

## Background

- The proportion of children with special educational needs (incl. autism), placed in special schools varies across countries with inclusive education policies [1-3].
- Autistic children in special schools tend to have lower IQ scores [4, 5].
- Disruptive problem behaviors can lead to transitions from regular to special school [5-7].
- Co-occurring conditions can affect access to education [8, 9].
- Effect of age on school placements and transitions among children with autism not yet identified [4, 10].

## Objective

Explore differences in the proportions and characteristic of children with autism in special and regular schools since the implementation of inclusive education policy (2013-2021).

## Hypotheses

1. With introduction of inclusive education policy in the Netherlands, reduction in the proportion of autistic children in special schools.
2. With introduction of education policy, children with autism transfer at later age from regular to a special school than before the policy.

Exploration of individual child characteristics related to school placement and transitions.  
Exploration of frequency in direction of transitions.

## Methods

- **Participants:** 1523 adult caregivers of autistic children reported on their child (M age = 11.8 yrs) (20.6% girls)



- **Design:** 8-year (2013-2021) study with 8 waves

Data collected via the Netherlands Autism Register (NAR), yearly questionnaires.  
[Nederlands Autisme Register – ENG](#)

### Measures

- School placement (current type of education)
- Transition (education attendance reported from one wave to the next)
- Predictors (gender, family SES, IQ, autism traits, behavioral indicators, co-occurring conditions, age, year (number of the wave), inclusive policy).

- **Analysis:** hierarchical logistic analysis

## Results

### School placement:

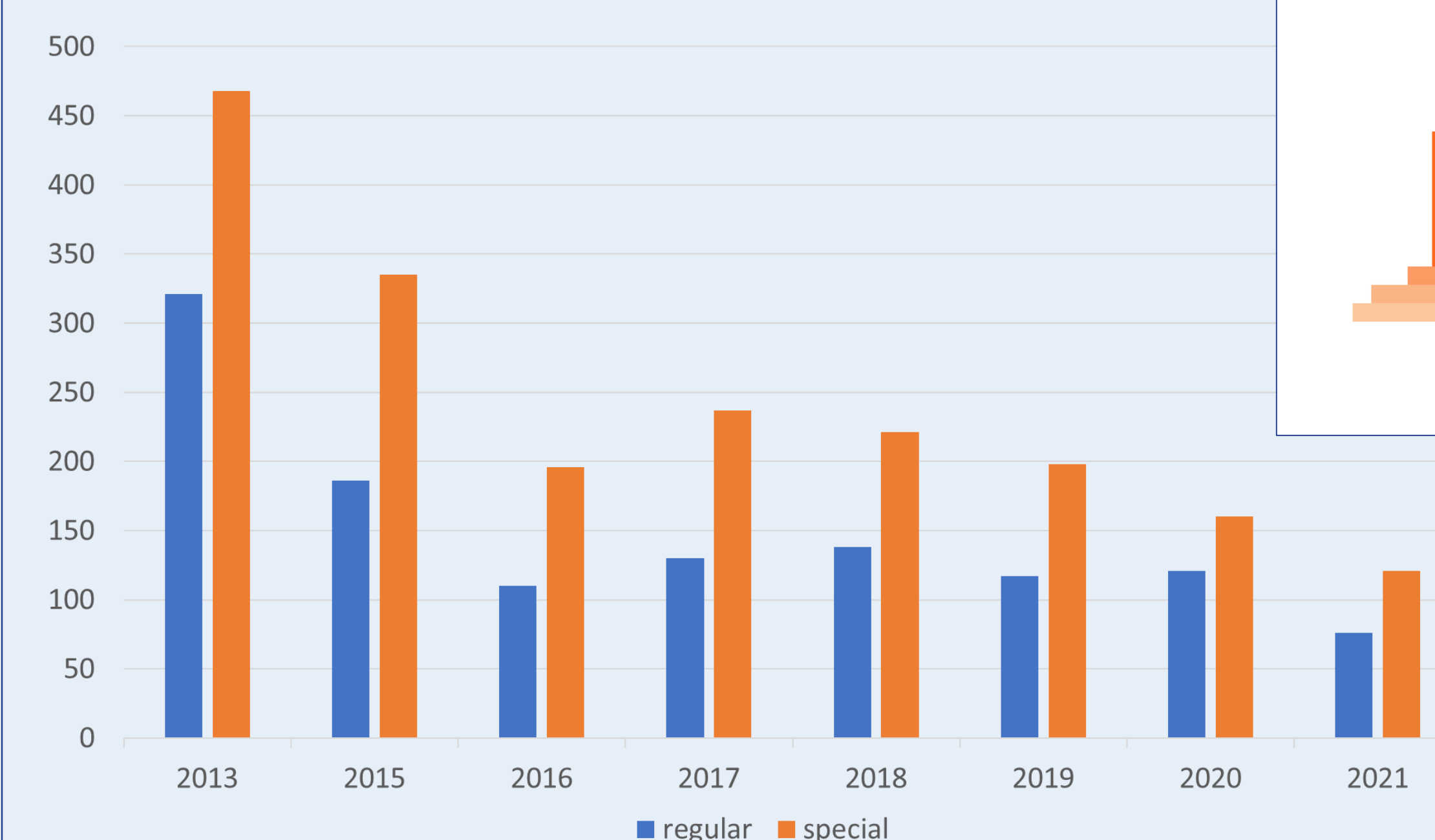


Fig. 1. Number of children in regular and special school in each wave

- Proportion of special school placements slightly increased.
- Boys and autistic children with co-occurring conditions, lower IQ scores, or behavioral / peer relation problems were more likely to be placed in special schools.

**Findings do not support hypotheses 1.**

### School transitions:

**Too little transitions to test hypothesis 2 (see Table 1).**

Table 1. Transitions per year

Transitions	2013-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
No transition	334	275	243	227	231	157	172
Regular to special	36	8	6	14	7	3	6
Special to regular	13	4	6	6	13	3	7
N	383	287	255	247	251	163	185

- Likelihood of special-to-regular transitions remained unchanged, but regular-to-special transitions were more prevalent during the years just after the policy change.

### Transitions regular to special:

- Younger autistic children with lower IQ scores, difficulties in behavior, (especially behavioral or peer relation problems) transferred more often from regular to special schools.

### Transitions special to regular:

- The transition from special to regular settings was more common in older autistic children and those with higher IQ scores.

## Conclusions

- These results indicate that the inclusive policy had little impact on autistic children's school placement, and at most led to a delayed drop in referrals to special schools.
- Behavioral difficulties that are perceived as disruptive by the environment may contribute to special school placement.

## Discussion

- Commanding legislative mandates and clear pathways in the policy for families of autistic children may contribute to more impact of the policy.
- More knowledge about autism and more awareness of the interaction of the autistic child with their school environment might lead to better understanding of the evolving educational support needs of autistic children throughout life.

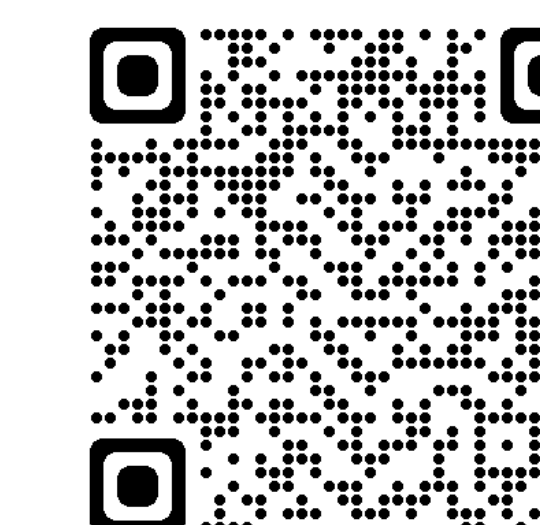
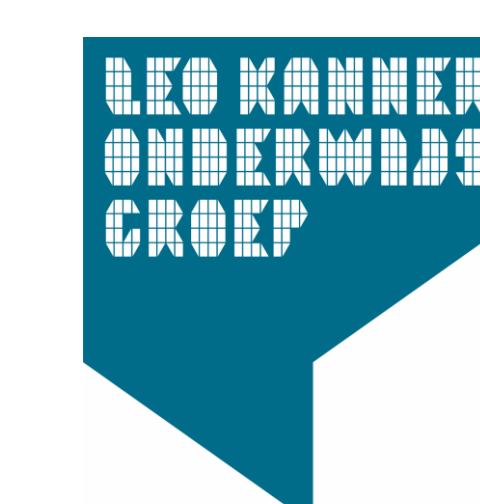
## References



Note: The preference for 'person with autism' (PFL, person first language) and 'autistic person' (IFL, identity first language) differs. Therefore, we have chosen to alternate between the two.

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