



# Tackling today's challenges together: Failure at School

## ” FACTS AND FIGURES

An average of 12% of pupils and students drop out of school or training every year in Europe\* and many more fail to reach their academic potential.

Several recent studies show that inadequate linguistic skills are one of the main causes of underachievement at school, with poor language skills contributing to failure in every subject, even maths and science\*\*. Difficulties with reading comprehension have been shown to be particularly significant.

Sources: \*Eurostat and \*\*the OECD's PISA surveys

## FAILURE AT SCHOOL

- ▶ Pupils and students who underachieve, or drop out of education altogether, are at risk of social exclusion.
- ▶ Children who underachieve may communicate well in social situations and have a good understanding of everyday language. However, they often fail to master the more complex “academic” language used in lessons and textbooks, which is needed to understand and learn school subjects.
- ▶ Such children often come from socially-disadvantaged families. They may be from migrant families, but may also be born and brought up in the country concerned and speak the language or languages used in their school as their mother tongue.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

— To make sure that children start compulsory education with an equal chance, they should all be introduced to the languages of schooling at nursery school.

— Teachers of *all* subjects – not just language teachers – need to be trained to help pupils understand and use the increasingly complex forms of written and spoken language used to teach each school subject.

— Teacher trainers and education professionals responsible for curricula, textbooks and assessment need to take account of the languages used to teach all school subjects. And head teachers need to ensure there is a coherent approach to language use across their schools.

— The Council of Europe provides handbooks and other resources to help education professionals ensure children have the support they need to succeed. In particular, it provides tools to help vulnerable pupils and children from migrant backgrounds and teachers working in multilingual schools. It has also set out the core linguistic skills that pre-school children need to acquire.



## COUNCIL OF EUROPE TEACHING MATERIALS

■ The *Framework of Reference for Early Second Language Acquisition* – defines what all children need to be able to do in the languages of schooling when starting primary school.

■ *Languages of schooling: focusing on vulnerable learners* – provides strategies for supporting the language development of vulnerable learners.

■ *Language sensitive teaching of so-called non-language subjects* – a checklist for teachers.

■ *Professional Development for staff working in multilingual schools* – brings together resources for teachers and managers working in multilingual schools.

■ *European Language Portfolios* – models were developed in a number of countries and exist in many languages and at many levels; they can be used to encourage pupil autonomy and to set whole-school approaches to language teaching. There are Portfolios designed for migrants and Roma.

## CURRICULA, TEXTBOOKS AND TEACHER TRAINING

■ *The Language Dimension in all Subjects* – a handbook for curriculum development and teacher training.

■ *Language and school subjects – linguistic dimensions of knowledge building in school curricula* – identifies steps and measures to define language requirements for teaching and learning different school subjects.

■ *Guide for the development of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education.*

■ The Council of Europe's *European Centre for Modern Languages* in Graz, Austria, trains teacher trainers and brings experts together to implement policy work on underachievement at school, plurilingual education and language education.



## COUNCIL OF EUROPE STANDARDS

■ Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/REC (2014)5 on the importance of competences in the language(s) of schooling for equity and quality in education and for educational success states that learners must be able to “master the specific linguistic rules that are applied in schools and are necessary for access to knowledge” and “that some learners may be disadvantaged vis-à-vis mastery of these linguistic competences because of social and linguistic inequalities”.

■ Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/REC (2012)13 on ensuring quality education requires that learners are enabled to “develop and secure the linguistic, numerical and cognitive abilities that are the basis of successful learning in all subjects”.

■ Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/REC (2008)4 on strengthening the integration of children of migrants or with an immigrant background calls for measures to assist such children “in acquiring the required proficiency in the language of instruction”.

■ The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages protect and promote the use of the languages used in education.

## USEFUL COUNCIL OF EUROPE WEBSITES

■ The main website on language policy includes over 1 000 resources.

**[www.coe.int/lang](http://www.coe.int/lang)**

■ *Platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education* (including languages of schooling and the integration of children from migrant backgrounds)

**[www.coe.int/lang-platform](http://www.coe.int/lang-platform)**

■ The European Centre for Modern Languages

**[www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at)**

■ The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

**[www.coe.int/minorities](http://www.coe.int/minorities)**

■ European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

**[www.coe.int/minlang](http://www.coe.int/minlang)**