

Press release

The Hague, 15 March 2005

The Netherlands must acknowledge the problem of illiteracy

***Stichting Lezen & Schrijven* considers the inventory into the reading levels of children under 12 years of age, published today by the Cito Group, as confirmation of the fact that functional illiteracy is an enormous social problem in the Netherlands. The Foundation agrees with the Schools Inspectorate that there is a question of a serious situation. The Foundation is arguing for greater acknowledgement of this problem at an early stage.**

“It is unacceptable that an estimated 10% of all 15 year-olds are functionally illiterate and, furthermore, that 1.5 million adults in our country have great difficulty reading and writing” stated Margreet de Vries, director of *Stichting Lezen & Schrijven*.

The Foundation is emphasising the importance of a chain approach to the problem.

This chain begins with the promotion of reading amongst children, reading skills in primary schools and their teachers’ command of the language and carries on to literacy teaching for adults, both those who are Dutch natives and those from other ethnic backgrounds. The Foundation is an advocate of paying special attention to, and developing tailor-made approaches for, different target groups.

The report from the School Inspectorate illustrated that illiteracy is also prevalent among young age groups. The conclusion of *Stichting Lezen & Schrijven* is that a great deal still needs to be done to ensure children acquire the essential literacy skills. In this respect, the Foundation considers that parallel to standard education there is an important role not only for parents but also for counsellors and carers, such as general practitioners and social workers. Teaching reading and writing is not solely a task for schools. It is important that in their homes young children are both read aloud to and encouraged to read themselves. Carers are often in a position to notice children whose reading and writing skills are lagging behind their contemporaries and should draw attention to this.

An earlier research study by the Max Goote Kenniscentrum (for vocational and adult education) revealed that 10% of the Dutch population is functionally illiterate. These people are able to read, write and do some arithmetic but their skills are insufficient for them to be able to function well either at home or at work. Not only is functional illiteracy a social problem, it is also an economic problem.

The objective of *Stichting Lezen & Schrijven* is to prevent and reduce illiteracy within our society. The Foundation is doing this by, amongst other things, establishing concrete projects and stimulating cooperation between institutions and bodies involved in the fight against illiteracy.

Note for the editorial board, not for publication:

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