INTRODUCTION

The education of children with special needs requires much motivation and a consistent hard work from both parents and teachers. Since parents play an important role in their child’s learning, a qualitative special education cannot be achieved without an efficient communication between parents and teachers. The Nordplus Junior project “Students with special needs – cooperation with the parents” was run to discuss the ways a trustful and cooperative parent-school relationship can be established.

The project was led by Borge School – a regular school in the South Norway that have both regular and special needs students up to the seventh grade. The project leaders were assisted by Vilnius Silas School – a special education school in the capital of Lithuania that teaches students with various intellectual and complex disorders up to the age of 21.

The project started in September, 2016, and ended in June, 2017. There were a total of four Borge and Vilnius Silas Schools meetings during the course of the project. The meetings consisted of staff discussions, shared knowledge and experiences regarding the topic. With a help of parent-oriented questionnaires, the schools have evaluated their present cooperation with the parents and compared the results between each other. The areas the schools felt they have to work on were analysed and reflected in a current handbook.

The current handbook summarises the discussion the Nordplus Junior project “Students with special needs – cooperation with the parents” underwent. It is expected that this set of advices will assist schools when aiming for an efficient and qualitative parent-teacher communication.
SECTION 1

THE VOICE OF THE PARENTS

• Invite parents to a meeting before the child is attending school, prioritize with the parents
• Listen to the parents
• Talk about the parents and school’s expectations
• Inform parents about their legal rights at school
• Ask parents what is important for them – which values they have when it comes to school
• Introduce parents with all teachers and specialists that are going to work with the child
• Present parents what School responsibilities are
• Parents are the experts of their own children
SECTION 2

BUILDING-GAINING TRUST

• Have positive expectations to the child and to the parents
• Listen to the parents needs
• Plan meetings, its content and participants in advance
• Start and end meetings with a positive attitude
• Double-check and come to an agreement with what parents are saying in meetings
• Agree on how the contact between school and parents shall be (phone calls, messages, e-mail, etc)
• Be attentive to parents’ feelings
• Be honest with parents – say things as they are and be specific
• Be professional – show confidence
• Parents should be informed that if there is a problem, they can ask the school for help
SECTION 3

CRITERIA FOR GOOD COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

• Show the parents that they always are welcome at school
• Schedule meeting for a comfortable day, time, define its duration
• Limit the number of participants coming to the meeting
• Plan the content of the meeting in advance
• Prepare the room for the meeting. Make sure it is tidy. Make coffee or tea
• Have meetings where parents and teachers can feel equal
• Start conversations with positive and friendly sentences
• Use a common and understandable language
• Be curious, listen and ask questions
• Give parents adequate information
• Emphasize the importance of teamwork
• Focus on the abilities of the child rather than the disabilities
• Invite parents to events in or outside the school
SECTION 4

THE DIFFICULT MEETING

• Plan the meeting in advance – rehearse it before the actual meeting
• Limit the duration of the meeting in advance
• Consult the administration on who is attending the difficult meeting
• The meeting should be attended by necessary people only
• Do not be alone dealing with difficult situations. Consult the administration
• Do not participate in meetings that are not well planned
• Give the parents a short summary of the problems in the start of the meeting – let the parents talk – listen!
• Keep asking good questions – be humble
• Do not continue with the meetings if you or the parents cannot control your feelings
• The staff must be loyal to decisions and rules made by the school
• Plan frequent meetings if you cannot solve the problems in one meeting
• Be professional – put personal feelings aside