



Country Background Report Czech Republic

1. Background – everyday reality vs. political framework

The political changes in the Czech Republic after 1989 also lead to the changes in the Czech education system. The school reform started in 2001 when the National Programme for the Development of Education was issued. All aspects of school education (school management, administration, educative system, curriculum, methods of teaching) went through many innovations.

Until 2001 Czech schools were governed centrally by the ministry and other political authorities. Since 2001, the powers have been shifted to lower levels of administration (regional governments, municipalities). The powers and responsibilities of school heads have been increasing with the introduction of the concept of a legal entity- nowadays all schools are regarded as legal entities with their own responsibilities.

2. National and local context

The role of the state is to define the rules of the game, the strategic goals, the general direction of the development, to create conditions in the economic area and in support systems, to establish the main principles of indirect management (curricular policy, evaluation, financing, support for school and teacher activities) and to exert a permanent pressure for achievement of these common goals. The role of the regional government and local municipalities is to assert the authentic local interests and to be responsible for the establishment, efficiency and functioning of the school network. The role of schools is to exercise their professional responsibility to put into practise the educational goals that they set themselves within the framework of rules prescribed by the state. Cooperation between the public administration and self-governing bodies as well as the participation of the whole of society is needed on all levels.

A number of fundamental changes in the creation of the curriculum were also brought into effect after the school reform. The School Act introduces

a system of multi-level educational programmes. The highest level of the system is represented by the State Educational Programme which is issued by the Ministry of School, Youth and Sports. This document determines the main principles of the state curricular policy and generally binding requirements. The lower level of curricular documents, the framework educational programmes (made for all school levels), are also issued centrally and they specify general requirements and define a framework for the design of learning plans.

School Educational Programmes are the lowest level of the curriculum system. The schools create this curricular document themselves, every school should state their own curricular priorities, the areas which are most important for them, teachers are to choose their own approaches and methods on how to teach the children. Teachers bring children not only factual knowledge, they should provide them with a systematic and balanced structure of basic concepts and relations that makes it possible to put information into a meaningful context of knowledge and life experience. A balance between knowledge, skills, and acquisition of attitudes and values is very important. The stress is put on the gaining of key competencies, the education has a new orientation: children learn how to know, how to act and live together, how to solve problems, how to exist in society, the important thing is also a quality system of values.

The stress in new approaches to teaching isn't put only on the new teaching methods but also on the teamwork. Teachers have to cooperate more with each other, they should discuss and consult the curriculum of the subjects they teach with each other. The general aim is to develop an integrated and linked curricular content.

New topics are also emerging across the curriculum, e.g.: European integration, multicultural education, environmental education and education for a healthy life style. All these changes have to be managed by the school principals. They became managers who deal with economic and personnel agenda (staff recruitment, supervision, evaluation and development), strategic planning, organizational development, data management and public

relations. Headmasters are seen as representatives in relations with parents, school council, establishments and various state control bodies.

They are also leaders who motivate and manage pedagogical staff, who set new strategies and visions. The principals thus have to solve various problems and lots of them are new to them. For successful results of all reforms which are currently running in Czech schools it is necessary to have good headmasters, who are not only good managers but also good leaders.

3. School leadership concepts and practises

Conceptual framework

The school headmaster has lots of various responsibilities. He issues the School Educational Programme, the annual report, he is responsible for self-evaluation of the school, issues school rules, decides all matters concerning education and other school services (personnel policy, economic issues, etc.).

The headmaster is responsible for the pedagogical and professional quality of education and other school services. The School headmaster is subordinated to the establisher of the school (Czech schools are established by municipalities, regional governments, churches or the Ministry of School, Youth and Sports) and the School Council.¹ The School Council consults the content of the School Educational Programme, approves the annual reports and the school rules. The council also decides about the way the pupils will be evaluated, participates in the processing of the conceptual intentions of the development of the school. The School Council debates the budget proposal, controls the economy of the school,

¹ The School Council is founded by the establisher. One third of the School Council members are representatives of the school establisher, one third of members are delegates of parents, one third is voted by the school staff. The elections to the School Council take place every three years. The headmasters cannot be members of the School Council, they only can attend the meetings of the School Council with an advisory role.

discusses the visit reports of the Czech School Inspection.

School organisation

In Czech schools a model of distributed leadership is often applied. The extent of the sharing of leadership functions depends on the size of the school. Headmasters of big schools have two deputies who focus on specific areas, e.g. business/operation management, curriculum, human resources, strategic planning and data management. In schools, where the principal has only one deputy, the extent of sharing of leadership functions is not so big.

School teachers also play an important role in the distributed leadership principle. The teachers as members of the Pedagogical Council should advise the headmaster in the area of curriculum and strategic development. After the introduction of the School Educational Programme there is now a coordinator of the School Educational Programme at each school. The coordinator works as an advisor for this curricular document, as the School Educational Programme is perceived as a flexible document which reflects actual development and the pupils' needs and should be modified according to the current situation.

For the curricular issues and student support services there are also specialists and teachers who work as school psychologists, teachers for special education, study advisors, coordinators of environmental education and coordinators of preventive activities. The School Council works as another important control and advisory body following the distributed leadership principle.

Networks for school leaders

The school headmasters can be members of the Association of Headmasters at Basic Schools in the Czech Republic which was founded in 2005. Its members can be both individuals as well as legal entities from the area of basic education. The membership is optional, the objectives of this association are to support the interests of its members, to be a negotiating partner for the Ministry of School, Education and Sports, or for other government institutions in the issues of educational policy and basic education, and to be a partner for universities which educate future educational staff and to create conditions for the in-service training of headmasters and teachers.

The headmasters also often use the opportunities to meet each other at in-service training workshops and seminars and they consult and exchange their experience with specific topics.

4. Recruiting and educating school leaders

Recruitment and retention

The establisher of the school is responsible for the recruitment process of a school leader. The establisher appoints a commission, whose members are representatives of the establisher, the regional government, the Czech School Inspectorate, an expert from the school management area (usually a headmaster from another school or someone who is experienced with school leadership), a representative of the educational staff of the school, where the future headmaster will work, and one member of the School Council.

The applicants for the position of headmaster should fulfil the conditions given by law (a master degree which allows them to follow the teaching profession and appropriate experience as a school teacher four years' experience is necessary for basic schools, five years' experience is needed for secondary schools) and conditions required by the establisher. The candidate is usually asked to elaborate his vision of new developments at school.

The commission checks candidates' knowledge of school management and legislation and their capability to be a good manager and school leader. The applied candidates can be tested in a written test or interviewed in front of the commission, the interview can last up to 60 minutes. The most eligible candidate is then nominated to become the headmaster of the school.

The headmaster is appointed for an unlimited term and according to the valid law the headmaster can be withdrawn only if he breaks the law or significantly disrupts the work discipline. There are proposals to change the law and set the limited term of appointment for five years.

National structures for education

According to the Act of Educational Staff from 2004 the headmasters have to acquire a specific qualification which makes them eligible to perform the position of a headmaster within the time-limit of three years after the appointment to the position of headmaster. They can obtain this qualification at universities or at some in-service training institutions.

There are several grades of educational management training. The basic and compulsory grade is called Study for School Headmasters. This training is provided by the National Institute for Further Education² and other in-service training centres. The minimum number of instruction hours, which is set by Ministerial Regulation, is 100 contact hours. The content of this grade includes legal fundamentals, labor law, school financing, school and educational process organization. The recent praxis has shown that this content is insufficient, it is under discussion that other topics, e.g. personnel management, health and safety issues, should be added into the compulsory content of the Study for School Headmasters.

Another stage in educational management training, Study for Leading Educational Staff, comprises 350 instructional hours. The participants in this training are schooled in the area of theory and practice of school management, law application at school, economic and financial management, educational process management, personnel management more comprehensively than in first grade. Graduates of this training obtain a bachelor degree, which guarantees them a higher salary.

Furthermore, a number of workshops and seminars is offered to school headmasters, as a part of lifelong learning. These seminars focus on specific topics and actual issues and are provided by the National Institute for Further Education, universities and various in-service training centres.

² NIFE (National Institute for Further Education) is an in-service training institution for educational staff established by the Ministry of School, Youth and Sport with a national scope. The main focus of this institution is to exert national priorities in in-service training.

5. Challenges, areas of innovation

According to the crucial curricular document, the National Programme for the Development of Education (a so-called White Paper) the changes, which Czech schools are currently facing, „... are putting new requirements on school and teachers, not only in terms of new professional and personal qualities, such as creativity, initiative, personal responsibility and professionalism but also of the strengthening of the teamwork throughout the school, the development and implementation of a long-term vision, a common vision of their development, ...a capacity for joint self-reflection, a realistic assessment of their own strengths and the stating of their own goals. The most demanding... are the role and personality of school heads, who should act in a non-authoritarian way, but with the authority of a democratic leader.“

It is obvious that current reform of the educational system is demanding not only for teachers but mainly for school heads. The school headmasters are expected to have various abilities and competencies. Many practices used in school are new for them, so it is very important to provide the school management with appropriate training and advice which will help them to manage effectively the changing system of education. Increasing the competencies of managerial staff at schools and educational institutes in the area of management and human resources policy is also a national educational priority as it is one of the supported activities in the Operational Programme Education for Competitiveness for the years 2007-2013.