



INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

EXAMPLE OF IECE PROVISION: POLAND

1. Abstract

Civic Integrated Kindergarten began operating in 1990. It is the first non-public inclusive nursery school in Poland. It is run by the Anna Florek 'Czas Dzieciństwa' Foundation. The nursery carries out objectives and tasks stipulated in the Education System Act and the laws based on it, particularly those included in the pre-primary education curriculum. The nursery is run in compliance with Anna Florek's original programme, 'Dziecko w grupie' (The Child in a Group). As it is funded by state and community grants and therefore offers low fees, the nursery is a place which is accessible to all.

The nursery's main aim is to ensure comprehensive psychological and physical development for its pupils in an atmosphere of respect and dignity, alongside ideological and religious freedom. The nursery is attended by children aged 3 to 5 or 6, divided into three mixed-age groups. Each group consists of children with and without disabilities. The number of children with disabilities does not exceed 25% of the children in the group. Children have a range of disabilities, including intellectual or physical disabilities, Down's syndrome, genetic syndromes, chronic illness (including those with diabetes, epilepsy, type III laryngeal cleft), children on the autism spectrum, hearing or visual impairments, anxiety disorders and high-attaining children. Children with disabilities who are not yet 3 years old attend individual classes in pairs or small groups, based on an opinion on early educational system intervention published by a centre for guidance counselling for young children. Each group is run by two tutors, a man and a woman. All employed tutors are qualified in the field of special education or educational therapy and all of them continually develop their knowledge of inclusive education, work individualisation and working with children with special educational needs. The nursery employs specialists, including psychologists, specialist teachers, speech therapists, physiotherapists and dance and movement therapists.

2. Inclusive features

The nursery is accessible to all children *in the area, including those with diverse and additional needs and their families*. The nursery has been or is attended by:

- children with diabetes: tutors have been trained in handling an insulin pump. The nursery is equipped with a kitchen scale which enables the calculation of carbohydrate exchanges. Parents also have access to the nursery meal plan.
- children with speech impairment: children follow individual educational and therapeutic programmes which include speech therapy, alternative communication methods and social skills training, among other things.
- children on the autism spectrum and children with adaptation problems: children follow individual educational and therapeutic programmes based on behaviour analysis. The pace at which children participate in the group and individually depends on their individual abilities and the progress of their therapy, among other things. At first, children work individually with a therapist at the therapist's office. Their contact with peers is incidental. The second stage is still dominated by individual therapy, but children start participating in selected group tasks. The third stage involves children spending more and more time with their peers, with the therapist slowly ceasing their support. The fourth stage involves children participating in the group with the tutor providing support in new or difficult situations. The role of the therapist becomes limited to half hour meetings and consultations with tutors and parents. The fifth stage sees children functioning in the group in the same way as their peers.
- children with hearing impairment: children follow individual educational and therapeutic programmes including alternative communication methods, auditory education and the possibility to communicate using sign language (tutors who work with children know basic sign language), among other things.
- children with Down's syndrome and other genetic syndromes: children follow individual educational and therapeutic programmes which include speech therapy, physical therapy, alternative communication methods, practical life training and programmes developing independence, among other things.
- children with a tracheostomy tube: children follow individual educational and therapeutic programmes which include speech therapy, physical therapy, alternative communication methods and social skills training, among other things. Tutors working with these children are trained in caring for the bronchial tree and handling the aspirator.



- children with intellectual disabilities: children follow individual educational and therapeutic programmes including speech therapy, physical therapy, alternative communication methods, practical life training and programmes developing independence, among other things.
- children with physical disabilities: children follow individual educational and therapeutic programmes which include a programme to develop fine and gross motor skills, programmes developing independence and self-handling, speech therapy, social skills training and alternative communication methods, among other things.
- chronically ill children: children follow individual support programmes which take into account difficulties which are characteristic to their particular disease.
- children with speech impairment: children follow individual educational and therapeutic programmes which include social skills training, speech therapy and psychological counselling, among other things.

The curriculum addresses the holistic developmental and learning needs of all children. Individual educational and therapeutic programmes are developed for children with special educational needs based on interviews with their parents, observation and a functional diagnosis, which determine the child's level of function in different development areas. A meeting of the entire team of specialists and tutors working with the child then takes place, in which educational and therapeutic goals are set, together with the ways in which educational requirements are to be adjusted, the scope of support provided to the child and areas of co-operation with the family and other important institutions (for instance, if a child is diabetic, then contact is established with a diabetes clinic). The team meets twice a year to evaluate and modify the programme based on the child's progress and development. All activities undertaken for children with and without disabilities and special educational needs are determined in detail and carried out in collaboration with their parents.

Each child is supported to enable them to actively participate in the regular daily activities of the provision. The following are some of the methods employed to support children with special educational needs in everyday group activities:

- tutors have very good knowledge of the child's abilities and limitations and, as a result, can adjust the physical environment by organising themed areas with well-thought-out aids and toys;
- the child is supported in carrying out activities and staying active by employing activity schedules;



- the creation of individual motivational systems;
- illustrating activities during the day by using graphical day schedules (the form of the schedule is always adjusted to the child that is being included in a particular group, using photographs, texts, etc.);
- adjusting schedules, educational content and instructions to child's abilities ('the same, but different');
- engaging children by working in pairs, small groups and larger groups;
- creating situations which promote relationships between children and favour co-operation, while limiting those in which children compare each other and compete;
- presenting children with special educational needs to their peers as attractive play mates by showing their strong sides.

3. Inclusive highlight

From the very beginning the nursery has been highly active in promoting the idea of inclusion. Efficient inclusive education is possible at the nursery due to:

- meetings with the child and parents during adaptation classes or individual classes in early development support which take place early on, a year before the child starts attending nursery school. At first, parents meet with the head teacher and tutors. It is important for them to get acquainted with any specialist documentation and hear what the parents say about the child, as well as familiarising themselves with tutors' observations. The nursery (the head teacher, tutors and specialists) should have an extensive knowledge of the child before they are included in groups with special educational needs. The nursery is interested in the child as a person, not just their disability or disorder;
- the building of an educational and therapeutic environment for every child with special educational needs. The creation of the programme is the result of collaboration with everyone who cares for the child at the nursery, parents and specialists from other facilities. The nursery offers as much specialist support to children with special educational needs as they require. Support in a particular area is also planned to cease once the child becomes independent in that area;
- the building of a positive image of a child with special educational needs among peers. Disability must not be a barrier for a child with special educational needs in establishing relationships with peers and vice versa. It is



very important to recognise and develop a child's strengths and to show these strengths to peers. Playing together and learning together enable this;

- the creation of mixed-age groups as an optimal organisational formula to include children with special educational needs in their peer groups;
- the support given to parents in the search for a new facility for the child's next educational stage. When parents select a school for their child, the nursery's head teacher can invite the child's future teacher or individual assistant to visit classes in which their future learner is participating. The future teacher or assistant should attend the nursery school several times during May and June to witness therapeutic and educational activities as well as free play. This also allows them to become acquainted with the child's documentation. If necessary, the child's therapist may visit the future school with the child. Then, in September, when the child starts at the new school, the therapist/tutor from nursery maintains telephone and e-mail contact with their new school teacher. The nursery therapist is invited to the first teaching staff council meeting at the school, during which he or she shares knowledge about the child, conducts training, helps with adjustments to the physical environment and indicates the required specialist support.

4. Other evidence of quality IECE

External recognition: what kind of external recognition does the proposed provision enjoy, e.g. by the local authorities, university, national associations, awards?

The nursery has been promoting the idea of inclusion since the first year of its operation.

The nursery regularly co-operates with government and local government educational institutions:

- the Ministry for National Education and the Lower Chamber of the Polish Parliament: on numerous occasions the head teacher of the nursery has been invited to work with teams of experts in connection with changes in education law relating to pre-primary education, teaching children with special educational needs and supporting the development of young children at risk of disability;
- since 1992 the nursery has conducted training sessions for education staff in Poland, actively participated in conferences and published materials for the Central Teachers Training Institution and the [Centre for Education Development](#);
- preparing workshops for teachers at the Mazowieckie Education Supervision Body and the Mazowieckie Local Government Centre for the Professional Development of Teachers;
- participating in the organisation of training conferences for the Department of Education for the Warszawa-Bielany district (the district in which the nursery is located), training and consultation for teachers, education staff and councillors;
- co-operation with the District Family Aid Centre.

Since 1994 the nursery has co-operated with the following universities through lectures, workshops and student internships:

- the [Faculty of Pedagogy at the University of Warsaw](#)
- [Maria Grzegorzewska University](#)
- Wszechnica Polska University
- Korczak University in Warsaw
- Teachers' College
- Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University.



The nursery organises conferences devoted to exchanging good practice in the scope of inclusive education:

- ‘Pre-school and school adaptation of children with social and emotional difficulties’ national conference, April 2012;
- ‘The teacher as a tutor for every child and a partner for parents’ national conference, April 2015;

The nursery has taken part in the following examples of international co-operation:

- British Council, 2006: a collaboration between teachers from Portsmouth and Poland; study visits from British teachers to the nursery school;
- Pedagogical University in Paris, April 2011: a study visit from students to the nursery school;
- participation in Inclusion Europe conferences (Austria, Graz 2007; Cyprus, May 2011);
- training in Tbilisi and Warsaw for teachers working in the field of inclusive education;
- participation in conferences devoted to the subject of inclusion in Lithuania and study visits from Lithuanian teachers to the nursery school.

The nursery participates in the following projects:

- ‘I know, I read, I understand’ for teachers of refugees: substantial training development, responsibility for conducting much of the training and conducting classes with teachers (http://www.pah.org.pl/?set_lang=en);
- ‘They are among us’ 2013 (continued in 2014): participation in a project carried out by the Centre for Education Development, a Polish-Georgian collaboration, development of materials (co-authorship) for ‘A child with autism and Asperger’s syndrome at the nursery school and school. Inclusion in a group of peers and creating conditions favouring learning’;
- conducting workshops in Tbilisi for Georgian co-ordinators of inclusive education regarding the inclusion of children with autism and Asperger’s syndrome in a group of peers.

Free-of-charge training sessions are carried out at the nursery for parents of children with special educational needs.

Awards:

- in 1996, 2002 and 2004 the nursery was awarded an Inclusive Leader diploma by the Ministry for Education;

- a Quality Certificate was awarded to the nursery in 2014 by the National Forum for Non-Public Education;
- the head teacher, deputy head and two teachers were awarded a Medal by the National Education Commission;
- the nursery's head teacher, Anna Florek, received the Silver Cross of Merit in 2005, the 'Meritorious for Warsaw' badge and the Chevalier's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta in 2014.

Children and families: to what extent does the proposed example demonstrate evidence of enhanced learning for all children, including those with diverse and additional needs?

- parents participate in the creation of individual educational and therapeutic programmes, they are partners in consulting, developing and evaluating educational and therapeutic results;
- parents are involved in their child's individual classes at the nursery;
- the nursery gives parents an opportunity to contact each other through support groups, parent societies, integration meetings, celebrating children's birthdays at the nursery;
- the nursery offers home visits for children in therapy at the parents' request. The visits aim to help the family work out difficult situations at home or in public places;
- the range of therapeutic help available is so wide that parents do not have to bear additional costs associated with child therapy;
- the regular exchange of information about the child's progress and difficulties between all interested parties (teacher, specialist teacher, therapist, parents) and their common search for acceptable ways to help the child;
- the nursery is open to all needs reported by parents regarding the functioning of their child and their relationship with the child.

Workforce: which staff traits cause the provided services to be of high quality?

Each nursery department has two tutors. The following specialists are also employed by the nursery: psychologists, speech therapists, a physiotherapist and a dance and movement therapist. Tutors are qualified in surdo-pedagogy, oligophrenopedagogy and therapeutic pedagogy.

Therapists (psychologists, speech therapists and specialist teachers) employed at the nursery are observed annually. Those working with applied behavioural analysis undergo a professional evaluation by Dr Anna Budzińska from the [Institute for Child](#)



[Development](#) in Gdańsk.

Collaboration: to what extent are other relevant stakeholders (e.g. parents, diverse community, health and social and other community agencies) engaged in the provided services?

The nursery is aware of the significance of local collaboration, and has therefore been creating a network of collaboration for several years. The nursery tries to promote good practices and develop interesting solutions, implement new initiatives and search for new partners and allies.

The nursery co-operates with the Education Supervision Body, a centre for guidance counselling for children and young people, healthcare institutions, the District Family Aid Centre and the primary schools which children with special educational needs from the nursery will attend. The type of institution and the scope of collaboration always depend on the child's needs.

Any other important quality characteristics

The rule that 'the therapist goes to the child' not 'the child goes to the therapist' means that children enter the therapists' offices as little as possible. The nursery therapists always prefer to work with the children in their natural environment, especially when working on improving self-reliance and developing social skills.

Nursery schools in Poland are female-dominated. In this nursery school each group has two tutors, a man and a woman. A diverse group of peers and tutors provides more opportunities for children to seek out a person they trust to establish a safe relationship with, particularly during the adaptation stage.