



Interview with Ruimte-OK: A different view on school building costs

Marco van Zandwijk works at Ruimte-OK. The programmes he works on are intended to promote school housing quality. Although the school housing quality is in the societal interest, in practice this is given insufficient priority. Van Zandwijk sketches the sector developments that contribute to this. 'Partly due to the growing market, the sector suffers from old VNG reference values. At the same time, there are a lot of imminent changes: many school buildings are now old and need to be replaced in the short term. Moreover, new buildings must now comply with international climate targets. In the mean time, the decrease in government involvement means that the task of school building has increasingly become the responsibility of the schools and public authorities themselves. To be able to tackle this, a different knowledge level and the correct expertise is required. So a school board can benefit from instruments that enable it to take the right decisions. We developed the School Building fan at the request of the Government Architect. This fan helps to discuss user requirements during a school's construction or refurbishment. The schools were very enthusiastic. The fan suited their knowledge level, gave them inspiration and helped them to pose questions.'

'Together with the sectoral councils in primary and secondary education and the VNG (ed.: Association of Dutch Municipalities), we have further developed the fan into a concrete tool for the programme of requirements: the Quality Framework for Housing. At the request of the VNG, the framework has also been financially audited. We selected BDB, because they use up-to-date construction cost data to provide an independent insight into trends and developments. The VNG had its own reference values for school housing. In practice, you could not build a school based on the existing VNG reference values,

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Ruimte-OK is a social organisation that stands for good quality and sustainable school housing.

let alone a future-proof school. The BDB calculations confirm this. The reason for the difference is that the VNG reference values are indexed annually using an index that was originally not intended for school construction. Neither have these reference values been adjusted for the higher requirements regarding interior climate and sustainability.'

'The financial paragraph as drawn up by the BDB in the Quality Framework initially met with incomprehension. You almost doubt your own credibility: are we not asking too much? The Quality Framework is however not just a wish list, but has an accentuated link with the Building Regulation. A learning environment must comply with that mandatory statutory minimum. In the mean time, an increasing number of tenders confirm the financial calculations in the Quality Framework. You also gradually see the discussion shifting: how can we achieve a particular quality level with the available resources? Opportunities can be found in innovative ways of building or financing. People also increasingly realise that it makes sense to let go of the traditional way of thinking based on investment costs, and to look at the financial burden over the entire period. That is the pain felt by a public authority in its budget, and that is felt by a school in its exploitation. Sometimes it is simply smarter to invest more beforehand. It makes sense to look at these problems from another viewpoint.'

'Ruimte-OK and BDB found each other in the joint ambition to create something that was independent and for which there was a demand in the market. Although the Quality Framework is now used by several public authorities and school boards, we would like to see the framework being used much more frequently. There is also a lot of demand for an explanation about the use of the framework. It is also desirable to update the financial paragraph on a yearly basis. So there is still a lot more work to be done. A recurrent question in this respect is: how can we finance this structurally? The creation of a framework is a success story, but now the implementation of the Quality Framework must be arranged for the future.' •