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Methodological Concept of Preparatory Classes

Policy Brief

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KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Preparatory classes should be designed as a temporary but impactful tool fostering integration, inclusion, and creating a supportive pathway for students to transition into regular education.
- The ways preparatory classes have been operating in Polish schools especially after 24.02.2022 require a thorough modification. Evidence shows that the current model promotes isolation and separation of the student community and schools often do not know how to plan teaching in such settings.
- The education and development of migrant children in a school environment is most effective when it takes place both formats: the preparatory classes (PC) and in the regular class to which a student has been assigned.
- In schools where organizing such process is unfeasible, the education should consist of two stages: a short-term period of learning in PC format (focused on acquiring Polish language skills), followed by the integration of students into regular classes in the second stage.
- It is necessary to clearly define the procedures for admitting a foreign student to a Polish school, enrolling them into the appropriate class and/or into the preparatory class.
- Effective teacher training in the context of preparatory classes should emphasize observation-based diagnosis of students' educational backgrounds, incorporate dynamic assessments to monitor progress, and provide tailored support.
- The key to the success of teaching in the PC format is the high quality of Polish language teaching.
- Teaching in preparatory classes should follow an integrated content and language learning (CLIL) approach.
- In developing the concept of the PC, it is also important to take into account the cultural differences and linguistic proximity between different groups of students from different regions of the world.

1. Introduction

Over the past 20 years, Polish schools, have seen an increasing number of students from all over the world, learning alongside Polish students. Among them are individuals with migration experience, including Poles returning from abroad who have used Polish in a limited way (or not at all) and have never attended a Polish school; individuals speaking Slavic languages, as well as those speaking languages that are typologically distant from Polish (e.g., Vietnamese). The gradually intensifying migration processes and the efforts of Polish non-governmental organizations have led to the introduction of the concept of a preparatory class into Polish educational law in 2016¹. Its main goal was to support the adaptation of migrant children to the education process and meet their educational needs, by supporting them in learning and using the Polish language.

¹ [Act of 14 December 2016 on: Education Law with further changes.](#)

According to the definition² which is still in force today, the preparatory class is a solution provided for people who:

- are subject to compulsory schooling (i.e. primary school pupils) or compulsory education (i.e. secondary school students),
- are not Polish citizens, or are Polish citizens returning from abroad,³
- have so far studied in schools in other countries' educational systems,
- do not speak Polish or do so at a level insufficient to benefit from education in a Polish school,
- demonstrate communication disorders and adaptation difficulties due to cultural differences and changes in the educational environment.

It's worth to mention that the part of the definition, included in the 2016 educational law, which refers to persons who "have so far received their education in schools operating in the educational systems of other countries" should be amended.

This provision omits children who have not started their education in their country of origin or previous residence and will start it in the first grade in a Polish school. This definition might be formulated as following: "A school class for persons who are not Polish citizens and who are Polish citizens, are subject to compulsory schooling (i.e. for primary school pupils) or compulsory education, who have not been in education or have so far learned at in schools in other countries' educational systems."

A pivotal moment for Polish schools came in 2022 – the full-scale war in Ukraine brought a significant social impact known as the "scale effect." Until June 2022 approximately 140 thousands refugee students from Ukraine have been admitted to schools in Poland and the vast majority of them – 70% – were enrolled to mainstream classes, while preparatory classes have been arranged for 30% of refugee students (approximately 38 thousands) 4. Moreover, the number of PCs decreased in successive school years, reaching its lowest level in October 2024, when only 3% (3,600) of all Ukrainian refugee students were enrolled in such classes⁵. On the other hand, as we know from practice and qualitative field research⁶ the preparatory classes were often culturally and linguistically homogeneous units, composed exclusively of Ukrainian students which only reinforced their separative nature instead of achieving integration goals⁷.

Based on this experience it's worth to modify the concept for preparatory classes in Polish schools. This concept should be effective both during periods of regular migration and in crisis situations to better prepare Polish schools to potentially accommodate a larger number of children and youth from other countries. Therefore, in the following analysis, both the legal and practical aspects of preparatory classes are examined and, based on these insights, conclusions and proposals for possible directions of change are formulated.

² Article 4 (13) Act of Education Law - PC definition formulated in Article 4 point 13: [A preparatory classes is] the school unit for non-Polish citizens and Polish citizens who are subject to compulsory schooling or education, and who have attended schools in education systems of other countries and do not know Polish, or know it at a level insufficient for learning, as well as those who show communication disorders and adaptation difficulties related to cultural differences or changes in the educational environment, which requires adjusting the process and organization of education to their needs and educational capabilities. The unit is organized in accordance with regulations issued based on Article 165 regarding the use of education and preschool and school care by foreigners, paragraph 16, point 2

³ For compulsory schooling and compulsory education definitions see the link: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32016R0609>

⁴ Center for Citizenship Education enrolment report, Paulina Chrostowska, Refugee students from Ukraine in Polish Education System, data for 06.2022

⁵ Center for Citizenship Education and Unicef enrolment report, Elżbieta Świdrowska, Klaudia Stano, [Students from Ukraine in Polish Schools. What has changed in 2024/2025 school year?](#)

⁶ Center for Citizenship Education and Unicef qualitative research report, M. Tędziągolska, B. Walczak, Wielecki, [Students from Ukraine in Polish schools: school year 2023/2024](#).

⁷ As above, slide 35

2. Legal aspects of organising a preparatory class

At the beginning of the 2024/25 school year, the conditions for establishing, organizing, and operating preparatory classes in Polish schools were defined by a series of regulations issued by the Minister of National Education – including the regulation from August 2017 and three subsequent ones issued after the escalation of the war in Ukraine (2022–2024)⁸. The key information regarding the organization of the preparatory class can be found in paragraph 16 of the regulation dated August 23, 2017⁹.

It should be noted that the discussed solution does not apply to all schools. Preparatory classes are not organised in art schools, special schools, sport schools, athletic championship schools, schools for adults, postsecondary schools and a stage II sectoral vocational school (item 165, section 14, Education Law). An exception is the possibility to organise PCs for students—citizens of Ukraine in sports schools and athletic championship schools.¹⁰

A separate legal regulation applies to preparatory classes created for students from Ukraine. Pursuant to the Act of 12 March 2022¹¹, teaching in the preparatory class referred to in Article 165 (11) of the Education Law may be provided in an **inter-school group**. In cases justified by demographic conditions, the authority in charge of the school in which the preparatory class has been organised may direct students from other schools of the same type, run by the same local self-government unit, to this class.¹²

Although it may seem justified for organisational reasons e.g. costs, space, and staff), the provision allowing the format of preparatory classes as inter-school groups may at the same time hamper the integration process in a given school environment and, consequently, educational achievements. On the one hand it slows down the sense of inclusion and belonging to one school community, which helps students rebuild a sense of agency, strengthens social bonds and provides a sense of collective identity. On the other, when a student leaves an inter-school PC, he/she once again needs to join a completely new group and unfamiliar environment with which they had no contact or relationship before.

As the model of educational integration shows¹³, the effective educational integration requires meeting three types of needs of students (Polish/hosting and foreign students): emotional, social and educational/learning needs. Among emotional needs, the authors point to the need for stability and predictability, and among social needs, the need to belong to a class and school community. The preparatory class should be a form of support for migrant and refugee students in the early stages of their stay at school to which they have been admitted. It is therefore questionable whether these needs of refugee students from Ukraine are taken into account in the case of inter-school preparatory groups.

⁸ More details – see Appendix 1

⁹ More details – see Appendix 1

¹⁰ Paragraph 16a [Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of 21 March 2022 on the education, upbringing and care of children and adolescents who are citizens of Ukraine; Consolidated text: Journal of Laws 2023, item 2094](#)

¹¹ Article 55(1) of the Act of 12 March 2022 on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine

¹² Article 55, item 2 of the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine

¹³ Center for Citizenship Education, [A model for educational integration in schools receiving migrant students](#)

RECOMMENDATION:

The organisation of preparatory classes should be guided by content-related considerations (didactics, integration, inclusion), rather than economic ones.

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

In a situation where a small number of foreign students induce the governing body to make decisions based on economic reasons (reject to open PC or agree to create inter-school PC), an alternative is an individualized education pathway. This allows the student to attend selected educational classes, which help him/her to adapt to their specific educational needs.

In addition, the student should take part in lessons in the class to which he/she has been admitted. This solution would not exclude the student from school life and will allow to pursue educational goals in a way that is compatible with his or her needs and abilities.¹⁴



¹⁴ The essence of this solution is explained by the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 1 January 2017 on the principles of organising and providing psychological and pedagogical assistance in public kindergartens, schools and institutions (Journal of Laws of 1 January 2017).

3. Practical and pragmatic aspects of the functioning of preparatory classes

3.1. School location and documents necessary to enrol a foreign child to a Polish school

The admission of a student arriving from abroad to a Polish school should be carried out under the same conditions and procedures as those applicable to Polish citizens¹⁵. The student has the right to education in the school within the district corresponding to their place of residence¹⁶. There is a possibility to enrol the student in a school located in a different area, but this depends on the availability of free places in the school¹⁷.

A student arriving from abroad (except first graders) is admitted on the basis of one of the documents:

- a certificate, attestation or other document attesting to the completion of a school or further stage of education abroad,
- a certificate, attestation or other document issued by a school abroad certifying that the student attended a school abroad and indicating the grade or stage of education which the student has completed,
- a document certifying the student's total number of years of schooling,
- a written statement concerning the total number of years of the student's schooling, submitted by the student's parent or other person having custody of the student or the adult, if it is not possible to establish the total number of years of schooling on the basis of a certificate, attestation or other document.

Additionally, in the case of technical and vocational secondary schools, it is necessary to present a medical certificate stating that there are no health contraindications to undertaking practical vocational education. In the case of schools where the curriculum requires specific individual aptitudes and skills (e.g. art schools), a document confirming the level of skills is required.

¹⁵ According to Act on Educational Law: art. 130 ust. 1, art. 131, art. 149, art. 150 ust. 1, ust. 2 pkt 1–3 i ust. 6–10, art. 152, art. 153 ust. 1 i art. 155–161 ustawy, § 3 ust.1 rozporządzenia Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 23 sierpnia 2017 r.

¹⁶ According to art. 133 p. 1 i art. 151 p 1 Act (§4 ust. 1 p. 1)

¹⁷ §4 ust. 1 punkt 1 – first class enrolment, §4 ust. 2 punkt 2 – other classes enrolment

3.2. Procedure for enrolment to a specific class

In accordance with the law, the decision to enrol a student into a given class should be based on an analysis of two key pieces of information, applied jointly:

- the student's total number of years of schooling: analysing this information is formal and allows an estimate which grade the student may be enrolled to,
- age of the student – the age of the student is a psychological criterion: the student should be placed in a peer group.

Enrolment **into a particular class is therefore not determined, and should not be, by the level of proficiency in Polish.** In practice, the additional criterion of proficiency in Polish language is often applied and migrant students are admitted to a class lower than what corresponds to their age and stage of educational development. As a result, the students often end in groups of much younger peers and their level of social, emotional and educational development is not taken into an account.

EXAMPLE:

A pupil who is 10 years old and arrives at a Polish school presents a Grade 5 graduation certificate, because he started school abroad at the age of 5. From the point of view of social and emotional development, he should therefore be placed in a peer class with a tolerance of +/- 1 year (i.e. grade 4–5). However, due to the application of the language criterion and the lack of proficiency in Polish, the pupil is placed in Grade 2 (8-year-olds), which is seriously misaligned with his general levels of development and competence.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended to establish a nationwide procedure¹⁸ for enrolling a student arriving from abroad in a Polish school, which will include the enrolment in an appropriate grade, the method of directing the student to the preparatory class and the definition of the head teacher's responsibilities in this area.

¹⁸ The outline of the applicable procedure is included in the Appendix 2.

3.3. Referral of a student arriving from abroad to a preparatory class

A student is admitted to the appropriate class from which they may be referred for compulsory schooling or education to the PC on the basis of the qualification by the assessment team.¹⁹ Therefore, in line with the legal provisions, a student arriving from abroad cannot be admitted directly to a preparatory class and there is no legal basis on which such an admission could take place.

However, the enrolment of refugee children directly into the PC has been a common practice since 2021/22 school year and after. As a result, many students who attended a PC did not have any or very limited contact with their Polish peers. Students enrolled directly in the PC did not have the opportunity to participate in selected lessons together with Polish students, and once the preparatory class was dissolved and students were transferred to (a) new class(es), they were placed in a group in which they did not know anyone and with which they were not integrated.

A likely reason for these practices were the pressing circumstances, including the need to enrol a large number of students in a short period of time, while in many schools the maximum number of students in regular classes was already reached before the arrival of refugee children.

RECOMMENDATION:

The practice of enrolling a foreign child directly into a PC (rather than into a general class) should be abolished.

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

To avoid the above-mentioned practice and to comply with the law, the governing bodies should develop a procedure for enrolling a student with migration experience in school. The Board of Education should monitor whether students are being referred directly to the PC (rather than to a class appropriate to the student) and, where this is the case, instruct the head teachers on the correct action, giving reasons why this is important for the child's development.

3.4. Diagnosing the competences of a student arriving from abroad

The decision to create a PC shall be taken by the governing body at the proposal of the head teacher who has identified such a need in their school. This diagnosis should take the form of a multifaceted diagnosis.

The pedagogical diagnosis of a student arriving from abroad is not an easy task and extensive experience in diagnosing Polish students may not be sufficient in such case. The table below shows the more important barriers to the diagnosis process of a student from another culture experiencing difficulties in communicating in Polish.

¹⁹ 3.1 Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 23 August 2017 on the education of persons who are not Polish citizens and persons who are Polish citizens and who have received education in schools operating in the educational systems of other countries (Journal 2017(1655) as amended).

Table 1. Challenges in diagnosing a foreign student²⁰

Diagnosed area	Description of the difficulties in the diagnosis and possible solutions
The student's range of knowledge and skills and educational experience	An area practically unverifiable due to a lack of or limited knowledge of the host country's language. A diagnosis hampered by unfamiliarity with the core curriculum of the country of origin, lack of information on the child's learning difficulties and successes at school in the country of origin. A possible partial assessment of selected key skills: mathematical competence, digital competence. The diagnosis of communication in a foreign language is possible if the child has been learning it in the school of the country of origin.
The course of cognitive processes	Diagnosis is possible with techniques to compensate for unfamiliarity with the language of the learning process (all non-verbal processes and operations, e.g. picture code, logical operations on objects, etc.). Possible diagnosis of cognitive processes in the acquisition of Polish as a foreign language, provided the process is carried out by a specialist glottodidactician.
Interests	Diagnosis (indirect, excluding the verbal channel) is possible on the basis of observation of the child and analysis of their involvement in the processes at school. Cultural or religious-cultural barriers can make diagnosis difficult.
Motivation and a sense of purpose	Diagnosis is hampered by unfamiliarity with language, culture and religion. An area particularly difficult to diagnose for existential, psychological or, in extreme cases, traumatic reasons. Motivation and sense of purpose sometimes undermined by situations of "existential limbo", plans for further family migration, etc.
Building relationships with peers, the environment	Diagnosis can be difficult: a child may withdraw due to language and cultural barriers. The way in which relationships with peers are built can run atypically. The child feels alien and cannot break the language and cultural barrier. At school, they function under stress outside their comfort zone (home, native language, native culture, etc.)
Environment: home and the student's family	Diagnosis can be difficult due to language barrier, cultural barrier, religious barrier, etc. Recognition of environmental conditions is possible with the support of competent cultural assistants. Most often, the foreign child's family has the same language and cultural barrier as the child.

²⁰ Own elaboration based on: Urszula Majcher-Legawiec, Na przerwie i na lekcji – język specjalistyczny w edukacji dzieci i młodzieży z doświadczeniem migracyjnym [At recess and in the classroom: specialist language in the education of children and young people with migrant experience] [in:] Acta Universitatis Lodzensis, Kształcenie Polonistyczne Cudzoziemców 24, 2017, pp. 243-259.

3.5. Eligibility to the Preparatory Class

The decision about eligibility of a student to the PC is made by an assessment team appointed by the head teacher where the class is established. This team consists of two teachers and a school counsellor or psychologist. The assessment team should take minutes of the meeting.

It is the task of the assessment team to determine whether a candidate to the PC knows Polish language at a level insufficient to benefit from study. For this purpose, the team may attempt to assess Polish language skills in the form of an interview or a placement test. There are no standardised Polish language assessment tests for children and young people. For the test to fulfil its role, such test would have to take into account, among other things:

- indicators such as the age of the student (a different test would have to be prepared for children who cannot read or write, a different one for younger students, a different one for students in higher primary school classes, and a different one for secondary school students);
- the typological distance of the languages (a different test for students speaking Slavic languages, a different one for students speaking languages typologically distant from Polish);
- and finally, cultural neutrality (including, for example, the many differences between languages that result from culture, such as the way in which polite forms are used, and many others).

There is a lack of clear guidelines on qualification rules for the preparatory unit, which brings a high risk of discretion.



RECOMMENDATION:

Qualification rules for the preparatory class to be used by the assessment team should be developed.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- It is recommended that the assessment team carry out:
 1. an analysis of the student's previous educational biography (e.g. number of years of schooling, course of previous education and educational successes/failures, knowledge of other languages),
 2. a two-stage interview to assess proficiency in Polish:
 - First stage: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) competence assessment²¹,
 - Second stage (if first stage is successful): Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) competence assessment²².

The two-stage assessment of language skills will help to make the right decision about 1) referring the student to a preparatory class; and 2) if the committee does not make such a decision, determining the extent to which the student will be supported in Polish as a foreign language classes.

- Qualification to the PC should also **take into account the student's country of origin/first language**: if they constitute a vast majority, students who speak a Slavic language should not learn in the PC with students who are using a language typologically distant from Polish (e.g. with students whose first language is Spanish or Vietnamese).
- It is pedagogically and psychologically justifiable to combine students from different countries and cultures in preparatory divisions. The experience of recent years shows that the PCs established from 2022 onwards are composed exclusively of students from Ukraine. As such, it favours communication in the language of the country of origin (in Ukrainian or Russian) and does not create the opportunity to use Polish as for PC students.

3.6. Number of students in a preparatory class and the language learning process

The maximum number of students in a class is set out in item 2 of Section 16 of the 2017 Regulation. By March 2022, it was 15 people, now it amounts to 25. The document does not specify the minimum number of students, so a class can also be organised for one student. This regulation led to the creation of classes of twenty-five students in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 school years, which disregards the specificity of this form of teaching organization. The aim of the educational process in the preparatory class, regardless of the age of the students, is to develop general competences (knowledge, practical and learning skills), cultural competences, and, most importantly, language competences (linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic). Research shows that the process of acquiring and learning a foreign language is considerably slower and less effective in a large group, thus extending the duration of the students' time in the preparatory class and working against the basic aims of the PC²³.

²¹ Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills: the language of everyday communication.

²² Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency: academic language, the language of school education.

²³ Proposals for linguistic activities are contained in the [Program nauczania języka polskiego jako drugiego dla oddziałów przygotowawczych w szkołach podstawowych](#) ["Curriculum for teaching Polish as a second language for preparatory classes in primary schools"] by Małgorzata Pamuła-Behrens and Marta Szymańska. [Curriculum for teaching Polish as a second language to preparatory classes in primary schools]

RECOMMENDATION:

The regulation setting the maximum number of students in a preparatory class at 25 should be thoroughly reconsidered.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- The maximum number of students in the PC should be 15²⁴, because only this approach guarantees the achievement of the educational and pedagogical objectives of this form of teaching. Only small group allow to individualize the teaching methods and approaches used, taking into account the needs of foreign students.
- In a preparatory class: work methods should be adapted to the educational goals, including a relevant and conscious path to develop both BICS and CALP level skills; the former may be developed using the textbooks for learning Polish as a foreign language available on the market, the latter require custom-made materials prepared by the teachers²⁵.

3.7. Curricula and adapting the methods and forms of implementation to students needs

In line with Article 165 of the Education Law, the preparatory class follows the general education core curriculum in a process that is adapted to the students' learning needs and abilities. Preparatory classes are conducted on the basis of the school curricula. The basic criterion for adapting the subject content in the curriculum is the lack of proficiency in Polish. The following number of compulsory education classes is allocated per week:

- 1) in primary school, grades 1 to 3: no less than 20 hours,
- 2) in primary school, grades 4 to 6: no less than 23 hours,
- 3) in primary school, grades 7 and 8: no less than 25 hours,
- 4) in secondary school: no less than 26 hours.

The weekly number of hours in the preparatory class is determined by the school organisation sheet drawn up by the head teacher, in line with the provisions of the Regulation on the minimum number of hours of compulsory education.

Learning Polish is obligatory in a preparatory class and is conducted according to the curriculum based on the framework curriculum of Polish language courses for foreigners. The minimum number of hours of teaching Polish should be no less than 4 hours a week (with 6 hours per week until August 2024²⁶). The remaining number of hours is used for other classes from the core curriculum, which are conducted in line with school curricula for general education. Their content, methods and forms are adapted to students' developmental and educational needs and their psychophysical abilities. Any subject lesson prepared with appropriate method can be an effective form of supporting the language skills (both at BICS and CALP levels) of students in the preparatory class.

²⁴ Małgorzata Pamuła-Behrens and Marta Szymańska, as above

²⁵ Ball, P, Kelly, K., Clegg, J. (2015). Putting CLIL into Practice. Oxford: Oxford University Press

²⁶ <https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/D2024000130201.pdf>

3.7.1. Subject teaching in PCs

As mentioned earlier, the teacher in the PC is obliged to individualize work with a student according to their needs, to cover all curricular content during the learning process²⁷. It should be noted, however, that in the case of the preparatory class for students from Ukraine²⁸ the teaching process is based on the general education curricula implemented at the school but adapted not only in terms of teaching methods and forms but also in terms of the scope, to meet the developmental and educational needs, as well as psychophysical capabilities of students. This provision, for example, exempts the Polish language teacher (understood here as a school subject) from the obligation to cover all content, and thus, for example, of the knowledge of literary works of the Polish Middle Ages. This flexibility makes the teaching situation more realistic and takes into account the limited possibilities of the student to learn the entire curriculum content in Polish as indicated in the core curriculum.



RECOMMENDATION:

The adaptation of the methods and forms of implementation of activities in the PC to the needs and abilities of foreign students should take into account integration aims.

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

One possibility is to include PC students in the activities of the classes to which they were qualified.

- Holistic inclusion of foreign students might be possible in subjects such as physical education, art, music, IT or form tutor period classes and, compulsorily, at modern foreign language classes.
- For other subjects, it is worth considering partial inclusions - implementing the core curriculum partly in the PC format and partly in the regular class to which the student is assigned (see table below).

²⁷ In accordance with Article 44c(1) and (2) of the Education System Act

²⁸ In accordance with Article 55(5) of the Act of 12.03.2022 on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine.

To show how such a combined system can be organized - below is a breakdown of the weekly number of lessons for the inclusive model of the preparatory classes in the 1st grade of a general high school.

The **light blue** colour indicates the subjects that are taught in the regular class to which the student has been admitted, **turquoise** indicates subjects that are taught both with the regular class and in the PC formula. The remaining cells are subjects taught exclusively in the PC formula.

Subject	In an inclusive manner, in the general classroom	IN THE PC
Physical education	2	-
English	5	-
Geography	1	1
Computer science	1	-
Form tutor period	1	-
Mathematics	1	2
History	1	2
Biology	-	1
Safety education	-	1
Physics	-	1
Chemistry	-	1
Polish	-	6
Polish as a foreign language/second language	-	3
Total:	12	18
Total, all hours:	30	

And the example of weekly timetable with the distribution of hours – **the turquoise** colour indicates the subjects that are taught inclusively in the class into which the student has been enrolled, while the black colour are subjects carried out fully in PC format.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	PE (girls)	ENGLISH	PE (boys)		
2	PE (girls)	ENGLISH	PE (boys)	MATHEMATICS	
3	GEOGRAPHY	PFL/2	MATHEMATICS	BIOLOGY	ENGLISH
4	HISTORY	POLISH	MATHEMATICS	BUSINESS EDUCATION	HISTORY
5	PHYSICS	POLISH	CHEMISTRY	PFL/2	FORM TUTOR PERIOD
6	PFL/2	GEOGRAPHY	HISTORY	POLISH	
7	POLISH		ENGLISH	POLISH	
8	POLISH		ENGLISH	COMPUTER SCIENCE	

A major difficulty for teachers in the PC is a limited methodological preparation (or the lack of thereof) for working in a linguistically and culturally diverse group. Since there are also no textbooks to work with students with limited proficiency in the language of education, each teacher has to prepare teaching materials for the students taking into account their level of Polish. From student's perspective, the subject teacher is also a teacher teaching in a foreign language – Polish language. Teaching in the preparatory class should therefore integrate subject and language teaching – so called CLIL method: Content and Language Integrated Learning. This approach allows students to simultaneously learn the subject content and master the foreign language in which the learning process takes place. Teachers of Polish as a foreign/second language and subject teachers should develop a common teaching plan for each class and subject so that language teaching supports subject teaching.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is important for subject teachers and Polish as a second language teachers in preparatory classes to improve their skills in effectively supporting students in achieving language proficiency while simultaneously acquiring subject knowledge.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

Content and Language Integrated Learning, CLIL, is an effective approach to the educational process that sets two goals for the student: simultaneous learning of the subject and mastery of the foreign language in which the learning takes place. Training should be planned for both subject teachers and Polish as a foreign language teachers, focusing on "hard" and "soft" CLIL approaches.

Key features of the CLIL method include:

- use of glottodidactically developed materials,
- systematic teaching of subject-specific vocabulary,
- use of visually developed materials,
- polysensory transfer of subject content,
- work in groups, pairs.

Teachers teaching in the PC (and ultimately all teachers teaching in the school), both subject and PFL (Polish as Foreign Language) teachers, should be trained in:

- **"hard" CLIL**, i.e. subject teaching through a foreign language (led by the subject teacher: the curriculum follows directly from the subject curriculum); it supports language education in non-language lessons²⁹;
- **"soft" CLIL** (led by a foreign language teacher who designs a language lesson based on subject content); it supports the learning of subject content in language lessons³⁰.

A long-term experiment conducted in Spain revealed that the so-called CLIL effect reaches also host country students who cannot do well at school in their mother tongue but may do better in a CLIL class.

²⁹ Aleksandra Zaparucha, *Theory in a nutshell* (Teoria w pigulce)

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 14.

3.7.2. Bridging the curriculum gap

Curriculum gaps in teaching may stem both from the differences between teaching in different schools of the same education system (e.g. differences between Polish schools) and from differences between education systems in different countries. In accordance with the Education Act, if analysing the student's educational biography reveals curricular differences, the new school should provide the conditions for reducing these differences by the end of the educational stage. This includes, for instance, lessons with another class, one-on-one tutoring under the conditions agreed with the subject teacher, or by means of a classification examination in these subjects³¹. As the educational regulations that govern the so-called bridging of the curriculum gap are prepared for Polish students that are fluent in Polish, thus they **do not take into account any potential communication difficulties stemming from the lack of proficiency or insufficient proficiency in Polish**. Therefore, as these educational regulations apply also to foreign students, they do not consider:

- the linguistic and cultural disposition of the student to meet educational challenges,
- differences in the core curriculum (except for students-refugees from Ukraine in the 8th grade of primary school)³²,
- differences in the content taught (information, skills and values conveyed in the learning process).

It's also worth noting that the concept to bridge educational differences includes an assumption that the curriculum in the country of arrival is better/fuller/more appropriate than the one covered in the country of origin. It is an example of organising the educational process in a manner assuming that the diagnosis requires marking deficits, and not the potential of learner.

For students from Ukraine with refugee experience, graduating from primary school in 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24, the need to make up curricular differences in music, arts, nature and technology is waived³³.

Bridging curriculum gaps — if undertaken in Polish schools for Ukrainian students—is conducted in Polish (i.e., in a foreign language for the student) and **requires an initial assessment of subject knowledge as well as language skills, particularly in the language of school education**. While it may be helpful to compare the core curricula in place in Ukraine and Poland and catalogue learning content, skills and values linked to culture (often also religion), such comparison has only indicative value for a teacher. It does not necessarily reflect the actual skills and level of knowledge of students who, for various reasons, have mastered the core curriculum to an unequal degree. An additional circumstance affecting the usefulness of comparative approach is the ongoing core curriculum reform in Ukraine, which means that **some Ukrainian students have followed either the old or the new core curriculum**.

³¹ Regulation of the Ministry of Education of 29 August 2019 on the detailed conditions for the transition of a student from a public school, a public art school or a non-public art school with the rights of a public art school to a public school of a different type or a public school of the same type (OJ 2019, item 1641 as amended).

³² *ibid*

³³ In the grade sheet and the certificate of completion of primary school, a horizontal line is inserted in the space designated for entering grades for these subjects. Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Science of May 13, 2022, amending the regulation on the organization of education, upbringing, and care for children and youth who are citizens of Ukraine (Journal of Laws of 2022, item 1047).

OBSERVATION:

The compulsion to bridge educational gaps is based on the erroneous assumption that it significantly impacts a child's educational success. This belief is especially flawed in the case of a foreign child.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- It is worth to prepare an indicative framework of information on the Ukrainian core curriculum (old and new one) for all schools, head teachers and teachers in Poland.
- It is recommended to abandon the practice to bridge curriculum gaps in subjects that are not included in the Ukrainian core curriculum but are covered in a Polish school.
- In case of foreign students and Polish returning students, the legal and residence criteria (day of arrival in Poland) should be abandoned, keeping in mind that educational success is decided by language and cultural competence.

3.7.3. Polish Language Teaching in PCs

The PC provides for the study of the Polish language as part of the weekly curriculum, no less than 4 hours per week³⁴. A student in a PC still has the right to 2–5 free Polish language lessons per week (group or individual) and remedial classes for 12 months of effective learning, excluding holidays and breaks.

The regulation regarding the curriculum for teaching Polish in preparatory classes is inadequate for the needs of children and adolescents. In the Regulation, the legislator refers to the framework programme of **Polish language courses for adults** set out in the Social Assistance Act, which does not take into account the needs of children and their development in a Polish school.³⁵

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

A good reference point for teachers developing a curriculum for a specific class is "[Program nauczania języka polskiego jako drugiego dla oddziałów przygotowawczych w szkole podstawowej](#)" [Curriculum for teaching Polish as a second language for preparatory classes in primary school] developed by M. Pamuła-Behrens and M. Szymańska as part of the Ministry of National Education project implemented by the Mikołaj Rej Foundation for the Promotion of Polish Culture and Language in 2019.

Teaching the Polish language is crucial to the process of adaptation, integration and education. It determines school and educational success and is a condition for the students' well-being. **The way Polish language is taught to foreign children learning in PCs and in general classes should undergo significant changes, both in the way learning is organised and in the teaching methodology.** From organizational point of view, the duration of Polish language teaching should not be an administrative decision given by a regulation from the central authorities but should be a result of a diagnosis of needs.

³⁴ Item 16, point 9 of the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 23 August 2017 on the education of persons who are not Polish citizens and persons who are Polish citizens and who have received education in schools operating in the educational systems of other countries (consolidated text: Journal of Laws 2023, item 2301): <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20230002301/O/D20232301.pdf>

³⁵ Regulation of the Minister of Education of 23 August 2017, item 16(9), Journal of Laws 2017, item 1655, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20170001655/O/D20171655.pdf>

The new methodology of teaching Polish language should be based on the BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) concepts, which distinguish between everyday communication language and the language of school/academic education³⁶. The key challenge is to integrate teaching Polish with subject teaching and taking into account that each foreign language learner achieves their goals at an individual pace that is difficult to standardise.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is necessary to develop a holistic program for teaching Polish as a second language.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

1. **Organisation of Polish language** learning should include the criteria such as:

- age of the student,
- country of origin (and consequent language affinity or lack thereof),
- the degree of mastery of the Polish language as determined by the diagnostic process.

These criteria should determine whether the student learns:

- always in a group with a similar development potential, largely thanks to age.
 - always in a group with people who, as their mother tongue, use a language with a similar typological distance to Polish. For methodological reasons, it is advisable to form Slavic and non-Slavic groups; it is not permissible to combine students from, for example, Ukraine and Vietnam in one group.
 - always on the basis of a binary diagnosis and including the degree of mastery of the communicative language (BICS) and the language of school education (CALP).
2. The duration of language learning should result from a diagnosis of the student's ability to use Polish in the everyday and school situations, taking into account the student's biography.
3. Two levels of competence, BICS and CALP, should be considered in language teaching and teaching should be organised after analysing the individual situation of the learner. The extent of support for language development should be tailored to the results of the language competence diagnosis and the analysis of the student's language biography, family situation, and migration experiences³⁷.

³⁶ The BICS and CALP concept has been proposed by Jim Cummins in Cummins, James (1979). "[Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters](#)". For details see the Appendix 2

³⁷ Details – see the Appendix 2

4. Communicative language lessons (e.g. for one year) and school education language lessons should be organised separately, with a focus on CALP in school education, as mastery of BICS happens largely through immersion. After (approximately one year, the additional lessons in communicative Polish should be replaced by lessons in the language of school education and taught using the CLIL methodology.
5. BICS level skills may be developed using the textbooks for learning Polish as a foreign language available on the market, while CALP level skills require custom-made materials prepared by the teachers.
6. Intercultural assistants should be included in the process of planning language development in the context of school education, to 1) strengthen their cooperation with subject teachers; and 2) use their experience and knowledge to make subject terminology more coherent (e.g. geographical and historical proper names, but also terminology used in other subjects, including the language of instruction).
7. As curriculum is taught in a language foreign to students, it is worthwhile to promote the possibility to get to know Polish literature in a linguistic and intersemiotic translation (film, drama adaptation).
8. It is worth **drawing on the solutions and support developed by various NGOs**³⁸ - especially the learning materials for teaching in a preparatory class and a multicultural school.

3.8. Combined Classes in PCs

The regulations allow the organisation of teaching in combined classes respectively for grades:

- 1) 1–3 of primary school,
- 2) 4–6 of primary school,
- 3) 7 and 8 of primary school,
- 4) 1 and 2 of general secondary schools, classes 1–3 of technical secondary schools and Level 1 trade school,
- 5) 3 and 4 of general secondary school and classes 3–4 of technical secondary school.

In practice, the possibility of combining classes means that the subject teacher in the PC follows two or even three curricula with students who do not know Polish. Assessing the effectiveness of such learning requires considering whether combining classes within a single PC is a good and effective solution in educational practice.

A PC can be created at any time during the school year. Learning in the PC lasts one year but can be shortened or extended at the request of teachers, a school counsellor or psychologist based a decision of the teachers' board. If the PC was created in September, a student can benefit from learning in the PC for an entire school year and then another school year, so a total of two years. If one PC is created in April, learning in the PC continues until the end of the school year in which the PC was created and can be extended for the following school year³⁹.

³⁸ Among others, teaching materials for PCs by the Mikołaj Rej Foundation <http://fundacjareja.eu/projekty/> or the methodical guide by M. Pamuła-Behrens and M. Szymańska, "W polskiej szkole. Materiały do pracy z uczniami z doświadczeniem migracji", or materials by CCE: <https://biblioteka.ceo.org.pl/o-oddzialach-przygotowawczych-w-szkole-prawo-i-dobre-praktyki/>; <https://biblioteka.ceo.org.pl/oddzialy-przygotowawcze-organizacja-procesu-dydaktycznego/>

³⁹ The duration of study in the preparatory class is set out in Article 13. of the Act of 14 December 2016, Education Law.

Experience to date has demonstrated that the governing bodies and head teachers almost always want to organise PCs in a formula that combines students from different grades of a given educational stage. This is usually decided by economic considerations, but didactic and educational considerations argue against such a solution. The teachers' feedback and practice emphasise that the organisation of PCs for students of different ages and from different classes of a given stage negatively affects the learning and integration processes. Teachers, lacking experience in working with a mainstream multilingual class, face an organisational, didactic and methodological challenge: they have to teach the language of school education and implement the core curriculum for several classes at the same time. In such a concept:

- The subject teachers, who should deliver the core curriculum for these subjects, when teaching students from different classes, they deliver the core curriculum for two or even three levels/grades.
- In the case of secondary schools, the framework teaching plan for Grade 1 may be substantially different from the framework teaching plan for Grade 2, including, for example, a subject which is not in the framework plan for Grade 2.
- A primary Grade 1 pupil is a non-writing and non-reading pupil, as opposed to a second or third grade pupil - combining students with such different skills in one PC condemns the teacher to failure and deprives the students of the chance of success.
- Placing students from three years in one PC does not take into account their psycho-developmental needs, which are well described in child and adolescent developmental psychology (e.g., cognitive independence or readiness to think abstractly).
- It is difficult to organise the education process in a way that integrates students from the PC with students from the receiving class, e.g. during tutor hours, physical education, music, foreign language classes (with correct enrolment, each pupil should be enrolled in his/her own class, to which he/she will return after a year in the PC).

RECOMMENDATION:

The concept and legal provision allowing the combination of different grades within a single PC should be reconsidered.

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

Procedures for enrolling foreign students to general classes and their referral to PCs should be clearly defined. As a result:

- a student should have "their" class and tutor from the beginning of their time at the school,
- they should be able to join the selected lessons and learn together with their Polish peers,
- the selected subjects should be taught in the PC, in line with the framework curriculum for the regular class, thus after finishing the period of learning in the PC, the student's integration to regular class will be easier.

4. Summary

The didactic and organisational concept of the preparatory classes require the following modifications:

- learning the Polish language in connection with the core curriculum using the so-called CLIL,
- adapting methods and forms of conducting lessons to the needs and abilities of students with little or no knowledge of Polish, through an integrative approach combining education in preparatory classes and regular classes,
- redefining the process of assigning a foreign student to a specific class and preparatory class,
- setting the maximum number of students in preparatory classes up to 15, so that the class size does not contradict the primary objective of the preparatory class,
- abolishing the obligation to address educational gaps.

The effectiveness of preparatory classes will largely depend on the preparation of teachers. When working with migrant and refugee students coming from different education systems, teachers should not focus on knowledge gaps or language skills deficiencies, as is often practiced. Instead, teachers should be trained in observation-based diagnosis and analysis of students' previous educational experiences (also in the context of their previous language education). Given how dynamic students' development is, it is also important for teachers to know how to diagnose educational and linguistic progress on an on-going basis and to provide effective support through additional Polish lessons, remedial classes, work with appropriately selected methods and well-thought-out assessment.

Finally, the solutions created should take into account different cultural backgrounds of students at a Polish school. For instance, for pupils from Slavic countries (e.g. Ukraine, Belarus, Russia), it is worth applying to a greater extent the inclusion into mainstream classes. Since the Polish language belongs to the group of Slavic languages, their acculturation in a mixed peer group will take place more quickly than in a homogenous group. It is important because Ukrainian students learning in a mainstream school only with Ukrainians in a class can easily lose motivation to work and develop their Polish language skills, which is a natural process. Both Slavic and non-Slavic students should stay in the preparatory class only temporarily, and this time should be used to strengthen the motivation to learn, relationships with peers, and a sense of agency and belonging to a school, cultural, and civic community.

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