



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT
OF ALL LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Country Report: Estonia



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ESTONIA COUNTRY REPORT

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1. What reference is made to raising achievement in national policies? How is raising achievement defined?

Raising Achievement is a learning and teaching process which enables all learners to attain the highest possible personal success and achievement and to reach their full potential.

The following are the focus areas needed to achieve this aim:

- effective learning and teaching experiences;
- targeted support for individuals and groups when needed;
- effective, high quality staff development;
- collaboration between different target groups.

In Estonian education policy, the main purpose of learning and education is to ensure learners' age-appropriate, moral, physical and social development and the shaping of a comprehensive world view.

In planning and carrying out learning:

- the special character of the learners' perceptual and cognitive processes, abilities, linguistic, cultural and family backgrounds, age, sex, health status, interests and experiences shall be taken into account;
- the learners' study loads should be age- and aptitude-appropriate, allowing them time for holiday and leisure activities;
- learners are allowed to engage in diverse experiences from different cultural fields;
- knowledge and skills are used in real situations: research is conducted and the subject matter in different fields is integrated with everyday life;



- opportunities are created for studying and coping in different social relationships (pupil–teacher, pupil–pupil);
- contemporary and diverse study methods, means and techniques shall be used (including oral and written texts, audio and visual study resources, active study methods, field trips, outdoor and museum learning, etc.);
- relevant means and methods of assessment are used;
- differentiated learning assignments are used, their content and level of difficulty should allow learners to study at a suitable level of exertion, considering everyone’s individuality.

The **Lifelong Learning Strategy** is a document that guides the most important developments in the area of education. It is the basis on which the government makes its decisions for educational funding for 2014–2020 and for the development of programmes that support the achievement of necessary changes.

The general goal of drafting the Lifelong Learning Strategy is to provide all people in Estonia with learning opportunities that are tailored to their needs and capabilities throughout their whole lifespan. This will allow them to maximise opportunities for dignified self-actualisation within society, in their work and in their family life.

To pursue the general goal, five strategic goals have been established:

1. Change in the approach to learning: Implementation of an approach to learning that supports each learner’s individual and social development, the acquisition of learning skills, creativity and entrepreneurship at all levels and in all types of education.
2. Competent and motivated teachers and school leadership: The assessment of teachers and head teachers, including their salaries, is consistent with the qualification requirements for the job and work-related performance.
3. Concordance of lifelong learning opportunities with the needs of the labour market: Lifelong learning opportunities and career services that are diverse, flexible and of good quality, resulting in an increase in the number of people with professional or vocational qualifications in different age groups, and an increase in overall participation in lifelong learning across Estonia.
4. A digital focus in lifelong learning: Modern digital technology is used for learning and teaching effectively and efficiently. An improvement in the digital skills of the total population has been achieved and access to the new generation of digital infrastructure is ensured.
5. Equal opportunities and increased participation in lifelong learning: Equal opportunities for lifelong learning have been created for every individual.



2. What national policies specifically target raising achievement?

Increase engagement and reduce early school leaving

Most measures aimed at reducing early school leaving are applied at the level of basic education (1st–9th year), which constitutes the minimum compulsory education. The **Basic Schools and Upper-Secondary Schools Act**, which came into force in 2010, brought about significant changes and specifications in the legal framework underlying the measures for reducing early school leaving.

Assessing school readiness

Pre-primary childcare institutions assess children's readiness for school based on the expected general skills of 6–7-year-old children and the development and education results described in the national curriculum for pre-primary childcare institutions. Parents must submit their child's school readiness card to the school their child will attend; this card specifies the child's strengths and areas that require development.

Children who have not reached the required readiness for school may, based on a recommendation from the counselling committee, start school the following academic year. During this time, the children must be provided with a suitable environment for development and rehabilitation, as well as the opportunity to continue pre-primary education until they start school.

Measures taken by rural municipalities or cities to ensure school attendance

Where necessary and possible, the local government is obliged to support learners of compulsory school age to attend school, as well as their parents and the school. Pursuant to law, local governments must appoint a position or structural unit entrusted with:

- attending to learners who are of compulsory school age;
- identifying reasons for learners failing to attend school;
- taking measures with regard to learners who fail to attend school.

Local governments organise training for parents in order to support them in creating conditions to ensure school attendance.

A temporary state-funded place in a boarding school may be assigned, based on an application submitted by a social welfare official of the local government, in order to enable learners to perform their duty to attend school.

Absence from studies

Learners are obliged to do study exercises and to participate in the studies laid down for them in the daily schedule of their school or in their individual curriculum.

Parents must notify the school of a learner's absence from studies and the reasons for their absence on the first school day of absence. The school is obliged to contact the parent immediately if they have not notified the school of the absence. If the school is unable to contact the parent and cannot identify the reason for the learner's absence, the



school will inform the learner's rural municipality or city government no later than the following day. At this point, the local government must take measures to identify the reasons for absence and organise measures to ensure performance of the duty to attend school.

Supporting learner development

Pursuant to the Basic Schools and Upper-Secondary Schools Act, teachers must observe the development and coping ability of learners at school and adjust studies according to learners' needs where necessary. For the purpose of developing learners' abilities and talents, their individual study needs must be identified, suitable teaching methods must be chosen and, where necessary, differentiated teaching must be carried out. Schools must provide support for learners who temporarily fall behind in attaining the determined learning outcomes with additional pedagogical guidance outside of lessons.

In Estonia, the Basic School and Upper-Secondary School Act (adopted in 2004 and 2010) establishes that a **developmental conversation** must be held with each learner at school at least once per academic year.

The main purposes of the developmental conversation are:

- supporting the learner's development;
- discussing their strengths and weaknesses;
- making plans for further schooling and development goals.

The class teacher, the learner and their parent(s) participate in this developmental conversation. One of the goals of this discussion is to strengthen and develop co-operation between school and home.

Learners will be provided with the services of support specialists – special education teachers, psychologists or social educators. The school owners create and head teachers organise opportunities for the implementation of the specialist support services.

The head of a school may form long day groups in the school. These groups provide learners with supervision and pedagogical instruction and guidance in their free time, pursuing hobbies and developing interests, as well as helping with their homework. Long day groups organised in schools are usually open until 5pm.

Support is provided from the state budget for covering school owners' school lunch expenses. Schools must provide learners in basic school with a warm school lunch that is financed from the budget of the local government, in addition to the support provided from the state budget. Parents still have to bear a small part of the expenses associated with providing school lunches in basic school in only very few local governments. At the upper-secondary school level, parents have a larger role in covering school lunch expenses.

Providing learners with individual support

Pursuant to law, the head teacher appoints a special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator. Their duty is to support teachers and instruct them in identifying SEN. They make proposals to teachers, parents and head teachers regarding further educational work, the application of measures offered by the school in support of the learner's



development or conducting further investigations, thereby co-operating with teachers and support specialists (through the so-called in-school student assistance roundtables).

During the application of a measure, the teachers and support specialists observe the learner's development and how they are coping.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the application of the measures, all the teachers and support specialists involved describe the learner's development and how they cope. They make their recommendations at least once per academic year.

At the end of the period of application of the measures, the school SEN co-ordinator assesses the effectiveness of the measures, in co-operation with teachers and support specialists. They make proposals to the parents and, where necessary, the head teacher for further activities, for example:

- termination of the application of the measures;
- continuance of the application of the measures in the same or an improved manner;
- replacement of a measure or addition of another measure;
- conducting further investigations;
- recommending that the learner see a specialist doctor, a specialist of a particular field or the consulting committee.

Alternative options for acquiring education

After recommendation of the counselling committee and with the approval of a parent, one-to-one teaching is applied to learners who require constant supervision or assistance at school due to their health status.

If it is deemed necessary due to the learner's health status, the duty to attend school can also be performed through home schooling. Hospitalised learners are provided with education in hospital.

Additional studies (to the amount of 1,050 lessons) may be organised in a basic school for learners who have graduated from basic school under the simplified national curriculum for basic schools. This provides additional preparation and support for the smooth continuance of studies or entry into the labour market. The duration of additional studies is one academic year.

The school may consider studies or activities that fall outside their curriculum, including studies in another general education school, as part of the teaching carried out by the school. This is provided that these studies or activities allow the learner to achieve the learning outcomes specified in the school curriculum or in the learner's individual curriculum.

Learners aged 17 or older (and younger people, in special cases, based on a recommendation from the counselling committee) can acquire basic education in non-stationary studies (flexible, part-time studies with a greater emphasis on independent study). The workload is 24 lessons per week.



Single subjects can also be studied in non-stationary studies. The workload for learners studying single subjects is laid down for each academic year in an individual curriculum.

It is also possible to graduate from basic school and upper-secondary school as an external learner.

Reduce attainment gaps between different groups of learners

In Estonia, there are some attainment gaps between learners in Estonian language schools and Russian language schools.

According to the results of the [2012 PISA test](#), the performance of learners from Estonia's Russian language schools has taken an unprecedented and, in the world context, remarkable leap forward in six years. The skills of learners from both Estonian and Russian language schools have improved. Although the skills of Russian learners are, on average, still lower than those of Estonians, the gap is narrowing rapidly. The results of Russian language schools have improved twice as fast as the results of Estonian language schools.

One way to reduce these gaps in Estonia is by implementing a **language immersion programme**. The year 1998 can be considered as the beginning of the language immersion programme in Estonia. The aim of this programme is acquisition of functional skills of both the language of instruction and the mother tongue. The programme is mostly implemented in Russian language kindergartens and schools. It means that the educational institution, in addition to the home, provides the learner with environment and culture in their mother tongue. Learners in language immersion forms study their mother tongue and its literature and culture.

In Estonia, educational institutions can join the language immersion programme at three levels. In early language immersion, it can be in the last years of kindergarten or in the 1st form of school and, in late language immersion, at school stage II (beginning in the 6th form or earlier). Learners are enrolled in the programme based on parents' applications, in the order of submission of the applications. In addition to one-way (focused on Estonian as a second language) language immersion, Estonia is on the way to implementing two-way immersion (the target language is Estonian and Russian, based on the group including learners with both Russian and Estonian home languages).

In total, 101 educational institutions (64 kindergartens and 37 schools), with around 10,000 learners, had joined the language immersion programme by the beginning of the 2016/2017 academic year.

Increase attainment in particular areas, such as literacy and numeracy

The Estonian comprehensive educational system has been quite successful in supporting all learners' learning. EU Member States have committed to reducing the proportion of low achievers in reading literacy, maths and science to below 15% by 2020. Only Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands currently have under 15% in all three PISA domains, therefore already reaching the benchmark. Estonia has the lowest level of low performers in Europe in reading, maths and science. Between 2009 and 2012, Estonia simultaneously reduced low performers and increased top performers in science. In Estonia, learners' home socio-economic background has less impact on performance than it does in other



countries. Schools must implement appropriate measures immediately when learners have learning difficulties or special needs (Findings from PISA 2006, 2009 and 2012).

Increase the use of learner-focused measures

Learner-focused measures include mentoring, nurturing approaches, personalised learning, assessment for learning and the use of ICT.

An individual curriculum shall be prepared, as required, for learners with SEN.

Formative assessment taking place during studies:

- analyses learners' knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and behaviour;
- provides feedback on learners' previous results and shortcomings;
- encourages and guides learners in further studies;
- allows the planning of future objectives and routes of study.

Above all, formative assessment focuses on comparing learners' development with their previous accomplishments. Feedback describes, at the right time and as precisely as possible, the learners' strengths and shortcomings and should include proposals for further activities that support learners' development.

In the course of a lesson, learners should receive mainly verbal or written feedback regarding knowledge and skills pertaining to the subject and the subject field (including general competences, learning and educational objectives of a stage of study and cross-curricular topics). Teachers and others working in the field of learning and education should provide learners with feedback throughout the school day, in order to support the formation of learners' behaviour, attitudes and values. Basic school should respond to cases in conflict with generally recognised values and good practice.

Learners should be involved in the assessment process for themselves and their companions, in order to develop their skills in setting objectives and to analyse their learning and behaviour based on their objectives. It also increases their motivation for learning.

Digital focus is one of the five strategic aims of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. Digital focus means a knowledgeable and smart process of integrating digital opportunities into studies. This enriches studies, takes learners' needs into better consideration and contributes better to meeting the needs of the labour market. Inclusive education is definitely one area using ICT, as it allows better differentiation of the study process and enables individual or distance learning, where necessary.

Textbook publishers in Estonia are obliged to make all textbooks published after 1 May 2015 available in a digital format. Schools and teachers in Estonia are therefore free to choose the study material. They are strongly encouraged to make the choice based on the needs of their learners and the specialities of the school. Some schools have chosen to only use material composed by the teachers themselves, to better meet the needs of their learners. In order to make various digital study materials that are available on the internet easily accessible for teachers and learners, the MoER recently launched an 'e-Schoolbag' portal. This allows teachers and learners to find different materials, add information about



materials available on other sites and comment on and rate the materials by logging into one environment. The portal also allows access to the materials for learners with SEN.

Improve learner health and well-being

According to law, schools must ensure the mental and physical security and the protection of the health of learners during their stay at school.

Learners acquiring basic or general secondary education in stationary studies (regular, full-time studies) are provided with health services at school, including activities carried out by nurses. The Ministry of Social Affairs establishes the activities that are carried out by nurses providing health services at school and the requirements for their time, scope, availability and location.

School owners ensure the availability of health services at school. In order to ensure consistency, subsection 25 (2) of the Health Care Services Organisation Act also requires owners, in co-operation with the school health services provider, to:

- ensure the availability of rooms and non-medical equipment;
- bear related expenses;
- organise and fund transport for learners to the location of health service provision in the event of an indispensable need, when the learners' parents are unable to organise transport.

Provide additional support for schools achieving lower learner outcomes

See the section on 'Increase attainment in particular areas, such as literacy and numeracy', above.

Improve transition between phases of education

Every general education school should notify their learners of opportunities to continue their studies and the general trends in the labour market and ensure the availability of career services (career studies, information or counselling).

Career counselling is conducted by career specialists who work in county educational support services centres:

- In-school career studies and their development are organised by the person conducting career studies, or a career co-ordinator.
- Career information specialists create, collect and intermediate information related to the labour market and education.
- Career advisers support people in career planning; they help to increase self-awareness, awareness of learning opportunities and the labour market, set goals and plan activities to achieve these goals.

Owners of basic schools may decide to organise additional studies for learners who have graduated from basic school under the simplified curriculum for basic schools. These studies provide additional preparation and support for the smooth continuance of studies or entry into the labour market.



Learners who have obtained a basic school graduation certificate but are not ready to continue their studies or enter the labour market, or who were not admitted to their desired educational institution, undertake these additional studies.

Additional studies last for one academic year. Learners attending additional studies receive up to 1,050 lessons, including 525 lessons of general education studies and 525 lessons of vocational training and the development of social and personal skills. Vocational training is carried out in co-operation with a relevant vocational education institution or employer.

A transition plan is made for each learner, specifying the subject matter and daily schedule of their studies. The learner's knowledge and skills, the requests and needs of the learner and their parents and the school facilities are taken into account when drawing up the transition plan.

According to the operational programme of the Government of the Republic, a memorandum and action plan have been developed for the smooth transition of learners with special needs from the general education system to vocational training and, after the completion of studies, to the labour market. To attain this objective, the Ministry of Social Affairs, in co-ordination with the MoER, has planned a number of activities for the period up to 2019.

Increase involvement of parents/local communities

The responsibilities of schools and parents are stipulated in the **Basic School and Upper-Secondary School Act** and in the **National Curricula**. Schools are responsible for involving parents and local communities.

The MoER started the **Interesting School (*Huvtav Kool*)** initiative in 2013. It aims to reflect society's expectations of school and education, to make the learning experience interesting to learners, teachers and parents and to educational benefactors and friends of education. The initiative sends a clear joint message from the state and the public: that going to school can and must be interesting, that developing a learner's natural curiosity is important and that school must be creative.

The initiative covers four important, expansive and inextricably connected fields in general education: community involvement, professional teachers, optimal curricula and supportive external evaluation processes. Making schools more interesting is an opportunity for and responsibility of every learner, teacher, head teacher, school owner, parent and educational benefactor. An interesting school is a learning organisation that recognises different sources of motivation and, by combining them, creates motivation for learning, willingness and skills for lifelong learning. An interesting school is characterised by openness and a learning process that encourages creativity and intellectual effort by offering a wide range of options and choices.

3. What information/data are collected at national level on attainment and achievement?

In order to raise learners' attainment and achievement, the results of national tests and final graduating exams are collected at national level.



One of the priorities of national thematic supervision is to monitor how the learners' development is supported. The outcomes of this are taken into account in developing the national policy.

Surveys on the availability of support specialists in Estonian schools have been conducted periodically. As a result, the government has taken measures to support areas where access to specialist support services is complicated.

4. What information/data on attainment and achievement (including the wider areas outlined above) are collected at school level?

In order to observe the development of learners with SEN and how they cope, a development observance chart/map is drawn up. It documents:

- the results of the pedagogical-psychological assessment carried out for the identification of SEN;
- additional observations and recommendations from teachers regarding the learner's strengths and weaknesses;
- recommendations from the school support specialists;
- test and examination results;
- the recommendations of the counselling committee, regarding organisation of studies;
- the measures applied to the learner.

The head teacher appoints the people in charge of drawing up and completing the learner's development observance map.

5. What information/data are used for school evaluation and quality assurance at national/local level?

The following are used for school evaluation:

- Self-evaluation
- Inspection
- Analysis of learner achievement/other school-level data
- Stakeholder surveys.

6. Are there any specific initiatives in place to support/enable teachers and/or school leaders to raise the attainment and achievement of all learners?

In 2015, the MoER launched the 'Inclusive school' pilot project, which aimed to:



- enhance co-operation between education officials in the central and local authorities and schools;
- harmonise the concept of inclusive education;
- pilot the implementation of organisational measures to support the inclusion of learners with SEN in mainstream schools.

Targeted support from the state budget was allocated to 14 local governments to help schools:

- improve their learning environments to support inclusive education;
- organise the necessary training for teachers and parents;
- employ the necessary support specialists;
- enhance co-operation with various stakeholders at the community level;
- share their experience with other schools.

The MoER has launched continuing training programmes for teachers and head teachers, with the implementation of inclusive education as the cross-cutting priority. The objective of implementing the programme is to improve the teaching competency of teachers, academic staff and heads of educational institutions and, as a result, the learning outcomes. The learning methods employed support:

- learners' individual development, creativity and enterprising and innovative spirit;
- the implementation of principles of inclusive education;
- learners with SEN to cope better across all levels and types of education.

7. What other policies may influence levels of attainment and achievement for all learners?

Organisation of schools and studies – autonomy

Schools in Estonia have autonomy and flexibility. Schools and teachers have flexibility regarding the selection of learning content, teaching strategies/methods and assessment strategies/methods. Teachers are free to choose learning content and teaching strategies according to the learners' former knowledge, skills, attitudes and individual needs.

The organisation of learning and education is set out in the school curriculum, based on the requirements in the national curriculum. Studies may be organised in many ways: all subjects may be taught throughout the academic year or at certain times during the academic year. A topic approach allows certain topics to be focused on, without distinguishing between conventional subject lessons.

The purpose of the teaching process is to create an age-appropriate, secure learning environment that acts in a positive way, aids learners' development and supports the development of:

- intellectual curiosity and learning skills;



- self-reflection and critical thinking ability;
- knowledge and qualities related to their will;
- creative self-expression;
- social and cultural identity.

In the national curriculum, teaching is considered to be the organising of the learning environment and learning activities in a manner that places the learner before the task. Tasks should conform to learners' development but require effort and give learners the opportunity to acquire the planned learning outcomes. Successful education requires trust and co-operation between the entire school community, the learners and their families. The key person in shaping views is the teacher. Their function is to serve as a personal role model, supporting learners' natural desire for clarity with regard to their identity and offering support for the development of behavioural habits that are accepted in various groups and communities and all of society, through a suitable development environment.

Pathfinder centres

On 1 September 2014, Pathfinder centres began their work in every county. Pathfinder centres offer the following integrated services:

- special needs education, speech therapy, social pedagogical and psychological counselling (level II);
- special educational and psychological counselling in municipal schools with less than 350 learners (level I);
- career counselling and career information exchange (level II).

The integrated approach to services offered by the centre will raise the quality of all the services. This allows them to be better offered to their target groups and creates an opportunity for comprehensive planning, development and ensuring of sustainability.

Educational counselling services

Educational counselling includes:

- the counselling of learners, their legal representatives and people working to identify their abilities and development opportunities;
- the prevention and resolution of problems related to learning or behaviour.

The purpose of educational counselling is to support learners to cope, to support their parents and people working with them to ensure their development and to provide training activities according to the learner's abilities and age. Availability of the counselling services prevents learners from dropping out of school and helps to ensure learners' competitiveness and that they can cope.

The target groups for educational counselling are:

- learners with special educational and developmental needs;
- learners' legal representatives (their parents, etc.);
- the employees of educational institutions;



- social workers and employees of local governments, education officials and managers.

Educational counselling services include special educational, speech therapy, social pedagogical and psychological counselling. Educational counselling services are offered in the form of individual or group counselling, direct contact or remote consulting. Counselling is conducted using a variety of methods and tools. If required, training will be held on the important topics related to the field.

Multi-agency work

Estonia's goal is that educational, social and health services which support the instruction and development of learners with SEN are cohesive and adjusted according to learners' needs.

Co-operation between the MoER and the Ministry of Social Affairs takes into account the following principles:

- The availability of educational, social and health services to learners with severe or multiple disorders must be ensured, regardless of the type or form of ownership of the school.
- The educational, social and health services applicable to learners with severe or multiple disorders must support the development of learners in an integrated way.

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Affairs, a cohesive model for educational, health, rehabilitation and social services rendered to learners with SEN and the operational programme thereof will be drafted for the period of 2016–2020.

8. Please provide a short commentary/critical reflection on the main policy challenges

In 2013, the **Concept of Organisation of Instruction for Pupils with SEN for 2014–2020** were compiled. They described the most significant weaknesses in the current organisation of instruction:

- Learners with SEN cannot get enough necessary support. Therefore, the involvement of learners with SEN in mainstream schools in Estonia is low in comparison to other European and Nordic countries.
- Education officers, school leaders and teachers are not prepared enough and lack sufficient knowledge to implement inclusive education.
- Local governments have very different capacity levels for the application of specialist support services. As such, learners with SEN do not have equal conditions for accessing specialist support services.
- The network of segregated special schools for learners with SEN does not conform to current or future needs.
- The cohesion of the educational, health and social support measures for severely disabled learners is weak.



An action plan was developed to overcome these challenges and there is a need for legislative amendments. For this purpose, a survey was launched, the results of which were received at the end of 2016.

The survey aimed to find out how the current national education policy in Estonia supports the educational and social inclusion of learners with SEN, the attainment of their learning outcomes and continuation of studies after acquiring basic education. It also considered what should be changed to make inclusion more effective. The survey looked at areas including:

- the classification of learners with SEN in legislation;
- national curricula;
- available learning materials;
- applicable support measures both inside and outside schools;
- the financing system.

The survey tasks were as follows:

- Conduct a comparative assessment of the current education policy. Provide a comparative overview of trends that are evident internationally and in the member countries of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education with regards the implementation of inclusive education policy. Analyse how the current national education policy (primarily legislation and financing system) has supported or obstructed the application of the principles of inclusive education in Estonia.
- Assess the effectiveness of inclusion in Estonia. Using the data in the Estonian Education Information System, analyse the education paths of children engaged in different types of education (mainstream class in mainstream school, special class in mainstream school, special school) to determine the effectiveness of different education paths: success in terms of further education, employment.
- Analyse the significance of inclusion and the satisfaction of various stakeholders with the current arrangements and their readiness to expand inclusion.
- Assess how relevant and up-to-date learning materials designed for learners with SEN are (based on a survey of owners and heads of school, teachers and parents). Identify the need for and possibilities of using (digital) learning materials.



ANNEX 1. EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE TO RAISE LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

Example submitted by: The Centre for Ethics, University of Tartu: Good School Project

Contacts:

Nele Punnar, project manager

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1. Location of school/learning community and short description of context

The context is national and the aim is to include all the schools in Estonia. The higher aim is to ensure that schools in Estonia are evaluated on fair grounds and that the evaluation motivates schools to pursue improvements in different aspects.

The process of developing the Good School Model involved 87 Estonian experts, including educational researchers, school head teachers, teachers, representatives of various unions, MoER officials and representatives from local councils.

The Good School Model aims to describe different aspects of a good school and to find the criteria that indicate that a school actually deals with these aspects. The model focuses on the self-evaluation of schools in given aspects.

2. Summary information on school/learning community

The Centre for Ethics at the University of Tartu and its numerous collaborators were motivated to develop the Good School Model to demonstrate that league tables based on examination results are one-sided. They can be harmful to school development and co-operation between schools. These league tables are often interpreted as if they show how good a school is, when in fact they only show learners' academic achievement by pointing out which schools have the most academically-gifted learners.

The new national curricula for basic and upper-secondary schools stress that schools have both educational and character-building functions. Schools should support the personal and social development of each learner, together with the development of critical thinking, creativity and entrepreneurship. This, however, requires a novel approach to the roles of teacher and learner and recognition of the importance of co-operation at all levels. With the focus on co-operation and development in education, the understanding of the role of teacher/supervisor as an authoritarian source of academic knowledge is no longer adequate.

Besides knowledge, attitudes in the sphere of values and skills are also important. In order to raise children as happy people, different parties need to co-operate – schools, families, after-school clubs, youth centres, local councils and the state. However, there are



currently no league tables or evaluation criteria for these activities and, as they are not evaluated, they are not acknowledged and do not receive sufficient attention.

If the aim is to reform the educational process, a reform of the evaluation practices applied to schools is also necessary. Teachers' readiness to support learners' personal and social development is not enough if the success of their work is still evaluated solely on the basis of learners' academic achievements. As long as examination results are the sole criteria for a school's success, schools will not have sufficient motivation to develop all important aspects. It is therefore very important that school staff, parents and local school authorities understand that a good school is a complex phenomenon and different criteria and tools are necessary to evaluate it.

3. Summary of key feature/strengths of current practice

The Good School Model focuses on school self-evaluation and self-analysis, based on the different aspects of the model. The whole process is supported by the Centre for Ethics at the University of Tartu (feedback to the written self-analysis, meetings, trainings, critical friend programme, etc.).

Instructors from the Centre for Ethics give written feedback on the school's analysis, calling attention to parts that need improving, methods of data gathering and deficiencies. After giving this feedback, the critical friend and a member of the Centre for Ethics visit the school in order to feedforward:

- How do different aspects look to the critical friend?
- How are these in accordance with the aims, principles and values that are important to the school?

The critical friend helps the school to reflect on different aspects, to sort activities and aims and to bring out the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

4. Data/information available

During the period 2009–2015, 46 schools from all over Estonia completed self-analysis reports.

The 'School of Values Education Award' was given to nine schools.

The 'Good School Pathfinder' quality mark was given to different schools 37 times and the 'Good School Promoter' quality mark was given to seven schools.

With the permission of the acknowledged schools, good examples from the self-analysis reports are published on the Ethics in Estonia portal ([Eetikaveeb](#)). A best practice database is being compiled, with the aim of sharing the valuable experiences of schools, supporting the creation of a co-operation network and disseminating the Good School notion and its different viewpoints.



5. Focus of example/work to raise achievement

As a part of the Good School Project, the 'Good School Pathfinder' quality mark is awarded to schools that have shown willingness to develop and have written a self-analysis report based on the Good School Model. A competition for this quality mark was organised for the first time in 2013. Its aims to recognise the work done by schools in the areas that have previously received little attention, but are nevertheless very important:

- the development of a variety of learners' gifts and abilities to the highest possible degree;
- formation of learners' social skills and their attitudes in the sphere of values;
- support of lifelong learning;
- attractive school environment;
- physical and psychological safety of learners;
- promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Since 2014, the 'Good School Promoter' quality mark has been given to schools that have continuously shown their willingness to foster the development of values and have supported individual development of both learners and staff, in co-operation with stakeholders. The recognised schools can assess their work on the development of values in a self-analysis report based on the Good School Model.

Every year, the Board of the National Values Development Programme gives a '[School of Values Education Award](#).' The award acknowledges the school's systematic and effective work to create an environment that supports wholesome growth. Winners receive a dolomite cup which they keep for a year. It then passes to the following year's winner. A tree that is planted in the cup is transplanted at the winning school and thus remains there permanently.

Candidates for the 'School of Values Education Award' are evaluated based on the values development aspect of the Good School Model self-analysis report. This includes:

- the process of agreeing on values;
- teaching and school culture based on values;
- child-centred approach;
- organised and methodical approach;
- inclusion of all stakeholders;
- continuity of activities.



6. Summary information about developments/current work in this area

The project targets all the schools in Estonia. The actions are divided throughout the year:

- April: Open invitation to all schools to participate in the project and to send in the first analysis in four areas:
 - Education process
 - School environment
 - Leadership
 - Co-operation and good relationships;
- May: First deadline for sending in the analysis;
- August: Critical friends read the analyses and write thorough feedback for the schools;
- August–September: Site visits with representatives from the Centre for Ethics and the critical friends;
- November: Second deadline for the analysis based on the information and questions presented in the feedback and/or site visit;
- December: Awards ceremony.

7. Key learning points from this example

One of the learning points so far has been the question of how to encourage schools to include all stakeholder groups in the analysis process. In order to get a full and honest overview of different aspects, teachers, learners and parents must be included in the process, as well as the school management. Information and data should also be discussed with the local government.

Reading and assessing the self-analysis reports, giving feedback and visiting schools has shown excellent examples of inclusion in schools where planning and self-analysis is done in co-operation with the school administration, teachers and support staff, learners and their parents. Schools often choose the aspects of the Good School Model that are directly related to inclusive education for analysis. For example:

- School staff make efforts to find out the individual needs of each learner and take these into account in the education process (both gifted learners and those in need of additional learning support are given special attention).
- Teachers apply the principles of assessment for learning.
- Those in need of assistance are noticed and helped.

Describing and analysing the different methods of inclusion and receiving feedback help the school to better understand its activities, set clearer aims, notice the areas in need of improvement and plan development activities.



Many years' experience has shown that schools need support when collecting and analysing data that proves the effectiveness of paying attention to different aspects, shows development needs and forms a basis for making strategic decisions in school. It is therefore necessary to add optional measures and indicators to the Good School Model to help schools plan informed and purposeful data gathering and make evidence-based analysis.

School leaders, support staff and experts outside schools have been involved in developing the indicators.

Development of the Good School Model is also planned for after-school clubs and vocational schools.

8. Supporting materials (web links, papers, presentations, etc.)

[Is it possible at all to measure the goodness of a school?](#)

[Good school and good pre-school](#)