RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ALL LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Country Report: Latvia

LATVIA COUNTRY REPORT

Report completed by:

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

The basic documents of the National Policy relating to education are as follows:

- Hierarchically the highest national level long-term development planning document is [Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030](#) (Latvija 2030) (approved by the *Saeima* – Latvian parliament – on 10 June 2010). It puts forward the need for a paradigm change in education. Education must be qualitative, available throughout life and creativity-orientated. It must enable opportunities to respond to global competition and demographic challenges; education is one of the preconditions for a shift in economic pattern. The most important long-term courses of action are:

    o access to education and changes in the organisation of the educational process;

    o schools as centres of social networking;

    o contextual education and a shift in the teaching profession;

    o e-schools and the use of information technologies;

    o lifelong education.

- The long-term conceptual document [The Model for Growth of Latvia: Human Being in the First Place](#) (approved by the *Saeima* on 26 October 2005) determines a human-centred growth model in Latvia. It emphasises knowledge, wisdom, skill and their use as a resource for growth. The priority is long-term improvement in the education system:

    o everyone has an opportunity to a secondary education, a qualitative higher and vocational education;

    o a sharp increase in the preparation of highly qualified specialists (masters and doctors) and an increase in the acquisition of technical sciences and natural sciences at all levels of the education system.

- Hierarchically the highest national level medium-term development planning document is the [National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020](#) (NDP 2020) (approved by the *Saeima* on 20 December 2012). It sets the medium-term priorities in the field of education and science, emphasising the development of

competencies, research, innovation and higher education. The following are mentioned among the main tasks:

- o high-quality pre-primary education;

- o inclusive education;

- o curriculum development;

- o support for talent-nurturing;

- o training and involvement of creative and skilled teachers;

- o development of vocational education in accordance with labour market trends;

- o access to higher education, export capacity, competitiveness and consolidation;

- o involvement of young people in non-formal education and voluntary work;

- o promotion of youth employment, including the development of a career education system;

- o improvement of educational institutions, including the preservation of small rural schools, providing support for the expansion of their functions and emphasising the NDP 2020 principle of distribution of the education services set according to the territorial placement.

In order to complete the tasks, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) has planned a series of measures that are reflected in the guidelines.

- The medium-term policy planning document Education Development Guidelines 2014–2020 determines the development of education policy rationale, objectives and courses of action for the next seven years. In the context of the EU's single strategic planning framework for the period 2014 to 2020, the forecasted conditionality criteria for education policy are set out in four thematic areas: early school leaving, higher education, lifelong learning and professional education.

Education policy in Latvia is developed in close association with the recommendations set by OECD. When forming a transition towards learning outcomes-based education, experts from the National Centre for Education in Latvia follow the OECD's Education 2030 project. OECD recommendations for education policy development largely comply with the reforms and policy priorities that have been already launched by the Ministry of Education and Science. They have been identified and accurately highlighted in the Education Development Guidelines and Smart Specialisation Strategy, both approved by the *Saeima*.

In international comparison, the average competence of Latvian learners in science, mathematics and reading meets the competence of learners of the national group whose achievements are not statistically or significantly different from the OECD countries' average level. In the future planning period, particular attention will be paid to the monitoring of learning outcomes and determining the causal links between learning outcomes and factors influencing learners' progress. This is in order to foresee educating

measures in the competence-based curriculum. Included as a part of the MES agenda and the government's action plan are:

- school network management;
- improvement of teachers' professional development opportunities and the quality control system;
- raising the prestige of vocational training;
- the provision of inclusive education.

2. What national policies specifically target raising achievement?

The Education Development Guidelines 2014–2020 state that education policy should be focused on the benefits to individuals, not to institutions. Safe educational environments, inclusive education and personalised approaches to the development of each resident's knowledge, abilities and talents play an important role in the implementation of the principle. There are a number of target groups that need a provision of inclusive education. These include children and young people at risk of exclusion due to their state of development, abilities, health and social conditions. They also include the children of Latvian nationals who were born abroad.

The action plan provides for the following:

- the introduction of a system of teacher quality, remuneration and motivation. In order to ensure teachers' professional development, improvements are planned in vocational subject teachers' lifelong learning competences (foreign languages, ICT skills) and professional competences (entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, leadership, creativity, skills for working with learners who have different levels of abilities and skills). Teachers' and internship supervisors' practical skills will also be improved. These measures will increase teaching staff's qualifications and will have a positive impact on learners' learning outcomes;

- support for introducing innovative ICT learning solutions, ergonomic furnishing in general education institutions, particularly regional secondary schools, and the modernisation of learners' hostels;

- support for educational institutions implementing methodological centre functions in the fields of STEM and ICT in order to raise the quality of education. Also, the promotion of modern methodology in education and support for the improvement of sports infrastructure in local comprehensive schools;

- the implementation of integration measures for young people with special needs and in other social risk groups in educational institutions. This will be done by:
  - o providing support and individual learning plans;
  - o supporting the organisation of summer camps and various events such as festivals, exhibitions, competitions, creative workshops for young people with special needs;

- o supporting the involvement of young people with special needs in the abovementioned activities;

- support for teachers and ensuring them access to methodological materials. Necessary educational and methodological tools will be developed for the integration of learners with special needs into the general education system. The professional development of teachers and support staff will be ensured;

- the development and implementation of further education programmes. Informing professionals (social workers, physiotherapists, ergotherapists, etc.) about the adapted sports programmes and providing specific training methods for working with learners with special needs;

- increasing the availability of support staff, including psychologists, in educational institutions in pre-primary and elementary education, to promote the prevention of violence in educational institutions;

- supporting the implementation of preventive and compensatory measures for low income learners at risk of poverty and early school leaving. This will ensure learners continue in general and vocational education institutions for as long as possible, and either graduate or obtain a useful qualification for the labour market;

- supporting an increase in quality and accessibility of extracurricular activities for learners at risk of poverty and social exclusion or from low income families, including training for business creation and functioning;

- supporting the co-operation of national and local municipalities to ensure professional support for learners from low income families and those at risk of poverty.

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

- Results of state examinations (National Centre for Education, NCE). The overall NCE statistics include:
    - o the results of centralised examinations;
    - o the number taking optional examinations in secondary schools and gymnasiums;
    - o the distribution of learners taking examinations, according to school type;
    - o a comparison of the average results of centralised examinations from 2014 to 2016;
    - o the number of learners taking centralised examinations;
    - o overall assessment of centralised examinations and the division of levels between schools and subjects;
    - o the correlation between overall assessment and parts of centralised examination;

- o   overall assessment of non-centralised examinations between schools and subjects;
- o   a comparison of evaluations of non-centralised state examinations from 2014 to 2016.
- results of diagnostic work in the 3rd and 6th grades (NCE);
- school self-evaluation reports, including a section on learning outcomes and marks, are publicly available on regional websites.

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

There are procedures in each school which define how learners' achievements are evaluated, listed and analysed.

For example, each month, learners receive transcripts of marks that are presented to parents. The dynamics of each learner's learning outcomes are analysed twice a year. Learners' daily achievements are analysed during Methodical Commission (MC) and Pedagogical Council (PC) meetings. The information obtained is used to improve the teaching and learning process. Learners with insufficient assessment levels are provided with individual consultations in the relevant subject. Parents are informed about the consultations by entries in an online journal and a learner's diary. The situation is then analysed by teachers and support staff. Where necessary, parents are advised to visit the Pedagogical Medical Commission to continue the education process through programmes that are appropriate for learners' abilities.

This resulted in the licensing of the 'Special Elementary Education Programme for Students with Learning Disabilities.' A number of learners applied to this programme and to other special education programmes that were already licensed in schools. The average class marks and each individual learner's marks are regularly analysed. At the end of a semester, the class with the best learning outcomes is publicly named and rewarded. Learners are motivated to acquire additional knowledge and skills that can be demonstrated by participation in regional subject Olympiads and obtaining awards. Learners with good and excellent educational achievements are regularly honoured.

State tests in schools are organised in accordance with the national procedures. Test results are recorded and compared with the average ratings in the country. They are then analysed during MC or PC meetings and discussed individually in the meetings of the Board and particular subject teachers.

The basic documents are:

- Regulations Regarding the Content and Procedures of Centralised Examinations Cabinet Regulation No. 335 of 6 April 2010;

- Regulations on National Examination Procedures, Cabinet Regulation No. 1510 of 17 December 2013.

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

School evaluation and quality assurance is provided at national level by the State Education Quality Service (SEQS).

Once every six years during the accreditation period, schools need:

- a self-evaluation;
- a self-evaluation of educational programmes.

The basic documents are:

- [Cabinet Regulation No. 852](#) of 14 September 2010: 'Procedure of accrediting general and vocational education programmes, education institutions and examination centres'

- [State Education Quality Service](#) of 15 April 2011: 'Regulations of Accreditation Experts Commission'

- [Internal Regulation No. 5 of the State Education Quality Service](#) of 24 May 2011: 'Methodology for evaluation of educational institutions, examination centres and implementation of educational programme quality'

- [Internal Regulation No. 14 of the State Education Quality Service](#) of 18 May 2015: 'Amendments of Internal Regulation No. 5 of the State Education Quality Service of 24 May 2011: "Methodology for evaluation of educational institutions, examination centres and implementation of educational programme quality."'

[Reports on schools](#) are available online.

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?

- Professional development courses
- Education projects
- School leader debates
- Support for working with talented learners and learners with learning difficulties
- Licensing of new educational programmes
- Development of support teams in schools
- Interdisciplinary projects, etc.

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

- De-centralisation, local level, school autonomy
- Reporting systems
- Curriculum policy
- School organisation and teaching approaches
- Support services
- Multi-agency work, etc.

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

The development of a curriculum that is based on the competences required in knowledge, society, creativity, innovation and promotion of a healthy lifestyle is only just beginning. It is planned to start in the 1st and 3rd grades in 2018.

Motivation and the professional capacity building of teachers and academic staff is very slow. The new teachers' remuneration system does not promote it across Latvia.

The provision of educational environments and processes appropriate to the 21st century is slow. The introduction of modern learning environments, including equipment for natural science classes and necessary teaching aids and technical equipment for carrying out elementary education programmes in comprehensive schools also happens slowly.

The principle of inclusive education and social risk mitigation is implemented in a planned manner. The framework of implementation includes planning to ensure integration measures for learners with special needs and in other social risk groups in educational institutions. Measures include providing individual learning plans and support for the organisation of summer camps and events such as festivals, exhibitions, competitions and creative workshops for learners with special needs. Support will also be provided to ensure learners' involvement in the abovementioned activities. Support is also provided to teachers and methodological materials are ensured.

The development of a career education system and service accessibility is still in progress. They will be available in schools in 2017.

A multi-million-euro project to reduce early school leaving and the number of learners who fail to complete education has been developed.

Educational opportunities outside formal education and learners' access to them are really expanding, including in the countryside. There are hardly any educational opportunities for adults in the countryside.

The arrangement of educational institutions' networks is the responsibility of municipalities.

ANNEX 1. EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE TO RAISE LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

Example submitted by: Artūrs Skrastiņš

Contact person: Artūrs Skrastiņš, head teacher

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

Valmiera Primary School is one of six schools in Valmiera. There are approximately 27,000 people in Valmiera and the city has highly developed industry. Learners from nearby villages also attend the school.

2.   Summary information on school/learning community

Valmiera pre-primary schools are attended by 1,515 learners. There are six schools in Valmiera, with a total of 3,184 learners. Schools are divided as follows:

- two primary schools (grades 1–6);
- Valmiera State Gymnasium (grades 7–12);
- Valmiera Pārgauja Gymnasium (grades 7–12);
- Valmiera 5th Secondary School (grades 1–12);
- Valmiera Viestura Secondary School (grades 1–12);
- minority Valmiera 2nd Secondary School (grades 1–12);
- Valmiera Music School;
- Valmiera Art Secondary School;
- *Vlamieras vājdzirdīgo bērnu internātvidusskola-centrs* (grades 1–12);
- Valmiera technical school (professional secondary school).

3.   Summary of key feature/strengths of current practice

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4.   Data/information available

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5.   Focus of example/work to raise achievement

At school, there is a support group for work with learners who have learning difficulties. The group includes a speech therapist, social pedagogue, psychologist and headteacher's assistant. The group works together with the school management group. In each grade there are four parallel classes, all of which are located in the same block at the school. This location ensures better co-operation between teachers. At school, there is modern ICT equipment, which helps to individualise and differentiate the teaching/learning process. A wide range of after-school clubs allows learners to experience and learn new skills in different fields. Clubs include choir, folk dance groups, modern dance groups, cooking class, robotics club, etc.

The school building also houses the Vidzeme regional inclusive education centre. The centre enables the pedagogical medical commission to evaluate learners' level of knowledge, capability and development. There is close co-operation between Valmiera Primary School and the centre specialists.

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

School work is focused on co-operation between teachers and supporting groups. Parents are involved in their children's learning processes. Analysis of results shows that learning achievements, including academic ones, reflect the invested work and development.

7.   Key learning points from this example

- Co-operation
- Teaching/learning process combined with after-school activities.

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

Valmiera Primary School website