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THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF SCHOOL COUNSELLING CENTRES IN THE SYSTEM OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

O PAPEL E A FUNÇÃO DOS CENTROS DE ACONSELHAMENTO
ESCOLAR NO SISTEMA DE EDUCAÇÃO INCLUSIVA

EL PAPEL Y LA FUNCIÓN DE LOS CENTROS DE ORIENTACIÓN
ESCOLAR EN EL SISTEMA DE EDUCACIÓN INCLUSIVA

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ABSTRACT: This study presents a comprehensive analysis of the role and functions of school counselling centres within the inclusive education system of the Czech Republic. It examines the work of pedagogical-psychological counselling centres, special education centres, and school-based counsellors, including educational counsellors, prevention specialists, special educators, and psychologists. Drawing on current legislation, literature, and educational practice, the study discusses challenges such as staffing capacity, inter-professional collaboration, and the need for methodological support for teachers. It emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation, counsellors' professional competencies, and the institutional integration of counselling services in schools. The findings underline that counselling centres are essential not only for supporting students with special educational needs but also for ensuring the long-term sustainability of inclusive education. The study concludes that strengthening staffing, methodological resources, and strategic involvement of these centres is vital for improving inclusive educational practice.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive education. Interdisciplinary cooperation. Pupil support. School counselling facilities. Staffing.

RESUMO: Este estudo apresenta uma análise abrangente do papel e das funções dos centros de aconselhamento escolar no sistema de educação inclusiva da República Tcheca. Examina o trabalho dos centros de aconselhamento pedagógico-psicológico, dos centros de educação especial e dos conselheiros escolares, incluindo conselheiros educacionais, especialistas em prevenção, educadores especiais e psicólogos. Com base na legislação atual, literatura e prática educacional, o estudo discute desafios como capacidade de pessoal, colaboração interprofissional e a necessidade de suporte metodológico para professores. Enfatiza a importância da cooperação interdisciplinar, das competências profissionais dos conselheiros e da integração institucional dos serviços de aconselhamento nas escolas. Os resultados sublinham que os centros de aconselhamento são essenciais não só para apoiar os alunos com necessidades educativas especiais, mas também para garantir a sustentabilidade a longo prazo da educação inclusiva. O estudo conclui que o fortalecimento do pessoal, dos recursos metodológicos e do envolvimento estratégico desses centros é vital para melhorar a prática educacional inclusiva.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação inclusiva. Cooperação interdisciplinar. Apoio ao aluno. Instalações de aconselhamento escolar. Pessoal.

RESUMEN: Este estudio presenta un análisis integral del papel y las funciones de los centros de orientación escolar en el sistema de educación inclusiva de la República Checa. Examina el trabajo de los centros de asesoramiento pedagógico-psicológico, de los centros de educación especial y de los orientadores escolares, incluidos los asesores educativos, especialistas en prevención, pedagogos especiales y psicólogos. Con base en la legislación vigente, la literatura y la práctica educativa, el estudio aborda desafíos como la capacidad de personal, la colaboración interprofesional y la necesidad de apoyo metodológico para los docentes. Se enfatiza la importancia de la cooperación interdisciplinaria, de las competencias profesionales de los orientadores y de la integración institucional de los servicios de orientación en las escuelas. Los resultados subrayan que los centros de orientación son esenciales no solo para apoyar a los estudiantes con necesidades educativas especiales, sino también para garantizar la sostenibilidad a largo plazo de la educación inclusiva. El estudio concluye que el fortalecimiento del personal, de los recursos metodológicos y de la articulación estratégica de estos centros es fundamental para optimizar la práctica educativa inclusiva.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación inclusiva. Cooperación interdisciplinaria. Apoyo al estudiante. Centros de orientación escolar. Personal.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there have been significant changes in the approach to education for children with special educational needs. The concept of inclusive education, enshrined in international documents (e.g. the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD], 2006) and reflected in national education policies, represents a major shift.

Education policy in the Czech Republic is aimed at developing an education system that puts education at the forefront of society and individuals. Education is seen as an important value that people cultivate throughout their lives.

Quality education should be available to all; everyone has an equal chance of a better life. At every level of education, it is essential that pupils know what is expected of them and what they can expect from education. Education is based on current human knowledge, fosters creativity and meets the needs of society. People acquire knowledge throughout their lives and their interest in education is supported by experienced teaching staff. Teaching staff should be adequately prepared for their role and should be able to guide and motivate pupils to achieve the best possible results in the set objectives, taking into account the societal trend towards inclusion in education.

The integration of individuals with disabilities into a society of equal opportunity has become a major goal of special education (Vítková et al., 2007). Inclusion is a concept that promotes the integration of individuals with disabilities. This concept is understood as the integration of individual students into mainstream schools. It is based on the regret of labeling and stigmatization and intends to put an end to special institutions and special education (Michalík et al., 2018). The primary goal of inclusion is the collective education of individual pupils in “mainstream” schools, regardless of their level of disability (Hájková & Strnadová, 2010).

The term inclusive education has recently been applied to many activities and practices, which can lead to misunderstandings. Inclusive education can be assessed as a domain of education policy in the Czech Republic. It is essential to be aware of what creates inclusion, i.e. attempts at change, alternative methods and forms of work. A very sensitive aspect of the process of inclusive education is the moral aspect, the right of every member of society to equal access to education and also the financial support for inclusive education. These are key aspects of putting inclusive education into practice (Clough & Corbett, 2005).

In the context of inclusive education, it is necessary to mention the family, both from the perspective of the environment in which the child/student lives and which influences him/her, and from the perspective of the partner of the educational institution. Communication, trust and respect are the areas that ensure the effectiveness of cooperation between the school and the family. Parents, or the school, have a shared responsibility in the process of

upbringing and education of the child and without cooperation it is impossible to ensure a positive influence on the child (Stárek et al., 2021).

It is very important to focus on the fact that there are big differences in education and to try not to widen the already wide gap between individuals. Access to education is for everyone, including pupils with special educational needs. It is important to take into account accessibility and inclusion, differentiation and individualisation in teaching, as well as the activation of pupils. At the same time, we can support the idea of Daněk and Klugerová (2023) who see inclusive education as a tool of social exclusion.

School counselling centres play a key role in this process, providing expert support for schools, teachers, pupils and their families. School counselling centres include mainly pedagogical-psychological counselling centres and special education centres. Their task is not only diagnosis and intervention, but also systematic support for an inclusive school climate, methodological support for teachers and interdisciplinary cooperation. These facilities are an integral part of the wider school guidance system, which aims to create conditions for the full participation of all children in education. Given the increasing diversity of school populations and the demands placed on teachers, the importance of the work of these facilities is deepening. Another instance must also be mentioned, but it is not the subject of this professional text.

This is the educational care centre, which is a school establishment established on the basis of Act No. 109/2002 Coll., the Act on the Execution of Institutional Education or Protective Education in School Establishments and on Preventive Educational Care in School Establishments and on Amendments to Other Acts. Educational care centres provide preventive and educational care for children, pupils and students at risk of the emergence and development of behavioural disorders, while also providing their services and assistance to parents (legal representatives) or the school. The educational care centres are staffed by pedagogical workers, special educators and psychologists who can be contacted in cases of behavioural problems of children, pupils and students.

High-quality inclusive education requires not only an open and respectful school environment, but also a professional support system. In this context, the staffing of school and school counselling services, which have faced increasing demands from schools and parents in recent years, is absolutely crucial. As current analyses indicate, the availability of qualified professionals—including school psychologists, special educators, educational counsellors and prevention methodologists—is often insufficient, uneven and dependent on the size and type of school and regional conditions (Mapa vzdělávání, 2023).

This staffing disparity can significantly affect the quality of counselling services and thus the inclusive education process itself. This is why it is essential to pay increased attention to both the training of these staff and their systematic support and embedding in the organisational structure of the school.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Legislative support and rights

The right to education is a fundamental human right. After 1990, the structure of the school system in the Czech Republic was created as part of the equalization of educational opportunities. It guarantees the right of every individual to an education according to his or her abilities and skills. These rights are also regulated in the current version of Education Act No. 82/2015 Coll. on pre-school, primary, secondary, higher vocational and other education (amendment to Act No. 561/2004 Coll.). This Act ensures education according to the needs of each individual, equal access to education for all without discrimination, free education and the possibility of lifelong learning for individuals.

At the same time, it defines and regulates the education system for pupils with special educational needs, which include pupils with mental disabilities. The aim of the legislative changes was to comprehensively change the environment for inclusive education in primary schools. The education of children, pupils and students can be carried out with the help of support measures. The law defines:

supportive measures means necessary adjustments in education and school services appropriate to the health, cultural background or other living conditions of a child, pupil or student. Children, pupils and students with special educational needs shall have the right to free provision of support measures by the school and educational institution.

Pupils with special educational needs are entitled under the above-mentioned law to the provision of support measures, which consist of the provision of counselling assistance, adaptation of the organisation, aids, workplace, the use of compensatory aids, education according to an individual plan, the use of a teaching assistant or other teaching staff, etc.

The regulation of the rules for the education of children, pupils and students with special educational needs and the education of pupils referred to in Article 16(9) of the Education Act is dealt with in detail in Decree No. 27/2016 Coll. This Decree characterises the possibilities of support measures that lead to the correction of a pupil's learning and educational problems due to a medical condition and deals with an individual education plan for pupils with special educational needs.

Education is also one of the basic components of an individual's integration into society. The promotion of integration and equal opportunities within education is also evident in the Czech Republic's accession to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

(which was done in 2009), which takes disability as a concept of interaction and seeks to combat discrimination and, conversely, to promote equal opportunities. The purpose of this treaty is to protect and ensure the recognition of human rights for persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual disabilities.

Furthermore, by signing the Convention, the Czech Republic has committed itself to eliminating prejudices and stereotypes against people with disabilities in society. It thus guarantees, among other things, to create conditions for equal opportunities in education, the development of talents, creativity or potential and the promotion of an inclusive approach in education. It also guarantees to assist in the acquisition of practical and theoretical knowledge according to the abilities and skills of each individual and to provide an appropriate environment, form of education or access to all levels of education (CRPD, 2006).

An important standard is the National Curriculum, which presents framework curricula that set the direction and content of teaching for different types of educational institutions and for different levels of education. The Framework Education Programmes are regulated by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic. The RVP is also established for pre-school education and regulates the curriculum and content of teaching in kindergartens or special schools.

There is also a Framework Curriculum for Primary Education, which regulates the education of pupils with mild mental disabilities, under which the educational process is adapted according to the physical and psychological capabilities of the pupils. There is also a framework curriculum for special primary schools and a framework curriculum for vocational education. These programmes provide the basic curriculum in which individual schools subsequently base the preparation and implementation of teaching, including schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities (Team of authors, 2017).

The framework curricula are followed by school curricula, which are developed by each school itself, based on the framework curriculum designed for the type of education in that type of establishment. If necessary, an individual education plan is then developed for pupils, which is particularly suitable for individually integrated pupils, pupils with intellectual disabilities, but also for group-integrated pupils or pupils in special school settings. It is based on the school curriculum and is drawn up according to the information from the results of psychological and special education examinations. The plan outlines the content and timing of the lessons to match the pupils' abilities and skills. It also lists all the support measures to be used in the pupil's learning. This plan is usually drawn up before the pupil starts school, but it may change as necessary during the school year.

Support measures are enshrined in Czech legislation, namely Act No.82 /2015 Coll., which amends Act No.561/2004 Coll., on pre-school, primary, secondary, higher vocational and other education, and Decree No.27/2016 Coll., on the education of pupils with special

educational needs and gifted pupils. Support measures consist of counselling assistance from the school and the school counselling centre. On the basis of their recommendations, adjustments are made to the organisation of the content, assessment, forms and methods of education and school services, including the provision of teaching of special education subjects and including the extension of the length of secondary or higher vocational education by up to two years.

Furthermore, the conditions for admission to and completion of education shall be amended. The use of compensatory aids, special textbooks and special teaching aids, the use of communication systems for deaf and deafblind persons, and the expected learning outcomes within the limits set by the framework education programmes and accredited education programmes will be defined. They also provide for the possibility of education according to an individual education plan or the use of an assistant or other pedagogical worker (interpreter, transcriber, etc.) (Act No 82 /2015 Coll.).

The severity of individual disabilities requires varying degrees of support to ensure that the resulting effect is as acceptable to the pupil as possible, while achieving the best possible results within the limits of what is possible. Support measures are divided into five levels according to organisational, pedagogical and financial requirements. Support measures can be combined. Support measures of the higher levels are used only when the support measures of the lower levels are insufficient to meet the pupil's educational potential. Inclusion in support measures shall be determined by the implementing regulation.

Support measures of the first level are applied by the school without a recommendation from the counselling centre; support measures of the second to fifth level can only be applied with a recommendation from the counselling centre. The prior written informed consent of the adult pupil or legal guardian is always a condition for the provision of second to fifth level support measures. If, on the basis of the recommendation of the counselling centre, it is no longer necessary to provide a second to fifth level support measure, the school shall cease to provide it after consultation with the pupil or legal representative.

In the United States, inclusive education is regulated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990), which ensures the right to a free and accessible education for all children with disabilities. This law requires schools to provide what are called Individual Education Plans (IEPs), which set out specific supports for each student with special needs.

A comparison of international and national approaches shows that while some countries have a long tradition of inclusive education and legislation is comprehensively developed, in other countries there are still institutional barriers that prevent the full implementation of inclusion.

Educational and psychological counselling centre

The pedagogical-psychological counselling centre is a key link in the system of school counselling facilities, whose activities are essential for the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools. It is a specialised facility providing counselling, diagnostic, intervention and methodological services in the field of upbringing, education and psychological development of children and young people. Pedagogical-psychological counselling centres are established as part of the network of school facilities according to the above-mentioned legislation.

The primary function of the pedagogical-psychological counselling centre is the professional assessment of the special educational needs of pupils, the identification of risks in their development and education and the proposal of appropriate support measures. The diagnostic activities carried out in these facilities are based on a multidisciplinary approach, combining the knowledge of pedagogy, psychology, special education and other related fields.

On the basis of a comprehensive diagnostic assessment, a recommendation is drawn up, which is a binding document for the school and the provider. This outcome includes information on the nature of the child's special educational needs, a proposal for placement in an appropriate educational regime (e.g. mainstream school with support measures), specific forms of support and, where appropriate, recommendations for cooperation with other institutions.

In the context of inclusive education, pedagogical-psychological counselling centres play a crucial role in ensuring equal access to education. They help to identify not only pupils with developmental learning disabilities, behavioural or other difficulties, but also pupils who are gifted or at risk of social disadvantage. This promotes the concept of diversity in the classroom and helps to individualise the educational process.

The counselling centres provide methodological support to schools in implementing support measures, draw up intervention plans and actively participate in the development of individual education plans. This cooperation with schools can take the form of one-off consultations as well as long-term support in the framework of so-called 'shared care', in which counselling centre professionals visit schools and participate in solving specific cases directly in their environment (Pivarč, 2020).

Preventing school failure, risky behaviour and early school leaving is also an important part of the work of pedagogical-psychological counselling centres. The counselling centres are involved in developing and implementing prevention programmes, educational activities and seminars aimed at promoting mental health, strengthening social skills, developing a healthy school climate and building positive relationships between pupils and teachers. Counselling staff—psychologists, special educators and social educators—often act as mediators in cases of conflict, bullying or other relationship problems (Tomková et al., 2020).

From the point of view of professional security, it is important to emphasise that the staff of pedagogical-psychological counselling centres must meet high demands in terms of qualifications and training. Their work requires not only in-depth knowledge of the theory of the field, but also the ability to apply methods of diagnosis, intervention and counselling in a variety of school contexts. At the same time, these professionals face challenges related to staffing shortages, high client numbers, and pressure for rapid administrative implementation of referrals (Štehlík et al., 2023).

Last but not least, the indispensable role of pedagogical-psychological counselling centres in the transition of pupils between the levels of education, especially in the transition from pre-primary to primary education and then to secondary education. In these cases, guidance centres provide both diagnostic support and career guidance, taking into account the specifics of the pupil's individual development, abilities and social background.

The pedagogical-psychological counselling centre therefore acts as a complex institution whose activities go beyond a one-off diagnostic exercise and aim to provide continuous support to schools and families in the area of inclusive education. The effective functioning of these institutions depends on high-quality interdisciplinary cooperation, professional erudition of staff, public trust and systemic support from the state. Its contribution to the formation of inclusive education lies primarily in the fact that it is able to mediate the connection between professional counselling and the pedagogical reality of schools, thus contributing to the implementation of the principle of equality and access to education for all.

Special Education Centre

The Special Education Centre is a specialised school counselling facility that focuses on providing specialist support to children, pupils and students with disabilities. These centres are set up in schools established for the education of pupils with disabilities and provide services in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act and related implementing regulations. Their activities are highly professional, individualised and based on a thorough knowledge of the specifics of each type of disability, with an emphasis on cooperation with the family and the school as key partners in the child's education.

The main function of the special education centre is to provide counselling, diagnostic, intervention and methodological support in the field of education of pupils with disabilities. The Centre operates on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity and comprehensiveness of support—it is based on the specific needs of the child, takes into account the degree and type of disability and proposes adequate support measures aimed at fulfilling the child's educational potential.

The special education centres are competent to make expert recommendations on the inclusion of a child in a special education regime, to grant second to fifth level support

measures and to cooperate in drawing up individual education plans. Diagnostics carried out within the special education centre are based on a combination of pedagogical, psychological, special education and social assessment methods (Růžička et al., 2020) Cooperative learning, which replaces traditional competitiveness, plays a crucial role in strengthening social bonds among students and developing their collaborative skills (Bačová, 2024).

The Centre's professional activities are closely linked to the promotion of inclusive education, as the Centres not only identify the special educational needs of pupils, but also support their inclusion into the mainstream education system through systematic work with teachers, teaching assistants and other members of the school counselling centre. The centre's staff—special educators, psychologists, or other professional staff—provide methodological consultation, intervention and supervision in the education of pupils with disabilities directly in the school environment. This is often a field-based form of cooperation, with centre staff visiting the school, observing teaching and providing targeted consultations on adapting teaching methods, communicating with the child or adjusting the school environment (Najmonová et al., 2023). The role of the special education centre in the field of education and support for families of children with disabilities is also significant. The centre provides parents with expert advice, facilitates contacts to other support institutions (e.g. early care, health care facilities, social services) and acts as an important source of information about the child's educational integration options.

Centre staff often act as guides for families through the system of support measures, help parents to navigate the legislative requirements and contribute to reducing their uncertainty or fears about inclusion. In terms of staffing, special centres are staffed by highly qualified staff with expertise in specific disabilities—typically hearing, visual, physical, intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders or multiple disabilities. This narrow specialisation is one of the main features of these centres and distinguishes them from the broader focus of educational psychological counselling centres. At the same time, however, this specialisation requires continuous training, supervision and sharing of experience between centres, as the field of disability and its impact on education evolves in the light of new research and pedagogical-technological innovations (Valenta et al., 2020).

The special education centres also contribute to the creation of expert documents for systemic decisions in the field of inclusive education, contribute to the methodological guidance of teaching staff, and create educational and didactic materials adapted to pupils with disabilities. Their work is thus multifaceted and is aimed not only at working directly with the child, but also at shaping the inclusive climate of the school as a whole.

From the perspective of inclusive pedagogy, the work of the special education centre is an indispensable professional support that ensures that inclusion is not just a formal process, but that it is actually implemented with respect for the individual possibilities and limits of the

pupil. It is thanks to their specialisation, consistency in the diagnostic and intervention process and their ability to establish close cooperation with teachers and families that these centres are becoming important carriers of the quality of inclusive education in the Czech Republic (Slowík, 2022).

The role and involvement of teaching and other staff providing counselling services in school counselling centres

The roles and distribution of roles within the school counselling service are based on the counselling programme of each school. For this reason, the roles of individual school counsellors may vary slightly from school to school.

Educational counsellor: at present, an educational counsellor is typically a teacher with a significant amount of teaching experience and a subsequent university qualification gained through specialised postgraduate study. (Opekarová, 2010) Depending on the number of pupils in the school, the scope of direct teaching activities of the teacher who is responsible for the function of the educational advisor is reduced by one to five hours per week, according to Section 3 of Government Regulation No. 75/2005 Coll (Puškinová in Mertin & Krejčová, 2020; Ondráčková in Knotová, 2014).

In the school environment, career counselling and counselling in the field of choice of further studies and preparation for future profession has traditionally been provided. In addition, this position in the school usually coordinates support for pupils with special educational needs and, in connection with this, also facilitates mutual contact and cooperation of teachers between the school, the pupil's family and school counselling centres or other entities (Slowík, 2022).

Ondráčková (in Knotová, 2014) adds to the other activities of the educational advisor the care of pupils at risk of failure and gifted pupils, solving problems related to school attendance in the sense of high or unexcused absences of the pupil, as well as solving problem situations and serious offences against the school rules (among others, educational difficulties, disciplinary measures and educational committees). Support through counselling is provided by counsellors to help pupils take control of their lives, form their own opinions, make decisions and solve their own problems. These positions are expected to apply their knowledge and skills in dealing with school crises related to a variety of problems and social pathologies in schools, as well as in promoting mental health, academic success of pupils and the development of talented children (Akdemir, 2023).

Thus, the basic tasks of this counselling position also include monitoring pupils with educational or learning difficulties and preventive action in dealing with negative influences on pupils' personal and social development such as bullying, substance abuse, criminality or problematic behaviour (Opekarová, 2010). Last but not least, the educational counsellor provides

counselling not only to pupils and parents, but also cooperates with teachers and school management. Apart from the above-mentioned activities, the counsellor is available to teachers and school management mainly in the sphere of methodological guidance and in some forms of teacher training.

In addition, the position cooperates with external organizations such as school counseling facilities, educational care centers, social-legal child protection authorities and other non-governmental non-profit organizations whose activities are related to the school's activities (Krejčová in Beranová, 2014). From the perspective of educators, guidance counselors can be an effective support in education if they actively communicate and cooperate in helping students achieve academic success (Foxy et al., 2016). However, the outcome of counseling is related to many other factors such as ethical issues, the qualifications of these counselors, experience within the teaching practice, and the socioeconomic status of the school (Zhu, 2023).

The school prevention methodologist: is a teacher who, like the educational counsellor, is appointed to the post by the school principal (Burdová, 2019). If the prevention methodologist performs his/her activities at a public school, he/she is entitled to a specialisation supplement of one to two thousand crowns per month after successfully completing the specialisation studies, pursuant to Section 133 of Act No. 262/2006 Coll., the Labour Code, as amended. The prevention methodologist focuses his/her activities primarily on the prevention of socially pathological phenomena in schools and also implements the school's minimum prevention programme.

In the field of prevention activities, it focuses on the issues of truancy, addictions, vandalism, violence, sexual abuse, criminal behaviour, self-harm, racism, xenophobia and other manifestations of risky behaviour. It is also responsible for the integration of multicultural elements into the educational process and is dedicated to working with pupils with a different mother tongue or from a different socio-cultural background (Kendíková, 2017). In accordance with the aforementioned legislation regulating the competences of counsellors in schools, this position is, among other things, interested in methodological support and guidance of teachers in the field of risky behaviour and coordination of cooperation with state and local government authorities or other professional institutions dealing with the prevention of socially pathological phenomena.

School special educator: in the context of the trend towards an inclusive approach and simultaneous efforts to create optimal conditions for pupils with special educational needs, the importance of involving school special educators in the system of advisory services provided by the school is increasingly being promoted in schools. The position of special educators in the school system has thus changed over time from their original exclusive role in special education. Now, this profession is perceived in the school environment as a specialist, i.e.

school special educator, who also performs his/her function irreplaceably within school counselling centres (Čech & Hormandlová, 2020; Šafrová in Knotová, 2014).

As already indicated, school special educator usually provides the agenda related to pupils with special educational needs and coordinates special education counselling at school. In addition, this position identifies pupils with special educational needs, carries out diagnostic and intervention activities in the form of special education diagnosis and care (re-education and compensation), participates in the development of an individual education plan and mediates contact between school counselling centres and the school in the comprehensive examination and evaluation of the effectiveness of pupils' support measures. An integral part of the work is also the provision of special and didactic aids or materials, communication with pupils' legal representatives and other interested professionals. The role of the special educator is also methodological support for teachers in the education of pupils (Čech & Hormandlová, 2020; Kucharská et al., 2013).

In the context of school practice, it turns out that the possibilities of special educational support in the primary school environment are wider, and this support can serve all children and pupils without distinction—even without undergoing a pedagogical-psychological examination, which usually leads to the assignment or non-assignment of the status of a pupil with special educational needs (Najmonová et al., 2023). Thus, the special educator devotes his attention and support not only to pupils with special educational needs, but to all pupils. However, the specific job description of this position may vary from school to school, depending primarily on the size of the school, the composition of the pupils in the school and the number of pupils with special educational needs, the specific composition of the school counselling unit and the division of roles between counselling positions, and the competencies and professional experience of the school special educator.

The activities of the work of this position also depend on the diverse specificities and needs of the school, teachers, pupils and their legal representatives. It is evident that the importance of school special educators in schools is increasing, especially due to inclusive educational strategies applied in the framework of common education and the logically resulting need for educators to acquire more information about the specific problems of pupils with special educational needs and adequate educational practices (Tomková et al, 2020). Although there is currently a noticeable high need for the support of these positions in the educational setting, according to Slowik (2022), they are still not sufficiently systemically provided in mainstream schools.

School Psychologist: although more and more schools are recognizing the importance of this consultant position and realizing its contribution to the school system, there are still many schools that lack school psychologists. Due to the smaller number of school psychologists in practice, there is also a lack of experience of teachers in collaborating and using the

position of psychologists for the benefit of prevention and problem-solving for students, classroom teams and teachers (Čech & Hormandlová, 2020; Tomková et al., 2020). However, school psychologists can assist teachers in many aspects. Štech and Zapletalová (2013) list the areas that dominate the range of activities of the psychologist when working with teachers.

These include assistance in solving problems in teaching and learning of pupils, including support for teachers in working with pupils with special educational needs, assistance in solving educational difficulties of pupils and phenomena such as truancy, bullying or substance abuse, and finally assistance in the form of individual and group consultations or offering educational seminars or lectures for teachers. Support from these positions in schools can help teachers to focus on working directly with pupils during lessons, to demonstrate resilience in the face of the challenges of the teaching profession and, ultimately, to work effectively to improve the learning process and the mental well-being of pupils themselves (Gray et al., 2017).

Within the scope of work with pupils, the psychologist particularly carries out intervention and diagnosis of learning and educational difficulties, screening and follow-up psychological care for children with various types of problems (including manifestations of specific learning disabilities, giftedness, social pathologies or special educational needs in general), classroom interventions, career counselling, and also provides crisis psychological intervention and counselling in the area of pupils' interpersonal relationships in school and in the family (Braun et al., 2014; Tomková et al., 2020).

An essential part of the school psychologist's work is also working with the classroom team, identifying the social climate of the classroom and working to promote a positive social environment in relation to all pupils in the school (Magerová & Řehulka in Bartoňová et al., 2019). The scope of work of school psychologists is generally enshrined in legislation, but in practice it is characterised by a relatively large variety and a wide range. The real workload of this counselling position is determined by specific training, skills, professional interests, as well as the school environment and specific requirements from the school (Lazarova et al., 2017).

Vozková and Vanek (2018) also draw attention to the diverse conception of the roles of school psychologists not only in the context of the different needs of schools, but also in the context of the legislation of different countries. Taking into account the specific activities that school psychologists hold, as well as the increasing incidence of serious psychological problems exceeding educational problems in schools, Gajdošová and Valihorová (2019) named the professional roles and competences of these positions in the school environment, which, according to them, include mainly the roles of counsellor, consultant, career counsellor, mental health and inclusion promoter, and expert implementing diagnostic, preventive and intervention activities.

In these roles, the school psychologist works with pupils, teachers, school management, parents and other professionals. School psychologists are in an ideal position to use

their expertise and skills within the school setting to effectively support not only students and their academic success, but also educators and their mental health. In doing so, school psychologists can also foster the growth of a positive school climate and overall school climate (Gray et al., 2017).

Studies that have examined effective school systems emphasize the importance of continuous professional development for teachers and the availability of support services (Mølster & Nes, 2018; Nemejc et al., 2019; Ramos & Andrade, 2014).

DISCUSSION

In the context of inclusive education, it is crucial to systematically strengthen functional cooperation between school counselling centres, school counsellors and the teaching staff. The effective functioning of these relationships is a prerequisite for ensuring smooth support for pupils with diverse learning needs. Educational-psychological counselling centres, special education centres and educational care centres have specialist facilities that can make a significant contribution to early identification, diagnosis and intervention on behalf of pupils. However, this potential can only be fully exploited if cooperation between professional institutions and schools is anchored in regular, open and trusting communication.

In terms of the internal dynamics of the school environment, it is desirable to create a space for sharing experiences between the school counselling staff and the teaching staff. Regularly organised inter-professional meetings, professional workshops, supervision or case conferences can contribute to this. Similarly important are informal forms of cooperation, such as team-building activities, which promote team cohesion and create a safe environment for openly sharing difficulties and finding common solutions. Such a collaborative culture is a prerequisite for quality prevention and early intervention in the event of educational, learning and psychosocial problems of pupils.

An important aspect of supporting inclusive education is also the systematic improvement of the professional competences of teaching staff. An inclusive environment places high demands on teachers, both in terms of professional knowledge and skills in differentiating teaching, working with diverse groups, creating support measures and communicating effectively with parents. School counselling centres should therefore play an important role in the implementation of methodological guidance for teachers, offering consultations, practical methodological materials, or participating in the development of educational programmes focused on inclusive approaches. Especially novice teachers, who often face high levels of uncertainty and overload, need accessible and targeted support to enable them to cope successfully with inclusive practice.

Practice also shows the need for more intensive involvement of school counselling centres in strategic planning for school development. Due to their interdisciplinary expertise and close contact with pupils, teachers and parents, guidance institutions have unique insight into the specific needs of the school community. Their participation in the development of school curricula, inclusion concepts or planning of preventive measures should therefore not only be desirable, but directly supported in a systemic way. In this respect, it is important to strengthen the role of experts as active participants in school management, not just as external service providers.

From the point of view of quality management of the work of school counselling centres, it is advisable to introduce systematic feedback, both to the professional staff and to the schools as recipients of services. Regular evaluations of the effectiveness of support, formative performance reviews of guidance teams and opportunities for professional development and remuneration should be part of the standard management of these facilities. In addition, greater transparency and clarity should be sought on the job roles and competences of guidance staff. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities help to avoid confusion in working with teachers and also promote the effective use of professional capacity for the benefit of inclusion.

The systemic provision and stabilisation of funding for advisory services, including a long-term solution to the issue of the obligation to fill certain positions, also remains a major challenge. Investing in human resources, their professional training and continuing education is a necessary condition for the sustainability and development of a quality inclusive education system. If school counselling centres are to truly fulfil their functions, they need not only competent professionals, but also adequate institutional and financial support.

CONCLUSION

A functioning system of school and school counselling is an indispensable element in supporting inclusive education. The role of professionals such as school special educators, psychologists, guidance counsellors and prevention methodologists goes far beyond individual support for pupils. These professionals help to create an environment in which diversity is respected, building a climate of trust and partnership between school, family and community. They are often the agents of change that lead to a more open school system towards pupils with specific learning needs, as well as pupils at risk of school failure, social exclusion or psychological distress.

At the same time, however, it is important to note the many challenges that accompany this area - insufficient staff capacity, uneven regional availability of services, and sometimes a mismatch between the legislative framework and practice in schools. Research and

professional reflection point to the need to develop interdisciplinary cooperation, to ensure systematic professional development of school counsellors and to cultivate school counselling centres as functional parts of the school environment. It is essential that schools and guidance services are seen as partners, not as separate worlds. This interdependence needs to be supported not only legislatively and methodologically, but above all practically—for example through sharing good practice, ensuring sufficient financial and human resources and developing the capacity of school teams.

School counselling centres must have sufficient space to work with individuals, but also to intervene at the level of classroom collectives and school communities. It is not enough for their services to be formally available—their actual utility depends on the quality of the relationship between counsellors, teachers and school leaders. It is also true that guidance services cannot substitute for the shortcomings of the system, but must be an integral and respected part of it. Emphasis on their professional background, clearly defined competences and realistic working conditions is a prerequisite for ensuring that the guidance system is not just an administrative backstop for reporting support measures, but real help for those who need it most.

In the future, school and school counselling centres should be seen as places of professional growth, teamwork and innovation. It is here that strategies can be born that will lead to greater inclusiveness, prevention of failure and the strengthening of the psychological well-being of all educational actors. For this to happen, it is essential to strengthen the systemic anchoring of counselling work, to link it with other support segments—including health and social services—and, last but not least, to create a stable framework for the continuing professional development of all professionals working in this field. Only under these conditions can the guidance system fulfil its mission — to be a real support to schools in caring for every pupil, regardless of their needs, abilities or life situation.

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