

# Experience with the Middle School Inclusion in the Czech Republic

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**Abstract** - The contemporary Czech educational system includes education of pupils with special educational needs within the main educational stream. There is an emphasis on creation of inclusive environment at schools in the place of their residence. The inclusive education offers a possibility to create “a school for everybody”. It is an adaptation of educational environment, in which it is possible to work with variation in gender, ethnicity, culture, language, social environment and various levels of mental predispositions and health handicaps within the educational process. The study is focused on an analysis of inclusive education in the context of changes within the Czech educational system and factors influencing inclusion as well as the system of support for the pupils with special educational needs. The study monitors experience with education of the pupils with special educational needs in the Czech Republic mainly within middle schools. It follows an implementation of legislative changes in connection with amending of the school law into practise. It offers particular examples from the practise in the specific educational system. The author describes experience from work with the pupils with supportive precautions. The author also deals with coordination of work within the school consultancy office as a tool for effective special education.

**Keywords** - *inclusive education, individual attitude, pedagogical support plan, assistant to pedagogue, pupils with special educational needs*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education in the Czech Republic becomes a more and more discussed topic. As a result, there are dozens of more or less successfully fulfilled strategies. A great attention is paid also to documents dealing with education of the pupils with special educational needs. In connection with passing of an amendment to the school law valid from 1st September 2016 it is clear that a new way of supporting these pupils belongs to conceptions with real impact in everyday life not only for the pupils and their parents but also for the teachers and counselling workers.

The most essential change applies mainly to §16 which comes with a new conception of supporting the pupils with special educational needs. It diverts from the categorization of children, pupils and students according to their diagnosis by which it becomes only a tool for setting of targeted support within education of pupils according to their educational needs (J. Horáčková, 2019).

## II. CHILDREN AND PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

By using a term children and pupils with special educational needs in accordance with the school law, we understand education of individuals who need provision of supportive precautions in order to fulfil their educational possibilities or to claim and use their rights on an equal basis with others. These are necessary modifications in education and school services corresponding with health status, cultural environment or other pupil's living conditions. They are provided to these pupils by the school free of charge.

### A. Supportive Precautions

As far as the supportive precautions are concerned, they include modification of organization, content, evaluation, forms and methods of education and school services. Furthermore, it includes provision of education of subjects for special pedagogical care, extension of education length, modification of conditions for acceptance to education and termination of education, using of compensatory aids, education according to individual educational plan, using of assistant to pedagogue and others (they are mentioned in § 16 paragraph 2 of the school law (<http://www.msmt.cz/>)). The supportive precautions are divided into five levels according to organizational, pedagogical and financial demand factors. It is possible to combine various kinds or levels of supportive precautions. Their application adheres to the public notice nr. 27/2016 Sb., concerning education of pupils with special educational needs and gifted pupils (Public notice nr. 27/2016 Coll.)

Supportive precautions of the first level are used by a school or a school consultancy office at school even without recommendation of the school consultancy office (pedagogical-psychological office, special pedagogical centres, education facility), i.e. by means of the plan for pedagogical support. It resides in minimal modification of methods, organization and evaluation of education and it does not have normative financial demand factor. The school provides them to pupils who encounter a need for partial modification to education.

If the supportive precautions of the first level are not sufficient for fulfilment of the pupil's educational needs, the school recommends the pupil to use a consultancy help provided by the school consultancy facility in order to

obtain assessment of his or her special educational needs. The director then assures immediate procurement of materials necessary for creation of a report and recommendation for determination of supportive precautions by the school consultancy facility. In case of a need, the school offers cooperation to the school consultancy facility within processing of the report as well as the recommendation. The school provides supportive precautions from the second up to the fifth level to the pupil immediately after receiving the recommendation from the school consultancy facility and granting of a written informed consent of an adult pupil or a pupil's/child's legal representative.

The school continuously evaluates their provision in cooperation with the school consultancy facility, child/pupil and his or her legal representative. The school consultancy facility evaluates provision of supportive precautions in the set limit, however, within 1 year from issuing the recommendation at longest. If the school finds out that the supportive precautions are insufficient or that they do not bring fulfilment of pupil's educational possibilities and needs, it immediately recommends new utilization of consultancy help provided by the school consultancy facility. The school applies the same process even if it finds out that the provided supportive precautions are not necessary any more. This can be used mainly within basic schools (P. Adamus a kol., 2016.)

Our middle school is entered by pupils who usually already have a recommendation from the school consultancy facility for incorporation of a pupil within the special school system. These pupils can study in special classrooms that are established for the particular type of disablement, for example for handicapped pupils, for pupils with cognitive deficit etc. Furthermore, the pupils with special educational needs can be educated in common classrooms, which contain more pupils in comparison with the special classrooms. The special classrooms contain not only less pupils but they are used only for the particular disablement.

Common classrooms, which include larger number of pupils in comparison with special classrooms, can integrate only a small number of pupils requiring supportive precautions. Some pupils have a recommendation for using an assistant to pedagogue as one of the supportive precautions. These are for example diagnoses with autism spectrum disorders, with handicaps etc. If the pupil is recommended to use an assistant to pedagogue really depends on a type and width of individual handicap.

#### *B. Assistant to Pedagogue*

An assistant to pedagogue provides support to other pedagogical worker within organization and realization of education of a pupil (event. more pupils) with special educational needs in the extent set by the supportive precautions. He or she works according to other pedagogical worker's instructions, supports independence and active participation of a pupil in all activities carried out at school within education including providing of school

services. Among his/her main activities belong assistance to the pupil within school environment adaptation, assistance during classes and preparation for them, assistance during pedagogical and educational activities and during communication with other pupils, pupil's parents and a community from which the pupil comes from. He/she also provides necessary help to the pupil within self-care and movement during classes and during actions organized by the school except for the place where the school carries out education or school services. When providing assistance, it is necessary to put emphasis on independence of the pupil as much as possible.

As our experience implies, the pupils do have recommendations for an assistant to pedagogue, however, these needs exceed financial possibilities of schools. There is not enough money for such number of assistants to pedagogue that would be sufficient for pupils. That is why one assistant is responsible for more pupils, who need an assistant mainly in special classrooms. What is perceived as a negative aspect is that as far as some handicaps are concerned the assistants supply work of a personal assistant whose work is in diction of the parent himself, not the school. The school only gives agreement that the pupil will have his/her personal assistant during classes. Many parents do not want a personal assistant, as they have to pay this service by themselves contrary to the assistant to pedagogue. However, the personal assistant has another mission and is needed for example during the pupil's personal hygiene or in situations when the pupil often falls into strokes or uncontrollable behaviour that prevents a teacher from teaching and that is harmful for the rest of the class. The personal assistant can take the pupil out of the class and the rest of the class can carry on afterwards. Consequently, the personal assistant works with the pupil and if possible, he/she aspires to calm the pupil in order for his status to be improved. Often, it is him/her, who takes the pupil to and from school if the situation requires so.

#### *C. Socially Handicapped Pupils and Their Need for Supportive Precautions*

There are children who are endangered by school unsuccessfulness and whose unfavourable prediction comes true during the school attendance. They can be more often found in families with low-educated parents living on the level of poverty. The families are socially weak and offer insufficient incentive environment. It is a category of socially handicapped children. Application of individual attitude is one of the fundamental methods of work with these pupils (J. Kendl ková 2016). Many teachers accept the fact that they are supposed to teach children, who are endangered by real educational failure as well as pedagogical problems, the necessary subject. It applies to cases, where there is not a good cooperation with parents, who do not provide proper support due to a way of life their live as well. This group includes parents who are unemployed, on the border of homelessness, abuse alcohol or other narcotic substances. They have low education and they live in dormitories or at their friends' apartment. They are socially weak and have material problems. They are in

conflict with law... There is a low probability that such a family could help itself in all aspects. If the parents find a stable employment, it is easier to solve for example living. A need of quality education for these children usually exceeds their capacity and therefore they leave their full development on a child and thus on a school as well. The school has much larger meaning for these children. It can be said that there is a greater responsibility than with children whose pedagogical-educational process is secured mainly by parents.

Even though intervention with the pupil himself is always purposeful, strengthening of parent competences seems to be pivotal. It is the only way, how to lengthen an effect of cooperation with the child-pupil himself. Training of parent competences is effective from the earliest child age. However, there is not much done on the level of the state in this area. Nevertheless, it is obvious that there are some parents, who demonstrably do not care about their children and do not respect their needs at all etc. We often encounter a fact that parents shift their parental competences on the state and even accuse the institutions from “dysfunctionality” in their families.

The democratic state should protect interests of its members and of the weakest ones in particular. The state helps parents with preserving health condition, e.g. compulsory vaccination, preventive inspection etc. It is not so in the area of a protection of concrete needs fulfilment. It is necessary to diagnose children needs in particular families from the point of view of at least three resorts, i.e. education, health and social affairs. It is necessary that these three resorts closely cooperate in order to fulfil effective help for children. The common practise shows that individual services provided to these children are not well coordinated which leads to decrease of effectivity in their functioning. Such interventions should be applied that do not take responsibility and competences from parents and that preserve maximum child’s feeling of being normal.

A school-family cooperation should secure support to a pupil as well as a family in order to reach required change. In connection with that, there are used such procedures which form a strictly determined frame through defining and applying of control mechanisms, disciplinary and other precautions and referring to generally defined duties for parents and children. On the other hand, the family should be provided with a certain space for applying a certain change with regard to a need to gain necessary competences. The family should be accompanied and positively motivated forward this change. Risk behaviour appears among some pupils in this regard. An application of an individual educational plan seems to be effective in coping with development of risk behaviour or its prevention.

In many cases of risk behaviour, the parent realizes this risk behaviour but does not have sufficient parental abilities for redemption. Such pressure from the school can cause frustration and it can lead to avoidance in communication with the school. Individual educational plan offers a space for mutual dialogue and a possibility to set a suitable

support for the pupil/parent in order to gain necessary abilities leading to elimination of risk behaviour.

#### *D. The Individual Pedagogical Plan*

Pedagogical problems at schools are becoming more and more serious. There is more aggressiveness and pupils’ vulgar expressions towards other pupils as well as to pedagogues. Cases of smoking, alcohol drinking, problems with drugs, sexual harassment and other offences against the school order are not unique. There are symptoms of chicane among pupils but we encounter also chicane towards teachers.

It is convenient to use the individual plan when a certain seriousness of pupil’s risk behaviour is reached and when it causes significant distortion of pupil’s educational process, eventually other pupils’ educational process. A school pedagogical worker or a member of school the consultancy office – for example a special pedagogue, a school psychologist and a careers master – can deliver an impulse for creation of the plan. The impulse can also come from the pupil’s parent or other interested part outside the school such as workers from the social care resort or the educational care centre, workers from pedagogical-psychological centres, special-pedagogical centres etc. The individual pedagogical plan is an agreement with parents or legal representatives whose children and pupils present repeated educational problems and offences against the school order or the class rules that have negative impact on the educational process of themselves or of the whole class (V. Lechta, 2016).

It is good to use the plan in situations where common educational precautions fail. Among common educational precautions belong an educational interview, a monition from a class master, a rebuke from a class master or a headmaster, eventually a conditional exclusion. According to a situation, it is possible to use the individual pedagogical plan as a preventive precaution against restriction. In this regard, we perceive it rather as a positive than restrictive attitude. Its aim is to induce a desirable change mainly with pupils to whom disciplinary precautions had to be applied in the past. As an example, we can use a pupil coming from the basic school to the high school, and whose school personal history from the basic school contains demonstrable behaviour failures and risk conduct. We can also presume that the application of the disciplinary precautions would not be effective.

The individual pedagogical plan contains real tasks and obligations for the school, parents as well as a pupil himself. We do not need a recommendation from the school consultancy office as with an individual educational plan. It is a form of a cooperation among the school represented for example by the pupil’s class master, a parent and a pupil, eventually another interested part. Its aim is elimination of pupil’s risk behaviour and consequent prevention of its effects. During its solution, the school perceives the pupil’s parent as a partner with whom it works towards the same goal – elimination of risk behaviour. Focused and unified pressure of both important institutions (schools and families)

on the pupil increases probability of success. Considering individual possibilities of a pupil, it is possible to use the individual educational plan even for pupils with a lower level of cognitive abilities. The individual educational plan should not be a tool for cases which exceed competences of the school such as for example the pupil's drug addiction, domestic violence etc. It is possible to use this tool at high schools as well as at basic schools and preschool facilities.

#### *E. An Individual Educational Plan for a Pupil with Special Educational Needs*

Another tool for work with pupils with supportive precautions is an individual educational plan. The plan is processed by the school based on a recommendation from the consultancy facility and a request given by an adult pupil or a pupil's legal representative. The content of the individual educational plan is composed of data about a structure of types and levels of supportive precautions provided in combination with this plan, pupil's identification data and data about pedagogical workers involved within his/her education. Furthermore, it contains mainly information about time and content scheme of education, modifications of methods and forms of education and pupil's evaluation. There is also a name of a pedagogical worker from the school consultancy facility with whom the school cooperates within securing pupil's special educational needs (Adamus, Zezulková Kaleja, Franiok, 2016).

Special pedagogical and pedagogical intervention is included in the individual educational plan based on a recommendation of the school consultancy facility. The intervention is determined in a detail depending on a level of support. The fifth level is the highest one and it contains a great amount of support for a pupil so that he/she is able to be educated in a common school. It for example includes securing of education aids, time length for work, material provision from the school, using an assistant to pedagogue, pedagogues' individual attitude and often many other types of support. Handicapped pupils and pupils with cognitive insufficiency are very often included within this level. The level also includes pupils with combined disorders. These can be for example deficiencies in cognitive abilities and handicaps together with behaviour disorders, neurological, psychiatric or psychical problems, with sensory deprivation and many others.

The individual education plan can be supplemented and modified according to the pupil's needs throughout the whole school year. The school introduces the individual educational plan to all pupil's teachers as well as to the pupil (or his/her legal representative) who confirms it by signing the written informed consent. Together with the school, the school consultancy facility observes and at least once a year evaluates fulfilment of the individual educational plan and at the same time provides the pupil, pupil's legal representative and the school with consultancy support. In case there is a modification to education, the individual educational plan can be terminated and the pupil is educated without modification of conditions.

At our high school, the individual educational plan is essential during the whole studies as pupil's handicap or disorder is so significant that the pupil needs this tool in pedagogical-educational process throughout the whole studies. On contrary, a plan of pedagogical support is set for a shorter time-period than the individual educational plan within the pedagogical-educational process and it is possible to cancel it after the goals of support are fulfilled.

#### *F. A Plan of Pedagogical Support*

The school elaborates the plan of pedagogical support before initiation of providing supportive precautions of the first level. At our high school, we use it for pupils, who currently find themselves in social or health difficulties or they have difficulties in coping with passing from a basic to a high school and show maladaptive symptoms. They have difficulties in conforming to a new society, they do not want to go to school, they fail in new subjects, which they did not have at the basic school. They often have bad learning styles and habits. Nevertheless, the pupil does not have to fail in all subjects. One or two are enough. The plan of pedagogical support is set in those cases when there is no obvious need for an examination in the school consultancy facility but according to a recommendation from school specialists (a school psychologist, a school special pedagogue) it is necessary to modify some demands for the pupil. The plan includes mainly a description of difficulties and pupil's special educational needs, supportive precautions of the first level, determination of goals of support and ways of evaluation of plan fulfilment. The school evaluates it continuously and updates it in accordance with development of pupil's special educational needs. The notice 27/2016 Coll. specifies the plan of pedagogical support in more detail. The school evaluates if the supportive precautions lead to fulfilment of set goals three months at latest after initiation of providing of the supportive precautions based on the plan of pedagogical support. If it is not so, the school recommends using consultancy help in the school consultancy facilities. The school introduces the plan of pedagogical support to a pupil, a pupil's legal representative, all pupil's teachers and further pedagogical workers involved in implementation of the plan. The plan includes signature of persons who acquainted with the plan. Experience from our high school implies that if we set the plan for the pupil, three months period and in some cases one year at maximum are enough for the pupil to fulfil the goals. The pupil can then continue in common studies without any supportive precautions.

### **III. A COOPERATION WITHIN THE SCHOOL CONSULTANCY FACILITY AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

At our school where I work as a school psychologist, there is good experience within a teamwork of the school consultancy facility. It includes a school psychologist, two special pedagogues, a prevention methodist and a careers master. The school incorporates 873 pupils altogether, 365 of which are pupils with special educational needs. The pupils are educated in special as well as in common classes.

There is an advantage that if the pupil fails in studying a branch with a school-leaving exam, he/she can transfer to an apprenticeship, eventually even to a special class of school-leaving exam or an apprentice branch within the same school. A wide-spectrum offer of branches within this high school offers an advantage that the pupil does not have to get used to new environment and new teachers during the transfer. Pupil's adaptation is thus simplified and stress load is decreased.

Work carried out by specialists from the school consultancy facility has a positive impact on a low level of unfinished education at the high school. The particular specialist works on his/her task or situation. In case of a need, he/she invites a colleague. The careers master for example invites the school psychologist to participate within a pedagogical interview. Another situation is, when the whole team solves a certain case, often with a presence of the school management. Such cooperation helps in solution of more complicated cases that are connected for example with a legal area. Based on a psychological consultation there can be a need to set supportive precautions for a pupil together with their incorporation within the individual educational plan – for example no lifting of heavy weight valid for a pupil with scoliosis at the practice, a recommendation for working pace, examination only in a written form within the subject etc. The cooperation of all involved members is very important in realization of support goals. The team members take part in seminars and conferences on a regional, republic or international level where they share their experience with other specialists. Thus, their scientific competences are enlarged.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The Czech Republic can be considered a matured country with a long tradition of public educational system. The international comparison shows that there is always something to improve including education of pupils with special educational needs. It is more than desirable that we are able to bring a part of available cognition of special pedagogical and psychological sciences to the environment of common schools.

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