

APPROVED
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THE GOOD SCHOOL CONCEPT

CHAPTER I GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. The Good School Concept (hereinafter – Concept) has been developed in order to prepare the ground for the country's schools, which implement the general education programmes, to improve the level of quality of their performance, to show the direction for school activities, to provide guidelines, and to empower the schools to act.

2. The aim of the Concept is to become a universal development guide for a modern school, indicating which school features are considered valuable and desirable in the country, and to encourage creativity of school communities and long-term initiatives for improvement of different types of schools. It is designed for all stakeholder groups: pupils, teachers, parents, schools, institutions which exercise the rights and obligations of the school owner, shareholders (owners), education management entities and the general public.

3. The context for the preparation of the Concept:

3.1. The 20th century school model was formed in the industrial age and was based on the ways of thinking and needs of the countries of that time. The school had to operate as accurately, transparently and smoothly as a mechanism. It had to adopt standard curricula and teaching methods and to train children grouped by their age, so that their education and skills would meet the norms for that particular age group. Such treadmill-like perfectly organised education was a convenient and effective way to provide general education – education for all, which delivered the agreed basics of traditional culture and crystallised societies.

3.2. Since the 20th century, the knowledge of the world and human nature, core values of society and lifestyles, state governance, and also the approach to the individual and his education objectives have changed significantly. With the rapid increase in the knowledge created by humans, the issue of what knowledge is required and sufficient as the basis for school education and what information learners must simply be taught how to find come to the fore. Improving awareness of learning processes results in changes of our understanding of the effective teaching/learning methods. Information technology brings about considerable changes in learning opportunities – it can be used for independent, distance, networked, and learning crossing school-community boundaries (global learning). Skills – critical, analytical, and creative thinking, ability to address the problems, initiative, and sociability – in the world where information abounds become more valuable than the information storage in one's memory. The attitudes of individuals in contemporary, busy, complex, and changing world are controversial: openness, good communication skills, flexibility, and adaptability are important qualities, but pursuit of the sense of identity, core values and personal meaning in life are none-the-less important. It is therefore particularly important to train personal values aiming at social, civic, and moral growth of an individual. All of this has an impact on the school vision suitable for the present day.

3.3. The environment is changing so rapidly that, when developing a good school model, both what a good school was in the studies conducted in the past and the most up-to-date learning trends – the needs of the information, knowledge, learning, networking, virtual or smart society – must be taken into account. It is important for us to realize what learning will look like in the future. The obvious trend – from education for all to education for every person, i.e. personalised, pupil-centred

education and learning recognising that individual experiences, needs, and aspirations differ and learning at different speed using different methods takes place. Team learning is becoming more social – individuals learn in partnership, in groups, teams, and in a variety of social and virtual networks. Organisation of education in schools changes – there is less preoccupation with the age-related norms (standards), division of pupils and individualisation are becoming more flexible. Individuals learn throughout their lives and pupils, who are more flexible and more responsive to innovation, often become educators of their teachers. There are fewer prescriptive formulas of “correct education”, because we are becoming increasingly aware of their diversity. Learning from electronic sources and virtual cognition are proliferating and at the same time we are becoming aware of the importance of active learning and experiential learning.

4. This Concept is not the first such concept in the history of independent Lithuania. The first concept of the National School (1988) was developed on the eve of the country’s independence and was based on the education objectives relevant at the time. It focused on bringing back the sense of personal dignity and individual value, and strengthening of humanity, morality, national identity and self-perception. The concept discussed the goals and values of school – school as a vehicle of culture, a space for meaningful spiritual activities, and the second child’s home – rather than the school model as such.

5. The second concept of the national good school appeared in 1994 in the introduction to the general education programmes of general education schools. At that time, the greatest challenge was freedom – a free man in a free society and country – therefore, the role of the school community and school lifestyle as the way of building society and the state was emphasised through learning to live a life based on democratic principles and moral and civic ideals. In terms of educating an individual, the importance of an independent, conscious individual committed to others and the homeland, active and fully educated was emphasised.

6. The present Concept neither questions nor denies the ideas of its predecessors. It is expected that the majority of the ideas were implemented and are still in place. Without repeating previous concepts, this Concept seeks to supplement the concept of school with new emphasis on the school as a learning community, teachers as learners, contemporary learning pathways, diversity of learning organisation and environments, merging of learning and school lifestyle, and different management cultures.

CHAPTER II THE GOOD SCHOOL MODEL

7. A good school is one where education relies on the core humanist values, which pursues meaning, discoveries and success in educating an individual, and which in its activities is guided by the school community agreements and learning. This concept of a good school defines the main values of the Concept and specifies the direction of school performance improvement.

8. The good school model identifies the main aspects in school activities, which reflect the mission of the school, factors which determine the implementation of the school mission, and preconditions for school existence. These aspects and their relationships are depicted in the scheme for the good school model provided in the Annex to the Concept.

9. The Concept considers appropriate implementation of the school mission as the most important feature of the successful school, i.e. good (desirable, acceptable) learning outcomes and rich, memorable, meaningful and pleasant experiences of school life. When the public assess a school today, it is customary to take formal academic (examinations, tests) results as the key indicators of how good the school is. The Concept identifies more than one type of learning outcomes (personal maturity, achievements and progress). It is also important to consider the method of achieving the learning outcomes: they must not come as a result of painful or frustrating experiences. Both aspects – outcomes and process of their achievement – are equal.

10. The factors for the school operation as an organisation – teaching/learning environment, teaching, school staff, school community and its learning, leadership and management – are the

factors affecting the implementation of the school mission. These factors are important, but they are only preconditions for the implementation of the mission, yet good performance can be achieved by working in different ways and organising school activities in a variety of ways. Therefore the factors for school operation as an organisation should not be standard across schools in the country and their assessment must not be overemphasised and must not become more important than the assessment of the school mission. With this approach to the organisation of school operations, school communities are encouraged to “invent” a school by developing its operation models, environments and teaching methods.

11. Local community, the institution which exercises rights and obligations of the school owner, and the shareholders (owner) shall provide conditions for school activities by encouraging and assisting rather than strictly instructing, and this factor shall be taken into account when measuring whether the school environment is conducive to teaching and learning.

12. When assessing school activities, it is suggested to observe the importance of the aspects identified in the Concept. More important aspects are provided in the Concept above.

13. Aspects of a good school:

13.1. Personal growth. It is reflected by the following features: maturity (self-perception, self-esteem, focus on values, and way of life); achievements (acquired general and academic competences as a whole); progress (the level achieved over a certain period of time by taking into account the starting point of learning, personal development capabilities, optimal learning speed for the pupil, and general curriculum requirements).

The main and desirable school performance: personal maturity of pupils, learning outcomes corresponding to individual capabilities of the pupil and continuous learning progress. Pupils perceive themselves as individuals, they are pleased with their achievements and patiently overcome failures, without losing faith that they will succeed. They accept new challenges as the way to improvement, have balanced self-confidence, and view reality adequately and critically.

School shall pay equal attention to the development of all competences specified in the curricula. Pupils shall acquire the basic skills which allow them to become civic members of society who nurture human values and to plan their private and professional life successfully. The achievements of the pupils shall be assessed by taking into account not only predefined learning aims of the curriculum, but also individual capabilities and qualities of each pupil seeking continuous individual progress at the speed suitable for the pupil without being disturbed by the assessment of the general level of achievement of the pupil in the class or group of pupils.

13.2. School life: participation through self-expression. It is reflected by the following features: activities, events and adventures (clubs, organisations, projects, campaigns, getting together to provide assistance, entertainment and other events); feelings of pupils (inclusiveness, being respected and safe, enjoy being at school and consider it meaningful); community (membership, unity, sharing, caring for others, assistance, and commitment); self-government (consultancy with others; initiating, taking and implementing decisions, and building of school life).

Participation in school life through self-expression is as important for personal growth as formal education. In a good school life and learning merge, and activities, spaces for activities, time for organization and experiences converge.

School life is full of interesting activities, events and adventures initiated and lead by any member of the school community. Harmony, humane relations, tolerance and compassion dominate. Pupil self-expression, active participation in non-formal education, various projects and thematic events is promoted in order to develop thinking, creativity, leadership and other capabilities of pupils, and their behavioural, communication, and cooperation skills. The school shall nurture positive values and promote a healthy lifestyle. Pupils shall feel psychologically safe, accepted, their opinion and ideas shall be heard and respected. They shall consider their presence at school to be meaningful.

The school shall have a strong sense of community. The unity of the members of the organisation, assistance to others, and commitment to friends and school community shall be felt. The relations between individuals are based on the humanitarian principles of goodwill, respect,

trust, solidarity, and equality. Strong relations between parents and teachers shall ensure the implementation of education objectives.

The school shall have a strong self-government. Pupils taking an active part in the activities of self-government will develop their social abilities, learn to work in a team, build their skills of solving problems constructively, and reveal themselves as leaders.

13.3. Learning through dialogue and exploration. It is reflected by the following features: interesting and growing (surprising, provocative, creating challenges, sufficiently broad, deep and optimally complex); open and experiencing (based on uncertainty, exploration, experimentation and creativity, the right to make mistakes, find mistakes and correct them); personalised, self-directed (based on personal needs and issues, learning objectives, speed, methods, sources, choice of partners, introspection and self-assessment); interactive (based on synergies and partnerships, based on dialogue, communal, networking, crossing school-community boundaries [global]); contextual, topical (developing various competences necessary in modern life, related to life experiences, and teaching to tackle real problems of the world and to use a variety of sources and information technologies).

The content of education shall be interesting, provocative, sufficiently broad and deep, and creating challenges. Pupils learn to tackle real-life problems; various competences necessary in modern life are developed. Learning takes place through exploration, experimentation, discovery, invention, creation and communication. Learning is based on a dialogue (between pupils, pupils and teachers, and pupils and learning partners outside the school space) and, as a result of it, pupils acquire information, ideas are born, and meanings are created. Learning is transposed outside the school into the way of life – it continues at home, in the circle of friends, institutions of non-formal education, and social networks and also through the use of other opportunities offered by modern technology.

13.4. Teaching: supportive to learning. It is reflected by the following features: targeted (selection of teaching aims and methods and planning of teaching based on knowledge of pupils, observation of learning, reflection, and assessment); different for different needs (taking into account the differences of learning needs, choices, opportunities, and styles and offering various choices of learning speed, methods, and techniques); flexible (various models for making teaching plans, grouping pupils, using time and school space and other resources); involving partnerships.

Teaching in a good school is not an end in itself. It helps the pupil learn various competences important to the pupil and society, teaches flexibility in the changing environment and ability to cope with challenges, and encourages pupils to raise questions and think independently. Learning to learn – to find, select, and give meaning to knowledge – is emphasised. Teaching/learning involves partnerships – the teacher assists the pupil in exploring the world, he is the pupil's learning partner and also an authority in the areas where the pupil lacks expertise or wisdom. The pupil is taught/learns according to his individual needs and choices based on personal experience, aspirations, and the understanding of meaning. Types of lessons, their structure and scenarios can be very different; teaching/learning time may be organised in different ways and is flexible (combined lessons, weeks dedicated to some topic or several subjects, etc.). There are multiple teaching/learning sources, which are engaging, targeted, and various and non-traditional means are used.

13.5. Staff: a variety of individuals. They can be described by the following features: positive attitudes (self-esteem; belief, trust and care for pupils; motivation – interest in their subject and work at school, enthusiasm); professionalism (knowledge of the subject, competences necessary for the profession, and wisdom); personal development (self-observation, learning, openness to new experiences, mobility); and balance of the members of staff (variety of individuals, individuals supplementing each other, age diversity, connection between generations).

The school is interesting and versatile to the extent there is a diversity of the members of staff working in a school: people are of different ages, male and female, with different competences, life experience, and different teaching styles, and interesting individuals. All members of staff working in school are united by positive attitudes, i.e. high self-esteem, trust and care for pupils, high

motivation, sincere interest in the subject, and civic responsibility. Members of staff are professionals in their respective fields, care for continuous personal development, and expand both their professional and cultural horizons. They are open to innovations, are not afraid to explore and test, learn from their colleagues and pupils, and do not fall into despair in the event of failure. The school ensures generational change, which brings the balance between youthful spirit of initiative on the one hand and creativity and expertise in the subject and practical wisdom on the other hand.

13.6. School community: a learning organisation. It is reflected by the following features: learning with and from others (communal learning through working with colleagues, sharing experience, discoveries, ideas and created works, observing lessons of the colleagues, studying various resources together, and learning from pupils); combined efforts (teachers and other members of staff form groups where they share their responsibilities, help each other, and pursue common professional goals); reflection (debates within the school community, reflection on activities, self-assessment, agreements for the future and planning); promotion of learning and personal development (staff training incentives and a system for organising training); openness of the organisation to the world (partnerships, joint projects, using alumnus, networking, etc.).

The school community is an organisation of continuous learning. Introspection and self-reflection on what I know, what I can or what I cannot, how I work and how I could work are a standard practice used for personal learning, learning with others and planning of learning. The learning culture thrives at school – those who learn and those who know are encouraged, respected and supported.

The school community is reflexive: it reflects on and discusses its activities and general life events, it assesses itself, and is able to learn from its experience and plan reasonably. School members can formulate their objectives, create a vision, and match personal objectives with the objectives of the school community together.

The school is open to the world: members of the school community take interest in changing environment and responds to changes. Cooperation with local community, external organisations, and other schools is promoted; long-term meaningful relationship with alumni is maintained.

13.7. Leadership and management: empowering. They are reflected by the following features: a clear, unifying, and inspiring vision (known to all, acceptable, implementation of which is sought based on human values); culture of dialog and agreements (participation of all members of the school community in decision-making); shared leadership (management culture based on trust, commitment and empowerment, promoting initiative and assuming of responsibility); effective administration (clear, simple, not overburdening, and convenient administration, efficient allocation of resources and their economic use); creativity and will to act (generation of ideas, experimentation, risk-taking, taking of difficult decisions, and persistence in implementing the decisions).

The school promotes empowering leadership. The school vision and strategy are developed by the entire school community and is clear and inspiring. Sharing management and leadership in school: the entire school community takes a large portion of decisions, various school members manage school activities, and personal initiative is promoted. Diversity of opinions and debate are an inseparable part of school life. School values creativity and new ideas; school takes risk and difficult decisions. Such management style underlies the style of work and general life in school as a learning organisation.

13.8. Teaching/learning environment: dynamic, open and functional. It is reflected by the following features: “classrooms without borders” (convenient spaces for different purposes, easily adaptable, use of school premises in a variety of ways, classes held outdoors, adapting of the school site for teaching/learning in different ways; stimulating environment (books, variety of objects and equipment, functional and original furniture, colours, materials and forms, lighting, plants, sounds, odours, convenient “untidiness”, etc.); contribution of pupils to the creation of the environment (pupil ideas, projects, works, creative works, and items implemented in the environment); and a virtual environment (school website, its diverse content, variety of ways to use the content, liveliness, popularity).

Open teaching/learning environment – from traditional classroom spaces to “classrooms without borders”: teaching/learning process may take place in corridors, lobbies, library, school yard and other spaces inside and outside school.

Functional and dynamic teaching/learning environment – simulates learning, promotes thinking and creativity. Not only completed works of pupils are on display and become elements of decor, but also examples of the process of work, creation or discussion – notes, sketches, plans, models, etc. Premises are convenient, functional, easily adaptable, and pleasantly colourful. Opportunities to learn individually and in groups, in silence and through communication; to use various materials and tools which may stain in a “clean” way are provided.

Pupils contribute to the creation of the school environment with their ideas and work, they feel good in such environment, it keeps them interested and happy. The school is not afraid of distinct and unusual environment and furniture.

13.9. Local community, the institution which exercises rights and obligations of the school owner, and the shareholders (owner) are committed. It is reflected by the following features: making strategies (creating the vision of education, planning aims and assuming responsibility for their implementation); encouraging (applying developmental and formative assessment methods, combining the “strict” and “soft” forms of assessment, allowing pupils to express and address their problems, supporting schools via formal assistance services); supporting and trusting (clearly planning and distributing adequate resources, creating a favourable environment for collaboration with various partners, and supporting schools via formal assistance services).

The institution which exercises rights and obligations of the school owner and the shareholders (owner) are committed to and support the school.

The school vision and strategy are developed by members of staff, pupils, their parents, the local community, the institution which exercises rights and obligations of the school owner, and the shareholders (owner); they assume the responsibility for implementation of the aims.

The local community, the institution which exercises rights and obligations of the school owner, and the shareholders (owner) provide encouragement and promote, and also expresses demanding and reasoned criticism. Resources for the school are clearly planned, distributed and are sufficient, the environment conducive to collaboration with various partners is built. The local community, the institution which exercises rights and obligations of the school owner, and the shareholders (owner) take interest in and look for various opportunities to support and assist the school, and provide advice on various issues. The school is trusted, it acts independently and accounts for its performance according to the procedure prescribed by legal acts.

CHAPTER III

PRECONDITIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONCEPT

14. The main precondition for the implementation of the Concept is public acceptance for its ideas and the desire of school communities to promote and initiate changes, and to change school.

15. The Concept should be used as a conceptual framework and a benchmark for the improvement of school performance. The Concept does not prescribe any specific formula of how to become a good school. The Good School Model should be treated as a map that helps you on your way to a better, superior quality school. Each school is provided with an opportunity to choose the operational aspects of the school to be improved first, i.e. arrange its path towards school improvement based on self-assessment, and the needs and agreement of the school community.

16. In view of the provisions of the Concept, quality and external assessment of school performance shall be carried out to help identify whether the school is on its way towards a good school in a targeted manner, what progress has been made, and which areas of its activities require the biggest impetus and assistance.

THE GOOD SCHOOL MODEL SCHEME

