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## **Inclusion of students coming to Poland from abroad**

### **Abstract**

While analyzing the teaching and attitudes of Pope Francis, we decided to devote this article to the issue of inclusion. Considering the sphere of our interests – education, broadly understood – we focused on the inclusion of students coming from abroad, in the education system in Poland. In our publication, we rely on legal regulations, the results of research and control carried out by the Supreme Audit Office in the field of education of children of foreigners and Polish citizens returning to the country, studies by researchers of the above-mentioned issues, and we discuss a case study. The conclusions are clear: there are more and more students coming from abroad into Polish schools; despite declarations, schools are not fully prepared for their admission when all responsibility for the organization of education rests with school principals and teachers. The role of pedagogical supervision in this respect is insufficient. It is worth paying special attention to practical guidelines for teachers in order to effectively implement the pedagogy of inclusion.

### **Keywords**

Polish citizen returning to the country, pedagogy of inclusion, student coming from abroad, education conditions.

By analyzing the biography of Pope Francis – Jorge Mario Bergoglio, we find that he has extensive experience in the field of inclusive education; he gained this experience in Buenos Aires when he was working for the universal education of children living in the poverty districts on the outskirts of this urban ghettos.<sup>1</sup> Whilst examining the life of Pope Francis and the process of inclusion as perceived by the Pope, and by quoting his statements, Mariola Teresa Kozubek emphasizes – the enormous influence that teachers and other educational institutions exercised in shaping the personality of the future bishop of Rome.<sup>2</sup> It should be stressed, that in the time of the dictatorship, the Argentine Church was divided into a small minority that resisted and was mostly murdered by the military, and a significant part of the hierarchy that had a record of guilt of direct cooperation with the regime. It is difficult to fully appreciate the group of individuals composed of religious congregations and priests who, without publicly condemning the generals, never approved of their rule, and managed to save the lives and education of many. Bergoglio and the Society of Jesus „certainly belong to the latter.”<sup>3</sup> The pontificate of Francis is deeply inscribed in the „strategy” of the pedagogy of inclusion.

## 1. What is inclusion?

Inclusion is teaching everyone to live together, respecting diversity. A dictionary of the Polish language offers three meanings of the word. First, to include something, or something that is included. Second, it signifies the relationship between two sets of which one is contained in the other. Finally, it can be understood as a foreign object embedded in a mineral, usually a tiny crystal of another mineral.<sup>4</sup> A very apt definition of this term was formulated by Kasper Sipowicz and Tadeusz Pietras, who wrote: „By inclusive pedagogy we understand the

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<sup>1</sup> A. Tornielli, *Jorge Mario Bergoglio. Franciszek. Biografia papieża*, Kielce 2013, Jedność, pp. 119–130.

<sup>2</sup> M. T. Kozubek, *Inkluzja w ujęciu papieża Franciszka inspiracją dla edukacji włączającej*, „Rozprawy Społeczne” 14 (2020) 4, pp. 17–33.

<sup>3</sup> N. Scavo, *Lista Bergoglio. Ocaleni przez Franciszka w czasach dyktatury. Historia nigdy nie opowiedziana*, Kielce 2014, wyd. Jedność, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> H. Szkiłdź, S. Bik, C. Szkiłdź, *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. I, Warszawa 1982, PWN, p. 791.

subdiscipline of pedagogy dealing with the study of the phenomenon of inclusion, understood as education to diversity without prejudice.”<sup>5</sup>

The upbringing of children focuses on developing a lack of prejudice against diversity. The aim of the school is to prepare students to live in a diverse society in which they should live and understand the values of diversity. Although every student has a talent or predisposition that requires support and development, we cannot focus on developing individual support only for children with special educational needs, including students coming from abroad. What is an inclusive school? An inclusive school is an ordinary, general district school, open to all children, in a specific area. A school that does not divide, but unites, giving students the opportunity to understand diversity in a broad sense. It is a school where each student receives individual support, tailored to his or her needs and possibilities. The task of employees in an inclusive school is to create a coherent system that supports all students, taking into account the different aspects of their diversity.

Though authorities will aim to avoid the infiltration of foreigners into our country, all statistical data indicates a significant increase in this population. In 2009, Krystyna Błęzyńska conducted research entitled, „Children of Foreigners in Polish Educational Institutions – The Perspective of the School”, that was published in the report of 2010. This research concluded that during Poland’s accession to the European Union, migration in our country started to increase slowly. Błęzyńska, in her conclusion, presented a number of postulates regarding inclusive education. In her opinion, the cultural diversity of students creates new challenges for educational institutions. They are as follows:

- recognizing the specifics of new students, patterns of their functioning, belief systems and references, needs and problems
- adapting the school’s work to the specificity of this group of students
- training the employees of the educational institution to enable effective work with these students
- supporting the integration of the school environment and the development of intergroup ties
- preventing the ethnicization of school space
- preventing intergroup conflicts

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<sup>5</sup> K. Sipowicz, T. Pietras, *Wprowadzenie do pedagogiki inkluzyjnej (włączającej)*, Wrocław 2017, Continuo, p. 7.

- developing the student's understanding of other cultures and belief systems as well as the ability to function harmoniously in culturally heterogeneous environments
- shaping attitudes of mutual respect, tolerance and dialogue
- correcting ethnic stereotypes and combating prejudices, xenophobia and ethnocentrism
- shaping knowledge and respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law
- shaping attitudes of responsibility, solidarity and civic involvement
- shaping a culture of peace and trust
- monitoring the situation of children of foreigners at school
- preventing school failure and social exclusion of culturally different students
- undertaking programs supporting the processes of acculturation and social integration of foreign students and the effective implementation of these programs
- undertaking therapeutic and corrective actions that will help children with refugee experiences to effectively cope with post-traumatic stress
- undertaking effective cooperation with parents of foreign students
- developing effective forms of training and supporting teachers, school principals, and educators
- creating an effective support system for institutions educating children of foreigners.<sup>6</sup>

The presented results of research, monitoring of integration, and inclusion processes carried out by various institutions, result in a well-supported reflection on the need for inclusive education, characterized by the implementation of equal rights and access to goods, inclusion and participation. The meaning of the pedagogy of inclusion in today's modern world, is to create educational institutions focused on the processes of including children and youth. However, the next and equally important step is to also create opportunities for a full participation in social life, and in institutions, for adults at risk of marginalization.

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<sup>6</sup> K. Błęszyńska, *Dzieci obcokrajowców w polskich placówkach oświatowych – perspektywa szkoły. Raport z badań*, Warszawa 2010, Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, pp. 114–115.

## 2. Legal conditions

The Ministry of National Education and Science uses its website to publish information about the education of people coming from abroad, in the Polish education system.<sup>7</sup> This material is extremely useful because it summarizes the most important information. According to the information provided, students coming from abroad – including both Polish citizens and foreigners – are admitted to public schools based on foreign documents confirming their attendance in schools abroad, or the completion of the next stage of their education; these documents do not require verification. This procedure applies to students who intend to continue their education in Polish schools. The legislator adds that in the case of applying for admission to public schools providing vocational, sports and artistic education, or bilingual departments, the condition for admission may include the fulfillment of some additional criteria.

The head of the public school makes the decision to qualify a student arriving from abroad to the appropriate class or semester, taking into account the age of the student, the opinion of the parent or the student, and if he or she is an adult.

It is important that foreigners subject to compulsory schooling or education, who speak Polish at a level which is insufficient for them to benefit from education, have the right to free teaching of the Polish language in the form of additional lessons. Supplemental teaching of the Polish language is organized by the commune or powiat responsible for the foreigner's place of residence. The use of additional Polish language classes by foreigners is not limited to a number of years.

Foreigners may also take advantage of additional remedial classes in a given subject for a period of 12 months. The total number of additional Polish language classes and compensatory classes may not exceed 5 hours a week.

Foreign students who are subject to compulsory schooling or compulsory education, with an insufficient understanding of Polish, have the right to assistance provided by a person who speaks the language of their country of origin. This person is employed as a teacher's assistant by the school head for no longer than a period of 12 months.

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<sup>7</sup> Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, *Informacja o kształceniu w polskim systemie oświaty osób przybywających z zagranicy*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/informacja-o-kształceniu-w-polskim-systemie-oswiaty-osob-przybywajacych-z-zagranicy> (21.09.2021).

The conditions for people who are coming from abroad and taking up education in Polish schools, are defined in relation to kindergartens and schools operating in accordance with the new school system – Art. 165 and 166 of the Act of December 14, 2016 – Education Law and the Announcement of the Minister of National Education of July 1, 2020 on the publication of the uniform text of the Regulation of the Minister of National Education on the education of non-Polish citizens and persons who are Polish citizens, who were educated in schools operating in education systems of other countries.

### 3. Audit results of the Supreme Audit Office

In June 2020, a report was published on the possibility of educating children of foreigners and Polish citizens returning from abroad in Poland, as well as providing them with appropriate educational conditions, including conditions for learning Polish.<sup>8</sup> As the report shows, the majority of parents positively assess the process of their child's adaptation and inclusion in the school environment. However, the audit of the Supreme Audit Office showed a complete lack of interest in this issue by the Minister of National Education, who is responsible for the education policy. The ministry does not monitor the situation, does not carry out appropriate analyses, has practically no knowledge about the issue and has done nothing to obtain such information. The report shows that in most cases, teachers are a relatively strong link, and despite the institutional lack of support, are committed to their work.

The report shows that the number of foreign students enrolled in the Polish education system has increased in the last decade from 9,610 in 2009 to 51,363 in 2019. The most numerous group in schools for children and adolescents were students from Ukraine – 30,777 individuals. Classes for foreign students were conducted in the 2019/2020 school year in 7,318 schools for children and youth (compared to 1,571 schools in the 2009/2010 school year).<sup>9</sup>

The authors of the report state that Poles go abroad for longer stays, sometimes for years, mainly due to economic reasons. After their return, their children

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<sup>8</sup> Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Kształcenie dzieci rodziców powracających do kraju oraz dzieci cudzoziemców*, Informacja o wynikach kontroli, <https://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,22685,vp,25384.pdf> (21.09.2021).

<sup>9</sup> Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Kształcenie dzieci rodziców...*, p. 23.

often experience adaptation difficulties related to the use of the Polish language in addition to finding themselves in different school and environmental conditions than they had abroad.<sup>10</sup>

The Supreme Audit Office examined how this process was carried out in the academic years from 2017/18 to 2019/20. The inspection covered the Ministry of National Education and 24 public primary and secondary schools. Additionally, the institution conducted a questionnaire survey among teachers of controlled schools that taught children from abroad, as well as the parents of foreign students and parents of students who had returned to the country. On the basis of the inspection, appropriate conclusions were drawn and addressed to individual entities.

The Minister of National Education was obliged to undertake activities aimed at using funds allocated annually in the ministerial budget for central training and in-service training programs for teachers who conduct classes with foreign students. This was done based on identified needs, and was to take into account the area of education of children coming from abroad, as part of tasks in the field of pedagogical supervision exercised by school superintendents. The Ministry should also initiate cooperation with institutions and central authorities to educate children coming from abroad, as part of the coordination and implementation of the state's educational policy. It should also strengthen its supervision over the implementation of subsidized projects as part of enacted public tasks by directly controlling them and requesting relevant documents from job accounting beneficiaries.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, school superintendents were advised to identify the methodological counseling needs for teachers educating children coming from abroad, and to appoint appropriate teachers of methodological advisers.<sup>12</sup>

As part of the conclusions of Supreme Audit Office audit, the authorities running public schools along with the principals of the schools in which children coming from abroad study, were obliged to devise in writing a method of agreeing on the organization of educational activities intended for these students, as well as organizing additional free Polish language classes in schools to be inspected and remedial classes in other compulsory educational subjects. They were also obliged to check the accuracy of data entered into the school

<sup>10</sup> Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Kształcenie dzieci rodziców...*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Kształcenie dzieci rodziców...*, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Kształcenie dzieci rodziców...*, p. 21.

SIO (Educational Information System) database on the number of students participating in these classes.<sup>13</sup>

The Supreme Audit Office imposes separate tasks on school principals, who should reliably inform the authorities who run the schools about the scope of the needs related to the organization of additional Polish language classes and remedial classes in other compulsory subjects. They should also ensure diagnosis of the level of educational achievements of students coming from abroad after their admission to school, in terms of their level of knowledge of Polish as a foreign language and curriculum differences in other compulsory subjects, as well as their psycho-physical needs. In the opinion of the Supreme Audit Office, principals are to consider applying to local governments for co-financing the participation of Polish language teachers in postgraduate studies in Polish as a foreign language, and other forms of training related to the education of foreign students. This is to be done in accordance with the identified needs of the school, as well as within the scope of the forms of pedagogical supervision issues relating to the education of said foreign students.<sup>14</sup>

A detailed analysis of the Supreme Audit Office's report on the education of children of foreigners and Polish citizens returning from abroad indicates the scope of tasks and the amount of work that is to be carried out by the Polish schools to provide all students with access to education, upbringing and care. The implementation of the recommendations of the Supreme Audit Office gives an opportunity to counter social exclusion – a phenomenon with socio-economic, political, and cultural connotations. It can have an individual, local, and global context. The socially excluded category is not limited to the unemployed or the poor. It is worth emphasizing that among socially excluded groups there are, for example, the sick or the disabled. This category is also made up of groups with social disapproval, e.g., prisoners, people avoiding work, prostitutes, immigrants, refugees, etc. All in all, we are dealing with a gradual phenomenon that includes the multiplicity and abundance of life situations that place individuals and groups in worse social positions. It is worth using the recommendations of the Supreme Audit Office so that the education in Poland of children of foreigners and Polish citizens returning from abroad does not put them on the margins of social life, *out of the mainstream*.

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<sup>13</sup> Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Kształcenie dzieci rodziców...*, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, *Kształcenie dzieci rodziców...*, p. 21.

## 4. Case study

In this context it is worth considering a specific situation. A student who was born abroad attends one of the sports high schools in the Silesian Voivodeship. The mother is Polish and the father is of Guatemalan origin. The student attended compulsory schooling in Spain. He began his secondary education in a sports high school. It should be noted that, despite communicating with his mother in Polish, the student has a significant problem with mastering the literary language.

In accordance with the provisions cited earlier, the student theoretically undertook additional hours of studying the Polish language for 12 months. Why only theoretically? Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic broke out just then in Poland and consequently, from March 2020, he was left to fend for himself. Not all the schools adapted immediately by introducing online classes. In this particular case, online classes were conducted only by some teachers, and unfortunately, they did not include teaching the Polish language. The situation continued until the end of the school year. In accordance with the regulations, the student was supposedly attending additional Polish language classes for a period of 10 months. The end of the school year brought with it a conditional promotion to the second grade, provided the student would continue to improve his Polish skills. The student was aware of his difficulties in his literary skills with the Polish language and very much hoped that the next school year would bring positive results. The beginning of the school year announced changes for the better, but at the end of October the schools switched to remote teaching again, which in this particular case just did not work. As a result, the student again faced the dilemma of not being promoted due to his language skills. At that time, from the legal point of view, the period of 12-month support in the Polish language had already ended. But is this really the way it should be?

If we honestly recalculate the number of hours of Polish language class carried out, it would turn out that the student should continue to receive support. However, in the event of any audit, the school can prove that the classes already took place. But what kind of inclusive education did this student who came from abroad really receive? Let us leave this question unanswered. However, another question arises for a Polish philologist: would he have liked to be treated this way, or have his child be treated in this way in a foreign country? Did the teacher even reach out for the relevant teaching materials, or did he contact someone to obtain information on how to teach Polish as a foreign language at all?

Perhaps it is worth considering whether the number of hours allocated to the student – regardless of age – is sufficient? If you compare a student who starts education in a Polish school in the first grade of primary school, then in his case the equalization of educational opportunities with an additional 5 hours of classes in the Polish language should not be a major problem. But a student who enters the first year of secondary school finds himself in a much more difficult situation. There can be only one appeal to the educational authorities – let us, thus, consider how to help students who enter Polish schools at a higher stage of education.

## 5. „The Other” in the Polish school

In 2010, a handbook prepared as part of the project „You can get education in Warsaw, too!” and edited by Ewa Pawlic-Rafałowska, was published entitled „The Other in the Polish school. A handbook for teachers working with foreign students”. The authors of the report are Anna Bernacka-Langier, Barbara Janik-Płocińska, Agnieszka Kosowicz, Ewa Pawlic-Rafałowska, Marta Piegat-Kaczmarzyk, Gawęł Walczak, Zuzanna Rejmer, Jolanta Wasilewska-Łaszczuk, and Małgorzata Zasuńska. Although several years have passed since the publication of this handbook, the content included in it remains entirely up-to-date, especially in the field of teaching Polish as a second language (as it is not the mother tongue for such students), as well as the rules of assessment, which should be based on information feedback and, therefore, close to formative assessment.

The authors point out that it is advisable that classes in Polish as a second language are conducted by teachers with appropriate qualifications. If the school lacks a specialist (glottodidactics), lessons should be conducted by a person teaching a foreign language (not a mother tongue teacher), as the methodology of teaching a mother tongue is fundamentally different from the methodology of teaching foreign languages. In addition to linguistic and didactic competences, a teacher teaching Polish to foreign children should have interactive and pedagogical competences.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> B. Janik-Płocińska, E. Pawlic-Rafałowska, *O języku polskim jako drugim*, in: E. Pawlic-Rafałowska (ed.), *Inny w polskiej szkole. Poradnik dla nauczycieli pracujących z uczniami cudzoziemskimi*, Warszawa 2010, MillerDruk Sp. z o.o., pp. 47–48.

Language competence consists of knowledge of the language taught as well as knowledge of the culture of the nation that uses it. Teaching competence is the ability to teach a language with particular emphasis on methods adapted to the needs of the student. On the other hand, interactive competence is the ability to communicate with the student based on openness and kindness. Pedagogical competence is the ability to organize the didactic process.

Strengthening or even acquiring the indicated competences seems to be a key issue. Therefore, according to the authors of the report, it is necessary to:

- prepare short, clear and simple summaries of readings and other texts (adjusted to the level of the student's knowledge of the Polish language) on the basis of the curriculum materials
- treat grammar only functionally
- accept each correct student's answer (even one-word or grammatically incorrect one)
- evaluate communication skills in written statements (we accept statements with linguistic errors)
- develop speaking and writing skills (cooperation with a teacher of Polish as a second language is necessary; writing exercises may include rewriting and completing short texts; writing some utility forms independently or a simple narrative text, if these forms were introduced in Polish as the second language)
- assess such skills as: reading comprehension (only prepared texts), searching for information, general understanding of the subject and issues of reading; elements of character characterization and evaluation (based on prepared texts), and others adapted to the student's abilities (with particular emphasis on the level of mastery of the Polish language)
- the language of instructions to be used should be short, simple, clear messages and short questions (e.g. Who is the hero? What does the hero do? What is the hero like?)
- enable the use of a bilingual dictionary during lessons.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> B. Janik-Płocińska, E. Pawlic-Rafałowska, *Jak oceniać? – ocena i informacja zwrotna*, in: E. Pawlic-Rafałowska (ed.), *Inny w polskiej szkole. Poradnik dla nauczycieli pracujących z uczniami cudzoziemskimi*, Warszawa 2010, MillerDruk Sp. z o.o., pp. 64–65.

The presented practical recommendations are in line with the idea of inclusion in pedagogy and are worth applying. The aforementioned idea seems to be common to many currents contained in well-known concepts, which are constantly updated, such as: education, multicultural and intercultural pedagogy, the pedagogy of differences, the pedagogy of asylum, anti-discrimination education – the goals of which should be interpreted as an antidote to the inhospitable world and, at the same time, a syndrome of the social and subjective needs of the contemporary man.

## **6. Conclusion**

The pontificate of Pope Francis is a time of progress, not so much in the understanding of Christian doctrine, but primarily in the field of religious pedagogy. While his predecessor's main emphasis was on proclaiming the Truth to the relativism surrounding us, Francis speaks of the need to open wide the doors of the Church. He bestows great importance to the proper style of proclaiming the Gospel, education, and upbringing, all in order to reach those who feel excluded. This applies to particularly vulnerable groups. Hence, his concern is focused on the problems of poverty, refugees, unemployment, disability, access to education, the labour market, or functioning in informal social structures. Francis emphasizes that you cannot wait for people to come, you must actively search for them, going to the „existential periphery” of the contemporary world.

Students – children of foreigners and Polish citizens returning from abroad – require a special search, interest, and pedagogical care. Often relegated to the fringes of social life, considered incompetent, inferior and stigmatized by negative qualities, they should be able to benefit from appropriate education in order to gain a profession, employment, housing, medical care, care benefits or access to new information in the future. The inclusion of students coming from abroad can become a clear sign of the transformation of the „culture of exclusion” into the „culture of encounter”. Pope Francis invites us to take steps in this direction.

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