

Inclusive Education for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities in Today's Schools: The Perspective of Special Needs Teachers and Supporting Factors

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ABSTRACT:

This academic article focuses on the issue of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities in the context of contemporary primary schools from the perspective of teaching staff. The aim of the research was to analyse teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, identify factors supporting inclusion, and highlight the barriers affecting the education of pupils with intellectual disabilities in lower secondary schools. The theoretical part of the article is based on current concepts of inclusive pedagogy, the role of the special needs teacher, and support measures in inclusive education. The empirical part was conducted using a quantitative questionnaire survey. The research sample consisted of 94 teaching staff working in primary schools, including schools established under Section 16 of the Education Act. The research findings showed that teachers perceive inclusive education as an important tool for social participation and the promotion of diversity; however, they also highlight a number of organisational, staffing and methodological difficulties associated with its implementation. Among the most significant barriers, respondents cited high class sizes, a lack of time for individualised teaching, administrative burdens and limited access to specialist support. The research also confirmed the importance of multidisciplinary cooperation, the role of the special needs teacher and teaching assistant, and active cooperation between the school and the pupil's family. The findings highlight the need for long-term systemic support for inclusive education and the development of teaching staff's professional competences in the field of special needs education and inclusive teaching practice.

Keywords: inclusive education; intellectual disability; special education; support measures; teaching staff.

Introduction

Inclusive education represents one of the most significant areas of educational theory and practice in the current education system. In recent decades, there has been a significant shift in both the European and global contexts away from a segregated model of education towards

the promotion of joint education for pupils, regardless of their individual differences, health status or special educational needs. This trend is closely linked to an emphasis on equal access to education, respect for human rights and support for the social participation of people with disabilities (Hájková, Strnadová, 2010; Oranga,

Obuba, Boinett, 2022; Pálsdóttir, Óskarsson, 2023).

In the Czech context, inclusive education has undergone significant development, particularly since 2016, when legislative changes were introduced to strengthen the system of support measures and the joint education of pupils with special educational needs. The school system began to reflect more intensively on the need for individualised teaching, multidisciplinary cooperation and the provision of support for pupils with various types of health-related disadvantages, including those with intellectual disabilities or intellectual developmental disorders (Černá et al., 2015; Slowík, 2022; Stárek, Klugarová & Kocurová, 2021). At the same time, it is becoming apparent that legislative measures alone are insufficient unless accompanied by appropriate staffing, professional and systemic support within the school environment.

The issue of educating pupils with intellectual disabilities represents a specific area of inclusive education. These pupils require an individualised approach, the use of special educational methods, appropriate support measures and long-term cooperation between the school, the family and other professionals. The success of inclusive education is significantly influenced not only by the level of support provided by the school, but also by the attitudes of teaching staff, their professional preparedness and their ability to respond to pupils' individual educational needs (Bendová, Zíkl, 2011; Valenta & Müller, 2013).

Special needs teachers play a significant role in the process of inclusive education, contributing to diagnosis, intervention, methodological support for teaching staff, and cooperation with the pupil's family. Their experience and attitudes represent an important factor influencing the quality and feasibility of inclusion in a mainstream school environment. Current research highlights the fact that teachers often view the principle of inclusion positively in itself, yet at the same time point to insufficient staffing, a high administrative burden, a lack of professional support, or limited opportunities for individualising teaching within the context of a

mainstream school (Müller, 2012; Talapatra, Miller, Schumacher-Martinez, 2018; Vágnerová, Hadj-Moussová, 2003).

In the context of current educational practice, it is also important to reflect on the broader social dimensions of inclusion. Inclusive education does not merely serve to fulfil the right to education, but significantly influences social inclusion, future employment prospects, quality of life and the overall participation of people with intellectual disabilities in society. Cooperation between the school and the family is also a significant factor in supporting inclusion, which can positively influence the pupil's adaptation to school, their motivation and the effectiveness of the educational process. At the same time, there is growing evidence of the importance of using modern technologies and digital skills in the education of pupils with intellectual disabilities, which can contribute to the individualisation of teaching and increase pupils' participation in the educational process (Oranga, Obuba, Boinett, 2022; Pálsdóttir, Óskarsson, 2023).

This study focuses on the issue of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities in the contemporary school environment, with a specific emphasis on the perspective of special education teachers and the identification of factors supporting inclusion. The aim of the study is to analyse teaching staff's attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education, identify the most significant barriers and support mechanisms, and formulate recommendations for teaching practice. The study is based on a theoretical synthesis of expert knowledge and simultaneously utilises empirical data obtained through a questionnaire survey among teaching staff working in lower secondary schools.

Inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities

In contemporary educational theory and practice, inclusive education is one of the most significant concepts promoting equal access to education and respect for the individual needs of every pupil. Its fundamental principle is to create an educational environment that enables all pupils to

learn together, regardless of their health status, social disadvantage, cultural differences or special educational needs (Ainscow, 2020; Clough & Corbett, 2005). The current concept of inclusion is based on a humanistic and social model of education, which rejects segregation and emphasises every individual's right to full participation in society.

The development of inclusive education is closely linked to a shift in society's view of people with disabilities. The traditional medical model has gradually been replaced by a social approach, which views disability not merely as an individual deficit, but also as a consequence of barriers created by society and the education system (Slee, 2018). A significant milestone in the field of inclusion was the Salamanca Statement adopted by UNESCO in 1994, which formulated the principle of inclusive education for all children in mainstream schools and emphasised the need to adapt the education system to the individual needs of pupils (UNESCO, 1994).

The professional literature often distinguishes between integration and inclusion. Whilst integration is based primarily on incorporating the pupil into an existing school system, inclusion presupposes a transformation of the educational environment itself so that it is capable of responding to the needs of all pupils (Ainscow & César, 2006). Inclusion therefore does not merely mean the physical presence of a pupil with a disability in a mainstream class, but above all their active participation in the educational process and the social life of the school.

Pupils with intellectual disabilities or intellectual developmental disorders constitute a specific group of pupils with special educational needs. Characteristic features include a reduced level of intellectual ability, limited adaptive skills, and specific educational needs requiring an individualised pedagogical approach (Schalock et al., 2021). The current professional approach emphasises the need to respect the individuality of each pupil and to focus not only on their limitations, but above all on their possibilities, potential and quality of life (AAIDD, 2021).

Support measures play a significant role in the inclusive education of these pupils, enabling their more effective participation in the educational process. These include, for example, adaptations to educational content, the use of special educational methods, teacher assistance, individualised teaching, or support from school counselling services (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The effectiveness of inclusive education is also significantly influenced by the professional preparedness of teaching staff, the availability of support services, and the overall school climate.

Current research shows that teachers' attitudes represent one of the most significant factors influencing the success of inclusive education. Positive teacher attitudes are typically associated with higher levels of professional training, prior experience with inclusion, and the availability of professional support (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Conversely, insufficient staffing, a heavy administrative burden or a lack of methodological support can lead to a negative perception of inclusion and a sense of professional insecurity among teaching staff (Sharma et al., 2018).

Multidisciplinary cooperation between the school, the family and specialist staff is also a significant aspect of inclusive education. Cooperation between teachers, special needs teachers, psychologists, teaching assistants and the pupil's family is a key prerequisite for the successful education and social adaptation of pupils with intellectual disabilities (Hornby, 2015). The family is not merely seen as a recipient of support, but as an active partner in the educational process.

In recent years, the Czech education system has seen significant development in inclusive education, particularly in connection with legislative changes supporting the joint education of pupils with special educational needs. However, current pedagogical practice shows that the implementation of inclusion remains a complex process requiring not only an appropriate legislative framework but also long-term systemic support for schools, professional training for teaching staff, and sufficient human

and material resources for education (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022).

The education of pupils with intellectual disabilities within a mainstream school setting represents **a specific area of inclusive education** that requires a comprehensive approach reflecting the pupil's individual educational needs, their social capabilities and the broader context of the school environment. The current concept of inclusion emphasises that simply placing a pupil in a mainstream school is not a sufficient condition for successful education. A key prerequisite is the creation of a supportive and flexible educational environment enabling the pupil's active participation in the educational process and the social life of the school (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Pupils with intellectual disabilities or intellectual developmental disorders exhibit considerable individual variability in terms of cognitive abilities, adaptability, communication and social skills. It is precisely this heterogeneity that requires a high degree of individualisation in education and the use of differentiated teaching strategies (AAIDD, 2021). The specialist literature also points out that the effective education of these pupils does not consist solely in reducing educational requirements, but above all in supporting the development of their potential, autonomy and social participation (Schalock et al., 2021).

In an inclusive environment, it is essential to respect the specific characteristics of the learning process for pupils with intellectual disabilities. These pupils often require a higher degree of visual aids, repetition, structured teaching and more time to master the subject matter. Positive motivation, fostering a sense of security and creating a stable social environment also play a significant role (Valenta & Müller, 2013). The educational process therefore requires the use of special educational methods, individualised educational plans and support measures appropriate to the pupil's current needs.

A key factor in supporting inclusive education is the use of support measures and assistive

mechanisms. Current research confirms that appropriately tailored support measures positively influence not only pupils' educational outcomes but also their social inclusion and the quality of their adaptation to school (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The most commonly used forms of support include teacher assistance, adaptations to educational content, special educational intervention, counselling services, and adjustments to the organisation of teaching. However, their proper coordination and long-term continuity are also important aspects.

Contemporary inclusive education emphasises the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration. The successful education of pupils with intellectual disabilities requires cooperation between teachers, special needs teachers, school psychologists, teaching assistants and the pupil's family environment (Hornby, 2015). The family is a key partner in the educational process, capable of significantly influencing the pupil's motivation, their adaptation to school, and the continuity of support between the school and home environments. Effective communication between the school and the family is associated with greater success in inclusive education and a more positive social climate at school (Epstein, 2018).

In recent years, the use of digital technologies and ICT in the education of pupils with special educational needs has also become increasingly prevalent. Modern technologies can enhance the clarity of teaching, support the individualisation of the educational process, foster the development of communication skills, and encourage more active pupil participation in lessons (UNESCO, 2023). At the same time, however, specialist studies highlight the fact that the effective use of technology depends on teaching staff having sufficient digital skills and on the availability of suitable methodological tools (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022).

The attitudes of teaching staff remain a significant determinant of the quality of inclusive education. As Avramidis and Norwich (2002) note, teachers' positive attitudes towards

inclusion are closely linked to a sense of professional competence, experience with inclusive practice, and the availability of professional support. Conversely, inadequate teacher training, a high administrative burden or a lack of staff capacity can lead to increased professional uncertainty and a negative perception of inclusive education (Sharma et al., 2018). The issue of teachers' professional preparedness therefore represents one of the key areas of contemporary inclusive education.

Despite significant legislative and societal changes, the implementation of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities remains a complex and long-term process. Successful inclusion requires not only a high-quality system of support measures, but also a shift in pedagogical thinking, support for collaboration between professionals, and the creation of a school environment based on respect, participation and an individualised approach to the education of each pupil (Slee, 2018; Ainscow, 2020).

At the same time, it is proving important to develop innovative approaches to the education of pupils with special needs that support their inclusion and reflect individual needs, as emphasised by recent studies focusing on the use of modern technologies in education (Daněk et al., 2025).

The current concept of inclusive education emphasises the importance of multidisciplinary cooperation and professional **support for teaching staff**. Special needs teachers represent one of the key professional groups in the process of inclusive education, as they are involved not only in diagnosis and intervention, but also in providing methodological support to teachers, coordinating support measures and collaborating with the pupil's family (Hornby, 2015). Their role in an inclusive environment is gradually moving beyond the traditional concept of special education, which focused solely on individual work with the pupil, and is increasingly oriented towards supporting the entire educational process and creating an inclusive school climate.

The professional competences of special needs teachers are significantly linked to the quality of inclusive education. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) point out that inclusive education requires teaching staff to be able to respond flexibly to the diversity of pupils and to develop educational strategies that support the participation of all pupils without segregating them. A special needs teacher should therefore possess not only specialist knowledge in the fields of psychopedagogy and special educational diagnostics, but also competences in communication, teamwork and the methodological guidance of teaching staff.

An important aspect of the special needs teacher's professional role is collaboration with teachers in mainstream schools. Research shows that teachers often view inclusive education positively as an abstract concept, yet at the same time point to a lack of professional support, methodological guidance and professional confidence when working with pupils with special educational needs (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Special needs teachers can thus make a significant contribution to the development of the teaching staff's inclusive competencies through consultation, methodological support and participation in the creation of individualised educational strategies. Cooperative learning, which replaces traditional competitiveness, plays a crucial role in strengthening social bonds among students and developing their collaborative skills. (Bačova, 2024)

In relation to the professional preparedness of teaching staff, the issue of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education is frequently discussed in the specialist literature. Sharma et al. (2018) state that positive attitudes among teachers are primarily associated with previous experience of inclusion, the availability of support services and a sense of professional competence. Conversely, insufficient training in special education, a high administrative burden or a lack of staff support can lead to professional uncertainty and increased psychological stress among teaching staff.

The school climate and the overall school culture are also significant determinants of the quality of inclusive education. Ainscow (2020) emphasises that inclusion cannot be achieved solely through individual work with pupils, but must be part of a broader school philosophy based on participation, respect and support for diversity. School leadership plays a key role in this process, as it influences the organisational conditions of education, the availability of support measures, and support for the professional development of teaching staff.

Key factors in promoting inclusive education include a system of support measures and the availability of specialist services. Current education systems utilise a wide range of support mechanisms, including teaching assistants, school counselling services, adaptations to the curriculum, individualised education plans and special educational support (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022). However, the effectiveness of these measures depends on their coordination, continuity and ability to reflect the individual needs of a specific pupil.

Cooperation between the school and the family is also a key element in supporting inclusion. Epstein (2018) states that the active involvement of parents in the educational process has a positive impact on pupils' academic success, their social adaptation and their motivation to learn. At the same time, the family represents an important source of information about the pupil's needs and a significant partner in establishing support measures. Effective communication between the school and the family is often associated with greater success in inclusive education and a more positive social climate at school.

In recent years, the importance of digital technologies and ICT as tools to support inclusive education has become increasingly prominent. Modern technologies enable the individualisation of teaching, enhance the clarity of the educational process, and can significantly contribute to the development of communication and social skills among pupils with special educational needs (UNESCO, 2023). Norwich

(2013) points out that the effective use of technology in inclusive education is not solely dependent on a school's technical equipment, but primarily on the ability of teaching staff to meaningfully integrate technology into the educational process.

Despite the development of support measures and the growing emphasis on inclusive education, the issue of systemic support for schools remains a significant challenge in current educational practice. Research shows that the long-term sustainability of inclusion is closely linked to the availability of specialist staff, opportunities for further training for teachers, staffing levels in schools, and support for multidisciplinary collaboration (Slee, 2018). Inclusive education cannot therefore be understood merely as the individual responsibility of individual teachers, but as a complex process requiring long-term systemic support for the entire educational environment.

Research

Research Objective

The aim of this research was to analyse the perspectives of teaching staff on the issue of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities in the contemporary school environment. The research focused primarily on identifying the factors that teachers consider key to the successful implementation of inclusion, whilst also identifying the barriers complicating the education of these pupils in a mainstream school environment.

Attention was paid primarily to the perceived professional preparedness of teaching staff, the importance of support measures, the role of the special needs teacher, cooperation between the school and the family, and the overall feasibility of inclusive education at lower secondary level. The research also reflected the broader context of inclusive education, which encompasses not only pedagogical aspects but also the organisational, staffing and psychosocial conditions of the school environment.

Based on theoretical foundations and existing professional knowledge, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do teaching staff assess the feasibility of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools?
2. What factors do teachers consider most important for the successful implementation of inclusive education?
3. What barriers most frequently complicate the education of pupils with intellectual disabilities in an inclusive environment?
4. How do teachers assess the importance of support measures and professional support in the inclusion process?
5. What role do teaching staff attribute to cooperation between the school, the family and specialist staff?

The research was designed to contribute to a deeper understanding of current educational practice and to formulate recommendations supporting the more effective implementation of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities within the context of the current education system.

Characteristics of the research design

The research was conducted through a quantitatively oriented survey based on a questionnaire method. The chosen research design enabled the collection of a broader spectrum of data concerning teaching staff's attitudes towards the inclusive education of pupils with intellectual disabilities, whilst also identifying factors supporting and barriers to the inclusive educational process.

The quantitative approach was chosen in view of the possibility of systematic data processing, comparison of individual areas of research, and capturing the frequency of occurrence of the phenomena under study in educational practice. In the field of educational research, the questionnaire survey is one of the most frequently used methods for ascertaining respondents' attitudes, experiences and

subjective evaluations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research design was based on a descriptive-analytical approach, the aim of which was not the experimental verification of causal relationships, but the identification and interpretation of selected aspects of inclusive education in mainstream school settings. The emphasis was primarily on reflecting on the respondents' pedagogical experience, their professional perception of inclusion, and the identification of factors influencing the provision of education for pupils with intellectual disabilities.

The questionnaire survey was conducted anonymously, which allowed respondents to express their views and experiences related to inclusive education more openly. The research instrument contained both closed and semi-closed items focusing on specific areas of the research, in particular:

- teachers' experiences with inclusive education,
- perceived professional preparedness,
- support measures,
- barriers to inclusion,
- cooperation among professional staff,
- and conditions in the school environment.

The construction of the research instrument reflected the theoretical foundations of inclusive education and the findings of recent international studies focusing on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Sharma et al., 2018). The research design also respected the fundamental ethical principles of educational research, in particular the anonymity of respondents, voluntary participation and the confidentiality of the data collected.

Research sample

The research sample comprised a total of 94 teaching staff working in primary schools in the Czech Republic, including schools established under Section 16 of Act No. 561/2004 Coll., the Education Act, as amended. The research survey included teaching staff with experience of

educating pupils with intellectual disabilities or special educational needs in an inclusive environment.

Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, with an emphasis on their professional experience with inclusive education. The research focused primarily on teaching staff working in lower secondary schools, as lower secondary education represents a specific and pedagogically demanding area of educational practice in terms of the inclusion of pupils with intellectual disabilities. This level of education is typically characterised by higher demands on pupils' independence, abstract thinking and social adaptation, which can significantly influence the implementation of inclusive education (Norwich, 2013).

Respondents were contacted electronically via an online questionnaire. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents' anonymity was ensured in order to encourage open responses and minimise potential bias in the results caused by social desirability. The study also adhered to the fundamental ethical principles of educational research, particularly voluntary participation, protection of respondents' anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Table 1. Characteristics of the research sample (N = 94)

Characteristics	n	%
Women	72	76.6
Men	22	23.4
Up to 5 years' experience	18	19.1
Experience 6–15 years	31	33.0
16 or more years' experience	45	47.9
Standard/mainstream primary school	61	64.9
School established under Section 16	28	29.8
Other	5	5.3

Source: own compilation

A total of 94 teaching staff working in primary schools, including schools established under Section 16 of the Education Act, took part in the survey. Women predominated in the sample (76.6%), which is consistent with the long-term trend towards the feminisation of the teaching profession. The largest proportion of respondents were teachers with more than 16 years' experience (47.9%). Most respondents worked in mainstream primary schools (64.9%), whilst 29.8% of teachers worked in schools or classes established under Section 16 of the Education Act.

Research tool

A non-standardised questionnaire of our own design, focusing on the issue of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities in a primary school setting, was used as the research tool. The design of the questionnaire was based on the theoretical foundations of inclusive education and also reflected the findings of international studies focusing on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Sharma et al., 2018).

The questionnaire contained closed-ended items focusing on several key areas of research:

- teachers' experiences with inclusive education,
- perceived feasibility of inclusion,
- teachers' professional preparedness,
- the importance of support measures,
- barriers to inclusive education,
- cooperation between professionals and families,
- and the conditions of the school environment.

The questionnaire items were formulated with an emphasis on clarity, content relevance and the ability to capture respondents' professional attitudes. The research tool was distributed electronically, which enabled more effective outreach to respondents from various educational institutions and simultaneously facilitated anonymous data collection.

A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted prior to the actual research survey. The aim of the pilot was to verify the clarity of the wording of individual items, the logical structure of the questionnaire and the time required to complete it. Based on the pilot test, only minor formal adjustments were made to the wording of some questions, which did not affect the content focus of the research tool.

When designing the questionnaire, emphasis was placed on the content validity of the research instrument and its alignment with the main research objectives. The research instrument was designed to capture not only the general attitudes of teaching staff towards inclusion, but also specific experiences and factors influencing the implementation of inclusive education in teaching practice.

Data processing and analysis

The data obtained were processed using descriptive statistical methods. The evaluation of the questionnaire survey focused primarily on identifying the frequency of individual responses and interpreting the attitudes of teaching staff towards the inclusive education of pupils with intellectual disabilities in a primary school setting.

The results were analysed with an emphasis on specific thematic areas of the research, in particular:

- teachers' experiences with inclusive education,
- the perceived feasibility of inclusion,
- teachers' professional preparedness,
- the benefits of inclusive education,
- barriers to inclusion,
- supporting factors in education,
- and the importance of cooperation between teaching staff and families.

The data were analysed using absolute and relative frequencies of responses. The results were subsequently interpreted in the context of current theoretical knowledge and specialist studies focusing on the issue of inclusive

education. A descriptive-analytical approach enabled us to capture the professional experiences of the respondents and identify key factors influencing the implementation of inclusive education in teaching practice.

In interpreting the results, emphasis was placed not only on the frequency of responses themselves, but also on their broader educational and social context. The research data were used to formulate recommendations for educational practice and to reflect on the current state of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities in lower secondary education.

Limitations of the research

The present study has several limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting the results. The first limitation is the size and nature of the research sample. The study involved 94 teaching staff working in primary schools in the Czech Republic, with respondents selected through purposive sampling. The results cannot therefore be considered fully representative of the entire population of teaching staff in the Czech education system. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the research was based on the respondents' subjective assessments, which may be influenced by individual professional experience, current working conditions or personal attitudes towards inclusive education.

Another limitation of the research is the use of a quantitatively oriented questionnaire survey, which allows for the capture of a broader spectrum of educational staff attitudes but does not provide a deeper understanding of respondents' individual experiences. At the same time, the questionnaire method limits the possibility of a more detailed interpretation of certain contexts and factors influencing the implementation of inclusive education in the specific conditions of school practice. Furthermore, the research was conducted within the Czech education system, and the results obtained may therefore be influenced by the specific legislative, organisational and cultural conditions of Czech education.

Another limitation is that the research primarily reflected the perspective of teaching staff and did not include the views of other stakeholders in the educational process, such as pupils' parents, pupils with special educational needs themselves, or specialists from school counselling services. Future research could therefore focus on a more in-depth qualitative analysis of the experiences of individual stakeholders in inclusive education and on a comparison of different perspectives relating to the issue of the inclusion of pupils with intellectual disabilities in the contemporary school environment.

Table 2. Teachers' experiences with inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities (N = 94)

Area of experience	n	%
Direct experience of educating a pupil with an intellectual disability	81	86.2
Repeated experience with the inclusion of pupils with SEN	67	71.3
Experience with creating IEPs	74	78.7
Cooperation with a teaching assistant	79	84.0
Cooperation with a special needs teacher	72	76.6
Negative experience with the implementation of inclusion	39	41.5
Mostly positive experience with inclusion	55	58.5

Source: own analysis

The results showed that the majority of respondents had direct experience of educating pupils with intellectual disabilities in a mainstream primary school setting. A total of 86.2% of teaching staff stated that they had encountered the education of pupils with intellectual disabilities during their teaching practice, with more than two-thirds of respondents having repeated experience of inclusive education. A significant proportion of teachers also reported experience of working with teaching assistants (84.0%) and special needs teachers (76.6%), which confirms the importance of multidisciplinary support in inclusive education. Although some respondents reported negative experiences associated with the implementation of inclusion, the majority of teaching staff rated their experiences with inclusive education as generally positive.

Research findings

Teachers' experiences with inclusive education

A total of 94 teaching staff working in primary schools, including schools established under Section 16 of the Education Act, took part in the survey. The results showed that the majority of respondents had direct experience of educating pupils with mild intellectual disabilities in a mainstream school setting.

Teaching staff perceived inclusive education as a standard part of current teaching practice, though their experiences varied significantly. Respondents repeatedly highlighted the fact that the implementation of inclusion is significantly influenced by the specific conditions of the school, the availability of support measures, and the professional support of the teaching team. In their open-ended responses, teachers most frequently emphasised the importance of cooperation with the special needs teacher and teaching assistant as key factors influencing the manageability of inclusive education.

At the same time, the results showed that teachers perceive the inclusion of pupils with mild intellectual disabilities in lower secondary school as significantly more demanding compared to primary education. Respondents mentioned, in particular, greater demands on the organisation of teaching, the difficulty of individualising the

educational process, and the high heterogeneity of class groups. These findings correspond with international research – for example, Charitaki et al. (2024) – according to which secondary school teachers more frequently highlight the time-consuming nature of inclusion and the difficulty of implementing individualised teaching under standard school conditions.

Another significant finding was the confirmation of the hypothesis that teachers with longer teaching experience evaluate inclusive education more critically than those with less professional experience. Respondents with longer experience more frequently highlighted organisational complications, an increased administrative burden, and limited opportunities for individual work with pupils in a mainstream classroom. This trend corresponds to the conclusions of the meta-analytical studies by Avramidis and Norwich (2002), which highlight the fact that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are significantly influenced by professional experience and the actual conditions of teaching practice.

Perceived feasibility of inclusion and teachers' professional preparedness

One of the key areas of the research was the assessment of the feasibility of inclusive education for pupils with mild intellectual disabilities in lower secondary school. The results showed that respondents' views on this issue were markedly varied. Some teaching staff considered inclusion to be feasible provided there was sufficient professional and staffing support, whilst other respondents expressed uncertainty or scepticism regarding the practical feasibility of inclusion under normal school conditions.

A key issue was the professional preparedness of teachers to work with pupils with mild intellectual disabilities. Analysis of the responses showed that teaching staff did not perceive their professional preparedness uniformly. Some respondents declared that they had sufficient professional competence to work in an inclusive environment, whilst other teachers reported uncertainty, particularly regarding the use of special educational methods, the organisation of

differentiated teaching, and the implementation of support measures.

At the same time, respondents repeatedly emphasised the importance of further training for teaching staff and the availability of professional support. Teachers stated that a positive experience with inclusion is significantly linked to the opportunity to consult with a special needs teacher, the sharing of experiences, and effective collaboration within the teaching team. The importance of professional support was highlighted across respondents' answers, regardless of the length of their teaching experience or the type of school.

The research findings also showed that teachers often have mixed feelings about inclusive education. Whilst respondents acknowledged the social significance of inclusion and its potential benefits for the development of social skills in pupils with intellectual disabilities, they also highlighted the high time and organisational demands of teaching. Teachers mentioned in particular a lack of time for individual work with pupils, high class sizes, and the increased administrative burden associated with inclusive education.

These findings are consistent with international research focusing on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Sharma et al. (2018) report that teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusion are significantly related to their level of professional competence, the availability of support measures, and experience with inclusive teaching practices. Similarly, Hornby and Kauffman (2024) point out that the education of pupils with intellectual disabilities is often perceived by teachers as one of the most challenging areas of inclusive education, given the need for intensive individualisation and long-term support.

The benefits of inclusive education from the perspective of teaching staff

The results of the research survey showed that teaching staff did not view inclusive education solely through the prism of organisational and pedagogical difficulties, but also reflected on its

significant social and educational benefits. Respondents most frequently associated inclusion with the development of pupils' social skills, the promotion of tolerance, and the creation of a natural social environment enabling mutual interaction between pupils without special educational needs and those with special educational needs.

Table 3. Benefits of inclusive education from the perspective of teaching staff (N = 94)

Benefits of inclusive education	n	%
Fostering tolerance among pupils	83	88.3
Supporting the social inclusion of pupils with special educational needs	79	84.0
Developing empathy and respect	76	80.9
Positive impact on the class atmosphere	69	73.4
Development of pupils' social skills	74	78.7
Promoting cooperation among pupils	63	67.0
Benefits for pupils in mainstream classes	58	61.7

Source: own analysis

Respondents perceived inclusive education not only as a pedagogical challenge, but also as a significant means of supporting the social participation of pupils with intellectual disabilities. Most frequently, teaching staff cited the development of tolerance among pupils (88.3%) and the promotion of social inclusion for pupils with intellectual disabilities (84.0%). A significant proportion of respondents also highlighted the positive impact of inclusion on the development of pupils' empathy, respect and social skills. More than two-thirds of teachers stated that inclusive education positively influences the social climate of the class and promotes cooperation among pupils. The results confirm that teaching staff perceive inclusion not only as an educational concept, but also as an important social tool that fosters positive relationships among pupils.

Teachers repeatedly stated that inclusive education can positively influence the social

inclusion of pupils with intellectual disabilities and support their ability to form social relationships within a mainstream peer group. Respondents also emphasised the importance of inclusion for the development of empathy, respect and mutual cooperation among pupils. These findings are consistent with current international studies, which indicate that inclusive education significantly contributes to building a positive social climate in schools and supports the social participation of pupils with special educational needs (Ainscow, 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

Another significant finding was that teaching staff often perceived inclusion as beneficial not only for pupils with intellectual disabilities, but also for the general pupil population. Respondents stated that contact with pupils with special educational needs can positively influence the attitudes of the general pupil population towards difference and support the development of social sensitivity and tolerance. This trend is also confirmed by international research focusing on the social impacts of inclusive education, which highlights the importance of inclusion in shaping prosocial attitudes and a positive school climate (Slee, 2018).

At the same time, respondents emphasised that the benefits of inclusive education are significantly dependent on the quality of the organisation of the educational process and the availability of support measures. Teachers repeatedly stated that the positive impacts of inclusion are most pronounced in environments where sufficient professional support is provided, there is effective collaboration within the teaching team, and realistic educational conditions are established for pupils with intellectual disabilities.

The results also showed that teachers associate the success of inclusive education with the possibility of individualising teaching and respecting pupils' specific needs. Respondents stated that effective inclusion requires flexible organisation of the educational process, sufficient time for individual work, and the possibility of differentiating educational content. These

conclusions correspond with the study by Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011), which emphasises the importance of inclusive pedagogy based on the active participation of all pupils and an individualised approach to education.

Barriers to inclusive education in lower secondary school

One of the most significant areas of the research was the identification of barriers affecting the implementation of inclusive education for pupils with mild intellectual disabilities in lower secondary school. The results showed that teaching staff perceive inclusion as a pedagogically and organisationally demanding process, the effective implementation of which is limited by a number of systemic factors.

Table 4. Barriers to inclusive education from the perspective of teaching staff (N = 94)

Barrier to inclusive education	n	%
High number of pupils in the class	82	87.2
Lack of time for individualised teaching	79	84.0
Increased administrative burden	71	75.5
Insufficient staffing at the school	68	72.3
Lack of specialist support	63	67.0
Lack of methodological support	58	61.7
Lack of teaching assistants	54	57.4
Inadequate material conditions	41	43.6

Source: own analysis

The results of the survey showed that teaching staff perceive the most significant barriers to inclusive education to be, above all, high class sizes (87.2%) and a lack of time for individualised teaching (84.0%). Respondents also highlighted the increased administrative burden associated with implementing support measures (75.5%) and insufficient staffing in schools (72.3%). A significant proportion of teachers also noted the limited availability of professional and methodological support. More than half of the respondents cited a lack of teaching assistants as a factor negatively affecting the implementation

of inclusive education. The data obtained confirm that the effective implementation of inclusion is significantly dependent on the organisational, staffing and systemic conditions of the school environment.

Respondents most frequently cited large class sizes and limited opportunities for individual work with pupils as the main barrier. Teachers pointed out that the heterogeneous composition of class groups significantly complicates the differentiation of teaching and the setting of individual educational strategies. At the same time, the time-consuming nature of lesson preparation and the administrative burden associated with implementing support measures were frequently mentioned.

Respondents also perceived insufficient staffing support in schools as a significant barrier. Teaching staff repeatedly highlighted the shortage of special needs teachers, school psychologists and teaching assistants. Respondents also noted that the effectiveness of inclusion is significantly influenced by the possibility of regular professional collaboration and the availability of methodological support. These findings correspond to the conclusions of the study by Sharma et al. (2018), according to which teachers regard insufficient professional support as one of the most significant factors negatively affecting the implementation of inclusive education.

Another key issue was the professional preparedness of teaching staff. Some respondents reported feeling uncertain when working with pupils with intellectual disabilities, particularly regarding the use of special educational methods, the implementation of support measures, and the organisation of differentiated teaching. At the same time, teachers emphasised the need for further professional training and systematic methodological support. These findings correspond with international research highlighting the importance of teachers' professional competence as one of the key determinants of successful inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Norwich, 2013).

Respondents also highlighted the issue of insufficient systemic support for schools and the mismatch between the legislative framework for inclusion and the practical realities of teaching. Teaching staff frequently expressed a sense of high professional responsibility without corresponding personnel and organisational support. This trend is also confirmed by recent international studies, which highlight the fact that the long-term sustainability of inclusive education depends not only on legislative support, but above all on the availability of human, organisational and material resources (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022).

Factors supporting inclusive education

The results of the research survey showed that teaching staff consider the availability of support measures to be one of the most significant factors influencing the quality of inclusive education for pupils with mild intellectual disabilities. Respondents repeatedly emphasised the importance of staff support, particularly the presence of a teaching assistant and collaboration with a special needs teacher. Teachers stated that it is precisely the opportunity for regular consultation and methodological support that significantly contributes to managing the demands associated with the individualisation of teaching and the organisation of the educational process.

Table 5. Factors supporting inclusive education from the perspective of teaching staff (N = 94)

Inclusion support factor	n	%
Teaching assistant	81	86.2
Cooperation with a special needs teacher	77	81.9
Teamwork among teachers	74	78.7
Further training for teaching staff	72	76.6
Cooperation between school and family	69	73.4
Smaller class sizes	67	71.3
Availability of methodological support	61	64.9

Inclusion support factor	n	%
Support from school management	58	61.7

Source: own analysis

Teaching staff linked the success of inclusive education primarily to the availability of specialist support and high-quality cooperation between the various stakeholders in the educational process. Respondents identified the presence of a teaching assistant (86.2%) and cooperation with a special needs teacher (81.9%) as the most significant factors in this support. A significant proportion of teachers also emphasised the importance of teamwork among teaching staff and further professional development in the field of inclusive education. More than two-thirds of respondents also cited cooperation between the school and the family and the possibility of education in smaller class groups as important factors in support. The results confirm that the effective implementation of inclusive education is significantly dependent on the availability of personnel, methodological and organisational support.

A significant finding was that most respondents linked the success of inclusion to the quality of teamwork among individual teaching staff. Teachers reported that effective communication between teachers, teaching assistants, special needs teachers and school management positively influences not only the organisation of the educational process, but also the overall school climate and the adaptation of pupils with special educational needs. These conclusions are consistent with international studies focusing on inclusive education, which emphasise the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration and collective professional support as one of the main prerequisites for successful inclusion (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Ainscow, 2020).

Respondents also emphasised the importance of smaller class sizes and the opportunity for individual work with pupils. Teachers noted that smaller class sizes allow for more effective differentiation of teaching, better organisation of the educational process, and higher-quality support for pupils with intellectual disabilities. At

the same time, respondents pointed out that implementing inclusive education tends to be significantly more difficult in large class groups. This trend is also confirmed by international research focusing on inclusive education at secondary school level, according to which class size significantly influences the possibilities for individualising the educational process (Norwich, 2013).

The research findings also showed that teachers regard further professional development for teaching staff as a key factor in support. Respondents highlighted the need for continuous development of competences in the areas of special education, differentiated teaching and working with a heterogeneous group of pupils. Teachers frequently mentioned that practice-oriented training and the opportunity to share experiences with other professionals positively influence their professional confidence when implementing inclusive education. These findings correspond with the study by Sharma et al. (2018), according to which teachers' professional preparedness is one of the key determinants of positive attitudes towards inclusion.

The availability of the school's material and organisational resources was also perceived by respondents as a significant area of support. Teachers emphasised the importance of suitable teaching aids, the possibility of adapting educational content, and sufficient time for preparing individualised lessons. At the same time, the need for long-term systemic support for schools and stable funding for support measures was highlighted.

Cooperation between schools, families and specialist staff

The results of the research confirmed that teaching staff consider cooperation between schools, families and specialist staff to be one of the key factors influencing the success of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities. Respondents repeatedly emphasised that effective communication between the school and the family significantly contributes to the pupil's better adaptation, the stability of the

educational process and the continuity of support between the school and home environments.

Table 6. Professional preparedness of teaching staff for inclusive education (N = 94)

Area of professional preparedness	n	%
Feel professionally prepared for inclusion	46	48.9
They don't feel sufficiently prepared	48	51.1
Need for further training in inclusion	83	88.3
Need for methodological support	76	80.9
Interest in practice-oriented education	79	84.0
Experience with special educational training	58	61.7
Need for closer cooperation with specialists	71	75.5

Source: own analysis

The results of the survey showed that teaching staff did not have a clear view of their professional preparedness for inclusive education. Approximately half of the respondents stated that they felt professionally prepared to teach pupils with intellectual disabilities, whilst 51.1% of teachers reported a lack of professional confidence in this area. At the same time, a significant majority of respondents expressed a need for further training focused on inclusive education (88.3%) and the availability of methodological support (80.9%). Teachers repeatedly emphasised the importance of practice-oriented training and closer cooperation with specialists, particularly special needs teachers and staff at school counselling centres. The results confirm that the professional competences of teaching staff are one of the key factors influencing the quality of inclusive education.

Teachers reported that active parental involvement positively influences pupils' motivation, their school attendance and the overall effectiveness of the educational process. At the same time, respondents pointed out that insufficient communication between the school

and the family can complicate the implementation of support measures and negatively affect pupils' educational outcomes. These findings are consistent with international studies by Epstein (2018), according to which active family involvement significantly supports pupils' academic success and positively influences the school's social climate.

Another key topic was the collaboration between teaching staff and specialist institutions and school counselling services. Respondents stated that consultations with special needs teachers, psychologists and counsellors significantly contribute to the more effective implementation of support measures and the organisation of the educational process. At the same time, teachers emphasised the importance of methodological support when working with pupils with intellectual disabilities and the need for long-term professional cooperation.

The results further showed that the quality of cooperation between the various stakeholders in the educational process significantly influences teaching staff's attitudes towards inclusion. Respondents who rated the cooperation between the school, family and specialists positively were also more likely to perceive inclusive education as a feasible and beneficial concept. Conversely, teachers who reported insufficient communication or limited professional support were more likely to express scepticism towards the practical implementation of inclusion.

These findings correspond with current international research on inclusive education, which highlights the fact that effective inclusion is not based solely on the individual work of the teacher, but primarily on high-quality multidisciplinary cooperation and shared responsibility among all stakeholders in the educational process (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Hornby, 2015). At the same time, it is confirmed that supporting inclusive education requires not only an appropriate legislative framework, but also the long-term development of partnerships between schools, families and specialist institutions.

Discussion

This study focused on the issue of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities from the perspective of teaching staff working in primary schools. The results of the research survey showed that teachers perceive inclusive education as an important tool for supporting the social participation and educational opportunities of pupils with special educational needs; at the same time, however, they highlight a number of factors that complicate its effective implementation in mainstream school settings. The data obtained confirm that teaching staff's attitudes towards inclusion are not unequivocally negative, but rather contingent upon specific organisational, staffing and methodological conditions of teaching practice.

A significant finding of the research was the confirmation that teaching staff associate the success of inclusive education primarily with the availability of specialist support and effective multidisciplinary cooperation. Respondents repeatedly emphasised the importance of the special needs teacher, teaching assistant and school counselling services as key elements in supporting the educational process. These results correspond with the conclusions of Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011), according to whom inclusive education is effective only if teachers are not isolated in the inclusion process and have access to systematic professional support. Similarly, Hornby (2015) points out that insufficient staff support is one of the most common reasons for the failure of inclusive educational practice.

At the same time, the results showed that teaching staff significantly reflect on the issue of professional preparedness for educating pupils with intellectual disabilities. Respondents frequently cited uncertainty regarding the differentiation of teaching, the use of special educational methods, and the organisation of education within a heterogeneous class. This trend is confirmed by the study by Sharma et al. (2018), according to which teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusion are significantly linked to their level of professional competence and

experience with inclusive educational practice. At the same time, it appears that insufficient methodological support can lead to professional uncertainty among teaching staff and negatively influence their attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education.

Another significant research topic was the issue of barriers to inclusive education in lower secondary schools. Respondents most frequently cited high class sizes, the time-consuming nature of differentiated teaching, and limited opportunities for individual work with pupils. At the same time, teachers highlighted the increased administrative burden and insufficient staffing levels in schools. These findings correspond with studies by Norwich (2013) and Slee (2018), which draw attention to the fact that inclusive education is often implemented in teaching practice under conditions of insufficient systemic support and high organisational demands. At the same time, it is confirmed that inclusion is generally perceived positively by teachers primarily at the level of an ideological concept, whilst its practical implementation is associated with a significantly higher professional workload.

The research findings also showed that teaching staff do not perceive inclusion merely as a source of pedagogical difficulties, but also as a significant social benefit for all pupils. Respondents particularly emphasised the promotion of tolerance, the development of social skills, and the opportunity for natural social interaction between typically developing pupils and those with intellectual disabilities. These conclusions correspond with the concept of inclusive education presented by Ainscow (2020), according to whom inclusion is not merely an educational strategy, but also a means of supporting social cohesion and participation. At the same time, the results confirm that teachers perceive the social dimension of inclusion as one of the most significant arguments in favour of inclusive education.

Another significant area of research was cooperation between school and family. Respondents repeatedly stated that active communication with parents positively

influences the stability of the educational process, the effectiveness of support measures, and the pupil's social adaptation. These conclusions are consistent with studies by Epstein (2018), which emphasise the importance of partnership between school and family as one of the fundamental prerequisites for the successful education of pupils with special educational needs. At the same time, it appears that insufficient communication between the school and the family can complicate the implementation of support measures and negatively affect the overall effectiveness of inclusive education.

This research also highlights a certain ambivalence among teaching staff towards the inclusive education of pupils with intellectual disabilities. Whilst teachers support the principle of inclusive education and recognise its social benefits, they also point to a discrepancy between the legislative requirements for inclusion and the practical realities of teaching. This trend is also evident in international studies, which highlight the fact that the long-term sustainability of inclusive education depends not only on legislative support, but above all on the actual availability of human, organisational and methodological resources (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022).

The findings thus confirm that inclusive education cannot be viewed merely as the individual responsibility of teaching staff, but as a complex process requiring systematic support from schools, specialist institutions and education policy. The effective implementation of inclusion for pupils with intellectual disabilities depends not only on the professional competence of teachers, but also on the quality of the school climate, the availability of specialist support, and the creation of conditions enabling an individualised approach to education. Future professional discussion should therefore focus not only on the concept of inclusion itself, but above all on the possibilities for creating genuinely functional conditions for its long-term sustainable implementation in educational practice.

Recommendations for educational practice

Based on the results of the research study, several recommendations can be formulated to support the more effective implementation of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities in primary school settings. The data obtained show that the success of inclusive education is significantly influenced not only by the professional preparedness of teaching staff, but also by the quality of systemic support, the organisation of the educational process, and the level of cooperation between the various stakeholders in education.

Support for the professional development of teaching staff can be considered a key area. The research showed that teachers often express uncertainty when working with pupils with intellectual disabilities, particularly in the areas of individualising teaching, using special educational methods, and organising education within a heterogeneous class. In practice, it is therefore desirable to enhance the availability of further training focused on inclusive pedagogy, differentiated teaching and working with pupils with special educational needs. At the same time, it is advisable to encourage the sharing of experiences among teaching staff and the development of professional collaboration within school teams. Staffing levels in schools are also a key area for supporting inclusive education. Research findings confirm the importance of collaboration with special needs teachers, teaching assistants and school counselling services. In educational practice, it therefore appears essential to ensure the long-term availability of specialist staff and to support multidisciplinary cooperation when establishing support measures for pupils with intellectual disabilities. Attention should also be paid to the organisational conditions of education. Teaching staff have repeatedly highlighted the issue of large class sizes and the limited opportunities for individual work with pupils. From the perspective of educational practice, it therefore seems appropriate to promote organisational conditions that enable more effective differentiation of teaching, flexible organisation

of the educational process, and higher-quality support for pupils with special educational needs.

At the same time, the research confirmed the importance of cooperation between the school and the family. Active communication with parents and their involvement in the educational process are important prerequisites for the effective implementation of support measures and the stability of the educational process. In educational practice, it is therefore desirable to develop a partnership-based approach between the school and the family and to support open communication among all stakeholders in education.

Systematic methodological support for teaching staff can also be considered a key area of support. The research findings show that teachers view the availability of professional consultations, methodological guidance and practical recommendations for working with pupils with intellectual disabilities positively. An appropriate measure could be to strengthen methodological support for schools through school counselling centres, specialist centres or specialised educational institutions. At the same time, the research findings suggest a need for long-term systemic support for inclusive education at the level of education policy. The effective implementation of inclusion requires not only an appropriate legislative framework, but also stable funding for support measures, the availability of specialist staff, and support for the professional development of teaching staff. Inclusive education thus represents a complex process, the quality of which depends on cooperation between teaching practice, specialist institutions and education policy.

Conclusion

This research article focused on the issue of inclusive education for pupils with intellectual disabilities in the contemporary school environment from the perspective of teaching staff. The aim of the research was to analyse teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, identify factors supporting inclusion, and simultaneously highlight the barriers affecting the

provision of education for pupils with intellectual disabilities in lower secondary school.

The results of the research survey showed that teaching staff perceive inclusive education as an important social and pedagogical concept supporting pupils' social participation and the development of their social skills. At the same time, however, respondents highlighted a number of organisational, staffing and methodological difficulties associated with the practical implementation of inclusion in mainstream schools. The most significant barriers included high class sizes, limited opportunities for individualised teaching, the administrative burden on teaching staff, and insufficient staffing levels in schools. The research also confirmed the importance of professional support and multidisciplinary cooperation for the effective implementation of inclusive education. Teaching staff repeatedly emphasised the importance of cooperation with special needs teachers, teaching assistants, school counselling services and the pupil's family. The availability of support measures and the opportunity for professional consultations were also viewed positively. Another significant finding was the confirmation that teaching staff's attitudes towards inclusion

are significantly influenced by their level of professional preparedness, the availability of expert support, and the specific conditions of their teaching practice. Teachers highlighted the need for further professional development and systematic methodological support in the field of inclusive education and working with pupils with intellectual disabilities.

The present research also confirms that inclusive education cannot be understood merely as a legislative requirement or an organisational measure, but as a long-term pedagogical and social process requiring systematic support from schools, teaching staff and the wider education system. The successful implementation of inclusion depends not only on the availability of support measures, but also on the creation of a school environment based on respect, participation and an individualised approach to the education of each pupil.

The research findings may contribute to a deeper understanding of the current challenges facing the inclusive education of pupils with intellectual disabilities and, at the same time, provide a stimulus for further professional discussion on ways to support inclusive teaching practices within the current education system.

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