

INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

EXAMPLE OF IECE PROVISION: LATVIA

1. Abstract

Ozolnieki county is located between the Latvian capital city Riga and the city of Jelgava. The population on 1 January 2015 was 10,628. Early education in Ozolnieki county is based on the principles of 'quality and accessibility for all children from 1.5 years old to the start of primary school'. The education system is inclusive in all aspects of personal development. All children from Ozolnieki county have the chance to attend the pre-school, to be involved in the educational process and prepare for the next educational level, primary school. The regulations for pre-primary education in Ozolnieki district state the ways in which pre-primary age children should be given the opportunity to learn in pre-primary education programmes.

Kindergarten Zīlīte is the biggest kindergarten in Ozolnieki. It is attended by 252 children aged between 1.5 and 7. Local government funds Zīlīte's pre-primary education curriculum.

The curriculum contents, together with the quantity and quality of teaching staff, learning aids and the facility settings are organised into licensed programmes determined by state regulation. There are three licensed educational programmes implemented in the kindergarten pedagogical process:

- Pre-primary education programme;
- Special pre-primary education programme for learners with language disorders;
- Special pre-primary education programme for learners with mixed disabilities.

There are 24 class teachers, 18 teaching assistants, 2 music teachers, 2 sports teachers, plus a support staff consisting of 2 speech therapists, a specialist teacher and education psychologists.

The teachers observe a child's individual development and success and keep records, then analyse the data and inform families. If necessary, individual plans are created and carried out. In appropriate cases, local authorities ensure financial and social support for the children and their families.

The child's holistic development and educational needs are ensured and everyone is involved in active learning. A creative and open environment is produced and independent play helps to develop the child's imagination, fantasy and



understanding of the world around them.

2. Inclusive features

The benefits of this pre-school facility are available to children registered in the Ozolnieki county administrative territory in accordance with the following requirements:

- children of mandatory pre-primary school age;
- orphans and adopted children or children in custody;
- sibling survivors with poor family status;
- children from large families (a family with three or more children);
- twins or multiple births;
- children who have been identified by the Ozolnieki county pedagogical-medical commission as needing specific study programmes, which are implemented through a specific individual education plan;
- children whose registration has been delayed for objective reasons (according to a court decision to temporarily remove children from families living in a social care institution, under adopted children protection).

The objective of pre-primary education is to foster the general development of children and their readiness to enter primary education. The education of children with special educational needs is organised through special education programmes. In Zīlīte these children are included in general pre-primary education groups to acquire general knowledge and skills, with a strong emphasis on their application to facilitating social inclusion corresponding to their individual health condition.

Zīlīte uses Fröbel's principle that states 'children are born with the need to learn about the world around them through perception and senses'. The child develops perception and observation skills, and makes decisions based on existing strong links in the world around. The pedagogical process allows every child the opportunity to experience positive emotions from different activities, including everyday sports, active learning through playing and games, listening, speaking, singing and dancing. During these activities children develop their bodies, minds, emotions and social skills. Yoga for 5- to 6-year-olds helps to develop concentration skills and self-confidence.

To develop social skills the kindergarten uses Fröbel's five rules:

- Life skills are acquired through daily tasks, such as laying the table, serving meals, preparing for naps and going out and coming in from the playground;



- Practical projects take place in the general surroundings and in group rooms;
- Practical tasks in the group room (arranging the learning aids, toys, games, making and displaying decorations), cooking activities, baking bread, making cheese, etc.;
- Jobs such as tidying the group room, raking tree leaves in playgrounds, planting and looking after plants;
- The environment in the group rooms is arranged to allow independent play.

Pre-primary education is considered as a comprehensive first stage of general education and all children must be entered in it until they are 7 years of age. Pre-primary education can be extended for a year in the presence of certain health or psychological problems at either the parents' or doctors' request or recommendation.

The pedagogical staff team produces individual learning plans for children with special needs. These plans cover the methods and activities that help to provide regular support and engagement for each child in the pre-school group. The child and their family are supported by the school psychologist, speech therapist and specialist teacher. The pedagogical staff document data on children's personal and learning skills development, producing a summary twice a year. Analysis of the gathered material is used to plan further activities.

3. Inclusive highlight

Individual support is given to each child with special and additional needs (children with low developed speech and language constitute around 10% of the learners) and their family. The support team is able to provide all the necessary help. One child with special needs is supported by an individual assistant.

To include the children from Chinese-speaking families, for the first month their parents come and take an active part in the pedagogical process with them, spending time together with their children and teachers. Gradually the children are left with Latvian-speaking children for more and more time.

The organisation of the inclusive pedagogical process is as follows:

- The aims and tasks in the pedagogical process are produced according to the curriculum content and the child's needs;
- The child's physical, personal, social and learning progress evaluations determine strengths and weaknesses;
- Planned co-operation between the child, family, teachers and support team



allows the fulfilment of tasks and the achievement of aims for the child's personal development and education;

- The child's self-evaluation is a part of progress evaluation;
- The criteria for determining the tasks and aims are reached;
- Assessment of the process makes it possible to change the plans if necessary.

4. Other evidence of quality IECE

Since October 2008 the Zīlīte kindergarten has been certified as implementing the German educator Friedrich Fröbel's (1782–1852) methods, materials and learning aids. These focus on children's practical skills training and self-development, which are underlying factors in the development of the head, hands and heart.

Teachers take part in in-service training courses in co-operation with the Friedrich Fröbel academy and put the ideas learnt into practice. The teachers at Zīlīte share Fröbel's ideas and methods with the pre-primary teachers in other Ozolnieki county kindergartens which follow the Global Insight into Fröbel's Pedagogy professional qualification programme.

The speech therapist, specialist teacher and class teacher plan necessary individual and small group activities for children with additional needs. There are regular meetings and consultations with families and specially developed exercises for training at home. If necessary the psychologist organises therapy for children and consults with parents.

The pedagogical and support staff are well prepared – teachers are professionally trained, qualified, skilled and have a wide knowledge of how to educate pre-primary school age children. They are all graduates from teaching universities or other institutions of higher education. They have the psychological and pedagogical knowledge necessary for work with children aged from 1.5 to 7. They are able and motivated to plan and carry out pedagogical processes, to predict results and to learn about, evaluate and understand the children's development. Their ability to communicate actively with children and their families helps teachers in everyday work.

Teachers regularly improve their skills. Qualification upgrading and re-training is funded by the national or municipal budget. This allows teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge of methods and approaches for planning and organising everyday pedagogical processes for children with special needs.

Parents play an active part in their children's educational processes, through help with homework and special exercises. If the children are advised to have additional



sport and rehabilitation activities, families should take them to and do activities recommended in the children's individual plans. Parents are responsible for taking their child to the doctor if necessary. Ozolnieki county health and social agency support is available to each family. By working together, the children are prepared for primary school according to their individual health conditions.