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## Non-subject teaching in years 5 and 6: legislative changes and institutional implementation routes<sup>12</sup>

**Abstract** The aim of our study was to discover the features of the implementation process, the way in which it was carried out at local and institutional level, and the ways in which localities and institutions adapted to the changes in different contexts. For the purposes of our study we chose some regulations which came into force between 2004 and 2009 and made changes to processes relating to enrolment and/or pupil progression. In the study we sought to follow the implementation processes in primary schools and among the maintainers of those schools in three areas: in a district of Budapest, a small town, and a village close to the small town. The research was based on qualitative methods, analysis of documentary evidence and case studies. Our research found that the introduction of non-subject teaching presented a serious challenge to primary school heads and teachers. Most of the schools we studied were not really receptive to the changes, and typically, similar problems soon appeared (e.g. lack of understanding, the differing interests of lower and upper school teachers, dissatisfaction with training courses, apathy, etc.) Altogether it seems that although various routes to successful implementation are open even from a less favourable starting position, it seems that success cannot be achieved without the commitment of the school leadership and without the willingness of teachers to be actively involved.

### *Keywords*

competencies, educational change, implementation, non-subject teaching, regional differences, teachers' role

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<sup>1</sup>This study presents the concept and some initial results of Project 7.3.5 within TÁMOP 3.1.1 [Social Renewal Operative Programme]. The project aims to contribute to knowledge about the processes of change observed at local and institutional level as a result of central initiatives, through a closer examination of local and institution-level management processes. The changes studied are linked to some legislative changes which came into force between 2004 and 2009, relating to enrolment and progression at school.

<sup>2</sup>In order to prevent identification of specific institutions, all names are fictitious.

## 1. Introduction

The implementation of changes dictated by central initiatives has become an issue in its own right since the 1970s and 80s following failures of education reforms (e.g. McLaughlin, 1975; Fullan, 2000). Questions relating to implementation have sought to shed light on the possibilities and processes of putting into practice educational changes initiated from above. One possible tool for central initiatives is legislation. Features common to legislative changes are that they reflect central intentions, they come into effect at the same time for all those affected, and in principle they affect all the actors, institutions and local authorities involved equally. There is very little systematic information in the Hungarian literature about similarities or differences in the way changes are implemented in individual areas, and the likely reasons for this. This question is particularly acute where the changes initiated by central government and introduced through legislation require a more complex approach, and in many cases also a change in professional practice and attitude from those charged with implementing them. The following is an extract from a recent research on this issue, relating to the introduction of non-subject teaching in years 5 and 6.<sup>3</sup>

### Questions and areas for research

Our research was modest in scope and means, and sought to follow changes which are initiated from above, enforced by legal means, and have a direct or indirect effect on issues of enrolment to schools, pupil progress, and organisation of learning, with aims linked to education policies seeking to help learning. Since the research project as a whole was undertaking to find out the effects at local and institutional level of initiatives introduced from above, we chose to examine the issue from below, placing emphasis on observing processes in localities and institutions, and using qualitative methodologies. In this approach the details of the process are best revealed through following and analysing carefully chosen institutions and cases. Thus by studying the way in which some legislative changes were put into practice in a few cases, we were able to analyse the features of local and institutional functioning through observing the practice of a few institutions, thereby gaining an insight into the process of implementing central directives related to enrolment and progression in various local and institutional contexts. The ultimate aim of our study was to discover the features of the implementation process, the way in which it was carried out at local and institutional level, and the ways in which localities and institutions adapted to the changes.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Areas and methods of study*

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<sup>3</sup> The regulation was abolished by the new Public Education Act in 2011.

<sup>4</sup>For the purposes of our study we chose some regulations which came into force between 2004 and 2009 and made changes to processes relating to enrolment and/or pupil progression. The selected regulations made changes to primary school catchment areas and enrolment, limited the circumstances in which pupils could be made to repeat a year, made formative assessments compulsory, required the integration of pupils with special educational needs and multiple disadvantages, changed teaching practice in years 5 and 6 to include non-subject teaching, and restricted the right of secondary schools to select pupils for admission.

In our study we sought to follow the implementation processes in primary schools and among the maintainers of those schools in three areas. The areas were a district of Budapest, a small town, and a village close to the small town. Our research was based on qualitative methods, analysis of documentary evidence and case studies, and elaborates the experiences of the five selected schools in the three locations.<sup>5</sup> Within the case studies we made interviews with headteachers and teachers teaching in years 5 and 6, among them both class teachers who were qualified for teaching at primary level and teachers who were qualified for teaching subjects at lower secondary level of the selected schools.<sup>6</sup>

### *The district of Budapest*

The district's population shows a slight downward trend, but in the longer term it is expected to rise. The district council meets its legal obligation to provide education by maintaining 18 nursery schools, 12 primary schools and a secondary school. It also maintains an institution providing professional services. As a result of demographic changes, in the last decade the network of institutions in the district has undergone several changes. Schools were closed or amalgamated in two waves: the first was in 2003 and 2004 and involved the closure or amalgamation of several institutions; a second, smaller wave followed in 2007. In our research we analysed developments in the role of the maintainer and also the experiences of two primary schools in the district.

The district's teaching and public education duties are carried out by the Education Department of the Mayor's Office. In the first half of 2010 the department was run by a head, a deputy and eight other professional staff members. When preparing to make decisions, the department regarded it as important to conduct research and make use of appropriate data and information. They also reported making use of their own local initiatives, such as a system of district-wide surveys. In addition they became involved in many centrally led developments by bidding for funding within the National Development Plan or the New Hungary Development Plan. Through the provision of professional services<sup>7</sup> the department sought to create a supportive environment for education policymaking, and on the basis of our interviews of departmental staff we can say that in every case where a proposal was submitted which affected institutions, the schools were consulted. The education department always sought solutions based on consensus: they reported undertaking

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<sup>5</sup> Empirical data for the study was collected in the spring of 2010. We confined ourselves to elaborating and analysing these data and were not able to take account of subsequent processes.

<sup>6</sup> Altogether we have made about 30-40 interviews at the local and institutional level of the selected areas for the case studies.

<sup>7</sup> At the time of the study professional services were provided in the district by the Education Advisory Centre. The Centre undertook all duties specified in the legislation except for assessment, in which it only undertook background tasks. Among its more important tasks were the organisation of professional development, the provision of an education information and advisory service (using in-house and outside experts), including publications and regular updates for parents, teachers and the maintainer, and the organisation of competitions.

several rounds of consultation with the school heads' representative group and incorporating ideas received from school heads.

### *The small town*

Nagyványod is the second largest settlement in a moderately developed county; its population shows a slow downward trend. The population is heterogeneous, with an estimated 8-10% of Roma (gypsy) origin. The town meets its legal obligation to provide public education, and has also voluntarily taken on the task of maintaining secondary education institutions. The local authority maintains two primary schools; the remaining primary education institutions in the town are run by religious organisations or other foundations. The proportion of pupils enrolled in schools not maintained by the local authority is significant and rising. There is in-house provision of education services with the exception of careers advice. The local authority had rather more limited resources than the capital district in terms of personnel and finance, and was able to devote less attention to the planning, provision and monitoring of education services. Its scope for action was further limited by the presence of institutions run by other organisations. Communication between the local authority and the schools was more haphazard than we found in the capital. In our research we analysed the experiences of two primary schools (one maintained by the local authority and the other having a centrally administered budget), but for reasons of space we are reporting only on the local authority school.

### *The village*

Kisványod is a settlement in the micro-region of Nagyványod. The village of 1600 inhabitants lies a few kilometres from Nagyványod, the micro-regional centre. It is regarded as less developed than other nearby settlements because it has no factory, so that the population is forced to commute to work. Both the mayor and the head of the village school agree that the school plays a vital part in preventing the commuting population from leaving the village permanently. The head regards the school as "the life force of the local community", and the mayor's opinion is similar. The only primary school in the village has been run since 2008 not by the village council (though the council treats the school as its own and is committed to supporting it) but as a member of an umbrella institution integrating the primary and nursery schools of eight settlements, maintained by the micro-regional multi-purpose association. The school functioned independently with regard to most professional issues and had virtually no direct contact with the maintainer.<sup>8</sup> At the time of our visit the system had been in place for barely a year, and we saw only the first signs that the member institutions were also recognising the professional benefits which accrued from their being forced to rely on each other economically.

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<sup>8</sup>Schools submit bids and receive income through the umbrella institution; its remit also includes employment decisions (e.g. provision of subject specialists, additional funding). The primary and nursery schools belonging to the umbrella institution (a total of 18 member institutions in eight settlements) joined forces for economic reasons, and at first regarded it as a necessary evil that this forced collaboration was "dressed up" as an opportunity for professional collaboration.

We followed their first steps in exploiting the opportunities for learning from each other which arose as they met one of their first joint challenges, the introduction of non-subject teaching in years 5 and 6.

## **2. Introduction of non-subject teaching in years 5 and 6**

The possibility of non-subject teaching as a way of reinforcing basic skills was set out in Hungarian legislation in the early 1990s but its compulsory introduction came only later. It was first made compulsory for 25-50% of teaching time in years 5 and 6 in the academic year 2008-09, and in more year groups in subsequent years, by § 133 (1) of Act LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education.<sup>9</sup> The relevant legislation did not specify teaching methods or ways to organise learning; nor did it prescribe whether these year groups should be taught by people with generalist primary teaching or subject specialist teaching qualifications. The only constraints were that the time allocation for teaching could not be reduced, and that non-subject teaching could only be carried out by people who had undertaken teacher training as specified in § 17 (8) of the Act or had an appropriate professional qualification. The Education Ministry prepared a framework curriculum for non-subject teaching in order to provide methodological assistance to schools preparing for the change. Training courses were accredited by institutions providing professional services in education, but school maintainers were also allowed to bid for funding in connection with the preparations (Brassói, 2008). After a new government took office in 2010, the Education Minister amended the legislation to make non-subject teaching voluntary rather than compulsory for schools. Our analysis of the experiences of those involved in introducing and implementing non-subject teaching was carried out in 2010, before the relevant regulations were revoked. The regulation was abolished soon after the research by the new Public Education Act in 2011.

Since the regulations did not prescribe the way in which institutions had to carry out their new obligation, they were in principle able to make use of many possible methods. The obligation placed on maintainers was small and primarily related to monitoring, but the task facing institutions was difficult. They had to determine the numbers of lessons within the education programme and their distribution between subjects, develop ways of organising learning, allocate tasks relating to implementation to teachers, and ensure that their teachers were suitably prepared. A similarly complex approach, indeed a change of attitude was required from teachers too, and in many places this was accompanied by feelings of existential threat. Difficulties experienced in implementing the new system typically included distribution of lessons, teaching the compulsory curriculum, and in addition the differing interests and approaches to the task of upper and lower school teachers. In practice a large number of approaches were developed, and typically the

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<sup>9</sup> Act LXXIX of 1993, § 8 (d): (...)Non-subject teaching is done in the introductory and rudimentary phases, and also in 25-50% of the time allocated for compulsory and non-compulsory lessons in the foundation phase, in accordance with the local curriculum and adjusted to accommodate the needs of pupils; subject teaching is done in the remainder of the time allocation in the foundation phase and in the developmental phase.

requirements were formally met. What follows is a brief account of the solutions developed by the three school maintainers and five institutions participating in our study.

### *District of Budapest*

*The role of the maintainer.*<sup>10</sup> In the implementation of non-subject teaching the role of the locality was primarily a monitoring one. At the same time the local authority made efforts to develop a suitably supportive environment through its education professional services provider, providing support to primary schools. The education professional services centre sought to provide strong professional support, and set up a "non-subject teaching workshop" led by one of its lecturers. The task of this workshop was to organise training courses and introductory activities with the aim of sharing of experiences between institutions, and to develop professional collaboration with the centre's other professional workshops (e.g. the workshop set up to support the introduction of competence-based teaching). During the academic year 2008-09 the professional services centre organised training courses, partly self-financed, which sought to harmonise training on non-subject teaching with training on competence-based teaching. During the academic year 2009-10 the non-subject teaching workshop coordinated a series of introductory activities in a few primary schools for the district's teachers. During these events teachers were able to obtain practical and professional help with the introduction of non-subject teaching.

According to the head of the professional services centre, the methods used to introduce non-subject teaching varied from institution to institution and from teacher to teacher. In early 2010 he was unable to report on its effect on pupils, but the centre aimed to take this into account as a criterion in analysing the district surveys. The leader of the non-subject teaching workshop said that teachers in the district were doubtful about non-subject teaching. What lay behind these doubts was primarily the worry of upper school teachers that they would lose lesson time; many of them also felt that they did not need the prescribed training courses as they already had appropriate education methodologies at their disposal. The head of the professional services centre said it was hard to make the teachers understand that the introduction of the non-subject teaching workshop was a reaction to real problems. Those running the training courses found many of the teachers apathetic. There was less interest in the activities held during the academic year 2009-10 than in the initial training courses. The leader of the non-subject teaching workshop thought the reason for this was mainly that teachers were overburdened and also that there were many programmes held across the district.

### *Szent Irma Primary School*<sup>11</sup>

Szent Irma School has a distinguished history and is one of the most sought-after schools in the district. It is centrally located and well served by public transport. It is

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<sup>10</sup>Case study by Georgina Kasza.

<sup>11</sup>Case study by Gabriella Kállai.

a large school of 650 pupils, with three-form entry. In terms of profile it has a music and singing specialist class, a PE specialist class and a normal class. As a result of the programmes on offer, the school has no problem recruiting pupils: only 30% of them come from within the school's catchment area (most of them to the normal class); the rest come from outside the catchment area, outside the district, and in a few cases outside Budapest – the latter mainly to the music specialist class, which has a nationally good reputation. The proportion of disadvantaged and multiply disadvantaged pupils is the same as the district average. The biggest upheaval the school has had to face in the last decade came in 2004, when a nearby school, which also had a good reputation but different specialisms (languages and informatics), was amalgamated with it. Though Szent Irma School retained its profile, the creation of a unified teaching staff and educational culture presented a lingering problem.

*Reception.* Though the teaching staff at the school generally like to try out new methods and resources, they initially had a very negative attitude to non-subject teaching. The fundamental reason for this was lack of information: at the start, all they knew about non-subject teaching was that it meant they would have to use more games to add interest to their lessons, and upper school teachers were not particularly keen ("do they really expect me to be an entertainer?!").

*Implementation.* From the academic year 2008-09 non-subject teaching was introduced in years 5 and 6 in mathematics, Hungarian language and literature, history, science, technology, art and PE lessons, the subjects to which it was extended depending on the type of class. On average one quarter of lesson time was used in this way; the actual proportion ranged from 15% to 50% depending on the subject.

After weighing up various considerations, the school leadership decided that the job of implementation should be given to the subject specialist teachers in the upper school. This decision was influenced not only by those teachers' existential fears but also by the uncertainty of the lower school teachers and the lack of confidence in them which became apparent: "It's very problematic for someone working in the lower school to teach the higher year groups. I currently teach year 1. It's really difficult to step up from time to time and teach something completely different, it's a different world. And we can't teach everything to higher year groups anyway. I could officially, legally teach PE because that's my specialist qualification... But here in school they don't even want to hear of us teaching. There's not the confidence yet that a generalist teacher can teach years 5 and 6...Even the upper school teachers don't want to accept it, not to mention the fact that they're worried about their jobs...We had to fight many battles here. As a lower school teacher and deputy head I often came into conflict with the upper school teachers, because my attitude is different." (Lower school teacher and deputy head)

Only a few of the teachers met the qualification requirements in the legislation (and only one had both generalist and subject specialist teaching qualifications), so the school took up the option of training courses organised by the local authority. The upper school teachers attended a 120-hour course, and their experiences were rather contradictory. They described the variety and playfulness of the methods as very interesting, but said they were not given enough help on how to incorporate these new elements into their daily work. "They went off and when they

came back they told us what the course was all about. Well, it did more harm than good. They were stuffed full of all kinds of theories but they didn't learn anything they could use the next day. All the upper school teachers here did it, we made all of them go. As far as I can see, it just made them decide they weren't going to become entertainers. I've been to a couple of lectures like this...when they teach you not to confront it head-on, and then they put you in a situation where you have to do just that from 9 to 5...what are we talking about?" (Lower school teacher and deputy head)

*Experience.* At the time of our survey the teachers had been using non-subject teaching for less than two full academic years – which had been a period of long and patient experimentation. Initially there was great uncertainty in their work; in the end they were not told how they should fit the new methods into their lesson structures but were able to try out for themselves which solution worked best for them. In some subjects (especially art and technology) these varied, playful methods based on cooperative techniques occupied whole lessons; in other subjects they were used for individual tasks. Despite the fact that the usefulness of the methods was already apparent by the time of our survey, the teachers were still uncertain as to how they should use them. They received some help with this from the lower school teachers, and lesson observations and joint lesson preparation were not uncommon. In addition to a broadening of the teachers' methodological repertoire, another positive outcome was a strengthening of cohesion within the teaching staff.

### **Petőfi Primary School<sup>12</sup>**

This school is at the edge of the district, near a housing estate built in the 1980s, in an area not particularly well served by public transport. The school was also built in the 1980s to serve the large number of children living in the housing estate. It now has fewer than its capacity of 450 pupils, and has been reduced to single-form entry, with half of the pupils coming from within its catchment area. The housing estate is culturally diverse, with many families of mainly Asian origin living there. As a result, the school faces the added challenge of teaching children with migrant backgrounds. The proportion of disadvantaged and multiply disadvantaged children is 28%, which is higher than the district average; the school keeps its own records of them. The school's biggest problem is the constant decline in pupil numbers. The differences between pupils which result from their differing social backgrounds also present a significant challenge to the teaching staff. The school head has been in post for a long time so there is continuity of leadership, the teachers have developed good cooperative practices, and the atmosphere in the school is familiar and open. The teaching is child-centred, the main aim being the holistic development of their pupils.

*Reception.* The teachers here were more receptive than those of Szent Irma School to the introduction of non-subject teaching, because the school has a culture of trying out and using a variety of different and new methods. Differentiation was already being used in traditional lessons. The teachers also emphasised that due to

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<sup>12</sup>Case study by Nóra Abonyi.



the school's small size there was generally no problem with the transition from lower school to upper school: year 4 pupils were regularly visited by upper school teachers, and they were not forced to sever their links with their lower school teachers as soon as they entered year 5: "The children were used to being able to come back and talk to us if they ever had any worries or problems. And when they went up into year 5 they did come back from time to time. They still feel a bit homesick for the lower school at the beginning of year 5." (Lower school teacher)

*Implementation.* The details of implementation within the school were worked out with the help of a working group set up for that purpose. Here too, the school's leadership designated the upper school teachers as the main implementers, but no unfavourable effects were reported either on them or on the lower school teachers, especially as most of the school's teachers had both generalist and subject specialist teaching qualifications, so that only two teachers needed to be sent on a training course.

Putting the new methods into practice caused no great upheaval for the teachers. They jointly decided to implement non-subject teaching in six lessons per week in years 5 and 6, using 25% of the yearly lesson allocation. It was introduced in mathematics, Hungarian language and literature, science and English, but was also used in environmental studies. In these lessons pupils received verbal assessments instead of grades.

*Experience.* Teachers in the school highlighted the positive effects on their pupils: they found that these playful methods, which encouraged creativity, independent thought and cooperation, made pupils less anxious and slightly improved the attainment of those who were falling behind. On the basis of these favourable experiences and results, the school continued with the practice of non-subject teaching even after the legislation forcing it to do so was revoked.

## **The small town<sup>13</sup>**

*The role of the maintainer.*<sup>14</sup>The maintainer of the school had no influence, either directly or indirectly, on the implementation of non-subject teaching.

### *Bánáti Primary School<sup>15</sup>*

*Reception in school.* Those involved in implementation in the school were resistant to the change. The school's education programme set out its aim to do the minimum necessary to meet the requirements of the legislation: "Under § 128 (19) of the Act on Public Education, in the academic years 2008-09 and 2009-10 non-subject teaching in years 5 and 6 may be organised in such a way that the time taken is only 20% of compulsory lesson time. This means that in order to implement non-subject teaching for these year groups in these academic years we have to provide it in 20% of the 22.5 lessons specified in §52 (3) (b) of the Act, in other words five lessons per

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<sup>13</sup>This chapter contains extracts from Zoltán Ákos Vég's case study.

<sup>14</sup>Case study by Zoltán Ákos Vég.

<sup>15</sup>Case study by Zoltán Ákos Vég.

week. This is what will be provided in our school." From the start teachers in the school were not very hopeful that things would change, and even two years after the introduction of non-subject teaching their comments were not positive. On the one hand they did not understand the point of it, and on the other hand they could see no positive change resulting from its introduction.

*Implementation.* A significant proportion of the work connected with implementation within the school was delegated to working groups. One upper school teacher described how the preparation was done: "The head gave it to the working group leaders. We looked at approximately how many children there would be, what level of work we would have to do. About the same as the way we put together the education programme and the curriculum. We tried to fit the guiding principles to our local characteristics." The school head's explanation for the fact that the teachers did not understand the point of the legislation, and for the disillusionment that overwhelmed them as they implemented it, was that they had not been given enough time either to prepare for or to implement the new methods. They felt that the innovation had emerged as a sudden idea which was introduced too quickly, before it had been properly thought out, and that schools had just been left to get on with it without being given any detailed guidance.

*Experience.* In this school practical subjects and languages are already taught by different teachers in years 3 and 4, so the transition to upper school is not such a major change for the children. The biggest problem was fitting non-subject teaching into the timetable. When it was introduced, this was the area in which the teachers expressed most fear and showed greatest resistance. Another problem was the selection of pupils to receive non-subject teaching. Teachers complained that they *were unable* to include "documented" pupils (those with special educational needs) because they were receiving special lessons. On the other hand they *did not want* to include those able children who could keep up because they felt that those children did not need the practice.

Opinions were divided when it came to assessing the results. Alongside the many negative comments mentioned above, some commented that the new methods were useful and had a part to play in developing basic skills. "What I see in my class is that it does have some significance, there were things that didn't work for the selected children but they were still able to develop. Clearly there are exceptions, it's not all going perfectly, but I find that fewer children are falling behind." (Upper school teacher)

### *The village*<sup>1617</sup>

*The role of the maintainer.* At the time of the legislative changes the school was involved in a reorganisation of collaborative arrangements between schools. It was initially in a partnership with four village schools; subsequently it became one of 18

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<sup>16</sup>Collaborators in the case study: Tímea Ceglédi, Kitti Hurja, Katalin Kardos, Edina Kovács, Livia Kriston, Gitta Ócsai, Erzsébet Pál, Júlia Tölgyesi és Eszter Varga.

<sup>17</sup>This chapter includes extracts from the case study "Introduction of non-subject teaching in years 5 and 6" by Livia Kriston and Edina Kovács.

members (primary and nursery schools), in eight settlements, of an education institution maintained by a multi-purpose micro-regional association. Since this collaboration was forced on the settlements by economic constraints, the maintainer did not involve itself in the professional work of the institution or its member schools. The school communicated directly more with the umbrella institution than with the maintainer. The school had to introduce the changes required by the legislation in parallel with this reorganisation of collaborative arrangements. Initially the upper school teachers, a group well used to working together, were given the task of reworking the local curriculum, but this came to an end when the umbrella institution integrating the primary and nursery schools of eight villages was set up. At the time of our visit the umbrella institution had been in existence for barely a year and its resources were not yet a perfect substitute for the previous arrangements: working groups were being set up between member schools which were just starting to recognise the opportunities inherent in learning from each other. Finding professional partners appeared to be a vital step towards the school starting to understand the aims of the legislation and becoming more open to it.

### *Kisványod Primary School*

*Reception.* The head of the school admitted that at first his attitude was that this change was being forced on them, and he did not explore the opportunities sufficiently. He had first heard about this new obligation at a start of academic year meeting at the county education institute, and then looked up the details on the Education Ministry website. One reason for his initial resistance was that both he and the school's teachers were of the opinion that they were already paying attention to year 5 and 6 pupils, and using methods which helped pupils in the transition to upper school; they preferred to adapt their practice to the needs of the children at any particular time rather than to an artificially and rigidly determined lesson structure. "I don't think there were many really major changes. As I said, our teachers were already using these methods. (...) The biggest problem, which wasn't clarified in the legislation, was how to document it. You're always worried that if you're called to account, you don't know what you have to account for. Because if they tell you to fill in forms A, B or C, you do it, but if there's no guidance on what you have to do, you can get all sorts of things wrong. So it's the documentation part of it that caused the problem." (School head)

*Implementation.* As can be seen from the previous interview extract, implementation was initially restricted to the minimum formal requirements. By way of explanation for this, interviewees cited inconsistencies in the legislation, inadequate preparation, contradictory assistance, and the excessive speed with which they were required to implement the changes. The school also consulted its partner institutions about the implementation.<sup>18</sup> However, the common denominator became an agreement to meet the formal requirements of the legislation rather than joint professional preparation for the change. Two teachers went on a training course (one at her own expense), and they were not satisfied with its standard. Their descriptions

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<sup>18</sup>At that time the schools of four villages; the eight-village partnership came into existence later.

of the course show that it was not made sufficiently clear to them what non-subject teaching meant in practice, more specifically what it was that they actually had to do. One of the teachers described non-subject teaching as where teachers use pamphlets instead of textbooks, and the children work in pairs or groups. The other said that she tried to give children activities in every lesson, and "offer them the information as one would to lower school pupils".

The school head reported that as time passed he started to seek better solutions and to recognise the positive aspects inherent in what the legislation expected them to do. This came about as a result of visits to the school's partner institutions, where he saw how others had interpreted and undertaken this task. One upper school teacher described this gradual opening up: "We chose the route of providing the legal minimum at the expense of compulsory lesson time, well we've done that and more, and then later we heard and saw in practice that actually there are very many ways of putting this into practice without losing time from compulsory lessons."

*Experience.* The biggest problem was the amount of material in the curriculum. The teachers regarded non-subject teaching as a burden because they thought it meant they had to give children non-textbook activities at the expense of compulsory lesson time and so could not make progress with the curriculum. "I have to take time out of my normal lessons, which is frightening because I don't know how I will finish the course. Well I don't know. We haven't had a proper inspector or anyone to visit, but as I say, the children will have to take entrance exams in maths, so no messing around, we have to get on with it." (Upper school teacher) Although the teachers were satisfied with their own work and regarded the change as restricting their freedom to make decisions on the work done in the classroom, they did see the need for methodological renewal, because the children they have to work with are constantly changing. However, they did not see this measure as providing the solution to that problem. "I don't think this is the solution to anything. It's not the basic idea that's wrong, as I say, we do have to use different methods and develop basic skills, but there's something wrong in the execution. They didn't prepare us for it, just threw us in at the deep end. (...) It would have been better just to have a renewal in methodology, and there would have been no need for this to be dictated by legislation." (Head of the schools' umbrella institution)

## Summary

Our research found that the introduction of non-subject teaching presented a serious challenge to primary school heads and teachers. Most of the schools we studied were not really receptive to the changes, and typically, similar problems soon appeared: lack of understanding, worry about the amount to be taught, the differing interests of lower and upper school teachers, problems with interpretation and the selection of pupils, dissatisfaction with training courses, apathy, blaming decision-makers for the lack of preparation, and the absence of tangible positive experiences and results. Although it may be assumed that mistakes were made by decision-makers at the central level (this level was not part of our study so we could not explore the details), we cannot fail to notice that in spite of this there are significant differences

between the responses of different institutions, and that even within institutions there are varying attitudes and experiences. We compared the schools we studied on the basis of the extent to which they were provided with what they needed to implement the change (information, resources, opportunities to gain professional experience, e.g. through training courses), and of their openness to change and their commitment.

Petőfi Primary School was the most successful in implementing non-subject teaching and was more receptive to change due to its previous experience and its institutional and educational culture. A significant part was played in its success by prior experience, the commitment of the head, the continuity of leadership, and the familiar atmosphere and culture supportive of collaboration that had developed from the school's favourable characteristics. Thus some of the conditions for implementation were already in place at institutional level, but the school also received significant support at district level from the education services centre, which provided training courses, professional workshops, and opportunities for collaboration between schools.

The situation of the schools outside Budapest was less favourable in terms of the viewpoints we studied, and their experiences in introducing non-subject teaching were also less favourable. These schools had less prior experience of competence-based teaching, not having had the opportunity to bid for funding for help with this. They received less support with preparation from their maintainer, and so had to build (or should have built) more on their own resources and commitment. However, in the schools we studied the heads proved not to be committed to the change and instead concentrated on meeting the minimum requirements, with the result that more of the teachers also showed a lack of interest and reported unfavourable experiences. Although various routes to successful implementation are open even from a less favourable starting position, it seems that success cannot be achieved without the commitment of the school leadership and without the willingness of teachers to be actively involved.

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