



Baltic
Institute
of Social
Sciences

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***CASE STUDY: PRIMARY SCHOOL IN
LATVIA***

Baltic Institute of Social Sciences

***Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is
education contributing to overcome or reproduce social
exclusion? /WP8***

2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. METHODOLOGY.....	6
3. INCLUSIVE PRACTICES	8
3.1 GROUPING THE STUDENTS AND USE OF HUMAN RESOURCES	8
3.2 IMPACT ON DISADVANTAGED GROUPS.....	15
3.3 IMPACT ON OVERCOMING CULTURAL SEGREGATION.....	17
3.4 HIGH EXPECTATIONS	18
3.5 OTHERS	19
4. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION.....	20
4.1 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES AND IN STUDENT'S LEARNING PROCESSES	20
4.2 REPERCUSSIONS ON SUCCESSFUL RESULTS AND GOOD COEXISTENCE ..	24
4.3 COMMUNITY EDUCATION	24
4.4 INCLUSION OF MULTICULTURALISM INTO PLANNING INSTRUMENTAL SUBJECTS.....	25
4.5 OVERCOMING GENDER STEREOTYPES	25
5. CONCLUSIONS	27

1. INTRODUCTION

This preliminary report was written within the framework of the Include-ED Project 2: *European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion?* Project 2 aims to *analyse components from educational practices that are decreasing the rates of school failure and those practices that are increasing them* (Annex 1, p. 5). In order to study educational practices altogether 20 case studies were carried out in Latvia, Spain, Finland, UK, Cyprus, and Hungary. For each case study one educational institution from pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational or special education field was chosen. In Latvia, four case studies were carried out by the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences at different levels: pre-primary, primary, secondary and vocational educational institutions. This report is one of the four preliminary reports focused on primary education.

The primary educational level in Latvia is divided in two periods: first encompasses forms 1 to 4, while the second consists of forms 5 to 9. The organization of teaching in these periods differs considerably. In the first period the form teacher of each class teaches all or almost all subjects. This happens in the same classroom with exception of sports and music lessons. Starting from form 5 each subject is taught by a different teacher and students have to change classrooms after each lesson. The transition to the second period is rather difficult for some students. Additionally as the teachers are changing after each lesson it is hard for teachers to have an overview of attendance and the academic success and to get to know the students as thoroughly as in the first period.

The selection of schools was based upon two main criteria established in Annex 1 of the Includ-ED Project. The school had to have demonstrated contribution to school success (as defined by children's educational attainment) in relation to their specific context. Secondly, the school had to respond to a number of social characteristics, including low socio-economic status of students and students with a minority background.

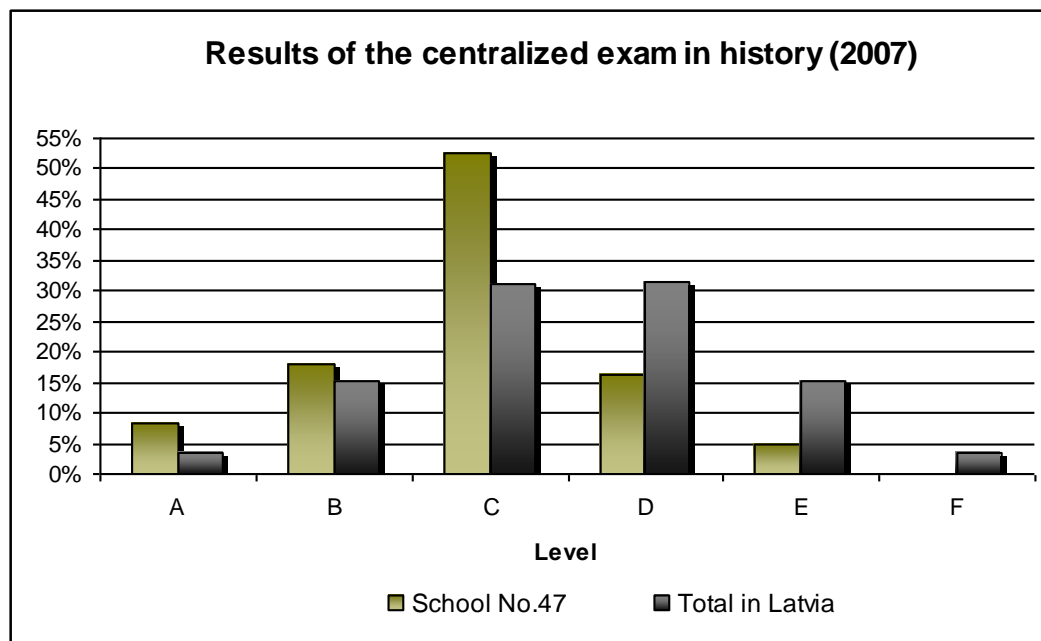
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Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

For the case study in Latvia on primary education the Riga Secondary school No. 47 was selected. The school provides primary (forms 1-9) and secondary (forms 10-12) general education. The research for this case study was focused on the primary level, however often respondents did not separate their comments regarding the two educational levels.

a) Contribution to school success in relation to context (as reflected by children's or adolescents' progress in educational attainment)

Students have good results in final exams. On the primary level there are no fully centralized exams where the exams are assessed centrally. Therefore here the results of final exams on the secondary level are demonstrated. See in the Figures 1, 2, and 3 comparisons of results obtained in the Riga Secondary School No. 47 and on average in Latvia in various subjects.

Figure 1.



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Figure 2.

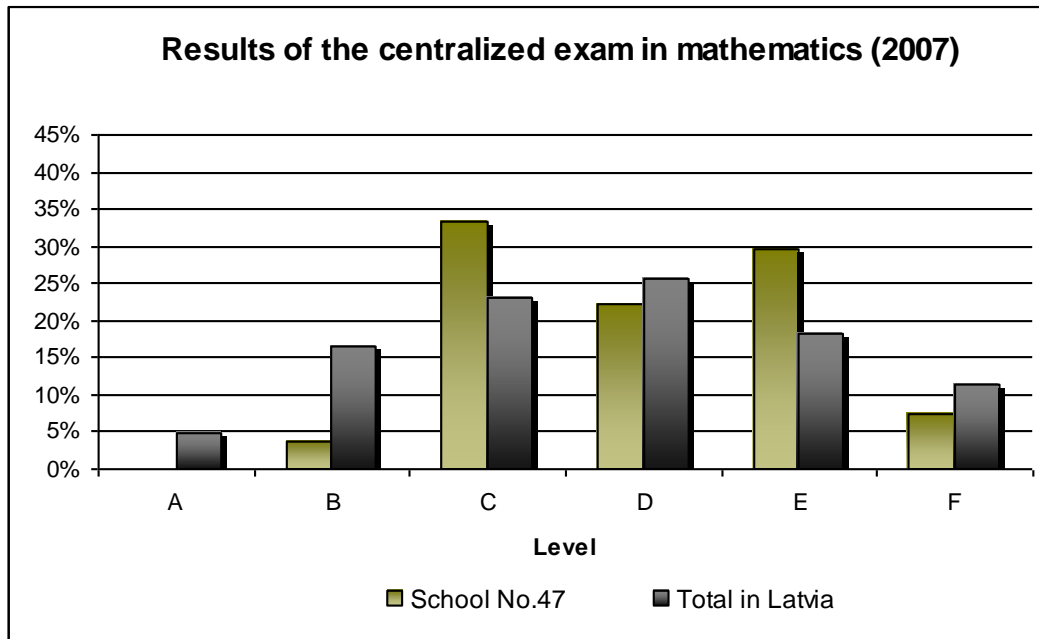
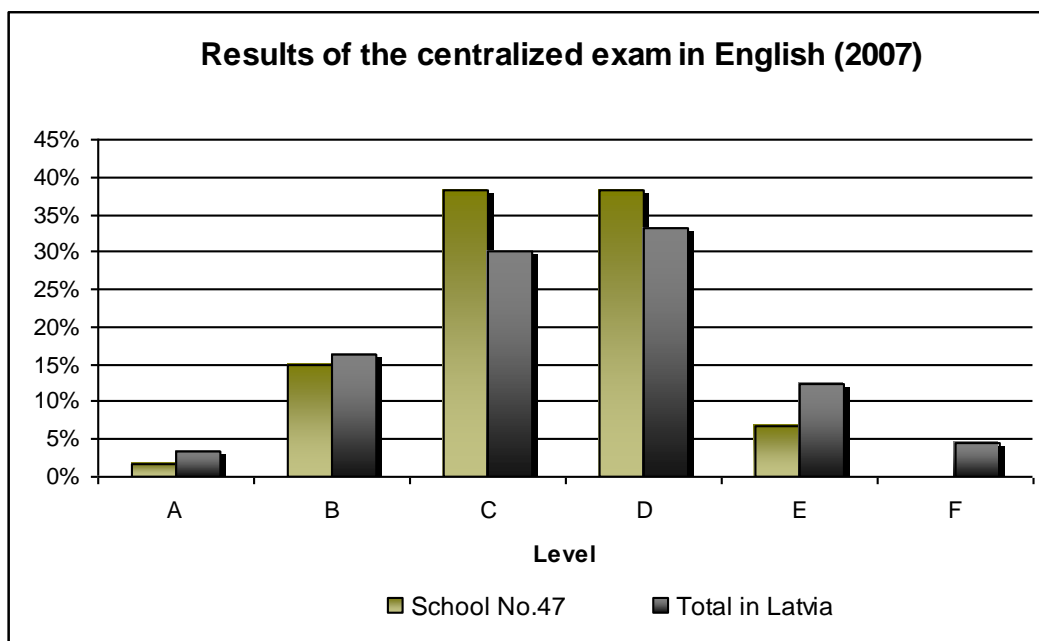


Figure 3.



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In the school year 2006/2007 the Riga Secondary school No. 47 was ranked on place 223 among all schools in Latvia. The ranking was done according to results in student competitions in various subjects. 98% of students move on to the next school year.

After the primary level almost all students continue to secondary education - in this school, in some of the most prestigious schools or in good vocational schools.

Several teachers working in the school write textbooks.

b) Social characteristics of students: low SES and minority background

In the school year 2006/2007 the school counted 552 students on the primary level (forms 1-9) and 201 student on secondary level (forms 1-12). Half of the students are from low SES families. 6% are minority students (mainly Russians), many students from mixed families. The school is located in an area with mainly low SES population.

In this area are also some very prestigious schools which attract the best students from the area. That means this school has higher percentage of weak students.

It must be noted that in Latvia the nationality of students usually does not have a significant impact on their academic success because there are no crucial differences in SES between Latvians and others. (The only exception is Roma students.) The population of Latvia consists of 60% Latvians, 30% Russians and 10% other nationalities. There are many schools with Russian as the main language of instruction, 27% of all pupils in Latvia learn in these schools. Some Russian students join schools with Latvian as the language of instruction in order to master better the Latvian language. In many cases these are students with great academic results.

2. METHODOLOGY

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 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

The methodology used for the case study will be described, including the fieldwork carried out: the techniques which were used, the number of techniques and people involved (teachers, families, students), as well as the analysis carried out based on the communicative methodology and the exclusionary and transformative dimensions.

Data collection

Data collection was carried out from 31.03 to 23.05. 2008.

Code	Description
CIF47-1	Female student, Latvian, Form 9
CIF47-2	Female student, Russian, Form 8
CIM47-3	Male student, Latvian father and Russian mother, Form 8
CIM47-4	2 male students (Latvian and Lithuanian), Form 9
RIM47-1	Father of pupils in Form 3 and Form 7, Latvian, higher education, lecturer in a college
RIF47-2	Mother of a pupils in Form 9, Latvian, higher education, pharmacist
RIM47-3	Father of pupils in Form 1 and Form 5, Latvian, secondary education, works in a security company
TIF47-1	Principal, teacher of geography (female, Latvian, 4 months in this school)
TIF47-2	Teacher of Latvian language and literature (female, Latvian, 20 years in this school)
TIF47-3	Teacher of mathematics (female, Latvian, 25 years in this school)
Oc47-1	Observation of Latvian language class (Form 6)
Oc47-2	Observation of mathematics class (Form 9)
Oc47-3	Observation of mathematics class (Form 6)
Om47-4	Observation in meeting of the parents committee
Om47-5	Observation in parent's meeting (Form 3)
TG47	Focus group discussion with teachers
Participant 1	Teacher of informatics (female, Latvian, 20 years in this school)
Participant 2	Teacher of English (female, Latvian, 20 years in this school)
Participant 3	Teacher of all subjects in forms 1-4 (female, Latvian, 3 years in this school)
Participant 4	Teacher of all subjects in forms 1-4 (female, Latvian, 20 years in this school)
Participant 5	Special pedagogue (female, Latvian, 10 years in this school)
Participant 6	Teacher of all subjects in forms 1-4 (female, Latvian, 25 years in this school)
Participant 7	Teacher of mathematics (female, Latvian, 7 years in this school)

3. INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

3.1 Grouping the students and use of human resources

The school promotes inclusive practices and **does not segregate students** in classes according to their academic achievements. On the primary level students usually stay in the same class from form 1 till form 9. Several teachers, parents, and students confirmed in interviews that all classes of the same age level are very similar in terms of academic achievements and the division in classes is random. However one teacher mentioned a case when a new student with good marks obtained in the previous school was assigned to the academically stronger class. Nevertheless the school does not pursue a strategy of segregating students with different academic achievements. During the interviews teachers stressed the positive effect of mixed ability classes – mainly that the weaker students have a good example and that the general level of the class is higher. One teacher admitted that sometimes it can also have the opposite result – that the academically strong students follow the bad examples and lose their motivation to learn. All classes of one age level learn according to the same programme. The only difference is the opportunity to choose between Russian and German as a foreign language in form 5. This choice is based on different arguments and no exclusionary pattern was found in the division of groups learning Russian or German.

Some time ago they were separated, the class A was for outstanding students, class B – for less successful, and D – for the rest. As much as I know the ones become arrogant, the others – what can we do, we are the stupid class. It stimulates when the average student can 'pull up' to the higher level. And in case when somebody does not understand what the wise teacher is telling then someone can explain it to him in a normal language. If no one understands then it is bad. (TIF47-1) ¹

¹ *Bija jau kaut kad, ka dalija A klase – izcilnieki, B – mazāk un D – kas paliek pāri. Cik es zinu, vieni kļūst iedomīgi, citi – Ko tad mēs, mēs jau esam dumjā klase. Tas stimulē, ka vidējais var „pievilkties” augstākam. Un gadījumā, ja kāds nesaprot, ko tas gudrais skolotājs tur stāsta, tad kāds viņam var normālajā valodā to izskaidrot. Ja neviens nesaprot, tad būs čābīgi. (TIF47-1)*

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

It was noted in several interviews that the school has made bad experience with segregated classes. Some years ago a so called catch-up class was organized for students with learning difficulties. This well-intended experiment failed mainly because of negative attitudes towards this class. First of all some parents were against putting their children in this class. In addition to that students from other classes called it the class of idiots, and soon this class was dissolved.

All students of one class usually have all lessons together. There are only three possible divisions of a class: first, if the class is large, it is divided in two groups for English lessons. The division is made according to the alphabetical order of the names of students. Both groups learn simultaneously in two classrooms and each has one teacher. The groups follow the same educational programme and the only difference is the individual way of implementation by the teachers. Second, in older classes boys and girls are separated for sports and for manual training lessons. The lessons for both groups take place simultaneously in different rooms and with two teachers. The groups follow different educational programmes, e.g, in manual training lessons girls do needlework and boys – woodworking and metal working. Third, the class is divided in two groups according to the choice of German or Russian as the second foreign language.

During the lessons **group work** is not widely used. Some teachers regard this method as very time consuming and rather ineffective. One teacher noted that group work is not an appropriate teaching method for weak students. The teachers rather use group work as a kind of game, e.g., in the last lessons before vacations. However some teachers organize group work as part of regular lessons, especially in lessons of Latvian or English language. The division into groups can be made on voluntary basis or according to some other principle. According to interviews some teachers stress that students have to learn to work together with different people, also with persons they don't like. The students understand it and accept this order.

.. group work is the most complicated, because, first, you have to be able to ensure discipline in all the groups. Second, in the groups it is usually that one is in the centre, and with his help all the others come through. (..) usually it is at the end of the term or before Christmas,

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

when nobody wants to do something, now there will be the end of the school year (TIF47-2)²

One of the most important support mechanisms practiced in the school is '**consultations**' – all teachers have a scheduled time every week when they are available for all students to ask questions, to go through some study material where they have difficulties or to write tests. This practice can be considered as **extending of the learning time** according to the Report 2 (p. 37).

Starting from the school year 2007/2008 every teacher working in general and vocational schools in Latvia receives an additional payment for at least two consultation hours per week which makes it a common practice in Latvian schools. But even before this many teachers of the Secondary school No. 47 organized consultations for their students because they regard it as a crucial support mechanism. It is especially important for rather weak students in order to keep up with the learning material.

This is the first year that we have obligatory paid consultation hours. But I have been all these more than 20 years; I am available every morning for one hour. And children are more willing to come in the morning than after lessons. Because when the consultation hours were after lessons than children didn't want to come. (TIF47-3)³

The attendance to consultations is basically voluntary; nevertheless some teachers do invite individual students to consultations when they notice some learning problems. This is especially characteristic to the younger classes. Sometimes teachers have to persuade students to come to the consultations.

Some students come regularly to the consultations in some subjects, some never do it. Teachers and students alike mentioned in interviews that students are more active when a term comes to the end. In this time students usually come to write or rewrite tests they have missed during the term. One teacher mentioned that

² .. grupu darbs ir vissmagākais, tāpēc, ka, pirmkārt, tev ir jāvar viņus kopā savākt pa tām grupām, otrkārt, tais grupās lielā mērā ir tā, ka tomēr viens ir tas, kurs ir tas centrs, un uz tā rēķina tie pārējie arī tiek galā. (..) parasti tas ir ceturkšņa beigās vai pirms Ziemassvētkiem, kad jau vairs nepatīk neko īpaši darīt, tagad būs gada beigas. (TIF47-2)

³ Šogad pirmo gadu mums ir obligātās apmaksātās konsultācijas. Bet es pilnīgi visus, vairāk nekā 20 gadus šajā skolā, esmu katru rītu no rīta stundu pieejama. Un bērni daudz labprātāk nāk no rīta nekā pēc stundām. Jo tad, kad konsultācijas bija pēc stundām, tad nu bērni negribēja nākt. (TIF47-3)

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

sometimes students become very motivated and come regularly to consultations in the end of the form 8 when they realize that with bad marks after the form 9 their further possibilities will be very limited.

There the material we do not understand is explained, or we correct the marks, or rewrite something. Usually students attend consultations in order to improve bad marks and rewrite some tests. And the teacher comes and helps, it is, yes. (..) Mostly we correct marks, we are not the ones who understand everything quickly, we are average, we have average level in studies. But we come sometimes to the consultations to improve marks, and sometimes when we get it explained it is really easier. (CIM47-4)⁴

That [how many students come to a consultation] depends on the material or if the term is ending soon. Sometimes there are 2-3 children, sometimes there is one. Usually these are boys who become wise at the end of the form 8, and then they come very often, they truly wait for me. Because they already know, where they will go further and then they are crawling out of the deep moat. (TIF47-3)⁵

Some students come to the consultations to catch up with the class if they have missed some material, for example, due to illness. Sometimes students come to ask questions about the previous material or the homework if they have some difficulties.

Teachers are available for individual consultations also outside the scheduled consultation hours. One teacher mentioned that some students avoid the consultation hours and prefer to talk to teachers at other times, e.g., during breaks, in order to be alone with the teacher.

One parent mentioned that sometimes the scheduled consultation hours fall on the regular lessons of some classes. In order to attend these consultations they have to miss some lessons.

⁴ *Un tur mums pastāsta par to vielu, ko mēs nesaprotam, vai arī izlabojam atzīmes, vai arī kaut ko pārrakstām. Pārsvārā uz konsultācijām iet tāpēc, ka vēlas izlabot tās sliktās atzīmes un pārrakstīt kaut kādus darbus. Un tad skolotāja tiešām atnāk un piepalīdz, tas ir, jā. (..) Pārsvārā mēs labojam atzīmes, mēs neesam tie, kuriem viss ātrāk pielec, mēs esam tādi viduvēji, viduvējs līmenis mācībās ir. Bet nu mēs nākam pa retam uz konsultācijām, lai izlabotu atzīmes, un dažkārt, kad mums paskaidro, tad tiešām ir vieglāk. (CIM47-4)*

⁵ *Tas, [cik skolēnu atnāk uz konsultāciju] ir atkarīgs no vielas, vai tur atzīmes jāizliek vai kas. Ir, kad atnāk 2-3 bērni, ir, kad atnāk viens. Parasti tie ir puikas, kas 8. klases beigās atjēdzas, un tad viņi nāk intensīvi, tad mani uzticīgi sagaida. Jo viņi jau zina, kur viņi tālāk ies, un tad rāpjas pa to dziļo grāvi ārā. (TIF47-3)*

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

A lot of individual work is done to prepare the academically strong students for participation in student competitions in various subjects. It takes place before or after the regular school day and even on weekends. These competitions are organized each year separately for all age groups on local and national level. It was mentioned in several interviews that despite the overall moderate academic results of students the school has good results in the student competitions. This shows that the teachers can be successful in working with academically strong students.

Teachers use the resources of the academically strong students by letting them to explain the material to other students. Several teachers noted that very often students can explain better because they have similar perspectives and way of thinking.

Some teachers mentioned that they sometimes give **additional and more complicated tasks** to students who learn fast while the rest is still doing the initial basic exercises. That means that the whole class is studying the same material but with different difficulty levels. Such practice is identified in the Report 2 (p. 29) as **streaming within classrooms by level** which does not facilitate inclusion. This practice indicates the different expectations towards different students.

Teachers try to give an opportunity to develop to students who learn fast. Usually it is done by offering additional and more complicated tasks to students who have finished the basic exercises. One teacher mentioned that she motivates students to do more than the basic tasks by giving extra points. When a certain amount of points is gathered the students obtains an additional high mark in this subject. One teacher mentioned that sometimes she prepares tests for three different levels. Students themselves have to estimate their knowledge and skills and decide to do tasks which give the mark 5, 8 or 10.

Several teachers noted with pricks of conscience that they experience difficulties to work in classes with mixed abilities and that usually more attention is paid to students with difficulties. Due to this academically strong students are left unattended and do not receive support to fully develop their potential abilities.

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

However in some interviews with students and a parent the opposite opinion was expressed – that teachers work more with students who follow lessons easily.

It is bad that all the time one has to work for the average level. It is very silly, in the consultations we work with those who fall behind, we help those who have difficulties, also during lessons we work for the average level. And for those, who understand mathematics very well, for those there is no time. (..) Here it is awkward – when I work for the average level, the best ones, they sink lower. (TIF47-3)⁶

Support is usually provided in the classroom, in interviews with teachers and students alike it was mentioned that teachers give additional explanations to students who have difficulties to follow the lesson or to do individual tasks. One teacher mentioned in the interview that she asks the students with some learning difficulties to write the exercises on the blackboard while others do it in their exercise books. This helps the teacher to identify the knowledge gaps and provide appropriate help with the necessary explanations.

*There are some who understand slower, but then they do not feel shy and ask questions. Talk through. The teacher explains one more time, and everything is fine. **Is this in all subjects?** Yes. In German lessons we can talk the whole lesson about one single issue. She can also explain everything individually. (CIF47-1)⁷*

For each class there is a '**form tutor**' who is responsible for all students in one class. His/her duties include among others contacts with parents, to reduce truancy, to have a regular overview about the learning progress and truancy.

An important characteristic of the school is the **work in a team**. Several teachers noted that they have a strong sense of being part of a team where one can obtain support and help from the colleagues. Official support teams are organized in order to deal with students in especially difficult situations. These teams usually

⁶ *Bēdīgi ir tas, ka iznāk visu laiku strādāt uz vidējo līmeni. Iznāk dikti muļķīgi, ar tām konsultācijām arī mēs pārsvarā strādājam ar tiem, kam neiet, mēs palīdzam tiem, kam grūti, arī stundā uz vidējo līmeni. Un tiem, kam tā matemātika iet, mums pietrūkst laika. Tiem pietrūkst laika. [..] šeit iznāk ačgarniski – kad es strādāju uz vidējo līmeni, tad tie labākie, viņi noslīd uz leju. (TIF47-3)*

⁷ *Ir tādi, kas saprot lēnāk, bet tad viņi nekautrējas un uzdod jautājumus. Izrunā. Vēlreiz skolotājs pastāsta, un viss kārtībā. **Vai visos priekšmetos ir tā?** Jā. Vācu valodā mēs varam kaut vai visu stundu par vienu jautājumu runāt. Viņa kaut vai individuāli visu pastāstīs. (CIF47-1)*

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

include the form teacher, social pedagogue, special pedagogue, doctors, psychologist, and other specialists according to individual needs.

A substantial support for the school staff in work with students who have some learning difficulties is the **social pedagogue**. In Latvia the number of social pedagogues in a school is calculated from the number of students. Usually they are not able to provide support to all students in need of it. Also the Secondary school No.47 needs more social pedagogues. in the focus group teachers stressed that it is hard to achieve any improvements without the support of students' families. Nevertheless teachers underlined that the social pedagogue is working very hard and is a very important support.

The **special pedagogue** usually works with students from the younger classes. In the focus groups teachers estimated that there are at least 80 students who need the support of the social pedagogue, but she manages to work with some 20 students only. She takes one or two students with learning difficulties out of the lesson and teaches them individually the same material what the rest of their respective class is doing during this lesson. In some cases this is done if the student is hyperactive or not in the mood to learn.

Another support mechanism to students and their families are the so called **prolonged day groups**. In the focus group discussion teachers estimated that approximately 70% of the students in forms 1 to 4 attend it. After the regular lessons students can stay at school for several hours and do their homework or play. These groups are a great help for parents who are working because students can stay at school under supervision of teachers. On the other hand students get an additional help from supervising teachers when doing their homework.

After the school year – **during summer vacations** teachers continue the work with students who have failed in some subjects for several weeks. This is a common practice regulated by national instructions. It gives an opportunity for the students to catch up at least partly with the educational material which was done during the school year in the respective subject. The additional work during the summer vacations is done by the same teachers and it takes place in the same school (the school building is open during the summer vacations).

There is also an institutionalized nation-wide support mechanism for students with serious learning difficulties. It is meant for students with health problems but can also be applied in other cases. This practice is based on **individual teaching** either at school or at students home. It is usually done by the teachers of the same school. Lately a more centralized mechanism was introduced gathering students from all school of the neighbourhood. It was noted in an interview that the individual teaching has been a great help to many students with learning difficulties.

Due to low salaries many teachers work up to two workloads. This leads to too many working hours, teachers get tired and have no time to elaborate their teaching methods and materials.

Teachers are held **responsible** for the numbers of students with unsatisfactory grades in their subjects.

As one of their main tasks teachers see the necessity **to motivate students** to learn. Therefore teachers try to vary the teaching methods and make lessons more **interesting** or students. Another way to motivate students is to **evaluate** with a mark nearly everything what students do in this subject. It was noted in several interviews that very often students do not their homework. As one of the reasons for this was mentioned that teachers do not do put it as a strict requirement – often they do not check and evaluate the homework. Some teachers ask to show them corrections of mistakes to be sure that students have understood their mistakes. This also motivates them to put more effort into every task when students know that they will have to correct the mistakes afterwards.

3.2 Impact on disadvantaged groups

As disadvantaged groups in the realm of learning success teachers mentioned families where parents do not take proper care of their children and are not interested in their schooling process. These can be families with low income, parents who use alcohol or take drugs. It can also be low or high income families

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

where parents work most of the time and for this reason do not look after their children and lose the contact to them.

Disadvantageous is a poor and alcoholic family, but also a family here parents earn a lot of money. And the third variant – where the parents have to work very much in order to make both ends meet. (..) Disadvantageous are also the very rich families, where they educate children with money only. (TIF47-3) ⁸

In cases of serious problems with the families the school involves social workers. Otherwise teachers strive to make an open and inclusive atmosphere in the school, so that all students regardless of support from their families can feel accepted. Teachers noted that sometimes students do not come to the school because they do not feel well there. As one example teachers mentioned a girl who was stinking because her parents did not take care of her, nor the house or clothes. The teacher tried to explain this to other students in the class. Nevertheless for some time this girl was learning individually – either teachers visited her at home or she came to individual lessons in the school. After some time she returned to the class and is now better integrated in her class.

In our class actually everybody is equal, and this is very good. The material situation is the same for all of us, nobody stands out neither with his poverty, nor richness. Yes, it is often like that, but it is not in our class. We do not care, who has the most exclusive mobile phone, if you have it – nice. We have one girl who lives in not very good circumstances, but everything is fine, there are parties at her place. (CIF47-2) ⁹

Taking into account that many students of the school come from low income families teachers strive to avoid situations where the income differences can become visible or have an impact on the learning process or coexistence of students. Therefore teachers keep low their requirements regarding study aids and utensils needed for learning. All in all teachers pointed out that generally the income level of parents is not significant for the academic success of the

⁸ *Nelabvēlīga ir gan trūcīga un dzērāju ģimene, gan arī tāda, kur vecāki lielas naudas pelna. Un trešais variants, kur vecāki ir spiesti tik daudz strādāt, lai izdzīvotu. (..) Nelabvēlīgi ir arī riktīgi bagāti, kas ar naudu audzina vai kaut kā. (TIF47-3)*

⁹ *Mūsu klasē īstenībā visi ir vienlīdzīgi, un tas ir ļoti labi. Tas materiālais stāvoklis mums klasē visiem ir vienāds, neviens neizceļas ne ar savu nabadzību vai bagātību. Nu jā, tas ir bieži, bet mums tā nav. Mums neskatās, kam krutāks telefons, nu ir viņš tev – labi. Mums ir viena meitene, kas dzīvo ne īpaši labos apstākļos, bet viss normāli. Pie viņas tur tusē. (CIF47-2)*

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

students. Most of teachers noted that income differences sometimes do affect the coexistence of students, but this is not regarded as a significant problem.

Now there is a system in the school that the used books stay in the school if the parents agree. And so the next class can use these books again. (RIM47-1)¹⁰

It was mentioned that in the school there are no students or personnel with serious physical disabilities. One of the reasons for this is that the school facilities are not adjusted accordingly. Nevertheless the school seems to be open to students with disabilities. It was pointed out by one teacher and also in an interview with a student. She told about her classmate who has asthma and underlined that this was not regarded as a problem among the classmates – they simply stopped using cosmetics with a strong scent.

3.3 Impact on overcoming cultural segregation

All in all students, parents, and teachers alike note that there are no significant differences between students of different ethnic background. Most of the minority students come from families where Russian language is the means of communication. Many of them have mixed Russian-Latvian families. Teachers and students alike pointed out that often it is not possible to notice that some students have another ethnic background. Some years ago many minority students came from schools with Russian as the language of instruction. Nowadays parents make their decision on the language of instruction before starting the schooling of their children. Most of the minority students have attended Latvian kindergartens and there they have already learned the Latvian language. Nevertheless some students have problems with the Latvian language in the beginning of the schooling. It was noted in an interview that usually the first two months are more difficult before the minority students overcome the language problems. Afterwards Russian students usually do not have problems with speaking in Latvian, but in writing they often have many mistakes. As one of possible support mechanisms in such cases is individual consultations when

¹⁰ *Tagad jau skolā ir tāda sistēma, ka tās grāmatas, kas ir izmantotas, paliek skolā, ja vecāki piekrīt. Nākošajā klasē jau attiecīgo literatūru ir iespējams izdalīt. (RIM47-1)*

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

teachers can provide extra help to minority students in learning the Latvian language.

Now I have very few, I have two children from mixed families. But there are no students, who have come from Russian schools. (..) those children appear already in the form 1, but such clearly Russian children are very few. (TIF47-3) ¹¹

There are also several Russian persons in the school personnel, for example, teachers of the Russian language or support staff (in the kitchen, watchman, and cleaner). Students asked about the impact of school personnel with Russian background did not mention anything specific.

3.4 High expectations

a) Exclusionary

During interviews when asked about the academic success of the school several teachers underlined that this is a totally ordinary school meaning that one cannot expect such results as in the prestigious schools. Regarding the abilities of the students one teacher mentioned that students from the neighbourhood with the best academic abilities go to the prestigious schools and this school receives the rest with rather low abilities.

Several teachers mentioned that the general ability level of students is declining and the number of students who have learning difficulties increases.

One teacher expressed her discontent regarding reduced requirements for students who are seriously doing some kind of sports and are often absent from school.

Lower expectations towards some students lies in the practice of streaming within classrooms by level. This practice is discussed more in detail in the chapter 3.1.

b) Transformative

¹¹ *Pašlaik man pavisam maz ir, man kādi divi bērni no jauktām ģimenēm. Bet tīri tādi, kas no krievu skolas būtu atnākuši, tā nav. (..) tie bērni jau no 1. klasītes parādās, bet tieši tā izteikti krievu bērni ir ļoti maz. (TIF47-3)*

Although not having high expectations towards some of the students teachers do not regard ability as the most significant factor for successful learning. They underline that being lazy and not making any effort is the reason why students fail. This indicates that most of the students are expected to acquire the learning material at least at a satisfactory level. One teacher mentioned that some students are convinced about their lack of abilities in some subjects and how she is persuading them not to give up and to make more effort.

The school psychologist works with students of the older classes with the aim to help students to choose their further educational path. With special tests the most appropriate spheres are identified. Of course, this can only be a suggestion which does not have a determinant impact.

3.5 Others

In order to keep the motivation of weak students several teachers mentioned that it is advisable to evaluate not only the academic results but also **the effort the student has made**. If a student has difficulties with some educational material but is very diligent and makes a lot of effort some teachers would give a better mark despite low results. The main reason for this is to keep the motivation of students to work hard. One teacher mentioned in the interview that one can notice easily a point in time when a student loses the motivation and hope to be successful in a subject. After this students are not making any efforts anymore and usually fail in this subject.

In several interviews it was mentioned that the school has an especially open and **positive atmosphere**. The teachers do really care for the students and their success. There are good relationships between teachers and students. Some interviewees related it to the social background of students – on question about the relationships among students it was mentioned that this is an ordinary school, not prestigious, and that students come from ordinary families which are not rich or famous.

Students and teachers do not change. I think that we have very strong teachers. I think that is also an achievement of our school - when our school, which is not an elitist school, can compete very well in student

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

competitions with the elitist schools, then it is only and solely the result of the work done by the teachers. (TG47)¹²

The school offers many **extracurricular activities**, e.g., sports clubs, dancing, choir, club for droughts, drawing and other clubs. Usually students of younger classes are involved in these clubs. It is important to mention that participation in these activities are free of charge. Sometimes families not taking proper care of their children fail to provide some additional things needed for participation in the activities. For example, it was mentioned in the focus group that sometimes parents do not dress their children properly for a concert.

4. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

4.1 Community participation in decision making processes and in student's learning processes

Teachers place emphasis on involvement of families in the schooling of their children. They underline that the support of parents is essential for successful studies. On the other hand teachers note that many parents are not willing to engage actively in the school. They explain it with the big workload of parents, poor relationships and lack of communication between parents and children.

There are three main forms of communication and cooperation with parents: 1) parent meetings, 2) E-class, 3) phone calls. **Parent meetings** are organized several times per school year or at least once per term for each class. If some urgent issues arise an extra meeting can be organized. The parent meetings are organized separately for every class by the form tutor. Sometimes there are also parent meetings for one age group, for example, before final examinations for the senior classes.

Unfortunately these meetings are not very well attended – usually less than half of the families are represented. Parents of younger classes are more active in attending the parent meetings. Whereas in forms 8 and 9 they show rather little

¹² *Nav skolēnu kustība, nav skolotāju maiņa. Es domāju, ka mums ir ļoti spēcīgi skolotāji. Es domāju, ka tas ir arī mūsu skolas sasniegums, ja mūsu skola, kas nav elitāra skola, var olimpiādē ļoti labi sacensties ar elitārām skolām, tad tas ir tikai un vienīgi skolotāju kolektīva darba rezultāts. (TG47)*

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

interest in the schooling of their children. Teachers understand that often parents are working at the time although parents meetings take place after the usual office hours. Some parents are afraid of hearing reproaches about their children. Many teachers are aware of this and always try to find also positive things to say about students. Teachers develop diverse strategies to motivate parents to come to the meetings. One is to send nice invitations and ask to return them with response, whether the parents will attend the meeting. Sometimes teachers get angry because of the passivity of parents and write sentences like: "If you care for the school results of your child... " It was noted that in general parents from disadvantageous families come more seldom to the school.

.. I am quite bitchy, I always send those invitations by post; I make them on the computer. [Parents] have to sign it and send to me. (..) One thing is an announcement, another thing is – not only to sign but – I will/ I will not come. It has helped a lot. One can sign everything but if you have to write if you will come then parents think about it for a while. It helped. In the beginning of the form 9 when I was totally angry then I wrote.... Kind of politely – if you are interested in the educational success of you child you will be welcomed in the parent meeting. Then after two years break 20 parents came. That is nearly a Guinness record. (TIF47-3) ¹³

Another way of ensuring communication and involving parents in the schooling of their children are **parent days** when all teachers are available for individual conversations in their classrooms from 17.00 till 19.30. Parent days are organized every two months. Some teachers noted that parent days are better attended than the class parent meetings. It can be explained by the fact that on parent days the parents can approach directly the teachers of subjects where their children have difficulties. One teacher underlined that parents prefer individual conversations with the subject teachers. One parent mentioned that at some subject teachers there are long queues and it takes a long time to actually talk to the teacher. Teachers are especially glad that parents of students with learning difficulties are very active in attending the parent days. Often these conversations

¹³ *.. es jau tāda diezgan nešpetna, es tos ielūgumiņus vienmēr sūtu uz mājām, uz datora uztaisu. [Vecākiem] jāparakstās un jādod atpakaļ. (..) Viena lieta ir paziņojums, otra lieta – ne tikai parakstīt, bet – būšu/ nebūšu. Ļoti kādreiz palīdzēja. Parakstīt var da jebko, bet nu ja tev ir jāuzraksta – būšu vai nebūšu – tad nu drusku vecāki padomā. Tas līdzēja. 9. klases sākumā, kad es biju galīgi nikna, tad es vispār uzrakstīju... Nu it kā jau pieklājīgi – ja Jūs interesējaties par sava bērna sekmēm mācībās, būsiet gaidīti vecāku sapulcē. Nu tad pēc divu gadu pārtraukuma man 20 vecāki ieradās. Tas jau ir gandrīz Ginesa rekords. (TIF47-3)*

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

help to find individual solutions to some serious lingering problems. Sometimes parents come together with their children to agree on further steps.

One of the most important ways how the parents are involved in the decision making on school level is the **parent committee**. It consists of parent representatives from each class. The representatives have to pass on the information and decisions to the parents of their respective classes. But it does not function if parents do not attend the class parent meetings. It was said in an interview that usually 10-15 parent representatives attend the meetings, and that mothers and fathers are equally represented in the parent committee. However in the observed meeting of the parent committee only 2 fathers and 6 mothers were present. This indicates also that not all representatives are active in attending the meetings of the parent committee. Some members of the parent committee represent two classes if they have several children in this school. The head of the parent committee keeps regular contact to the school principal.

In the observed meeting of the parent committee the school principal and 2 teachers of the school were present. Sometimes student representatives also attend these meetings. The meeting was chaired by the principal. During the observed meeting mostly practical issues were discussed, for example, about the necessary repairs, joint clean-up of the school surroundings, financial matters, and plans for the next school year. In interviews it was mentioned that in previous meetings issues like student assessment and system of additional payments were discussed. The principal evaluates very positively the work of the parent committee and appreciates very much the support from the parents in solving different matters.

We have a parent committee at school, and it is quite active. They discuss the rules in the school and some events. And it has been successful; there were even parents on duty in the school for some time. Now there are the long lunch breaks which were not before. The parents decided that it is necessary, so that children have time to eat. Thus there are positive things. Only the problem is that nowadays parents work a lot and don't want to do much outside their work, but there are in each class at least 2-3 parents who are very active. (TG47)¹⁴

¹⁴ *Mums ir skolā vecāku komiteja, kas ir diezgan aktīva vispār. Viņi apspriež skolas kārtības noteikumus, gan pasākumus, un ir panākusi arī, bija taču vienu brīdi vecāku dežūras skolā. Tagad ir garie ēdināšanas starpbrīži, kas arī nebija, ko vecāki izlēma, ka tā tomēr vajag, lai bērni var paēst. Tā, ka ir pozitīvas lietas, vienīgi tas ir, ka vecāki*

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

One of the main purposes in the communication between the school and parents is to inform parents about the academic success or difficulties, or behaviour problems. One way used in the school is **achievement sheets**. These are prepared by the respective form teachers for each student.

E-class is an Internet based system to inform parents about the grades and absence of their child. It has already been introduced in many schools in Latvia. E-class is based on an electronic register of grades, attendance and other information. Parents can see on Internet the data on their children or they can choose to receive SMS with the type of information they are interested in, for example, all grades, grades below certain level, absence etc.

E-class has been introduced in this school in the school year 2007/2008 and many parents have joined this system. Some parents do not use Internet and some are not ready to pay for the SMS although there is a limit set for the maximum payment (EUR 3) regardless the number of SMS which are actually sent. The school sees plans the e-class as an important and efficient way of communication with parents and plans to involve all parents in it in the next school year.

Individual **phone calls** are made very often, especially when there are some problems. Some form tutors call parents every time when the student is absent. Sometimes they even wake the students up. Some parents send SMS to form teachers to inform that their child will stay at home. In some cases parents tell lies to teachers to cover truancy of their children.

Form teachers organize excursions to some public institutions or enterprises, e.g., banks, chocolate factory. Another way of involving the community in the school is to invite representatives from NGOs or other institutions to talk to students about different topics, for example, safety, sexual education, drug abuse and others. If there are some serious problems the school contacts institutions like police, social workers, and custody court.

mūsdienās ļoti daudz strādā un ļoti maz grib kaut ko darīt kaut ko ārpus sava darbalaika, bet ir klasē vismaz kādi 2-3 vecāki, kas ir ļoti aktīvi. (TG47)

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

As a positive example that parents can influence significantly the educational process is a case when on parents request a textbook was replaced by another one.

Teachers have not noted any differences between parents of different ethnic origin. Teachers emphasize the role of parental involvement to support the motivation and ensure regular attendance. But often the school stands alone in this work. Several teachers noted that parents do not look into student diaries and do not react in any way. In some cases parents ignore invitations and do not attend meetings of the school board to discuss the difficulties of their children. One teacher noted that parents are afraid to come to the school and to talk to teachers. As another reason was mentioned that parents do not have anything to say. In many cases parents admit that they don't know how to cope with the problems related to their children. One teacher mentioned that unfortunately the school is not able to offer many solutions in such cases to support the parents.

4.2 Repercussions on successful results and good coexistence

Teachers underline that one of the most important preconditions for educational success is the interest of parents and the involvement in the schooling of their children. Teachers often attribute learning difficulties to the careless attitude of many parents. In this way students learn from their parents that education is not important and valuable factor for their further success in life.

4.3 Community education

There are no community education programmes in the school. This can be explained in different ways. First of all this practice is almost nonexistent in Latvian schools. Schools complain about the lack of interest on parent side regarding the schooling of their own children; many parents work long hours to maintain the family. Therefore they do not expect parents to be interested in educational programmes. On the other hand schools lack human and financial resources to organize community education programmes.

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

Although there are no elaborated community education programmes some elements of it are present. For example, in the observed parent meeting (Om47-5) of form 3 the form tutor had invited an expert on safe use of electrical appliances. He had prepared a presentation and educational films on these issues. This meeting was meant for children together with their parents.

4.4 Inclusion of multiculturalism into planning instrumental subjects

Including multiculturalism into planning instrumental subjects is not an issue in this school. It must be noted that for the most part Latvian society is not aware of multiculturalism and does not regard it as an enriching asset. Regarding the educational system schools with Latvian as language of instruction have been almost only Latvian until 15 years ago. In the Secondary school No.47 the most important minority are students with Russian mother tongue. They have been born and have lived their lives in Latvia therefore the cultural differences are not very large.

A minority student pointed out in the interview that an inclusion of the Russian culture into the curriculum or into school life in general is not necessary. It was underlined that she can observe the Russian traditions at home and it is not necessary to do it at school. A teacher mentioned that sometimes Russian traditions and special celebrations are mentioned during the lessons.

4.5 Overcoming gender stereotypes

In this section the overall situation regarding gender equality will be characterized including the aspects of community participation. In the Secondary school No. 47 as in many other schools in Latvia this realm is rather ambiguous. On one hand the school personnel is mostly female and girls are more successful in attaining academic achievements. On the other hand gender stereotypes regarding different abilities in some subjects still exist.

Several teachers noted that girls are usually more diligent and put more effort into the studies. Whereas boys are more often lazy and have more behaviour problems. This difference is especially notable in forms 6 to 8. In this time boys often obtain gaps in their knowledge and it is hard for them to catch up

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

afterwards. Nevertheless some teachers have stereotypes regarding abilities in exact sciences like mathematics, physics etc. These differences are especially attributed to very high achievements like national student competitions etc. On the school level girls and boys are regarded as equally able to have good results in all subjects. Therefore there are equal expectations towards male and female students. One teacher pointed out that appropriate and efficient teaching is the decisive factor in achieving good academic results, not the gender of students.

This school has a specialization in training girls in basketball. Tall girls from all over Latvia are invited to learn and train in this school. For them also a dormitory is offered. It was noted in an interview that boys are disadvantaged in this respect as there are not that many trainers and sports clubs at school as for girls. However the girls training in basketball do not make a significant proportion among all students of the school. This aspect was mentioned only in some interviews which indicates that this specialization does not have a significant influence on the school.

The school personnel is mostly female, women make up the whole management team. There are only 4 men among the teachers – teaching physics, biology, music, and manual training for boys. One female teacher pointed out that most men are not capable of doing this kind of job because in addition to teaching the subject it involves also dealing with social problems, students' families and other aspects. Another teacher mentioned that male teachers experience more conflicts with students for several reasons. First, many students come from single parent families are not used to see a male person in a role of an educator, second, in case of difficulties they have a more harsh voice tone which is unusual for many students and therefore more provoking. The small proportion of male personnel is typical for Latvian schools, and one reason for this is the small remuneration for this work.

Men cannot stand it. Briefly and shortly – men are not able to stand the work at school. (..) They simply run away, they cannot stand it; it is too hard for a man. And of course, the salary, it also, but the work of teachers itself... Before it was different, the teacher as an authority (..), but all this, we have to deal with now, the problems of the children and

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
 Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

of the families... And all those tricks happening here at school, a man cannot stand it. (TIF47-3)¹⁵

Non-academic women at school are involved in practical positions like catering and cleaning.

Regarding the parental involvement in the school, women seem to be more active. They are usually attending parent meetings (also observed in the parent meeting Om47-5). As observed in the meeting of the parent committee (Om47-4) mothers outnumber fathers and women are more active in organizing the activities. Also the leader of the parent committee is female. This reflects the general trend in Latvia that mothers are more involved in taking care of children and also in the schooling process.

All in all gender equality is not regarded as a serious problem in the school, none of the contacted school personnel, parents or students mentioned it. There are no specific measures intended towards increasing gender equality.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The case study carried out in the Riga Secondary school No.47 has given a profound insight in the various practices of this school. The findings partly confirm some of the hypotheses at the core of this study. On the other hand the results suggest additional factors which can be substantial for an inclusive education.

As the main disadvantaged groups in the context of this school could be identified 1) students lacking support and control from their parents, and 2) students with Russian mother tongue. The economic status of their families does not play a significant role in the educational success. A more important factor is the quality of the relationship with the parents and parental care.

¹⁵ *Vīrieši to nevar izturēt. Īsi un kodolīgi – vīrieši skolas darbu nevar izturēt. (..) Viņi vienkārši mūk, nu nevar to izturēt, tas ir par smagu priekš vīrieša. Un, protams, alga, tas ir tā, bet tīri skolotāju darbs... Agrāk bija savādāk, skolotājs kā autoritāte (..), bet tas viss, ar ko mums tagad ir jānodarbojas, tā nu ar bērnu problēmām, ar ģimenes problēmām... Un visi tie jociņi, kas te skolā notiek, nevar vīrietis to izturēt. (TIF47-3)*

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

Several transformative elements fostering inclusion and educational success for all students were identified. An overall inclusive principle is **not to segregate** students according to their abilities and academic achievements in separate classes or learning groups. Teachers stress the positive educational effect in mixed ability classes where the weaker students can learn from the academically more successful students and have them as an example.

Consultation hours of teachers provide an opportunity to extend the learning time for the students who have some difficulties. Most often the consultations are used to write or rewrite some tests. Although the consultations are attended on voluntary basis sometimes teachers invite individual students to their consultation hours to give a better understanding of some material.

Support is usually provided in the classroom, in interviews with teachers and students alike it was mentioned that teachers give additional explanations to students who have difficulties to follow the lesson or to do individual tasks. This practice is very simple and efficient as it does not require additional time and human resources. In this way many problems can be tackled and solved immediately after they arise.

For each class there is a **form tutor** who is responsible for all students in one class. His/her duties include among others contacts with parents, to reduce truancy, to have a regular overview about the learning progress and truancy.

An important characteristic of the school is the **work in a team**. Several teachers noted that they have a strong sense of being part of a team where one can obtain support and help from the colleagues. Official support teams are organized in order to deal with students in especially difficult situations. These teams usually include the form teacher, social pedagogue, special pedagogue, doctors, psychologist, and other specialists according to individual needs.

Some teachers mentioned that they sometimes give **additional and more complicated tasks** to students who learn fast while the rest is doing the initial basic exercises. That means that the whole class is studying the same material but with different difficulty levels. Such practice is identified in the Report 2 (p. 29) as **streaming within classrooms by level** which does not facilitate inclusion. This practice indicates the different expectations towards different

INCLUD-ED Case study: Primary education.
Project 2: European effective educational practices: How is education contributing to overcome or reproduce social exclusion? /WP8

students. On the other hand in this way teachers try satisfy the needs and to give an opportunity to develop to students who learn fast. Therefore this practice cannot be evaluated only regarding its impact on inclusion/ exclusion of disadvantaged groups.

As one of their main tasks teachers see the necessity **to motivate students** to learn. Therefore teachers try to vary the teaching methods and make lessons more interesting or students. Another way to motivate students is to **evaluate** with a mark nearly everything what students do in this subject.

Parental interest and involvement in the education of their children is crucial for the motivation of students. The main practices of the parental involvement are parents meetings, communication of marks and attendance via Internet or SMS, and phone calls. Unfortunately the parents usually take a very passive role despite the efforts of teachers. Direct parental support in the educational process or participation in the decision making on it is almost non-existent in Latvia. According to the interview data teachers, students, and parents alike can hardly imagine how and why parents could participate more directly in the educational process.

In several interviews it was mentioned that the school has an especially open and **positive atmosphere**. The teachers care for the students and their success. There are good relationships between teachers and students. The open atmosphere can be regarded as an inclusionary practice which has an important impact on the coexistence among students.