



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT
OF ALL LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ALL LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Country Report: Sweden



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



SWEDEN COUNTRY REPORT

Report completed by: Bengt Weidow, Expert, Swedish National Agency for Education; Charlotta Pettersson, Researcher, National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools

1. What reference is made to raising achievement in national policies? How is raising achievement defined?

The Swedish Education Act (Skollagen 2010:800) says:

Charter 1. The purpose of education in the school system

4 § Education within the school system aims to ensure children and students acquire and develop skills and values. It will promote all children's and students' development and learning and a lifelong desire to learn. The training shall also communicate and secure respect for human rights and fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society rests.

The training shall take account of children's and pupils' different needs. Children and pupils should be given support and incentives so that they develop as far as possible. One aim will be to outweigh the differences in the children's and students' conditions to benefit from the programme.

The programme also aims, in co-operation with homes, to promote children's and students' all-round personal development as active, creative, competent and responsible individuals and citizens.

Chapter 3 §3 All children and pupils shall be given all the support they need to learn and develop in perspective to their personal capacity, and also be given the opportunity to develop as far as possible according to the goal of education.

2. What national policies specifically target raising achievement?

Legal system

The basic principle guiding all Swedish education, from childcare to the transition period, is access to equivalent education for all (Skollagen 2010:800, 4 §). This means that learners in need of special support should not be treated or defined as a group in a way that is any different from other learners and their rights should not be stated separately. The obligation for schools to attend to all learners' needs is, however, emphasised.

If learners require additional adjustments to the teaching, these adjustments must be made immediately. If extra adaptations are not sufficient to achieve knowledge requirements, the school must investigate whether the learner needs special support.

For learners in need of special support, an action plan of provision has to be drawn up. The head of school is responsible for the action plan. The teachers, in consultation with



the learner themselves, their parents and specialist support teachers, usually draw up the plan in co-operation. This plan, which identifies needs and provision to meet them, is continuously evaluated and progress and changes of solutions are possible (Skollagen 2010:800, 9 §).

Learners in need of special support have the right to specialist provision. All education corresponds as far as possible to the national curricula, but with the emphasis upon meeting individual learning needs. In a few circumstances, this provision is offered in special settings, such as individual tutorials or special classes. Another form of provision is special schools. Three national and five regional state-run special schools are available for learners with visual impairment combined with additional disabilities (MDVI), deafness or hearing impairment combined with learning disabilities or severe speech and language disorders.

All learners have the right to choose their school – either municipal or independent – as long as the school can demonstrate that it meets the learner’s educational needs (Skollagen 2010:800).

Curricula

The curricula of pre-primary, compulsory and upper-secondary education are partly consistent in order to make these activities a homogenous system. The curricula state the leading values, tasks and goals for the activities, but do not state the means to reach them. The organisation of childcare and school activities is the responsibility of the local authorities and should therefore ensure opportunities to reach goals and follow curricula. The pedagogical staff in each unit are responsible for the pedagogical means and specific organisation of the operation.

The curriculum for the *Pre-school Lpfö 98*, revised in 2010, covers the following areas:

- Norms and values
- Development and learning
- Influence of the child
- Pre-school and home
- Co-operation with leisure time centres.

The Curriculum for Compulsory School, Pre-school Class and the Leisure Time Centre (2011) covers:

- Norms and values
- Knowledge, responsibility and influence of pupils
- School and home, transition and co-operation
- The school and the surrounding world
- Assessment and grades
- Responsibility of the school head.

Every syllabus and subject plan describes why the subject or subject area is taught in school. They also describe the contents of teaching in the subject. Every syllabus and



subject plan concludes with knowledge requirements that describe the minimum acceptable level of knowledge and what is required for the various grading scales.

The upper-secondary school curriculum covers:

- Knowledge
- Norms and values
- Responsibility and influence of pupils
- Educational choices – employment and social life
- Assessment and grades
- Responsibility of the head.

Early years education

The Education Act states that children are entitled to childcare from the age of 1–12 (after entering compulsory education childcare takes place in leisure time centres) whether the parents work, study or are unemployed. Activities should be based on individual needs and children in need of special support should receive care related to their needs (*Skollagen* 2010:800, 3–7 §).

Until 1998, childcare was the responsibility of the National Board of Health and Welfare. Since that year all childcare, pre-primary activities, leisure time activities, compulsory education and upper-secondary education have been incorporated under the National Agency of Education.

Compulsory school

The nine-year basic compulsory school is for all learners between 7 and 16 years of age, but learners can choose to start school at the age of six. Learners with intellectual disabilities are not always able to manage mainstream comprehensive school. In that case, the learner can attend a special needs comprehensive school instead. This is a separate form of schooling, providing education which is adapted to each learner's circumstances and needs.

The municipalities also have a duty to organise pre-primary activities from the age of five. In most municipalities these activities are integrated in the compulsory school. Six-year-olds have the right to start compulsory school if their parents wish. In autumn 2010, 103,300 learners started grade 1. Of these, around 1,200 were six years old or younger, which represents 1% of all the learners in grade 1. In the school year 2010/11, the proportion of those aged six years or younger in grade 1 was four times larger (4%) in independent compulsory schools than in municipal schools (1%). A reduction in the proportion of six-year-olds has occurred over time. Girls were over-represented among the learners who began school a year before compulsory education. Among the six-year-olds in grade 1, nearly 63% were girls, while boys accounted for only 37%. The distribution showed that the proportion of girls among six-year-olds in grade 1 was almost 2% and the proportion of boys was 1%.



Upper-secondary schools

Upper-secondary schools (gymnasia) are not compulsory, but are attended by almost all learners. Schools are free of charge and there are no fees for educational materials, food or health care. Learners in upper-secondary schools have the same right to special support as learners in compulsory school.

For learners in need of special support, technical aid is available from the regional counties and adaptations of teaching materials are provided by the state. Schools and teachers are consulted by local resource centres, which in turn are consulted by the Swedish Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools.

Learners in upper-secondary education can choose from 18 national programmes according to their interests. Most learners with disabilities attend these national programmes. Learners who are deaf or have hearing disabilities can attend special upper-secondary schools. Learners with physical disabilities also have this opportunity.

Five introductory programmes are available to those learners who are not eligible to apply to a national upper-secondary school programme. These programmes provide individually adapted education to meet their needs and offer clear educational alternatives. The introductory programmes are intended to help learners establish themselves in the labour market and set the best possible foundation for continued education. Each school is responsible for setting up an individual study plan for these learners, while it is the responsibility of the learners' local municipality to offer the introductory programmes. In addition, learners in compulsory schools for learners with learning disabilities have the right to a work introduction or an individual alternative, if they wish to take a particular programme and the municipality feels they have the prerequisites for it. After completing an introductory programme, it is the responsibility of the head to issue a school leaving certificate that shows what education the learner has received.

Municipalities have a duty to offer upper-secondary education to all learners, including those with severe learning disabilities. This is mostly done in a programme offering both theoretical studies and practical training in special needs upper-secondary school.

National programmes for learners with learning disabilities include programmes for tourism, trade, industry and arts. As for all upper-secondary education learners, individual solutions are possible. Within compulsory schools for learners with disabilities, there is a special orientation called the training school. The training school is intended for learners who cannot benefit from all or part of the education in specific subjects.

Financing

Local authorities are bound by law to provide a number of basic services. Among these, the provision of compulsory, upper-secondary and pre-primary education and childcare play a major part. Municipalities are free to use collected taxes and state funding for whatever services and systems are judged to be best for their respective areas. Many municipalities delegate budgets directly to individual schools.

An amount of money is granted and follows each learner to whatever school they choose, either municipal or independent. A school that receives grants from the municipality is not entitled to collect school fees.



The State, through the National Agency of Special Needs Education and Schools offers special needs support, education in special needs schools, accessible teaching materials and government funding.

The National Agency runs three national and five regional special schools. The national schools cater for pupils with:

- visual impairment combined with additional disabilities (MDVI);
- deafness or hearing impairment combined with learning disabilities;
- severe speech and language disorders.

Technical aid is accounted for by the regional counties.

Pre-schools, school-age childcare, schools and adult education are an integral part of the municipal sector's activities. The costs of these activities represented 41% of the municipal sector's total costs, which amounted to SEK 500.1 billion. Of the total municipal expenditure, pre-schools and school-age childcare accounted for 14%, while schools accounted for 27%. These costs also include payments to other education providers and authorities (for further information see the European Agency's [Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems, \(FPIES\) project](#)).

Early years education

Childcare is financed by locally-collected tax revenues, state grants and parental fees.

There are no separate funds for special education. Municipalities decide upon allocations in the same way as for all childcare, and parental fees vary. In 2011, the parental fees' average share of the municipal total costs accounted for about 17%.

Pre-school fees are linked to the family's income and how many hours the child attends pre-primary education. Since 2001, municipalities have been able to adopt the system of maximum fee. This means that there is a ceiling for pre-school fees of about 1–3% of the family's income, depending on how many children the family has.

Since January 2003, all children of four and five years of age have been offered at least 525 hours of free education per year. The provision is mandatory for the municipalities, but children participate on a voluntary basis.

Compulsory education

Municipalities are responsible for educational provision and the education system is financed with locally-collected tax revenues. There are no separate state funds for special education.

Each school is provided with an amount of money based on the number of learners in the school. The school is responsible for allocating means in a way that ensures all individual needs are met. If a learner needs extra special support, the school can apply for additional grants.

Learners or their parents are not usually charged for teaching materials, school meals, health services and transport.



Many municipalities have resource centres that offer pedagogical support to schools and teachers.

Transition period

Upper-secondary education is free of charge. Financial assistance from the state is available for adults attending most post-compulsory school education in the form of personal subsidies and loans.

Identification of special needs

The local municipalities are independent in terms of organisation and there are different ways of identifying and investigating individual needs for special support. In 2011, 82.6% of children aged 6–9 and 16.9% of children aged 10–12 attended organised childcare, either municipal or independent. The need for special support can often be identified before the child reaches compulsory school age.

There are regular health checks for all children. The health service and psychologists are available for childcare and school staff, learners and parents to consult. Parents must give their approval when more long-term or detailed investigations other than pedagogical need to be completed.

A forum for consultation must be offered to the guardians in order to influence their child's education. Each pre-school and school unit shall contain one or more forums for consultation with children, learners and guardians. In one or more such forums, children, learners and guardians must be informed of proposals and given an opportunity to comment on matters to be dealt with before decisions are made. The head is responsible for the existence of forums for consultation and information and for ensuring consultation obligations are fulfilled.

Municipal childcare, pre-primary activities, compulsory schooling, after-school centres and youth centres are often part of the same organisation with a common school board. Several of these activities are often integrated, with the staff organising joint work together. This facilitates a complete view of each learner. It is common practice to provide for the learner's needs in close co-operation with their parents. The Education Act (*Skollagen* 2010:800, 13 §) states the importance of the parents' participation in the planning of learners' education.

Special needs education within the education system

Information is available on the Swedish National Agency for Education website. The Swedish Education Act, *Skollagen* 2010:800, outlines learners' right to knowledge and special support as follows:

- All learners should be given support and encouragement to develop as far as possible.
- Additional adjustments should be given when there is a need.
- Staff are required to report to the head if it can be anticipated that a learner will not achieve the minimum proficiency requirements.



- The head is responsible for ensuring the learner's special needs are investigated promptly.
- If the learner has additional needs in their school situation they also should be investigated.
- If the investigation shows that a learner needs special support, an action plan of provision shall be developed.
- Action plans and a decision not to develop action plans may be appealed.

For detailed information regarding the organisation of education services in Sweden, please visit the Eurydice information service. Educational Support and Guidance gives information about Special Needs Education within the education system.

The National Curricula state the leading values, the responsibility of different aspects of school activities and the educational goals. Within those limits, each municipality sets up a plan for its education system. Each school is bound accordingly by the national goals and leading values, but is free to organise its means to reach those goals as it chooses. There are very different ways of doing this.

The schools have a (learner welfare team) learners' health service made up of a representative of the local school board, the learner welfare staff (i.e. a school doctor, nurse, psychologist, counsellor) and special needs teachers. The schools' health service should be primarily preventive and with health promotion. Learners' progress towards educational goals should be supported (*Skollagen* 2010:800, 25 §).

Action plans of provision are set up for each learner in need of special support in co-operation with teachers, parents and the learner concerned. These plans indicate the responsibility of each partner in the development of the learner's abilities and knowledge.

There are regular health checks in childcare and schools. Health service and psychologists are available for staff, learners and parents to consult.

Co-operation with services other than the educational system, such as healthcare and training, has to be approved of by and involve the parents of the child concerned.

Municipal childcare, pre-primary activities, compulsory schooling, after-school centres and youth centres are often part of the same organisation with a common school board. Several of these activities are often integrated, with the staff organising joint work together. This facilitates a complete view of each learner. It is common practice to provide for a learner's needs in close co-operation with their parents. The National Curricula state the importance of parents' participation in the planning of learners' education (see the Curriculum for Compulsory school, Pre-school Class and the Leisure Time Centre, 2011).

Pre-school

All pedagogical activities should be related to the needs of all children, and children in need of special support should, as far as possible, receive that care in their original childcare group. There is a new Curriculum for Pre-school Lpfö 98, revised in 2010. An information booklet for parents ('The pre-school is for your child – A booklet about the curriculum for the pre-school') describes the curriculum.



Most childcare centres are organised in groups of 15–20 children, with three employees to work with them. Where children in need of special support attend a group, extra staff can be allocated.

Health care, social care, fostering and teaching are the major tasks stated in the pre-primary curriculum. The social development of children takes place in groups. Consequently, the group has an important educational function in childcare, and both the individual child and the group are focal points in pedagogical programmes. Diversity is considered as a general standard in this social development and all children should, as far as possible, irrespective of their needs, be a part of such a group.

Pre-schools develop plans to meet all children's needs. Written action plans of provision are set up in co-operation with the learners themselves, parents and professionals involved (*Skollagen* 2010:800, 8 §).

Due to the large degree of independence of the municipalities, Special Needs Education can be organised in different ways. Support could include variations of the following options:

- The learner's teachers are supported by a resource centre at the local level.
- A specialist teacher works with the learner concerned within the frames of the activities of the larger group; this could be a permanent role, or be organised for longer or shorter periods.
- The learner leaves the larger group for limited periods to work with a specialist teacher.
- Resource centres at the local level may be supported by an advisor at the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools.

Compulsory education

Most learners in need of special educational support are educated in general basic compulsory classes. The school must indicate very clearly why other educational options for learners should be considered. This is an important philosophical standpoint for childcare organisation and operation. Earlier debates focused upon prerequisites for mainstreaming. Now the focus has shifted to the need for justification for segregated options to be considered for learners. The concept of mainstream education is not used (see Areas of Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Research).

The National Curriculum states the leading values, the responsibility of different aspects of school activities and the educational goals. Within those limits each municipality sets up a plan for its education system. Each school is bound accordingly by national goals and leading values, but is free to organise the means to reach those goals as it chooses.

This leaves a free choice concerning use of staff, groups of learners according to age and levels and, to a large extent, the content of subjects (this is presented in a school plan which every school is bound to set up and evaluate). The municipality must evaluate and work systematically with improvement according to the national policies and legislation. According to the National Curriculum, all compulsory education will be organised in such a way that individual solutions are possible for all learners. This is a way of strengthening



the learners' influence and personal responsibility, but also a way of taking all learners' needs and individuality into account.

Within this development, the organisation of school activities and educational environments is important. Local projects are now run to investigate the possibilities of abandoning national timetables and making compulsory education even more goal-orientated. The goals of a certain subject shall be achieved by each learner, but the ways to reach them and the time spent can vary.

A learner who, for one reason or another, encounters difficulties can receive various forms of support within this organisation. Due to the large degree of independence of the municipalities, Special Needs Education can be organised in different ways.

Support could include variations of the following options:

- The learner's teachers are consulted by a specialist teacher.
- Teachers are supported by a resource centre at the local level.
- Learners in need shall have extra adjustments according to their needs.
- Learners receive teaching materials adapted for their needs.
- The special support needs of (all) learners who need more support to achieve the educational goals should be investigated.
- Learners in need of special support must have written action plans of provision set up in co-operation with the learners themselves, parents and professionals involved.
- A specialist teacher or assistant helps the teacher or works with the learner concerned for longer or shorter periods within the frames of the activities of the larger group.
- The learner leaves the larger group for limited periods to work with a specialist teacher.
- A classroom assistant works with the learner in need of special support or in the class of the learner concerned.
- The learner in need of special support works in a group of learners with similar needs for longer or shorter periods within the same organisation.
- Resource centres at the local level may be supported by an advisor at the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools.

Pupils with severe learning disabilities

In Swedish compulsory schools, there are special programmes for learners with severe learning disabilities; special needs compulsory school, *särskola*. Since 1996, the municipalities have taken over the control and operation of these programmes from the counties. Special programmes for learners with severe learning disabilities are now more closely linked to, or included in, general compulsory schools (see: *Särskola* – compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities, Special needs compulsory school).



Transition period

Upper-secondary schools are not compulsory, but are attended by almost all learners. Schools are free of charge and there are no fees for educational materials, food or health care. Learners in upper-secondary schools have the same right to special support as learners in compulsory education.

Technical aid is available from the regional counties for learners in need of special support and adaptations of teaching materials are provided by the state. Schools and teachers are consulted by local resource centres, which in turn are consulted by the National Agency of Special Needs Education and Schools. Learners in upper-secondary education can choose from 18 national programmes according to their interest. Most learners with disabilities attend these national programmes. Learners who are deaf or have hearing disabilities may attend special upper-secondary schools. Learners with physical disabilities also have this opportunity.

Five introductory programmes are available to those learners who are not eligible to apply to a national upper-secondary school programme. These introductory programmes provide individually adapted education to meet their needs and offer clear educational alternatives. The introductory programmes are intended to help learners establish themselves in the labour market and set the best possible foundation for continued education. Each school is responsible for setting up an individual study plan for these learners, while it is the responsibility of the learners' local municipality to offer the introductory programmes. In addition, learners in compulsory schools for learners with learning disabilities have the right to a work introduction or an individual alternative, if they wish to take a particular programme and the municipality feels they have the prerequisites for it. After completing an introductory programme, it is the responsibility of the school head to issue a school leaving certificate that shows what education the learner has received. National programmes for learners with severe learning disabilities include programmes for tourism, trade, industry and arts. As for all upper-secondary education learners, individual solutions are possible.

State and regional support

The technical aid that is needed is provided from the regional counties.

The state offers a special pedagogical support service to authorities, services and schools through the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools. This ensures that learners in need of special support are given an equal quality of educational experiences as their peers. It complements the support services and provision from local authorities, but the aim is to develop the local resource centres to be able to provide more support at a local level.

The National Agency for Special Needs and Schools teaching materials also include a number of teaching material production units which develop, produce and distribute specialist teaching aids and certain technical aids.

State-run special schools and resource centres

Specialist provision for learners with physical disabilities, hearing and visual impairments exists mostly in general classes, but in some cases within separate settings. All education



corresponds as far as possible to the learner's non-disabled peers and the National Curriculum, with the emphasis on the meeting of individual needs. According to the National Curriculum, learners with deafness will have the ability to communicate in both written Swedish and sign language, but sign language is stated as their first language.

The State offers support from the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools, which runs three national and five regional special schools. The national schools cater for learners with:

- visual impairment combined with additional disabilities (MDVI);
- deafness or hearing impairment combined with learning disabilities;
- severe speech and language disorders.

The regional schools offer education for learners with deafness or hearing loss that corresponds to compulsory schooling. Parents apply for their children to attend a special school. If the learner does not live within commuting distance, it is possible for them to live at the school and take an active part in leisure time activities during the school term.

The National Agency for Special Needs Education's supplementary support also runs four national resource centres with specialised knowledge. The resource centres receive learners with:

- visual impairment with or without other disabilities;
- severe speech and language disorders;
- deafness or impaired hearing combined with severe learning disabilities and/or autism;
- congenital/early deaf-blindness.

The resource centres offer assessments of children and young people and training programmes for educators and parents.

Learners who are blind or have visual impairments, but no other impairments, have been taught in mainstream classes since 1988. Support is provided via resource centres. The teaching materials used in their classes are adapted for their needs by the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools, and technical equipment by the regional counties.

3. What information/data are collected at national level on attainment and achievement?

The Swedish Agency for Education is responsible for statistics in the school system and childcare. The aim is to provide an overall view of schooling and material to follow up and evaluate at the national and local levels. Each year the Agency collects data on learners, school staff, costs and education outcomes. The data is presented in statistical form by type of activity and school. This contributes to comparisons between different principal organisers and types of activities.



It is obligatory for every school to report all their learners' marks and educational results. They must also report how many learners have an action plan for provision. The reports are collected by the National Swedish Agency for Education. This agency compiles and presents the results at group level. It is possible to compare schools, communities, sex, parents' education levels and migrant status. Schools for learners with learning disabilities are excluded from obligatory reporting.

4. What information/data on attainment and achievement (including the wider areas outlined above) are collected at school level?

Same information as in 3. All schools are obliged to file all marks/results.

5. What information/data are used for school evaluation and quality assurance at national/local level?

At a national level, the Swedish School Inspectorate makes inspections of all schools. The evaluation is based on visits to schools, the schools' self-evaluations, the schools' own documents and the School Inspectorate's evaluations.

By means of in-depth studies and analyses, the Swedish Agency for Education evaluates schooling to identify and highlight those areas where national development is needed. Causes of variations in goal attainment among different principal school organisers and schools are analysed. The Agency takes part in international studies to benchmark the Swedish education system and compare it with other countries. The Agency disseminates the results and outcomes by different means, such as reports and knowledge overviews. At a local level, school evaluation is mostly based on comparisons with the results of other schools in the municipality.

6. Are there any specific initiatives in place to support/enable teachers and/or school leaders to raise the attainment and achievement of all learners?

The principal organiser in municipal and independent schools, together with the staff, is responsible for raising the knowledge among teachers and school leaders. The National Agency for Education offers a wide range of professional development courses and in-service training. These include:

- Pedagogy for school leaders
- Assessments and grades
- Participation and equal treatment
- Digitalisation
- Raising achievement for reading



-
- Raising achievement for mathematics
 - Counteract racism
 - Science and technology
 - Migrant learning
 - Pedagogical issues in special needs
 - Language, reading and writing development

They also offer several courses covering different aspects of special needs and disabilities. The universities offer a broad range of long and short courses on different topics.

The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools offers a variety of in-service training for all staff in school around the topics of disability and special needs. Together with the Agency, the principal organiser may organise in-service training and counselling according to their needs. At a local level, there are many resources at hand to help with provision.

7. What other policies may influence levels of attainment and achievement for all learners?

Sweden has a rather well-organised educational system and has made several reforms in the last eight years. However, the challenges remain. Firstly, the results of PISA investigations have bothered national decision-makers for some years, which resulted in several reforms. During the period 2008–2016, there were reforms of the school system, curricula, syllabus, teachers' legitimation, the introduction of 'first teachers', reformed teacher education and more.

Secondly, the national School Inspectorate has for several years presented an annual 'status', built on the inspected schools. In general, the Inspectorate states that almost two thirds of the inspected schools and authorities lacks in providing:

- equity and equivalent treatment of all learners;
- special support for those in need;
- systematic quality work led by local authorities.

Thirdly, the three most important questions on the political school agenda are:

- raising achievement for all learners;
- education for the large numbers of migrant learners in Sweden;
- an offer to all teachers about skill development around special needs and disabilities.

A school commission worked at a broad, whole school, national level during 2016 and 2017 to recommend actions to enhance the results for all learners.



8. Please provide a short commentary/critical reflection on the main policy challenges

There are many factors that may influence inclusive processes. There are many different models of inclusive work, but also a need for community of practice. Collaboration, capacity, integrated comprehensive services and partnership are crucial.

In sum, inclusion is more of a general resilience strategy, rather than a strategy to anticipate learners with special needs. 'Inclusiveness' is not just about responding to learners with special needs. It is also about schools being able to change their qualities in terms of increased inclusive capability to see, understand, adopt and provide support to both professionals and learners.

When it comes to learners with special needs and disabilities, pedagogical, social and physical availability and the learners' participation are particularly important. The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools offers education and methodological material on this subject.



ANNEX 1. EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE TO RAISE LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

Example submitted by: Essunga municipality

Contact person: Bengt Weidow, Expert, Swedish National Agency for Education; Charlotta Pettersson, Researcher, National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools.

Sweden: The Essunga school transformation by increased inclusive capability toward raised achievement for all

Essunga municipality has 5,500 citizens and is located 50 miles from Gothenburg, Sweden. The educational level is low; many young people are supported by the local social work service and some young refugees without parents have been sent to Essunga to stay with support families. There are three primary schools and one secondary school serving all learners in the municipality. The 2007 results, when only 76% of the learners were eligible for upper-secondary national programmes, were described as a 'cold shower' for the school.

In the academic year 2006–2007, about 20% of learners in grades 6–9 were placed in special education groups and other segregated support units. There was recognition that special groups were taking a lot of resources, but, despite this, learners were not achieving the expected grades. It was also evident that learners sent to the special groups – even if a placement was only intended to be short term – did not return to their mainstream class but remained 'excluded', with the consequent low expectations and stigmatisation.

Main activities and findings

The main findings concern the transformation process. In 2007, all learners (in grades 6–9) were sent back to their mainstream classes. The fundamental change was institutionalised by:

- closing the segregated special education groups that existed in the school and redistributing the resources;
- professionals who worked with the special education groups following the learners into the mainstream classrooms. Two teachers were in the classroom for core subject lessons – Swedish, English and maths;
- the realisation that the classroom is the school's most important arena and that each learner's success is the responsibility of the school;
- individual adaptations becoming an everyday occurrence for all learners. Inclusion strengthened both learners and teachers, both regarding knowledge and social development;
- challenging prevailing teaching methods. It became a priority to change the lessons to meet the needs of all the learners. A very clear structure was



introduced to the lessons. While this was essential for some learners with special needs, it also proved to be a benefit for everyone in the classroom, by using time more effectively.

Early in the change process, the Education Board decided that all work should emanate from current research evidence. Literature was summarised and given to all staff, from the pre-school teachers to the staff in adult education. The content was discussed and connected to the teachers' own knowledge and experiences.

The outcomes are interesting: inclusion, a focus on knowledge and adaptation for individuals led to better results for the learners. In 2010, the school reached the Education Board's goal that all learners should pass all subjects. All the learners were also eligible for upper-secondary national programmes. In 2011, the national test results for ninth grade in mathematics, Swedish and English were better than ever. Only two learners left school without an upper-secondary qualification and 89% of learners passed grades in all subjects (see also Persson, 2012; Persson and Persson 2012; Skoglund, 2013).

Theoretical essence

The theoretical essence of the case is that the following are crucial to move towards better and sustainable outcomes:

- Leadership (politicians and managers) must get involved in seeing and understanding how it really is.
- Principals and supporting functions (e.g. special pedagogues) must join in the search to understand the challenges of the school, e.g. by relating to external national counselling support and current research knowledge and finding a practical way to involve all professionals in a common reflective process.
- Teachers must be supported by research, principals and special pedagogues to better recognise, understand and support each learner, together with a colleague in those areas where the greatest difficulties are recognised.
- All parties must get involved in a search for a joint approach to the development of the local school within the local community.

In sum, it seems to be a theoretical challenge to both traditional 'top-down' change and 'bottom-up' change. Rather, as Argyris (1991) and Schein (1993) have shown, it is about 'how to help smart people to learn'. 'Smart' in this case means those in charge. Politicians, managers, principals and teachers started learning by a new perspective and new ways to explain learners' difficulties; they went from blaming learners and parents to focusing on their own professional capability as main determinant.

Issues for future development

In order to further develop this learning, it is crucial to point out the general motor of development of practice and research: willingness, awareness and the ability to question. A non-questioned reality is a stagnating reality. Therefore, it is essential to get underneath it all and ask: what are we really certain about? What are we not certain about?



The critical question is how to uphold and further develop when it is change in leadership and personnel. The school is also challenged by the Swedish culture of not really supporting those 'doing something extraordinary'.

References

Persson, B. and Persson, E., 2012. *Inkludering och måluppfyllelse – att nå framgång med alla elever [Inclusion and Goal Achievement – to reach success with all learners]*. Stockholm: Liber

Persson, E., 2012. 'Raising achievement through inclusion' *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, pp. 1–16, DOI:10.1080/13603116.2012.745626

Skoglund, P., 2013. 'Inkludering och skolans osäkerheter – att stödja professionella att lära' ['Inclusion and uncertainties in schools – to support professionals to learn'] *Paideia, Tidsskrift for professionel pædagogisk praksis*, 13 (05): 20–29

Skoglund, P., 2014. 'Fundamental challenges and dimensions of inclusion in Sweden and Europe. How does inclusion benefit all?' *La nouvelle revue de l'adaptation et de la scolarisation*, 65, 1er trimestre 2014