Introduction

The current professional standard and register for school leaders in the Dutch primary education system has been under ongoing development for almost 20 years. School leaders in primary education established their own professional standard in 2002, with the current criteria dating from 2012. Ever since the Schoolleidersregister PO (School Leader Register for Primary Education) was established in 2013, school leaders have taken an active role in continuing to develop and improve their professional register. The Primary Education Council (*PO-Raad*), the General Association of School Leaders (*Algemene Vereniging Schoolleiders*/AVS), CNV Schoolleiders (professional association dedicated to promoting the interests of school leaders) and the General Union of Education (Algemene Onderwijsbond/AOB) have also formalised their terms of engagement in the Collective Agreement for the education sector. As a result of these various initiatives, a total of 85% of the 8,500 school leaders in the Netherlands have demonstrated that they comply with the professional requirements. The majority of school leaders are focusing on the first professionalisation cycle after registration, while a rapidly growing number of them are working on the second cycle and some school leaders have already advanced to the third cycle.

In 2018, the Schoolleidersregister (School Leader Register) organisation decided the professional standard was due for a re-evaluation, and they incorporated the findings of recent social, technological, demographic and scientific research into their reassessment. These trends and developments, including digitalisation, have altered the role and duties of school leaders in primary education. Any professional standard should be in step with and mindful of trends and developments affecting school leaders' professional role. These are some of the motivating factors for updating the current professional standard.

Knowledge base

The professional standard is part of school leaders' knowledge base, which is used by school leaders to define their job category. This knowledge base serves as the foundation for professional conduct and the development of individual school leaders and their professional peers. In addition to the professional standard, the knowledge base also covers professionalisation issues and includes a description of technological and social trends and developments that affect the role of school leader.

Purpose of professional standard
The main purpose of this professional standard is to promote the professional development of school leaders and to formally recognise the professional group. The term 'standard' refers to a criterion for the specific qualities an effective school leader should possess, while the standard outlines how the professional cohort in the Netherlands defines effective school leadership. Effective school leadership also extends into the realm of ethics, i.e. how and driven by what motivations school leaders manage their institutions. The objective of the new, updated professional standard is therefore to lead the way towards effective school leadership.

Terminology
Since the term 'professional standard' may not adequately communicate its development-oriented role, terms such as 'professional image' or 'professional mirror' might be more accurate and appropriate; that is, an image or mirror for school leaders to reflect on, and more closely define, their professional development. Since the professional standard was established two decades ago, many school leaders have been using the standard for years, and it has become a tool to assist them with their professional registration. The Schoolleidersregister PO therefore endorses the idea of continuing to use the term 'professional standard'.

Scope
School leaders operate across a range of environments, and there are obviously differences between a school located in a small village and a school in an underserved neighbourhood in a large city. School leaders working for a school board overseeing a large number of schools differ in many respects from their counterparts at small, independent schools, as well as having different experiences from principals in charge of several schools, principals tasked with managing their peers at a large number of schools in a specific region, school leaders at small or large schools, principals of Integrated Child Centres (*integrale kindcentra*), and acting principals. These different environments notwithstanding, the professional standard must serve the needs of *all* school leaders, as it describes the core skills and competencies of their profession.

Approach to school leadership
The new, updated professional standard defines the work of school leaders as the *ability to influence employees*[1] *(i.e. teachers and auxiliary staff) of the organisation and other stakeholders (i.e. parents, professional practitioners, social institutions, and companies) in order to advance the vision and mission of the organisation: providing high-quality education to children.* By this definition, school leadership refers to all relationships that make an impact and that serve the primary process.

The updated professional standard is based on an integrated approach to leadership that foregrounds a set of *generic leadership practices* and *personal leadership* among educational leaders. *Leadership practices* refers to an *interrelated set of activities* performed by an *individual or group of leaders at a school* designed to improve educational quality and school development. These leadership practices may be conducted by various formal superiors within the school, ranging from principals/school leaders tasked with managing their peers at a large number of schools in a specific region, school leaders with a full range of responsibilities, coordinators, and interim leaders. By this definition, multiple leaders within the school are responsible for leading the way in educational quality and school improvement under the supervision of the school leader. This brings the new, updated professional standard in line with recent research and practices related to *diversified leadership*.

[1] Child centres obviously also employ educational staff

Personal leadership refers to individual personality traits, technical, social and conceptual skills and the personal ethics of the school leader. Personal leadership is related to the school leader's identity: who am I and who do I aim to be? Personal leadership is regarded as essential for school leaders in defining their leadership practices.

Professional standard

Introduction
School leaders have a substantial impact on educational quality and school development,[2] playing a unifying and crucial role between pupils, teachers, auxiliary staff, school board members, and the school's immediate community. For one, they are responsible for developing a shared philosophy for education and translating these into specific goals and objectives, and are open to ideas and embracing new trends. They also encourage teachers and auxiliary staff to continue their professional development and use their skills and talents and help to create a professional culture where teachers and auxiliary staff can trust each other and give each other feedback on their professional conduct. In other words: to foster an environment where teachers can focus on providing children with a good education and liaise closely with their board members, parents, other schools, local councils and professional practitioners. This is highly challenging for school leaders, and since they also bring their own personalities into the workplace, it is important to be mindful of these personalities and of their personal traits, skills and personal ethics. This has resulted in the leadership practices and aspects of personal leadership that are front and centre of the professional standard.

Leadership practices
Vision-driven approach
A clear and value-driven philosophy of children's upbringing and education allows the school leader and the team to establish specific learning and development goals for pupils, teachers and auxiliary staff. A shared philosophy works to inspire and motivate people and helps teachers to make their work more meaningful. Another key factor is that an approach driven by a specific philosophy helps to pursue a consistent strategy while at the same time offering opportunities to innovate and introduce new approaches, including in the realm of digitalisation.
The following interrelated activities are key in this respect:

- Developing a shared/common philosophy of children's upbringing and education
- Communicating this shared philosophy clearly and persuasively
- Setting shared goals and objectives
- Promoting the acceptance of group goals and objectives
- Anticipating essential changes
- Promoting renewal and innovation, e.g. in the realm of digitalisation

Human Resources Development
This leadership practice involves influencing the ideas and opinions, attitudes and conduct of teachers and auxiliary staff. School leaders who encourage teachers and auxiliary staff to keep learning and developing promote the quality of teachers and auxiliary staff in primary education.[3]

[2] For child centres (*kindcentra*), this also extends to the quality of childcare and the development of the child centre
[3] For child centres, this is also understood to include educational staff and support staff.

This allows pupils to reach their full potential and attain the educational goals established.[4] The following set of interrelated activities is important in managing human resources development:

- Having high expectations of the performance of teachers and auxiliary staff
- Encouraging teachers and auxiliary staff to reflect on their ideas and opinions, attitudes, and professional conduct
- Providing individual support and attention
- Being mindful of others, taking time for each other and being available to teachers and auxiliary staff
- Offering opportunities to, and providing support to, teachers and **auxiliary staff to keep learning and developing**
- Acting as role models to teachers and auxiliary staff

Developing the organisation

This leadership practice focuses on developing the school as a professional organisation, which school leaders do by creating and implementing comprehensive policies designed to align goals, resources and timelines. School leaders must also ensure that their school policies are consistent with the strategic policies of their school boards – this requires effective cooperation and mutual trust between school leaders and their boards.

In addition, it is important for the development of a school as an organisation that its school leaders encourage and promote collaboration and teamwork, knowledge sharing, and shared decision making, as well as strengthening the professional culture and mutual trust within the team. This is how school leaders can ensure that their schools are professional communities that serve as nurturing and stimulating professional and learning environments for teachers and auxiliary staff. School leaders can manage the development of the organisation using the following set of interrelated activities:

- Pursuing comprehensive policies and aligning resources (i.e. finances, staff and accommodation) in order to achieve the organisation's goals within a set time period
- Ensuring good coordination between school policy and the strategic policy pursued by the board
- Enhancing teamwork and the school's relationship with the school board as its employer
- Encouraging professional collaboration, knowledge sharing and shared decision making
- Strengthening the professional culture and mutual trust within the team;
- Redesigning, changing and innovating the organisation[5]
- Dealing adequately and flexibly with crisis situations and unexpected changes (e.g. coronavirus).

Guiding/managing the quality of education

This leadership practice is designed for school leaders to ensure that high-quality education can be provided to pupils. This means the school must satisfy the basic quality standards, set its own goals, and that there is a well-functioning quality assurance system in place. In addition, school leaders must endeavour to create a safe and supportive educational environment within the school, ensure there is a coherent curriculum with appropriate learning resources, and that policies and clear terms are set regarding duties, responsibilities and the deployment of school staff. This is how school leaders can ensure that teachers and auxiliary staff can perform their work effectively.

[4] Note: the terms 'pupils' and 'children' may be used interchangeably

[5] This may also include digitalisation efforts

In order to effectively manage educational quality, the following interrelated set of activities is important:

- Systematically and methodically evaluating basic quality levels
- Developing goals and the school's own educational quality system
- Promoting a safe and supportive teaching environment
- Organising a coherent curriculum, range of courses and tools and resources (including digital media)
- Assigning staff for the programme (including the educational programme)[6]
- Providing teaching support to educators
- Creating the basic conditions that allow teachers and auxiliary staff to perform their work effectively.

Investing in good relationships with the community

This leadership practice is designed to build, maintain and further develop strong relationships with parents, the neighbourhood/district, local councils and care institutions. These relationships should be based on understanding and mutual trust and respect, as this is important for schools in order to provide maximum support to their pupils. Investing in good relationships with the community also makes it easier for school leaders who report to multiple bodies/individuals. This, in turn, can potentially improve support for, and trust in, the school and education in general. The following related activities are key in this respect:

- Investing in good, reciprocal relationships with parents
- Investing in enhancing the neighbourhood as a good and healthy living environment for pupils
- Investing in sustainable relationships with partnerships, care institutions and youth support services as part of offering appropriate education
- Maintaining professional relationships with other primary and secondary schools
- Developing and maintaining productive relationships with the council and the local business community
- Aligning school policies at the local and national levels
- Engaging in a dialogue with stakeholders in the community and rendering account for the policies pursued at the school

Personal leadership

In addition to the five leadership practices, personality traits, skills and competencies/capabilities and the personal ethics of school leaders also form part of the new, updated professional standard. Personal leadership is related to the school leader's identity: who am I and who do I aim to be? Personal leadership helps school leaders to define these leadership practices.

Personal leadership centres on personal characteristics or traits which are relatively stable and can only be changed with significant effort: these are known as *personality traits*, as identified in the Big Five Personality Test and the HEXACO model. In addition, it revolves around *technical, social and conceptual skills and competencies* of school leaders which can be developed and which impact the conduct of school leaders. Technical skills refer to knowledge and skills related to methods, processes and techniques relevant to leading schools as organisations. 'Social skills' includes knowledge and skills related to human behaviour and interpersonal processes. Conceptual skills relate to the ability to analyse, use logical reasoning and conceptual thinking. In this context, technical skills focus mainly on objects, while social skills relate to people and conceptual skills relate to ideas and concepts.

[6] Integrated child centres do not actually provide education yet to the youngest children

Finally, personal leadership also extends to the personal ethics of school leaders, i.e. the school leader's ethical reasoning and moral principles. Based on this system, the following personal qualities are relevant to personal leadership (list is not exhaustive):

- Extroversion, personability, conscientiousness, friendliness, transparency, restraint (*personality traits*)
- Knowledge of children's upbringing and education, leadership in educational institutions, educational quality and educational policies *(technical skills)*
- Alertness, empathy, tact and listening skills *(social skills)*
- Flexibility, adaptability and decisiveness *(social skills)*
- Reflection, self-regulation and systems thinking *(conceptual skills)*
- Creativity and inventiveness *(conceptual skills)*
- Integrity and transparency *(ethics)*
- Courage, wisdom and sense of perspective *(ethics)*