

EMPOWERING INCLUSIVE TEACHERS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

# **EiTTT** Case Studies



# Case study:

Cross-Disciplinary Support for Inclusive Education

## Riga Secondary School No. 45, Riga, Latvia





### Context

The EiTTT Project team was based in Riga, Latvia for the week of the 26th to 30th November, 2018. This learning activity took place at Riga 45th secondary school. (Rīgas 45.vidusskola). Upon arrival, the project partners were greeted by the school principal, Baiba Neimane, teachers and project partners Natasa Dilba, Laura Zavacka and Iveta Liepina, and were entertained with a delightful performance of traditional music and dance by the school's students. It was a week of immersive learning about Latvia; its traditions and culture, and an opportunity to gain a comprehensive insight into Latvia's education system. Riga Secondary School No. 45 has extensive experience in facilitating Inclusive Education with Support Teams and Outreach Programmes. It was this collaborative, integrated support model which was the focus of our study during the week. The project partners focused on the concept of **Support** Teams working in schools in Latvia and of how this support takes account of both academic and social-emotional factors in the learning process for children.

# The Education System and Teacher Education in Latvia

The education system in Latvia is administered at three levels national, municipal and institutional. The Parliament (Saeima), the Cabinet of Ministers and the Ministry of Education and Science are the main decision-making bodies at national level. The Ministry of Education and Science is the education policy development and implementation body that oversees the national network of education institutions, sets educational standards and determines teacher training content and procedures.

### Language of tuition

In state and municipal educational institutions the language of tuition is the state language - Latvian. Education in other languages of tuition can be acquired in private educational establishments, as well as in state and municipal educational institutions where they provide study programmes for national minorities.

### **Tuition fee**

The tuition fee for pre-school, basic and secondary education in an educational establishment under the auspices of the state or municipality is funded from the national or municipal budget. A private educational institution may set its own tuition fee for providing education. In higher education programmes the state covers tuition fees for a certain number of students' places and the respective students receive state grants. Each higher educational institution may set a tuition fee for the remaining student places.

All students are entitled to a state guaranteed loan for his/ her studies in higher education programmes. A foreign citizen or stateless person pays for his/her education in accordance with the agreement concluded with the respective educational establishment. The tuition fee for citizens of the European Union countries and their children is determined and covered according to the same procedure as for citizens and permanent residents of the Republic of Latvia.

#### **Pre-school education**

Preschool education (kindergarten) caters for children below the age of six or seven. Kindergartens are established by local governments and private organisations. Since 2002, preschool education for five-and six-year-olds has become compulsory and is considered part of general education. In 2018 almost 96% of five-year-olds and 93% of six-year-olds were enrolled in preschools.

The objective of the pre-school education curriculum is to ensure multi-faceted development of a child's personality, to promote health and readiness to enter the primary stage of basic education. Pre-school education is considered a comprehensive first stage of general education and all children have to complete it by the time they are 7 years old. This deadline may be extended for a year due to specific health or psychological problems by parental request or on a doctor's request or recommendation.

Pre-school education can be delivered at various pre-primary education institutions (kindergartens) or at special pre-primary classes in general education institutions. Children with special educational needs attend special pre-school institutions or classes for children with special needs within general education schools. There are public and private pre-primary education institutions. Public sector institutions require that parents make a financial contribution to cover the cost of meals, but access to educational activities is free of charge. The fee in the private sector institutions covers the full costs of the programme, except for the salaries of pedagogues teaching pre-primary education to five and six year olds.

#### **Basic education**

A nine-year single structure basic education programme incorporating primary and lower secondary education (according to The International Standard Classification of Education) is compulsory for all children from the age of 7 (Grade 1) and is generally completed by the age of 16, but may continue until the age of 18. The National Basic Education Standard determines the objectives and tasks, the compulsory curriculum and the principles and procedures for assessment of basic education. The aim of basic education is to provide opportunities for acquiring the basic knowledge and skills required for community and personal life, to lay the foundation for continuing education, to promote the learner's harmonious development and to foster a responsible attitude toward one's self, family, society, the environment and the state.

Full **basic education** programmes are provided in educational institutions named Basic Schools. The first six grades of basic education can be provided by primary schools. 'Secondary schools' may also provide a full programme of basic education in addition to second-level education. Compulsory basic education can also be provided by different educational institutions such as vocational schools, special education institutions, night schools, boarding schools, etc.

Upon completion of grade 1 in primary school, knowledge and skills in all subjects acquired by pupils are assessed in a descriptive way without marks. After grade 2, some subjects including the Latvian language, a minority language and mathematics are assessed on a 10-point scale. Upon completion of grade 3 foreign languages are also assessed on such a scale. From the beginning of grade 4, pupils' achievements in all subject areas are assessed on a 10-point scale.

At the end of basic school students take centralised national examinations, and the number and content of these examinations is determined by the Ministry of Education and Science. Having received assessments in all subjects of the basic compulsory education curriculum and the centralised national examinations, pupils receive a Certificate of Basic Education. This qualifies students for admission to further education and training in secondary level educational programmes and serves as a selection criterion.

Should a student not be successful in an assessment in any of the basic education subjects or centralised national examinations, he/she receives a school report which provides opportunity to continue education and training in basic vocational education programmes.

#### **Special Needs Education**

Special schools or special education classes within general education schools provide education for children with special needs that correspond to their individual developmental needs, abilities and health conditions. The structure of special education is very similar to that of mainstream education. It provides opportunities for persons with special needs to attain general knowledge and skills, with a strong emphasis on their applicability, thereby facilitating social inclusion.

#### **Preparatory Vocational Education**

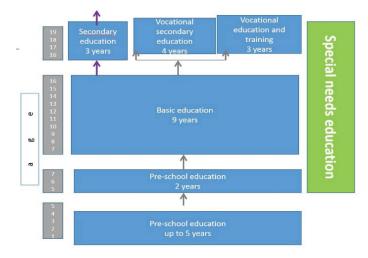
Preparatory vocationally-oriented education in arts, culture and sport is available in addition to basic education. Participation is voluntary and provides the opportunity to prepare for further professional training in the chosen area.

#### **Secondary Education**

There are two types of programmes at the secondary education level: academic secondary education programmes and vocational secondary education and training programmes. The main task of academic secondary education programmes is to prepare for further studies at university, while the vocational programmes are aimed at acquiring a qualification for entering the labour market directly and/or continuing education. When admitting students to secondary level educational programmes, schools are free to hold entrance examinations according to the basic compulsory education standard, except in those subjects for which students have already received assessments reflected in the compulsory Certificate of Basic Education.

### **Higher Education**

The admission procedure to higher education is not centralised; each higher education institution has its own admission board and criteria. However, a Certificate of Secondary General Education or Diploma of Vocational Secondary Education is required to proceed to all higher education programmes. Admission is competitive, based on each institution's examination results. Institutions may set additional requirements concerning some specific prior education or training, special aptitude or previous qualification (for example, in arts, music, sports).



#### **Study programmes**

Two groups of programmes can be distinguished: academic programmes and professional programmes. The duration of bachelor's programmes may be three to four years at different institutions. The master's degree of higher professional education is awarded if the total duration of studies is at least five years.

### Teacher Education in Latvia

General admission to higher education applies also for entry to teacher training programmes. Although the main access requirement is a general upper-secondary education certificate (with marks in subjects relevant to the programme), the training institution, depending on the course or area of specialisation, establishes methods of selection and has the right to state additional admission requirements. Recently, practical selection procedures to state-financed study places have been based on the results of centralised examinations passed at the end of secondary education, but may also include competitive entrance examinations and (or) a ranking according to the marks in secondary education certificate. The latter can be accompanied by an interview. Teachers in Latvia are trained at four higher education institutions. They undertake one of the following programmes:

- First-level professional higher education study programmes (short-cycle higher education study programmes)
- Second-level professional higher education study programmes (integrated bachelor programme)
- Academic study programmes in pedagogy followed by a professional higher education study programme

In order to qualify to work in a school, all teacher candidates must undergo study programmes leading not only to higher pedagogical education but also to a teacher qualification in the respective level of education. Most programmes also prepare teachers to teach certain subjects. Thus, completion of a certain kind of programme entitles you to teach the respective subject at the respective level of education. There are exemptions – early childhood teachers and primary school teachers (classes 1-4) receive a teacher qualification in that level of education and are entitled to teach most subjects i.e. they are generalists.

The Cabinet of Ministers' Regulations on the Necessary Academic and Professional Qualifications of Pedagogues and Professional Competence Development Procedures for Pedagogues prescribe that a person is entitled to work as a teacher after completing a 2-3 year short-cycle programme or 4-5 year Bachelor study programme and acquiring teacher qualification. Bachelor study programmes open up the possibility to enter a Master's programme. Practical placements at school are also a compulsory part of initial training of the teachers. In Latvia, a student acquires a teacher qualification and is entitled to work as a teacher immediately after the completion of an initial training programme. There is no other transition period required in order to become fully qualified for a teaching profession.

A teacher who has previously acquired qualification via a 1.5 - 2 year programme and who wishes to acquire a further qualification can enrol in a second-level professional higher education programme. In this case, the number of credit points of pedagogical practical work may be reduced or the previous time spent for professional improvement may be acknowledged. The general structure of pedagogical education for student teachers comprises four parts:

- Pedagogy and psychology
- Content of specific subject/s to be taught in school and the methodology of teaching
- Pedagogical practice and development of the qualification thesis
- General education courses like languages, ICT, arts, physical education

Computer science is mandatory for all student teachers. Areas of management/administration, aspects of behaviour management/school discipline, integration of pupils with special needs, work with multicultural groups of pupils are offered in compulsory courses or core curriculum options in initial teacher education.

# Teacher Education for Inclusion / Special Education in Latvia

The qualification of special education teacher and the qualification of teacher / speech therapist are acquired in separate programmes. These qualifications allow the teacher to work at all education levels. It is possible to acquire the qualification of a special education teacher in various higher education institutions and in a variety of ways:

- By completing a 4 or 4.5-year professional study programme in special education
- Through a 2.5-year study programme (80–93 credits) for teachers who are already qualified
- Through master's study programmes
- Through in-service training courses for teachers with qualifications in some other subjects (at least 72 study hours)

All such student teachers have to acquire knowledge in psychology, special pedagogy and medicine in order to be able to integrate children with special needs into mainstream schools.

The Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers ensure that teachers undergo ongoing professional development. For example, teachers may undergo in-service training in Inclusive Education. Teachers themselves are responsible for their professional development, but the head of the educational institution (school) in which the teacher is employed together with the municipality, plans the provision of professional development. Long established educational institutions (schools) with experienced staff, special education development centres, nongovernmental organisations and higher educational institutions are permitted to provide training for teachers who implement inclusive education.

# Riga Secondary School No. 45 (Rīgas 45. vidusskola)



Riga Secondary School No. 45 was founded in 1911. Located approximately 7.5km from the central district of Latvia's capital city Riga, this large school has a present enrolment of 714 students ranging in age from 7 – 18 years. The students are accommodated in 32 classes across grades 1-12. Together with the school principal there are eight deputy directors and 100 teachers employed in the school. In accordance with general educational practice in Latvia, schooling at Rigas 45. vidusskola

is structured into three levels; Primary, Basic and Secondary. Grades 1-4 comprise the Primary level, grades 5-9 are the Basic level and Secondary schooling takes place in grades 10-12.

### Uniforms and diary



The school has six education programmes:

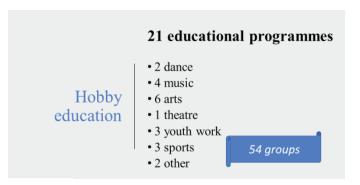
- Basic education programme
- Basic education programme with professional orientation
- Special basic educational programmes for pupils with physical problems
- General comprehensive secondary educational programme
- General comprehensive educational programme with humanitarian and social courses
- General Secondary educational with professionally oriented course in music

still at the core of the school's pedagogy. There are two Music programmes provided: Basic Music Education and Vocational-Oriented Music.

Students selected to study in classes oriented towards music have to play at least one musical instrument. They may choose from a range of instruments, e.g. piano, clarinet and saxophone. This additional tuition is provided by the school at no cost to the many students involved. Some students learn traditional Latvian music and dance as an additional subject which is not compulsory.

# Extra-Curricular Activities: 'Hobby Education'

There are many extra-curricular activities offered after formal school lessons. The following 'hobby groups' are provided at Rīgas 45. vidusskola.



Riga 45th Secondary School celebrates all national and historical events and also marks special days and events such as 1st of September – first day of school; The 'Week of Colours', The 'Week of Slippers', Christmas Day, 'Fathers' Day', The 'Last Bell' – for students in classes 9 and 12.

## Music in the Curriculum

Strongly influenced by historical links with the Soviet Union, Music holds pride of place to this day in the cultural life of Riga. Hence, in 1968/69, a course of Music was introduced at Rīgas 45. vidusskola. This aspect of the curriculum has flourished and is

### Week of Slippers



Riga 45th Secondary School celebrates a 'Week of Slippers'. It is held in the first week of October when the weather is becoming cold and rainy. Children take old slippers from their homes to school and wear them all week in school. In this way children are demonstrating that summer time is over and winter is coming. It means that walking in muddy boots in school is not allowed and everyone must change their shoes when they are in school. The slogan of the week is – 'Clean school without dust and mud'!

## Week of Colours



Another unique tradition at Riga 45th School Secondary takes place in April. The weather in Latvia is usually cold, rainy and snowy until then. Everyone is waiting for springtime. During this period children celebrate the 'Week of Colours' by wearing brightly coloured clothes (usually bright

yellow, light green, bright red) - colours which remind us of spring. We really believe that the spring will come sooner then!

## Support Teams in Schools in Latvia

The purpose of special education within the concept of the development of education in Latvia is to give students with special needs opportunities to gain an appropriate education according to their capabilities and health status in each educational institution, while providing educational, psychological and if necessary, medical supports, in preparation for work and life in society. Parents of children with special needs may choose any educational institution in which to enrol their child. Each educational institution has a right to provide a special education programme in the manner prescribed by the law on general education, if the conditions in that institution are appropriate and if qualifed staff are available to provide high quality education for students with special needs.

Latvia's 'Educational Development Guidelines 2014-2020' determine the characteristics of high quality inclusive education for personal development, human welfare and sustainable national growth. Within these guidelines parents have the freedom to choose a school for their child. However, the chosen school must also offer the opportunity to attend and the possibility to learn. This means that every mainstream school should provide a suitable environment and suitable staff for supporting schoolchildren with special needs. Since 1997 therefore, every mainstream school in Latvia has had Support Teams. The main task of these teams is to support students with special needs and their teachers. In many schools these Support Teams of inter-disciplinary professional personnel are based on-site on a full-time basis. The composition of these teams varies from school to school and generally comprises the following:

- **Special Education Teacher:** Identifies and analyses needs. Provides in-class learning and special needs educational support. Provides advice and support to class teachers and to parents.
- **Psychologist:** Identifies student learning difficulties and particularly those arising from emotional / behavioural challenges and recommends interventions and strategies to teachers and parents.
- **Speech Therapist:** Works with pupils from 1st to 4th grade. Makes suggestions for diagnosis. Works with groups or individuals and prepares guidelines for students and their teachers. The therapist works alongside teachers in mainstream and special education settings.

• **Social Pedagogue:** The Social Pedagogue encourages dialogue and co-operation between families and educators and takes responsibility for educating and supporting young people with respect to a range of social and/or community-based issues.

## The Role of the Support Team:

- > Cooperating with the class teacher
- > Observing students who need the support
- Cooperating with parents, seeking resolutions to difficulties arising
- Presenting and analysing students' strengths and needs (together with special teachers, social pedagogues and the school's head teachers and assistant head teachers)
- > Making decisions regarding next steps
- > Drawing up ( (usually with the psychologist)
- Individual Learning Plans for students who need support

In special schools the Support Team is complemented by additional medical personnel such as Nurses, Doctors / Medical Officers, Paediatricians, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists /Physical Therapists and Psychiatrists.

# The Support Team at Riga 45th secondary school

With a view to facilitating Inclusive Education, the school has a full-time Support Team on site comprising:

- One Speech Therapist
- One Psychologist,
- Two Social Pedagogues
- Four Special Education Teachers

This team supports students from grades 1 - 4 (approximately one third of the school's student population) who experience a wide range of difficulties. In addition the school has:

- A Career Advisor,
- Two Sports Activities Organisers
- Two Librarians

During the Learning activity week the project partners observed lessons in different subjects. It was an opportunity to observe the teachers and children in their daily work. The partners were also introduced to the members of the Support Team and observed them in their work.



We noted that co-teaching between members of the Support Team (e.g. Special Education Teacher, Social Pedagogue or Speech and Language Therapist) and the teaching staff is one strategy employed to support students within the classroom. Individual support is provided to a maximum of three pupils in any one class. The Special Education Teacher supports the class teacher in working with learners with physical and/or intellectual disabilities and vision or hearing impairments. A Speech and Language Therapist works with children with speech problems in the first six classes. Withdrawal from class is available either for small group instruction or individual attention for some students. Support is also provided to help students prepare for lessons, and to integrate in class and in the school in general. For students with identified special needs there is additional support provision such as extra time during assessments and

Riga Secondary School No. 45, Riga, Latvia

the conduct of these in separate venues. Individual Learning Plans and Individual Behaviour Support Plans are drawn up by the teachers in conjunction with the support team.

### "Mēs Esam Līdzās" Rehabilitation Centre



Inclusive Education Support Centres have been established in Latvia's main cities. A set of methodology support materials has also been developed and is published online for teachers and parents.

For students with special needs and physical impairments that preclude their full-time inclusion in mainstream schooling, support is available from Rehabilitation and Support Centres. On the invitation of centre Director Dr Andra Greitāne, the team had the great privilege of visiting the "Mes Esam Līdzās" Rehabilitation Centre which is affiliated with Riga 45th Secondary School, and engaging with students and staff there. This centre is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation which developed as a response to the lack of such services in Latvia. It provides for the education and development of children with a range of special needs. As we learnt, the emphasis in this centre is on supporting the child's quality of life in the broadest respect. Children are encouraged and supported in their management of everyday responsibilities, in establishing and maintaining relationships, in participating in community life, and with their recreational needs and interests. Both medical and educational personnel work side by side in this setting. The valuable role of the Arts as a means of communication and in enhancing children's physical, intellectual and emotional development is also a central feature of this centre's curriculum. If required, the Ministry of Education provides funding for child transport and transport assistance between these rehabilitation centres and their affiliated schools.

### Riga No. 1 Special Boarding School



Another very informative morning was spent with students and staff at Riga No. 1 Special Boarding School. Founded in 1924, this was the first such school in Riga. With 200 students currently enrolled, the school employs a teaching staff of 75, as well as 35 assistants and a range of allied medical / therapeutic personnel. A broad range of learning and extra-curricular activities is incorporated into the two special education programmes provided - one for students with intellectual impairments and another for students with severe or multiple disabilities.

The school's success in identifying each student's vocational potential and supporting its development was evident. With a development centre on site which provides support to parents and offers continuous professional development courses for teachers, the school is considered a 'Centre of Excellence'.

### Samples of Students' Work: Embroidery / Book-binding



## Ropazi Secondary school: Ropažu Vidusskola



A visit to Ropažu Vidusskola, a mainstream school located approximately 36 kilometres outside of Riga, offered another insightful perspective on inclusive educational provision in Latvia. Presentations from school staff and a student-led tour of the school referenced the school's exceptional commitment to the importance of environment in education. Located in pristine rural parkland, the interior of this long-established school building had been recently re-designed to reflect an understanding of the impact of environment on student and staff wellbeing and hence learning.



Furthermore, Environmental Education and Protection were central features of the school's learning programme. The prevailing atmosphere in the school was one of remarkable calm and respect and above all of much pride in, and enjoyment of the educational endeavours underway. Input was provided by school staff on the clearly structured supports in place to meet the needs of the diverse student population.

## Key Learning During the Week:

- Inter-disciplinary collaboration / Support Teams: The value of an integrated response for inclusive education: Teachers' inclusive practice is enhanced through their liaison with, and support from a readily accessible (ideally on-site) team of other relevant professional personnel in health and social service disciplines – personnel who are also engaged with the students concerned and their families. Such Support Teams offer opportunity for the immediate sharing of information and for the employment of strategies such as co-teaching, all of which benefit the holistic development of the child.
- Art / Music based Education: The potential of the Arts as an alternative means of communication and in advancing the physical, intellectual and emotional development of all children.
- Inclusive education **Support Centres** established in the main cities of Latvia. A set of methodological support materials for teachers and parents is also available online.
- Parents of students with special needs **can choose any educational institution** for their child.
- Each educational institution has a **right to provide a special education programme** if the provisions in the school are in accordance with legal requirements and if suitably **qualifed staff** are available to provide high quality education for students with special needs.
- **Support Teams** were created to support teachers, students with special needs and parents. The Support Team is a great help for teachers, students and parents at Riga 45th secondary school.
- All special education institutions of Latvia are extending their functions and their **cooperation** with general education schools and vocational training schools.
- Life-Skills / Vocational Education: Exceptionally high student vocational skill levels were evident in the schools visited by the project team indicating considerable attention to this aspect of curriculum in Latvia.

- Shared campus for pre-primary, primary and secondary mainstream education: In some schools in Latvia children share a campus from age 5 (kindergarten) to age 18 (secondary education). This structure can provide for easier transition from one schooling stage to another and facilitate collaboration between teachers and support personnel.
- The role of environment in facilitating students' engagement with learning and in enhancing wellbeing.

### Some comments from project partners at the close of our Learning Activity Week in Latvia:

'Integrate special need classes in mainstream schools. Teachers and paramedics from both schools can work together and learn from each other'.

*Continuing professional development should be provided for all staff involved'.* 

'The benefit of having a multidisciplinary Support Team in mainstream schools. You can get in touch with them to support children when needed. You also can experiment with different forms of co-teaching in classes'.

'A complete support team including all specialists is a must in every school in order to support children, teachers and parents effectively. A support team should include nurse/doctor, clinical psychologists, physiotherapists, social pedagogues, special education teachers, speech therapists. The size of the support team will depend on the school's population and needs'.

'It is very beneficial to free up a teacher from teaching duties every day (as we observed in this school) with a view to supporting the learning and development of children with behavioural difficulties'. 'Sense of 'Community' – celebrating with music': The importance of taking the time to celebrate with your school, class, ... important moments in life ...'

## What the Research Says

Following the shared European education policies of accepting parents' rights to choose the educational institution for their children, there are attempts in Latvia during the last 15 years to integrate and educate children with special educational needs in general educational institutions. The goal, implementation of inclusive education in mainstream school, is stated also in nationally accepted national and education development plans.

According to these plans, the majority of learners with special needs who are learning in mainstream schools should be provided with professional assistance of a special pedagogue/ special education teacher and special teaching assistant. In real life, the number of special pedagogues/ special education teachers and special teaching assistants at schools is negligible and so are their work hours.

In many schools in Latvia school leaders think that most needed are logopaedists (deal with speech disorders) and psychologists (deal with behaviour disorders), as there is not enough money to provide the full spectrum of professionals (not in Riga 45th secondary school as in our school all spectrum of professionals are provided. There is a wide range of specialists in our Support team.)

Professionals know that wherever a learner with special needs studies he/she needs assistance of a special pedagogue/special education teacher, corrective action, in order to achieve higher educational background and, very probably, to work and support himself in the future.

By investing into professionals in Support teams in schools in Latvia in mainstream educational institutions we invest into future. This is linked to advanced democratic society policysustainable development and education for sustainable development. One of the challenges is providing equal opportunities to all society members. It is still a huge challenge to provide equal opportunities to all society members.

In Latvia there is the Latvian Association of special Education teachers. The aim of the association is to rise and address issues related to special education in Latvia, offer opinions and recommendations, study and publish documentation and recent findings. It helps also to all specialists working in Support teams in mainstream schools to find answers to difficult questions.



## Conclusion and Recommendations

The EiTTT Team came to Riga 45th secondary school in November 2018 to learn about the role of the support team in the school. Students with a variety of learning disorders in mainstream schools are supported by different specialists to help them to study. The EiTTT group observed how the support team works in the school and what kind of support it offers to students, teachers and parents. EiTTT partners were also able to experience how the support team model works in other schools in Latvia – one mainstream school and two special schools. The number of students with learning difficulties studying in mainstream schools in recent years has been increasing. The ability to respond to different learning disorders and challenging behaviours are the main reasons why the support team model in Latvia is very valuable.

The EiTTT team gave positive response about the work of support teams:

- It is a must to have a support team in every school in order to help schoolchildren and teachers in their daily work. It also helps to produce suggestions to parents.
- The support team can help to plan interesting lessons and it is good for organising different kind of co-teaching.
- It is a way to organise the inclusion of a student in a mainstream school despite of him/her having learning difficulties or challenging behaviour.

In conclusion, the EiTTT partners highly recommended having support teams in all schools as a way of supporting every student. It was noted that the composition of support teams in many schools in Latvia depends on the availability of municipal funding, therefore the model may differ as it is reliant on available funding.

### References

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