**The challenges of the integration of children with a migration background**

**using the example of a secondary middle school in Vienna**

**Director Christian KLAR (headmaster of Franz-Jonas-Europaschule)**

**● The emergence of awareness of the problem**

With the rise of the Islamic state in the school year 2014/15 at the latest, many attitudes of some of our Muslim pupils and sometimes also schoolgirls became visible. At first, we did not look at many of the problems with the attention with which we should have done that.

In the school year 2015/16 we had many new arrivals in Austria/Vienna due to the wave of refugees. Many of them were unaccompanied minor refugees (UMRs). This year the situation at the school was very difficult, some cultural and religious differences escalated and were almost unmanageable.

The first classes of the school year 2016/17 had, besides the children we were and are used to and who often carry along a considerable backpack of personal problems, also a large number of so called "eye children": Children whose behaviour is actually not suitable for teaching in regular schools, but who can sometimes be dealt with in individual cases. In this case, there were so many children with behavioural problems in one year cohort that the situation could not be overcome.

I will come back to the different challenges afterwards and present my/our solutions.

It happened by chance that I was increasingly given the opportunity to talk about these challenges in public. However, this did not lead to the authorities paying attention to this school situation and trying to find solutions, but rather to trying to present this as an individual situation of this school and also to try to find the blame for it in the weakness of the school management, i.e. myself.

**● Data and facts, what is a "hot spot school"?**

I will deliberately not list exact data of my school hereafter, but average data of many compulsory schools in Vienna in socially challenging residential areas. The data and also the challenges are very similar, although they vary from school to school, as described in the introduction, even in one location from year to year. To this end, it is important to explain that elementary school (primary level) is a comprehensive school for six to ten-year-olds, while secondary school for ten to fourteen-year-olds has a dual system in which about half of a cohort in Vienna goes to grammar school, while the other half attends secondary school. Selection is made on the basis of primary school marks, in cases of doubt on the basis of an entrance examination, but very often also on the basis of parents' commitment and social status.

At the secondary level, the proportion of children with migration background in grammar schools is currently well below 50%, while in secondary schools in Vienna it is already well over 50%, and in most secondary schools it is often 90%. There are also elementary schools with up to 90% of children with migration background. This often raises the question of who is the majority society in this area, who is the minority. It is a mathematical question how high the proportion of Muslim children is accordingly. This year all reports of Muslim children had to be rewritten at very short notice at the end of school because of the name of the religion. A friend of mine, a headmistress of a primary school, commented: "I had to rewrite all the reports because picking out the two non-Muslims in each class would have been even more work.”

At the same time many children are in very difficult family situations, have no support from home, some reject Western culture, others have parents with alcohol or drug problems or live in shared flats because they have been taken away from their parents or have come to Austria alone.

**● Integration vs. assimilation**

What do we expect from people who want to live in Austria and above all: Can we express what we expect in public without being condemned by others?

There is an Arabic pre-Muslim proverb: "If you live with another people for longer than 40 days, like them or move on".

In keeping with this, I would like to tell you a conversation I recently had with one of my parents' representatives, who comes from Lebanon and has been living in Vienna for 17 years (she is a Muslim): we had an appointment in an office and while we were offered a seat and were waiting, a young lady with a headscarf, a long skirt, but a short-sleeved top occupied herself in the room. She put water on the table, arranged papers, cleaned up and then sat down at the computer. In the end, my companion couldn't hold back and whispered to me: "That's impossible what's happening here. Such places like supermarkets, the airport, big shops are the flagships of a country! Why does Austria renounce its identity? That is a big mistake. Moreover, this girl is not dressed in a Muslim way at all, there can be no religious reason for wearing a headscarf on the one hand, but on the other hand short sleeves, you Austrians don't know anything about it. When I left my homeland 17 years ago, my mother said the following on her farewell: 'If you want to be happy in your new homeland, you must first learn the language and then you must see what and how to eat. Eat like them, see how they dress and dress like them. See how they live and live like them. Then you will become a part of them and it will be your new home. Then you can become happy. If you try to live in a foreign country as you lived at home, you will never be happy.'"

I think that's the answer: Successful integration means assimilation. Integration means "insertion" and that ultimately means adaptation. Adaptation is another word for assimilation. The truth is that we want assimilation, but we should also be allowed to say that.

Integration without assimilation promotes the emergence of parallel societies that recognize the law, but not the way of life and the values! So what do we want? What do the pillars of our society mean to us?

Ahmad Mansour: "Integration is not the celebration of differences, but the establishment of rules that apply to all!” Integration is first and foremost a responsibility of the immigrants, but it is our duty to support them!

**● Gratitude**

We must be grateful that we are allowed to live in this form. But this also obliges us to maintain this form of society or to maintain/improve it in our sense!

Recently I met a school friend who lived with his wife almost everywhere in the world. His Venezuelan-born wife said to me: "If my husband says it, it doesn't apply because he was born here. But I tell you: here in Austria is the best place in the world to live. Nowhere else is there such a high quality of life."

Immigrants therefore have the opportunity to live a beautiful life in the "most beautiful place in the world". Therefore it is okay to demand gratitude and respect for our country and our way of life from them as well.

Austria is a free country with free civil rights. All people who live here are so free that they can even leave at any time if they do not like this country or the way of life.

**● Stories from school**

Some time ago, a student from another school was transferred to me. He then wrote a WhatsApp message to a group about his previous headmaster who had brought about the transfer: "Anyway, I'm going to stab the headmaster." (In the background the symbol of a knife). A few weeks later, a search photo of him was in a daily newspaper. As a result, some of the other children were afraid of him, others found him cool and wanted to join his gang, teachers were also afraid. Possible measures: NONE, he is not yet a criminal and has the right to a school place!

In the fall of 2018, we discovered that a Muslim girl was married. Further research showed that this was not voluntary, but that this Chechen girl did not find anything special about it, because it was completely normal in her society. She told us which other former schoolgirls from our school had already been forcibly married.

In some classes (not at my school, I don't accept that) under pressure of the Muslim children (mostly the boys) no birthday celebrations may take place in class, because that is un-Islamic. Christmas parties are also often problematic and many headmasters accept this in order to avoid problems.

One of my Syrian students has already been interviewed several times at Praterstern on the subject of banning alcohol and weapons, because he often (even during his school days) hangs around there. Nobody had the idea to check his identity card and send him to school. On the contrary, I was publicly reprimanded by my superiors because there were too many reports of non-compliance at my school. (Since autumn 2018, unexcused absence has been reported according to the law and parents receive a fine. This law meets with resistance in the Viennese school authority.)

**● Violence at school, brutalisation of language**

Irrespective of migration background or religion, language becomes brutal and increases the propensity to violence among children and adolescents; sanctions are practically non-existent.

It is particularly striking to me how permissive many are today with insults and threats to others, but how sensitive they themselves react when they themselves or even worse the family honour is insulted. The same applies to cases where one's own child is the victim of violence or bullying. This is where the school is held responsible. But if your own child is a perpetrator, then you stand in front of the child and insist on its rights and the missing rights of the teachers.

Unfortunately, the authority always stands behind the perpetrators and their rights, both in the courts and in practice. The victims are forgotten. This year we had a student from another school who left her school (a lower grammar school) because she had been raped by a classmate. The perpetrator still goes to the same school.

That is not an isolated case, in the media a few months ago there was a case where a girl (also in lower grammar school) was forced to oral sex by several boys. The video made of it was spread through WhatsApp at school. The girl was helped to find a new school. Great, the boys went on to the same school and boasted about their deed.

**● Religion vs. traditions - image of women, headscarf, forced marriage**

It is very difficult to clarify whether the causes of ethnic behaviour and thus of pupils' behaviour are due to religion or traditions, and also whether these are really lived in this way in their home countries. In any case, they do not belong in an enlightened and tolerant world. We must develop self-confidence again, be proud of the positive achievements of our society, adopt our own attitudes and demand these from our fellow human beings, especially our students.

Every girl in Austria has the right to a self-determined and equal life, even if she comes from or grows up in a different ethnic group. There are only a few girls who voluntarily wear a headscarf, some of my pupils tell at home that it is forbidden by me so that they do not have to wear one at school. We always have girls who are not allowed to accept an apprenticeship after school because they have to marry soon and their job is to have children and take care of the household. A large shoe company no longer accepts Turkish girls for apprenticeships because they have recognised that the rate of those leaving the job is too high due to marriage and a family ban on working.

Some time ago, a pupil proudly explained to a girl who had come out as a lesbian how to deal with such "creatures" in his home country, and what a bad country Austria is, that she is not imprisoned here for it. I offered this pupil to move to his home country if he liked the laws there much better. Several people accused me of racism and almost opened disciplinary proceedings.

I taught for many years in a Jewish school and still have contact with some former pupils. In the meantime, many Jewish families, who until recently were able to live here unharmed, are considering moving to another country because Islamic anti-Semitism is becoming stronger and stronger and nobody is protecting them from it. But they do not know where they could go, because this is a pan-European problem.

**● Responsibility for the reputation of one's own group/ethnos**

I always explain to students that as a representative of a group, an ethnic group, a religion, you have a special responsibility. When I am on holiday abroad and one knows that I come from Austria, it is not me who is judged in my behaviour, but my behaviour is judged as "How the Austrians behave".

There is a group of young Afghans who pose a threat to our society, to our fellow citizens. We must have the courage to say that, the Afghan community must also do this and clearly distance itself from their behaviour.

In a Viennese NMS (modern school) this school year there was a stabbing between a Syrian and an Afghan. This was then presented as if it had been an accident - no report, no consequences for the pupils, because: what must not happen does not really happen. Last year, a girl was raped by five immigrant children at school in Graz. She only dared to report this after she had left the school, and she was right, because there were no consequences for the perpetrators, who had completed school in the meantime. I am convinced that young people who are capable of such an act, behave in such a way that they should not be allowed to be schooled in a regular school in order to protect the other pupils.

The knife attack in front of a polytechnic school (school for pupils in their ninth or tenth year of school) was in fact self-protection from blackmail. The later victim had extorted money several times for the honour of his sister because the later perpetrator had said that she was pretty. The blackmailed fellow received no help anywhere. He paid a few times, but when the demands did not stop, he brought the knife instead of money and used it.

How do we deal with it? Shouldn't victim protection again prevail in our society instead of perpetrator protection? I/We do that at my school. With us the perpetrators get problems, not the victims. Violence has no place. The sentence "I had to beat him, he insulted my family" was abolished.

**● We are role models**

Our teachers, educators and social workers convey values! Do they convey the values the employer wants?

We must pay attention to who our role models (teachers) are and what values they convey, and accordingly we must develop the courage to demand attitudes from teachers and not to let them work in the classroom if they do not meet these criteria. Teachers are role models, educators ideally are role models for whole generations. We as a society and, of course, our teachers must become much more aware of that. Not only specialist knowledge, but above all appropriate appearance, clothing, behaviour and attitudes are therefore indispensable. Then (but only then) one can demand that from the children (and also from the parents).

For me, teachers therefore have a very special responsibility in everything they do, how they work, how they dress. We must have the courage to say that, too. It is not an exaggeration, and above all not a restriction of personal freedom, to legislate here in the same way as in other professions. This leads, for example, to the necessity of "clothing regulations" for teachers and, if we do not consider the headscarf for girls and women to be desirable in our society (and hopefully we agree on this), also to a headscarf ban for teachers and kindergarten nurses. Of course, certain regulations should also be possible for children. According to our motto "Clothes make the man" we do not have military clothing, no jogging trousers, proper clothing even in summer (no "swimming trunks", flip-flops,...) and of course no headgear, unfortunately with the exception of the Muslim headscarf, as long as it is permitted by law.

**● Signs and symbols**

It took me months and years to know all the religious, ethnic, nationalistic and vulgar signs, and I keep learning. Nevertheless, I think the approach "If I don't know a sign, I don't have to react" is wrong. With us all these signs and symbols (e.g. swastikas and other re-activation symbols, the IS sign, the sign of the Muslim Brotherhood, the grey wolves or also the Serbian Chetniks, ...) are forbidden and we react very clearly and distinctly. Sayings and signs on clothing such as T-shirts are also checked. Clothes with inappropriate inscriptions etc. are forbidden and must be changed.

A student once wore a T-shirt that said "1453, it's time, when will this time come again"! I googled and found that this was the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans and the beginning of the Ottoman Empire. Imagine the excitement when a student comes to school in a T-shirt with the inscription "1938, it's time, when will this time come again!”

Actually, it would be the task of the education directorates and the ministry to be up to date and to give clear guidelines and information. The knowledge about signs and symbols is a debt of the authority and not a debt of the pedagogues.

**● Religious regulations and how to deal with them in school**

For example, we adjust our annual calendar to Ramadan. We plan our summer party, the school ball, a hiking day or other school events outside the fasting month. Everyone should be able to participate. During project days we try to explain to parents and students together with the Islam teacher that you do not have to fast while travelling according to the Koran. At school, however, the teachers already notice great differences in performance. Those who fast are very tired and not so efficient. If a child decides to fast individually, that is fine for me. Unfortunately, the group pressure is also high here. Many fast because they don't want others to look at them askance. But freedom of religion means respecting the decisions of others. Putting pressure on classmates who decide not to fast or have a different religion is not okay.

You don't have to accept that. It took me a long time to be self-confident about this consistent attitude. Years ago, one of my students covered herself up from one day to the next. At first I tried to get support from the city school council, but I didn't get an answer. At some point I spoke with her father. He didn't even know that his daughter was fully veiled. It turned out that she spent the afternoons without her father's knowledge in a radicalizing mosque and was about to leave for Syria. Accordingly, the father was grateful to me for my courageous and consistent appearance.

**● Are there sufficient possibilities for sanctions and consequences in case of misconduct?**

Education works with punishments and consequences. When sunflower seeds are lying around all over the class, it is appropriate to ask the children who caused the dirt to clean it.

But a small part of the parents then say that their child must not be punished because punishments are forbidden by law. So one is dependent on the cooperation of the parents, which unfortunately does not always exist.

Here I would like to see support from the law.

**● Can all-day schools solve our problems?**

All-day schools would be an important step for children who do not speak German so well. At the moment, however, we are going in the wrong direction and are only increasing the gap. Since the all-day school currently costs something, they are attended by children who come from socially better backgrounds and whose parents can afford it. Those who urgently need all-day care cannot afford it. The all-day school should be free of charge.

**● Children who were born in Austria but do not know more than five words of German when they start school**

In fact, it is already too late when children who were born here come to school and neither speak German nor are sufficiently supported. We always talk about whether the German class is the right measure for children who cannot speak German. Why don't we also (or even especially) think of the children who come to school, who are good at German, who were well supported at pre-school age, and who are now entitled to good and challenging lessons? However, this is not possible in joint lessons with children who do not master the language of instruction. German classes are a correct measure, but it cannot work wonders either.

I am also in favour of repeating the class in the first or second grade, but no longer in the third and fourth grades of primary school. Only over-aged children are produced. The basis is laid on elementary level 1. If they don't understand that, they have to repeat the first class of elementary school, otherwise they won't be able to catch up. Above all, we must put more resources into elementary schools. If children can read, write and do arithmetic, we will all benefit. Primary school teachers should always be able to work in pairs. Each elementary school class should be double staffed throughout.

Furthermore, school social work must be promoted more intensively. The schools need more support staff in the school in order to be able to meet the new requirements.

**● Children with a colloquial language other than German**

Many families, many groups speak exclusively their language at home. One cannot learn a language sufficiently, however, if one uses it only few hours in the school and there only during the instruction. My daughter was seventeen when she was in a high school in America for one year. When we visited her after three months in the Christmas holidays, she didn't notice when she was speaking English and when she was speaking German, because she thought in the respective language. Now she speaks, reads and writes English perfectly. The children don't get there by far, they stay in the phase of translating with very little vocabulary. But when you're busy translating, there's no resource for the content, the educational opportunities are reduced, the system doesn't lead there. In order to learn a language, you have to live it, speak it, think, write it, above all read it, watch TV, have your mobile phone set to this user language and speak it in your free time.

**● My approach**

I am in favour of clear strict rules, compliance and control of these.

Living by example and demanding an attitude is an important basis for a functioning coexistence at school.

It is not enough just to create laws and rules. Attention must also be paid to their observance. But teachers also need the appropriate skills and opportunities to do this.

Respect, esteem and tolerance have their value for society in mutuality. Therefore, it is not only important to live these values for oneself, but also to demand them from pupils and subsequently from their parents.

Insulting and assaulting teachers on duty should always be considered a serious offence, as it is with the police. In my opinion, the lowering of the age of criminal responsibility (possibly only for the school sector) should be considered.

It is not right-wing to promote one's own culture in one's home country and to defend the achievements of European (Austrian) society.

We must recognise that racism exists among almost all groups. Especially the hatred of many immigrants for the country in which they now live is unacceptable to me. (Quote of a pupil: "The teacher is a weakling!")

School can only work if there is trust in it. The cooperation with the parents also means that they support our work and sometimes also look for mistakes in their child. The school is not always to blame. "Don't believe everything your child tells about school. We also don't believe everything it tells about home".

Much of my work is justifying our work to parents and authorities, because one’s own children are always innocent, but the school is accused of mistakes, lies and injustice.

Teacher is one of the most beautiful professions there is, but with the support of the authorities, respect and recognition it would be even more beautiful. We don't need pity, we need support!

**Our HOUSE RULES, to which we pay very close attention**

The guidelines of these house rules are to be observed by all students without exception. Anyone who violates the house rules must bear the consequences and, if necessary, perform compensation work!

Desired:

Your positive attitude!

Greetings! Courtesy! Respectful tone with each other!

Cleanliness! Appropriate everyday clothes!

Only go to the toilet during the breaks!

Do not leave your own floor during breaks!

Leave the school area immediately after the end of class!

Mandatory:

Wear slippers in the school building!

Appear punctually at each lesson!

Bring along a notebook and school supplies every day!

Proper use of school facilities and toilets!

Dispose of garbage in the dung buckets! Pay attention to waste separation!

Prohibited:

Leaving the school building during class time and also during the breaks!

Entering the teacher's room without a teacher!

Use of mobile phones and other small electronic devices without permission!

Photography and filming without permission!

Wear jogging pants, caps and hoods during class time!

Chewing gum and sunflower seeds!

Of course there is also forbidden:

Threats, violence, bullying!

Wearing military style clothing (camouflage) as well as clothing with political, religious or vulgar symbols and statements!

Destroying or smearing!

Smoking in the whole school area!

Energy drinks, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, weapons!

(Upon request, these items are to be handed over to the teacher!)

Entering into the school and staying in front of the school for persons not attending school!

Hints:

No liability can be accepted for valuables!

Removed objects will be stored in the head office until further decision!

**Exact explanations of the guidelines mentioned above can be found in the detailed version of the house rules.**