

THE NATIONAL AGENCY FOR  
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**General guidelines and comments**

# **Quality in leisure-time centres**



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Fryklunds  
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**General guidelines and comments**

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## Foreword

The following general guidelines for quality in school-age child care with comments replaces the previous general guidelines with comments for Leisure-Care Centres, General guidelines 1992:2.

The general guidelines for quality in school-age child care have a clear connection with the Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-School Class and the Leisure-Time Centre, Lpo 94, but the emphasis is placed on the task of the leisure-time centre as formulated in the Education Act. The guidelines are directed both at the municipality and at the staff of the leisure-time centre, and they illustrate the division of responsibility between the municipality and the centre.

As an introduction, an account is given of what general guidelines are, as well as of the ordinances on which they are based. This is followed by a section on concepts. Finally, there is a list of references.

The general guidelines are followed by comments. The comments clarify the guidelines and are based on the preliminary work relating to the provisions, on research and on experience such as surveys and other relevant material. It is the hope of the Agency that these general guidelines with comments will constitute the basis for discussions on how the activities can be run. The Agency also hopes that the guidelines and the comments provided will be a valuable support in the further development of the activities.

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# Introduction

## What are general guidelines?

The National Agency for Education's general guidelines are recommendations for assisting with the application of different statutes, i.e. laws, ordinances and directives. A general guideline is based on a statute. It states how one can or should act and aims at influencing development along a certain course and at promoting uniformity in the application of legal rules. The guidelines should be adhered to unless the organisation can demonstrate that other methods can result in the requirements of the provisions being fulfilled.

## General guidelines for quality in leisure-time centres for school-age children

The National Agency for Education's general guidelines for quality in school-age child care are based on provisions in the Education Act (1985:1100), on the Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-School Class and the Leisure-Time Centre, Lpo94, and on the children's perspective in the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child. The ordinance (1997:702) on quality reporting within the school system, and others, have also been taken into consideration during formulation of the guidelines. Following the guidelines are comments which are aimed at providing clarification. The comments are based on research, existing knowledge and experience.

The general guidelines for quality in school-age child care are directed both at the municipality and at staff working in leisure-time centres. Other target groups are staff in schools and other organisations that cooperate with leisure-time centres. The guidelines can also be a support for guardians in increasing their influence.

In addition, the guidelines can be helpful in municipalities' assessment of the quality of school-age child care programmes when issuing permits and with regard to the supervision of privately run centres. They can also act as a support in the quality work in these centres.

## Concepts

The following concepts, with the specified definitions, are used in the general guidelines and comments.

**School-age child care** is used in the Education Act as a collective term for different types of pedagogic activity that, during the school-free part of the day and during school holidays, are directed at school children who are both enrolled and not enrolled, up to the age of twelve.

School-age child care is conducted under the Education Act in the form of **integrated leisure-time centres, family day-care centres, and open leisure-time activities**. The provisions in the Education Act on which the guidelines are based, including the preliminary work, generally include all types of school-age child care, whereas these general guidelines concern leisure-time centres.

**The leisure-time centre** is a pedagogic group programme for school-age children up to the age of twelve and for which the children are enrolled. A leisure-time centre can be run as a completely independent activity but they are usually, to different degrees, integrated with the pre-school class and compulsory school.

**Open leisure-time activities** are, under the Education Act, an alternative to enrolled activities for children in the ten to twelve year age group, and they can also be a supplement for school-age children enrolled at family day-care homes. Open leisure-time activities can be coordinated with the municipality's other leisure-time activities for children and youths and can also be organised in cooperation with club activities.

**The family day-care home** is an alternative to the leisure-time centre, for children, for instance, who need to be in a smaller group, in locations where there is not a sufficient base for organising a leisure-time centre, or where parents and children prefer family day-care homes. In family day-care homes, family child-minders conduct activities in their own home for enrolled children.

**School** refers to pre-school class and the compulsory types of school.

**Curriculum** refers to the Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-School Class and the Leisure-Time Centre, Lpo94.

**Holiday** means individual days' holiday, in-service training days, longer holidays and summer holidays.

**School children** includes children in pre-school class.

## How is the leisure-time centre regulated?

The leisure-time centre is regulated by the Education Act and the curriculum (Lpo 94). There are also other fundamental provisions that are directed at leisure-time centres: the Ordinance (1997:702) on Quality Reporting within the School System, for instance, and the Act (2006:67) Prohibiting Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment of Children and School Students. The Agency has issued general guidelines with comments to these provisions, directed at activities additional to leisure-time centres: The National Agency for Education's general guidelines for the work on promoting equal treatment and on counter-acting discrimination and other degrading treatment (SKOLFS 2007:7) and the National Agency for Education's general guidelines for quality reporting within the school system, etc. (SKOLFS 2006:18). There are, in other words, three sets of guidelines that deal with different aspects of the leisure-time centre's activities, on the basis of different provisions.

### **Task, prerequisites and starting point for the work**

The leisure-time centre covers time outside school hours. The task of the leisure-time centre is, through pedagogic activities, to be a complement to school, to provide children with meaningful recreation, and to be a support in their development. The leisure-time centre, in addition, is to provide children with the care required for parents to be able to combine parenthood with work and study. The basic regulations for leisure-time centres for school-age children are contained in the Education Act. In chapter 2 a, section 3 of the Education Act, the task, conditions and starting point for the work of the leisure-time centre are stated.

*... The purpose of school-age child care is to supplement school and to offer children meaningful leisure time and support in their development.*

*In order to conduct ... school-age child care, it is necessary to have personnel with such training and experience that the children's need for care and good teaching activities can be satisfied. Groups of children shall be of an appropriate size and composition. The premises shall be suitable for the purpose.*

*... school-age child care shall be based on the needs of each child.. Children who for physical, mental or other reasons require special support in their development shall be given the care that their special needs demand.*

The curriculum was originally formulated on the basis of the school's activities. It included values and tasks as well as goals and guidelines for the activities. It was adapted in 1998 so that it could also be applied to the leisure-time centre. This is the reason for the curriculum applying to the compulsory school system and the pre-school class and being applied in the leisure-time

centre. These organisations have several points in common. They are based on children's development and schooling and work with the same children but their tasks differ in certain respects. In the documentation preparatory to the curriculum, the situation regarding these differences is explained:

*"In respect of the sections of the curriculum dealing with fundamental values, understanding and human feeling, objectivity and versatility, norms and principles, the curriculum can also be applied in full by the leisure-time centre. With regard to the outright knowledge goals, the leisure-time centre can contribute with its experience of an investigative, exploratory, practical methodology."*

The relation between the curriculum and the general guidelines for leisure-time centres is also described there:

*"It is the responsibility of the leisure-time centre's teachers and other staff, with the support of the curriculum and the general guidelines, to form a suitable whole for the task of the leisure-time centre in cooperation with the pre-school class and with school"*

### **General guidelines for quality reporting and general guidelines for quality in leisure-time centres**

According to the ordinance on quality reporting, quality reports must be drawn up as one stage in the continual process of following-up and evaluating the activities - "systematic quality work". The systematic quality work aims at continually identifying the necessary prerequisites for working towards the national goals, at developing work processes, at assessing results and goal fulfilment, and at taking appropriate measures. To ensure that improvements last and that quality is improved, the trend has to be monitored over time. Quality reporting is a tool for regularly checking how far the organisation has come in the continual work on improvement.

Every municipality must draw up a quality report at municipal level with regard to all municipally-run pre-school activities, school-age child care, and school activities. Every municipal leisure-time centre must draw up a quality report at operational level.

General guidelines for quality reporting aim at providing support in the drawing up of quality reports and at explaining their role in the quality work. As they are addressed at several different operations, the guidelines usually are formulated in a general way. In respect of leisure-time centres, for instance, they state that the quality report at municipal level should present comprehensive information on important preconditions for the activities and, at operational level, report goal fulfilment by assessing how well the leisure-time centre has worked towards the goals in the Education Act and the curriculum respectively.

One of the purposes of the general guidelines for quality in leisure-time centres is to provide support and guidance in the quality work. The guidelines are constructed in such a way as to make it clear which preconditions, national goals and principles for the leisure-time centre in the Education Act and Lpo 94 that are important for achieving good quality. In the systematic quality work, the general guidelines for quality in leisure-time centres must therefore be used parallel to the general guidelines for quality reporting in the systematic quality work.

# PRECONDITIONS

## Control and management

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

It is important that the municipality

- states clearly how the responsibility for the leisure-time centre is divided, and ensures that its executive is well acquainted with the activity's goals and tasks and with the day-to-day work of the leisure-time centre,
- has systems and procedures to deal with the continuous planning, follow-up and evaluation of the activities and how the results are used for quality improvement, and
- has resource allocation systems that take into consideration that different leisure-time centres require different amounts of resources in order to perform their tasks.

### COMMENTS

#### ***Division of responsibility***

Under the Education Act, the municipality must have one or more committees that deal with implementation of the municipality's tasks in leisure-time centres. The municipality has considerable freedom to decide how the activities should be designed. Municipal law requires a division of the responsibility within the municipality in order to have effective control of and insight into the activities. The municipality must therefore decide how the responsibility for the leisure-time centres should be divided. It is important that this division of responsibility is explicit, so that it is clear who holds responsibility and makes decisions at different levels.

#### ***Management of the leisure-time centre***

The pedagogical leadership is an important factor as regards the quality of the leisure-time centre. It is therefore of considerable importance that the leadership is well-versed in respect of the leisure-time centre's goals and tasks. To deal with the responsibility for educational development, it is also important that the leadership has insight into and knowledge of the day-to-day work in

the leisure-time centre. A management group that is active and involved leads to possibilities for developing the activity towards the national goals. Giving the staff time to plan, follow up and evaluate the activities means that opportunities for a high level of goal fulfilment are created.

### ***Systems for planning, follow-up and evaluation***

The leisure-time centre is included in a goal and result oriented control system. Both the municipality and the leisure-time centre's leadership have a duty to ensure that the activities are conducted satisfactorily. In accordance with the ordinance on quality reporting, a quality report must be drawn up as one step in the procedure of continual follow-up and evaluation of the activities. These general guidelines clarify the need for systems and procedures, not only for planning but also for follow-up and evaluation. As has already been stated, the general guidelines for quality reporting and these general guidelines must be used in parallel with each other in order to decide which systems and procedures for follow-up and evaluation are required for the achievement of good quality.

If follow-up and evaluation results are to be used to improve quality, there must be effective communication between politicians, public executives and the leisure-time centre's leadership with regard to the framework and conditions of the activities. The staff's knowledge of local conditions can be used in decisions regarding, for instance, frameworks and resources for the activities. The dialogue between the municipal executive and the leisure-time centre's leadership regarding evaluation results and the development of the activities is of great importance. Clarity in the signals and feedback to those involved is important for maintaining a good level of commitment to the quality work.

### ***Allocation of resources***

According to the curriculum, children's different circumstances and needs must be taken into consideration.. When allocating resources, it is important to consider factors such as the social character of the area, children's ages, the staff's competence, premises and the layout of the outdoor environment, the number of children with a mother tongue other than Swedish, the number of children requiring special support, and the size of the group of children.

One requirement for the municipality being able to allocate resources in relation to the different needs of children at leisure-time centres is that regular follow-ups and evaluations of the quality of the activities are carried out. The results of these evaluations can serve as guidance for how the resources should be allocated.

## Follow-up and evaluation

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

It is important that the leisure-time centre's leadership

- ensures that there are systems and procedures for following up and evaluating how the centre works in relation to the Education Act and the curriculum, and
- ensure that the staff have systems and procedures for evaluating their work together with management and colleagues and together with children and parents in order to acquire as broad and varied a picture of the activities as possible.

### COMMENTS

In accordance with the ordinance on quality reporting, a quality report must be drawn up as one step in the procedure of continual follow-up and evaluation of the activities. This general guideline clarifies the need for systems and procedures for follow-up and evaluation. As has already been stated, the general guidelines for quality reporting and these general guidelines must be used in parallel in order to decide which systems and procedures for follow-up and evaluation are required if good quality in leisure-time centres is to be achieved. What is suitable for prioritisation in follow-ups and evaluations, in addition to what appears in both of these sets of general guidelines, varies as the circumstances in the municipality and activity in question vary.

If the evaluation is to be as balanced as possible, it is important that scope is also given for the opinions of parents and children. The involvement of children in evaluating the activities is a prerequisite for the influence that the children, under the curriculum, should have. The quality report should be drawn up in cooperation between teachers, other staff and children at the leisure-time centre, in accordance with the ordinance on quality reporting. In the general guidelines on quality reporting, under the section *Responsibility and participation*, there are recommendations regarding participation in the work on quality reporting. It is stated, for instance, that it is important that the leisure-time centre develops and applies procedures for how children's and guardians' cooperation and participation in the quality reporting work are to be assured.

The results acquired through evaluations constitute one stage in the quality work and they can also indicate what the educational activities should be aimed at. They can provide a picture of the changes that ought to take place and of the development requirements that exist. To ensure that improvements last and that



quality is improved, the trend has to be monitored over time. The written quality report is one of the tools for regularly checking and clarifying how far the activities have progressed in the continual improvement efforts.

## **Staff density and the size and composition of the group of children**

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

The municipality should

- adapt the group size, staff density and composition of the group to the needs and safety of the children, and take factors into consideration such as
  - the children's ages
  - the proportion of children in need of special support
  - the proportion of children with a mother tongue other than Swedish
  - the social character of the catchment area
  - continuity in children's group and staff group
  - the competence of the staff
  - the children's attendance times
  - the design of the premises and of the outdoor environment, and
- perform documented impact assessments prior to making decisions affecting staff density and the composition and size of groups at leisure-time centres. These assessments should include economic as well as educational impact.

### **COMMENTS**

#### ***Appropriate composition and size***

The Education Act lays down that the children's groups are to be of an appropriate composition and size and that the activities are to be based on the needs of each child.

The curriculum clarifies the responsibility for each individual child's development and learning. The activities of the leisure-time centre are based on children's socialisation and development taking place in groups. A child's self-esteem and identity is developed in interaction with other children and adults. In a group that is too big in relation to the number of staff, there is, however, a risk that the positive effects of being in a group may be reversed. The conse-

quences of having groups that are too large can be that the interaction between adults and children and between children is negatively affected, resulting in stress and high noise levels. When the group becomes too large, it is difficult to take stock of relations, and this can contribute to a feeling of anonymity and insecurity. Aggressive behaviour or other negative conduct can start to come into play. It is therefore important that the group's composition and size allow a group-focused method of working that satisfies the needs both of the individual child and of the group, promoting positive interaction between the child and the group.

The size of the group of children can be decisive for the safety of the children in respect of the possibility for staff to have an overall view of and contact with the children. In activities where children are involved, there must be procedures that prevent the risk of accidents in the children's physical environment, both outdoors and indoors.

There is no determined group size or staff density that is optimal in all contexts. Circumstances vary from group to group and from time to time. A group size or staff density that suits one leisure-time centre will not necessarily be right for another. Even if it is not possible to state what size of group is best in all contexts, it must be emphasised that the possibilities for creating a good organisation decrease with larger groups. The size of the group is an important quality factor and the composition of the group is significant with regard to children's opportunities for finding friends who are interesting, stimulating and fun to be with.

### ***Factors that affect the suitability of group size and staff density***

It is important that groups with a lot of younger children are not too big, taking into consideration younger children's greater need for adult contact.

Children who need special support (see under the section, *Special support*) and children who do not yet command the Swedish language generally benefit from being in smaller groups with a high staff density.

The social character of the different catchment areas can vary and this is yet another factor to consider in relation to staff density and the size of the group.

Continuity in children's groups and staff groups is a prerequisite for children developing in their relation and interaction with each other and with adults.

The competence of the staff is also of significance. In work teams with well-trained, experienced staff, there are better opportunities for working on the interplay and relationships in the children's group.

## Staff competence

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

The municipality should

- as far as possible, endeavour to employ staff with teaching degrees, with a specialisation in the relevant age group and activity,
- provide all staff with knowledge development, based on the needs of the organisation and
- give the staff time for the development of the activities.

### COMMENTS

The Education Act lays down that there must be staff with such training or experience as to be able to fulfil the children's need for care and good pedagogic activity.

The competence of the staff is decisive for quality in the leisure-time centre. It is the responsibility of the municipality to ensure that the staff have a suitable level of competence. Having staff with higher teacher training is important from a quality point of view.

To be able to work in accordance with the curriculum, the staff must have good knowledge of the younger schoolchildren's development and learning. The staff must be able to plan and conduct pedagogic activities that are adapted both to the needs of the individual child and of the group, and to critically examine and further develop the activities. Competence also involves developing the interaction within the group, strengthening children's identity and self-esteem, and interacting and communicating with each child in the group and their parents.

#### ***Knowledge development as required***

In order to provide the right knowledge development in relation to the leisure-time centre's specific activities, the municipality needs, in close cooperation with the centre's leadership and staff, to continuously chart and analyse the need for knowledge development. Long-term, sustainable quality development in the organisation presumes, in addition, that the need for knowledge development is based both on evaluations and on current research results.

### **Time for development**

One condition for taking advantage of different professions' knowledge and experience is that leisure-time centre, pre-school class and school staff are given the opportunity for joint as well as activity-linked planning, follow-up, evaluation and reflection, for the development of the activities.

## **Premises and outdoor environment**

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

The municipality should ensure that the leisure-time centre's premises and outdoor environment

- are secure, safe, healthy and formative,
- are designed to enable good, varied teaching activities that support children's learning and development, both individually and in groups, and
- are designed so that both the indoor and the outdoor environment enable the staff to have an overview of the children for whom they are responsible.

### **COMMENTS**

The Education Act lays down that the leisure-time centre's premises must be appropriate for their purpose, meaning that the premises' size, design and outdoor environment should enable the centre to operate good teaching activities that are based on the children's needs and interests.

The size and design of the premises, environmental factors such as air, sound and light, and the choice of materials should be such that the leisure-time centre can operate good pedagogic activities. Space is needed for activities of different types, from creative, lively activities in large groups through to rest and gentle activities in smaller groups.

It is usual for leisure-time centres to be located in school premises. Research and evaluations show that premises-oriented integration is not always without problems. School premises are not always adapted to the activities of the leisure-time centre. In addition, the way in which premises for integrated activities are to be utilised is not obvious, and disagreements between the interests of different operations can easily arise. One condition for effective cooperation and co-existence is a mutual agreement between different staff groups as to how and when the school's different premises can and may be used during different times of the day and during holidays.

As regards safety and teaching methods, it is important that the premises and outdoor environment are easy to overview, that they facilitate contact between staff and children, and that procedures exist that deal with the collection, leaving and supervision of the children. While the adults are responsible for supervising the children, the children, from their perspective, must have the possibility of playing and relaxing with a certain amount of freedom from disturbance.

The outdoor environment around the leisure-time centre is of great significance for children's development and learning, and plays an important part in the children's general situation. It is necessary to have an outdoor environment that provides scope both for fixed games and for exploratory activities.

One of the natural elements of the activity must be to pay attention to and to counteract high levels of noise. That is to say, to plan, run and follow the work so that the risks involved in high noise levels are eliminated or reduced as far as possible.

# THE WORK IN THE LEISURE-TIME CENTRE

## Task of the leisure-time centre

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

It is important that the staff

- design the activities so that the leisure-time centre is a complement to school from the time as well as the content aspect,
- offer the children meaningful, stimulating and formative recreation that is varied and based on the needs and interests of the children, and
- combine care and teaching that supports the child's physical, intellectual, social and emotional development.

### COMMENTS

#### ***Supplement to school***

Under the Education Act, the leisure-time centre is to supplement school. The leisure-time centre supplements the school time-wise in that the activities are run during the school-free part of the day and year. School and the leisure-time centre provide the children with different types of knowledge and experience, thereby complementing each other. The leisure-time centre also supplements the school by the possibility of offering other activities and by the focus of the activities being different. The leisure-time centre is an important supplement to school as it creates diversity, completeness and continuity in children's development and learning.

With their competence, the staff of the leisure-time centre can contribute additional perspectives. With their more pronounced focus on children's social development, wellbeing and care, and on the group and its social interaction, the staff of the leisure-time centre can be a valuable complement in, for instance, pupil welfare work and in work on the prevention of bullying, harassment or other problems that can arise in children's groups. Not only children who attend leisure-time centres benefit from the supplementary teaching methods and content.

#### ***Meaningful recreation***

According to the Education Act, the leisure-time centre should offer children meaningful recreation. The prerequisites for children to consider their recrea-

tion time to be meaningful are that the activities are secure, fun and stimulating, with much time being spent on play and creative activity, and with the activities being designed on the basis of the children's ages, maturity, needs, interests and experiences. This means that the work of leisure-time centres will vary according to the children's experiences, situation, interests, the specialisations of the school and the resources of the local environment.

It is important that the children have the opportunity to get to know their immediate environment and the different possibilities it offers. By making contact and cooperating with the municipality's public recreational activities for children and young people, and with cultural and club activities, children can be encouraged to develop recreational activities in which they can participate when they finish at the leisure-time centre.

### ***Play and creative activity***

Children are constantly and actively creating their own development and their own learning during play, during creative activity and in their exploration of their surroundings. It is important that the work of the leisure-time centre is varied to include play, physical activity, creativity such as drama, music, dance and art, and exploration of the surrounding world in the form of study visits, outings etc.

Patterns in children's ways of thinking, problem solving and handling information can change and develop through play. They test and develop their physical, mental and social skills. It is during play that children can test different social roles and lay the foundations of their identity. It can also be also a question of being able to appraise other people and try to understand how they think; in other words, of developing empathy. With regard to supporting and stimulating children's development and learning, the presence of adults can be required when children are involved in free play. Rules are often needed if the game is going to work. Jointly making up rules that can be followed or broken is a form of training in democratic thinking. The leisure-time centre is an important educational arena for children to learn to respect differences and contrasting opinions and to realise the need for compromise.

### ***Support in development***

According to the Education Act, children must be offered support in their development. By encouraging children to successively extend and strengthen their knowledge of themselves and their world, and by making the most of their curiosity, initiative and eagerness to learn, children's all-round development is stimulated. In an activity based on the awareness that children's development and learning is continuing all the time and in all contexts, and characterised by the attitude to children as being active co-creators of their own development and

own learning, excellent opportunities are created for each child to develop fully and diversely.

A comprehensive view of children's development is based on the understanding that different aspects of children's development and learning are related and influence each other. For instance, a child's self-esteem can be strengthened if he or she feels secure in a group and has developed trust in friends and in adults. Self-esteem, in turn, influences the child's ability to learn. Children's social and emotional development thus influences their intellectual development and vice versa. Surveys have shown that children's social status in the group has a certain link with how they perform at and adapt to school. To be able to enjoy oneself and feel good is possible in an environment that is free from stress, where children can experience trust, tranquillity, pleasure and curiosity. The leisure-time centre combines care and teaching and can thus be a support for the child's physical, intellectual, social and emotional development.

### ***Social skills and independence***

During a child's school years, there is a successive development of their independence. The child increasingly develops its own identity and own interests. This development continues in close interaction with others. A child's group of friends and the group's values become increasingly important. Children still need the support of adults, but also additional opportunities for taking their own responsibility. Children of these ages often alternate between liberation from and dependence on adults. The older the child becomes, the greater the importance of friends, with group relations becoming more central. In this process, the leisure-time centre can contribute to children developing confidence in themselves and in their own abilities.

### ***Diet and physical activity***

Children need to be active. It is therefore important to offer plenty of opportunity for regular physical activity at the leisure-time centre, with a focus on creativity, enjoyment and play so that all the children will want to participate. Diet also has a significant influence on children's health and lifestyle. By serving nutritious meals in a pleasant atmosphere, the leisure-time centre can contribute to the establishment of good eating habits.



## Norms and values

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

It is important that the staff

- work actively to ensure that the norms and values described in the curriculum are an integral part of the day-to-day work on supporting children's development, and link this with how the children develop their ability to take on responsibility and exercise influence, and
- endeavour to see each child's uniqueness, and consciously work to ensure that the differences within the group are regarded as an asset.

### COMMENTS

The curriculum's fundamental, democratic values are to be the basis for the work of the leisure-time centre. The staff have a considerable responsibility to discuss different values and concepts, while distancing themselves from anything that conflicts with these.

The activities of the leisure-time centre are based on the idea that children's socialisation and development takes place in groups. Children's self-esteem and identity develop in interaction with others. In a group that functions well, the children get enjoyment from each other. It is also within the group that social norms and values are tested and developed. The group thus constitutes a forum where democratic thinking, equality and other value issues can be put into practice. Together with others, the children learn to handle disputes and conflicts of interest and to solve them in a positive way.

According to the Act Prohibiting Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment of Children and School Students, any tendencies towards discrimination, harassment and other degrading treatment must be counteracted actively, and an equal treatment plan drawn up. The presence of adults is of core significance in the prevention and discovery of any tendencies towards discrimination, harassment and other degrading treatment. If children are able to form their norms completely on their own, there is a risk of a negative culture taking over within a group, resulting in rejection or bullying. General guidelines and comments for the work on promoting equal treatment (SKOLFS 2004:19) provides support in the work of counteracting and preventing all forms of discrimination, harassment and other degrading treatment.

Staff have many opportunities for highlighting and, together with the children, discussing and dealing with the issue of the differences between people. In an environment where differences are considered natural, children

have the possibility to develop an understanding and tolerance of different ways of thinking and being. In present-day society, the media have a great deal of influence on children's and young people's norms and values. The leisure-time centre can contribute to an increased awareness of the norms and values that the media express, with regard to, for instance, gender roles, physical ideals and consumption.

## **Equality between boys and girls**

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

It is important that the staff

- give thought to their own attitude to masculinity and femininity, and discuss how the educational environment can be designed in order to strengthen the equality work, and
- work actively for equality between girls and boys to be integrated into the leisure-time centre activity.

### **COMMENTS**

In the curriculum, equality is highlighted as being an important part of the work regarding values. It is, to a great extent, a question of counteracting traditional gender patterns and of girls and boys having an equally great influence on and scope in the activities. Research and experience show that girls and boys are systematically treated differently.

#### **Attitudes**

Effective equality work starts with adults. The foundations of the sexual identity that is established as a teenager are laid at a very early age. Adults' way of treating girls and boys, and the demands and expectations placed upon them, contribute to forming girls' and boys' perception of what is feminine and masculine. It can sometimes be difficult for adults to identify their own attitudes regarding femininity and masculinity as well as gender patterns in the everyday life of the leisure-time centre. It is therefore very important that the staff examine their own attitudes critically, analyse how gender patterns express themselves in the educational activities and link this to fundamental values.

### **Equality is part of the work on values**

The leisure-time centre's staff and management have a key role to play in the development of the equality work. In order to work with the values and tasks of the curriculum it is necessary to have theoretical knowledge of equality and gender as well as practical experience of equality work in children's groups. Deliberate equality teaching can create the opportunities that the curriculum prescribes. That is to say, to provide scope for children to test and develop abilities and interests irrespective of gender.

Many spare-time activities are sex-typed. It is important to allow scope both for girls' and boys' interests but also to consciously attempt to break ingrained gender role patterns. The staff have an important role in creating a balance between the children's involvement in the interests they already have and demonstrating alternatives and giving inspiration for new discoveries.

## **Children's participation and influence**

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

It is important that the staff

- work actively for children's right to responsibility, involvement and influence in the activities, based on experience, age and maturity, and
- clarify for the children the connections between involvement, influence and responsibility for decisions taken.

### **COMMENTS**

Children's responsibility and influence are dealt with in the curriculum. The democratic principles of being able to influence, take responsibility and be involved are to include all children.

At the leisure-time centre, children have the opportunity to develop an understanding of what democracy is by, in different ways, expressing thoughts and opinions and by being able to influence the content of the centre's work. Working actively with children's involvement and influence means being acutely aware and showing respect when children express their will in everyday situations.

There are plenty of opportunities in the daily activities to stimulate children's ability to take responsibility for their actions and for the leisure-time centre's environment. To be able to act democratically, children need to participate in democratic processes such as assemblies, planning, meetings and evaluations. Participation, based on experience, age and maturity, is a basic

prerequisite for children's possibilities for making their voice heard and for exerting influence. It is, however, important that not only the influence exerted at group activities is strengthened, but also the child's influence over their own activities.

The adults' attitudes are decisive in the work with children's involvement and influence over their own everyday life. The staff must have the necessary qualifications for the work as well an awareness of how children can be involved. Large groups of children, for instance, can be an obstacle as the adults must control the activities to a greater degree if they are to function properly.

Children's influence on an everyday basis must be clarified and fed back so that the children understand that their opinions matter and discover that there are both informal and formal democratic forums. In this way, the children have the opportunity to develop their understanding of the democratic processes of which they are a part. It is also important in this context that the children participate in different types of evaluation and in the work on quality reporting, in accordance with the ordinance on quality reporting within the school system etc, and in the work on the activities' equal treatment plan, in accordance with the ordinance (2006:1083) on children's and school pupils' participation in the work on an equal treatment plan.

## **A multicultural leisure-time centre**

### **GUIDELINES**

The municipality should

- act for the work of the leisure-time centre to be characterised by an attitude through which different cultures and multilingualism are regarded as an asset.

It is important that the staff

- continuously give consideration to their values and attitudes with regard to cultural and language differences,
- aim for a method of working by which different cultures' equal value is emphasised and by which language and cultural diversity are regarded as assets, and
- ensure that the work on supporting children's linguistic and cultural identity is integrated into the daily activities.

## COMMENTS

The work relating to cultural diversity is one part of the curriculum's work on values. Today's multicultural leisure-time centres are places where children and parents of differing ethnic origins, religions, faiths and cultural backgrounds meet. The centres' activities therefore have an important role to play in the development of tolerance and solidarity.

### ***Knowledge in the municipality***

The municipality has an overall responsibility to ensure that the leisure-time centres, in the best way possible, can meet the needs and challenges that exist in a multilingual, multicultural society. This requires knowledge at all levels within the municipality about what it means to work with multilingualism and multicultural groups. It is important to give consideration to cultural differences and to deal with prejudices and attitudes. The staff have a considerable responsibility with regard to discovering and actively counteracting prejudices.

### ***Work in multicultural groups***

A multicultural method of working is based on every child's language and cultural background constituting an asset in the group. When the staff show an interest in the children's language and culture, encouraging them to talk about and, in other ways, communicate about their life outside the leisure-time centre, the children's self-esteem and cultural identity are reinforced. The leisure-time centre needs to be open and positive towards different habits and customs. Parents are an important source of information that can ease both cultural and linguistic understanding.

Different leisure-time centres have different prerequisites for working with children's linguistic and cultural development. The size and composition of the group and the competence of the staff are important factors that influence the work.

## Special support

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

The municipality should

- adopt the approach that children's need for special support is related to the surroundings and the environment in which the child exists,
- endeavour to ensure that children's need for special support is satisfied in the ordinary activities, and that the staff have the necessary competence for this, and
- regularly make an evaluation of whether the resources for children in need of special support are sufficient and whether the efforts are working.

It is important that the staff

- work with an approach involving the support requirement for children being regarded in relation to the surroundings and the environment in which the child exists
- cooperate with the pre-school class and with school so that different types of expertise contribute jointly to create a picture of how the child functions in different contexts, and this ought to constitute a basis for adequate support efforts,
- cooperate with pre-school in order to facilitate the transfer from pre-school to leisure-time centre,
- when planning initiatives for children needing special support, are alert to the views of guardians.
- by way of follow-up and evaluations, clarify the factors that have influenced the work with children in need of special support and whether the support resources are adequate, and
- together with the child and the child's guardians, document, follow up and evaluate the support initiatives.

### COMMENTS

Under the Education Act, children who for physical, mental or other reasons require special support in their development are to be given the care that their special needs demand.

Children in need of special support do not refer to any uniform or clearly defined group. All children need support in their development, some need special support during certain periods, others during their entire time at the leisure-time centre. Children with diffuse needs that are difficult to interpret,

such as concentration difficulties, speech and language difficulties or psychosocial difficulties are among those needing special support. Others needing special support can have obvious functional disabilities such as motor disabilities or sight or hearing impairments.

When the leisure-time centre and school work together it can become clear that children's need for special support should be put in relation to their surroundings. Both of these activities make, to an extent, differing demands on the child, and this can mean that children who need special support at school do not need it at the leisure-time centre, and vice versa.

### ***Special support measures***

For many children, the most important measure is for the activities to maintain a generally high quality. For others, special support measures can be required as a complement. Support can be in the form of staff reinforcement, either in the group as a whole or for the individual child, or it can take the form of consultation and guidance for the staff. Other important prerequisites are cooperation with an effective pupil welfare body that has special needs expertise as well as psychological and medical expertise, and effective cooperation with specialists outside the leisure-time centre. A reduction in the number of children in the group or an adaptation of the premises are other forms of support. It is important that the municipality provides different types of measures so that, in each individual case, an assessment can be made of which measure will benefit the child most. It is also important that the staff of the leisure-time centre, pre-school class and school all cooperate and together try to arrive at the measures that will be best for the child. In the transfer from pre-school to leisure-time centre, it is extra important for children requiring special support that this is dealt with jointly so that there is security and continuity for the child.

The assessment of the suitability of support measures should be made by management and staff. So that measures for children in need of special support achieve their purpose, it is most important that there is good cooperation with and attentiveness towards guardians. In general, the consent of guardians consent is required.

### ***Follow-up and evaluation***

To ensure that sufficient, adequate resources have been allocated for special support, the municipality must be aware both of the extent of the support requirement, its character, and whether the measures being used are having the intended effect.

The staff and management have the closest contact with the activity and their assessment of the need for special support can thus play a significant part

when the municipality makes decisions about resources. That the child has a diagnosis is not necessarily a prerequisite when resources are being allocated to the leisure-time centre.

Regular follow-ups and evaluations of how the need for special support changes in the municipality provide valuable information about the quality development of the leisure-time centre. If the need for support increases, this can signal that the general quality has deteriorated and that changes are required if the leisure-time centre is to be able to conduct activities that are adapted to the needs of every child.

### **Documentation**

At school, action plans must be drawn up for pupils who are in need of special support measures. There is no corresponding requirement for children at leisure-time centres but, for the activity to give the child the best possible support, it is important together with the child and the child's guardians to document the support measures so that they can be followed up and evaluated.

## **Cooperation between the leisure-time centre and the home**

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

It is important that the staff

- build up a close, trusting cooperation with the child's guardians with regard to the child's individual development and learning, and discuss the way in which the leisure-time centre can help the child to enjoy itself, learn and develop,
- use the contact with the child's parents as an opportunity to discuss the child's enjoyment, learning and development, and
- take into consideration the guardians' different possibilities for participating in and influencing the activity by ensuring that there are different forms and forums for influence and cooperation.

### **COMMENTS**

The curriculum puts emphasis on cooperation with the child's guardians and parents. Good cooperation is a natural element of the leisure-time centre's activity and is an important quality factor. Close cooperation is an important prerequisite for the child being able to enjoy continuity in its life at home and at the centre. Cooperation is also a condition for the leisure-time centre being able to build on the child's experience and background.



It is the responsibility of the staff to ensure that there is cooperation with parents and guardians. It is important that cooperation is built upon openness, reciprocity and respect. The purpose of providing a guideline regarding contact with parents is to emphasise that the parents can have an interest in the child's welfare even if they are not the guardians. If information includes classified information, it cannot be disclosed without the consent of the guardians.

Having good contact on a day-to-day basis is fundamental to a trusting relationship. For the home to feel it is being included in questions involving the child and the leisure-time centre's fundamental values, norms and rules, planning and content, it is important to maintain a continual dialogue.

In the leisure-time centre, pre-school class and school, different types of cooperation with guardians occur, such as parents' meetings, planning meetings and personal development dialogue. When the leisure-time centre, pre-school and school all work together, there can be an advantage in arranging some of these meetings jointly.

## **Cooperation with other activities**

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

It is important that the staff

- create the best possible prerequisites for each child's all-round development and learning by way of cooperation with other activities such as pre-school, pre-school class and school,
- in cooperation with pre-school, pre-school class and school, act on the basis of the children's needs and interests, and
- cooperate with pre-school, pre-school class and school in order to create continuity and to facilitate transfer between different types of activity.

### **COMMENTS**

In the curriculum, the importance of cooperation between pre-school, pre-school class, school and leisure-time centre is emphasised. Close cooperation between different activities promotes the development of a common view of children's development and learning. A fundamental educational approach that is common to all can prevent gaps from developing between the different types of activity. It can also create better conditions for continuity and consistency in the children's lives. Efforts to arrive at a joint fundamental standpoint

do not mean that different activities' distinctive characteristics will be erased. On the contrary, it is in the meeting between different types of competence that the educational gains of cooperation are to be found.

If the cooperation is to be successful, certain basic conditions have to be fulfilled. It is important that the children are in focus and that the children's needs and interests are given priority. To achieve a good result, it is important that time is allocated for preparations and discussions as to how the cooperation should be organised through staff in the leisure-time centre, pre-school class and school being given the opportunity for joint planning, follow-up, evaluation and development of the activities.

For the children to experience continuity and security, it is important that the transfer between pre-school and leisure-time centre is given particular attention.

## REFERENCES

### ***Provisions not included in the school statutes concerning premises and environment in leisure-time centres***

The information is very brief. More details can be found, for instance, on the websites mentioned in the different sections

### ***The Environmental Code*** ([www.sos.se](http://www.sos.se), [www.naturvardsverket.se](http://www.naturvardsverket.se))

The Environmental Code and its consequential legislation contain provisions regarding the indoor and outdoor physical environment of leisure-time centres. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket), the Swedish Chemicals Agency (Kemikalieinspektionen) and the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), for instance, issue directives and general guidelines within the scope of the Environmental Code. Regarding the indoor environment requirements, it is mainly the Board of Health and Welfare's directives and general guidelines that are of interest. The Environmental Protection Agency has responsibility for the corresponding regulations relating to the outdoor environment.

Supervision of compliance with the Environmental Code is dealt with by the municipalities environmental committee or the equivalent. The supervisory authorities that provide guidance are, for the indoor environment, the National Board of Health and Welfare and, for the outdoor environment, the Environmental Protection Agency.

### ***Building legislation*** ([www.boverket.se](http://www.boverket.se))

The requirements applying to leisure-time centres with regard to new building and conversions can be found, among others, in the Planning and Construction Act. More detailed requirements are contained in the Act on Technical Requirements for Construction Works etc.

Supervision of compliance with the Environmental Code is dealt with by the municipalities' environmental committee or the equivalent. The central supervisory authority is the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverket).

### ***Relationship between the building legislation and the Environmental Code.***

In the main, the Environmental Code regulates the conditions for existing leisure-time centres, while requirements relating to new building and conversions are regulated by the building legislation.

### **Working environment legislation (www.av.se)**

The Work Environment Act makes requirements with regard to both the physical and the psychosocial working environment. In detailed directives and general guidelines, such as the directives on pre-school and leisure-time centres, the Swedish Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket) provides more detailed information about the requirements that apply. The working environment legislation only includes the staff. The National Agency for Education and the Work Environment Authority have jointly developed a website with guidance regarding work relating to the work environment in school. Much of the information there also applies to leisure-time centres. (www.av.se/amnessidor/skolweb). The Work Environment Authority together with its local districts supervise compliance with the work environment regulations.

#### *Relationship between the work environment legislation and the Environmental Code.*

The Work Environment Authority, with the support of the work environment legislation, and the municipal committee (environmental committee or the equivalent), with the support of the Environmental Code, supervise the environment in leisure-time centres. The work environment legislation applies to both the physical and the psychosocial environment, while the Environmental Code only applies to the physical environment.

### **Official publications**

Prop. 1973/136. *Om förskoleverksamhetens utbyggnad och organisation (On the expansion and organisation of pre-school)*

Prop. 1975/76:39. *Skolans inre arbete m.m. (School's internal work etc.)*

Prop. 1979/80:1. *Om socialtjänsten (On social services)*

Prop. 1993/94:11. *Utvidgad lagreglering på barnomsorgsområdet m.m. (Extended regulatory intervention in the field of child care etc.)*

Prop. 1997/98:6. *Förskoleklass och andra skollagsfrågor (Pre-school class and other issues relating to educational legislation)*

Prop. 1997/98:94. *Läroplan för det obligatoriska skolväsendet, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet m.m. (Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre etc.)*

Prop. 1997/98:182. *Strategi för att förverkliga FN:s konvention om barnets rättigheter i Sverige. (Strategy to realise the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child in Sweden.)*

Skolverket. 1998. *Integration mellan barnomsorg och skola. Beslut, genomförande och ekonomiska konsekvenser i tolv kommuner.*

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SOU 1997:116. *Barnets bästa i främsta rummet. FN:s konvention om barnets rättigheter i Sverige.*

SOU 2006:75. *Jämställd förskola. Slutbetänkande från Delegationen för jämställdhet i förskolan.*

## Legislation

Arbetsmiljölagen (1997:1160) (The Work Environment Act)

Föräldrabalken (The Code on Parents and Children)

Kommunallagen (1991:900) (The Local Government Act)

Lagen om tekniska egenskapskrav på byggnadsverk m.m. (1994:847) (The Act on Technical Requirements for Construction Works etc.)

Plan- och bygglagen (1987:10) (The Planning and Construction Act)

Skollagen (1985:1100) (The Education Act)

Lagen om förbud mot diskriminering och annan kränkande behandling av barn och elever (2006:67) (The Act Prohibiting Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment of Children and School Students)

## Ordinances

Förordning (SKOLFS 1994:1) om läroplan för det obligatoriska skolväsendet, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet. Lpo94

Förordning om kvalitetsredovisning (1997:702) (The Ordinance on Quality Reporting)

Förordning om barns och elevers deltagande i arbetet med en likabehandlingsplan (2006:1083) (The Ordinance on Children's and School Pupils' Participation in the Work on an Equal Treatment Plan)

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## International Conventions

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## General guidelines

Skolverkets allmänna råd för fritidshem. Allmänna råd 1999:2

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The general guidelines are directed at principal organisers, those responsible for the activities, and leisure-time centre staff. Other target groups are school staff and staff of other activities that cooperate with the leisure-time centre.

The purpose of the general guidelines is to clarify the activities on the basis of the Education Act and curriculum, and to support the quality work in leisure-time centres. For parents, the general guidelines can be a support with regard to influence and cooperation.

*Skolverket*

[www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)