

Anti-Semitism in secondary schools¹ in the Netherlands

Panteia, July 2013

Summary

To get a picture of the scope of anti-Semitic incidents in secondary schools today, the Anne Frank House asked Panteia to conduct a survey which involved secondary school teachers.² They were asked about their experiences with Anti-Semitism in their school.

Predominantly insults about Jews as a group

Last year teachers witnessed anti-Semitic incidents of various degrees. In most cases, pupils directed insults and abuse at Jews as an ethnic group and did not insult individual pupils or teachers. One in ten teachers reported that pupils denied or trivialised the Holocaust.

Threats and physical violence against pupils or teachers who are (thought to be) Jewish hardly occurred within the researched group. A few incidents were reported. However, pupils did call each other "Jew", regardless of which ethnic background they had. More than 25% of the teachers witnessed this once or several times in the last year.

Ethnic background of offenders: predominantly ethnic Dutch

Apart from the anti-Semitic incidents teachers experienced last year, teachers were also asked about the characteristics of the most recent incident. The offenders were predominately ethnic Dutch; in nearly two-thirds of the most recent incidents.

Teachers also reported incidents caused by pupils of Moroccan or Turkish descent. These ethnic groups are overrepresented within the group of offenders when related to the pupil population.

¹ There are around 700 secondary schools in the Netherlands, both publicly and privately run. There are four types of secondary education: pre-university education (VWO); higher general secondary education (HAVO); pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO); practical training (PRO). All four types of secondary school cater for children from the age of 12 and begin with a period of basic secondary education. Young people must attend school until the age of 18 or until they have obtained a basic qualification. There are also special schools for secondary education for children with special needs. For more information, see www.government.nl/issues/education/secondary-education

² In total 937 teachers filled out the questionnaire.

Anti-Semitism was often expressed in a football-related context³; the Middle East conflict played a role too

When teachers were asked about the context of the anti-Semitic incidents they had witnessed in the last year, they responded that the abuse directed at Jews as a group was mostly expressed in a football-related context. Two-thirds of the respondents mentioned this context. One in five teachers saw the Middle East conflict as the source of the abuse. Furthermore, when abuse directed at Jews occurred in a football-related context, this was done more frequently by ethnic Dutch offenders. Abuse expressed in the context of the Middle East conflict, however, was done more frequently by pupils of Turkish or Moroccan descent.

Slightly more incidents at preparatory vocational education (VMBO) compared to senior general secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university secondary education (VWO)

Differences between the various school types were taken into account in the survey. Anti-Semitism was expressed at all school types; yet relatively more incidents were reported at VMBO. Teachers were asked what environmental factors they thought should be taken into consideration when analysing the anti-Semitic incidents. According to teachers, at practical education schools affairs within the school or classroom caused pupils to express anti-Semitic insults more frequently than at other secondary education school types. In contrast, at HAVO and VWO current affairs in the Middle East were of greater influence on the reported incidents compared to affairs within the school or classroom.

Slightly more incidents at schools with a relatively large number of pupils with Moroccan or Turkish backgrounds

Teachers who work at schools with a relatively large number of pupils with a Turkish or Moroccan background reported more anti-Semitic incidents. However, this finding does not mean that the offenders were always of Turkish or Moroccan descent. A mere correlation has been found between the frequency of incidents and the percentage of pupils of Turkish or Moroccan origin in a school.

³ This 'football-related context' refers to conflicts between football fans of the Amsterdam football club Ajax and fans of rivalling clubs. A large part of the Ajax supporters tend to identify themselves as 'Jews', referring to the Jewish history of Amsterdam. Fans of rivalling clubs seek to insult Ajax supporters by making anti-Semitic insults. These kinds of insults, for example using 'Jew' as a term of abuse or chanting 'Jews to the gas', have become popular outside the stadiums, especially in regions where the support of these rivalling clubs is abundant.

Less abuse than in 2004, but still a major problem

The results of this survey have been compared to the results of the 2004 survey on aggression and violence in education, in which respondents were asked about the frequency of verbal abuse. More than a third of the teachers in the latest survey said that they had witnessed abuse directed at Jews or Holocaust trivialisation in the last year. Compared to the response to a similar question in the 2004 survey, the percentage of teachers who witnessed abuse in the last year is lower. To put the anti-Semitic incidents in a wider context of discrimination, the survey also contained questions about abuse directed at the Islam or homosexuality. Abuse directed at these minorities occurred more frequently than abuse directed at Jews or Holocaust trivialisation. In comparison to 2004, slightly more abusive comments about the Islam and homosexuality have been reported.

Most teachers act appropriately

The results about the most recent incidents indicate that virtually all teachers took action when witnessing abuse. This was usually done by rebuking the offender. One in four teachers say they talked with the pupils involved about the incident after it had happened. Most teachers believe that their intervention had a positive effect. In addition, the majority of the respondents found that their school acted appropriately when confronted with anti-Semitic incidents.

Need for education about how to stop discrimination

The survey has shown that teachers generally value education and classes about the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, discrimination and codes of conduct at their school. Moreover, two out of five teachers have indicated that they would appreciate additional training on these topics, in particular on preventing or dealing with discrimination. One out of five teachers have asked for additional education or training in teaching the Holocaust.