

# Inclusion of Talented Children (Pupils) In the Current Czech Education System<sup>1</sup>

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*When searching for an educational space allowing a deeper insight into the issue of inclusion in the Czech Republic, we chose a gifted pupil during his compulsory school education among the inclusion users. We are primarily interested in pupils with extraordinary intellectual abilities. In many aspects, the status of these pupils is comparable to the situation of other groups of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), as confirmed by relevant findings of both our and foreign researchers. Our focus is primarily on the broader, rather than just cognitive, issue of inclusive education. Using the example of the risks associated with the unequal social development of the gifted child, we attempt to point out the complexity and interconnectivity of the social and cognitive dimension of the child's development. We assume that the goal of inclusion is a healthy and developed personal social competence, allowing the individual to overcome the obstacles resulting from his/her diversity and enabling him/her to develop his/her educational potential, to participate fully in society and to have access to all its resources.*

*Key words: intellectual giftedness; social competence; inclusive education; school; school actors; risk factors; institutional support; research findings; partial research results*

## Background

The subject of social pedagogy is the issue of education examined in relation to the influence of the social environment (family, school, formal and informal peer groups, local and regional environment, media, civic associations and organizations).<sup>2</sup> Naturally, social pedagogy also studies the issues of inclusive

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<sup>2</sup> Gulová, L., Střelec, S. (2017). Social Education and Social Work as an Inspirational Resource of Teacher Training. *Czech-polish historical and pedagogical journal*. Brno: Masaryk University, Faculty of Education, 2017, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 21–30.

education and training, interpreting them as a social process that promotes equal educational opportunities for children, enabling all children to attend compulsory education in a heterogeneous pupil group, where an individual approach is also applied as a key educational principle. Other principles of inclusive education consist of an emphasis on cooperation, trust in the natural desire of each child to learn, openness to otherness, tolerance, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Each child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and educational needs. Inclusion is founded on the forms of school education, teaching and organization that meet the developmental and learning needs of all pupils. The pedagogical concept of inclusion is characterized by self-responsibility, recognition of individuality and heterogeneity, cooperation and solidarity, which are currently considered to be characteristics of a high-quality modern school.<sup>4</sup>

The current education system should provide conditions suitable for the entire spectrum of pupils; develop the gifted children without neglecting the less gifted ones; support the weakest pupils; and create the appropriate conditions for the education of the SEN pupils. The School Act characterizes these pupils as disadvantaged pupils needing supporting measures to fulfil their educational needs. It is the school's responsibility to ensure that each pupil develops satisfactorily in a desirable way through education tailored to their individual educational abilities. The friendly and welcoming atmosphere should encourage pupils to study, work and develop desirable interpersonal relationships, and provide them with the space, motivation and other conditions for both active learning and activities that help to fully develop their personalities.<sup>5</sup>

To meet these goals, a social health of the individual is necessary, as well as a healthy human community respecting the declared values and supporting the measures aimed at fulfilment of these goals.<sup>6</sup> The term "relationship" is a universal sign and determinant of social health. Here we distinguish three levels (dimensions) of social health – intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social level.<sup>7</sup> On the intrapersonal level, social health is perceived as an internal transformation of personality expressing the person's relationship to oneself, and includes self-acceptance, self-control, autonomous acceptance of social roles, needs, values and

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<sup>3</sup> Gulová, L. – Kurovski, M. – Šíp, R. – Denglerová, D. – Sedláková, M. – Trapl, F. (2018). *Inklyuziya – vikliki ta perspektivi. Nethneniya z Chehii*. 1. vyd. Praha: KUFŘ.

<sup>4</sup> Tannebergerová, M. (2016). *Průvodce školní inkluzí*. Praha: Wolters Kluwer ČR.

<sup>5</sup> *Act No. 561/2004 Coll. On Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education (The Education Act)* as amended.

<sup>6</sup> See for example *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child* and following legislative and school documents.

<sup>7</sup> Štřelec, S. (2015). K podpoře zdravého sociálního vývoje nadaných žáků. In *Škola a zdraví v 21.století: sborník za roky 2014 a 2015*. Brno: MU, pp. 456–467.

the like. On the interpersonal level, social health is understood as an expression of a certain level of relation to other people. As far as it concerns a pupil, this term includes, for example, the ability to cooperate with classmates, to respect the opinions of others, to cooperate in solving common tasks, the skills to communicate with comprehension, the disposition to friendship and partnership. The third level of relationships is the social level, in a broader (civic) sense, including, for example, reflecting the consequences of the person's behaviour and acts on the life of social groups and the society as a whole. Social cohesion is one of the key conditions of quality of life. In the school and social environment, respectively, social health is associated with the concept of social competence of a person. In relation to the school environment, the pupil's social health is reflected in the Framework Educational Programs through the pupil's key competences, namely social, personal and civic competences.<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned above, when searching for an educational space allowing a deeper insight into the issue of inclusion, we chose a gifted pupil among the inclusion users. In this case too we had to narrow the study subject. We are primarily interested in pupils with extraordinary intellectual abilities. Under school legislation, children diagnosed as intellectually gifted are among the group of pupils with specific educational needs. While the educational needs of, for example, children with physical disabilities are now clearly defined (barrier-free access, compensatory aids, teaching assistant, etc.), the needs of gifted children are not always satisfactorily met. They are often not given enough attention. Their school results are often mistaken for not needing any extra or special care. This approach can easily dim the emerging extraordinary intellectual potential. Children (pupils) with extraordinary intellectual talent have a very difficult position in the school and family environment. Their extraordinary talent is often also accompanied by some of the other developmental disorders. A special case in this context is represented by children with Asperger syndrome, who can also be gifted pupils.

A pupil is considered extraordinarily intellectually gifted if he/she has a high level of one or more intellectual abilities compared to their peers. The pupil's extraordinary talents, including his/her educational needs, are detected by a school counselling facility in cooperation with the school that educates the pupil. A sensitive approach of both parents and teachers is necessary for a healthy and successful development of the child's talents. The potential of giftedness itself is in practice insignificant if the gifted child is not sufficiently motivated to develop it. Talented children are naturally interested in studies and new findings. This learning motivation can be reinforced or attenuated by external factors, including

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<sup>8</sup> For example *Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání*. Praha: Výzkumný ústav pedagogický, 2005 and other modifications of this document.

the positive or negative effects of school and parents. Children, who understand new things faster than others and are able for example to effectively use the knowledge, seek relationships and apply them to solve other problems, may not find the usual teaching methods and procedures useful. It is therefore necessary to look for new ways when trying to ensure that the gifted child has sufficient educational incentives that helps to develop his/her potential.

### **Common reasons for difficult socializations of gifted children**

Professional literature dedicated to the education of gifted children provides considerable knowledge of the problem framework accompanying the education of gifted children in pre-school period and then at the first and second level of school education. As mentioned above, the problems concern three areas: self-perception, perception of others and perception of external factors influencing the formation of personality traits. As for the perception of others, gifted children hear and have to contend with two types of reactions from their surroundings and the social environment. On the one hand, they receive praise and rewards, on the other hand a reaction full of jealousy, envy, resentment and misunderstanding. Gifted children may begin to feel guilty about their talent. This feeling can be manifested either by being self-contained or by rude and negative or aggressive behaviour. The children notice the differences between themselves and other peers, and they may tend to separate themselves from the group, distancing themselves psychologically and emotionally. It is therefore important that such an insecure child finds assurance and support in their immediate environment. If a gifted child does not meet the high expectations of others and feels that he/she is not performing optimally and acceptably in all areas, he/she can easily slip into doubt and feeling of inferiority. This is called gifted child depression.<sup>9</sup>

A summary of the strengths and weaknesses in the development of gifted children is presented by J. T. Webb (1993). The author approaches the identification of the gifted children's problems from two points of view. He sees their origin both in the child's personality, and their interaction with the external world. He identifies the first group of these problems as endogenous, i.e. causes are based on the child's personality. These include:

- Uneven development of individual psychic functions. Uneven development may not only concern the conflict between intelligence and emotion, but may include, for example, asynchronous development of cognitive abilities and fine motor skills. Fine motor skills often develop later on in these children, so many

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<sup>9</sup> Mcmann, N., R. – Oliver, R. (1988). Problems in Families with Gifted Children: Implications for Counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*. Vol. 66, No. 6, pp. 275–278.

of them have difficulties writing or drawing when entering school. Immature motor skills often affect the child's skills such as self-care, etc.

- Perfectionism. The child sets high goals and wants to be perfect in everything. In this context, there is a distinction between the positive influence of perfectionism, which is related to the performance orientation of the child, who wants to continue to improve and takes occasional setbacks as a matter of course, which motivates him/her to pursue further. This kind of perfectionism is prevalent among gifted children. Perfectionism can be adversely manifested in a child as fear of possible errors, which leads to neurotic tension, lack of self-confidence and consequently low performance.
- Avoidance of risks. Increased ability to estimate potential pitfalls and risks can lead to lower performance than expected when performing various activities.
- Multipotentiality. Greater abilities in various areas can lead to indecision (anxiety) about the right choice for further study or professional direction.
- Issues with negative self-image. Lack of self-knowledge and inability to distinguish one's strengths and weaknesses is considered a possible cause. Some experts encounter this cause in gifted pupils whose high intellectual capacity is not associated with a particular interest in any area or activity. Others report that the inadequate self-image is based on feelings of difference in relation to their peers.<sup>10</sup>

Another cause of issues in gifted children is described by J. T. Webb (2002) as exogenous, i.e. causes arising from interaction of the child with his/her environment. This group often includes:

- Relationships with peers. Children with „adult“ interests and exceptional abilities find it difficult to gain friends among their peers. Gifted children therefore usually seek friends among older children, but also among average children, or they remain isolated.
- Relationships at school. The originally positive characteristics of a gifted child may develop into problematic behaviour due to an inappropriate educational approach. An interest in problem solving and intellectual activity can cause the child to reject the teacher's style of work, discuss teaching methods, and criticize classmates. The gifted child may become unpopular among teachers and classmates.
- Relationships in family. The family in which the child grows up can be a serious source of emotional problems if the parents fail to appropriately manage the gifted child, their relationship with him as well as with his siblings.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Webb, J. T. (1993). Nurturing Social – Emotional Development of Gifted Children. In *International Handbook of Research and Development of Giftedness and Talent*. Oxford: Pergamon.

<sup>11</sup> Webb, J. T. (2002). *Guiding The Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers*. Scottsdale: Gifted Psychology Press. Citováno podle Hrnčárová, M. (2006). *Psychologické aspekty rodičovství rozumově nadaného dítěte*. Diploma Thesis. Brno: Masaryk University, pp. 25–32.

As far as integration of specific personality traits is concerned, other important conceptual support structures are referenced by experts. This includes typology of gifted children. M. Novotná (2012) referencing other authorities in the field<sup>12</sup> considers the following typology most common:

- Successful gifted child – a child who learns very well, the school achievement is excellent without significant difficulties, he/she is able to deal with adults, behaves well, is conformable, is able to follow instructions and adapt, sets a good example for others...
- Highly creative gifted child – a child who is constantly experimenting and trying to create and discover something new. The child finds it difficult to adapt to any rules, especially to the school system, and wants to change the rules. He/she is always correcting adults, questions them, finds it difficult to control himself/herself, causes conflicts...
- Autonomous gifted child – the child tends to be very independent and usually handles everything alone, without the help of others. He/she takes the school system of work as a necessity and tries to use it for his/her own education on his/her own terms. The child has a positive self-concept and self-esteem and can take risks...
- A gifted child disguising his/her abilities – passive, non-assertive, quiet, timid child. Doesn't want to show his/her true abilities and masks them to be accepted by classmates and surrounding people.
- Demanding gifted child – the child is very dissatisfied and bored in the standard school environment that does not suit him because it does not satisfy his/her desire for education. Tends to be stubborn and critical, expresses his/her feelings, requires constant attention of the teacher, disrupts lessons or does not participate at all.
- A „wrecked, failed“ gifted child – such a child usually protests against everyone and against everything. The child always opposes adults, parents, teachers, but also peers. He/she suffers greatly from the classical school system, showing his/her constant dissatisfaction. The child has difficulties with self-acceptance and feels that nobody understands him/her.
- A gifted child with a developmental disorder (the so-called „twice exceptional“) – most often it is a specific developmental learning disorder –

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<sup>12</sup> E.g. Betts, G. T.; Neihart, M. (1988). Profiles of Gifted and Talented. *Gifted Child Quarterly*. Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 253–284; Laznibatová, J. (2001). *Nadané dieťa – jeho vývin, vzdelávanie a podporovanie*. Bratislava: IRIS; Portešová, Š. (2007). Rozumově nadané dítě se specifickými poruchami učení ve školním kontextu – problém nebo výzva pro učitele? In *Pedagogika*, 2007, Vol. 62, No.1, pp. 47–56; Hrnčárová, M. (2006). *Psychologické aspekty rodičovství rozumově nadaného dítěte*. Diploma Thesis. Brno: Masaryk University; Hříbková, L. (2005). *Nadání a nadaní*. Praha: Charles University; and others.

such an individual may suffer of such disorder or any physical handicap or suffer of emotional disruptions while being exceptionally intellectually gifted.<sup>13</sup>

### Role of gifted child's parents

As a rule, parents are the first to identify that their child differs in some of their extraordinary abilities from other children, and thus they become discoverers of their talents. These findings are surprising for many of them, accompanied by positive expectations, confusion, and helplessness and, in some cases, problematic educational decisions.<sup>14</sup>

Kearney (2008) notes that while children from most families go through normal developmental stages, families of intellectually gifted children have very different experiences. Gifted children may experience uneven cognitive, social, emotional and physical development in their childhood. With some exaggeration it is possible to say that intelligence of an adult and the emotions of a child in a single child's body is certain to lead to some difficulties. The same author further states that such asynchronous development puts the gifted person out of normal development patterns from birth. Asynchronous development can also disrupt the entire family system and the socio-cultural environment of the surrounding environment. Parents of gifted children often find themselves in a position of a „multi-level mediators“, who not only have to monitor the asynchronous development within the child, but also act as mediators and counsellors of the child in their social circles and at school, until the child's individual pattern of development reaches cultural standards.<sup>15</sup>

The basic problem for parents of gifted children is the question of what happens to their child when two or more different developmental levels clash. Parents often witness situations where their child's advanced intellectual and linguistic development encounters, for example, inadequate levels of social behaviour. First, they have to recognize and accept the actual child's developmental pattern, while unusual, is natural for their child. They must address and respond to all development components at once. The family needs to be

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<sup>13</sup> Novotná, M. (2012). Identifikace nadaných. In Štáva, J. – Novotná, M. – Janda, M. – Věchtová, G. – Dan, J. – Škrabánková, J. *Příručka pro práci s nadanými žáky*. Ostrava: VŠB – Technická univerzita Ostrava, pp. 17–18.

<sup>14</sup> Střelec, S. – Frimlová, L. (2016). Rodiče nadaných dětí v situacích pedagogického rozhodování. In Malach, J. – Matysková, K.. *Sborník příspěvků XII. ročníku mezinárodní konference Pedagogická diagnostika a evaluace 2016*. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, Pedagogická fakulta, pp. 73–83.

<sup>15</sup> Kearney, K. (2008). Life in The Asynchronous Family. In *Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education*, GEN/AR/006.

constantly aware of not only the rapidly changing zone of proximal development - at the physical, emotional, social and intellectual levels, but also recognize collisions or discrepancies as they occur and address them. The asynchronous development of an intellectually gifted child can radically change the child's position in the family system, for example when a younger sibling's success surpasses that of the older one. Accelerating the school attendance of a gifted child, which is becoming increasingly popular, can also represent a potential minefield of asynchronicity in the family. Although acceleration may be the best educational option for a gifted child, the family must be very sensitive to the perspectives and views of other children.<sup>16</sup>

During the upbringing of their child, parents may encounter a period when the child loses enthusiasm, is not interested in school, and his/her internal motivation decreases. This is called by J. R. Whitmore (1980), and others after him, *underachievement*.<sup>17</sup> It is a discrepancy between the child's abilities and his/her performance. It may occur suddenly or it might be a long-term problem, and may have mild to severe symptoms. Such children with reduced performance may display many possible manifestations and characteristics. There may, for example, be a noticeable difference between oral and written expression, poor grammar skills, reduced level of effort in activities, the children often do not complete homework or school tasks. They become very self-critical and therefore do not take risks and avoid new things. At the same time, they set unrealistically high goals for themselves. They may have problems interacting with classmates and participating in group tasks. Children often hide their talents by escaping into their inner space and closing themselves, becoming dreamers, or on the contrary appearing naughty, disturbing and disobedient.<sup>18</sup>

Garn, A. C., Matthews, M. S., Jolly, J. L. (2010) assume that the development of positive forms of motivation is based on the ability of the social environment surrounding the child to support his/her basic human needs – such as desire to self-regulate one's behaviour, to develop a sense of competence and belonging to others, to understand the environment and effectively integrate within, etc. When parents and teachers are able to create such a stimulating environment, they support the child's autonomy. The importance of the child's autonomy support from parents is indisputable and opens up a lot of possibilities for the child,

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<sup>16</sup> Kearney, K. (2008). Life in The Asynchronous Family. In *Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education*, GEN/AR/006.

<sup>17</sup> Whitmore, J. R. (1980). *Giftedness, conflict, and underachievement*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, c1980, xiii; Montgomery, D. (2009). *Able, Gifted and Talented Underachievers* [online]. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chichester: John Wiley.

<sup>18</sup> Montgomery, D. (2009). *Able, Gifted and Talented Underachievers* [online]. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chichester: John Wiley. [cit. 2013-04-06].



encourages problem-solving, reduces disproportionate pressure and offers new perspectives.<sup>19</sup>

In summary, factors affecting the development of underachievement are often defined as internal and external. The internal causes are based on the child's personality: motivation, personal characteristics and specific learning disabilities (most often dyslexia and ADHD). External influences are associated with the effect of the social groups that the child encounters, with the assessment from others, interest of the environment, and the challenges imposed on the child from the surrounding environment.

### **Educational strategies for gifted pupils**

It is not possible to compile an exhaustive set of universal recommendations for the education of gifted children (pupils). Every child is unique and educators need extensive awareness of the child's differences, knowledge of the relevant findings of special pedagogy, tolerance, passion, creativity and willingness to seek and apply unconventional practices in the educational activities of teachers, parents, grandparents, extracurricular tutors etc. Without any doubt, working with gifted children (pupils) is particularly demanding for all involved. It may be made more effective by:

- Positive and supportive relationship between child, parent and teacher – providing a framework for the safe development of the child.
- Meaningful stimulation, providing opportunities to learn and support the child's specific interests, including those requiring special conditions, resources and aids.
- The amount of experience and practice that a child has the opportunity to gain if he/she wants.
- Providing material and appropriate study environment to achieve high study motivation and creative expression of an individual. For all this, good relationships between school and the family of the pupil must be maintained.
- Providing materials and environment for the child to use and experiment with.
- Identifying potential more general and specific areas where talent could be manifested.
- Parents' and teachers' sensitivity to the needs of the child; they should know when to intervene and when rather not.
- Avoiding labelling and categorizing the child.

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<sup>19</sup> Garn, A. C. – Matthews, M. S. – Jolly, J. L. (2010). Parental Influences on the Academic Motivation of Gifted Students: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective. *Gifted Child Quarterly* [online]. Vol. 54, No. 4, pp. 263–272.

- Providing real emotional support. Real emotional support and love are not terms with the same meaning. Parents may cause lot of damage in the name of love – for example being uncritical about the child, raising the child in an authoritative way, suppressing the child's interests etc. Therefore it is right to provide the gifted child with an appropriate level of recognition and praise if he/she achieves success or makes the desired effort. It is also important to provide feedback to help the child to both improve and adequately correct his/her attitude towards others.
- Just like ordinary children, gifted children with emotional problems generally perform below their actual abilities. Therefore, it is always necessary to treat the child with respect, leaving the child with the opportunity to make his/her own decisions, thus helping him/her to build responsibility for his/her own decisions, as such an approach is a prerequisite for fulfilling the child's potential abilities.<sup>20</sup>

Since 2004, the Czech Ministry of Education has been supporting the implementation of the "Concept of Care for Exceptionally Gifted Pupils in School Counselling Facilities" from the state budget. There is a working group of psychologists and special educators from counselling centres working within the project with adequate representation of all regions of the Czech Republic. Each region has its own coordinators. Since then, there has been an increase in the number of professionals in the Czech Republic who seek information to help them identify gifted children and try to create appropriate conditions for them by working with schools that are more specialized in the care of gifted children. Other measures supporting gifted children have also been implemented. The Education Act, as amended, for example allows headmasters to create groups for gifted pupils where pupils of the same or different school years are educated in certain subjects. In accordance with the development of their school knowledge, the education of gifted pupils can be extended beyond the limits set by the relevant curriculum, or they can participate in the higher school year's lessons. With the agreement of the headmasters of the respective schools, gifted pupils can at the same time have fellowship in another school of the same or a different kind. The education of an extraordinarily gifted pupil may take place according to an individual educational plan, etc.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Střelec, S. – Frimlová, L. (2013). K systemizaci problémů provázejících výchovu nadaných dětí (žáků). In Bartoňová, M. – Vítková, M. et al. *Vzdělávání žáků se speciálními vzdělávacími potřebami VII. (Education of Pupils with Special Educational Needs) VII.* Brno: Paido, pp. 91–102.

<sup>21</sup> Act No. 561/2004 Coll. of 24 September 2004 on Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education (Education Act), as amended. *Directive No. 27/2016 Coll. Directive on Education of Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Gifted Pupils.*

Another way of providing such support is the MEYS subsidy program for 2014–2020 to strengthen the interest and motivation of gifted pupils by linking school and extracurricular activities such as summer schools, camps, research activities with participation in adequate scientific projects; and linking the offer of activities for gifted pupils also through the activities of regional networks for gifted children.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

From the MEYS point of view, the support provided to gifted pupils appears to be clear and sufficient. In educational practice, the situation is far from clear, especially when inclusion is concerned. Several examples show the institutional cohesion of the Czech education system and its weak (vulnerable) points. We rely mainly on research findings of several Czech research teams: Straková, J., Simonová, J., Friedlaenderová, H. (2019); Gregor, D., Martinková, P., Drabinová, A., Chvál, M., Straková, J. (2017) and others.

The first and one of the main problems interfering with inclusion is differentiation in the primary education system.<sup>23</sup> Taking into account, for example, the fact that some gifted pupils leave mainstream elementary schools for multi-year grammar schools, this trend also has negative inclusive consequences. Research findings state: "...differentiated system does not lead to overall more effective education: the average results in the differentiated and undifferentiated system are the same, but pupils in the selective classes perform better and pupils in non-selective classes perform worse than in the joint education. This is, among other things, due to the different educational experiences of pupils in selective and non-selective classes. While the separation is disadvantageous for pupils in non-selective classes, pupils in the selective classes find it beneficial. They have more academic subjects, more enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers, better learning climate..."<sup>24</sup>

Between 2012–2016, educational development of representatively selected pupils from higher grades of elementary schools and lower grades of grammar school were compared. The research confirmed better results and socio-economic status of pupils at grammar schools, but the increase in knowledge in basic

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<sup>22</sup> See <http://talentovani.cz/system-podpory-nadani/krajske-site>.

<sup>23</sup> Pupils in the Czech Republic can complete their compulsory education at regular elementary schools, at elementary schools with extended teaching of some subjects, at six or eight-year grammar schools or at special schools (for pupils with specific disabilities).

<sup>24</sup> Straková, J. – Simonová, J. – Friedlaenderová, H. (2019). Postoje odborné a laické veřejnosti k inkluzivnímu vzdělávání v kontextu obecných postojů k vnější diferenciaci. *Studia paedagogica*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 85.

subjects (mathematics, Czech language) was comparable in both educational programs.<sup>25</sup>

Both our and foreign researches<sup>26</sup> confirm that this differentiation increases, most of all, inequalities that exist among pupils from different socio-economic status (parents education, social status of the family, ethnic aspects, material and other circumstances). In this context, the fact that the family environment has a fundamental impact on the pupil's educational career, from entering compulsory education to university education, appears as unquestionable. A significant number of parents make extraordinary efforts to ensure that their child escapes from the "trap" of inclusion to a selective school during compulsory education. Here dwells one of the confrontational surfaces related to the broader concept of inclusion: „If society accepts inclusion of pupils with disabilities or social disadvantages, but at the same time allows pupils with better cognitive abilities or better family backgrounds to go to selective classes, the system will continue to be unfair and the situation will not significantly improve for disadvantaged pupils.”<sup>27</sup> Premature differentiation, described as differentiation taking place before the 15 years of age, is not favourable not only for the mentioned cognitive reasons, but also because of the important aspect of the formation of social relationships between the pupils in terms of intrapersonal, interpersonal and social cohesion.

The topic of inclusion in the Czech Republic has escaped beyond school and has become a subject of public interest. Events of the school year 2016/2017 contributed to this in their own way. In this year, the system of support for pupils with special educational needs was significantly modified. The MEYS document on joint education called Basic Information on Joint Education declares “joint education of all pupils in mainstream education wherever it is in their interest, and support of every pupil in need, including entitlement to full payment of support measures thus granted.”<sup>28</sup>

The regulation met with great resistance from both the professional and lay public. For example, critics questioned the usefulness of educating pupils with disabilities with healthy pupils in mainstream schools and argued that these pupils

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<sup>25</sup> Gregor, D. – Martinková, P. – Drabínová, A. – Chvál, M. – Straková, J. (2017). Tisková zpráva o přidání hodnotě výčetných gymnázií na základě zjištění longitudinálního výzkumu CLOSE.

<sup>26</sup> For example Clark, C. – Dyson, A. – Millward, A. – Robson, S. (1999). Theories of inclusion, theories of schools: Deconstructing the „inclusive school“. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(2), pp. 157–177; Straková, J. – Simonová, J. (2015). Výběr základní školy v ČR a faktory, které jej ovlivňují. *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 51(4), pp. 587–606.

<sup>27</sup> Straková, J. – Simonová, J. – Friedlaenderová, H. (2019). Postoje odborné a laické veřejnosti k inkluzivnímu vzdělávání v kontextu obecných postojů k vnější diferenciaci. *Studia paedagogica*, Vol. 24, No.1, p. 84.

<sup>28</sup> MEYS. (2018). Základní informace ke společnému vzdělávání. Available at [www.msmt.cz](http://www.msmt.cz), page 1.

would have better conditions for education in special schools and that their inclusion in mainstream schools would have detrimental consequences for them and their classmates. Some teacher organizations, the media<sup>29</sup> and a number of politicians led by the President of the Republic joined the protest against joint learning. The Ministry of Education responded to the resistance by trying to explain its intention and expected impacts thereof. Thus, the idea of inclusive education is not only confronted with the long tradition of special education and traditional teaching organization, but also with the differentiation of the education system, which has an impact on educational inequalities. Note that world has been focused on inclusive education and wider public has been aware of the issue since 1990s, especially after the UNESCO conference in Salamanca.<sup>30</sup> On this occasion, nearly a hundred countries declared the right of the SEN pupils to be educated in mainstream schools, which are expected to adapt their environment and approaches to the needs of these pupils. In this context, experts noted that the practical consequences of inclusion should not only be the changes in traditional forms of special education aimed solely at pupils with certain types of disabilities, but most of all the inclusion should lead to shaping and developing new structures and methods in mainstream schools. The fundamental argument is respecting the fact that pupils' learning difficulties arise not primarily from the pupil's deficit, but from the inappropriate response of the school, caused by the organizational characteristics of the mainstream education, where teachers work mainly routinely, applying strategies that are suitable for most pupils, which limit the possibility of a response from diverse pupils. The shift towards inclusive education therefore requires the organization of school education in a way that allows it to adapt to the full spectrum of pupils. It assumes that schools will allow teachers to work in teams to jointly solve problems that arise from the diversity of pupils in the classroom.<sup>31</sup> Inclusive schools differ from non-inclusive schools not only in the attitudes of teachers, but also in their structure and methods.

Both Czech and foreign researchers agree that the practical consequence of inclusion should be to restructure the entire education system to strengthen mainstream education in favour of joint learning and reducing inequalities between all pupils.

We conclude our study with a brief presentation of one of the positive examples of inclusive practice: *Researchers from the Department of Social Education who are*

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. Klapka, D. (2016). Prolínání mocenských diskursů v týdeníku Učitelské noviny: Sociální inkluze romských žáků v českém školství. *Pedagogická orientace*, 26(2), 203–227.

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO (1994). The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education. Paris.

<sup>31</sup> Clark, C. – Dyson, A. – Millward, A. – Robson, S. (1999). Theories of inclusion, theories of schools: Deconstructing the „inclusive school“. *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(2), pp. 157–177.

currently working on the Czech Science Foundation research project, within which this text has been composed, have completed the first phase of data collection, which ran from January to June 2019. We have the first results from observations in schools and partial analyses from interviews with school actors. One of the selected schools, a small rural school, has set a great example of working with SEN pupils, in this case, gifted pupils. In the last few years, there were a total of five talented boys, whose talent the school not only diagnosed, but also created an environment where the pupils could develop without any barriers, as evidenced by their further study career. The school approached these pupils individually, addressed their specific needs, communicated and cooperated with parents and other professionals in great details. The situation of each child was discussed by a team of educators and also with the whole class and school team. The teachers did not hesitate to undergo various trainings and receive further education and were strongly motivated by the school management to work with the SEN children. The school also sought the Fair School certificate, which it successfully defended several times.

This was in great deal achieved thanks to the former headmistress of this school, whose openness to otherness and sensitivity to pupils' needs was highly inspiring. Several examples of this school's practice are described below: After a few days in the first grade, one of the pupils (who had been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome) progressed to the upper grade and is currently studying at the Bishop Grammar School, where was described as an outstanding pupil last year. The management of the rural school together with the teachers showed a high level of sensitivity to the child's talent, which is rather rare in our environment. The research shows the example of another boy who transferred to a higher grade of the rural school from a Brno school, where he had a number of absences, conflicts with teachers and overall poor position. The management of the rural school was able to discover very soon the potential of the child who, despite his talent for mathematics and physics, had never participated in an elementary school's competition for talented children ('Olympiáda') and was regarded a rather problematic child at his original school. Because of his really extraordinary talent, the pupil currently studies simultaneously a high school and a university, and is preparing to study abroad.

The headmaster has accumulated a lot of experience in supporting talented children in the school environment in a completely inclusive spirit. Besides gifted children, the classrooms also incorporate children with mental handicap. The situation is certainly not easy and, as partial research results show, not all teachers fully identify with inclusive processes at school. Despite these facts, the school managed to embark on the path of inclusion, among other things by working with

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<sup>32</sup> Štech, S. (2018). Inkluzivní vzdělávání – obtížné zvládnání „rozmanitosti“ v praxi. *Pedagogická orientace*. 2018, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 396.

*talented children and including them in the school environment. The research also points out the important role of school management in these situations.*

How to conclude? Consider the situation of parents whose children need specific approach and support from school, teachers and society during compulsory education. In their child's case, this support was found by professional diagnostics to be necessary and feasible at an accessible elementary school. Based on this, parents hope for the positive educational outcomes of their child. All pupils are entitled to quality foundations of their further education, career and life. A modern state with a democratic, solidarity (selfless) society should be able to meet these natural and legislative requirements. The responsibility lies not only with parents and schools, but also with the political willingness and, consequently, with the conditions that enable these goals to be put into practice. Above we have mentioned some of the systemic and procedural barriers, but it is often forgotten what demands are placed on teachers, their professional background, specific methodological training, increased demands on their lessons preparations, collaboration with parents, teacher assistants, school management, participating teachers, etc. Teachers also need adequate support to successfully meet these above-standard requirements.

We therefore fully agree with the views and concerns of the Minister of Education S. Štech (2018), corresponding with our previous data: „ ... joint education, as it has been launched, does not generally meet with unambiguous resistance. Nevertheless, it is evident that the debate on inclusion is for some time going to be quite controversial; even the existing support for joint education can drastically fall unless administration is simplified, lower number of pupils in a class is ensured, and high quality, clear information and most of all, training in teaching heterogeneous classes, is provided. What now represents an anchor can quickly turn into a reason for strong rejection (because of reduced funding, weakened support measures, etc.). Statistics for the last ten years show that joint education of SEN children with other pupils can not be cancelled or stopped. Now it's a matter of getting closer to real inclusion. Such complex change can never be 'ready-made'. Crucial, therefore, will be our flexible response to non-functional elements and ensuring adequate conditions and real participation of pupils with SEN included in mainstream schools. Only then can the idea of inclusive education be accepted.<sup>32</sup>