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## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POSTPONEMENT IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

School education has risen in value tremendously in the contemporary society, bringing about an increased emphasis on the child's school performance. How the child is viewed by their teachers and parents is closely related to the extent, to which the child manages to live up to the expectations at school. Generally speaking, at school, children mainly assert themselves through their performance, based on which they are not only evaluated (predominantly using grades), but also received by others – a process, under which certain conditions must be met. It is an undeniable advantage if the child has the full set of prerequisites for success right at the onset of the school attendance.

It is mainly the children themselves who are open to the threat posed by poor school results and whose characteristic features and capabilities do not automatically guarantee success. Any deterioration in the child's physical health, irregularity in their physical or sensory development, or delay in their mental development, however minor, may grow into a certain handicap for the child, making it impossible for them to cope with the demands of the educational process. Serious difficulties and failings at the very onset of school attendance may result in the child's poor motivation; they may compromise the child's school results and their ability to interface with other children. Therefore, it is imperative that the child have all of the prerequisites to good performance right at the onset of their school attendance, because the enrolment in the 1st grade of the primary school represents a long-term task for the preschooler, which brings about certain demands and a certain amount of stress. Today, pre-school and primary school teachers as well as

parents of pre-school children increasingly ask the question whether their children are sufficiently mature and prepared to successfully adapt to the new school setting and be able to successfully and seamlessly handle the demands the 1st grade of primary school places upon them. The parents' concerns about a potential failure or a lack of success of their child are related to the fact that 1st grade classrooms are nowadays populated with a large number of children who commenced their school attendance after a 1-year postponement. This leads to concerns on the part of some parents that such classroom setting might disadvantage their six-year-old.

### SCHOOL READINESS AND COMPONENTS OF SCHOOL READINESS

School readiness is seen as a certain developmental process of maturing, as a conditional stage in the development of each pupil's personality, which, if reached, allows the pupil to achieve further progress at this stage of primary education. School readiness may also be referred to as "a certain bridge between the family, kindergarten and primary school."

A child's school readiness may be described as the result of educational factors, as an ability to meet the requirements presented by the nature of school work. While the notion of school maturity is mainly related to a biological phenomenon conditioned by the maturing of the central nervous system, which correlates with the age of the child, school readiness is seen as a function of age. However, the child's age may not be viewed as the only factor of readiness. The effects of the social environment in which the child is raised also have a role to play in this consideration. The notion of school readiness is more deeply interlinked with the level of preschool preparation in terms of the capabilities, effects of the environment and education.

School readiness is defined as a complex of prerequisites of paramount importance to the successful mastery of all demands placed by primary education. The notion combines several components. The first component is called **Value and Meaning of School Education**, combining certain life values and behavioural strategies already absorbed by the child, which correspond to the socio-cultural status of the family. Their family background equips the child with certain competences, which translate into better or worse preconditions to the satisfactory adaptation to the school setting and the assumption of the pupil role. The second component of school readiness concerns **Social Readiness**, the attainment of a certain degree of socialisation necessary for

the pupil role to be successfully assumed and for the stress the school setting may impose upon the pupil to be minimised. The main points of interest in this area concern the ability to discriminate between the individual roles and behaviour patterns, the level of verbal communication and orientation of the child in the value system and behaviour standards. The ability to engage in verbal communication is yet another important aspect. Sufficient vocabulary, the necessary language skills and the ability to use them adequately are highly important in terms of school readiness. The fourth component of school readiness is the ability to figure out the value system and behaviour standards. This component includes the child's ability to respect the common behaviour standards and to accept the value system applied in the environment the child comes from. The child acquires most of these values and standards within the family and within the environment where they are raised. Any conflict between the standards of the family and those of the society translate into immense stress experienced by the child.

#### SCHOOL MATURITY AND COMPONENTS OF SCHOOL MATURITY

The latest specialised literary sources contain a number of definitions of school maturity that describe the attained maturity level of preschool children. Sufficient maturity of the central nervous is one of the most important factors in a child's success at school, i.e. the attainment of an adequate level of development by the child manifesting itself through certain stability and resistance to stress, which makes it possible for the child to face, without difficulty, the demands linked to school attendance and tuition. Today, a distinction is made between school maturity, which is predominantly linked to the capabilities, which are subject to maturing, and school readiness within the sense of the competencies, the development of which is affected to a considerable extent by learning and the external environment. School maturity may therefore be defined as

maturity of the CNS, which is manifested by resistance to stress, by the ability to concentrate and by emotional stability, while the notion of school readiness (eligibility) is related to the level of preschool preparation in terms of the capabilities and the effects of the environment and upbringing, rather than to biological process of maturing.

School maturity is defined as the attainment of such a stage of development where the child is capable of engaging in the school education process. In this

context, a distinction is made between three basic aspects of school maturity. One of them is the intellectual aspect, which includes, without limitation, differentiated perception, sufficient concentration of attention, the attained level of knowledge, skills and memory and the ability to employ analytical thinking. Mastery of the language is yet another important factor. Another aspect is the emotional area, which is characterised by emotional stability, by the ability of the child to suppress impulsive reactions, and by their ability to cope with fear, fright and fear of failure. The third aspect concerns the social and emotional area, which includes the child's ability to break away from their mother for a prolonged period of time, its ability to integrate in a group of children in the classroom, to establish friendship with their peers and their ability to accept the teacher's authority and assume the role of a pupil. Yet another criterion of school maturity involves physical maturity, which includes the age of the child as well as their physical development and health status. Physical maturity is closely related to the development of gross and fine motor skills and, by inference, of the entire motor coordination essential to the future training of writing. The child's laterality must be identified before the child enrolls at the primary school. A certain degree of work maturity and concentration are also essential from the viewpoint of the successful commencement of school attendance. Assessment of the child's ability to concentrate, to hold their attention even with regard to a task, which is not sufficiently intriguing, and their ability to distinguish between a game and a responsible task are all crucial factors in the decision whether the child's school attendance should be postponed.

#### COMMENCEMENT OF THE COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Commencement of the compulsory school attendance with the enrolment for the 1st grade of the primary school represents a major event in the life of a preschooler, which in social terms, is conditional upon certain changes in their existing way of life. New qualities are being added to the personality development of the preschool child, which then evolve throughout the entire school attendance period. The transition from kindergarten to primary school is seen and referred to as a breaking point in the life of both the preschool child and their entire family. For the child, it is an important social milestone, which has its exact time definition and, as an important event, is generally duly ritualised by the family.

In terms of the child's experiencing of the event, their arrival at the 1st grade of the primary school is always connected with the need to adopt a new role – the role of a pupil. The role is not optional for the child; it is automatically assumed at a certain age, regardless of whether they wished for it, or not. For the child, this brings about a necessary change in their existing life style, which is associated with increased requirements placed on the child and an increased emphasis on the meeting of such requirements, both from the primary school teachers and the parents. The pupil role is limited by the attainment of a certain age and an adequate level of development. Therefore, it may be regarded as a certain confirmation of the child's soundness. However, it needs to be noted that every child takes the role in their own individual way, assuming a certain attitude to it, which is determined by the degree of their identification with the role as well as by the level of social prestige the role entails for the pupil. This newly acquired pupil role combines two component and equally important roles. One is the pupil role, which is defined institutionally, its content precisely and unequivocally defined by the school rules, and which is always a subordinate role. The other, equally important to the child, is the coordinate role of a classmate, i.e., a peer and a friend. The degree of success, with which the child copes with the classmate role is an important overall factor not only in their experiencing the school age, but also in their future behavioural strategies and informal social relationships.

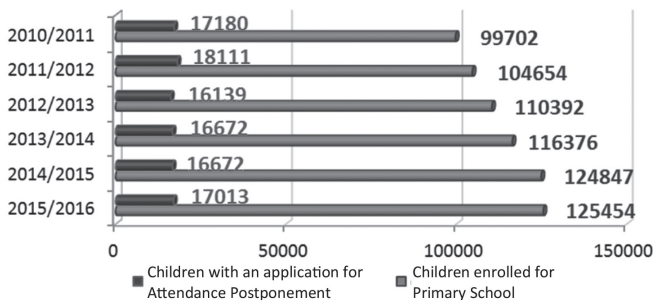
## POSTPONEMENT OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The child's success coping with school work depends on their ability to attain a certain level for multiple competencies, in the development of which it is not only the level of maturity, but also experience that have a role to play. For children who do not attain the required level of these prerequisites, i.e. children who are immature or inadequately stimulated, their arrival at school is usually postponed by one year. The postponement of school attendance by one year is typically the case for children who appear immature for school at more than one level. The conditions governing the postponement of school attendance are regulated under Section 37 of Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on preschool, primary, secondary and higher vocational and other education (the Education Act). Parents who decide to defer their child's arrival at school by one year must notify the principal of the primary school concerned in writing. The decision on the postponement is then made by the principal of the primary

school, based on an expert opinion provided by an educational and psychological counselling centre, a special education centre or a paediatrician.

Postponement of school attendance applies to a significant number of children every year. Analysing the data available in the Statistical Yearbooks of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, I tried to map the issue in the Czech Republic during the last six years with reference to individual regions of the Czech Republic and in terms of the number of preschool children who have commenced their school attendance and for whom a postponement application has been lodged.

Chart 1. Number of children who commenced their school attendance in the Czech Republic



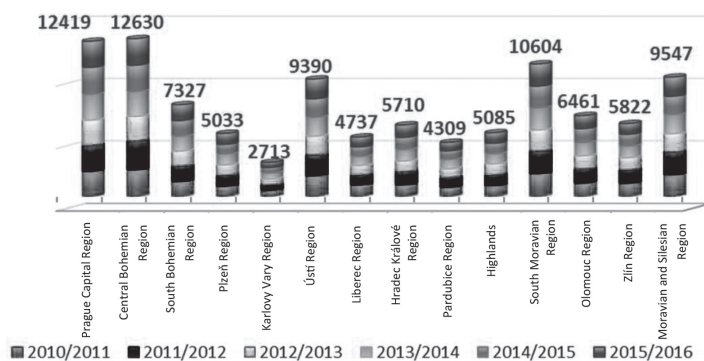
Source: Statistical Yearbooks of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic.

Chart 1 above shows that the number of children who commenced their school attendance in September of the respective school year by enrolling in the 1st grade of a primary school has displayed a growing trend during the past six years. While during the school year 2010/2011, the total of 99,702 children commenced their compulsory school attendance, in the school year 2015/2016 it was already 125,454 children overall. Moreover, Chart 1 shows that during the six years under consideration, the decrease in the number of preschool children with postponed commencement of school attendance has been hardly noticeable – i.e., during the school year 2010/2011, the number of children with deferred school attendance was 17,180 overall, while in the school year 2015/16, 17,013 children chose to postpone their arrival at school. The sharpest growth in the number of children during the six years under consideration was recorded in the Czech Republic during the school year 2011/2012, when the number of children whose arrival at school was

postponed was 18,111 out of the overall number of preschool children who commenced their compulsory school attendance that year.

I attempted to map the number of children whose school attendance was postponed during the last six years from the viewpoint of individual regions of the Czech Republic, based on data available in the Statistical Yearbooks of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic.

Chart 2. Number of applications for school attendance postponement in the Czech Republic during 2010–2016

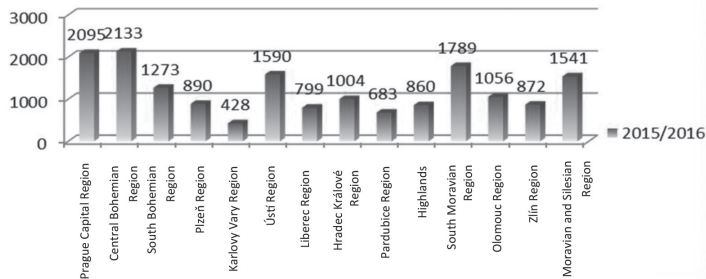


Source: Statistical Yearbooks of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic.

As shown in Chart 2, the highest number of school attendance postponements – as regards specific regions of the Czech Republic – was recorded in the Central Bohemian Region, with the total of 12,630 preschoolers applying for the postponement during 2010–2016. Prague comes second with 12,419 preschoolers applying for the postponement. Prague is followed by the South Moravian Region, the Moravian and Silesian Region and the Ústí Region with 10,604, 9,547 and 9,390 applications overall, respectively. The lowest number of postponement applications was traditionally filed for preschoolers in the Karlovy Vary Region, namely 2,713 overall.

The current situation as regards the number of postponement applications filed during the school year 2015/2016 split as per individual regions of the Czech Republic was mapped using data available from Statistical Yearbooks of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic.

Chart 3. Number of children whose school attendance was postponed in the Czech Republic during the school year 2015/2016



Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic.

Chart 3 shows the number of children with school attendance postponement, by individual regions of the Czech Republic. The results show that the highest number of applications were filed in the Central Bohemian Region where the application for school attendance postponement was filed for 2,133 preschoolers overall. Prague comes second with the total of 2,095 postponement applications, followed by the South Moravian Region, the Moravian and Silesian Region and the Ústí Region with the total of 1,789, 1,541 and 1,590 applications, respectively. The lowest number of postponement applications was traditionally filed for preschoolers in the Karlovy Vary Region, namely 428 overall.

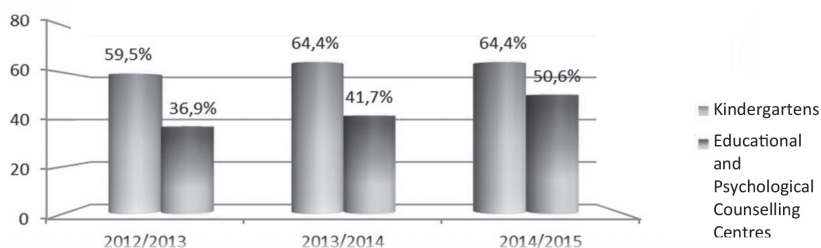
Using data obtained from Annual Reports of the Czech School Inspectorate (hereinafter referred to as ČŠI), I also focused on specific areas that have been most often cited as the reason for the postponement of school attendance for preschoolers during the last five years.

## INITIATORS OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POSTPONEMENTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The analysis of ČŠI's Annual Reports shows kindergartens were the most frequent initiators of school attendance postponements during the period under consideration (64.4% of all postponements identified). Educational and psychological counselling centres were the second most prolific initiators of school attendance postponements (50.6%). Physicians, primary schools and parents may also be named as important initiators.



Chart 4. The most frequent initiators of school attendance postponements in the Czech Republic

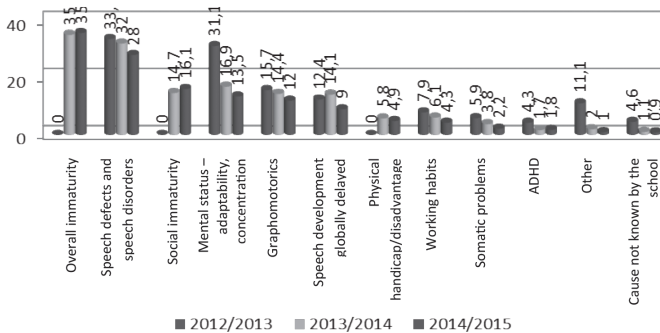


Source: ČŠI Annual Reports.

#### MOST FREQUENT REASONS FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POSTPONEMENTS BASED ON DATA FROM ČŠI ANNUAL REPORTS DURING 2013–2015

The conclusions of ČŠI's Annual Reports published for the school years 2012/2013, 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 show overall immaturity of the children has been the most cited reason for school attendance postponement during the last three years (except for 2012/2013). The second most frequently cited reason for the postponement concerns speech defects and speech disorders. Mental well-being, adaptability and concentration dominated among the most frequent causes for school attendance postponements (SAPs) during the school year 2012/2013. Some of the causes with rather sporadic incidence included somatic problems, ADHD and other causes without closer specification.

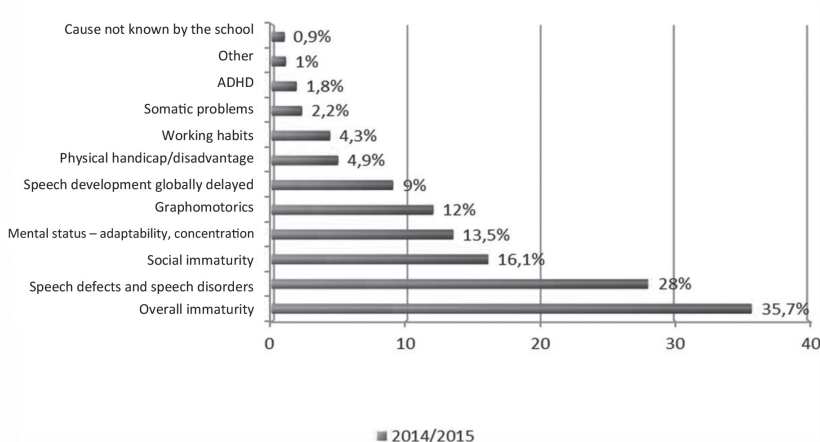
Chart 5. The most frequent reasons for school attendance postponement in the Czech Republic



Source: ČŠI Annual Reports.

### MOST FREQUENT REASONS FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POSTPONEMENT IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC BASED ON THE ČŠI ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR OF 2014/2015

Chart 6. Reasons leading to school attendance postponement in the Czech Republic during the school year of 2014/2015



Source: ČŠI Annual Reports.

The results obtained from Chart 6 show the most frequent reasons for school attendance postponement in the Czech Republic during the past three years include overall immaturity of the preschoolers (35.7%), followed by speed defects and speech disorders (28%) and issues related to social maturity of the children (16.1%). Somatic problems correspond to the least cited cause of school attendance postponement (2.2%) along with ADHD (1%) and other causes without closer specification (0.9%) of the overall number of school attendance postponements afforded to preschoolers.

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## KWESTIA ODROCZENIA OBOWIĄZKU SZKOLNEGO W CZECHACH

**Streszczenie:** W swoim artykule podejmuję problematykę gotowości dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym do pomyślnego rozpoczęcia obowiązkowej nauki szkolnej. We wstępnej części krótko charakteryzuję pojęcia dojrzałości szkolnej i gotowości szkolnej dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym, zwracam również uwagę na kwestię odroczenia obowiązku szkolnego u dzieci, które zgodnie z przepisami prawnymi obowiązującymi w Czechach powinny rozpocząć naukę w szkole podstawowej. W dalszej części, w oparciu o analizę danych statystycznych czeskiego Ministerstwa Szkolnictwa, Młodzieży i Wychowania Fizycznego oraz Czeskiej Szkolnej Inspekcji, przedstawiam zwięzły przegląd liczby wniosków o odroczenie obowiązku szkolnego w Czechach w ciągu ostatnich sześciu lat, w tym także przegląd najczęstszych przyczyn odroczenia obowiązku szkolnego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** gotowość szkolna, dojrzałość szkolna, odroczenie obowiązku szkolnego, dziecko w wieku przedszkolnym

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POSTPONEMENT IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

**Summary:** The paper deals with preschoolers' readiness for the successful commencement of compulsory school attendance. The introduction gives a brief account of the terms "school maturity" and "school readiness" while also dealing with the issue of school attendance postponement afforded to children who should commence their primary school attendance according to the applicable Czech legislation in force. The following part uses statistical data of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Czech School Inspectorate to provide a brief overview of the number of applications for school attendance postponement in the Czech Republic during the past six years, including an overview of the most frequent causes of school attendance postponement.

**Keywords:** school readiness, school maturity, school attendance postponement, preschooler