

Tragic matura mock exams in the Silesian region of Poland

Everyone is guilty

Interview with Krzysztof Cywiński, author of the book "Mathematics for humanists, the dyslexic and... other hopeless cases", by Katarzyna Piotrowiak

Almost 40% of students of high-schools failed the matura mock exam in mathematics. Who should feel ashamed: the students, teachers, parents or maybe the Ministry of Education?

Everyone is guilty, without exceptions. Parents, because they did not control their children. Teachers, because did not do much, sensibly thinking that if the students do not do well, no mathematician will be blamed. The Ministry of National Education should also hang their heads in shame, because they are charged with a constitutional responsibility for education.

And the students?

Such a result shows their attitude towards school responsibilities and presents the attitude which they bring to school.

We have worked out that if summer vacation started tomorrow, then 15 out of 40% of students would not get their end-of-school document. Plenty?

Last year I estimated that the exam would have been failed by even 50% of all students. A while later the minister of education, Katarzyna Hall said not to scare with mathematics so much. But today it is visible that little has been done.

Maybe adding mathematics to the list of obligatory matura subjects is not enough, because schools do not have the money for additional classes?

Last year, when mathematics came back to matura as an obligatory subject, sufficient amounts of money have been found; this year there are no funds at all. The matura in May was very easy, it consisted of simple tasks. The mock exam in November had been exactly the same, with only the numerical values being different. It was enough for the teacher to just go through those tasks. But something else happened, even though the European Social Funds gave 4 mld PLN for this school subject. The EU are aware that schools need innovative methods of teaching, while our teachers waste their time on writing dozens of reports.

Does everything look this bad?

There are some things done by MEN that can change a lot for the better. One of them is to presenting the progress of a student (educational added value). Another good idea is the offer to have the schools taken over by the self-government, under the condition that what will follow is the right for parents to decide which school they will send their children to, and the "school authority" will follow parents who will render quorum to the school authorities.

Parents would be supposed to influence the teaching process of mathematics? In what way?

Maybe they should, because it's scandalous that students cannot work out basic tasks. I admit I am really disappointed with the level of knowledge. This year's matura mock exam should not have been a surprise to students - in fact, the difficulty level has not changed. This was the exact same little test as last year, and so thinking that they have not chosen the right tasks is no explanation. It is the same as if a teacher of Polish said that such and such a book would be present on the sheet - just like last year. But I am worried about a different thing. If the students could not handle the tasks, then how did they get all those sufficient grades at school?

The price of such an exam is impressive. One set of examination sheets costs about 10 PLN. Has this money been wasted?

Such tests are needed, but looking at the presented level, today's matura can be compared to the old introductory exams.

Maybe the students should also have look into old books, if the old ones did not give them much?

Teachers explain that they are charged with a teaching schedule, which should be adequate to the new teaching programme. Hardly anyone has the time to check the website to see that the, for example, secondary school programme is just one page with information on what a student should know, so for example, the Thales theorem, square roots, raising to power. The programme of teaching for the current year is constructed by the teacher. It is up to them to decide what material they work on with the students. They can thus decide, that they will spend more time on square roots or some other part of the material. Still, they could simply just re-write the index from the book. Our schools need a lot to be done about them.