THE SPECIFICS OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IN THE INSTITUTION AS ONE LEGAL ENTITY - CZECH EXAMPLE

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to introduce the management processes in the educational institution of primary school and kindergarten as one legal entity. The partial aim is to point out the specificity of the organizational school structure that is reflected in the proceedings of the school management. The management particularity of two different educational institutions is described on the theoretical level in terms of legislative, managerial. The case study describes management processes specifics. The empirical part brings findings and experience from the real environment of primary and kindergarten school in one legal entity. The results show the importance of the key role in management represented by the quality of head of the school’s management and leadership skills. The main problems can be seen in the lack of support of the founder, the sufficient number of children and pupils and therefore low received required funds for the salaries for the employees, that is why the school is exposed by a chain problematic situations and circumstances that cause increased demands on school management to address these negative phenomena and try to keep the school stable and operational.

Keywords: school management, kindergarten, legal entity, management processes, head-teacher, primary school.

1 INTRODUCTION

Current education, not only in the conditions of the Czech Republic, learns to respond to conceptual changes, particularly to the dynamically changing conditions of social development. Learning about management is absolutely essential for modern management of a school as a learning society [1]. Fulfilment of the vision of the concept of the educational paradigm of the ability of schools to develop from within [2] is conditional mainly to determined establishment of a school environment and community within and outside the school, which fundamentally supports and is beneficial to improving the quality of learning, teaching and the education of pedagogic workers in their professional careers. Sufficient professional autonomy, which authorises the school’s head-teacher to make independent decisions and take independent actions, and allocates a specific level of responsibility, is also an essential condition [3]. [4] points out the transformations of the concepts of management and leadership and the problem encountered by school executives. The school’s head-teacher is an important element of management in the school system. The school's successful or less effective operation and the entire educational process in the kindergarten, as the basic element of child education, or the following primary education of students in the primary school, depend on the head-teacher’s pedagogic, professional and managerial abilities. The head-teacher’s authorities are defined by the law in most European countries, on the basis of the degree of decentralisation, or are possibly regulated by local government depending on the school's founder [5]. [6] points out the starting points for examining the quality, effectiveness and internal transformations of schools inspired by foreign studies, based on empirical research and analysis of issues and examples of good practice in school environments. Key concepts, such as a good school, a quality school, school culture and schools as learning organisations, subsequently become a basis for research in the Czech school environment [6], [7], [8], [9]. Current Czech pedagogic research substantiates records of empiric research in the field of management of schools and managerial processes in schools [10], [11]. For example, Lukas [12] examined relations between the school head-teachers and teachers, and the functioning of current Czech primary schools empirically examined in a multiple case form is contained in the works of [13]. There is less research of the environment of management of kindergartens and this concerns individual studies [14], [15], [16][17]. Scientific findings concerning management of schools must be compared with the reality in schools and with practical experience. One specific example is organisation of a school as a combination of a primary school and kindergarten in a single entity subject. This type of allowance organisation usually appears at the perimeters of towns and in smaller municipalities. It appears that the combination of kindergarten and primary school as a single organisational unit seems optimal for making the children’s admission to basic education easier. A kindergarten and primary school in a single legal entity cooperate completely
naturally and the crucial point of this cooperation is the succession of the educational processes and school educational programmes and fulfilment of a joint vision. The boundaries between both institutions are very close and clearly defined, the mutual harmony in the educational roles of both levels of school institution is mutually closely interconnected. Origin of a new allowance organisation means the concurrent blending of multiple organisational units and establishment of a single allowance organisation. The legal entity enters legal relations in its own name and bears responsibility for these legal relations. In practice this means more independence when making decisions regarding financial and budget matters; management of assets in the scope defined by the founder in the deed of foundation; independent decisions in labour matters; development of supplementary activities and management of economic results and origin of an independent accounting unit. The main areas of school management, which characterise the key areas of management of a primary school and kindergarten, are the field of pedagogic management; the field of economic and administrative management; the field of administrative management [18]; the field of personnel management; the field of management of external relations [19]. As well as everyday school management processes, a quality school management also builds on the pillars of coping with changes and innovations in the school, establishment of the school’s external image and actual evaluation of the school.

2 METHODOLOGY

The aim of research was to identify the particularities of management of a primary school and kindergarten as a single legal entity, with partial aims to describe the role of the head-teacher in a school organised in this manner. The point of interest was to reveal which management processes can be observed in the everyday duties of the work tasks of the school’s head-teacher. An allowance organisation established by a municipality into the legal entity of a primary school and kindergarten, school dining room and after-school club, became the subject of interest. The primary school is organised as a primary school with two classes combining years 1 – 4 of primary school, with a capacity of up to 50 students at first level primary school. In the case of the primary school this is a school with fewer classes, such as those usually operating in rural settlements, as one possible organisational type of primary school, distinguished by the fact that students of two (or more) years are taught in one class. The reason for merging the years is the low number of students in individual years [20]. The primary school and kindergarten (under the pseudonym of Good school) also includes an after-school club, which all the school’s students can visit. The after-school club has its own school curriculum for extracurricular activities. Ten natural persons work in this organisation, two primary school teachers (the school head-teachers is also a primary school teacher), one educator, two kindergarten teachers, one school dining room manager, one cook, and also a cleaning lady, and accountant and building manager. Children visiting the kindergarten are taught in a single class, in which children usually aged between 3 and 6 years are taught. As well as realisation of its own class and school projects, the school is also involved in many state development and also international projects promoting the education of students and teachers, ecology and healthy eating. The teachers choose topics for project education according to the curriculum or in response to current events in society. It is normal for entities of this general type to cooperate with their founders and local organisations, such as the fire brigade, hunters and partner organisations in the surrounding area. The school assures its promotion by means of its own website, which it manages itself. The school’s results are also published in the local magazine and on the aforementioned school website, at the school’s premises and also at the school’s public events. The school’s statutory body is its middle-aged head-teacher with over 25 years of pedagogic experience and over 10 years of experience in the position of head-teacher. The head-teacher has spent most of her professional career at this school, initially as a first level teacher, then as the school head-teacher.

Qualitatively focused research, utilising the approach of a case study, was chosen for the research section. We primarily chose methods that verify formulation of the problem and offer not just in-depth examination of a single case [21], for analysis of the case. The following methods were utilised within the terms of the research investigation in the chosen case study:
Table 1. Case study – Methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>semi-structured interview</td>
<td>interview with the school head-teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>observation</td>
<td>observation of a day at work as head-teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>analysis of documents</td>
<td>analysis of selected school documents (inspection reports, the school’s curriculum, annual report, the school’s rules)</td>
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Within the terms of data processing, interviews were analysed using open coding, which enabled detailed analysis of text into individual codes and subsequent formation of categories for description of data. Yin (2014) recommends using multiple methods, which are closely linked to the case and are absolutely crucial for obtaining the relevant data, for data analysis in the case study. We also analysed the content of the school’s documents and analysed the unstructured observations within the terms of a day with the school’s head-teacher. We follow the analytical part of the research to the chosen methods according to [22] with the goal of assuming a descriptive-explorative approach to interpretation, because this also provides new topics [13].

3 RESULTS

3.1 Fields of school management

The case study on the example of the Good school, led, managed and administered by the school head-teacher, shows several positive elements of a good school image, which can be summarised into homogenous groups [23]. As well as the school’s long-standing tradition, its location and school environment, which is in an attractive natural location, with the school’s very good facilities and technical equipment (with regard to the school’s size and potential), the public is also aware of the school’s publicity, it participates in various competitions and shows and promotion of the school, for instance by means of the school’s website, from which the school’s image is evident.

The quality of the educational content in both facilities providing education must be emphasised, and this is proof of the qualities and professional competence of the teaching staff, their own initiative and activeness to “teach” in an innovative manner, but also naturally and in a cooperative spirit. We again emphasise that the combination of primary school and kindergarten is an exemplary method for improving the effectiveness of the educational process and preparation of the child for further education. The smooth transition from kindergarten to primary school is supported by the harmony between the head-teacher’s managing strategies, communication between the pedagogic staff and the school’s culture, jointly supported and developed by all the people involved in education. In the monitored aspects of the school’s reality we observed school management processes followed by realisation of the school’s visions and goals and considerable harmony between the school’s philosophy and the school’s declared documents. We consider the environment within the school to be stimulating and supportive not only to learning and teaching. The school culture, based on the principle of the school’s openness to parents, the surroundings and the public, is also a clear reflection of the skills mastered managerially by the head-teacher, applying specific management processes within the terms of her own strategy, effectively and in high-quality.

Despite the limitations of the school’s size (with regard to the number of children, students and school employees), the school has enormous potential. This is the potential to establish an open relationship with parents and the founder. The transparency of processes that take place within the school, because the school allows people from outside to view inside it, which acts as a type of prevention against various disinformation, which is typical for the rural environment [20]. In the context of the TALIS 2013 survey, during which it was found that incomplete schools demonstrated the highest percentage compared to complete schools in relation to work with a vision, it was also confirmed that head-teachers with more experience show more involvement and quality during work with teams and management of the pedagogic process [24]. This finding is conformed by the pedagogic management of the school in compliance with school management processes clearly benefiting the specific school. Staff stability is also the reflection of a clearly shared vision and school priorities. The proven system for planning and inspection at the specific school enabled successful realisation of gradual improvement of quality and improvement of the effectiveness of the school’s activities. The school’s management demonstrated
regular planning and evaluation in all areas of the school's activities, which leads to improved quality. The current quality of monitoring and evaluation of the results of education of children and students, and also the results of pre-school and primary education, was rated as being at the required level at the time of the monitored inspection activities. The school’s head-teacher also demonstrated her qualities in school management by the well-executed plan for inspection and auditing activities, along with an evaluation system, and thereby creates conditions for high-quality inspection and evaluation of pre-school education.

Within the terms of identification of school management processes, we created the following table 2, which presents the individual fields and gives a brief description.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIELDS of school management</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION of fields of school management</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>planning</td>
<td>well-thought out, anchored in the school documentation and determining clear rules within a specific horizon</td>
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<tr>
<td>decisions and organisation</td>
<td>focusing on the school’s needs and interests (cooperation with family, the founder and other subjects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personnel management</td>
<td>in-house salary regulation, which also determines the criteria for acknowledging non-claimable salary components and remuneration of school employees, clear description of the pedagogic staff – management of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management of people</td>
<td>clear description of the personnel, qualifications, approach to further and life-long education, financial compensation as a motivator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inspection</td>
<td>regular and systematic, planned and performed using multiple mechanisms verifying fulfilment of the school’s goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluation of the quality of work</td>
<td>clearly formulated rules proportioned to the field of school evaluation (children, students, pedagogic staff, pedagogic process, work quality and cooperation with subjects)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

3.2 The head-teacher’s key role

The head-teacher creates opportunities for people to be involved in management of the school; all its employees have the opportunity to express their opinion and are involved in happenings at the kindergarten. The school curricula are the result of work by the entire school team, including the operating employees and are based on detailed analysis and evaluation tools [15]. The participative style of management with the strong personality of the head-teacher represents the ability of bilateral communication between the school’s employees and the management, and this communication is based on an informal and open principle thanks to solid relations, for instance with the kindergarten teacher or in the primary school. Emphasis on quality and also autonomy within the terms of the educational process is proof of the transparent criteria determined by mutual agreement and on the principles of respect, trust and the acceptability of acceptance of terms. The external factors influencing the school include emphasis on close cooperation between parents and the school in the interests of the child and also a positive approach to changes with regard to the founder.

The school’s culture is established on the basis of the common goal of all the employees led by the head-teacher, who uses her own example of intensive work and a positive approach to life in the school to lead other school workers and also motivates the children, students and their parent. This is also reflected in the cooperation with the municipality, which favours the school (even though it has control and supervision over it) and the school’s founder is aware of the importance of the fact that, in a small municipality, the school is the basis of existence of the specific municipality, because without children and students as potential new parents and residents, the municipality would be unable to expand and develop.

The head-teacher has a clear vision when planning in the long-term. The goal is to maintain a sustainable number of children and students in the school, if possible to continue to develop and modernise the school environment and to establish new kindergarten departments in cooperation with the school’s founder. The goal is to improve the environment in the kindergarten, initially the equipment inside and outside the school, as she presents her plans: We are considering, this is a question of capacity and space, and in the future, with regard to what I have discussed with the mayor, we would
like to connect the gym with this building. It was originally to have been connected by a corridor and there is even a project that would build part of the building, which would contain a new class, from the Establishment of capacities project, where there would be cloakrooms for the children, a gym and also an additional classroom. Which would mean dividing the students into older and younger, two new teachers, I would have more children, I already turn away 8 children a year and I also have applications from outside our catchment area. There could certainly be two classes of 20 children here. There would be 40 children certainly, 100%. We now have a total of 56, the kindergarten certainly, we are planning, but we don’t know when it will happen. However, this innovation creates a mutual burden – for the founder in relation to material and financial assurance of a new classroom and for the school’s management as a result of personnel management and recruitment of new staff, campaign for new potential clients of the school linked to promotion, administration and additional, not completely clear issues of establishment of new kindergarten classes.

Within the terms of development of the primary school the head-teacher also has arguments for how to advance teaching and potentially expand the school’s capacity. During a specific period of the school’s management the head-teacher made efforts to admit the greatest possible number of students, because the system for financing schools was conditional to and dependent on the number of students in a specific school. She no longer has the ambition to admit every student, even though she realises that the number of students must be maintained on at least a level that it will not become an existential factor for the school. She also declares her comprehensive vision regarding operation of the school on the basis of the example of connection of the primary school and kindergarten with the help of investments from the founder and constant modernisation of the school.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The current school has been undergoing major changes for over two decades since the major break in Czech political-economic-social development. Despite the fact that modern schools endeavour to cope with the imbalance in education, changes to legislation have given schools the opportunity of autonomous management and on-going professional training of not only pedagogic, but also executive employees of the school, is registering increasing progress in the field of quality. The potential of the educational environment we were interested in is linked to the quality of education and is also closely tied to the educational-political aspects of the mental, physical and social conditions of the specific educational institution [25]. Despite this there are still so-called white spaces in the Czech educational system, such as the school in a single legal entity we studied, which encounters and deals with numerous problematic situations every day, with minimum options for acquiring support from the personnel, organisation and financial aspect. We have endeavoured to present one selected primary school and kindergarten in a single legal entity as an example of management of a school organised in this manner.

The head-teacher’s daily duties and tasks were observed in the everyday reality of the school and specific managerial processes characteristic of simultaneous management of a primary school and kindergarten were identified. The manager’s primary responsibility for management of processes within the organisation is based on effective cooperation between the people who manage it. All the described findings are a limited portrayal of one primary school and kindergarten in a single legal entity, but the uniqueness of our examined case clearly resonates in many areas of management. We can therefore summarise the fields of the school’s personnel management, planning and organisation as fundamental aspects of management of the specific school, which support its development in the event that processes are problem-free. If the school encounters lack of support from the founder, if it does not have a sufficient number of children and students and thereby does not receive the required funds for the salaries of its employees, the school is subject to a chain of problematic situations and circumstances, which place increased demands on the school’s management to deal with these negative phenomena and endeavour to keep the school stable and operational. For quantitative research this case study is the ideal basis for verifying which of the identified topics could be applicable for a broader research sample. We thereby appeal to current pedagogic research to devote more attention to these schools, whose quality of educational work and high quality of management is underestimated and deserves more research interest.

REFERENCES


