

LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION: THE CASE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract. This article deals with leadership in education in the Czech context. First of all, it outlines a number of changes that have occurred since the early 1990s and influenced various aspects of leadership in education. Data on education and schooling are described as related to the work of school leaders (headteachers). Attention is also paid to major initiatives in school leaders' professional development and their relation to the attempts (albeit unsuccessful) to establish a headteacher career system and standards. Subsequently, data from main research projects focusing on various aspects of school leaders' work are provided. The article concludes with a view towards future developments in educational leadership in the Czech Republic.

Keywords: educational leadership, Czech Republic, headteachers, career system, career standards.

INTRODUCTION

Education/school leadership is an issue that regained new importance after the political and social transformation of the late 1980s. The new democratic era brought new arrangements to schools and schooling and, as a consequence, was reflected in expectations related to school leaders, particularly headteachers.

The education system became looser as early as the beginning of the 1990s, when the direct and, for a long time, strict links of schools to the higher levels of the system, mainly the central authorities, abated. In this new situation, schools soon obtained a relatively large degree of autonomy in many aspects of their operations, particularly in regard to their legal status and the increased powers of headteachers in various managerial activities, the management of staff, work with the curriculum and so on.

Nevertheless, schools were also rather soon affected by a tendency to balance this autonomy with an accent on external responsibility (*Kvalita a odpovědnost*, 1994) and, subsequently, started receiving demands for multilateral accountability, both internal (including self-evaluation) and external (e.g. by means of obligatory annual reports on the state of the school).

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The bureaucratic load of schools, or rather that of their leaders, began to increase, which was often criticized by headteachers (McKinsey, 2010).

Financial limits (insufficient funding) in almost all areas of school operations have long had unfavourable effects. Some of these limits are compensated for by subsidies through projects, particularly those co-financed by European funds. Although many of these projects clearly play a positive role, a sometimes exaggerated accent on school development based on externally subsidised projects implies risking a loss of focus on the objectives the school has or would like to have.

On the other hand, thanks to these projects, professionals in various specialist non-teaching occupations, such as school psychologists, special educators and sometimes pedagogical consultants and mentors, have established themselves in some schools. And a variety of trainings are offered for newly founded positions for teacher specialists, so-called coordinators, in areas such as environmental education, school education programmes, inclusion, and so on. So, in a certain sense, schools are better equipped than before, both in terms of personnel and material resources, but the external setting is changing so quickly that there are justifiable concerns about whether this is sufficient for schools to react adequately.

Also, the new arrangements highlight the influential role of school-founding entities. This is usually the municipality for basic schools¹ (with the exception of private and church schools) and office of the regional administration (with the above-mentioned exception) for upper secondary schools.

This article is focused on the topic of leadership in school education, particularly on school leaders in basic (ISCED 1, 2) and upper secondary schools (ISCED 3) in the Czech Republic.

CONTEXTUAL DATA

In 2017, the Czech Republic had approximately 10.5 million inhabitants and, in the school year 2017/2018, there were 4,155 basic [primary] schools (for pupils aged 6–15) in operation, 241 of which were church schools and private schools and 332 were schools for pupils with special educational needs. A total of 63,005 teachers were employed in these schools. With regard to the age of headteachers, those in the age group 51–60 have long been predominant, accounting for 49% of all headteachers of basic schools in 2017/2018 (*Kvalita*, 2018). The proportion of male teachers in basic schools

¹ Basic schools operate on ISCED 1 and 2 levels; upper secondary schools on ISCED level 3 in the Czech Republic.

is 13% while for headteachers it is 34% (MŠMT, not dated). With regard to this, Plitzová (2013) presented results of research carried out by the National Institute for Further Education (NIDV) showing a certain trend towards a higher percentage of male headteachers in larger schools. Female headteachers were more often employed in schools with fewer pupils.

In the same school year, in the Czech Republic there were 1,308 secondary schools (for pupils aged 15–18/19) (including 331 church and private schools), employing 38,115 teachers (*Statistická ročenka České republiky*, 2018). The age profile of headteachers in secondary schools is also dominated by older teachers: “The negative trend of the ageing of teaching staff in secondary schools has also been observed for management. The number of youngest headteachers, aged 31–40, is stagnating while the number of those shifting from the 41–50 age group to the 51–60 age group is rising, as is the number of those in the 61–70 age group” (Výroční, 2018: 95–96). As a consequence, the number of headteachers with a total experience in school leadership of 11–20 years has increased, as has the number of those with 21–30 years of experience. Again, this is related to the continuous ageing of secondary school headteachers and the low natural generation change (*Kvalita*, 2018: 96). In secondary education, the proportion of men is approximately 28.5%, while in the leading position (headteacher) their representation is 56%.

Teachers’ salaries in 2017 were only slightly above the national average but have followed a rising trend, particularly in recent years. The average salaries of headteachers are higher by approximately one third in comparison to teachers’ salaries. Also, statistics have revealed that men’s salaries in schooling are higher than women’s even when the same salary patterns are applied (MŠMT, not dated).

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The operation of basic and secondary schools in the Czech Republic is controlled by explicit legal regulations. Above all, the School Act 561/2004 stipulates the powers and responsibilities of headteachers and the way in which they are selected for and carry out their work. The founding entity may, but does not have to (in such cases, the current headteachers remain in their positions), publish an invitation to tender for the position of headteacher every six years² (Školský zákon, 2004). Such practice does work in some places, but is problematic in others. With regards to the basic [primary]

² The same person can apply for multiple mandates.

school headteachers, “the average numbers of applicants who have participated in tenders show that pedagogues are showing increasingly less interest in the position of headteacher; one reason for this may be the increasing difficulties in the performance of this work” (*Kvalita*, 2018: 50).

A 2018 inspection report found that tenders for the position of headteacher at basic [primary] schools were assessed (altogether 668 tenders in the given period) as follows: “the tender was carried out in a rather formal way, it was evident that the favourite was known beforehand and most committee members had agreed on him/her (18.9%); the tender took place whereby evident efforts were made by part of the committee to promote their own favourite candidate at all costs (5.1%); evident efforts were made by the committee to choose the best applicant and the most appropriate applicant received a large majority of the votes of the committee (58.6%); evident efforts were made by the committee to choose the best applicant and the most appropriate applicant won by a narrow margin (10.2%)” (*Kvalita*, 2018: 50).

Tenders for the position of headteacher of secondary schools also indicate that the “leading positions at secondary schools are not wanted” (*Kvalita*, 2018: 97).

Headteacher education

For a headteacher to successfully apply their relevant powers and responsibilities, he or she is supposed to undergo requisite education and to continue educating him/herself in the position. With regard to the formal qualification training of school leaders in the Czech setting, the main initiatives are implemented on two levels:

Short (usually one-off) courses

These are either one-off events, specifically targeted, or short-term projects. They are numerous and are delivered by various providers who offer educational programmes accredited by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth of the Czech Republic. They have been largely supported by structural funds in recent years and some of them are important, coordinated on a nationwide scale. For basic school headteachers, the most frequent topics of in-service training were legal regulations (81.5%), the education of pupils with special needs, the organizational management of schools, and inclusive education. Analyses focusing on in-service headteacher training have confirmed that “[...] a lower proportion of headteachers (less than 50%) prefer

in-service training in the form of seminars on leadership of the teaching process and teaching in classrooms [...] headteachers usually underestimate the importance of the pedagogical and methodological leading of teachers in strategies of education and schooling and efficient methods and forms of teaching. This aspect has continued to be on a lower level than management in the sense of economics and administration" (*Kvalita*, 2018: 49). A similar trend has been identified for headteachers of secondary schools (*Ibid*: 97).

More systematic training

Apart from short courses, there is a recent but probably more stimulating tradition of more systematic programmes. Most of these are provided by university departments, although other providers are involved as well. One such programme is "Study for Headteachers of Schools and Education Institutions" (also called Functional Study I) which offers a 100-hour course in "knowledge and skills in the management of schools, education institutions and human resources, including health care" (*Vyhláška* 317, 2005: 5654). This course is a basic prerequisite for the position of a headteacher. Another course is Study for School Leaders (also called Functional study II), a 350-hour programme which takes place at higher education institutions and provides the participant with "knowledge and skills in the management of school-engaged legal entities, particularly in the theory and practice of school management, law, economics, pedagogy and psychology, health care and protection, and information technologies" (*Vyhláška* 317, 2005: 5655). This type of study consists of five obligatory modules: (1) Theory and Practice of School Management; (2) Human Resource Leadership; (3) Teaching Process Management; (4) Law; (5) Economics and Financial Management. These modules are carried out according to given content standards and minimum time frameworks for each form of work. Participants are typically people who are considering the possibility of becoming headteachers, or those who are already beginning headteachers. The graduates of this training receive a non-degree certificate.

It may be interesting to examine the latter of these options more closely. First of all, it seems that this programme features a number of specific characteristics that correspond with school leader training programmes in several other countries. First, there are incipient efforts to approach school leader training as a continuum. Also, there is an evident tendency to provide those pursuing the programme with opportunities to address individual needs, and there is an accent on the learning process and respect for the context specifics of participants. Moreover, this programme makes it possible to invite participants to learn in a setting of multilateral relations between

theory and practice. The organizational/methodological arrangement of the programme corresponds to this as well, leading to a needed diversity of methods and forms. In this respect, the programme can be considered a notable step forward.

As regards the shortcomings, they can be found in the content of the training. Unlike principal trends in modern education systems, this programme is rather marked by symptoms of technicality, which means that economic and legal aspects have so far played a relatively strong role. Therefore, in terms of content, the current concepts of this programme for school leader training are closer to a conservative approach to education for school management, and thus lag behind present-day possibilities and needs in preparing and supporting people involved in school leadership and management (cf. Pol, 2007).

Comprehensive approach to educational leadership in new projects

In spite of evident failures in the efforts to innovate basic provision of education and create/implement a career system and career standards, support for headteachers and wider school-leading teams certainly exists. This is evidenced by the large number of usually short-term courses offered by the National Institute for Further Education and other institutions at central, regional and local levels, both public and private, and by previously mentioned investment projects supported by the government and European funds.

Some of these deserve attention in this context. The aim of the project *Successful headteacher (2005–2008)* was to “[...] provide information and improve the skills necessary for curricular change in school management, in conformity with long-term developments of society, regions, municipalities as well as schools and education institutions”. This training was carried out in the form of a number of optional modules: (1) Curricular Change and the New Role of Schools; (2) Managerial Control of the Processes of Change in Schools; (3) Quality Management and Assessment; (4) School Development Strategies; (5) Supervision in Managerial Practices (*Úspěšný*, not dated).

A large project entitled “Strategic Management and Planning in Schools and Territories” started in March 2016 and will continue until 2021. This project “[...] is focused on nursery schools and basic schools with development potential in strategic management and planning”. It is based on the premise that the participation of headteachers and school leaders in wider forms of professional development should be promoted. For this reason, the

project is not only aimed at delivering courses and seminars but, taking into consideration the specific conditions and needs of schools; it will offer headteachers the participation in individual forms of professional development (coaching, mentoring, supervision or benchlearning) (*Strategické*, not dated).

The main objective of the project “Support System for Professional Development of Teachers and Headteachers”, which runs from January 2018 to the autumn of 2022, is to “[...] strive for the creation, verification and implementation of a system of integrated modular support that will contribute to improved professional development of leaders in school management and teachers in subject didactics. This should be achieved by means of professional communities using a wide range of peer support and in-service teacher training with pre-defined quality criteria” (*Systém*, not dated). One of the nine key activities of the project (KA 06 — Management) is focused on school leadership and the design and verification of a comprehensive and continuous modular system of school management, particularly in education management.

The shift from education based on courses and seminars to individualised forms that better reflect the needs of headteachers is particularly in evidence in most recent projects. Also, these place more emphasis on shared experience, the evaluation of new forms of education, and continuity.

Absence of a career system and headteacher standard

The problems of headteacher education are sometimes considered to be related to a non-existent career system and the lack of a headteacher standard. Efforts to establish a career system and to create a standard for headteachers seemed to be in progress some time ago but never reached the stage of implementation. (Incidentally, more recent efforts to define and implement a career system for teachers have ended up the same way.) With regard to the career system, the plan was to distinguish several stages of headteachers’ careers, differentiating between beginners, advanced and highly experienced. The latter were intended to have not only the opportunity of leading their own schools but of being engaged in the education of headteachers on the lower levels of the career system.

A proposal for a career system and standard for headteachers was put forward in 2015 as a basis for wider professional and political discussion prior to making a final decision. The authors declared that it was aimed at improving quality, updating priorities, and pupils’ achieving better results (*Kariérní systém*, not dated). The document defined the following principles/assumptions:

- A headteacher is, primarily, the pedagogic leader of the school. Pedagogic leadership will be restored as a priority for headteachers (or school leaders).
- Applicants tendering for the position of headteacher will be ready to hold the post and will receive immediate support at the beginning of their professional career.
- There will be a nation-wide system for the transparent and criterion-based evaluation of applicants that is accepted by establishing entities.
- Formative assessment of the performance of headteachers will be carried out at the end of an adaptation period as well as at further stages of their career.
- There will be a standard of quality that should be attained by every headteacher after six years in office.
- The career system of headteachers will be interconnected with that of teachers, with emphasis on support for teachers' professional development from the headteacher.
- Headteachers will receive high-quality support for their professional development; conditions will be created for the sharing and exchanging of their experience, monitoring, coaching and the involvement of the best headteachers as leaders of the schooling system.
- The evaluation of the headteacher will be linked to the evaluation of the whole school (*Kariérní systém*, not dated).

As for the headteacher standard, certain levels were designed as being associated with expectations for the intensification and development of headteachers' competences. The standard was designed as a tool for achieving, maintaining and increasing the quality of their work; it was also intended to incorporate the scope of headteachers' involvement in the system. A new feature was the inclusion of governmental requirements for professional competences and their development throughout one's career, which related to five domains: (1) Leadership and Management in Schooling and Education; (2) Leadership and Management as Based on Values and Visions; (3) Human Resource Leadership; (4) Organization Management; (5) Personal and Professional Development.

The idea of the authors of these proposals was to interconnect the careers of headteachers with their standards. A major criterion was that a degree of attainment of competences is to be expected at various career stages. Indicators were designed for the assessment of these competences. The career system of a headteacher was to be divided into four stage indicators: 0, 1, 2, and 3. An applicant for the post of headteacher would be classified as

stage 0 and then, once in office, the headteacher would be expected to progress from career stage 1 to career stage 3 (*Kariérní systém*, not dated). The proposal was not accepted due to lack of political support.

CURRENT STATE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: RESEARCH DATA

A variety of research studies into the work of headteachers (school leaders) has been carried out in recent years. These can be divided into: (1) studies directly focusing on the headteachers' work as such (e.g. instructional leadership) and (2) those covering a wider range of problems in schools such as inclusive education, school climate, and so on. With regard to the latter, the findings on the work of headteachers were rather secondary, as an inevitable factor within the topic under observation. Similarly, research surveys can be divided into: (1) those in which headteachers (school leaders) themselves were the respondents and (2) those in which teachers or other people in schools reported on the work of headteachers. The following section presents selected findings from surveys dealing with the work and position of Czech headteachers. Not all surveys are mentioned, as the focus is on those carried out after the year 2000, which was when the situation in Czech schools changed significantly, and new legislation was introduced. Even so, not all the findings are applicable in full. The results should be rather understood within the dynamics of the time. The various methodologies and limitations should be taken into account, both for qualitative and quantitative surveys.

Symbolically, let us start with a survey focused on the path towards the position of headteacher. Pol *et al.* (2009) explored the professional careers of headteachers by a method of life history, focusing on important events at the inception of their careers. It was found that headteachers felt strongly anchored in the teaching profession. Their opinions indicated that the shift upwards was a matter of chance that could be expressed as "being in the right place at the right time". It was typical for them to feel lonely when adapting to the new role and so they tended to look for support and security, for which they used a variety of strategies. During the second phase, the need to perform the role of headteacher "appropriately" arose and called for a feeling of self-reliance, which is fundamental to success in such a professional role. Nevertheless, it was typical for headteachers to lose their initial optimism, sometimes rather naive, and to seek self-confidence in activities they were good at. A key factor in this phase was their relation to the school;

a feeling of responsibility and affinity made it easier to get through this period. The research confirmed the existence of several stages in the career of a headteacher and, consequently, the need to differentiate headteacher education, support and evaluation in relation to these stages (Pol *et al.*, 2009; Pol *et al.*, 2010).

A variety of relevant data was generated by extensive questionnaire surveys within the project TALIS, which was supported with EU funds (Kašparová *et al.*, 2015). Some of the results enabled a comprehensive and comparative examination of the job of headteachers in the Czech Republic and abroad (Kašparová *et al.*, 2014). These surveys focused on a wide range of headteacher activities in order to recognize the current state with regard to their activity, the major limiting factors, needs, and so on. Among other objectives, the authors of this project were interested in how much time Czech headteachers devoted to various activities. The data showed that most of their time was dedicated to administration and meetings (including human and material resource management, planning, reporting, checking that regulations were complied with and so forth). In the Czech Republic, this takes up as much as a half of their working time. A large percentage (94%) of headteachers said they had checked school documents and administration procedures “often or very often” during the previous year, and it seems they did so more often than headteachers in other countries that were studied. In contrast, a lower percentage of headteachers cooperated with headteachers of other schools (37%) and solved timetabling problems (20%) when compared to international average.

Headteachers of Czech public schools spent more time (50%) on managerial and administrative operations and meetings than headteachers of non-public schools (44%). Headteachers of grammar schools (students aged 11–19 or 13–19) devoted more time to administration and managerial operations (55%) than headteachers of basic [primary] schools (50%). Moreover, secondary school headteachers spent more time on teaching-related activities than their counterparts in basic schools (22% vs. 18%). Another finding was that the amount of time spent on the two main activities (administration and teaching) was influenced by the size of school. Administration took up more of the time of headteachers in bigger schools (those with a staff of more than 40 teachers) than of those of smaller ones (40 or less). Nevertheless, this may have been due to the fact that headteachers of smaller schools had a higher teaching commitment, so they spent more time on teaching-related activities (Kašparová *et al.*, 2014).

In response to questions indicating headteachers’ responsibilities and willingness to delegate powers, the respondents said they felt responsible

mainly for decisions on recruiting and dismissing teachers, fixing or increasing their starting salaries, and admitting pupils. In these areas, only 19% to 29% of headteachers shared the responsibility with other actors. By contrast, responsibility was most often shared in areas such as decision-making on the offer and content of subjects, on the wording of disciplinary principles and on procedures for evaluating pupils. These findings were confirmed by Lhotková (2011) whose research focused on the work of deputy headteachers and middle management. She also observed that teaching and pupil-related activities (marking, choice of textbooks and aids, work with new teachers, in-service teacher training) were areas in which middle managers worked quite independently. The tasks headteachers were least willing to delegate were typical managerial activities such as planning, specifying teachers' workloads, evaluating employees, managing finances, and so on.

The results of TALIS indicated that headteachers in the Czech Republic felt most constrained by insufficient finance and school budgets (93% of headteachers), government directives and regulations (89%), work overload and responsibility (82%) and the salary system based on career advancement (73%) – headteachers would prefer more possibilities to reward teachers not only according to the length of teaching practice, but especially according to their performance. In contrast, 32% of headteachers claimed their efficiency was mostly limited by a lack of teachers and 29% cited lack of support for their own professional education. A comparison of results from various schools has shown that headteachers of public schools perceive more obstacles to the efficient performance of their job than headteachers of non-public schools (although this relation is not strong). Headteachers of public schools more often perceived the advancement-based salary system as limiting. They also more often mentioned lack of opportunities and sources for the professional education of teachers. Insufficient human resources were more strongly perceived as a limitation by primary school headteachers than their secondary grammar school counterparts. As expected, it was found that the more strongly a headteacher perceives any kind of limitation, the lower work satisfaction he or she reports (Kašparová *et al.*, 2014, 2015).

However, it seems that Czech headteachers experience a relatively high level of job satisfaction. Almost all (98%) would recommend their school as a good workplace and hardly any would change it for another school if they had the opportunity. Approximately the same percentage stated that they took pleasure in their work. Overall, job satisfaction was expressed by 95% of headteachers, both in terms of their own performance and in general. The level of job satisfaction of headteachers in the Czech Republic does not seem to be related to their own personal characteristics (gender, age, educational

attainment) nor to most of the characteristics of their schools (type, size, location). One exception was that headteachers of schools where more than 10% of pupils had special educational needs reported more job satisfaction. Also, the authors of this extensive study found that if teachers spend more time in teaching-related activities and follow a pedagogical style of leadership, their job satisfaction is higher (Kašparová *et al.*, 2014).

Instructional leadership was also studied by Lazarová *et al.* (2015a) in their research using a mixed methodology. They investigated the efforts and feeling of success in selected areas of education leadership: (1) fulfilling teachers' needs; (2) supporting professional development; (3) concern for pupils; (4) working with academic results; (5) developing the educational programme; (6) cooperating with parents; (7) stimulating climate; (8) shared vision. They found that headteachers concern themselves most with teachers' needs (an average of 3.68 on a scale of intensity of 1 to 4) and concern themselves the least with supporting the professional development of teachers (2.37). Female headteachers assessed their approach with a higher intensity in all areas apart from academic results. Working with these hard indicators, such as educational results of students, was, apparently, the realm of male headteachers. In the areas of supporting professional development, working with academic results and concern for pupils, the lowest intensity was expressed by headteachers whose experience was the shortest. Headteachers of fully organized schools (school providing education to students of all grades) said they dealt more with academic results while those of schools that were not fully organized concentrated on providing a "home-like" atmosphere, with a stronger focus on pupils. Headteachers of primary schools considered their leadership work to be successful, feeling most proficient in the field of support of a stimulating learning environment (85 points out of 100). Most self-criticism was associated with the development of the education programme (75 points out of 100).

More recent surveys have examined headteachers' perceived proficiency in developing a stimulating climate. The school climate has been a continuous focus of researchers for some time now. Results from Czech schools indicate that the manner in which headteachers communicate with teachers fundamentally affects the leadership style and, thus, mutual relations (Lukas, 2009). The nature of the relationship between teachers and the headteacher has an impact on the satisfaction of both and, therefore, on the success of the school. Dividing the team into two opposing camps, a situation of them and us, can be an obstacle to school development (Sedláček, 2008).

Lašek (2001) and, later, Urbánek (2003, 2006) used the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire to explore teachers' perception of

headteachers' responsiveness, supportive behaviour and directedness. They found that teachers in primary schools perceived headteachers to be more directive compared to teachers in secondary schools. Differences were also apparent regarding gender (Lašek, 2001). Female headteachers, despite being slightly more directive, were perceived as more helpful; teachers cooperated with female headteachers more willingly and reported less frustration. The school climate was perceived to be more positive in schools where the headteacher had been in office longer (11 years and more). Conversely, more directedness, less openness and more frustration were associated with the least experienced headteachers.

Pol *et al.* (2013) studied the processes of organizational learning, also using a mixed methodology, and their key topic was how headteachers support the processes of organizational learning. They found that the primary condition for such support is the headteacher's behaviour whereby he or she: insists on a high quality of work, becomes a model of behaviour, accentuates the teamwork of teachers, supports peer visits to classes, delegates, and supports the school climate. Headteachers in this study considered it important to have good relations between leaders and create strong partnerships or larger groupings.

Research focused on school leadership in specific contexts or specific periods of change in education policies also produced interesting findings. For example, Sedláček (2008) studied the specifics of school leaders of rural schools and came to the conclusion that an important factor in the processes of leadership is the context of the small rural school and, related to that, the larger importance of the role of the mayor. The mayor's considerable influence can act as a destabilizing element, making the headteacher feel less secure. The headteacher then largely attempts to convince the mayor of that he or she is the right person in place.

The obligation for schools to compile reports was an impetus for the international project "Developing Leadership Capacity for Data-informed School Improvement" (DELECA), which focused on questions such as how headteachers work with data. It found that Czech headteachers collected data on pupils, infrastructure and teachers, while the least data was collected on the external community and the perception of the school by various subjects. Czech headteachers were convinced that their task was to develop schools by means of decisions based on data, but they felt much less obliged to collect data and carry out research in their own schools. They expressed more desire for data-based school development than data collection. Also, they generally expressed the view that there was more need for education in school development than for work with data (Lazarová *et al.*, 2015c).

Inclusion has become a significant topic in recent years, so it is not surprising that many researchers have inquired into it. Using qualitative procedures, Lazarová *et al.* (2015b) studied how school leaders supported inclusive education. From the viewpoint of the leaders, there were two key aspects: supporting the idea and culture of inclusive education in schools and mastering the practice of inclusive education. Headteachers are able to significantly influence the way in which inclusion in schools is perceived. They stated that if the leaders themselves are not committed to the idea, it is very difficult to support inclusive education. Mastering the practice includes “protecting teachers” from work and administration overload related to inclusive education. Support systems for teachers are established, which involve a structure of rules, prompt solutions for problems, consulting, personnel reinforcement, and support for participation and democracy in schools. Although headteachers reported that they often had to strike a balance between the rules and making concessions to teachers, they were not afraid of making decisions in difficult situations.

A VIEW TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Headteachers of basic [primary] and secondary schools are people in positions of great responsibility. This will have to be taken into account when establishing strategies and procedures that will lead to an adequate legislative framework for their work, continuous education, and support for and evaluation of their work. This should also include the aspect of differentiated career phases. It will also be necessary to liberate headteachers from administrative overload and accentuate the necessity to support the key processes in schools, namely, learning and teaching. Headteachers should have a realistic chance to develop schools in this direction, from the inside, in cooperation with other people in schools and the wider community.

The work of headteachers will have to remain under relatively strict control. At the same time, it must be made more attractive so that we can recruit proficient individuals from future generations. Unfortunately, the demographic indicators are not favourable. A variety of tools and specific measures are at hand, but their application often remains a matter of political will and preference, both in terms of general politics and education policy.

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