

Press Release

Five Years of a Unique Educational Experiment and Research Project in Košice

Košice, 1 September 2026 – The Private Primary School of Free Democratic Education in Košice (“Slobodná škola”) is marking five years since it opened its doors. It is the only school in Slovakia that is experimentally testing, in practice, a model of free democratic education based on self-directed learning.

To mark the occasion, the school invites media representatives, education professionals and parents to the two days of event and meetings, including **Open Day and fifth anniversary celebration**, taking place on Friday, 11 September 2026, at the school premises at Galaktická 9 in Košice. Visitors will have the opportunity to see for themselves how a school based on trust, scientific research and genuine responsibility of students actually works.

Scientific Research Under University Supervision

Slobodná škola is not an informal leisure group, but a state-approved and closely monitored primary school conducting an officially approved educational experiment. The experiment has been running since September 2021 and is scheduled to continue until August 2030.

The project's academic and methodological guarantor is the **Faculty of Education at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra**, under the direct leadership of Dean Assoc. Prof. PaedDr. Gábor Pintes, PhD. A team of experts, including school psychologists, special educators and external collaborators, is involved in collecting, processing and interpreting the data. Researchers continuously monitor not only children's cognitive development and knowledge, but also their social and emotional growth, creativity and adaptation to a free environment.

Hard Data: Creativity

Five years of systematic data collection are providing the first important scientific evidence of the outcomes of self-directed education in terms of cognitive and personal development:

- In the standardized **Torrance Test of Creative Thinking – Figura Form**, students at Slobodná škola achieved a statistically significantly higher overall score on indicators of creative potential (mean 5.76) compared with the control group of students from mainstream primary schools (mean 3.60). Similar results were found in elaboration. This indicates an ability to develop ideas in depth, perceive unusual visual perspectives, demonstrate a rich imagination and produce highly original responses.
- Students from mainstream schools achieved better results within the same time limit in **fluency**, i.e. the speed of generating ideas under pressure (mean 19.56 vs. 16.20), and in **cognitive flexibility**, i.e. the ability to switch flexibly between different categories of ideas (mean 10.13 vs. 8.06).

The mainstream school system systematically trains children to respond quickly to stimuli under time pressure. Under such pressure, students at Slobodná škola show lower readiness and a slower pace because they are not accustomed to perceiving time as a regulator of their performance. They tend to prioritize depth over quantity. This, however, becomes a genuine limitation in situations that are strictly time-limited.

Hard Data: Academic Aptitudes and Curricular Knowledge

- **Cross-curricular skills:** In this year's nationwide commercial external assessment, Komparo, our students achieved average results in general academic aptitude (mean percentile 51, with an individual maximum of the 96th percentile). These data suggest that a free environment without external performance pressure can support critical thinking, logical reasoning, problem-solving and the ability to connect different pieces of information. Systematic support for experiential learning in nature and outdoors also contributes to this.
- Students from mainstream schools have an advantage in factual and memory-based subjects that require memorization of specific information linked to grade-level curricula. At Slobodná škola, the lowest result was recorded in geography (mean percentile 18), with a relatively low score also in biology (mean percentile 24).
- Students from mainstream schools are accustomed to continuous summative testing. They have developed "test literacy" and routines that students at Slobodná škola lack. When faced with an unfamiliar test format under time pressure, this can generate stress and anxiety.
- Our observations and case studies openly confirm that the absence of compulsory repetitive practice can lead to deficits in the technical foundations of literacy, spelling and the formal presentation of written work and mathematics. While students' logical thinking is often at a high level, their written expression can become overly abbreviated and include mirror-writing errors.

Hard Data: Emotional Intelligence

- A grade-free, self-directed learning environment leads children towards a high degree of honest self-reflection. When students at Slobodná škola answer questions about their self-esteem, adaptability or relationships, they tend to be critical and realistic about themselves and resist conformity. They are aware of the complexity of their emotions and do not feel the need to simplify or present them in an externally acceptable way.
- Students from mainstream schools achieved higher scores in their subjective sense of stability, adaptability and peer relationships. The clear structure of a mainstream school provides them with a predictable routine and stable social roles, giving them a stronger sense of control over situations. Students from mainstream schools may also be more inclined to evaluate themselves in socially desirable ways, expect external confirmation and evaluation from adults, and present things in a way that meets expectations in order to avoid being challenged or entering into conflict.
- Living in freedom without a fixed external structure can bring genuine psychological and social demands. For some students at Slobodná škola, particularly more

introverted or vulnerable children, continuously negotiating their place within a mixed-age group without intervention from an authority figure can be exhausting.

- The research also showed that students from mainstream schools have significantly greater persistence in completing assigned tasks, including tasks they find boring or unattractive. Students at Slobodná škola rely primarily on genuine intrinsic interest. When they do not perceive an activity as meaningful, they typically refuse to overcome their internal resistance. This represents a real limitation in adapting to expectations commonly encountered in mainstream society. This finding is consistent with international studies of graduates describing approximately twice the proportion of careers as self-employed, entrepreneurs or artists compared with the general population.

Not “a Fake Democracy”: Students Actually Decide on Staff and the Budget

During the 2025/2026 school year, the daily school community consisted of 50 students supported by approximately twice as many adults as in mainstream schools. At the same time, the school provides homeschooling support for more than 850 external students from across Slovakia.

Self-government at Slobodná škola serves as a real-life training ground for the 21st century. The school is governed through genuinely horizontal structures and based on sociocratic principles, where a child's voice carries the same weight as an adult's:

- **Community governance meetings:** During the past school year, 154 community meetings took place. As many as three quarters of these meetings – including meetings attended by more than 60 people – were fully moderated and run by students themselves.
- **Financial independence:** The school has 14 active committees, including an important financial committee that directly decided how to allocate a five-figure budget during the past year. The money was used for trips, equipment, transportation, admission fees, ice cream and many other community needs. The committee has its own bank account and cash box. Students therefore gain practical experience in financial literacy, prioritizing needs, planning and taking responsibility.
- **Conflict resolution:** Through the Human Rights Committee and sociocratic dialogue, students themselves directly participate in resolving peer conflicts and protecting individual rights within the community.

National Recognition and International Reach

The seriousness and innovative nature of the Košice model have been recognized by professional institutions both in Slovakia and abroad:

1. **Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic:** Slobodná škola has been successfully included in the Ministry's list of providers of new forms of personalized support for schools, allowing it to officially share its unique know-how with other schools within the education system.



Súkromná základná škola slobodného demokratického vzdelávania Private elementary school of democratic education

Galaktická 9, 04012 Košice - www.slobodnaskola.sk - info@slobodnaskola.sk +421 948 223 247

2. **UN reports on education:** As part of the international FutureEd project, contributions from Slobodná škola were incorporated into a thematic report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education for the 62nd session of the UN Human Rights Council in 2026.
3. **Academic consultations:** Representatives of the school provide expert consultations to Tomas Bata University in Zlín in developing methodology and establishing a laboratory school in the Czech Republic. They also actively cooperate internationally with international associations and universities.

“Slobodná škola is not primarily about having slightly more freedom or more respectful communication. History shows that society becomes more diverse and resilient when the rights of women and minorities are recognized. Our school is based on trust and on scientifically supported experience showing that giving children rights and decision-making power can have a genuinely positive impact on their reality. And on the question of what happens when we, as adults, start taking children seriously,” conclude the project’s initiators.