

Supportive measures – new approach towards pupils with special educational needs

(overview essay)

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Abstract: *In the Czech Republic there is a paradigm shift being realized in the approach to the education of students (children, pupils and students) with the need for supportive measures. The existing model where diagnosis of a pupil plays a crucial role and where support of this pupil is related to this diagnosis does not fit the educational reality any more. By contrast special educational needs of the pupil are linked to the supportive measures nowadays. Pupils need these supportive measures “to fulfil their educational opportunities or to exercise or to apply their rights on the principle of equality” (Education law, p. 9).*

This change is reflected not only in legislation, but especially in the work of teachers. Like any other change, this brings a lot of doubt and ambiguity. In this situation a team of specialist with field experience (especially special education teachers who work in special educational centres) and academics involved in the project Systemic support of inclusive education a series of detailed methodological materials: Catalogue of supportive measures. This is a document that gives teachers a relatively detailed description of the various supportive measures. The catalogue is supposed to provide recommendations how to fulfil special educational needs of pupils in the context of newly passed supportive measures.

Keywords: *Supportive measures, Degrees of support, Catalogue of supportive measures.*

1 Introduction

Pupil with special educational needs – current concept

The term “supportive measures” has not unequivocal interpretation in Europe. The concept of “supportive systems” appears for example in the document “Five key

messages towards inclusive education”¹. However in this document this term is being related only to the funding of special educational needs. The closest interpretation of the “Czech concept” of supportive measures is to see in Estonia:

Supportive measures for pupils with special educational needs:

If it turns out that the pupil has special educational needs, coordinator for vocational studies initiates the necessary educational and psychological research, and implements other supportive measures. Special education teachers, psychologists and social teachers are at pupil's disposal if needed. Other supportive measures implemented in schools the most are differentiated instruction in the classroom, help after school, special educational support and logopedic sessions in support groups and individual education plan.

New school year (2016/2017) will reflect changes in Czech education related to the effective amendment of Education act (Law nr. 82/2015. The law that changes the law nr. 561/2004, about preschool, primary, secondary, higher, vocational and other education (Education Act), as amended and some other laws). This amendment changes the definition and therefore also meaning of the term “special educational needs”.

Nowadays, in accordance with applicable legislation, are as children, pupils and students (pupils) with special educational needs meant pupils with:

- health disabilities,
- health handicap,
- social handicap.

This approach favours the medical aspect: the pupil and his/her special educational needs are assessed on the basis of his/her medical diagnosis (usually clearly defined, but saying just little or nothing about the needs that need to be fulfilled in his/her educational process) or on the basis of “diagnosis” of his/her social or cultural status, for which, however, are not clearly defined criteria.

This system, however, does not fully cover in practice the special educational needs of pupils. These pupils are now being educated in more than 65% in so-called normal schools (the schools are not established just for pupils with special educational needs). State manages to provide education of pupils with health disabilities (normative funding, support for school counselling facilities...)

Nevertheless there is not the same, equal, mechanism for pupils with health handicap (they do not receive any financial support from the state despite high educational demands) and for pupils with social handicap (the funding is possible only by means

¹ European agency for special and inclusive education, 2014. Five key messages towards inclusive education. Putting theory into practice. Odense, Denmark: European agency for special and inclusive education.

of non-systematic measures within development programs of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports).

2 Pupils with the need of supporting measures – a new concept

The amendment of Education law defines special educational needs in another way:

§16, par. 1: *Child, pupil and student with special educational needs is a person that needs supportive measures to fulfil his/her educational opportunities or to exercise or to apply his/her rights on the principle of equality.*

What do supportive measures bring?

Supportive measures are a set of organizational, personnel and educational measures that are provided to the pupils who these measures for some reason (generally defined by law) need.

It is essential that the law clearly states that children, pupils and students who have special educational needs identified, are entitled to free supportive measures provided by school.

The law specifies areas that include individual support measures:

§16. par. 2: *Supportive measures lie in:*

- a) *consulting support schools and school counselling facilities,*
- b) *adjustment of setup, content, evaluation, forms and methods of education and school services, inclusive providing of subjects of special educational care and inclusive prolongation of the length of secondary and higher vocational education up to two years,*
- c) *adjustment of conditions of admission to education and completion of education,*
- d) *use of assistive aids, special schoolbooks and special teaching aids, use of communication systems for deaf and deaf blind persons, Braille, and supportive or alternative communication systems,*
- e) *adjusting of expected learning outcomes within the specified limits of educational programs and accredited education programs,*
- f) *education according individual education plan,*
- g) ***use of teaching assistant,***
- h) *use of other teaching assistant, interpreter of Czech sign language, transcriber for deaf people or use of other person that can support child, pupil or student at school or educational support facilities according to special legal regulations, or*
- i) ***arranging of education or school services in structural or technically modified rooms.***

In view of the fact that the pupil has the right on free supportive measures provided by school, it is clear that the amendment will have a significant impact on the financing of education in the Czech Republic especially thanks to the provisions of subparagraphs g) and i).

3 Supporting measures – grades

The law divides further supportive measures into five degrees:

§16, par. 3: Supportive measures are according to the paragraph 2 divided into five degrees based on organizational, pedagogical and financial demands. Supportive measures of single types and degrees can be combined. Supportive measures of a higher degree can be used if school counselling facilities finds that according to type of special educational needs of child, pupil or student or according to the effect of use of supportive measure up to now supportive measure of a lower degree will not be sufficient to fulfil his/her educational opportunities or to exercise or to apply his/her rights to education. Incorporating of supportive measures into different degrees is determined by implementing legislation.

The whole system makes step back from the “medical diagnoses” and focuses on real needs of schools and teachers: **diagnostic of the impact of health status or social status of the pupil on his/her education, determination and implementation of measures that reflect his/her educational needs.**

The law avoids, correctly, the labelling of pupils with health diagnoses. Nevertheless, it is clear that majority of pupils will require support measures due to the impact of some of the following situations in education:

- Pupils with health disability: mental, physical, visual, auditory, communication disorder, autism spectrum disorder, or have a combination of different disabilities.
- Long-term sick pupils, pupils with mental illness, pupils with learning disabilities, pupils with behavioural disorders.
- Pupils from a non-stimulating social environment, living in the so-called excluded localities, pupils in families that do not want or cannot dedicate to the needs of pupils, pupils from families with long-term or seriously disordered relationships, pupils placed in social protection equipment or in school facilities for institutional or protective care.
- Pupils with a different mother tongue, pupils from families of immigrants and asylum seekers, pupils exceptionally gifted and talented.

The majority of the above mentioned target groups of pupils have special educational needs determined hitherto. However, there is a presumption that supportive measures

will be focused fairer also on the groups of pupils who had difficulties with obtaining of the support or who have not been receiving any support at all. These are pupils with health and social handicap.

Supportive measures are divided into 5 degrees, based on the organizational, educational and financial demands. Supportive measures in the first grade are provided by school, even without a consultation and decision of school counselling facilities.

If there is a school advisory staff at school, this facility is supposed then to find those pupils at school. Simply said, the purpose of the first grade is to highlight the need for “individual approach”. In other words we can talk about creativity, skills and professional honour of every teacher to find the way to the education of pupils who are in certain way “different” and therefore need our support. The school provides these measures within its current budget without any increase of funding.

Supportive measures in 2.–5. degree are diagnosed by school counselling facilities. The facility establishes a diagnose and based on this diagnose they propose supportive measures. They supervise if the school provides these measures and evaluate their efficiency in cooperation with schools and legal representatives. The higher is the degree of supportive measures the higher is the financial amount that the state provides in order to implement these measures in education of a particular pupil.

The result of the diagnostics is not only a simple classification of educational needs in a particular grade (a pupil can get support from more degrees). Below there is a list of illustrative problems and handicaps of pupils that lead to getting support from particular degrees. However the cases illustrate just situations where problems and handicaps of pupil are isolated from other problems and handicaps that make the education more complicated.

Problems of the pupil in the first degree of supportive measures can be based on:

- Danger of school failure due to short-term illness, moving, divorce or family bereavement, bullying, change of teacher...
- Longer-term problems resulting from the impossibility or the inability of families to secure an adequate homework, little attention disorders, non-specific non-serious behaviour disorders...
- Light disruptions of communication skills affecting the level of reading and writing skills.

Problems of the pupil in the second degree of supportive measures can be based on failure of the pupil due to:

- weak cognitive performance (“borderline intellect”),
- weak auditory and visual functions,
- diseases (including psychological), which has serious impact on educational process,

- weak communication skills,
- insufficient knowledge of language of instruction.

Problems of the pupil in the third degree of supportive measures can be based on failure of the pupil due to:

- mild mental disabilities,
- visual or hearing disability (partial blindness, partial deafness), impaired communication skills,
- physical disability or illness (including psychological), which has serious impact on educational process,
- lack of knowledge of language of instruction,
- syndrome CAN.

Problems of the pupil in the fourth degree of supportive measures can be based on failure of the pupil due to:

- moderate mental retardation or severe mental retardation,
- severe visual or hearing disability (blindness, deafness),
- Autism Spectrum Disorder,
- inability to communicate through the spoken and written word.

Problems of the pupil in the fifth degree of supportive measures can be based on failure of the pupil due to:

- profound mental retardation,
- combination of severe health disability.

In view of the fact that degrees of support depend more on educational needs rather than on the actual diagnosis, the amendment brings more freedom, but consistently higher demands on the responsibility of counsellors who diagnose these educational needs.

4 Catalogue of supportive measures

A team of experts from the Institute of Special Education Studies at Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc (area of special educational needs due to health handicap) and organization People in need (area of special educational needs due to social handicap) created the following upcoming legislative amendments a **Catalogue of supportive measures** within the project Systemic support of inclusive education.

This project was co-funded by the ESF and the state budget of the Czech Republic.

The catalogue of supportive measures is primarily intended for teachers of pupils with educational needs. However the practice shows that in the short period of its

“life” (the catalogue was published and distributed at the end of August 2015) the catalogue has become a great tool in the work of counsellors.

The catalogue consists of one general and seven thematic parts:

- *Catalogue of supportive measures – general part.*
- *Catalogue of supportive measures – thematic part for pupils with educational support needs due to **mental retardation or weakening of cognitive performance.***
- *Catalogue of supportive measures – thematic part for pupils with educational support needs due to **physical disability or serious illness.***
- *Catalogue of supportive measures – thematic part for pupils with educational support needs due to **visual disability or weakness of visual perception.***
- *Catalogue of supportive measures – thematic part for pupils with educational support needs due to **hearing disability or weakness of auditory perception.***
- *Catalogue of supportive measures – thematic part for pupils with educational support needs due to **impaired communication skills.***
- *Catalogue of supportive measures – thematic part for pupils with educational support needs due to **Autism Spectrum Disorder or psychiatics inness.***
- *Catalogue of supportive measures – thematic part for pupils with educational support needs due to **social handicap.***

The general part of the Catalogue of supportive measures introduces the whole topic and explains:

- Why was the Catalogue created.
- What is the purpose of the Catalogue.
- What are the supportive measures inclusive description of individual degrees.
- Who will implement supportive measures in practice.
- How should the user work with the Catalogue.
- How should the user work with online version of the Catalogue.
- Overview of all supportive measures which are presented in detail elaborate in specific parts of the Catalogue of supportive measures.

The thematic parts of the Catalogue have the same structure:

- Definition of concrete type of disability or handicap leading to mentioned special educational needs.
- Characteristics of the impact of the disability or handicap on educational process.
- Diagnosis of disability or handicap, with an emphasis on pedagogical diagnosis leading to the identification of the first degree support.
- Description of individual supportive measures.
- Overview of the basic terms of special education terminology of specific area.

- List of important organizations related to educational process of a pupil with certain disability or handicap.
- Bibliography.

To make the work with the Catalogue more manageable the supportive measures are divided into ten areas:

1. Organization of teaching.
2. Modification of teaching methods and forms.
3. Intervention.
4. Teaching aids.
5. Modification of teaching content.
6. Evaluation.
7. Teaching preparation.
8. Social and health support.
9. Work with the class group.
10. Adjustment of environment.

The catalogue of supportive measures is a set of time-honoured experience of counselors and teachers in the education of pupils with special educational needs

The new part is supportive measures for pupils who, based on the current legislation, do not have any access to the financial support – particularly pupils with health and social handicap. Besides that there is also description of supportive measures in the first degree which in first instance mean “a return to good pedagogy”.

On the writing of the Catalogue participated about 100 authors, especially counselors, experienced teachers and academics.

The Catalogue has been published in printed and electronic version (.pdf, e-book) and is available for all interested parties (together with outcomes of the project Systemic support of inclusive education) on www.inkluzi.upol.cz.

There is also an interactive electronic version of the Catalogue available to make the work with the Catalogue more manageable: www.katalogpo.cz.

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