

A DIALOGUE FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

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In 2021, the team of academic staff of the newly established Institute of Special Education at the FVP SU in Opava is to implement a project of the Ministry of Education and Science – *Practical Model of Primary Prevention of Risky Behaviour in Schools (PRCH-IP-organization_0040/2021)*, which is in line with the long-term concept of the development of scientific and research activities of the Institute. Primary prevention of risky behaviour in schools is an important component of early pedagogical intervention, especially in the context of current trends of inclusive education accompanied by increasing heterogeneity of classroom collectives and increasing demands on pupils' social skills. The priority topics of the scientific and research activities of the Institute of Special Education include: inclusive education with an emphasis on the education of pupils at risk of school failure and pupils with special educational needs, the development of cooperation between the university and practice with a focus on the issue of balancing opportunities for citizens with disabilities in the Moravian-Silesian region, and strengthening the competencies of graduates of special education for the needs of the labour market.

The project concept is based on the needs of school practice to continuously strengthen the development of social skills of pupils. The need to pay increased attention to this topic is made more acute by the consequences of the crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the development of pupils' social competences was put on hold for a considerable period. Pupils who exhibit risk behaviours have serious emotional deficiencies that limit their self-concept and their success in establishing and maintaining appropriate interpersonal relationships. They often face mistrust from classmates and teachers due to uncertainty over how to assess and respond to their risky behaviour. Impaired social skills can significantly disrupt the process of adaptation to the school environment and can also negatively affect educational progress and outcomes. A significant period in the formation of an individual's personality is the period of early school age. Fixed risk behaviours at this age are very difficult to eliminate later on, and the effectiveness of educational approaches often does not correspond to the efforts made by educators.

The project is intended to support the development of professional competences in school counsellors and teachers for intervention work with pupils with problematic and risky behaviour. The aim of the project is to monitor risky behaviour of pupils in the school environment with an emphasis on the analysis of manifestations and causes of risky behaviour, including reflection on effective means of support in dealing with risky behaviours in pupils. The target group consists of primary school teachers and pupils of younger school age (6–12 years) in inclusive education; attention will also be paid to pupils with special educational needs, which can be a predictor of risky behaviour.

In order to develop social skills, the method of working with the target group will be activity-based. In addition to verbal methods (narratives, interviews, discussions about specific stories and situations), activating methods (interactive guided games and didactic games aimed at developing particular social skills in the form of concrete experiences of children, exercises, acting improvisations, common situations of everyday life, etc.) will also be used.

Cooperation with the primary schools supporting the project is long-term and is mainly based on the successfully implemented project *Direct and Clear Support for School Inclusion – the Question of School, Family, Neighbourhood* (2016–2019). The project addressed issues relating to the conditions of inclusive education, with an emphasis on increasing the competences of teaching staff, on cooperation with legal representatives of pupils with special educational needs and pupils at risk of dropping out of education, and direct support for these pupils. Throughout the project, for more than 600 pupils, tutoring was provided directly in the school environment, and, for 55 pupils, individually in the environment of their homes.

The outputs of the implemented project *Practical Model of Primary Prevention of Risky Behaviour in Schools* will be presented in the concrete form of final reports on the results of the monitoring of the manifestations and frequency of risky behaviour of pupils in the school environment, and on the results of the monitoring of the needs of teachers in the field of support in intervention work with pupils with problematic and risky behaviour. The findings will provide the necessary basis for the design of the Interactive Social Skills Development Programme and its pilot testing in school practice. On the basis of the analysis of the pilot validation, measures will be formulated for the implementation of the Interactive Social Skills Development Programme in school curricula, especially in minimum prevention programmes.

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