

Children with special educational needs in Polish education system

Polish education system

Under the terms of the Education Act 1991 and the implementing regulation, the Polish education system provides adjusted education for every child, appropriate to the age and the level of development reached, as well as adaptation of content, teaching methods and organisation of work regarding to the psycho-physical capabilities, together with the possibility of getting the psychological and pedagogical support and special forms of teaching.

Furthermore, the system provides:

- a chance to receive education in all types of schools by children with disabilities, socially maladjusted and at risk of social maladjustment, according to individual developmental and educational needs and predispositions,
- care of all pupils with disabilities by allowing for the implementation of individualized educational processes, forms, curriculum and revalidation.

Education is compulsory up to the age of 18. Compulsory education begins in the year in which the child reaches 6 years old – one year in a kindergarten (5 years old from 2012).

Education system in Poland provides early intervention for disabled children from the moment of statement of disability to the start of the school.

There are following stages of education:

- pre-school education – for children in the age of 3 till 6, from 2012 till 5
- lower secondary school – six years school, including two stages of education
- middle school – three years school, third stage of education
- upper secondary school – general or vocational school; in those schools students are attending during two, three or four years. The finish of the education in the high and vocational school is an general certificate of education. Vocational schools provide professional exams.

The total system of care and education in Poland is presented in table below:

Table. Structure of Education System in Poland and institutional Children Healthcare (data from 2009/2010)

Type of setting	Key stage	Age Years	Length of program in years	Certificate/ diploma awarded	Providing Organizations
Nursery	<i>not obligatory, only healthcare</i>	0-3	-	-	<i>Health Departments in administrative districts-towns</i>
Nursery School (Kindergarten)	<i>since September 2011 obligatory for children at the age of 5</i>	3-5	3	-	Education Departments in administrative districts-towns
Nursery School or Nursery Division at Primary Schools	Pre-primary	6-7	1	-	Education Departments in administrative districts-towns
Primary school	Stage I-II (primary)	7-9	3	Certificate of Completion of Primary School Education	Education Departments in administrative districts-towns
		9-13	3		
Gymnasium	Stage III (lower secondary)	13- 16	3	Certificate of Completion of Education in the Gymnasium	Education Departments in administrative districts-towns
Basic Vocational School	Basic Vocational	16-18	2	Certificate of Completion of Education in the Basic Vocational School	Education Departments in administrative regions
Technical Secondary School	Stage IV Technical Secondary (upper secondary)	16-20	4	Maturity Certificate of the Technical Secondary School) or Certificate of Completion of Education in the Technical Secondary School	Education Departments in administrative regions
General Lyceum	Stage IV (upper secondary)	16-19	3	Maturity Certificate of the General Lyceum or Certificate of Completion of Education in the General Lyceum	Education Departments in administrative regions, sometimes other administrative bodies

Special educational needs

Children or young people have special educational needs if their opportunities for education, development and learning are limited to such an extent that they cannot meet the educational requirements at mainstream schools without receiving additional assistance, both throughout the entire educational process (for example: because of disability, specific learning difficulties) or during certain period of education (a child showing signs of emotional problems resulting from trauma). In the group of children with special educational needs are in Poland gifted children as well. The school should recognise the abilities and assist in their talents.

Special educational needs refer to:

- long-term illness
- adaptive problems
- specific learning difficulties (*dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia*)
- speech impairment
- trauma-induced emotional and behavioural difficulties
- learning difficulties.

Special organisation of education and teaching methods

In the Polish education system among the pupils with special educational needs we distinguish children who require special organisation of education and teaching methods. This means that such children need broad specialist support during their education, with adapted curriculum and adjusted learning conditions.

Within this group we distinguish disabled children as follows:

- physically disabled
- intellectually disabled
- blind
- visually impaired
- deaf
- hearing impaired
- autistic, including Asperger syndrome
- with multiple impairments;

and pupils with abnormal social functioning:

- socially maladjusted youth (who need reclamation)
- young people at risk of social maladjustment (who need sociotherapy).

Types of schools

There are different types of school in Poland:

- Mainstream schools, providing inclusive education,
- Integration classes in mainstream schools or integration schools
- Special schools and residential special schools for:
 - the blind and the visually impaired
 - for the deaf and the hearing impaired
 - for the mentally handicapped
 - for the physically disabled
 - for the ill children (these schools are situated in the hospitals)
 - centres for children and young people with abnormal social functioning.

Parents are responsible for choosing a school for a child, including child with a disability. If a child has a statement of the need of the special education, parents may choose for him a mainstream school, special or integration school. Special educators refer to types and degrees of disability, as well as other variables to determine the functioning of the student. Special education is designed for pupils with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities and those with profound and multiple disabilities – also those with mental illness and with aggressive behaviour.

The purpose of inclusive education is to ensure that all students gain access to knowledge, skills and information, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area. It brings all students together in one classroom and community and seeks to maximize the potential of all of them. In order to ensure the smooth process of education for every child, in particular with special educational needs, it is necessary to create an individual path of development, from pre-school education during all stages of education, containing the diverse forms of education and proposals for activities supporting the family in its educational and caring role.

The role of the teacher in inclusive classrooms is to provide appropriate individualized supports and services to all students, both with and without special needs. They should vary their teaching styles and choose curricula, teaching aids and materials to meet the diverse learning styles of a diverse population of students. The schools of all types provide pupils with disabilities psychological and pedagogical support, a specific organization of education and appropriate working methods, various forms of stimulation, rehabilitation, therapy tailored to their developmental needs.

In Poland the legal changes in the organisation of education of pupils with special educational needs were made in 2010. The changes were systemic in nature and aimed to:

- more flexible model of education which fits individual pupil needs
- create conditions for systematic increasing the quality of teaching methods
- prepare pupils to make aware, vocational decisions
- provide better access to the early support in the development and education inc. early intervention and pre-school education
- provide forms and conditions of the external exams adopted to the nature of the disability.

Basic assumptions of the changes:

- Support as close to a pupil as possible and as early as possible - to identify pupil's needs is a duty of every teacher, specialist or school employee,
- Teacher and specialist conducting activities with a pupil work together in a team formula
- The ground of education of pupils with disabilities is individual educational and therapeutic program, regardless of the type of the school the disabled pupils attend (before special and inclusive only).