

## Czech Republic

### Fakultni zakladni skola profesora Otakara Chlupa

*This school caters for students aged 6 to 15 (grades 1th to 9th). The school's self-formulated objectives are to match the individual children's needs, to support students' inner motivation to learn, and to develop positive personality traits in students. Regular staff meetings (including weekend sessions) are conducted to ensure that all teachers share a concept of quality teaching and have a common vocabulary. Instruction methods are based on exploration and problem solving, including project blocks for older students at least several times a year. The school day is organised into standard lessons, but the teachers can adjust the length of the lessons if learning units require more or less time. Students form their learning process in different ways: They can regularly choose the activity and difficulty level they want to engage in; they create their own rules in the classroom and have a school parliament; and they are involved in the assessment process by means of self-evaluations. The students also publish a school magazine. Although the school uses standard grading, the emphasis is on reflections on positive results and individual progress. The students' development throughout their time at school is documented in a portfolio. Parents are involved in the school during consultation hours, they are invited to take part in instruction, and brought into contact with each other during family afternoons, campfires, weekend trips, etc.*

**Main focus of innovation:** ORGANISATION

#### General Information

**Name of the ILE:** Fakultni zakladni skola profesora Otakara Chlupa

**Location/Address:** Prague 13, Fingerova 2186, 158 00

**Website:** [www.fzs-chlupa.cz](http://www.fzs-chlupa.cz)

**Rationale**

*Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning challenges?*

We can offer many years of experience and a wide range of verified methods. For sixteen years of our school existence we have been trying to educate our pupils in a modern and meaningful way. We think about *why children learn particular things* and *why these things will be useful for them*. We want our pupils to fulfil themselves. We believe not only reasoning should be developed. We try to target the whole personality including emotional and social development.

Our ILE was a pilot school of Framework of Education Programmes for Compulsory (Basic) = (primary + lower secondary) Education. We have welcomed the opportunity to work on own school educational programme because we could finally realize our visions of education without facing obstacles. We have passed through a great part of this journey and we have found that its course is the right one.

Some of the facts observed by Czech School Inspectorate in their last report (to illustrate our ILE grossly):

- Unique, original, and very effective educational strategies,
- aiming at individual pupils' development with emphasis on students' cooperation,
- exceptional success in students' education,
- reflection and self-evaluation are inseparable parts of education,
- openness, use of imagination, expression abilities and partnership effort are permanent inputs for pupils' personal, social, and behavioural development.

In the present time, the amount of knowledge mounts up with a great speed. All of our educational influence comes from the belief that linking permanent knowledge with practical life is more desirable rather than just gathering pieces of information. Instead of asking "what to teach" we put emphasis on "how to teach".

We value the quality of educational process. Teachers at our school use activation methods that lead toward effective learning. We support independent critical thinking of pupils. We build on pupils' own experience and their prior learning. We let them work with various information resources including the internet. Constructivist procedures aim at higher level of cognition and thinking development. Children are prepared for team work by cooperative approaches. Local as well as international projects prepare pupils to work in global and virtual environment.

**Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE**

*What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)*

Our main goals can be found in our two mottos: OUR EDUCATION – CHANCE FOR EVERYONE. DESIRE TO LEARN, JOY TO DISCOVER.

Our main objective is to create a system that would:

- a) Match every individual child's needs regardless of skill or socio-economic background which leads to attitude of tolerance and discrimination refusal.
- b) Support a motivation to lifelong learning, inner motivation to search and discover, self-evaluation ability, and own learning and behaviour control.
- c) Develop all positive personality traits equally and support self-confidence and responsibility.

We can state that these goals reflect individual's needs in the real world scenario. Our pupils are able to solve problems, express themselves, give presentations on their findings, as well as work as a part of a team.

This is indicated by their works, presentations, exhibits, projects, etc. They can take on the role of organizers, guides, and leaders of their peers or adults. Also there is a fact that after leaving our school, they can formulate what benefits and knowledge have they gained at our school and they value what are our own goals.

We judge so even from the fact that our alumni have no troubles when entering higher levels of schooling. Also, the Czech School Inspectorate's last report evaluates our educational approach and its results as excellent and substantially different from regular practice.

### **Learners**

*Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?*

The original school Chlupova was running classes of 1<sup>st</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The new Faculty Basic School (after merging) is a fully organized school running classes of 1<sup>st</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The original school has been known as an innovative centre using RWCT methods and methods of active learning. We hope that the merged school will continue to be perceived that way.

By the merging, we want to create conditions for the students who finish their 5<sup>th</sup> grade so they keep evolving their creative and critical thinking, team work abilities, reflect on own work, and, last but not least, preserving their joy of discovering new things and further will for learning just like they were used to previously. By changing the school after the 5<sup>th</sup> grade they might easily lose this potential.

We would like to create our 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grade programme as an alternative to eight year grammar school – one of the high school types in the Czech Republic. Our priority will be not only to focus on acquiring knowledge but also on thinking development, and social and ethical education. We want to differentiate further our education and approaches so that our school is attractive to children with whichever predispositions.

Our school serves the children between the ages of 6 – 15 for their compulsory education. Currently we have 620 pupils.

### **Facilitators**

*Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?*

School leadership: headmaster, two deputy headmasters, after school club coordinator, cafeteria manager, and janitor. 95 % of our teachers have university degree education.

The teachers' roles in the ILE: grade teachers, subject teachers, project coordinators (e.g. ICT, environmental studies, anti-drug prevention, etc.), teachers working as mentors with student teachers (our school has been a "faculty school" since 1995; we cooperate with Charles University, Faculty of Education).

There is an interesting question of *how people perceive what is quality teaching & learning*. Accordingly to pedagogical praxis and Q-analysis (ran in 2007), the original staff of the ILE had a shared understanding of this. We are starting to discover how quality teaching and learning is understood by Fingerova school teachers as well as by our new-coming staff members. Our goal is unity on this. So far we have had one of many weekend sessions that aimed at common vocabulary and at sharing the understanding of quality within the staff. New staff will also take RWCT and active learning training courses.

## Organization of the ILE

*How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?*

Standard lesson lasts 45 minutes. The teaching unit, however, doesn't always have to have this duration. Teachers have a right to adjust the lesson as they need, according to their plan. They can make it shorter or join lessons into blocks. They do have to stick to the week schedule outline and bear in mind hygiene and school rules (e.g. breaks, relaxation, etc.).

We are preparing several project blocks for our older pupils. These will not quite stick to the regular schedule. We intend to run such blocks at least several times a year and hopefully increase the number as our teachers become more accustomed to it.

Our teachers prefer constructivist approach. They do not tell finalized information but lead our students to find out and work with information, use mutual help or work individually, analyze information and come to conclusion. We understand learning as gradual process where pupils' activity plays the major part and teachers try to create the best conditions for it.

Building on what is already experienced is a key for us; we always build on prior learning. We use tools such as brainstorming or mapping of pupil's existing knowledge. Pupils formulate what they already know and what they would like to find out. That outlines the next course of study. For instance in algebra, we want our students to evaluate results critically, based on real life experience. When reading, pupils compare what they read with what they have personally experienced.

Pupils' choice is also very important to us. Our children get the option to choose the form of activity and its difficulty level as well as members of their work team. They formulate questions for which they want to get answers; they frame the size and depth of their project. We let them experiment, take "healthy" risks and select problem solving methods that are not traditional.

We do not underestimate individual learning, but cooperation, social interaction, and peer (mutual) teaching and learning are more characteristic for our school.

Starting at the first grade, teachers use strategies such as jigsaw technique of cooperative learning, pair sharing and other procedures that support pupils' independence on teacher and ability to acquire knowledge without her/his help. Children are led to solve tasks together. They should discover a problem and solve it with the help of their peers in a positive environment. The ability to work with a problem or mistake is an important part of learning.

## Learning motivation support, social and emotional development

We support inner child motivation when the child is not learning just to be praised by teacher or parent or to receive positive response, but for joy of exploration and overcoming of obstacles. Important part of this procedure is evaluation that points out positive results and asks the pupil to self-evaluate and clear away mistakes. We always try to praise individual progress and thriving for best results. We do not compare pupils' results mutually. Motivation to learn is supported by appraisal of initiative, activity, extra work, depth of research, etc. Results can be presented later at exhibits or discussed at forums.

We believe not only intellect should be developed in child. The whole personality, including emotional and social development, needs to evolve symmetrically. Community discussion groups are characteristic for our education. Children learn how to listen to others, match their experience with their own and justify their position.

Children also create their own rules in their classroom and see after their use. They cooperate among themselves and help the younger and weaker peers (e.g. by grade patronage or guidance of children with handicaps). We have an operating school parliament that shows children how to act and make decisions in a democratic way.

We have children from other countries at our school. With their help and international cooperation we teach all our students tolerance and increase their awareness about problems of racism and discrimination. We also put emphasis on aesthetics and creativity. Art related activities are part of projects in whatever subject.

### **The curriculum and preferred pedagogical methods**

The school operates according to its own school educational programme. The methods most used are critical thinking (Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking - RWCT (the school is an official methodical and training center since 2001), active learning – programme called “Creative School” (the school is an official training center since 2003), project – based education, cooperative learning, etc.

What is characteristic for our approach is that the strategies listed do not exist separately, they complement each other. Our objective is to guide and support learning that is based on explorations, discoveries, and problem solving. This goal is central to all of the methods we use.

We try to support development of meta-cognition. We are still developing and searching for effective ways in this regard. Within self-evaluation, children learn to value effectiveness of their chosen approach. They evaluate whether they could have taken different steps, what to do next, what are they good at and what not.

Our main effort is to help each girl / boy to make maximum use of her / his potential. This effort is monitored by our evaluation portfolios, where pupils and teacher go over existing results and plan for next development. We can take advantage of the diversity among our students. Especially during cooperative learning, we encourage students to take advantage of the different strengths of group members.

### **Learning Context**

*In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?*

The building of the newly established school Chlupova is a typical school facility from the 1990's. It wasn't kept in good shape for many years. Within nine months before the merging, the renovation of school facilities started and these have already improved in several aspects. We have changed all window frames, built modern bathrooms, equipped school library, and re-constructed the sports fields and playgrounds. Currently, our aula and atrium are undergoing renovation. We still need to insulate the building and fix its roof.

According to our intention as well as new architecture blueprints there will be a reception desk based right after the school entrance with a space for sitting and relaxation aside. There will also be lockers for students. We are planning to get solid and mobile panels for presentations of works and paintings. We are organizing exhibits, concerts, and so on. Renovated atrium will be a place of active relaxation for children during breaks and after school programme. There will be a mobile theatre stage, space for sitting, and green plants to decorate the space.

The decorations in hallways and corridors provide space for children works presentations. We post up projects results, posters, pictures, 3-D products, etc. We would also like to equip the space with relaxation elements such as sofas, ping-pong tables, etc. With a significant financial and physical help of our pupils' parents we were able to change many classrooms into comfortable rooms good for learning as well as relaxation.

### **Community and family involvement in the ILE**

Learning of the youngest students (1<sup>st</sup> grade) is broadly linked to life in community. We often go to movies, theatres, concerts, libraries, etc. We use sports facilities such as swimming pool and winter sports stadium. Children visit historical sites that do not have to be in the city only (day and field trips). We also take advantage of performances of theatre "Glans" that rents our theatre room from us.

Parents play essential role at our school. We are trying to create a relationship of trust between school and family, so both parts have a united effect on the child. Parents have option to take part in the instruction. We often organize common activities for children and parents such as family afternoons, campfires, weekend trips, etc.

Parents also have the option to attend regular consultation hours where they together with their child evaluate past periods of education. They also have the option to contact teachers by phone or e-mail. School informs parents about its activities via school web site. Parents can reflect their opinions or leave messages and commentaries at this site. There is a board of parents for each class that takes care of class funds and looks after current class environment. For the parents of our future students, we offer workshops where they can come and experience directly what education at our school is like.

### **History of ILE**

*Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?*

The initiator was Blanka Janovska (current headmaster of the ILE) who entered the newly established school Chlupova as a headmaster in 1993. She was followed by a handful of her female colleagues. In the first few years of school existence they have taken part in various training programmes and activities (Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking – RWCT, Active learning, etc.). Such experience together with the findings published after fall of Berlin wall has confirmed their long-time belief that changing of classical educational methods they were using until then in their practical work, is inevitable.

Methods of critical thinking expressed and gave tools to what the teachers have felt for a long time. The initial reasons, i. e. the conviction that we cannot prepare children for life by the use of prevailing (typical) Czech school approach, have not changed. These have actually strengthened with time and growing experience. It was clear that with the change of procedures we also needed to change the way of planning lessons and evaluating pupils' outcomes. We have started to gain experience with meta-cognitive learning and pupils' self-evaluation. Now we know this process cannot end soon and we are ready to keep on learning about it.

Between the years of 1999 – 2009 vast majority of our teachers has gone through modern methods training. During the creation of school educational programme the staff clarified and united their goals and ways of their completion. The teachers have intensified cooperation, planned common projects between classes and grades, and worked in the spirit of unity.

A change has occurred on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 when the original primary school merged with fully organized (primary + lower secondary) school Fingerova. This school, unlike the school Chlupova, educated children from 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Some of its approaches were similar but altogether it was mainly a traditional school with typical problems such as lack of new 1<sup>st</sup> grade applicants or the decrease of student body due to pupils' leaving after 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade for grammar schools.

The merging brought larger operation space. Originally, our school was using a building of former day-care centre which was very tiny. Nowadays, we can satisfy a larger number of applicants which formerly reached well beyond our school's capacity. We can also provide our older students with the possibility to continue in their education under the same conditions that they have been accustomed to.

Merging the two staffs of different beliefs, approaches and professional habits is a great challenge for school leadership and the "new" staff. We need to convince more colleagues about our philosophy of working in a united and modern fashion in all grades of our school. We believe that we will succeed in it.

### **Funding of the ILE**

*How is it funded?*

School has legal personality. It is financed by state, own commercial activities (space rentals), from grants and sponsorship.

### **Learning Outcomes**

*What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?*

We monitor the quality of our education systematically and longitudinally. We use a broad set of both quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools, and both our own and national wide testing as explained below.

We use Kalibro testing (since 1996) and Scio testing (since 2000) for our 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders respectively. In both of these national tests our pupils achieve above average in all categories (within Prague as well as the rest of the country). The involvement of schools in these tests is voluntary. Each school gets information about its position within the distribution of all schools that took part in the testing and not about any other school's position.

We use these results to keep the strengths and fix what has not turned out well in the tests. These results tell us whether our teachers might possibly omit some of the important goals (e.g. work with text, information gathering, understanding, etc.) Similarly, we use analyses of our pupils' ranking in advanced rounds of various competitions. Based on all of these sources, we find out that our course does lead toward quality education. This was confirmed by Czech School Inspectorate reports.

The pupils' results are monitored systematically and periodically. Teachers use formative evaluation (continuously and after each topic is completed) as well as summative evaluation (twice a year).

The ideal state occurs when every pupil works at its own "personal maximum", understands schoolwork, and enjoys personal success. Therefore the evaluation criteria stem from what the pupil should know; what the expected outcomes in individual subjects are, and whether they are formulated so the child can understand their meaning.

In our approach, the teacher, child, and parent take part in the evaluation. The pupil uses a simple three point scale (e.g. I understand without any problems; I still make mistakes; I do not understand). Then the teacher adds his/her own evaluation, and finally the parents can reflect on all of these. Such approach is a natural outcome of effective verbal evaluation.

In the great detail, we have also elaborated team work evaluation as we use the method of cooperative learning quite often. We want our children to realize how effective their work within a team was and to be able to assess how well others performed. Not only individuals within a team are evaluated but also the entire teams can be evaluated by other groups and the teacher.

A grade (numbers from 1 to 5 when “1” means the best and “5” the worst) is a measure of level to which the pupil matched formerly known criteria of work quality. For the way we provide assessment (as described above), the grade loses its meaning. What is more important is that pupils hear and see reactions and reflections of others about their work and they come to realize their concrete mistakes as well as concrete successes. They also get feedback what could be done next time to avoid mistakes or failure. Children learn that a mistake is a natural companion of learning”.

### **Evaluation tools in the ILE**

- Pupils’ portfolios are created in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Information such as written tests, project sheets, artworks or photos is being cumulated and added to the portfolio folder during all the time of student’s education at our school. These portfolios document skills development in time.
- Interviews are carried out as regular opinion feedback among teachers, children, and parents during consultation hours or according to the need.
- Discussions are taking place as periodical feedback within classes where individual and team work is assessed.

Informal oral or written evaluation of individual’s work that reflects on what has turned out well and what not is also used.

### **Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE**

*Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)*

We have several editions of the school’s chronicle. School affairs are monitored through our website [www.fzs-chlupa.cz](http://www.fzs-chlupa.cz) . This is a modern platform where teachers and students contribute and the readers have the options of commenting on posts.

Children between 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade have been publishing school magazine Chlupik for 15 years. It is published every month and has 20 pages per issue. For the second year in a row, our children run their own school radio programme. As a part of our new subject “Media Education” our older students publish an electronic magazine. We also have three representatives that take part in video programme for children on TV D-Zone. This is broadcasted locally (on cable TV) in Prague 13.

We also contribute to local magazine (in Prague 13) called Stop. Other articles regarding our educational approach have been previously published in national and international press. Reports by national TV and radio stations were made at our premises. Some of our teachers’ works were published in “Good Practice Examples Handbook” issued by the Research Institute of Education in 2007. Many of our staff members contribute to professional press and publications.

**Other information you consider to be relevant to describe the ILE**

Our ILE repetitively takes part in international projects in learning English and in service teacher education. We are involved in Comenius project and in eTwinning since 2007. This year we won European Quality Award for one of the projects. In 2006 we successfully organized conference for European school headmasters about evaluation and self-evaluation.

The school headmaster and some of our teachers are involved in in-service headmasters' and teachers' education activities as lecturers. They also take part in writing textbooks and they publish their work in various almanacs.