

“A vital, effective school is recognised by its precision. Strong teachers and curious students will provide the secure base to ensure that the children of this area do not have to march off to the big city to acquire a contemporary gymnasium education,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves today in Kuusalu High School, on the occasion of the 1<sup>st</sup> September joint opening ceremony for first class and graduate students.

According to the head of state, it must be possible to obtain a good elementary and basic education as close to home as possible, while the quality of education is becoming more and more important in gymnasiums.

“This means that every Estonian gymnasium must have very good teachers and a suitable number of students to be taught. In rural areas, this should come with a good network of school buses and, whenever possible, a students’ home for young people who come from more distant areas,” President Ilves explained.

“The questions regarding how we can achieve this and what will become of the Estonian school network can no longer be solely decided in community offices or by a city government. They must be decided in the Ministry of Education and Research and ultimately, on Toompea, in the halls of the *Riigikogu*. Estonia is a parliamentary republic and education is one of the main pillars supporting the state. Therefore, final resolutions in this sphere must be adopted by parliament,” emphasised the Head of State.

He wished everyone self-confidence and friendliness at the beginning of the school year.

“These are two things that all of us need together with our state of Estonia,” President Ilves said. “Self-confidence will help us reach our objectives with our heads held high both as individuals and as a state. A critical mind is also beneficial, but this must never turn into moaning and only noticing what’s wrong. Friendliness, good will, consideration and supporting each other are the characteristics that will turn a circle of friends, class, school, village, parish and, ultimately, a state, into a caring family.”

According to the Head of State, we should all focus on making Estonia bigger, but we will only

be successful if we first start noticing mutual links and connections.

“Friendliness will spread and will stand in opposition to viciousness and ill temper, which we still see far too much of all around us. Therefore, my friends, I wish you more good humour and faith in yourself,” President Ilves told.

The President gave the 1<sup>st</sup> class students a book about 365 natural science experiments and to the graduate students he presented a book by Jaan Tõnisson, entitled The Head of State, from the Estonian philosophical series.

“The background is simple: in the very beginning of the last century Jaan Tõnisson – a statesman before the birth of the Republic of Estonia – felt concerned and worried about education and intelligence, an open society and democracy. These are the same topics that are important for us today. We need a good education and inspiration to learn to cope as individuals, a nation and a country. Estonia must ensure openness and democracy on a daily basis to be a state in which people want to live and embrace their country as their own,” President Ilves said, adding: “Books by Jaan Tõnisson should therefore belong to the ‘must read’ list of every graduate student.”

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