PISA 2025 performance trends in the Netherlands

This short paper provides a summary of key findings on students' performance in reading, mathematics and science in the Netherlands from the PISA 2025 survey as presented in the OECD's *PISA 2025 Results Volume I: Future-ready students* (OECD, 2026[1]). A more comprehensive overview of the Netherlands' PISA results is available on the *PISA 2025 Results Volume I country note for the Netherlands* ((OECD, 2026[2])

1. What is PISA and what does it measure?

The Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) is an international large-scale assessment survey of fifteen-year-old students led by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It assesses students' capacity to apply their knowledge and skills to solve real-life problems. Over 760 000 students participated in PISA 2025 representing 33 million 15-year-olds from 91 countries and economies. In the Netherlands, a representative sample of 6636 students completed the assessment representing about 165900 fifteen-year-old students.

PISA 2025 assessed students in science, reading and mathematics as well as a new domain of computational problem solving. Contextual information about the students, the schools they attend, and the education systems were also collected through questionnaires filled by students, school principals and system leaders.

2. What does PISA 2025 tell us about fifteen-year-old students' learning outcomes in the Netherlands?

Performance in science, mathematics and reading

Fifteen-year-old students in the Netherlands scored on average close to the OECD average in the PISA 2025 science test. Almost three quarter of students in the Netherlands (73%) attain the proficiency level 2 in Science in PISA 2025, similar to the OECD average (74%). Students reaching at least level 2 in science demonstrate that they are able to correctly recognize and explain familiar scientific phenomena and identify in simple cases the validity of conclusions based on the data provided. About 9% of students in the Netherlands attain the highest levels on the science proficiency scale (levels 5 or 6) (OECD average of 7%). These students can creatively and autonomously apply their knowledge of and about science to a wide variety of situations.

Fifteen-year-old students in the Netherlands scored on average higher than the average across OECD countries in mathematics in PISA 2025. Some 70% of students attain at least level 2 (more than the OECD average of 65%). These students are able at minimum to interpret and recognize how a simple situation can be represented mathematically. Some 13% of students attain level 5 or 6 which is higher than the average across OECD countries of 8%. Top performers in PISA can model complex problems mathematically and are able

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to select, compare and evaluate appropriate problem-solving strategies to solve these situations.

Fifteen-year-old students in the Netherlands scored below the average across OECD countries in mathematics in PISA 2025. Some 61% of students attained minimum proficiency level (level 2) on the PISA reading scale (lower than the OECD average of 69%). Students reaching level 2 in PISA, can at a minimum identify the main idea in a text of moderate length, find information based on explicit criteria and reflect on the purpose and form of texts when explicitly directed to do so. The share of top performers at levels 5 or 6 in reading is 4% in the Netherlands (6% on average across OECD countries). Students at this level can comprehend lengthy texts, engage with abstract concepts and distinguish between fact and opinion based on implicit cues.

Socio-economic disparities in science, reading and mathematics

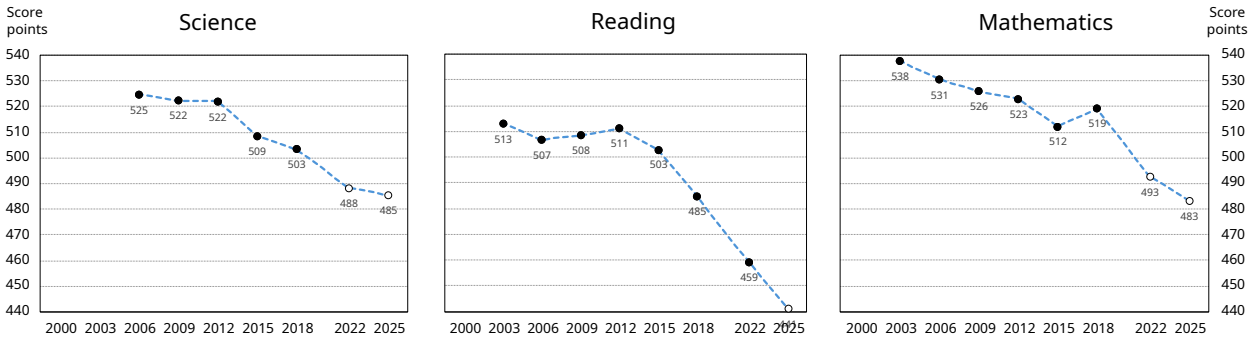
In the Netherlands, the most advantaged students (top 25% on the PISA index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status or ESCS distribution) outperformed the most disadvantaged students (bottom 25% of ESCS distribution) in all three domains. While disparities in performance based on students' socio-economic status are observed across almost all OECD countries, the gap in performance is particularly wide in the Netherlands (105 points in science, 94 points in reading and 102 in mathematics between most advantaged and disadvantage students). In all three domains, the performance gap in the Netherlands is among the five largest across all PISA participating countries and economies.

Students' performance in reading declined in the Netherland over the past decade

Compared to the previous PISA cycle in 2022, students' performance in science and mathematics remains unchanged in mathematics and sciences but decreased by 18 score points in reading. However, long term trends since 2015 show a decline in performance in all three domains. Students' performance in mathematics, reading and science in PISA 2025 in the Netherlands is the lowest ever observed across cycles (see Figure 1).

Compared to PISA 2015 cycle, the share of low performing students (students scoring below the proficiency level 2 in PISA) increased in all three domains (13 percentage points in mathematics, 20 percentage points in reading and 8 in science).

Figure 1. Trends in performance over time in science, reading and mathematics in Netherlands



Note: White dots indicate mean-performance estimates that are not statistically significantly above/below PISA 2025 estimates.
Source: OECD, PISA 2025 Database, Tables I.B1.2a.36, I.B1.2a.37 and I.B1.2a.38.

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3. What may explain the decline in reading performance?

The Netherlands experienced an important decrease in PISA reading performance over the past decade. Students in Netherlands in PISA 2025 performed 62 points lower than those who participated in PISA 2022. The second biggest decrease in performance across PISA participating countries and economies.

While it is more acute in the Netherlands, this trend is not unique and reflects a global trend observed across a great majority of OECD countries and beyond in PISA. While long term downward trends were also observed in science and mathematics across the OECD countries on average, the decline in reading is steeper.

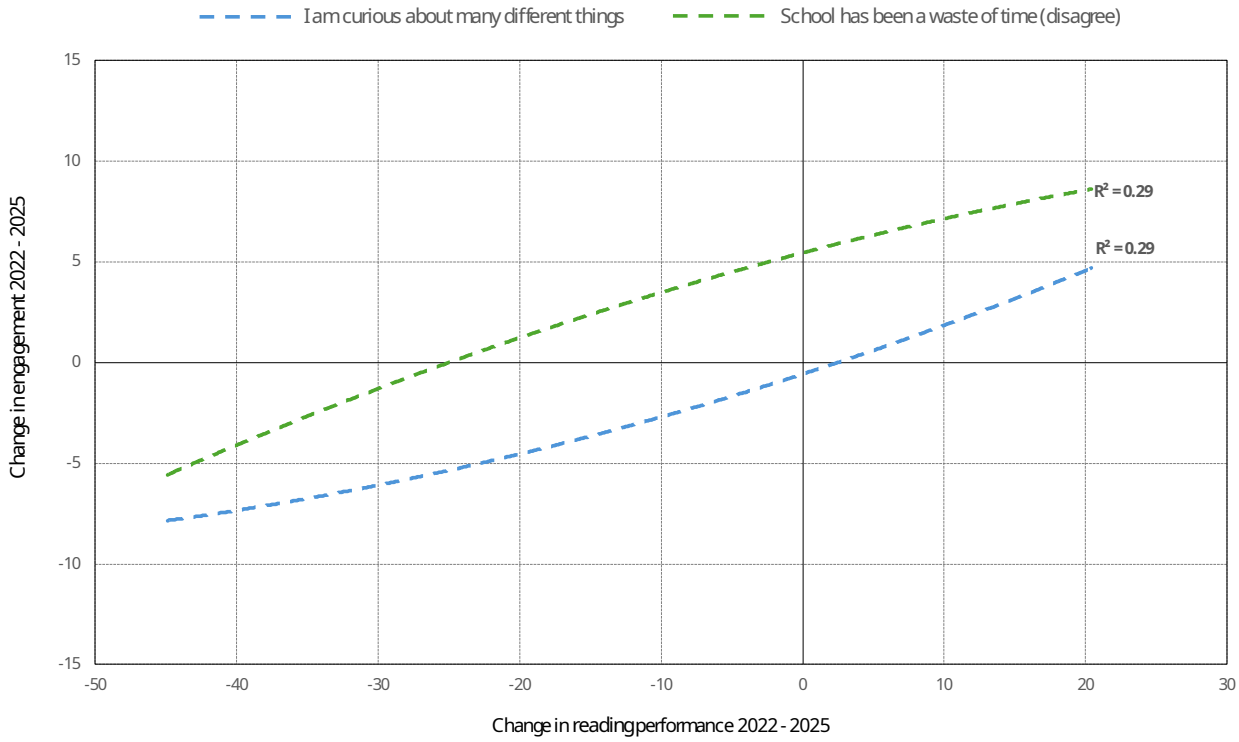
It is not possible to identify the causes of this decline relying solely on the PISA data. However, some trends in patterns of response, engagement with the test and self-reported attitudes towards learning in PISA provide some clues and hypothesis as to what might be happening.

- **Increase in the instances of hasty responses:** The instance of hasty responses (fast responses to the test questions but providing the wrong answer) has doubled in the Netherlands between PISA 2018 (7% of total responses) and PISA 2025 (14%). This follows a similar trend observed across other OECD countries on average. This indicates a change in how students approach reading tasks and attention to tasks.
- **Stronger decrease in tasks involving cognitive processes of "evaluating and reflecting":** Between 2018 and 2025, the success rate in the PISA reading test for students in the Netherlands declined more on PISA cognitive tasks involving higher-level processes such as evaluating and reflecting, which require careful engagement with the text. In contrast the change in success rate was smaller for tasks requiring locating a single piece of information. Similar trends are seen on average across OECD countries between PISA 2018 and 2022 but not as apparent for the long-term trends (PISA 2018-2025).
- **Decline in self-reported motivation to learn and engagement with school:** PISA participating countries and economies who experienced declines in reading performance -including the Netherlands- also experience decreases in students' motivation to learn and engagement with schools (see Figure 2). For instance, while 67% of fifteen-year-old students reported not giving up easily on tasks in PISA 2022, only 58% reported doing so in PISA 2025. More students in Netherlands reported agreeing with the fact that "school has been a waste of time" (35%) than in PISA 2022 (30%).

Put together, these patterns point out to heightened challenges related to students' ability to engage with long or complex text, sustained attention in reading as well as broader issues of engagement with learning and school.

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Figure 2. Trends in engagement and trends in performance across PISA participating countries and economies



Note: Only countries and economies with available data are used.
Source: OECD, PISA 2025 Database, Tables I.B1.2a.37, I.B1.3.2 and I.B1.3.71.

4. For further reading

OECD (2026), *PISA 2025 Results (Volume I): Future-Ready Students*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/73451bc5-en.

OECD (2026), PISA 2025 Results (Volume I): Netherlands, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pisa-2025-results-volume-i-country-notes_2d4ff9ea-en/netherlands_1c998a42-en.html

OECD (2026), *PISA 2025 Assessment and Analytical Framework*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/86c36975-en.

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