

European head teachers after a visit to Dutch schools: identity and freedom left a deep impression

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Head teachers from seven different protestant schools came to the Netherlands early March. What did they learn from Verus and our schools?

Impressing: the freedom of the Dutch education system

The dual Dutch education system (Christian schools vs state schools, both fully financed by the government) and the presence of *Verus* as an organization for Christian schools left a deep impression on all members present. In other European countries, schools with a religious character are not fully funded by the government. That is probably why there is a great number of Christian schools in The Netherlands and a much smaller number of such schools elsewhere in the world. Elsewhere, it is parents' choice to want to pay – sometimes large amounts of money – to have their children receive confessional education.

Another positive, appealing aspect leaving a deep impression was the presence of *Verus* as the organization responsible to support and advise confessional schools in shaping shared Christian ideals on a national level.

Dreaming of 'Verus Poland'

Head teacher of a Polish Lutheran middle school Dagmara Mielke is planning to set up and build up a network of such confessional schools in Poland. Looking back, she experienced her visit to the Dutch education system as enriching and inspiring. She hopes to make stronger and closer connections between confessional schools in her home country.

Unique and open character

German Dr. Uta Hallwirth from Hannover was mainly impressed by the unique and open character of Dutch confessional schools. In the visit to the Orfeo Gymnasium of the Carolus Clusius College in Zwolle, she was struck by the unique and original character of its worship moments and religious classes. Besides open conversations, a rising occasion for pupils to exchange their personal stories left the deepest of impressions.

Totally different and yet authentic

All head teachers went through a similar experience of surprise as our advisers, Walter Wassenaar, Taco Visser and Jacomijn van der Kooij and host teacher Dr. Gerdien Bertram-Troost of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, opened the conference. At this first day of the visit, they shared their experiences and insights about the Christian identity of schools in the Netherlands.

From all other activities planned during the trip, it was the wide diversity and openness of the Dutch schools that left them impressed and surprised. While the (orthodox) Christian identity in the Christelijke Hogeschool Ede markedly differed from the (liberal) one in the Alfa College in Hardenberg, both identities showed to be closely connected with their employees' individual drives.

PBS

The Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) gained the head teachers' close attention. Both schools, Kon-Tiki (primary school) and the Corderius College (high school) in Amersfoort contribute to a prevailing positive pedagogic climate. They successfully manage to bind this climate to the Christian identity and the key values of the school. As a result of their enriching experience in the Netherlands, all head teachers said to be deeply inspired and would like to be kept up-to-date with the developments of the PBS approach in Dutch schools.

Taco Visser