

# PUPILS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT AND THEIR POSITION IN THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL

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No. 482122 - Pupils with hearing impairment and their position in the classroom team of inclusive  
schools (Czech Republic)*

## **Abstract**

Pupils with hearing impairments can choose between special schools and mainstream schools for their education. The Czech Republic has 13 special schools for pupils with hearing impairments, but more students are opting for inclusive education. They are therefore educated with hearing peers, with the use of support measures and often in the presence of another person - either a teaching assistant (who checks the pupil's understanding and can also help in case of mishearing) or a Czech sign language interpreter. Unfortunately, this type of education can also bring barriers - communication and social. They can arise from the nature of the disability - pupils have difficulty with hearing, have to ask repeatedly about the same thing, or use a completely different communication system. They may be overlooked by their peers after repeated failures in communication and have the role of class outsiders. This 'exclusion phenomenon' is also a common reason why pupils leave for special schools.

The author of this paper has already dealt with the issue of inclusive education in her previous studies and now she is building on her research in her dissertation. The findings provide the perspective of parents and teachers on the education of this group of pupils, and the author herself focused on the interaction between classmates and teachers by observing the classroom. The results obtained from the research will be used to create material for teachers of pupils with hearing impairment - containing recommendations on how to work with this group of pupils.

**Keywords:** *Barriers, hearing impairment, inclusive education, mainstream school, social roles.*

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## **1. Pupils with hearing impairment**

The hearing impaired group includes people with different types and degrees of hearing loss, varied degrees of compensation, diverse skills and communication systems. In the school year 2017/2018, the total number of pupils with hearing impairment in primary schools was 1 173 (we should point out that there will be pupils with mild hearing impairment in schools or more socially able pupils who have not yet been diagnosed with the impairment and are therefore not included in this statistic) – 60.4% (i.e. 708 pupils) are placed and educated in mainstream schools, the remaining 39.6% (i.e. 465 pupils) are educated in schools for the hearing impaired. The current situation is probably very similar, pupils are more likely to opt inclusion and it is therefore possible that the current percentage in mainstream schools could be even higher (Inkluze v praxi, 2018).

These two educational pathways have some positives and negatives and therefore suit various groups of people with hearing impairment. There are 13 schools for children, pupils, and students with hearing impairment in the Czech Republic. These institutions employ people with proper education and knowledge in the field of special education of children, pupils, and students with hearing impairment. There are also many experts - whether they are special educators, speech therapists or (Czech) sign language interpreters. In many of these schools we also encounter i.e., bilingual education - deaf and hearing teachers work together in the classrooms, bringing both languages to the pupils as native speakers/users. Specific to this education is also the use of textbooks adapted for the group of pupils with special educational needs, aids and one extra year of compulsory education - the Czech Republic has 9 years of compulsory primary education, so in special schools the length of education is 10 years. The extra year is either used to divide the first grade into two years, or the school use this year as a last year to repeat and consolidate the material that has been covered (Hádková, 2016).

Inclusive education is usually recommended for those pupils whose abilities, skills and maturity allow them to enter mainstream school. These are mainly pupils who communicate in the language of the majority society (spoken Czech), and in rare cases also users of Czech sign language. Inclusive education for pupils with special educational needs is based on their level of support. There are five of them - level 1 is the lowest level of support up to level 5, which is usually for severe forms of hearing impairment combined with other disabilities. The support measures are based on the type of hearing impairment, abilities, communication skills of the pupil and based on that an individual education plan is created in which the pupil is educated. The catalogue of these support measures clearly specifies what pupils are entitled to at each level; from level 3 onwards, a teaching assistant may be assigned to the pupil, and from level 4 onwards, the pupil might need a Czech sign language interpreter (or another expert on communication system used by the pupil). In general, if we were to mention some support measures suitable for pupils with hearing impairment, these include, for example, adapting the classroom (carpet, curtains - suitable for soundproofing the classroom) or providing a correct place for the pupil (preferably in the second row of desks). In addition, it would also be advisable to know the principles of communication with a person with a hearing impairment - i.e., to keep a maximum distance of 4 metres, not to speak while you are turn back and not facing the classroom (this is extremely important for lip-reading), and to provide suitable lighting for communication. In addition, teachers should be informed on how to work with a compensatory aid, for example, to be able to change the battery (Barvíková and all., 2015).

### **1.1. School climate**

The climate of the classroom collective is understood as the social relations between the individuals who are participants in the educational process. It is the (self-)evaluation of the emotions, experiences, and interactions of all participants, within the classroom environment and their activities. The climate of the classroom collective can thus be influenced by the pupils, teachers, and parents of the participating pupils (Dewitt, 2018).

In the case of the placement of a pupil with a hearing impairment, we may encounter a certain lack of understanding from peers (sometimes, unfortunately, from the teaching staff as well) and intolerance of their individual needs. For this reason, a social and communication barrier then also arises. Pupils with hearing impairment would therefore be perceived as outsiders within the hierarchy, standing on the periphery of the collective with minimal interaction with their classmates. In such cases, we speak of the so-called exclusion phenomenon. The presence of these barriers, and other pathological phenomena (bullying), can be a reason to change schools, even to return to a special school.

Therefore, it is important to work with the class, to develop peer interaction and positive relationships between classmates. It is important to explain to classmates what accommodations pupils will have in the classroom, why they are important to them, and how their hearing impairment affects their language sensitivity, auditory perception and listening comprehension - because the presence of accommodations is often the reason that pupils complain about their classmates, feel unfairness, and pupils with special educational needs then become targets for the rest of the class (Čáp and Mareš, 2007).

## **2. Author's research**

The author has already dealt with this issue in her master's thesis. There she also focused on inclusive education of pupils with hearing impairment and their communication and social skills. It was the results of this research that pointed to the social isolation of pupils with hearing impairment, primarily those pupils who were later diagnosed with hearing impairment and its compensation (Tureckiová, 2019).

This research is currently being followed up with a focus on the position of pupils with hearing impairment and the classroom climate of a collective in which they are present. This research will involve the use of several research methods - a questionnaire survey aimed at teachers working with pupils with hearing impairment, interviews with teachers and parents of these pupils, and observations of the normal school day in the classroom. Due to the specificity of the focus, the research will also use methods related to the climate of the classroom (school) team. Primarily, the SO-RA-D (Sociometric Rating Method) will be used, which focuses on the likes and dislikes in the classroom collective and examines how individual students are perceived in terms of their influence. The advantage of this research method is that pupils rate themselves as well. This reflection on their part is important for us to understand the different groups and the hierarchy of relationships in the classroom. This method will be complemented by other methods focusing on the climate of the classroom collective, so that the most comprehensive view of the issue is obtained.

## 2.1. Expected results and contribution of the work

The aim of the author's research is to map the inclusive education of pupils with hearing impairment throughout the Czech Republic, to focus on possible changes in the classroom climate in the presence of pupils with special educational needs and to point out the most common problematic areas associated with the placement of these pupils in mainstream schools.

The findings obtained from the parents and teachers of this specific group of pupils, together with the results of the used methods, will be crucial for the development of the material. The latter will shed light on the education of pupils with hearing impairment, its problematic areas and the factors that can lead to impaired work with the class collective and the emergence of pathological phenomena in the classroom. Working with pupils with hearing impairment is often a new experience for many teachers, and this will also be the focus of the newly developed material. So that inclusive education can be understood by all and thus increase pupil's chances of success in their educational journey.

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