

The Issue of Inclusion in Secondary Schools from the Czech School Principals' Point of View

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Abstract: Since the introduction of new legislation in 2016, questions of inclusive policy have been constantly discussed not only in schools, but also among professionals, parents, and politicians. This article is part of a larger research survey mapping the state of inclusive education at all Czech Republic secondary schools. It presents the results for two regions in order to show what attitudes and views are held by principals on the implementation of inclusion in the education system. The research was carried out as a qualitative study and semi-structured interview were employed as the research method. The obtained data were analysed using the grounded theory method. The results show that inclusion is not generally accepted by school principals. There are schools that are very pro-inclusive, but there are also schools that fundamentally reject inclusion. Initial assumptions that inclusion has been best received by general secondary schools were not confirmed. On the contrary, it turns out that the type of school does not matter as much as the attitudes of the seniors' pedagogical staff towards inclusion. Their behaviour and attitudes significantly influence the whole school climate, which is passed on to all actors as well as how the school functions overall in working with pupils with special needs.

Keywords: secondary school, school principals, special education, inclusion, children with special needs.

Introduction

Inclusive education has become a practice that has been adopted by many schools across the globe and most commonly in developed countries. While special education is an integrated system of academic and social supports designed, implemented, and monitored to ensure that students with disabilities are appropriately educated (National Staff Development Council, 2001), the idea of inclusive education contains more forms of diversity relevant to school education. The first framework for inclusive education was developed in 1994 in Salamanca in Spain (UNESCO, 1994). The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organisational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use, and partnerships with their communities.

There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school (The definition of inclusive education, 2021). There are a variety of views on inclusive education and on the effectiveness of inclusion, etc. (e.g., Szumski, Smogorzewska & Karwowski, 2017). Mitchell (2015) presented a model of inclusive education (IE) that has been generally accepted. His formula states: $IE = V + P + 5As + S + R + L$, where V = Vision P = Placement A = Adapted Curriculum A = Adapted Assessment A = Adapted Teaching A = Acceptance A = Access S = Support R = Resources L = Leadership. However, we understand it is not easy to characterise inclusive education in one single definition. As Lakkala & Ósaksrðóttir (2021) say, there are several elements of inclusive education that make it difficult to characterise. Perhaps the most important element of inclusive education is the fact that it involves the school system as a whole, a system where all parts affect each other through the relations between them.

This fact also implies the need to take into account not only the handicaps and limitations of the disadvantaged, but also otherness in the form of specific talents or a significantly faster pace of education. An inclusive school should create optimal conditions for the development of all children and thus confront them with an experience that does not naturally belong to the horizon of their normal life. The inclusive school thus becomes a near-optimal model of the democratic school, about which John Dewey has already written (Kohout-Diaz & Strouhal, 2022; Dewey, 2016), and

fulfils Comenius' classic requirement to teach all people everything (Comenius, 1991). It is in this sense that we understand the concept and essence of inclusive education.

It is clear that the idea of an inclusive school and inclusive education is very difficult to implement. A great burden and responsibility lie on the shoulders of school leaders, especially principals. Logically, these staff members focus primarily on pupils who show certain problems, the solution to which may be difficult in the newly set conditions of inclusive education. This also has a long history in the Czech environment, as special educational needs have always been associated with clinical-diagnostic procedures in Czechia, the model for which was adopted from medicine (Kohout-Diaz, 2018, p. 24). This led to an overly remedial and mainly normative approach to differences in children's educational needs and later to a predominantly compensatory understanding of inclusion.

Administrative leadership is a powerful predictor of positive teachers as well as the attitudes of school principals, as they implement inclusive education practices for students with disabilities, and this has a strong effect on virtually all critical aspects of teachers' working conditions (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001, p. 557). Gous, Eloff & Moen (2014) pointed out, inclusion to most principals is about acting, humanity, and emotion. The principals also described inclusion as personal and pragmatic. Different findings showed that, contrary to research on teachers and their views on inclusion, principals are a more influential factor for perceptions on inclusion than are child or educational environmental factors (Chandler, 2015).

McKelvey (2008 in Conaway, 2018) conducted a study to examine secondary principals' perceptions of the inclusion of students with autism and found that principals who had background training through graduate training courses on inclusion and autism practices demonstrated a greater likelihood of including students with autism within the general education classroom. They also tended to have a more positive view of inclusion in general. The school principal plays a critical role in shaping an educational climate that provides opportunities for interaction between nondisabled and disabled students (Dyal, et al., 1996).

Praisner (2003) found that school principals have different experiences and perceptions of appropriate educational placements depending upon a student's disability. Principals often base their placement decisions on their beliefs and experiences. Therefore, students with certain disabilities

may not be granted an equal opportunity to be included in regular education classes (Workman, 2016).

The Situation in the Czech Republic

The school system in the Czech Republic is currently responding to the necessary changes relating to inclusive approaches. It is currently responding the educational needs of children and pupils with disabilities, redefining support measures to optimise education, and promoting inclusion through new legislative measures (Bočková & Vítková, 2016).

In this area, 2016 was a turning point for the Czech Republic. The Education Act 561/2004 Coll. and the original Decree 73/2005 Coll. on the education of children, pupils, and students with special educational needs and children, pupils and students with extraordinary talent were replaced by Decree 27/2016 Coll. on the education of pupils with special educational needs and gifted pupils, effective from 1 September 2016.

The amendment to the Education Act, especially § 16, introduces a new concept to support pupils with special educational needs. It refrains from categorising pupils according to their diagnosis, which therefore becomes only a means of setting targeted support in educating pupils according to their educational needs. A fundamental innovation is the establishment of five levels of support measures that respond to a child's individual needs and possibilities.

Schools and their staff should always be primarily responsible for independent work with pupils with SEN, which requires low levels of teaching and material demands. Schools can develop pedagogical support plans, which include a description of a pupil's difficulties and special educational needs, support measures at the first level, the setting of support objectives, and how the plan will be fulfilled. The new law stipulates that schools may apply support measures at the first level without a recommendation from a school counselling facility. These measures may include modifying methods, organising teaching, evaluation, and providing methodological support. This reflects the subsidiarity principle that the school itself should work with the pupil first. Only if this proves insufficient should assistance be provided by specialised facilities, such as a school counselling facility.

A statutory representative or school may request assistance from a school counselling facility straight away, without the school providing

prior independent care. An application and a recommendation by a school counselling facility are still required for placement in a special class or school. It is vital that school counselling facilities determine and prioritise the possibility of educating pupils in mainstream classes with the use of support measures. (Systems of support and specialist provision, 2020).

The *first level* of support measures is always proposed and provided by the school. In this case, the increased individualisation of the procedures employed with a pupil may be sufficient. Alternatively, more teachers can agree on adjustments in pupil education procedures. After that it's appropriate to create a plan of pedagogical support. The plan should briefly describe where the pupil has problems, what will change in the workflow, and how this will be reflected in work methods, in how the pupil's education is organised, and in the pupil's assessment. If, after three months, the changes made to the work with the pupil do not lead to the expected changes, and if the pupil's difficulties persist or worsen, then the school will send the pupil's legal guardian or the adult pupil to a school guidance facility. In connection with the above, the responsibility for the implementation of the first level of support is exclusively within the competence of the school.

The *second to fifth* levels of support provision propose and methodically accompany the school counselling facility in its implementation. After examining and evaluating all connections, the school counselling facility issues recommendations to the school on educating pupils with special educational needs, and these recommendations are based on the results of an examination of the pupil and recommended support measures. These recommendations are linked to other demands such as financial support, material support, or the provision of a teaching assistant. Promoting pedagogical work while strengthening pupil education involves interventions that often lead to re-education in the subject of special pedagogical care or pedagogical interventions, which include strengthening teaching skills in subjects where there more support should be provided to a pupil during the teaching process and in the pupils' own work, including homework.

The levels can be briefly characterised as follows (Michalík, Baslerová, & Felcmanová et al. 2015):

- 2nd level:

These measures are implemented based on recommendations from the school guidance facility. A pupil spends most of their class time with the rest of their class. The methods and forms used to teach a pupil

also follow from an individualised educational plan. If necessary, the conditions for completing the requirements for the state graduation can be adjusted.

- 3rd level

The nature of a pupil's difficulties in education at this level of support requires partial adjustments in the organisation and course of the pupil's education that more seriously affect the organisation of work with the class in which the pupil is educated. Professional special-pedagogical and psychological intervention is necessary. Pupils are usually educated using an individualised education plan. In the case of a pupil included in the system of special education, pupils are educated according to the adjusted FEP. In addition to the usual teaching materials, special textbooks, special methods of teaching, and compensatory and rehabilitation aids are also used. Where justified, the use of a teaching assistant is indicated. For pupils and students of it is also possible to extend the length of enrolment on secondary and higher vocational education, but no more than for one year.

- 4th level

The nature of a pupil's difficulties in education at this level requires substantial adjustments in the organisation and course of education, and that methods and procedures be determined for addressing these difficulties. During the education process, it is necessary to use special textbooks, more expensive special didactic compensatory and rehabilitation aids, and in most cases a more extensive adjustment of the working environment in the classroom. For some students, it may be necessary to use alternative forms of communication to support communication in the classroom. There is usually a need for another teacher or another person to be involved in working with the student.

- 5th level

The nature of the pupil's educational difficulties at this level requires the highest degree of adaptation of the organisation, content, forms, and methods of education to address the pupil's educational needs and to respect the pupil's abilities and limitations in the assessment of educational results. The content of the curriculum is always modified or even significantly reduced in relation to the pupil's capabilities. During the education process, it is necessary to use special textbooks and other alternative teaching materials and more expensive special didactic compensatory and rehabilitation aids, and

it is always necessary to modify the working environment in the classroom. If necessary (due to a pupil's health condition and at the recommendation of a doctor), it is possible for individual teaching to be provided by school teachers in the home environment.

As support measures represent legal financial demands, an environment is being created in which both the pupil and the teacher are supported by measures aimed at improving educational conditions. This creates a level playing field for educating pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, who have been integrated into these schools for many years, where, however, it had not been possible to provide adequate funding for support measures. However, it should be acknowledged that not all the planned steps have been fully implemented. For this reason, repeated amendments have been made to Decree 27/2016 Coll., and the last one came into effect on 1 January 2020.

Since introducing the amendment to the education system, there has been an active debate between the supporters and opponents of joint learning. The aim of this article is to present the views of a significant group of stakeholders, i.e., senior teachers at secondary schools.

Methods

This article is the partial output of an extensive project devoted to mapping the state of inclusion in Czech Republic secondary schools and colleges. All the secondary schools and colleges in Czechia were mapped throughout the project. For the purposes of this article, data from two regions – Královéhradecký and Liberecký – are processed. However, it's clear from the analyses already performed that similar results are found in all regions, so it's possible to generalise the conclusions from partial surveys to some extent and to draw conclusions for the whole of the Czech Republic.

Methodologically, this is a qualitative study. The basic principle is to understand the issue of inclusion at secondary schools and the possibilities and ways of implementing inclusivity in pedagogical practice.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

The primary objective of this research is to find out what the opinions of school principals are on the implementation of an inclusive education policy in secondary schools and how this policy is implemented in their schools.

In order to achieve this aim, we formulated the following few research questions:

1. How has your school changed since the introduction of the new legislation?
2. What benefit or negative do school principals see in implementing joint education?
3. How do school principals work with pupils with special needs in your school?

Research Sample

The selection of schools is based on information from the Register of Schools available at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic. Therefore, it is a purposive sampling, its aim is to cover 100% of schools in the regions.

Table 1: Numbers of students with special needs in schools.

Number of students in total	32 239	In total		With diagnosis		Without diagnosis	
		Abs.	%	Abs.	%	Abs.	%
Students	Foreigners	390	1.2	248	63,6	142	36.4
	Culturally and socially disadvantaged	76	0.2	69	90,1	7	9.9
	Gifted and talented	77	0.2	10	12,9	67	87.1
	With SLD (specific learning disability)	1903	5.9	1763	92,6	140	7.4
	With behavioural disorders	80	0.2	67	83,6	13	16.4
	With learning and behavioural disorders	4	0.01	4	100	0	0
	With ASD (autism spectrum disorder)	54	0.2	46	85,2	8	14.8
	With sensory impairment	133	0.4	119	89,5	14	1.5
	With mild mental disorder	278	0.9	278	100	0	0
	With physical disabilities	97	0.3	93	85,9	4	14.1
	With combined defects	41	0.1	41	100	0	0
	Others (physical problems, diabetes, anorexia, etc.)	53	0.2	36	67,9	17	32.1

Between 2016 and 2021, 116 secondary and tertiary professional schools were contacted, 19 of which refused to participate in the research – the resulting research sample is 97 schools, which equals 83.6% of all schools.

This number also corresponds to the number of school heads[principals] or their representatives who participated in the research.

In terms of types of schools, this sample contains a cross-section of the entire spectrum of secondary education. It includes general schools such as grammar schools, secondary specialised schools such as industrial, medical, or business academies, and vocational schools preparing students for a profession without a school-leaving examination.

A total of just over 32,000 pupils' study at the mapped schools, covering a wide range of special educational needs (see Table 1).

The table shows that pupils diagnosed with special needs account for almost 10% of all students. What's interesting, however, is that a relatively large percentage (12.9%) of pupils are found in these schools who have not undergone diagnostics at school counselling facilities, but their school is convinced that they should receive certain support measures.

Research Method

A semi-structured interview was chosen as the research method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). First, a pilot verification was carried out as part of the preparation of the research instrument when the research set consisted of five schools. Based on this pre-research, the research instrument was partially modified, and the modified version was used in the main data collection.

Four interviews were conducted at each school. They were recorded on a Dictaphone and then transcribed using standard methodological procedures.

The interview was structured to focus on five key areas:

1. The concept of inclusion.
2. Experience working with pupils with special needs.
3. Current status with regard to providing advisory services.
4. Inclusion and its expected development in connection with legislative changes.
5. Obstacles and limits of inclusion.

The average length of an interview was 30–35 minutes, while the shortest interview lasted 11 minutes and the longest 73 minutes. The interviewees

were selected by the school and the interviews had to be conducted face-to-face. For the purposes of this article, only interviews conducted with senior pedagogical workers at a school are analysed.

Data Processing

As already mentioned, the interviews were electronically recorded and were then literally transcribed. Given the type of data and the objectives of the research, the Corbin & Strauss grounded theory method was chosen for the analysis. (1990). Grounded theory represents a set of systematic inductive procedures for conducting qualitative research aimed at generating theory. According to Strauss & Corbin (1990), the theory is inductively derived from an investigation of the phenomenon it is focused on. This means that it is detected, created and provisionally verified by systematically collecting data on the phenomenon under investigation and analysing the data.

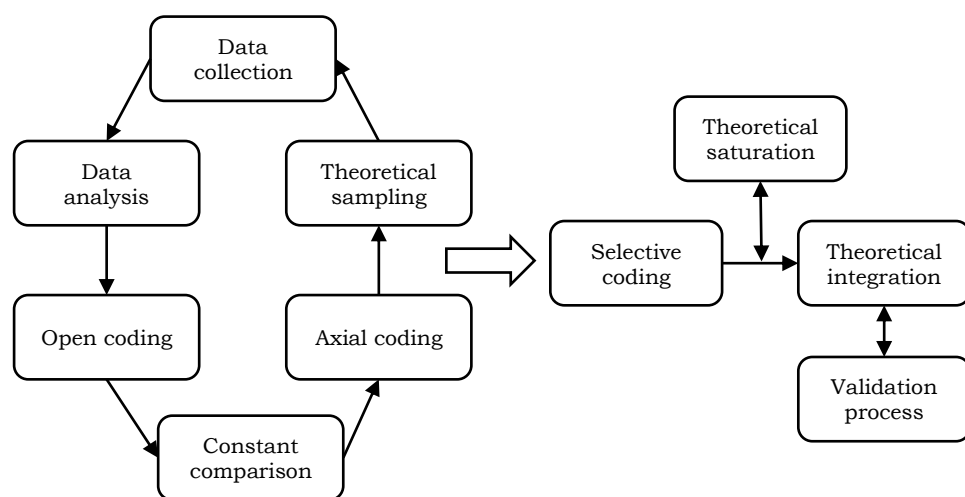


Figure 1: Steps of grounded theory (Roman, Osinski & Erdmann, 2017).

We used the standard methodological procedure for this approach (see Figure 1). The data we obtained were first coded using a combination of open coding – axial coding – and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Open coding means creating terms that indicate units of text. The created terms were further categorised. Axial coding created links between categories and subcategories. The last phase was selective coding, which involved selecting

key categories that form the basis on which the basic analytical story is organised.

Ethical Aspect

The ethical aspects of the research were properly discussed within the research team. All schools are identified by codes to prevent their actual identification. Similarly, codes are assigned to individual respondents. Prior to the interview, all respondents signed an informed consent form expressing their willingness to take part in the research. All respondents – institutions as well as individuals – had the opportunity to refuse to take part in an interview without further consequences.

In any reference to the interview transcripts the names that could be identified in a wider context are anonymised. Likewise, all investigation findings are strictly anonymised with respect to respondents' rights and in accordance with personal data protection laws.

Research Limitations

The research limitations are based on the very principle of qualitative research, which is based on subjective testimonies. However, due to the high percentage of participating schools, this limitation is relatively well eliminated as the sample of participating schools de facto copy the basic research file.

The second limitation is the subjectivity of the statements from representatives of each school – especially with regard to the respondent's loyalty to the institution and also to personal interest in increasing the good school's reputation especially when we consider that the respondents are loyal to their institution and have a personal interest in upholding the school's good reputation. A certain role is also played by executives' inability to distinguish between the everyday educational practice and the intention of where to direct the school in the discussed area.

The limitation associated with the researchers' subjectivity is eliminated by long-term experience in conducting similar surveys and also by the fact that they're not employees of any of the surveyed schools and do not have any other personal ties to these schools.

Results

The obtained results are an interesting probe into the thinking of leading pedagogues. They comprise many different opinions and attitudes, which are reflected in the functioning of a school as a whole. However, despite some negative statements, a positive finding is that in most cases the interests of the children come first.

Although this study was primarily qualitative, we also present some quantitative data (see Table 2). Those who perceive inclusion *“positively”* argue that everyone has the right to education together with others, and that it is not good to be socially excluded. Related to this is the second fundamental argument that inclusion has a significant social and humanistic impact that benefits society as a whole. At the same time, they believe that a high level of education can be achieved even within joint education, and that the social aspect will not be applied to the task of the level of education.

Table 2: Attitudes towards inclusion.

	Frequency	%
Positive	24	24.7
Positive-cautious	65	67.0
Negative	8	9.3

Most respondents perceive inclusion *“positively but cautiously,”* which means that they basically have no problem with inclusion. They understand this idea and to some extent also support it. A fundamental condition is that there be consistent respect for the possibilities and needs of all pupils, which includes the other students' right to quality education. In addition, some respondents question whether a mainstream school is able to educate pupils with all diagnoses as well as a specialised school. These respondents are concerned that they will not be able to provide pupils with a sufficient quality of education if at the same time they have to deal with, for example, the external manifestations of included pupils. The inclusion of pupils with mental disabilities and behavioural disorders in mainstream education is a common argument against inclusion and both school principals and teachers are concerned most about this situation. The external manifestations of these pupils often disrupt the education of the other students. Physical or sensory disabilities are not perceived as negatively.

One-tenth of respondents perceive inclusion *“negatively.”* They perceive it as a phenomenon that benefits neither students with special needs nor the other students in the class. These respondents are critical of the change

in the education system and especially of how well-functioning special schools are being used. Arguing against the possibility of implementing this / arguing why this cannot be implemented in their school, they use arguments such as work safety or not being able to accommodate the specific needs corresponding to a pupil's physical and mental condition. In this context, more than anywhere else, it is possible to see the importance of the attitude of the school's management and its willingness to find ways to integrate pupils with special needs into the educational process.

Understanding Inclusion and its Concept

The first and probably the most important topic was the question of how leading pedagogical workers understand the concept of inclusion. Understanding the meaning of inclusion corresponds with how the term is interpreted within the framework of the applicable legislation. Almost all the respondents agreed that every pupil should be granted the right to a quality education appropriate to their abilities. Simply, joint learning is interpreted as educating pupils with special needs together with other pupils. Nonetheless, the respondents' understanding of inclusiveness in education decreased slightly as the questions became more in-depth. This is understandable, as most respondents do not have special-pedagogical education. On the other hand, there were some surprising answers that we would not have expected from school principals:

"No need to talk about that, I don't care. I have a good education counsellor; she understands this and solves these things for me." (Jiří)

With regard to orientation in respondents' understanding of the issue of inclusive education, we had another interesting finding. Many of the respondents, when defining the range of pupils with special needs, forgot about gifted pupils. This occurs especially in secondary vocational schools. In the case of general education schools, such as grammar schools, pupils with special needs are only sporadically omitted when defining the circle of pupils with special needs. In this context, it should be remembered that in the Czech Republic the issue of education regarding gifted pupils has been neglected for a long time.

Less than a tenth of respondents clearly support inclusive tendencies practices. Their vision is primarily based on the fact that everyone has the right to education together with others. The main benefit is the possibility of the social inclusion of pupils with special needs on the one hand, and the ability to accept otherwise already intact pupils on the other hand. Linked

to this is the second fundamental argument that inclusion has a significant social and humanistic impact that is beneficial to society as a whole. Therefore, the social dimension of inclusive education which accepts knowledge and skills but considers the ability of interpersonal coexistence to be essential for the well-being of society.

"We live in one society, society is diverse, so are the students. Allowing pupils with disabilities to study is the least we can do for them. And when you want, it almost always works, after all." (Radka)

Most respondents, around 80%, basically have no problem with inclusion. They understand this idea and, to some extent, support it. However, the fundamental condition is there be a consistent respect for the possibilities and needs of all pupils, including the right to quality education for the intact population.

"I don't agree with the total inclusion of the type where perhaps the mentally disabled will be in the normal educational stream. I see the justification of those former special schools. And it seemed to me that children weren't doing bad there. We need to assess more individually what's best for these children. For both disabled and non-disabled individuals." (Jana)

There's often the problem that the right of pupils with special needs is disproportionately highlighted, but the right to quality education for other pupils is forgotten. Some respondents have doubts that ordinary schools are able to educate pupils with all diagnoses as well as specialised schools. Respondents fear that they won't be able to provide pupils with an education of sufficient quality when they have to deal with, for example, the external manifestations of pupils with special needs who disrupt the classroom or are not focusing on their learning materials. They fear that in these cases the quality of teaching will decrease and that the other pupils won't be able to make the most of their potential, and therefore the school will de facto fail to fulfil its function of providing an adequate education to all. In this group it's also possible to find a kind of hidden resistance, where respondents are open to joint education, but because it cannot be implemented in their school, they use arguments in the form of work safety or not being able to meet the specific needs corresponding to a pupil's physical and mental condition. In this context, more than elsewhere, it shows how important the attitude of school management is to be willing to seek ways of integrating pupils with special needs into the educational process it is possible to see the importance of the attitude of the school's management and its

willingness to find ways to integrate pupils with special needs into the educational process].

Less than a tenth of respondents consider inclusion in its current form as something negative that has a detrimental impact on the quality of education of both pupils with special needs and the other pupils. They criticise the more limited use of the system of special schools, which have a greater possibility, compared with regular schools, to provide pupils with a more individual approach and enable them to fully develop their potential, experience a sense of success, achieve their best, etc., which mainstream schools can only manage to do to a limited degree:

“My opinion is very negative, I’ll tell you why. Inclusion in itself is a great idea, no doubt. As I’ve been in education for a long time, the first thing that should be done is that someone has to discuss it, then experts have to do it. And then a slow incursion has to be done, basically it can’t be done from day to day. And the problem with inclusive education is that we’re starting to generalise those children. This means that those children who are better reach the level of children who are worse off because the teacher doesn’t have time to focus on them individually as well as the children who are at a lower level. So, the teacher devotes more time to them at the expense of the others.” (Karel)

It’s worth noting that if there are negative reactions to inclusion, they usually relate to pupils’ mental disabilities. Physical or sensory impairment is not perceived nearly as negatively, even though there are objections that, for example, a pupil in a wheelchair cannot perform a certain activity or a hearing-impaired pupil cannot do something else. In general, tolerance for sensory and physical defects is greater than it is for mental disability. Similarly, there is greater tolerance towards pupils with a different mother tongue:

“Inclusion as such, of course, no one can disagree with it when it comes to certain types of disabilities and the degree of those disabilities. So, if a school, any school has created spatial, staffing conditions, then why can’t a child with physical disabilities go there? Why can’t a spastic child go there, why can’t a child with a slight visual impairment or an acceptable visual impairment go there? There’s no problem with that. Same with speech disorders, learning disorders, behavioural problems. All this can be compensated, all this is possible under certain conditions. But with mentally disabled children? It doesn’t work well enough.” (Lucie)

Implementing Inclusion at School

The interviews at the schools that participated in the survey confirm that each school has at least some experience of inclusion. The level of experience varies according to the type of school and the fields of study offered, but at none of the schools was this merely a rare experience. At some schools, the cognitive prerequisite for mastering the programme of study an insurmountable obstacle, at other schools it is essential to maintain safety at work in terms of manual activities within the curriculum.

The education of pupils with specific learning difficulties seems to be problem-free, regardless of the types of schools and study fields. It can be said that all schools accept the education of pupils with special educational needs as a matter of course and they do not consider de facto educating these pupils even to be something new ushered in by joint education.

“Well in the past, they didn’t deal with it, those teachers who were teaching in the socialist period, so if someone was dyslexic or dysgraphic, or had dysorthography, they were simply just lazy, can’t spell, they got clobbered and had to try harder and that was that. Maybe it’s better for life, because they won’t have an assistant forever. So suddenly a little change in the thinking of those teachers that objectively a dyslexic or dysgraphic student has these problems. And today we take it as something normal we work with every day and know how to do it.” (Thomas)

Schools are able and willing to adapt conditions for educating pupils with specific learning disabilities, especially in the form of increasing the time they have to write tests or essays. To a lesser, but still sufficiently large extent, they make adjustments to an assignment, for example, in the form of fewer mathematical tasks for someone diagnosed with dyscalculia, and an adjustment to the assessment, for example, in how Czech language skills are assessed for those diagnosed with dysgraphia or dysorthography.

A relatively large number of schools also have experience working with pupils with sensory or physical disabilities. There are more concerns in the interviews on the part of respondents about how to deal with the situation successfully, because mastering quality education for pupils with these diagnoses requires the school’s more active involvement and places greater demands on the pedagogical competences of teachers. However, the fear stems from inexperience or (in isolated cases) less willingness to adapt to conditions. In some cases, there is some resistance that relates to work safety, although in other schools with a similar focus the inclusion of pupils with similar disabilities works.

"We don't have restrictions by law, but in the field of social interaction with customers, the pupil must have a confirmation from the doctor that they can study the programme (and I think the doctor should investigate some kind of psychological resistance to prevent the instability child going to these fields), and during the admission procedure we say that our school is very demanding when it comes to manual motor skills. And that parents should consider this... But it's a recommendation" (Martina)

In this area, the attitude of the school management, which in most cases is also passed on to the teaching staff, is reflected in the inclusive process. However, it can be stated that pupils with sensory or physical disabilities, if they have a normal cognitive skill, are admitted in schools without major problems. Schools do their utmost to help pupils be successful in the education process. They acquire auxiliary aids (e.g., magnifying glasses, hearing aids, laptops) and attempt to create a positive classroom environment so that pupils with disabilities are accepted by the other students. In the case of a physical disability, if the school is not barrier-free (which is the majority of schools), they arrange for the pupil's teaching classes to be on the ground floor, for example, which can be reached by building an outdoor ramp.

There are also many positive experiences where schools that have admitted pupils with significant special educational needs to study. These schools are able to draw on the support of special education centres, which engage in closer co-operation, whose staff make personal visits to the school and interview classmates. This applies to diagnoses such as behavioural disorders, autistic spectrum disorders, pupils with sensory defects, or physical disabilities.

Pupils with intellectual disabilities are the most debatable group in terms of joint learning. Although there are fields, especially vocational, where these pupils are educated, schools are not very willing to accept these pupils. They primarily argue that when these pupils are included in mainstream education, the schools are unable to guarantee an adequate quality of teaching for all pupils.

Gifted pupils are the least represented category in secondary schools. In this case gifted means students would be diagnosed as such on the basis of standard PPP diagnostics. Mapping results show that schools often confuse the concepts of skilled and talent. Schools include pupils with, for example, graphic or design talents; pupils who regularly win mathematical, physical, historical, or language competitions at the national and international level; pupils who are representatives of the Czech Republic in various sports.

Schools respect these individual prerequisites and strive to adapt educational conditions to suit the pupils' options and needs, but not at the cost of reducing the quality of education.

Problems and Obstacles Regarding Inclusion

In most schools, legislative changes have not been reflected in any significant changes. Some schools perceive the new legislation as beneficial with regard to the possibilities of supporting pupils with special needs and see the opportunity to make use of financial and material resources. However, there are also more critical perspectives, especially from the viewpoint of special schools and schools established under paragraph 16, which perceive the new legislation as a step backward that does not reflect the needs of pupils with special needs. The destruction of a quality (and internationally respected) system of special education in the Czech Republic is a frequent argument. Similarly, it is often said that the new decree is insufficiently prepared and its frequent amendments only complicate school life. There are also opinions that, instead of providing funding since 2016, schools at present must pay from their budgets for joint learning.

Almost all schools agree on the fact that the new legislation has brought a significant increase in administrative activity and that the benefits do not make up for the increased demands that the new decree introduces. The only difference is the criticality with which schools approach this fact. Schools range from ones that approach the situation rather stoically to others that express their disagreement very loudly. Frequent criticism is also directed at the wasting of resources when auxiliary aids are purchased for use by one pupil but then remain unused at the school.

“Well, I think we’ve actually educated students with disabilities or disadvantages before. And it worked. The inclusive question, I think it’s a pretty big bubble right now, because maybe we have students who are somehow disadvantaged and needlessly use aids that cost a lot of money, even though we’ve managed to work with them without these aids and worked with them and had success.” (Lukáš)

In view of the developments in connection with Decree No. 27/2016, no major change in the educational process or in the education system can be expected. The vast majority of schools were working with pupils with special needs at least in some way before the aforementioned decree and were forced to set-up their own system to educate them. Some progress can be expected in the education of teaching staff who, according to respondents, are

gradually undergoing training in special education, specifically increasing (or are interested in increasing) their skills in working with students with the diagnoses they most frequently encounter at school.

What schools would undoubtedly welcome is for the legislative on inclusion to reach a definitive form in order to avoid annually amending the Decree. They would also welcome the timely distribution of requested funds so that they can ensure joint learning seamlessly.

Discussion and Conclusion

It can be stated that school principals understand inclusion in the context of the current legislation. At the same time, everyone grants students the right to access education within the individual possibilities of students. Some limits appear to be the perception of gifted students as groups that also require special educational needs. A possible limit to these answers is the fact that school principals usually admit cognitively gifted students to a grammar schools. However, for example, an individual education plan for students gifted in sports is recognised across secondary schools. The conclusions here are consistent with those, for example, of Murrell (2006), who points to the need for social equality in education.

Inclusion as well as its implementation sparks turbulent discussions throughout society. Likewise, the concept of inclusion varies between schools. Although school principals are in favour of implementing joint education, it turns out that it is realistically possible to identify partial barriers in their approach. These are based primarily on the schools' emphasis on the quality of education, which is obviously considered to be an important aspect of secondary education. The main argument against inclusion in this case is above all the concern about the possibility of giving all participants the maximum opportunity to develop within their individual possibilities.

It turns out that every school participating in the research had at least some experience in educating pupils with special needs. Their experience of education pupils with specific learning disabilities seems to be problem-free, regardless of the types of schools and fields. In this case, the respondents do not perceive the inclusion of pupils with sensory or physical disabilities as an obstacle but see problems mainly with the inclusion of pupils with mental disabilities and in some cases pupils with a form of autism spectrum disorder.

As a positive fact, it can be stated that in principle the new legislation did not manifest itself in the schools' approach to the education of pupils with special needs. According to respondents, the legislative regulation's biggest effect was the increase in the administrative burden on schools. From the viewpoint of the need for reform, the respondents' opinions are ambivalent. On the one hand, there are claims that a new education system was not necessary, in part because most schools had implemented inclusive education before the reform began. On the other hand, the amendment of legislation is perceived as an opportunity for a change in approach by treating pupils as individuals, for a change in the thinking of teachers and in pedagogical-psychological diagnostics, or for innovating the paradigm of education as a whole.

The process of implementing inclusive education as we would imagine it is still a long-term matter. This article aimed to highlight selected aspects from the viewpoint of school leaders and to understand problems, questions, and opinions. It is on this basis that it is possible to further create conditions to successfully implement joint education in secondary schools.

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