

This profile is part of the EU Study on Supporting School Innovation Across Europe. It presents one of the 24 schools in the study, giving an overview of the changes and experiences in that school. Find the rest of the materials from the study at:

www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation

Individual achievement tracking and competence-based learning in Vyturio progymnasium



About our school

- ◆ **Location:** Panevėžys
- ◆ **Established:** 1980
- ◆ **Status:** Public school that provides primary and lower secondary education (grades 1 – 8)
- ◆ **Number of pupils:** 710 (in 2016)
- ◆ **Website:** www.vyturio.panevezys.lm.lt
- ◆ **Contact person:** Vitalija Dziuriciene



Why did we innovate?

- To improve learning experiences of students, making learning more interesting and responsive to individual needs
- To attract new students to this school. The school had a negative image and parents did not want to bring their children there due to poor surrounding area, and low quality of school management and teaching



What were our innovations?

The school introduced Individual Achievement Tracking (IAT) in 2004. Back then, the school was searching for the most effective ways to track, record and evaluate each pupil's progress during lessons, project-based activities, individual conversations, class teachers' activities and the development of general competences. Individual progress is tracked using information from the records of eight years of learning history (from 1st grade till the 8th grade). Pupils' self-assessment is a key part of the process, meaning that at the beginning of each school year, pupils themselves review

their previous achievements and set personal goals for their own grades. They look at past challenges and successes, identify which factors help and hinder their learning process, and plan next steps.

Once the semester is over, teachers discuss individual results with pupils and their parents. Engagement and close communication between teachers, pupils and parents are essential for the IAT system to work. For example, parents can schedule a meeting each week with their child and a teacher to discuss current issues, and find solutions. Pupils are expected to gain different competences from learning each subject. This process systematically tracks each pupil's progress in achieving the goals they have set, throughout the school year. One of the aims of the IAT is to track to what extent pupils are gaining necessary competences through their learning.

Competence-based learning was systematically introduced in 2010, after the school participated in the national project together with 10 other schools from Lithuania. The school community picked six general competences to focus on:

1. ability to learn
2. communication
3. cognitive competence
4. initiative-taking and creativity
5. social competence
6. personal competence.

These competences were integrated into curriculum, making sure that all of them were sufficiently covered.

At the beginning of the academic year, each pupil sets individual goals for their general competence development. Each pupil traces their progress through project-based activities, debates and presentations, completed experiments, career development activities and others. To visual the progress, each pupil is awarded special stamps by their teachers which are stored in their "Vyturiečio" book. These stamps help to measure the development of general competences (levels 1-4).

In addition to stamps, teachers provide constant feedback to pupils regarding their competences, discussing their main strengths and identifying what could be further improved. When a pupil receives the highest evaluation (level 4), she/he describes her success in a written format. At the end of each year, there is a survey for teachers, pupils and their parents to find out whether general competence development is meaningful.



What have we achieved?

Pupils

- Although the systematic evaluation has not been conducted, the staff observed that pupils' reading and writing skills have improved (5th - 8th grades)
- Better academic results were also noted in natural science and social science
- In 2015, the school demonstrated second best results in Lithuania in civic and citizenship education among 8th grade students
- Parents from the focus group noticed that innovations have boosted their children's creativity and social responsibility, as well as self-confidence and resilience among students

School as a whole

- The school community felt that social climate at school has improved
- The school was awarded with an external quality label – a school became recognised as a community of ambitious hardworking professionals

- In 2015, the school received an award of “Good School 2015”. National Agency for School Evaluation (NASE) led quality assessment procedures, and the school stood out by a number of aspects:
 - school activities directed at personal growth valued by pupils and parents
 - high yearly grades
 - use of diagnostic tests and test take-up
 - assessment of school’s microclimate
 - the quality of socially-oriented preventive programmes
 - educational orientation of the events
 - adaptation of educational spaces to learning
 - lesson organisation meeting pupils’ and parents’ expectations;
 - financed project applications;
 - performance quality, and more



The process of change: what helped us succeed?

School level

- The fact that the starting conditions at school were very poor had a great push for change. Positive changes are more visible in such a complex environment, and therefore, it is easier to gain trust from the school staff and initiate further changes
- Active participation of teachers and pupils in the process of innovation. Children with various capabilities participated in working groups and could equally express their opinion. This ‘legitimised’ new measures and facilitated their introduction
- The school gained strong support from parents. It invested quite a lot of time into working with pupil representatives from each class who would later become educators for their classmates and parents, explaining about the benefits of developing general competences. Innovations were not imposed - the school made changes step by step, communicated with parents and wanted to hear their opinion
- 'Snowball effect' - it was easier to introduce further innovations when some other were already established at the school and accepted by its community. It allowed building on the knowledge accumulated from previous experiences in how to manage innovation introduction better

National level

- The school participated in a national project on competence-based learning together with 10 other schools coming from different counties in Lithuania. This allowed systematic training of teachers and learn from the process of implementation in other schools
- The school library manager was a member of the national team responsible for creating a tool for assessing ‘learning to learn’ competence. This team worked together with educational researchers from the UK who helped to define and operationalise this competence



The process of change: what limited us?

School level

- There was resistance from teachers to start innovative processes. Especially at the beginning the school staff found it unclear why to invest more time, effort and other resources into innovations. The initial teacher education (ITE) does not prepare future teachers to be more open to experimentation. This required additional consultation work with teachers.
- Parents also were quite sceptical at the beginning. The initial resistance was related to the fact that it was “new and unusual”. They were afraid about the outcomes of these novelties for their children. Students' ambassadors, trained to advocate for innovations among students and parents, were a key success factor to overcome the initial resistance.

Municipal level

- There is no direct support from municipal centre of education (as the region performs well in national tests on average and the change is not a priority)
- Very limited cooperation between schools in the region. All surrounding schools are in the same ‘area of competition’ for pupils

National level

- No stable financial support available for innovations. At the moment, the question on whether it is more beneficial to support those schools that are already considered to be more innovative or re-allocate this funding to low-achieving schools
- In Lithuania, there is no research done on the impacts on pupils’ achievements and broader effects of innovations, which creates a barrier for convincing stakeholders that innovations are necessary



Sustainability of change

- Detailed strategic planning and constant monitoring provide evidence-base, and help to learn from past experiences and set future directions. The school therefore promotes constant learning and structure, when each school activity starts from planning and ends with self-reflection on its strengths and weaknesses
- Before the school starts any novelty, it has an experimentation phase. An idea is to test this novelty first and then share experiences in respective working groups, learn, and decide whether continue with it
- The school does yearly evaluations of their teaching practices, including innovative methods. Teachers invite pupils to discuss the best forms to evaluate their individual progress in general subjects and acquisition of general competences
- The school has learning clusters where teachers organise themselves into groups and learn together about various topics. A cluster leader oversees that monthly plan is implemented. Teachers accumulate credits and at the end they receive certificates that are acknowledged by the Pedagogues’ Educational Centre (PEC) of Panevėžys
- The school also aims to engage parents into simple practical learning practices. Two years in a row the school organises trainings for parents where pupils are the main lectors

- The school organises 'Tea Hours' when they invite former pupils and seek their feedback on changes.
- The main issue for sustainability of the innovations is a transition of leadership. Both school leaders and teachers agreed that current innovations came with an appointment of the new school leader in 1992. There are no specific mechanisms set in place to sustain present innovations through managerial changes. But the staff was convinced that the practices would not cease to exist if a new school leader is appointed. For sustainability, the most important condition is to create favourable environment with embedded values and stable implementation mechanisms
- Ways the school uses to spread innovations to other schools: attending various conferences, workshops, projects and other type of initiatives; the school leader and some other teachers are external evaluators for the quality of school performance in Lithuania (when they visit and evaluate other schools, they learn about innovations practised there); staff mobility to other schools and visits from other schools or education experts; the school offers qualification improvement programmes for other schools.



What did we learn in the process? Key messages

- Innovations create a positive 'snow-ball' effect when school needs and priorities become clearer. They suggest what kind of innovative improvements are further needed. For example, the school has been working on pupils' project-based activities for at least 10-15 years already. They were following pupils' annual performance and analysing what is needed for their growth, and identified a need to learn how to perform a public speech (which is now a part of general competences development plan)
- The exchange of good practices and experiences is beneficial for the school's teacher qualifications. All managers of different school departments pointed out that it is difficult to find and hire qualified external consultants who would provide relevant continuous professional development; therefore, internal training becomes an important element of professional development of teachers
- Regarding the transferability of innovations, the school staff noted that the popularity and success of the school depends on the complexity of these innovations and the amount of resources they demand, as well as the openness of schools to embrace them.
- Careful planning and needs analysis is an important precondition for the successful implementation of any innovation.

Further reading

- **A full report** 'Supporting School Innovation across Europe' explores the conditions in the school education system that can enable or constrain positive change in schools.
- **12 case studies** explore the national approaches and individual school innovations. They include the perspectives of key national education experts and stakeholders who were interviewed and took part in workshops.
- **24 individual profiles** give a quick view of the changes and experiences in each school.

Available here:

www.schooleducationgateway.eu/innovation

- The school profiles also feature as part of the [European Toolkit for Schools](#), alongside a range of materials and many other inspiring examples of practice from European countries.

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