

POLAND

1) EDUCATION SYSTEM

In 1999 a major reform was carried out in Poland's educational system. It involved profound changes in the school structure, curricula, the grading system and requirements made on students. The basis of the Polish education system form as from now the new six-year primary school and the new 3-year lower secondary school.

At the moment there still exists besides the new educational system introduced gradually since 1 September 1999 the old education system derived from the communist era. According to the plans arranged by the national Ministry of Education both the old and the new systems will continue to co-exist during a transitional period until approximately 2007. We will introduce here the new educational model since the old one will gradually disappear.

a) Pre-primary education (*Przygotowanie do szkoły*)

Pre-primary education concerns children from 3 to 6 years of age and is optional in kindergartens and kindergarten sections of primary schools. Pre-primary education also includes the one-year of preparation for primary education which is compulsory for six-year-old children. The aim of this course is to even the educational opportunities of children before they start primary school. This educational level is regarded as the first level of the school system and is normally integrated in primary school, although it is most frequently organised in kindergartens.

b) Primary school (7-13 years of age) and lower secondary school (13-16 years of age)

After the reform of the system of education the common and compulsory primary school forms the basic school of the educational system. After completing this 6-year primary school (*Szkola podstawowa*) pupils continue their education at a 3-year compulsory lower secondary school, which is some sort of orientation stage. The place of residence of a child determines the lower secondary school (*Gymnazium*) he/she will attend. The parents are obliged to register their children in the school nearest their home.

In Poland compulsory education lasts 9 years (from 7 to 16 years of age), i.e. until the ninth stage.

c) Further education: upper secondary education level (general, vocational school)

The 3-year period at lower secondary school concludes with an examination in humanities and in mathematics and natural sciences. Students select the school where they continue with their education on the basis of the results of this examination. The following options are given:

a) a three-year "upper secondary general school" (*Liceum profilowane*) with the following features:

- a profile providing a general education

It is some kind of general education school and concludes with an examination (the maturity examination, i.e. standardised national secondary school achievement

examination, called “*Matura*” as in Austria). The students who successfully complete this final examination may apply to higher education.

- technical or professional profile

At the end of the course, the technical college or the vocational lyceum organises final examinations, too. Students receive either a leaving certificate that gives them access to the job market or, when they have successfully completed the examination, a certification which is required for admission to higher education.

- b) a two-year upper secondary vocational school (*Szkola zawodowa*):

Graduates of the lower secondary schools can also change to a vocational school, where they can acquire a skilled worker qualification in a wide range of professions. After attending this vocational school, it is possible to obtain a *Matura* certificate in a supplementary lyceum or technical college. The Polish vocational education system clearly differs in its organisation from the dual system practised in other European countries. Vocational training is mainly organised in full-time school hours and is an essential part of the secondary school system. There is almost no apprenticeship in companies and the possibilities to acquire practical knowledge is very scarce.

In 2005 examination regulations for the maturity certificate shall be standardised. The new *Matura* examination (school-leaving exam and higher education qualification) will be organised centrally. This would make the results comparable all over the country and would allow the graduates to access higher education without entrance examination.

d) Higher education

- University and other university-type education

There are over a hundred state university and non-university higher education institutions (universities, polytechnics or technological universities, academies of medicine, economics, agriculture, pedagogy, fine arts, non-university higher vocational colleges, and other). In addition there are more than 200 private higher education institutions aimed exclusively at teaching and very scarcely devoted to research.

- Professional education

Those who after concluding secondary education do not go to university have the possibility to attend some kind of post-secondary vocational school. These higher technical schools train students in professional applications and prepare them for specific professions.

2) TYPES OF SCHOOLS

In recent years a change has taken place in the stewardship of schools. Formerly most schools were public schools run by the state. At present there are other bodies which run schools: companies and associations, societies, foundations, denominational organisations, parents, or other private persons. Access to these private schools is fee-paying whereas tuition in the state schools is free. Since 1992 the state contributes to the

financing of private schools with a share of up to 50 per cent. However, there are also numerous private schools which do not receive any financial aid from the state.

Regional distribution of private schools varies considerably and is connected with the degree of industrialisation of each particular region.

There are also special schools which are supported by government ministries such as Justice or Health or even schools which are run by cooperatives for disabled persons.

3) EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

For the general and vocational education system is applicable the 1991 Act on Education, which also established a new administrative structure.

Whereas the national Ministry of Education (reorganised in October 2001 in the Ministry of Education and Sports) as the highest supervisory authority is responsible for standardised regulations all over the country (for instance, core school timetables, curricula, performance rating), inspection in the sixteen voivodships - *województwa* (provinces which are not autonomous, rather they are under the supervision of the central government as regards the most important areas; they are further divided into districts - *powiats* and these are further divided into municipalities - *gminy*) is carried out through a government administrative body (*Kuratoria*). The internal school regulations regulate the management and codetermination of individual schools. According to the reform trends schools shall have a certain degree of programme autonomy within the framework set by the national Ministry of Education.

Since the beginning of the nineties and within the framework of the decentralisation processes municipalities manage and finance compulsory schools i.e. primary schools and lower secondary schools. Likewise, kindergarten facilities come also under municipal responsibility.

During the 1999/2000 school year Polish lower secondary school was newly introduced and a lot was invested in most of the new established *Gymnaziums*. However, there still are big differences between the cities and the rural areas. The lower secondary school network is not distributed evenly all over the country. Consequently, not only the municipalities but also the pupils encounter great problems: low school density, long school routes, and few public transports characterise the poor rural regions.

4) FINANCING OF SCHOOLS

With the educational reform the previous way of school financing, directly from the state budget, has changed through the transfer of competences to the lower administrative levels. Districts and municipalities are now responsible for the financing of schools which come within their sphere of responsibility. They receive financial support from the state budget to finance educational duties.

The State supports the constitutional principle of the free of charge access to all public primary, lower and upper secondary schools for every citizen until the age of 18.

However, it is not contrary to the principle of free of charge access if parents finance or financially support additional educational services which exceed the programme basis. Thus, parents are expected to pay a contribution to the costs of school books, for instance.

5) PUBLIC AUDIT

In 1998 in Poland was carried out a reform of territorial self-government. As a result of the reform process, since 1st January 1999 there are three tiers of territorial governments: voivodships, districts and municipalities.

The administration of the voivodships is divided in two parts:

- the supervision of the governor-voivod (*wojewoda*)
- the self-government of the head of board and parliament of the voivodship (*marszalek*)

Whereas the *wojewoda* is appointed by the central government and represents this latter in the voivodship, the *marszalek* is designated by the directly elected parliament of the voivodship (*sejmik*, some kind of assembly of the municipal councils, which represents the municipalities at voivodship level) from amongst its members.

The areas which the central government considers to be important are assigned to the *wojewoda* who supervises the local self-government units and is responsible for the execution of the central government's policy within the province. The self-government of the *marszalek* is responsible for any other task.

Districts only carry out those tasks which are clearly assigned to them by law. The competences of cities and municipalities (*miasta i gminy*) affect all areas of local interest which are not reserved by law to other levels or authorities or those areas which were transferred to them.

In accordance with the constitution of the Republic of Poland (Art. 171 paragraph 2) the organs exercising review over the activity of the units of local self-government (i.e. the voivodships in the areas administered by themselves, districts and municipalities) shall be: the Prime Minister and voivodes and regarding financial matters, regional audit chambers.

Within the framework of their responsibilities, the sixteen regional audit chambers (*Regionalna Izba Obrachunkowa, RIO*) can carry out financial audits directly in schools themselves or they can audit schools through their audit work performed in the respective supervisory authorities.

Also the Supreme Chamber of Control (*Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, NIK*), which is subordinate to the *Sejm* (Lower House of the National Assembly), can perform audits in the school sector. For instance, between April and June 2004 the *NIK* carried out audits in those schools where German as mother tongue of the German minority is taught.

Both the audits performed by the *RIOs* and the *NIK* are conducted in such a way to ensure legality, economic prudence, efficacy, and diligence of financial management.