Catch-up and support programmes to repair learning loss: overview and analysis of funding applications from primary, secondary and special needs schools in the second tranche of the COVID-19 funding programme

SUB-STUDY 1/A

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Executive summary

Schools could request for funding for catch-up and support programs with the aim of catching up on missed learning time because of school closures due to COVID-19. Researchers from LEARN! analysed funding requests in the second tranche to obtain a picture of the type of interventions that schools aimed at implementing in order to repair learning losses - , the underlying motivations, the target groups of the programmes, and the practical aspects of implementation of the programs(for example cooperation with external parties). Following, a brief overview of these analyses will be given, based on applications from 1,181 primary, 686 secondary, and 85 special needs schools (special needs/secondary special needs/primary special needs).

The analyses show that most primary and special needs schools focused on gaps in language and arithmetic. Secondary schools mainly focused on the core subjects (English, Dutch and mathematics). Most primary and special needs schools aimed to make up for students' lost learning time by offering additional support or tuition during (tuition during independent working periods) and after school hours (extended school day) and by purchasing new learning resources/materials (digital practice software). Within secondary education, tutoring or extended school day were the most common interventions, followed by homework supervision and exam training. In all sectors, the main reason for implementing catch-up programmes was to enable students to catch up with the rest of the class/regular lessons. For nearly three-quarters of secondary schools, the catch-up programmes are run by both internal and external professionals, while more than half of primary and special needs schools assign the organization of these programmes to internal professionals.

Pre-school and early childhood education providers could apply for a different, although fairly similar funding programme, to obtain funds for providing additional support in the period from July to December 2020. This funding application did not distinguish between programme types; the descriptions consisted solely of the number of hours per week and the total number of weeks or months that the program would run. Therefore, we report the initial results of an enquiry that we did of programs that are set out at pre-schools and in early childhood education. In addition, we describe the data that is currently being collected at preschools and in early childhood education in order to obtain an overview of the implemented programmes and their effectiveness.

Contents

1. Introduction

In order to catch up on learning loss caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) has established a funding programme for schools and institutions in primary education, primary special needs education, secondary education, secondary special needs education, special needs education and vocational education and training (VET). This funding programme consisted of two application rounds (tranche 1 and 2) in which schools and institutions could submit a funding application. Applications submitted in the first tranche had to be for activities implemented between June 2nd 2020 and August 31th 2021, whereas support and catch-up programmes in the second tranche had to be implemented between October 1st 2020 and August 31th 2021. The funding programme is based on an amount of €900 per student. Schools could apply for funding for up to 10% of the students and, for schools with a positive disadvantage score in context of public funding for combating educational disadvantage, it was possible to apply for funding for up to 20% of the students enrolled at that time. This information comes from the subsidy scheme regulations (in Dutch).

Schools were free to organise their own catch-up and support programmes (from now on simply 'catch-up programmes') and could decide themselves which students were eligible for the additional support, as long as the programs were intended for students who needed additional support due to the school closures. The list of funding applications in tranche 2 of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science shows that 3,556 applications were submitted by primary schools and special needs schools, and 392 by secondary schools. Interestingly, 37% of the funding applications for primary schools came from primary schools in the G4 cities (Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht)[1].

The funding programmes for early childhood and preschool education were comparable to those for primary and secondary education in terms of funding value, but applications were only accepted in one period (from July 4th 2020 to January 3rd 2021). A total of 312 early childhood and preschool education institutions applied for funding for a total of 3,676 children (an average of 12 children per institution). On average, programmes lasted 3 weeks with an average level of support of 13 hours per child during this period.

2. Method

A random sample of 1,250 primary/special needs/secondary special needs/primary special needs schools, all with a unique BRIN-4 code, was drawn from all 3,556 schools in these sectors that had submitted an application in the second tranche. Of these 1,250 applications, three applications from Caribbean schools (Bonaire and Sint-Eustatius) were not included. Of all 392 secondary school applications in the second tranche, two secondary schools from Bonaire were not included, since. Schools in the Caribbean Netherlands will be analysed in a separate sub-study. Furthermore, in order to obtain an overview of catch-up programmes per school, 190 multi-site schools (BRIN-6 code) were e-mailed and/or called to obtain further details on the submitted application. A total of 61 multi-site schools did not respond and, for this reason, the applications of these schools have not been included in the study.

After specifying the applications at the school level, the applications from 1,181 primary schools, 85 special needs schools (n=47 primary special needs; n =34 special needs; n =4 secondary special needs), and 686 secondary schools were coded according to: sector (primary, secondary, primary special needs, special needs and secondary special needs); type of catch-up programme; delays incurred; objectives of the catch-up programme(s); implementation and teaching of catch-up programme(s); and the motivation for the catch-up programme(s). The Code Book (see appendices 1 and 2) provides a summary of the types of catch-up programmes and motivations (according to which the applications are coded), a brief explanation of these types and motivations, and quotes from applications that serve

1. Ministry of Education OCW detail of applications for the second tranche of catch-up education funding (unpublished).

as examples for these types and motivations. For this report, the following categories were created and analysed: primary, special needs (primary special needs/secondary special needs/special needs), and secondary education.

At least 20% of all coded applications were double-coded; changes in initial coding were only made following consensus between both coders.

Early childhood and preschool education providers that applied for funding received a questionnaire in which they had to indicate what programme(s) they offered, the objectives they pursued and whether and how they measured the development of the children. At the time of writing, 136 of the 312 early childhood education and preschool education institutions have responded. The answers of these 136 institutions are included in this report and the remaining responses will be analysed at a later stage. Two early childhood education and preschool institutions were approached for a qualitative study using the data on children's development that these institutions collect themselves. If it appears that early childhood education and preschool education institutions often use similar measurement tools to map children's development, and if children's development was measured shortly before and shortly after completion of the catch-up programmes, this data will be used to monitor the impact of the programmes on language, cognition, socio-emotional development and motor skills.

3. Intended aims and target groups of the requested catch-up programmes

Figure 1 and Table 1 provide an overview of students' learning losses, as defined by schools, and the objectives of the funding programmes applied for. Logically, both closely correspond. Primary schools and primary special needs schools focused primarily on repairing learning loss in language and arithmetic, while secondary schools often focused on the core subjects mathematics, Dutch and English (see appendix 3). In addition, catch-up programmes were used in all sectors to improve the socio-emotional development and skills of students (see Table 1). Within secondary and special needs education, the acquisition and improvement of practical placement skills (practical training) were more often among the objectives of the catch-up programmes, while training of study skills was more often the focus for secondary schools compared to primary and special needs education (41.1% vs. 5.4% and 10.6%, respectively).
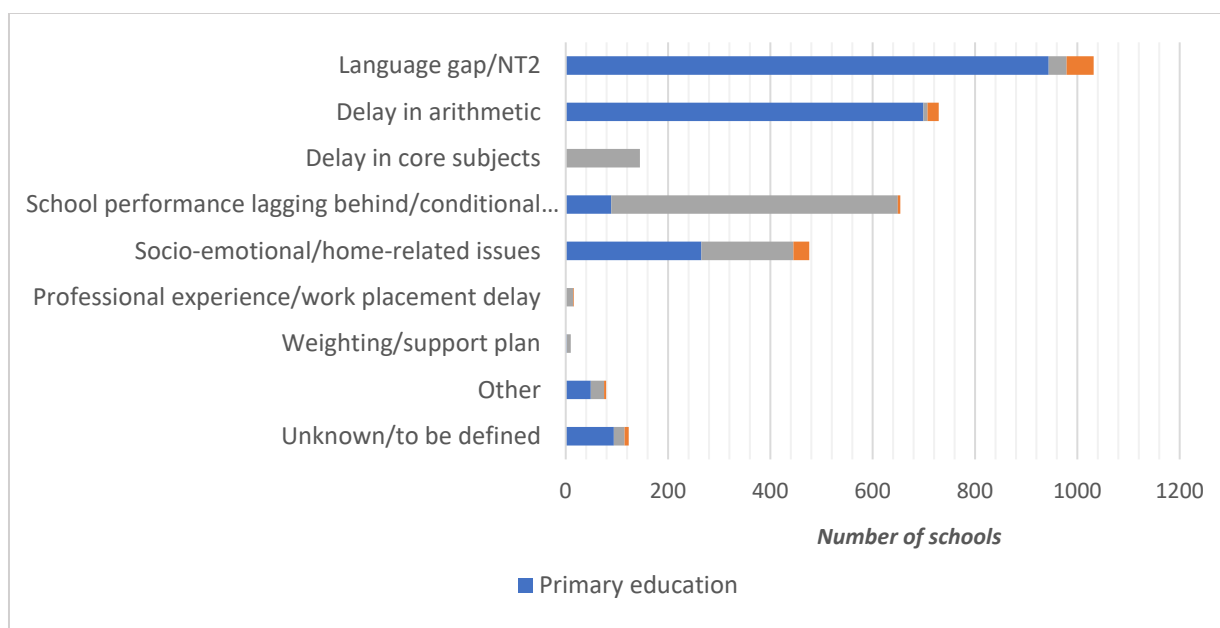
Figure 1. *Learning loss, as defined by schools, stratified by sector.*

Table 1. *Number of schools per intended objective of catch-up programmes, stratified by sector. Percentages show the percentage of all schools (by sector) that described the objective in their application.*

Objectives of the interventions	Primary education N= 1181 (%)	Secondary education N= 686 (%)	Special needs education N= 85 (%)
Arithmetic	710 *(60.1)*	9 *(1.3)*	23 *(27.1)*
Language	966 *(81.8)*	30 *(4.4)*	56 *(65.9)*
Secondary school subjects	-	624 *(91.0)*	-
School performance (undefined)	184 *(15.6)*	17 *(2.5)*	17 *(20.0)*
Socio-emotional development and skills	278 *(23.5)*	183 *(26.7)*	31 *(36.5)*
Study skills	64 *(5.4)*	282 *(41.1)*	9 *(10.6)*
Vocational training skills (work placement)/professional field/practical experience	2 *(0.2)*	30 *(4.4)*	5 *(5.9)*
Distance learning	7 *(0.6)*	15 *(2.2)*	3 *(3.5)*
Teacher professional development	44 *(3.7)*	5 *(0.7)*	6 *(7.1)*
Sport	21 *(1.8)*	2 *(0.3)*	5 *(5.9)*
Culture/excursions/creative	25 *(2.1)*	1 *(0.1)*	5 *(5.9)*
Other	81 *(6.9)*	4 *(0.6)*	10 *(11.8)*
Unknown	6 *(0.5)*	6 *(0.9)*	-

In early childhood and preschool education, almost all institutions (98%) focused on improving language skills. In most cases (83%), these institutions also focused on encouraging the development of socio-emotional skills of pre-schoolers within their programme. Furthermore, 70% of all institutions

sought to improve cognitive skills through their programme. In 62% of the programmes, one of the aims was to stimulate children's motor skills. In some cases, the emphasis was on play-based development or providing structure for pre-schoolers (including in the home environment).

4. Implementation and tuition within the catch-up programmes

The figures below show, separately for each sector whether programmes were executed by school staff or externally: 27% of primary schools (N=319), 31% of secondary schools (N=213) and 26% of special needs schools (N=22) opted to use their own staff, such as a teacher, special needs coordinator and/or teaching assistant. Compared to primary schools and special needs schools, secondary schools more frequently used external professionals (both qualified and unqualified) to teach the programmes (16% and 20% vs. 26%, respectively).
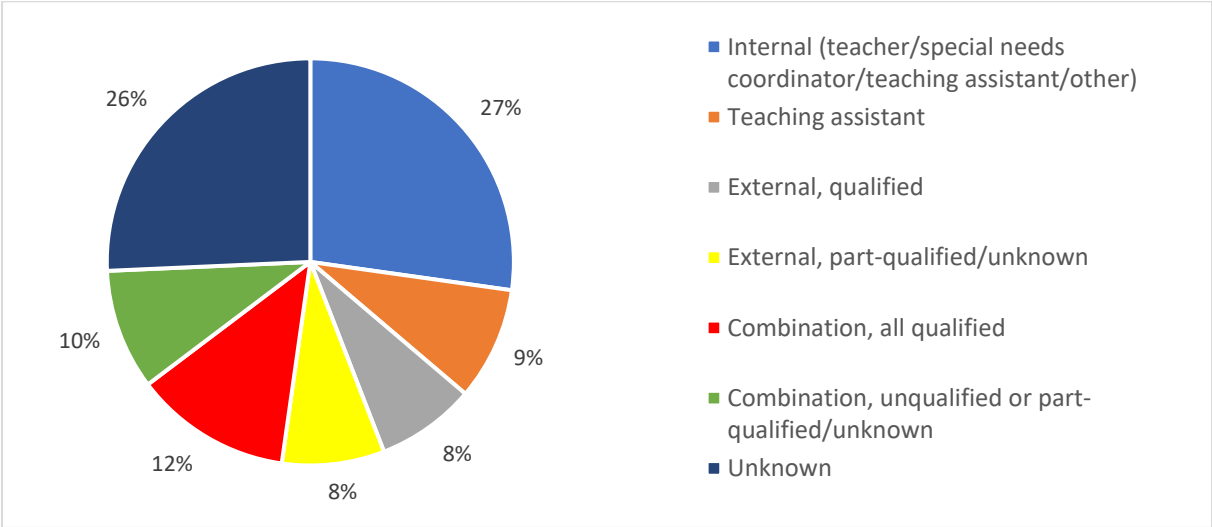
Figure 2. *Practitioners teaching catch-up programmes in primary education (N=1181)*
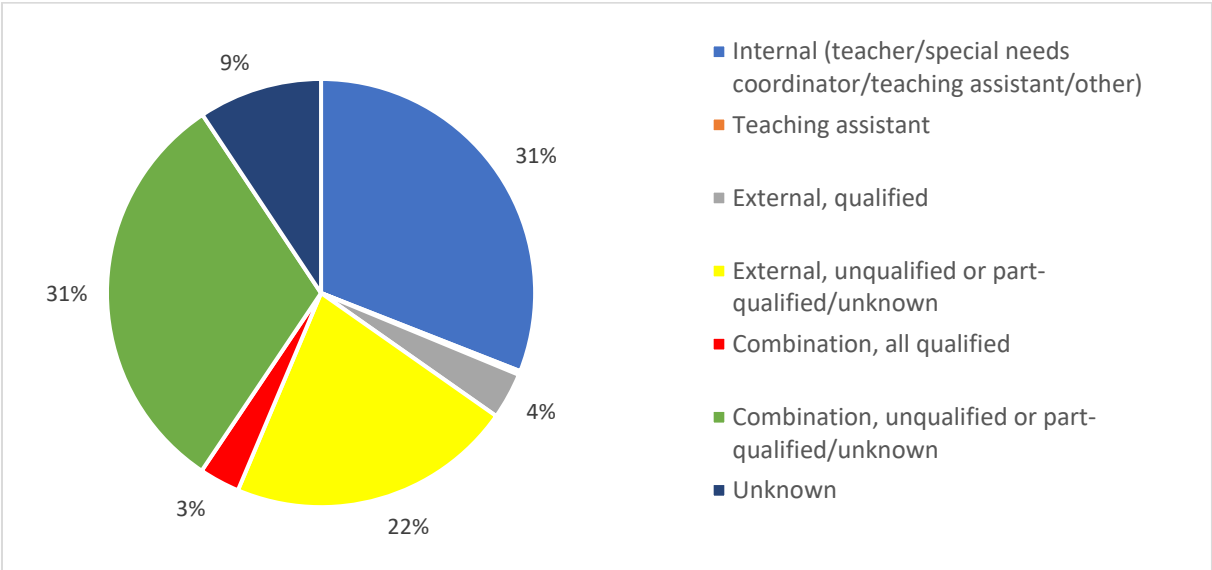
Figure 3. *Practitioners teaching catch-up programmes in secondary education (N=686)*
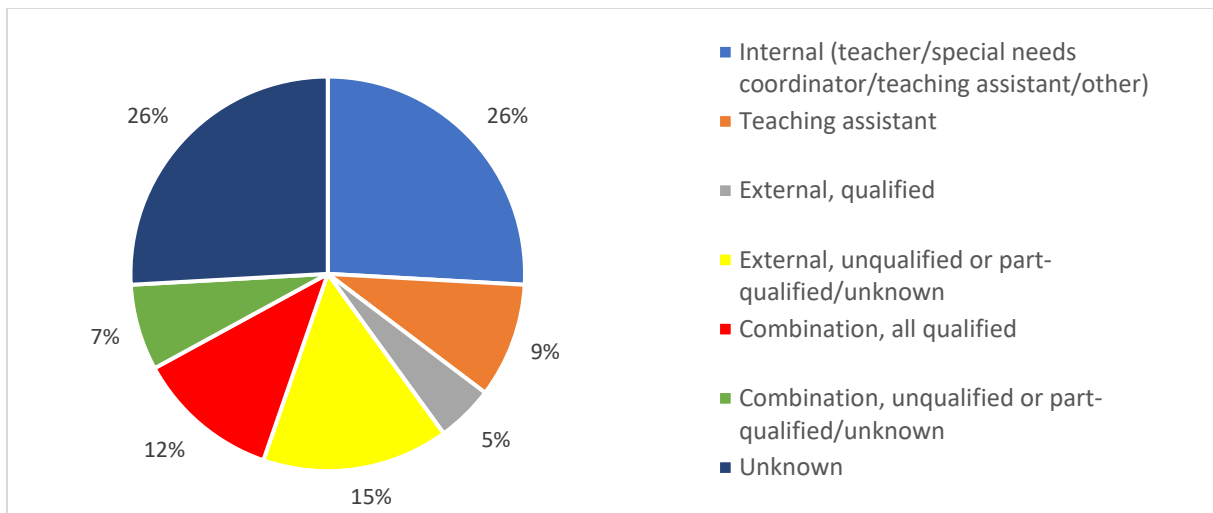
Figure 4. *Practitioners teaching catch-up programmes in special needs education (primary special needs/special needs/secondary special needs (N=85)*

Teaching of programmes

Schools and school governors can collaborate with external partners to execute the catch-up programmes and/or can outsource the implementation of the programme entirely. Figure 5 provides, per educational sector, who implemented the catch-up programmes. The Figure shows that for most secondary and special needs schools, the implementation of the catch-up programmes was delegated internally, but also to external parties, such as: other schools, cultural institutions, teacher training programmes, education consulting services, homework assistance providers, local authorities and sports associations, or a combination of these. Primary schools, secondary schools and special needs schools collaborated primarily with education consulting services and providers of homework assistance. In addition, in primary education and special needs education (46%) the implementation of the programmes was delegated solely to internal professionals more frequently than in secondary education (31% of secondary schools).
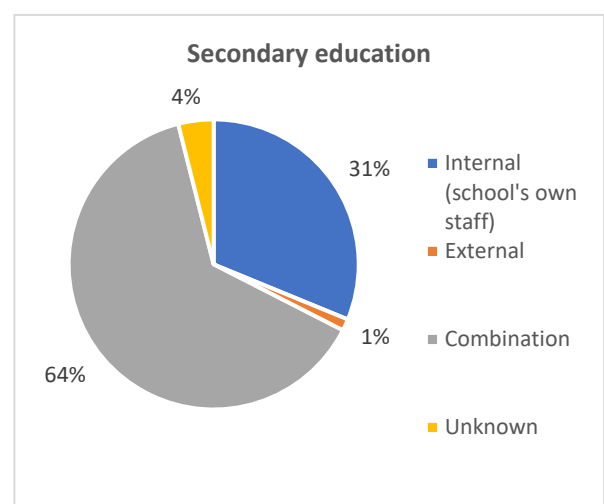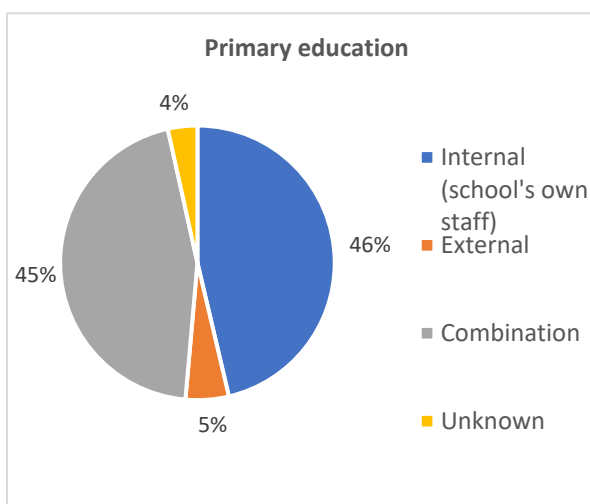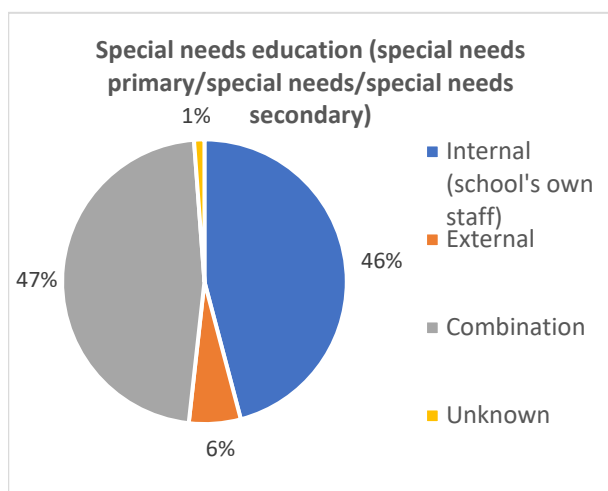
Figure 5. *The teaching of catch-up programmes, breakdown by education sector.*

5. Types of support and catch-up programmes

The figures below show the types of catch-up programmes that schools have applied for to catch up on learning losses due to school closures. A total of 814 schools from all sectors applied for two or more types of programmes; 247 schools applied for three or more; and 56 schools for four types of catch-up programmes. Appendices 1 and 2 provide a summary of examples of the programmes that primary, secondary and special needs education applied for.

As can be seen in Figure 6, most primary schools (80%) opted to catch up on the missed learning time through the use of additional support/teaching (either within or outside school hours). Figure 7 provides further details on the type of support/teaching provided. Most primary schools extended the teaching time (n=277), followed by extra tuition for students during independent work time (n=211 schools). New educational resources were purchased by 26% of the primary schools, sometimes including resource-specific external support and/or monitoring to catch up on the missed learning time, such as digital exercise software.
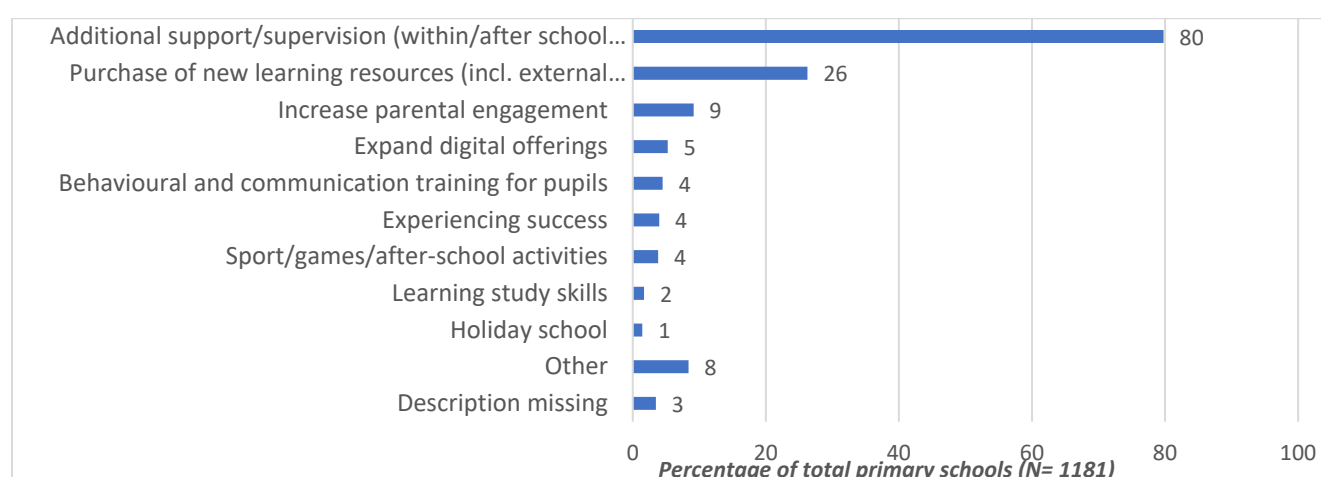

Figure 6. *Type of catch-up programmes, aimed at catching up on missed learning time due to school closures, which was applied for in primary education.*

NB: Percentages in this figure add up to more than 100% because many schools offered multiple types of programmes.
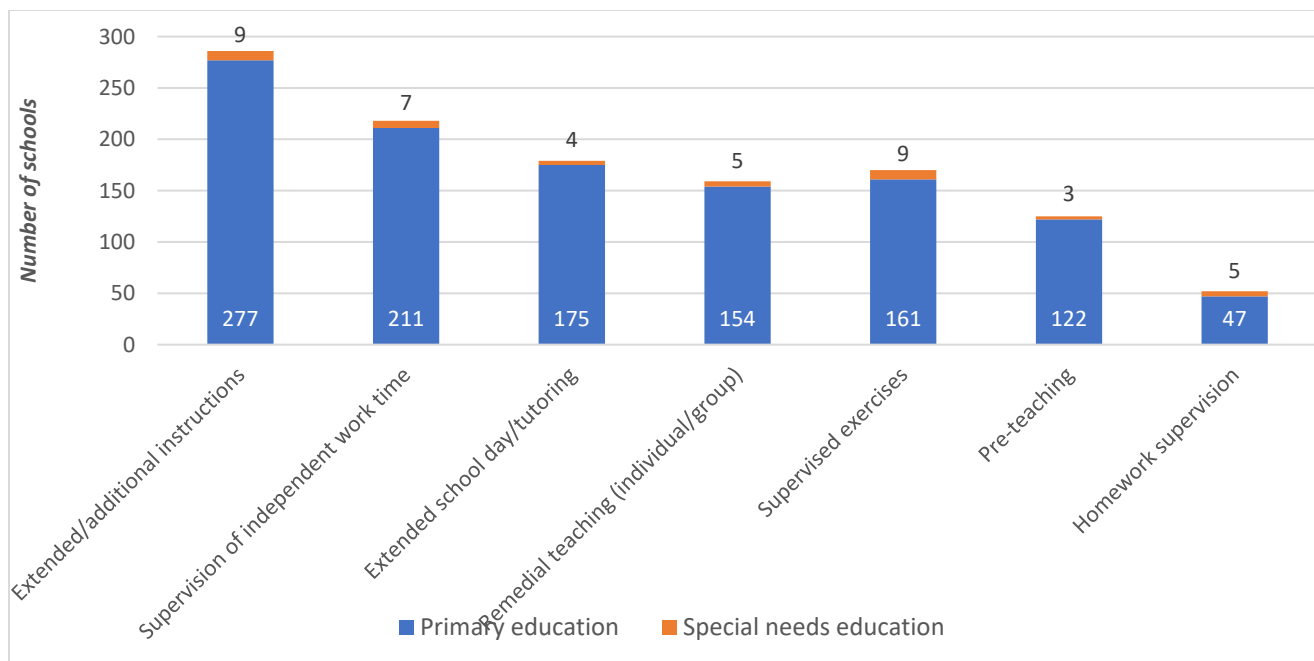
Figure 7. *Breakdown of support/teaching within/after school hours) in primary and special needs education.*

In secondary education, most schools (79%) applied for additional tuition or extension of the school day (see Figure 8). Many schools (18%) focused on exam training. Only 2% of secondary schools applied for funding to attract/retain work placements, to develop alternatives for work placements and/or to provide supervision of work placements. Another 2% of the schools employed job coaches and/or network experts to provide academic and professional career information to their students.

Figure 8. *Type of catch-up programmes, aimed at catching up on missed learning time due to school closures, which are/have been used in secondary education.*

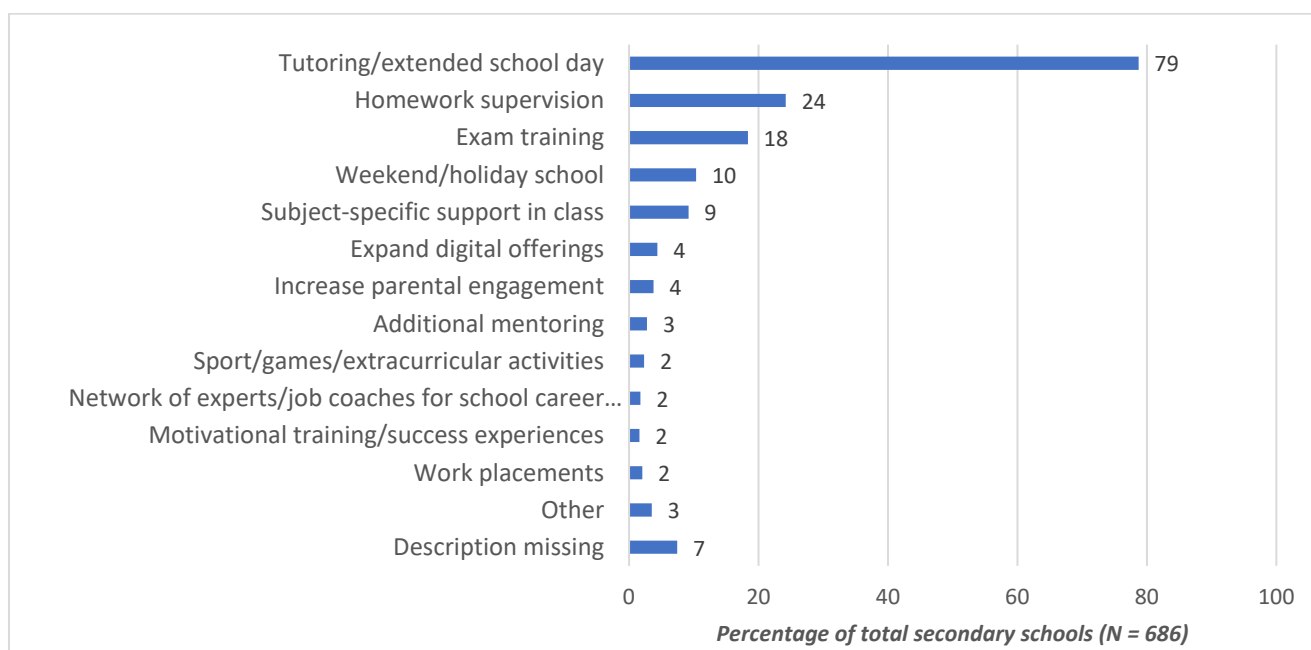NB: Percentages in this figure add up to more than 100% because many schools offered multiple types of programmes.

Similarly, most special needs schools (54%) applied for additional support and tuition for their students (see Figure 9). remarkably, 13% of the special needs schools offered additional sports or after-school activities, whereas this was only offered by 4% of the primary schools and 2%, of the secondary schools.
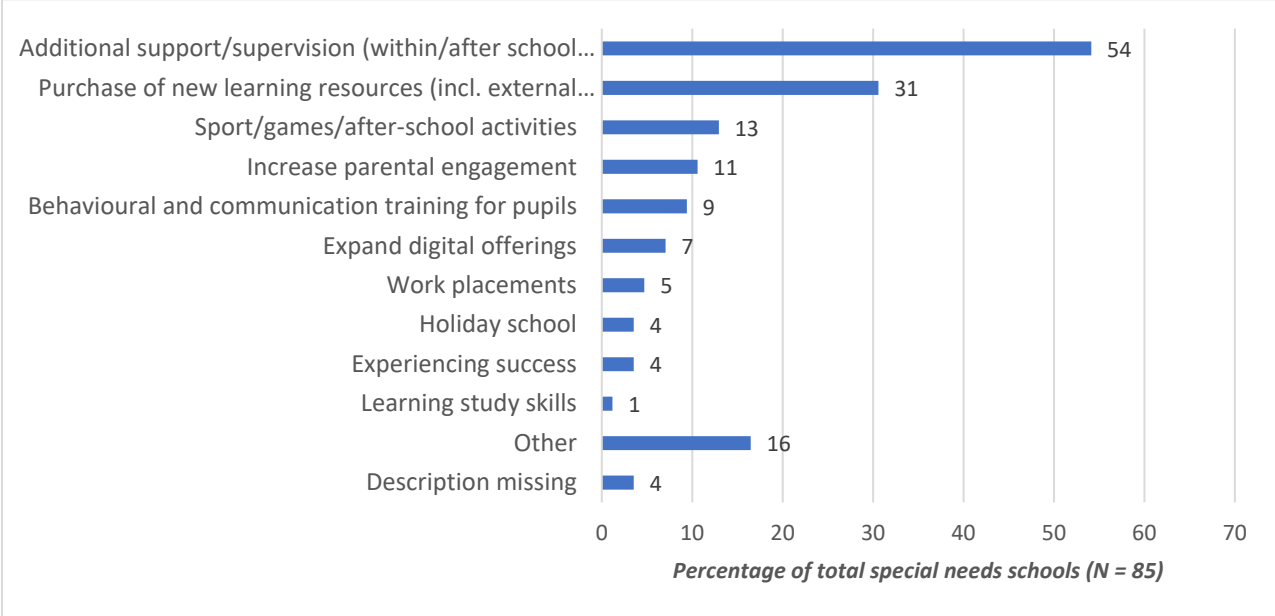

Figure 9. *Type of catch-up programmes, aimed at catching up on missed learning time due to school closures, which are being or have been used in special needs education (special needs/secondary special needs/primary special needs).*

Within early childhood education and preschool education, the catch-up programmes almost always took the form of an expansion of existing education (e.g. opening during the summer holidays in 2020 or in the following weeks). The programmes were always taught by early years practitioners. In 20% of the programmes, the early year's practitioner was joined by a colleague, usually the early years coach, early childhood and preschool education coordinator or a teacher/special needs coordinator. Additional staff was recruited by 18% of early childhood and preschool education institutions. In other cases, the own staff worked overtime during the holiday period. Usually an additional theme of the existing programme was offered, or additional early childhood and preschool education programmes/resources were used.

6. Motivation for the selected catch-up programmes

Schools were able to indicate in their application forms why they opted for certain programmes and how these programmes would help tackling the identified learning losses. From the applications in which this information was provided, it appears that primary, secondary and special needs schools mainly wanted catch-up programmes to help get students back in line with the rest of the class or to reduce differences between students (secondary schools). In addition, 137 primary schools mentioned providing a boost to the self-confidence and motivation of students (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Summary of motivations for selected catch-up programmes in primary and special needs education. Percentages show the percentage of all schools (by sector) that described their motivation in the funding application.*

Motivation	Primary education N= 1181 (%)	Special needs education N= 85 (%)
Catching up with rest of class and regular lessons	896 (75.9)	58 (68.2)
Preventing overburdening of regular teacher/organise back-up	14 (1.2)	1 (1.2)
Professional development for home schooling (incl. online)	25 (2.1)	5 (5.9)
Training teachers in distance learning	13 (1.1)	4 (4.7)
Facilitating transition from primary to secondary education	42 (3.6)	4 (4.7)
Improving the learning environment in the classroom	17 (1.4)	5 (5.9)
Boosting self-confidence and motivation	137 (11.6)	9 (10.6)
Encouraging study skills, work attitude	55 (4.7)	4 (4.7)
Broadening opportunities for practical experience	-	1 (1.2)
Motivational effect of future prospects and role model	1 (0.1)	2 (2.4)
Other	14 (1.2)	2 (2.4)
Description missing	227 (19.2)	13 (15.3)

NB: Percentages in this table add up to more than 100% because schools have multiple motivations for a given programme.

In secondary education, catch-up programmes were not only used to close the gap between students (487 secondary schools), but also to improve students' study skills or to prepare students for exams (266 and 176 secondary schools, respectively) (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Summary of motivations for selected programmes in secondary education. Percentages show the percentage of all secondary schools that described their motivation in the funding application.*

Motivation	Secondary education N= 686 (%)
Reducing learning gaps between students	487 (71.0)
Encouraging study skills, work attitude	266 (38.8)
Preparing for school exams and final exams	176 (25.7)
Boosting self-confidence and motivation	138 (20.1)
Developing a feeling for language	17 (2.5)
Preparing for further education/boosting school career	14 (2.0)
Broadening opportunities for practical experience	27 (3.9)
Motivational effect of future prospects and role model	2 (0.3)
Professional development for home schooling (incl. online)	11 (1.6)

Eradicating fear of failure	14 *(2.0)*
Other	25 *(3.6)*
Description missing	78 *(11.4)*

Appendix 1. Code Book for catch-up and support programmes in primary and special needs education

Catch-up programme type	Brief description	Example of text from the application
Support (individual/small groups) inside/outside the classroom	Pre-teaching, supervised practice, rote learning, including homework supervision, remedial teaching (RT) in small groups, individual help with processing material, rote learning and practice, extended school day, individual tutoring; back-up role for absent teachers	*'The teacher supporter provides additional teaching and targeted instruction to the pupils in small groups (up to 4 pupils per group) to help repair the learning loss'*
Parental engagement in terms of teaching content and progress of pupils	Engage parents in teaching content; provide them with tools to support distance learning at home/homework. Engage parents in the progress of their children.	*'Wherever possible and within the Covid-19 guidelines, we want to initiate parental participation to involve them in the support plans'*
Behaviour/communication training for pupils (individual/in groups)	Targeted training, personal assistance (remedial teacher/special needs coordinator). E.g. resilience training and mindfulness training.	*'We want to provide extra support for this group of children by helping them with their processing skills and resilience.'*
Experiencing success	Experiencing success, targeted training (socio-emotional), personal assistance (remedial teacher/special needs coordinator)	*'Consider the use of game therapy, social therapy''.*
Teaching study strategies	Improving students' independence to learn and plan	*'A group of pupils receives assistance with acquiring skills to help them work more independently.'*
Purchase of new learning resources and materials (including external support or monitoring)	Purchase of new learning resources, these often include external support or monitoring.	*'We want to purchase the BOUW! method, and further expand Rekensprint and Spellingsprint.'*

Expand digital offerings	Purchase of digital equipment, such as laptops, tablets for students.	*'Because our school still has few digital devices that can be used for BOUW!, we also need to purchase additional laptops/Chromebooks'*
Holiday school		*'During the school holidays, we teach the Vakantie!SchOOL programme, working together with partners to reduce disparities in socio-emotional development and the problems that have arisen recently (loneliness, collaboration, etc.). This will be accomplished using sport, theatre, music and play.'*
Sport, play and extracurricular **activities**		*'holiday school and/or extracurricular activities focusing on social-emotional development and general development, mainly for children of vulnerable families.*

Motivation	Brief description	Example of text from the application
Catching up with the rest of the class and regular lessons	Reduce disparities among students so they can reconnect with the group (through pre-teaching, supervised practice, rote learning)	*'Repair learning losses that have arisen, especially among pupils with an increased risk of learning and development delay. The programme that the school deploys with the help of remedial teachers and additional teachers will meet the pupils' educational needs.'*
Preventing overburdening of regular teachers (organising backup)	Use of teaching assistants and other teachers in regular lessons to support and unburden regular teachers, and hiring additional teachers. (Back-up when regular teachers are absent due to quarantine or illness.)	*'The aim of this is to unburden the teacher but also, of course, to help repair the learning losses of the children.'*
Professional development for home schooling (incl. online)	Increase parental engagement and support/educate parents in providing home-schooling and supervising homework so that students are better supported at home	*'In addition, the software 'Rekentuin' is purchased, so children can also devote time to learning arithmetic tasks by rote in the home environment.'*
Independent learning improvement	Develop strategies for learning and practice/working independently, processing information and learning to concentrate so students can learn independently (including at home/online) (executive skills)	*'The focus is, in addition to cognitive support, on executive skills. In this way, students will be able to perform better in a possible second period of home-schooling.'*
Improving online/distance learning: teacher	Facilitate teachers by offering laptops, software and skills for online learning to improve teacher and pupil performance during distance learning	*'Professionalization of teachers for distance learning'*

Improving the learning environment in the classroom	Behavioural specialists who can help students with behavioural or socio-emotional problems or communication disorders (acquired during lockdown) in improving their behaviour (including dealing with trauma) to ensure less disruption in the classroom and an improved learning environment.	*'After returning to school, we noticed a change in the dynamics of this class. It's quite a challenge to get through the day in a discordant classroom. We will be using a group intervention that will help the children function as a group again. The school's own coach will be involved in this.'*
Improving self-confidence and motivation	Improving self-confidence and motivation for school and schoolwork (e.g. by play techniques/investigative learning/linking topics outside the school to lessons, providing students with success experiences)	*'Giving children the tools they need to deal with their fears and worries. Giving them more confidence and resilience. Learning to take care of themselves so they can be confident in their contacts with others and have compassion and understanding for the other person and their own dynamics.'*
Facilitating transition from primary to secondary education	Facilitating the transition from primary to secondary school for students in grade 6 (final year of primary school). Focus on secondary education.	*'With students in the final three years of primary, who are lagging behind the reference levels at which they should leave school in the final year of primary.'*

Appendix 2. Code Book for catch-up and support programmes in secondary and special needs education

Catch-up programme type	Brief description	Example of text from the application
Weekend school	Extra lessons on weekends, often in combination with sports and cultural activities.	*'This involves a maximum of 4 days at the weekend, one subject per day. We focus primarily on (pre-)exam candidates, so their learning is back on track and they can finish school successfully. Additional hours will be included in the timetable for a number of subjects.'*
Homework supervision	Supervision and help with homework	*'Working independently under supervision; We offer students who need it or who we have selected the opportunity to work on their homework in small groups or to prepare their tests under the supervision of a study supervisor who can help them plan and test their knowledge, and ensure that the children work in a calm environment.'*
Tutoring	Extra subject-specific support outside the lesson (excluding homework supervision), extended school day for specific students	*'support classes are offered after school hours for students in the first two years and final three years of primary school.'*
Subject-specific support in class	Using additional teachers during the lesson, by forming separate class groups with specific instructions	*'Working in smaller groups (by working in smaller groups, and hence using more teachers, extra attention can be paid to the students who need this form of support)'*
Exam training	Additional lessons/tuition focused on exam exercises	*'Exam training: for all exam candidates. We offer all exam candidates the opportunity to prepare for their final exam in two subjects. This helps to address any learning delays which are difficult to repair in class.'*
Internships	Recruitment/retention of work placements, development of alternatives, supervision of work placements	*'Because some of the practical school students were unable to complete their work placement before the summer due to coronavirus (early school closures and reluctance among companies offering training places), we are now hiring an additional work placement supervisor for 10 weeks, 12 hours a week. We will also*

		have to make increased use of vocational training courses due to a meagre supply of work placements. Furthermore, some students are difficult to place and need more intensive supervision, due to the loss of teaching time and lack of work placements.'
Network of experts and job coaches for school career and career guidance		*'we want to hire job coaches for a number of students so they can get back on the right track in the coming school year.'*
Sports and games and extracurricular activities		*'Targeted sports projects, repairing delays in motor skills and attention to healthy nutrition.'*
Expand digital offerings	Purchase and implementation of digital educational resources; additional (online) lessons by study coaches and teaching assistants.	*'This teacher prepares instructional videos for the rest of the week using Google Classroom or provides resources that students can use in the classroom to help them learn the content. To enable this, we will purchase Chromebooks and additional resources. The aim is to be back on track before the summer holiday.'*

Motivation	Brief description	Example of text from the application
Motivational effect of future prospects and role model	To boost school career/playing for success, career guidance and job application training	*'Role models: The coaches come from an environment close to the environment of the target group. This makes it easier for the girls to identify with them. The coaches are already a few steps ahead of the girls and can inspire them by sharing experiences as role models'*
Reducing disparities between students	Reduce disparities between students so they can get back on track with the rest of the class	*'The aim is for students to be able to cope with the level of the school year ahead.'*
Strengthening study skills (including independence)	Develop strategies for learning and practice/work independently, processing information and learning to concentrate so students can learn independently (including at home/online) (executive skills)	*'With the current class, the emphasis is on extra reading and arithmetic; for the current upper school (final three years), a remediation programme with a focus on the executive skills. In particular, on checking your own work and improving where necessary.'*
Improving self-confidence, feeling of competence		*'In addition, the aim is for students to be able to participate confidently, with motivation and trust in the regular learning programme, and to have the skills to successfully keep up with the learning on their own'.*
Eradicating fear of failure		*'Social-emotional programme to eradicate fear of failure, emerged from delays.'*
Preparing for school exams and final exams		*'During the corona lockdown, our exam students had limited opportunity to prepare their exam and study skills. Distance learning was not fully able to provide this as is actually desired. For this reason, students will receive additional support with learning exam skills this year. The teaching assistant will provide this support.'*
Increasing opportunities to gain practical experience		*'From 1 October 2020, we will be organising weekly catch-up lessons in the general subjects (75 minutes)*

		and catch-up practical lessons (75 minutes). We will have a maximum of 4 students per lesson for both practical lessons and general subject lessons.'
Preparing for further education/work/boosting school career		*'Students are offered additional career guidance activities to help with their subject and career choices. Students are offered 8 group activities, with a maximum of 8 students per group, in which they find out about a profession, professional field or a specific technology or practice. During the first half of the year, the focus will be on students in the third year (of secondary school) and in the second half on students in the second year. Visit an outside location where the activity takes place.'*
Developing a feeling for language		*'For whom: six students with a non-Dutch background to stimulate their feeling for language. These students have the ambition to move on to vocational education and training (VET).'*

Appendix 3. Overview of secondary school subjects targeted by catching-up programmes
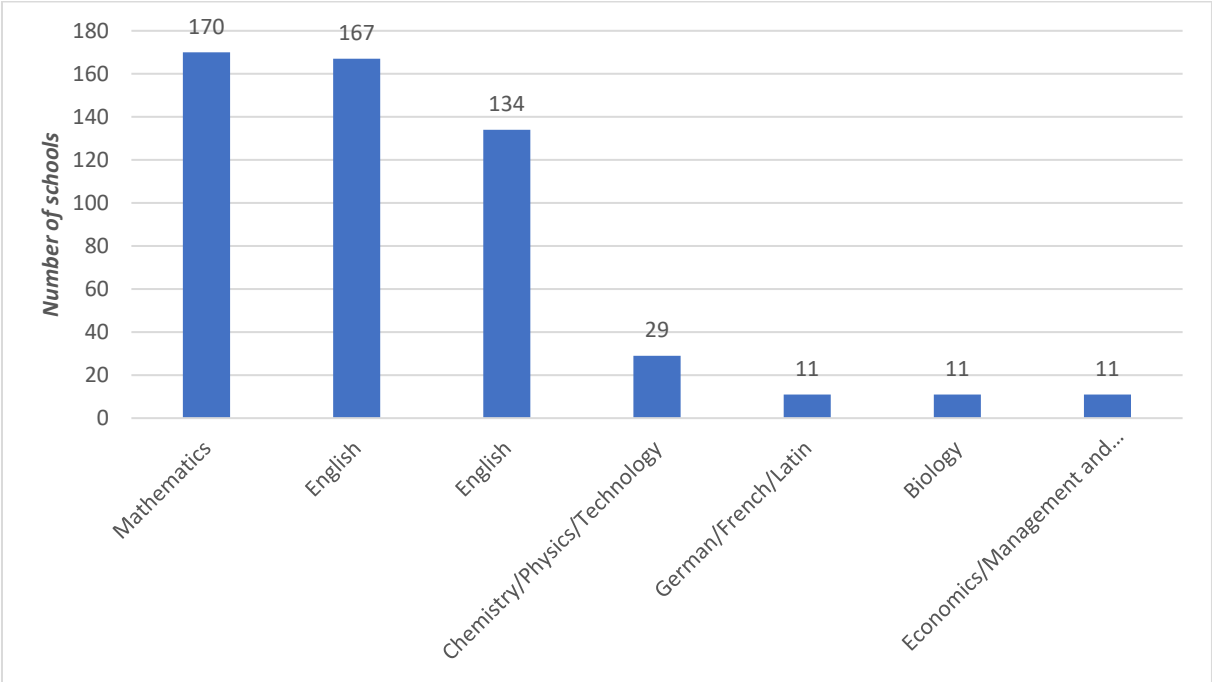

Figure 1. *Overview of school subjects for which catch-up programmes are used, as described by secondary schools.*