

SUMMARY OF
REPORT 421

An Assessment of the Situation in the Swedish School System 2015



Skolverket

An Assessment of the Situation in the Swedish School System 2015

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Foreword

The Swedish Government has commissioned the Swedish National Agency for Education to perform an overall assessment of the situation and development in preschools, schools and adult education every other year. This is an extract from the report *An Assessment of the Situation in the Swedish School System 2015* by the National Agency for Education (Skolverkets lägesbedömning 2015, report 421). The report was published in May 2015. The summary describes particularly urgent challenges and point out ways forward. The report was prepared by Anders Fredriksson, Jessica Lindvert and Hedvig Modin.

The Swedish National Agency for Education, November 2015

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The Swedish National Agency for Education's overall assessment

In 2013, when the National Agency for Education (NAE) last summarised the school situation, we highlighted that the situation was worrying in a number of ways. By 2015, it is even clearer that we have significant problems in Swedish schools. The latest PISA study confirms and reinforces the picture of a continuing decline in educational results in compulsory school within the areas covered by the international knowledge measurements, i.e. mathematics, reading comprehension and natural sciences (see PIRLS, PISA and TIMSS).¹ The NAE has shown in a study that pupils' reduced motivation to carry out the PISA test can only explain a small proportion of the falling PISA results.² The NAE cannot see any explanation other than that the dramatic drop is due to poorer knowledge. It is however difficult to definitively establish the explanatory factors behind this loss of knowledge.³ The school system is complex, making it hard to isolate the link between different possible explanatory factors and the pupils' results trend. Additionally, several reforms have been introduced more or less simultaneously, making it even more complicated to investigate cause and effect.

Alongside the negative trend within key areas of knowledge, the NAE sees a number of other challenges. The shortage of teachers is even more alarming today than two years ago. Many teachers are not satisfied with their working situation, as shown by the international TALIS survey, which Sweden had participated in for the first time prior to the previous assessment.⁴ Far too many pupils leave compulsory school without the necessary qualifications for the upper secondary school, and in addition pupils also leave upper secondary school early. The differences between schools' results have grown over a long period. The growing school segregation, which means that pupils from different backgrounds increasingly rarely spend time together, is a serious development. Since the previous overall assessment by the agency 2013, the uncertain global situation has also led to a growing number of newly arrived pupils at Swedish schools.

1 These abbreviations stand for Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, Programme for International Student Assessment and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

2 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2015) *Att svara eller inte svara. Svenska elevers motivation att genomföra PISA-provet. (To respond or not to respond. The motivation of Swedish students in taking the PISA test.)*

3 See e.g. SOU 2014:05 Staten får inte abdikera – om kommunaliseringen av den svenska skolan (The Government cannot abdicate – on the municipalisation of Swedish schools), Appendix 2.

4 TALIS stands for The Teaching and Learning International Survey.

Strengths on which to keep building

It is possible to reverse the trend of declining educational results. One positive aspect is that there is trusting contact between pupils and teachers in Swedish schools.⁵ Teachers also believe that they can reach out to their pupils and instil a sense of enthusiasm in them to a significant extent.⁶ The fact that pupils are content at school is also important in terms of their tolerance and their views of others. There are many examples of good schools and schools where the negative trend has been reversed. The vast majority of principals have job satisfaction, and have good management training.⁷ It is pleasing to note that there has been a rise in teacher education applicants, however from a low level.

Three areas for development

Society as a whole needs to gather its forces in order to create educational development that is sustainable in the long term. All efforts made at different levels within the school system need to contribute towards improving the conditions for teachers to provide good teaching in their encounters with pupils. In order to meet the challenges faced by Swedish schools, the NAE has highlighted three areas for development in its 2015 assessment:

- Teaching that connects with every pupil in his or her knowledge development
- The right working conditions for teachers and principals
- Long-term steering and clearer responsibilities in the school system

5 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) *PISA 2012. 15-åringars kunskaper i matematik, läsförståelse och naturvetenskap. Resultaten i koncentrat. (PISA 2012. 15-year-olds' knowledge in mathematics, reading comprehension and natural sciences. Results in concentrated form.)*

6 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2014) *TALIS 2013. En studie av undervisnings- och lärmiljöer i årskurs 7–9. (TALIS 2013. A study of teaching and learning environments in the 7th to 9th grades.)*

7 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2014) *TALIS 2013. En studie av undervisnings- och lärmiljöer i årskurs 7–9. (TALIS 2013. A study of teaching and learning environments in the 7th to 9th grades.)*

Teaching that connects with every pupil in his or her knowledge development

Teaching shall promote the development and learning of every child and pupil. Through teaching, children, young people and adults shall have the opportunity to acquire and develop both knowledge and values. The Swedish Education Act and the curricula state clearly that pupils shall have influence over their education and shall be encouraged to participate actively in continuing to develop it.⁸ When pupils can have their voices heard, be respected and feel able to influence teaching, this creates the right conditions for them to acquire knowledge.⁹

THE SWEDISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION'S ASSESSMENT

- Everyone involved in education shall focus on quality teaching.
- Teaching should feature high expectations regarding all pupils.
- It is necessary for teachers to plan, carry out and follow up on their own teaching so that all pupils are given the leadership and stimulus they need.
- Education providers and principals need to ensure that teachers are given the right conditions to plan, carry out and follow up on teaching so that all pupils are given the leadership and stimulus they need.
- Principals need to take responsibility for pupils' need for support being noted early on and quickly met.
- Additional efforts are needed in order to safeguard the role of the school as a meeting place within society, and to reduce school segregation.
- Education providers need to work towards and promote an inclusive composition of pupils within schools.
- The NAE proposes that the Swedish Government initiates a coordinating function in order to quickly and effectively take advantage of new arrivals' teaching skills and other skills that can benefit schools.

8 Chapter 4, § 9 of the Swedish Education Act (2010:800).

9 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) *Forskning för klassrummet. Vetenskaplig grund och beprövad erfarenhet i praktiken.* (Research for the classroom. Scientific basis and proven experience in practice.)

Creating a desire to learn

Pupils' success is based on a combination of individual efforts and management of well trained, committed teachers who continually adapt their teaching according to where pupils currently are in their learning. It is a matter of encouraging pupils' motivation based on most pupils being of the opinion that school is valuable. Teaching must be structured so all pupils feel that their teachers believe in their ability, regardless of the composition of the group of pupils. In many cases, schools need to raise their expectations of pupils' performance and develop learning environments that motivate and connect with all pupils.

EXAMPLES OF TOOLS TO STRENGTHEN TEACHING:

- the teacher uses a broad and varied repertoire of teaching methods
- the teacher creates a working climate that encourages dialogue
- the teacher sees every pupil
- the teacher encourages pupils to share their experiences
- the teacher uses formative assessment

Source: The Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) *Forskning för klassrummet. Vetenskaplig grund och beprövad erfarenhet i praktiken. (Research for the classroom. Scientific basis and proven experience in practice.)*

Education is of great significance in terms of the opportunity to live a good life. Complete final grades from the ninth grade are a strong protective mechanism for young people.¹⁰ It is also a success factor for young people to have completed upper secondary education. Pupils' future prospects in the job market differ depending on whether or not they have attended the third year of upper secondary education.¹¹ If schools can show the connection better between what happens in the classroom and continued studies or the benefits in working life, the desire to learn can be stimulated. Knowledge of working life needs to become a natural element of regular teaching early on. Study and vocational guidance plays an important role in this context.

10 The National Board of Health and Welfare (2010) *Social rapport 2010 (Social report 2010)*.

11 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2014) *Vad ungdomar gör efter gymnasieskolan – en registerstudie (What young people do after upper secondary school – a register study)*.

Connecting with every pupil in his or her knowledge development

School has a compensatory mission, but is unable to compensate sufficiently for differences in children's and young people's circumstances. The children of more highly educated parents generally succeed better than the children of less educated parents, boys achieve poorer grades than girls, and pupils with foreign backgrounds generally achieve poorer results than pupils with Swedish backgrounds. However, there are wide variations within these groups.

Pupils should be given the opportunity to progress as far as possible in their knowledge development.¹² Supporting and encouraging every pupil is a major challenge for schools, for both high- and low-performing pupils. The teacher often adapts teaching according to the average level of the group.¹³ Those pupils who have progressed further in their knowledge development are not therefore always given the challenges they need in order to develop as far as possible. Pupils who need additional teaching adaptation or special support must therefore be able to receive this at the right time. The need for support must be noted early on and addressed quickly. If the pupil does not have the opportunity to develop the basic skills needed in order to keep up at school, there is a risk that the desire to learn will disappear and self-esteem will be eroded. Here, effective health care plays a central role in the work to capture and support pupils.

Teachers need to be able to vary their teaching based on a wide range of methods in order to be able to explain, illustrate and exemplify the content in different ways in the subject area in question. The NAE's experience – not least from the 'mathematics boost', a skills development programme for maths teachers – is that there is a demand among teachers to broaden their repertoire and improve their ability to reflect on the strengths of different methods in different teaching situations. Educational digitalisation brings new opportunities to vary teaching and thus broaden teachers' repertoires. Even though access to digital technology has increased for both teachers and pupils, it remains unevenly distributed and is used to a limited extent.¹⁴

12 Chapter 3, § 3 of Swedish Education Act (2010:800).

13 The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2014) *Från huvudmannen till klassrummet – tät styrkedja viktig för förbättrade kunskapsresultat (From the education provider to the classroom – the importance of a tight timing chain for improved knowledge results)*.

14 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) *It-användning och it-kompetens i skolan (IT use and IT expertise in schools)*.

Pupils must not be left alone while learning

Adapting teaching according to each pupil's circumstances does not mean that pupils should be left alone while learning. Structured teaching, in which an active teacher closely supports and follows pupils in their knowledge development and seeks to give feedback on how each pupil develops the best, leads to better results. In order to be able to adapt teaching, the teacher needs to know how pupils learn. A process of formative feedback is an effective way of achieving this.¹⁵ This involves the teacher explaining the goal of the teaching to pupils, and the teacher finding out where every pupil is in relation to the goal and giving feedback on how the pupil can make progress towards the goal. The formative process enables the teacher to quickly give feedback on the pupil's efforts, and the pupil's feedback enables the teacher to develop his or her teaching. By knowing where they stand and where they are heading, pupils can also take greater responsibility for their own learning.

Increased school segregation is a risky trend

Since the 1990s, schools have become increasingly segregated in relation to pupils' backgrounds.¹⁶ The increase in segregation between schools is a risky trend. In order for schools to continue to be a cohesive force within a democratic and open society, it is important that schools really are a meeting place for pupils from different backgrounds and different circumstances. UNESCO has emphasised that inclusive schooling is the most effective way to combat discriminatory attitudes, build an open society and achieve good education for everyone.¹⁷ In schools where pupils from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds come together, there is an opportunity to create common experiences and to establish networks between different social groups, which is essential for Sweden's future.

A trend whereby we are missing out on the opportunity to allow schools to be such a meeting place is unfortunate for both the school system and society as a whole. An inclusive school includes all pupils, whatever their circumstances and needs. Pupils with disabilities or pupils who need special support, for example, should in the first instance be given additional adaptations or special support within the group of pupils to which they belong, and not separately from regular teaching. One important lesson that has been learnt

15 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) *Forskning för klassrummet. Vetenskaplig grund och beprövad erfarenhet i praktiken.* (Research for the classroom. Scientific basis and proven experience in practice.)

16 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2012) *Likvärdig utbildning i svensk grundskola?* (Equal education in Swedish compulsory schools?)

17 UNESCO (2009) *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education.*

from PISA is that educational results can be improved while also improving equality.¹⁸

Additional efforts are required in order to safeguard the role of schools as a meeting place within society and to reduce school segregation. One important task of the Swedish School Commission will be to submit proposals for a long-term plan for a cohesive school system. Promoting school units' comprehensive composition of pupils through controlled choice may be one accessible option. In its report *Improving Schools in Sweden: An OECD Perspective* (2015), the OECD highlights several ways of achieving a socioeconomically balanced distribution, in combination with freedom of choice. Controlled school choice is used in several places internationally, and it may be worth studying these experiences further. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that school systems differ, and different models are therefore not always directly transferable. Central queuing systems and financial control may be ways of countering socially uneven recruitment. The goal of achieving a comprehensive composition of pupils is not new to Sweden. Before the 1990s, the compulsory school curriculum stated that the municipality should work to ensure that pupils were grouped so that as comprehensive a social composition as possible should be achieved in classes and working units.

It is important that public and independent education providers use the organisational tools at their disposal to achieve a comprehensive composition of pupils from different backgrounds within the framework of the school choice system. The number of pupils is rising in compulsory school, and when new schools are built there is an opportunity to analyse how their position could counter school segregation. Some municipalities are focusing on building large schools in town centres attended by pupils from a wider catchment area, with the stated aim of countering segregation. Moving classes from one school to another is a solution that has been used in locations such as Malmö.¹⁹ The NAE intends to monitor the effect of these measures on equality.

18 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) *PISA 2012. 15-åringars kunskaper i matematik, läsförståelse och naturvetenskap. Resultaten i koncentrat. (PISA 2012. 15-year-olds' knowledge in mathematics, reading comprehension and natural sciences. Results in concentrated form.)*

19 Wigerfeldt, B. (2010) *Kroksbäck möter Linné: en utvärdering av integration mellan två skolor i Malmö. (Kroksbäck meets Linné: an evaluation of integration between two schools in Malmö.)*

Successful teaching for new arrivals requires joint efforts

Of those pupils who have come to Sweden during the last four years and who have not previously lived in Sweden or attended a Swedish school, 27 percent achieved the necessary qualifications for upper secondary school during the 2013/14 academic year.²⁰ Around 80 percent of this group of pupils did not reach the knowledge requirements in one or more subjects.²¹

Every newly arrived pupil creates excellent opportunities for Sweden. Access to equal education is crucial in order to ensure all newly arrived pupils have the right conditions to continue studying and working. Successful teaching for new arrivals requires significant efforts from several sectors of society. Many newly arrived pupils come to the municipalities at short notice, and sometimes to municipalities with no previous experience of welcoming newly arrived pupils. There are education providers and schools who have made great progress in their work with newly arrived pupils' learning. There, teaching newly arrived pupils is seen as part of regular operations, and is included in the schools' systematic quality work. However, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate's quality review and the Swedish National Agency for Education's knowledge overview of new arrivals shows that an overall grasp on the part of education providers and a systematic operational approach for newly arrived pupils are often lacking.²²

There are a number of important success factors for positive development. An introductory mapping of pupils' knowledge needs to be carried out in order to plan the continued teaching and learning. The pupils need to encounter high expectations and should get access to all school subjects as soon as possible. In many cases, pupils need to receive study guidance in their native language so that their knowledge development continues. Schools also need to provide the right conditions for newly arrived pupils to get to know other pupils of the same age, for example through mentors.²³

20 This refers to the eligibility requirements for the vocational programmes.

21 Sweden's official statistics. Compulsory school. Grades for the 9th grade in the 2013/14 academic year. Table 2.

22 The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2014) *Utbildning för nyanlända elever (Education for newly arrived pupils)*; The Swedish National Agency for Education (2014) *Behovsinventering inför kompetensutvecklingsinsatser för kartläggning av nyanländas kunskaper (Inventorying needs ahead of quality improvement initiatives for mapping the knowledge of new arrivals)*.

23 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2012) *Greppa språket! Ämnesdidaktiska perspektiv på flerspråkighet (Grasp the language! Subject didactic perspectives of multilingualism)*; Bunar, N. (2010) *Nyanlända och lärande. En forskningsöversikt om nyanlända elever i den svenska skolan. (New arrivals and learning. A research overview of newly arrived pupils in Swedish schools.)*

The expertise of school staff is important in terms of newly arrived pupils receiving a successful welcome. All teachers need knowledge of working methods that encourage language development, and there is a particular need for teachers with expertise in second language learning. The way in which operations are organised around new arrivals is also important. The school's staff need to come together in connection with welcoming new arrivals, and for example there must be good opportunities for tutors in the native language to meet teaching staff for the purposes of planning. In the case of transfers between different teaching forms or school forms, the school needs to ensure that information is not lost and that structures are in place for communication between the affected operations.

Great efforts will be needed from education providers and schools in order to achieve results. Particularly in small locations and sparsely populated areas, it may be hard to recruit teachers and to offer native language teaching and study guidance. The NAE's assessment is that Sweden currently have significant needs for:

- More teachers with expertise in Swedish as a second language.
- More native language tutors and teachers.
- More adults in schools with native language expertise.
- Skills development for all teachers in language development in all subjects.
- Digital remote solutions to ensure access to native language study guidance and teaching throughout Sweden.

In order to meet these significant needs, cooperation is required between the Swedish Government, education providers and other actors, including civil society. The NAE wishes to draw particular attention to the importance of establish a coordinating function tasked with quickly and systematically making use of new arrivals' teaching expertise and other expertise that may be of use in schools. If Sweden can make use of the resource presented by newly arrived academics, in the form of subject teachers, tutors or native language teachers, for example, the conditions will be improved for giving newly arrived pupils good schooling.

The right conditions for teachers and principals

Connecting with every pupil in teaching at his or her level is an important but difficult task. Highly trained, committed teachers are needed in order for schools to succeed with this. If teachers have the right conditions to carry out high quality teaching, a positive spiral can be created. If more people see teaching as an interesting and creative profession, this could encourage more people with good study results to choose teacher training.

THE SWEDISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION'S ASSESSMENT

- The alarming shortage of authorised teachers must be taken extremely seriously. A national gathering of strength for the teaching profession is needed.
- The NAE proposes that the Swedish Government investigates whether it is possible to create more, faster and more flexible ways into the teaching profession without lowering the requirements placed on those who are trained as teachers being lowered.
- The 'boost for teachers' should be made permanent. The NAE should be tasked with working together with education providers and academic institutions to assess the need for further training leading to authorisation for school staff and to take action to ensure that this further training is available.
- The NAE should be given the right conditions to continuously develop skills development initiatives similar to the 'mathematics boost', the 'natural sciences and technology boost' and the 'reading boost' for more subjects and areas of knowledge.
- Education providers and principals need to work actively to strengthen professional structures in schools, for example through first teachers.
- Education providers need to provide principals with better conditions for devoting themselves to pedagogical leadership.

Alarming shortage of authorised teachers

Access to competent teachers is absolutely crucial to Swedish schools. There is already a severe shortage of authorised teachers in key areas. One in five people who work as teachers do not have a teaching degree and cannot therefore gain teacher certification. A third of teachers at compulsory and upper secondary schools do not have authorisation for the subjects they teach.

It is expected that there will be a great shortage of teachers and preschool teachers in the future. In order not to worsen the situation, society must act decisively. Large numbers of retirements are expected. The number of people accepted for teacher training courses is certainly continuing to rise, but

there is still little pressure in terms of application numbers for several of these courses. Relatively low grades are needed in order to be accepted. The shortage will become alarming if there is not a dramatic change in application patterns during the next few years.

At the end of March 2015, the NAE had reached decisions on the certification of just over 202,000 teachers and preschool teachers, but many teachers are still waiting for their certification. The NAE therefore needs to do its utmost to ensure that all teachers obtain their certification as quickly as possible. Changes are under way at the NAE to streamline the process.

The Swedish Government has previously announced that the teaching profession needs to be made more attractive through a national assembly for the profession with aims including better wages for teachers linked to their competence and career development.²⁴

It is important for the Swedish Government to persevere with its ambitions. The NAE proposes that the Swedish Government investigates whether it would be possible to create more, faster and more flexible ways into the teaching profession without the requirements placed on those who are trained as teachers being lowered. This could involve a higher rate of study or financial incentives, for example.

The ‘boost for teachers’ should be made permanent

The fact that many teachers completely or partly lack authorisation means that they cannot apply for teaching certification. The ‘boost for teachers’ is an important further education initiative for teachers who need additional qualifications in order to obtain their certification. In order for more teachers to gain authorisation, the ‘boost for teachers’ needs to be made permanent. At the same time, education providers need to create the right conditions for teachers to take part in the ‘boost for teachers’. It is worrying that the number of participants is not higher, and that education providers do not prioritise this training that leads to authorisation to a greater extent. Many education providers indicate that there is insufficient Government funding, and that this is therefore one of the reasons why more teachers do not take part. Another reason noted by the NAE is that there are education providers who believe that it is the teacher’s own responsibility to obtain the authorisation required.

24 Government Bill 2014/15:100 2015 economic spring bill.

A lasting national skills development offering

Teacher training is an important foundation in order for teachers to be able to do a good job. Working authorised teachers also need regular skills development. It is important for teachers who have not previously taught one or more subject in which they are authorised to have the opportunity to put their skills into practice.

According to the Swedish Education Act, education providers have a responsibility for school staff's skills development and therefore need to review the need for skills in both the long term and the short term. In recent years, the Swedish Government has gradually taken greater responsibility for skills development, including through the 'mathematics boost', the 'reading boost', the 'natural sciences and technology boost' and the 'principals' boost'. However, these initiatives run for a limited time. In order for education providers to be better able to take responsibility for skills development, the NAE should have a lasting assignment to provide an offering that is adapted according to needs. This should be in partnership with universities and colleges. In order to capture local needs, greater national and regional cooperation is needed.

Strategic use and further development of professional structures

Formalised professional structures for the school system that promote cooperation and collegial dialogue are important. Teachers need to work together more on the planning and implementation of teaching. In this way, capacity can be built within the teaching profession that leads to greater opportunities for teachers to take responsibility for monitoring and developing teaching. Induction programmes and mentoring are two examples of such structures. However, neither mentoring activities nor supervision have proven to be widespread at Swedish schools.²⁵

The first teacher and senior subject teacher career positions also have an important function when it comes to establishing structures in schools that promote cooperation and collegial dialogue. By the end of 2014, almost 12,000 first teacher career positions and 130 senior subject teacher positions had been established. It is important that education providers use their first teachers to develop teaching, for example by ensuring that they supervise colleagues and create pedagogical forums where there is a focus on developing teaching. These forums are important in order to capture steering signals from

25 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2014) *TALIS 2013. En studie av undervisnings- och lärmiljöer i årskurs 7–9. (TALIS 2013. A study of teaching and learning environments in the 7th to 9th grades.)*

Government authorities, and in order to develop teaching based on a scientific basis and proven experience. Education providers also need to be better at using these career positions to attract experienced and committed teachers to those schools that face the biggest challenges. The NAE's analysis shows that this has not been the case this far.²⁶

Principals need to be given time to be pedagogical leaders

Many teachers do not have the conditions they need in order to be able to carry out good quality teaching. Principals have a decisive role to play in organising school operations and creating a collegial dialogue at school that revolves around pupils' learning and the development of teaching. As pedagogical leaders, principals must have knowledge about the teaching that takes place in the classroom, and must give teachers professional feedback on their teaching. Principals are also responsible for staff receiving the skills development they need in order to be able to perform their duties in a professional manner. From an international perspective, however, it is less common for Swedish teachers to say that they receive feedback on their teaching from their principal.²⁷

This pedagogical leadership needs to occupy a greater position in principals' day-to-day work so that they genuinely have the opportunity to monitor, analyse and take action to develop teaching. Principals spend more time on administration than on their pedagogical duties. In many cases, principals' administrative burdens need to be lightened.

This requires education providers to take greater responsibility for ensuring that principals have the right conditions to do a good job. Schools' development work can only become more long term when principals can monitor, analyse and take actions that lead to teaching being developed, in other words focusing on systematic quality work.

Principals who have completed school leader training are satisfied with this training and, in international terms, Swedish teachers have strong leadership training. This is a good foundation on which to stand, and it is therefore essential that all principals complete school leader training and, if necessary, also participate in the 'principals' boost'.

26 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2015) Memo: Analysis of the first teacher register, autumn 2014.

27 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2014) *TALIS 2013. En studie av undervisnings- och lärmiljöer i årskurs 7–9. (TALIS 2013. A study of teaching and learning environments in the 7th to 9th grades.)*

Long-term steering and clearer responsibilities in the school system

The Swedish school system is complex. From Government level and outwards to each individual situation in which teaching takes place, multiple actors at different levels have a responsibility for schools. The school system is also largely characterised by being a market in which both public and independent education providers act. There are significant differences in education providers' conditions for carrying out their duties. School management needs to become clearer. The focus of this work needs to be on what benefits the quality of teaching.

THE SWEDISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION'S ASSESSMENT

- National development initiatives must be systematic and long term, and must be linked to local development work. Isolated measures should be avoided.
- Education providers should allocate resources to a greater extent in way that compensates for differences in the different conditions experienced by schools and pupils.
- The NAE proposes that the Swedish Government considers whether national development support for increased coordination and planning could be a way of strengthening regions' combined upper secondary education offering.
- The NAE should be given the right conditions to continuously and systematically review schools' steering documents.

National development initiatives need to be long term

In the NAE's experience, Government development initiatives that are ambitious and are implemented with a degree of continuity over a longer period of time are more likely to have an impact on schools' development work than isolated, incoherent measures. One challenge for national development initiatives is that the capacity to accept them varies greatly from one education provider to the next. There is great variation in schools' and education providers' conditions for linking national development initiatives to local change work and incorporating new knowledge and new ways of working into day-to-day operations. There are differences between education providers in terms of participation in national development initiatives. Large education providers participate more often than smaller providers in national development initiatives with governmental funding, and municipal providers participate more often than independent providers.

It is important that the NAE's initiatives are based on nationally identified needs. However, these initiatives also need to be adapted according to the education providers' different circumstances. It should be possible for all education providers to participate, including small and independent providers. In order to increase the opportunities for participation, initiatives can be targeted and reach out to specific education providers and schools. However, the NAE continues to see the value of initiatives in which all education providers and schools are able to participate, such as the 'mathematics boost'. There also needs to be a long-term management plan for how the results and experiences from national development initiatives are to be made available beyond the assignment period.

Education providers need to be better at allocating resources according to need

All schools must be developed into good schools. Schools should strive to compensate for differences in pupils' individual circumstances, but they do not succeed in giving pupils enough support to develop. Since the 1990s, schools have become increasingly segregated in relation to pupils' backgrounds. The differences in the results between schools have also become greater during the same period.²⁸ The greater differences in schools' results require powerful action at education provider level in order to ensure equal education. Both public and independent education providers should work more actively for strategic use of resources.

The municipalities are responsible for financing their citizens' compulsory school education, regardless of whether pupils attend a municipal school or an independent school. The NAE notes that a number of municipalities do not allocate resources in a way that meets the national requirement for resource allocation to be adapted to suit pupils' different circumstances and needs.²⁹ Since the municipalities are responsible for financing schools, it is important that they develop their resource allocation systems in a conscious manner. Many municipalities need to improve the way in which they monitor and evaluate their resource allocation systems.

Every education provider must take responsibility for the schools and pupils that need the most support are receiving it. Education providers need to moti-

28 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2012) *Likvärdig utbildning i svensk grundskola? (Equal education in Swedish compulsory schools?)*; Holmlund, H. et al. (2014) *Decentralisering, skolval och fristående skolor: resultat och likvärdighet i svensk skola (Decentralisation, school choices and independent schools: results and equality in Swedish schools)*.

29 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) *Kommunernas resursfördelning till grundskolor (The municipalities' resource allocation to compulsory schools)*.

vate experienced and committed principals and teachers to work where they are most needed. This is particularly important when many newly arrived children and pupils need to be included in the school system quickly. It is pleasing that there is now thought to be a desire among the municipalities to increase the element of compensatory resource allocation to schools.³⁰ The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions is also carrying out development work to find effective models for equal resource allocation, which is attracting great interest from the municipalities.³¹

Regional cooperation is important in order to offer a broad range of upper secondary education

There is a trend within upper secondary education whereby large education centres gain greater importance by attracting pupils from other municipalities. The range of education that pupils can choose between varies in different parts of the country. The range of upper secondary programmes and specialisations is broad in some places but more limited in others.

The responsibility for adapting upper secondary education according to both pupil demand and society's needs and for providing good quality education currently lies with education providers. Many municipalities cooperate within a region in order to offer a broader range. Despite existing cooperation at local and regional levels in connection with upper secondary school and adult education offerings, on the whole there is a clear risk of a reduced offering of various vocational training courses. Representatives from various industries have expressed their concern about this. A large number of specialisations and few pupils (due to the demographic trend) are leading to certain courses being very small and risking being discontinued. The NAE is of the opinion that increased regional cooperation is required in order to maintain a broad educational offering, and that Government initiatives are needed in order to support this collaboration.

30 The Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) *Kommunernas resursfördelning till grundskolor* (*The municipalities' resource allocation to compulsory schools*).

31 The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (2014) *Socioekonomisk resursfördelning till skolor. Så kan kommunen göra*. (*Socioeconomic resource allocation to schools. What the municipalities can do.*)

Intensified work with schools' steering documents

The responsibility for drawing up and deciding on schools' steering documents in the form of curricula, syllabi and knowledge requirements is divided between the Swedish Government and the Swedish National Agency for Education. According to its instructions, the NAE shall review syllabi, grading criteria and knowledge requirements, and shall report to the Government on issues that may arise from these.

In its cooperation with the national programme committees, the NAE already carries out an ongoing review of upper secondary level syllabi for the vocational subjects in particular. However, the NAE see the need to work more systematically with schools' steering documents. The NAE therefore intends to continuously and systematically monitor how well the syllabi and knowledge requirements work in practice, and how relevant they are in relation to external changes. If necessary, the NAE will decide, or submit proposals to the Government, on making justified changes to curricula, syllabi and knowledge requirements. However, intensified work with schools' steering documents requires the Government's control of the NAE to take place in such a way that it is possible to work in the long term on those tasks listed in the NAE's instructions.³²

A more systematic overview of the steering documents should include both ongoing minor adjustments and updates and more comprehensive revisions that are carried out at longer intervals, for example every four or six years. One central element of continuous review work is taking advantage of teachers', principals' and pupils' experiences. We should also take into account national tests, international studies, experiences from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate and quality reviews from the national programme committees. Relevant research and job market trends also need to be considered.

The strength of more continuous monitoring is that syllabi and knowledge requirements can thereby work in the best possible way as steering documents for teaching. A modern steering document system needs to be continuously developed and changed in line with global changes, such as technological advances, changes in the job market and other social changes. It must also be relevant on the basis of science and proven experience. Together, this can contribute towards higher educational results, greater equality in teaching and better control of schools.

32 Cf. the Swedish National Audit Office (2013) *Statens kunskapspridning till skolan* (*The Government's dissemination of knowledge to schools*).

The Swedish Government has commissioned the Swedish National Agency for Education to perform an overall assessment of the situation and development in preschools, schools and adult education every other year. This is an extract from the report *An Assessment of the Situation in the Swedish School System 2015* by the National Agency for Education (Skolverkets lägesbedömning 2015, report 421). The summary describes particularly urgent challenges and point out ways forward.

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