

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS

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SUMMARY

The relevance of the audit

Lithuania aims to improve the quality of education for children with special educational needs, in accordance with the principles of equal opportunities, accessibility and quality assurance in education. The Law on Education stipulates that the education of pupils with special educational needs is to be provided by all schools offering compulsory and general education. Amendments to the Law on Education, which came into force on 1 September 2024, stipulate that every child must be provided with the opportunity to learn alongside their peers, ensuring the principle of inclusion, and that schools may not unreasonably refuse to admit pupils with special educational needs.

One of the key aspects enabling children with special educational needs to integrate successfully into the learning process is educational support, which is understood as assistance provided by specialists to pupils, their parents, teachers and education providers, with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of education. In 2025, 57,600 (12 percent) of all pupils in pre-school, pre-primary and general education had special educational needs.

Objective and scope of the audit

The objective of the audit is to assess whether every pupil with special educational needs is provided with high-quality educational support.

The main audit questions are: whether sufficient resources are provided to deliver educational support to all pupils in accordance with their needs arising from exceptional abilities, congenital or acquired disabilities, or adverse environmental factors; whether every pupil is guaranteed access to education, taking into account their needs arising from exceptional abilities, congenital or acquired disabilities, or adverse environmental factors.

Limitations of the audit – we did not assess educational support in higher education institutions or other non-formal education, as this merely supplements formal education, as provided for in Article 15 of the Law on Education. Educational support is assistance provided by specialists to pupils, their parents (guardians, carers), teachers and education providers, enabling them to enhance the effectiveness of education¹. During this audit, we assessed only the educational support provided to pupils with special educational needs. Special educational needs² – the need for support and services in the educational process arising from an individual's exceptional abilities, congenital or acquired impairments, or unfavourable environmental factors.

We defined pupils as all individuals enrolled in pre-school, pre-primary or general education curricula. We defined schools as institutions providing education under pre-school, pre-primary or general education curricula.

Audited entities – the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, which formulates state policy in the fields of education, educational support, the qualifications system and the recognition of competences, and organises, coordinates and supervises its implementation³; the National Agency for Education, which monitors the state education system, initiates professional development programmes for teaching staff and provides opportunities for teaching staff to enhance their qualifications⁴; The Lithuanian Centre for Inclusion in Education, whose aim is to strengthen the effectiveness of the education system by helping the education community to base the education of pupils with diverse learning needs on a culture and practice of inclusive education⁵.

We collected data and information from 60 municipalities, 102 educational institutions (pre-school, general education and vocational training), 53 educational psychology services, 44 vocational training institutions, 20 institutions for the professional development of teaching staff, 13 higher education institutions, the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service, and the Employment Service (Appendix 1, p. 57).

The audit period covers the 2024–2025 academic year, while data from previous years and 2026 were used to assess trends and changes.

The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions⁶. The audit criteria, procedures performed and methods applied are described in more detail in Appendix 1, “Audit Criteria, Procedures Performed and Methods Applied” (p. 57).

¹ Law on Education, Article 2(29)

² Ibid., Article 2(26).

³ Regulations of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, approved by Government Resolution No. 914 of 21 July 1998, paragraph 7.1

⁴ Regulations of the National Education Agency, approved by Order No. V-573 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of 20 April 2023, paragraph 9

⁵ Regulations of the Lithuanian Centre for Inclusion in Education, approved by Order No. V-1724 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of 28 October 2022, paragraph 11.

⁶ ISSAI. 3000 - Performance Audit Standard, available online at: <https://www.valstybeskontrolė.lt/LT/post/15649/>.

Key audit findings

More than 90 percent of pupils with special educational needs are educated in general classes; however, more than half of these pupils do not receive educational support tailored to their needs, or receive it too late, because the process of identifying their needs takes too long and there is a shortage of educational support specialists in schools.

1. Inclusive education, as enshrined in the education system, does not guarantee that every pupil receives the support they need

Pupils with special educational needs may attend general or special schools

- ✓ In Lithuania, more than 90 percent of pupils with special educational needs are educated in general classes or pre-school groups (94 percent (74,800) in the 2024–2025 academic year, 91 percent in the 2025–2026 academic year). Accordingly, during the academic year, 81 percent (17 out of 21) and 90 percent (19 out of 21) of the selected municipalities met all requests for the admission of these pupils to their preferred school or the school designated for them based on their place of residence. 93 percent (out of 3,971) of the parents surveyed stated that their children had been admitted to their chosen or preferred school. One percent (5,200) of pupils attended special schools or special classes within general schools; the number of parents choosing to send their children to these institutions is not increasing. This suggests that the conditions are in place in Lithuania for pupils with special educational needs to be educated in an inclusive manner (Section 1.1, pp. 15–18).
- ✓ Representatives of municipalities and schools have pointed out that, when admitting pupils, there are instances where the school lacks information about pupils with special educational needs and is therefore unable to organise classes appropriately or ensure an even distribution of these pupils. It is recommended that no more than three pupils with severe or very severe special educational needs be placed in a general class; however, there are instances where there are as many as six. From the 2026–2027 academic year, parents' applications will be submitted via a centralised system to schools in the 24 municipalities, and from 2028 it is planned to roll this out to all state and municipal schools. This platform could be used as a tool enabling parents to indicate, at the time of enrolment, whether their child has special educational needs and what the level of these needs is, while allowing schools to access this information in advance (Section 1.1, pp. 15–18).

Delays in identifying special educational needs hinder the provision of support to pupils, while exceptional abilities often go unrecognised

- ✓ The process of inclusive education begins with a crucial stage – the timely assessment of a pupil's abilities and difficulties, and the well-founded identification of special educational needs. However, obstacles are encountered at this stage:
 - Waiting lists are forming at Educational and Psychology Services for special educational needs assessments – in 34 percent (18 out of 53) of these services, the wait for an assessment is 30 days or longer. The longer waiting times are influenced by the higher number of vacant posts for educational support specialists: due to this shortage, each specialist is responsible for a larger number of pupils, e.g. 2–3 thousand. When a service delays carrying out an assessment of a pupil's special educational needs, there is no guarantee that appropriate educational support will

be provided as early as possible. The staffing standards for social pedagogues and psychologists set by the services vary by as much as a factor of four (8,000 and 2,000 pupils respectively), which does not help to ensure an adequate supply of specialists (Section 1.2.1, pp. 19–23).

- Schools wishing to assess a pupil's educational needs face resistance from parents. Without the parents' consent, initial assessments are generally not carried out in schools, even though parents should merely be informed of this; nor are assessments of special educational needs carried out. 35.8 percent (19) of services reported that in 2024 they received reports from schools which were unable to register a pupil for assessment due to parental refusal. Schools make almost no use of the option to contact the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service. It is usually the teachers working with the child who attempt to change the parents' attitude, but this takes time (Section 1.2.1, pp. 19–23).
- Educational and Psychology Services require medical documents to assess pupils; 85 percent (45) of these services obtain them from parents. This reliance on parental initiative means that the assessment process is delayed and/or has a negative impact on the proper assessment of a pupil's needs if parents fail to provide the documents, provide incomplete documents or fail to provide them on time (Section 1.2.1, pp. 19–23).
- Between 88 and 98 percent of the 50 services indicated that special needs teachers, speech and language therapists, social pedagogues and psychologists lack adapted, standardised assessment tools for assessing pupils. As a result, specialists at these services use non-standardised, non-adapted assessment tools. 73 percent (1,560 out of 2,128) of educational support specialists working in schools lack access to these tools. The lack of methodologically sound assessment tools limits the ability to objectively assess pupils' special educational needs and to ensure consistent assessment practices across different support services or schools when carrying out assessments prior to referral to support services (Section 1.2.2, pp. 23–26).
- No exceptions or restrictions have been established for Educational and Psychology Services regarding the (non-)assessment of special educational needs related to pupils' exceptional abilities and the determination of support. There is a lack of regulation and methodologies; consequently, representatives of these services do not carry out such assessments and consider this not to be their responsibility, while schools lack the tools to identify such pupils. In the absence of a coordinated approach to identifying gifted children and determining their needs, the conditions for providing the necessary educational support are not in place (Section 1.2.3, pp. 26–29).

Not every pupil with special educational needs is guaranteed access to the prescribed educational support in schools

- ✓ Ensuring educational support for pupils with special educational needs is an essential condition for guaranteeing their inclusion and equal opportunities to learn and develop; however, this support is insufficient:
 - We found that more than half (56 percent, 123 out of 220) of pupils in the schools visited were not provided with all the services recommended by Educational and Psychology Services, while 5 percent of pupils received none at all. 27 percent (1,085

out of 3,971) of parents state that their children do not receive all the necessary specialist support at school; consequently, 57 percent (615) of them have sought help from specialists outside school. The main factor limiting the availability of educational support in schools is a shortage of educational support specialists and teaching assistants: 52 percent of general education schools lack educational support specialists, and 40 percent lack teaching assistants; in vocational schools, the figures are 75 percent and 55 percent respectively (Section 1.2.2, pp. 23–26).

- In 30 percent (18 out of 60) of municipalities authorities, the number of pupils per educational support specialist in general schools exceeded the target (111 in 2025; target for 2026 – 108). In municipalities, the ratio ranges from 60 to 176 pupils per specialist, while in schools it ranges from 16 to 337. According to data from the National Agency for Education, in the 2024–2025 academic year, 6 percent (53 out of 859) of schools did not have a single educational support specialist. 91 percent (19 out of 21) of the selected municipalities faced a shortage of specialists, while 45 percent (46 out of 102) of the selected schools had unfilled posts for educational support specialists. The main reason is a shortage of specialists (individuals) in the labour market. Faced with this shortage, schools (12) approached their municipalities for additional funding, purchased specialist services (4), or contacted Educational and Psychology Services (2). In an effort to attract specialists, the Ministry pays grants to students on teacher training programmes and awards targeted grants to final-year students who have committed to working in a school for a certain period. Due to a shortage of specialists, pupils do not receive all the necessary support, and there is also a lack of specialist attention for teachers working with pupils with special educational needs – this is indicated by 41 percent (3,977 out of 9,737) teachers (Section 2.2, pp. 33–39).
- Between the 2023–2025 academic years, the number of filled teaching assistant posts increased, whilst the average number of pupils with special educational needs per teaching assistant decreased (from 15 to 9). In the 69 selected schools, the number of pupils with special educational needs per teaching assistant post ranged from 1 to 27 in the 2025–2026 academic year. 88 percent (8,571 out of 9,737) of teachers believe that having a teaching assistant is beneficial but emphasise the importance of their competence and active involvement. The teaching assistants themselves point out that they are responsible for too many pupils (e.g. 3–4 pupils across different classes, 6–8 in a single class, or even several complex cases assigned to a single assistant), and as a result, they are unable to attend all lessons, leaving pupils and teachers without the necessary support (Section 2.2, pp. 33–39).
- We found that the Education Information System indicator “Proportion of pupils receiving educational support” (for which the National Agency for Education is responsible) is intended to reflect the actual provision of support across all schools; however, it is unclear on the basis of which data sources it is calculated. Neither the Ministry, nor the National Agency for Education, nor the Lithuanian Centre for Inclusion in Education were able to explain this. Without knowing what proportion of the recommended educational support was actually provided, it is difficult to make decisions on ensuring educational support (Section 1.2.2, pp. 23–26).
- ✓ 76 percent (16 out of 21) of the selected municipalities implemented measures to attract, train or retain specialists in 2024 and 2025, most commonly financial measures. Nevertheless, according to data from the Employment Service, in 2025, 1,157 employers

were seeking educational support specialists, while the number of jobseekers registered was almost three times lower – 428 people. There were seven times more vacancies for speech and language therapists than there were jobseekers. In an effort to attract specialists, the Ministry pays grants to students. According to data from three higher education institutions, between 57 and 83 percent of special needs teachers, speech and language therapists, social pedagogues and psychologists found employment in their chosen field within the first year after graduation. They indicate that, given the shortage of teachers, some students on teacher training programmes find employment while still studying. Around 80 percent (455 out of 571) of students in the field of education who responded to the survey plan to work in a school after graduation (Section 2.2, pp. 33–39).

- ✓ At present, there is no standard methodology governing the assessment of the achievements of pupils with special educational needs, which makes it difficult to assess their individual progress objectively. Teachers follow general assessment principles, but 70 percent (6,800 out of 9,737) of teachers are unsure how to assess these pupils' achievements and therefore assess them in different ways – often combining an assessment of knowledge with an assessment of effort. 80 percent (82 out of 102) of the selected schools and 74 percent (7,157 out of 9,737) of teachers believe that such a methodology is necessary. In the absence of a common assessment framework, pupils with special educational needs may be assessed differently in schools (Section 1.2.2, pp. 23–26).
- ✓ A total of EUR 3.9 million was spent in 2025 on the professional development of teachers and educational support specialists (data on inclusive education is not collected): EUR 3.5 million from the state budget and EUR 0.4 million from municipalities. In the 2024–2025 academic year, more than 70 percent of teachers and educational support specialists from selected schools took part in training under national and long-term programmes in the field of inclusive education and other professional development events (training courses, seminars, conferences), 80 percent of which (653 out of 822) were organised by accredited professional development institutions for teaching staff and other authorised bodies. 79 percent (1,677 out of 2,128) of educational support specialists reported participating in the necessary training. Professional development for teachers and educational support specialists in the field of inclusive education remains a priority area until 2028, and training will therefore continue to be organised for them (Section 2.3, pp. 39–43).

2. Although funding is increasing, disparities in municipal contributions result in unequal access to educational support for pupils

- ✓ Not all municipalities are yet contributing to the funding of educational support, although overall municipal involvement is increasing.
 - Total funding for education has increased year on year: EUR 185.7 million in 2023, EUR 233.4 million in 2024 and EUR 287.4 million in 2025. The share of municipal budgets allocated to this area rose from 24 percent to 31 percent during this period, but their involvement remains uneven – in 2025, between EUR 1 and EUR 648 was spent per pupil, while one municipality allocated no funds at all. This depends on the municipalities' approach and financial capacity. Funding from the state budget has increased by 14–15 percent annually since 2024, and the amount of educational support funding per pupil has risen accordingly: EUR 352 in 2024, EUR 408 in 2025, and EUR 469 is planned for 2026. Based on 34 examples from 11 selected schools,

we found that, on average, educational support for a pupil with special educational needs would require twice as much funding as the average amount allocated jointly from the state and municipal budgets. When assessed according to the levels of special educational needs, funding is sufficient only for pupils with mild needs (Section 2.1, pp. 30–33).

- Inclusive education is additionally funded through projects. One of the largest initiatives is the “Millennium Schools” programme, under which it is planned to allocate EUR 24 million to infrastructure and EUR 26.5 million to equipment, resources, professional development, educational activities and networking in this area by 2026. However, once the project ends, no funding is earmarked to ensure the continuity of these activities. A project worth EUR 12.7 million, entitled “Project on the Formation of Groups and Classes Open to Pupil Diversity and the Organisation of Education within Them” (the Open Classes Project), is being implemented until 2027. Its aim is to create conditions for the inclusion of pupils with diverse educational needs (a second teacher and a teaching assistant participate in the teaching alongside the lead teacher). A total of 103 classes from 57 schools took part in the project, and they have responded positively to this opportunity. For the period 2026–2028, the Ministry has planned to allocate EUR 3.2 million annually to open classes (Section 2.1, pp. 30–33).
- ✓ Educational support in vocational training institutions is funded from the state budget, but no information is collected at national level on how these funds are used, and vocational schools do not report on their expenditure. In 2024, the ratio of funds allocated to and actually spent on educational support in vocational training institutions was 121 percent (7.5 out of 6.2 million euros). In the absence of reliable information on the funds utilised, it is difficult to make decisions regarding the provision of educational support in vocational training institutions (Section 2.1, pp. 30–33).

3. Pupils are guaranteed the opportunity to continue their education at vocational training institutions

- ✓ Pupils with special educational needs choose vocational training programmes, but the vast majority of them do not find employment after completing their studies.
 - 69 percent (257 out of 370) of pupils with special educational needs from the selected schools who completed 10th grade and/or 12th grade at general schools in the 2024–2025 academic year continued their education at vocational training institutions the following year. More than 90 percent of final-year pupils with special educational needs who completed vocational training programmes obtained a qualification; however, around 70 percent of graduates are not in employment (Chapter 3, pp. 43–47).
 - In the 2025–2026 academic year, 75 percent (33 out of 44) of vocational training institutions delivered modular vocational training programmes for persons who had not attained the required level of education. These programmes are also open to persons with special educational needs arising from intellectual disabilities. The number of such institutions increased in 2024–2025 (from 24 to 33), the number of learners doubled (from 452 to 955), and the number of training programmes increased (from 11 to 15). The majority of students were training to become cooks (390) and assistant painters and plasterers (216). The least popular programmes,

such as room attendant (3), assistant potter (6), wicker weaver (12) and so on, may not offer sufficient employment opportunities in today's labour market (Chapter 3, pp. 43–47).

Recommendations

To the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

1. In order to ensure that pupils with special educational needs receive education and educational support that meets their needs, introduce open-class models:
 - 1.1. update the criteria under which a second teacher must be employed in primary and basic education classes that meet these criteria;
 - 1.2. update the criteria under which a person providing educational support must be employed in primary and basic education classes that meet these criteria.
2. In order to ensure that pupils in all pre-school, pre-primary and general education schools receive educational support, identify measures to increase the availability of educational support based on the results of an analysis of the use of teaching funds and the educational support provided.
3. In order to ensure the monitoring of the provision of educational support and data-driven policy-making decisions in the field of educational support, schools should be required, and enabled, to complete special educational needs assessment forms in the Pupil Register, recording the actual extent of support provided to each pupil by the educational support specialists recommended for them.
4. In order to facilitate the identification and nurturing of pupils' exceptional talents, establish procedures for the identification and assessment of special educational needs arising from exceptional talents, both at school and within the Educational and Psychology Service, as well as measures for adapting education.
5. To ensure children's right to education and educational support, to establish a sequence of actions to be taken by the school in cases where parents (guardians, carers) refuse to consent to an initial assessment, refuse to sign the conclusions of the initial or special educational needs assessment, fail to attend to review the documents, or fail to respond to invitations from the school and/or the Educational and Psychology Service.
6. In order to facilitate the most objective assessment possible of pupils' special educational needs and to formulate comprehensive recommendations for their education, the assessment of a pupil's special educational needs should be supplemented using the information provided in the pupil's health certificate.
7. To ensure an objective and consistent assessment of the achievements of pupils with special educational needs across the country, develop a programme for teachers to identify pupils' educational needs and adapt tools for monitoring the individual progress of pupils with varying abilities and skills (including assessment methods).

8. To ensure that information on pupils' special educational needs reaches schools in good time, enabling them to prepare to provide educational support and organise classes, to enable schools to access information on the identified special educational needs of newly admitted pupils before 1 September.
9. To ensure that educational support is provided to pupils in all vocational training institutions and to enable policymakers to take the necessary decisions, assess the extent of the educational support recommended by the Educational and Psychology Service and actually provided to the pupil by schools.
10. To ensure that individuals with intellectual disabilities have access to vocational training programmes aligned with contemporary trends and focused on the acquisition of practical competences, initiate a review and update of the Level II qualification descriptions in the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework (LTKS) by introducing new qualifications.

Lithuanian Centre for Inclusion in Education

11. To ensure that educational support specialists in all Educational and Psychology Services and schools can assess pupils' special educational needs in a consistent manner:
 - 11.1. to develop and implement a standard for the process of educational and psychological assessment of children;
 - 11.2. procure or develop instruments for the educational and psychological assessment of children.

The measures and deadlines for implementing the recommendations, the expected impact of the audit and the indicators for assessing changes are set out in the section of the report entitled "Plan for the Implementation of Recommendations" (p. 48). Up-to-date information on the status of the implementation of the recommendations, the results and the changes that have taken place is published in the open data section of the National Audit Office's website [at https://www.valstybeskontrole.lt/LT/AtviriDuomenys](https://www.valstybeskontrole.lt/LT/AtviriDuomenys).