure youth care is 16. Fifty per cent of students in juvenile justice institutions stayed in another residential institution before entering the present juvenile justice institution; 40 per cent lived at home. Less than one third of the students in secure youth care lived at home before entering the institution, whereas over 50 per cent stayed in another residential institution. The student files show that in

juvenile justice institutions, as compared to secure youth care institutions, aggressive behaviour is more common, as well as autism, addiction to alcohol or drugs, and having a disturbed personality. In young people in secure youth care attachment disorders, sexually aberrant behaviour, suicidal behaviour and self-harm behaviour are more common as compared to in juvenile justice institutions.

In the schools in juvenile justice institutions over 25 per cent of students are enrolled in the lowest level of senior secondary vocational education and 50 per cent are enrolled in a secondary vocational education class. In schools in secure youth care institutions over 50 per cent of students are enrolled in secondary vocational education and about 20 per cent in secondary practical education, which is of a lower level as compared to secondary vocational education. Only a few students are at the level of higher secondary general education or pre-university education.

In the juvenile justice institutions over 50 per cent of young people had been taken into custody. In general, these young people leave the institution after a short period of time. Over one third had been placed in the juvenile justice institution as a result of a 'PIJ-maatregel' (Placement in a juvenile institution). These young people have committed an offence and suffer from a psychiatric disorder or disturbed development. These youngsters in general stay in the institution for quite a long time. The files that have been examined show that about 50 per cent of students in juvenile justice institutions had been there for less than six months, whereas over 25 per cent had stayed there for over a year. In the juvenile justice institutions there were comparatively large groups of students who had stayed there for less than a month or for 18 months or longer, as compared to in secure youth care. In the latter institutions about 50 per cent of students had stayed there less than six months when their files were examined.

5) How is the information that is available used in order to place students in classes?

When placing students in classes schools especially consider the student's preference for practically-oriented or theoretically-oriented education, the student's educational level and the student's developmental perspective. Information is taken into consideration that has been acquired at the school's intake of the student, from the treatment file, from the school the student previously attended, if available, and results from additional tests, if administered. Over 25 per cent of staff members who participated in the survey pointed out that some young people can't be in the same class together, which has to be taken into consideration. Students are often enrolled in class without much background information being available.

There is a large variety in types of classes. In schools in juvenile justice institutions the average number of classes is eleven; in schools in secure youth care institutions it is eight. In some schools education is provided on a one to one basis. Two out of eight schools place most of the students in an introductory class. After some time they are transferred to another class. Sometimes students are not placed in the class that seems the most appropriate, because then the number of students would exceed the limit. Apart from this, several young people do not attend classes, because of various reasons.

6) *How frequent are student changes in classes and to what extent are these changes disruptive to the educational processes?*

Over 50 per cent of participants in the survey have stated that changes in classes because of students being placed or leaving occur once a week or more often. One out of three estimated this happens one to three times a month. These changes are considered to be rather disturbing or very disturbing for education, according to 50 per cent of the staff members. These changes are more often considered disturbing in juvenile justice institutions as compared to secure youth care. The most disturbing aspect is the change in group dynamics as a result of changes in class. Students have to get used to each other after a new student has entered the group. The frequent changes are considered to be an important barrier by staff members who participated in the case studies as well. These frequent changes are caused by large numbers of young people who stay in the institution for only a short while. According to participants from schools in secure youth care institutions the number of changes is rising, since the duration of the stay of young people in secure youth care is decreasing. In addition, the files show that 25 per cent of students in juvenile justice institutions and one in three students in secure youth care institutions change class at least once during their stay.

7) *What other barriers do these schools in juvenile justice institutions and in secure youth care experience in the process of providing education to the students?*

The first important barrier that has been put forward is the large effort it takes to acquire information from the school the student attended before being placed in the present institution and the large variety in information that is provided. A second barrier is that opportunities for practical training are limited. In order to be able to participate in practical training outside the institution the students have to be allowed to be on leave. This in particular limits the possibilities of youth in juvenile justice institutions to finish senior vocational education. A third barrier are the limitations with respect to the use of ICT in some institutions. A fourth barrier is the large effort that is needed to find mainstream secondary schools that are willing to accept students who leave a juvenile justice institution or an institution for secure youth care. Another significant barrier is the fact that schools have to adapt to the institutions, as far as the number of students that can be placed is concerned. Large changes have occurred in recent years. Moreover, school staff feel that education is subsidiary to treatment in these institutions, and more consideration with education would be desirable.

8) *What is the destination of youth leaving juvenile justice institutions and secure youth care institutions, what information is transferred to the institution or school the student enters at that moment and is follow up care provided with respect to education?*

Around 25 per cent of the young people who leave a juvenile justice institution are transferred to another residential institution: 50 per cent of this group are admitted to a secure youth care institution and 25 per cent to another juvenile justice institution. Around 40 per cent of young people who leave the institution are enrolled in a school. Almost one out of three young people who leave a secure youth care institution are admitted to another institution, for the most part another secure youth care institution. About 25 per cent are enrolled in a senior secondary vocational school and one out of eleven is admitted to a school for special education. Finding a school or a job opportunity for young people who leave the institution is in many cases the responsibility of a staff member from the institution. The same applies to transferring information and providing aftercare. Around 75 per cent of participants in the survey contended that their school in most or in all cases

transfers information by means of an educational report when students leave. Over 50 per cent stated that information is provided orally as well. According to most participants contact between the school and school that enrolled the students who left the institution only takes place in case of questions from the latter schools, which rarely happens.

Report of the study:

Smeets, E. (2011). *Onderwijs in justitiële jeugdinrichtingen en gesloten jeugdzorg*. Nijmegen: ITS.