

Follow-up Audit of Special Needs Schools and Juvenile Committees

Has the state been successful in dealing with problematic young people?

Report of the National Audit Office to the Riigikogu

Tallinn, 1 December 2010

Summary of audit results

The purpose of the follow-up audit conducted by the National Audit Office was to assess whether or not the recommendations made in previous audits have been acted upon and the performance of juvenile committees has improved. The follow-up audit covered the audit 'Function and Performance of Special Needs Schools (2004) and part of the audit 'Performance and Efficiency of Guaranteeing the Performance of Compulsory School Attendance' (2007).

Although there are fewer than one hundred students in the school for children with special behavioural needs, it is important for the state to cut the number of offences committed by minors and thereby avoid the emergence of future criminals. A student place in a special needs school costs more than 275,000 kroons, which is almost ten times more expensive than a student place in a general education school.

The state only spends a couple million per year on juvenile committees, but they should play an important role in preventing minors ending up in special needs schools. Juvenile committees should be successful in their work to guarantee that the number of juvenile offenders decreases in the future.

The National Audit Office finds that the state has not been successful in dealing with problem youth. Special needs schools are still an expensive but inefficient tool in the prevention of offences committed by minors and in reducing the number of such offences. Regardless of several positive initiatives, such as increasing the number of staff in special needs schools and offering additional support services during the students' stay in special needs schools, the state has not managed to achieve a considerable decrease in the number of offences committed by youngsters who have left special needs schools. There have also been no significant changes in the work of juvenile committees.

- **Many young people who leave special needs schools continue committing offences.** Almost four-fifths of students commit a new offence and two-fifths of them commit a new crime within two years. 43% of youngsters end up in a penal institution in just a couple of years after leaving special needs schools.
- **The education of students in special needs schools is cut short.** Most students who leave special needs schools do so without acquiring basic education, or they only acquire basic education.
- **The Ministry of Education and Research and other ministries have been unable to launch follow-up care for students who have left special needs schools.** However, the lack of

continued care renders the expensive work of special needs schools useless, because it does not guarantee that minors are re-socialised after leaving special needs schools.

- **The Ministry of Education and Research has planned massive investments in special needs schools without having a clear vision of the area.** The Ministry plans to invest more than 150 million kroons in the modernisation of Tapa Special Needs School. At the same time, it is uncertain how many student places there should be in special needs schools in the future, as there are plans to create classes for students with behavioural problems that may reduce the need for places in special needs schools.
- **The state does not spend much money on juvenile committees, but their sanctions are not effective or regionally available.** The options of juvenile committees to use sanctions differ by region and queues are long. The period between the time when an offence is committed and the time when a sanction is applied is too long.

The National Audit Office advises the Minister of Education and Research to organise continued care for students who have left special needs schools in such a manner that there is a detailed action plan for the re-socialisation of students and it is clear who is responsible for its implementation. The National Audit Office also recommends analysing how many student places in special needs schools will be needed in future and reviewing the investments planned for special needs schools on the basis of this analysis.

The Minister of Education and Research replied that the lack of continued care for students released from special needs schools is a major problem, but added that he saw guaranteeing equal learning conditions for all students as the main task of the Ministry. The Minister agreed with most of the recommendations, but pointed out that implementation of several recommendations calls for cooperation between agencies or amendment of legislation.

Tarmo Olgo
Audit Director
Performance Audit Department