

Attitudes to school 2000

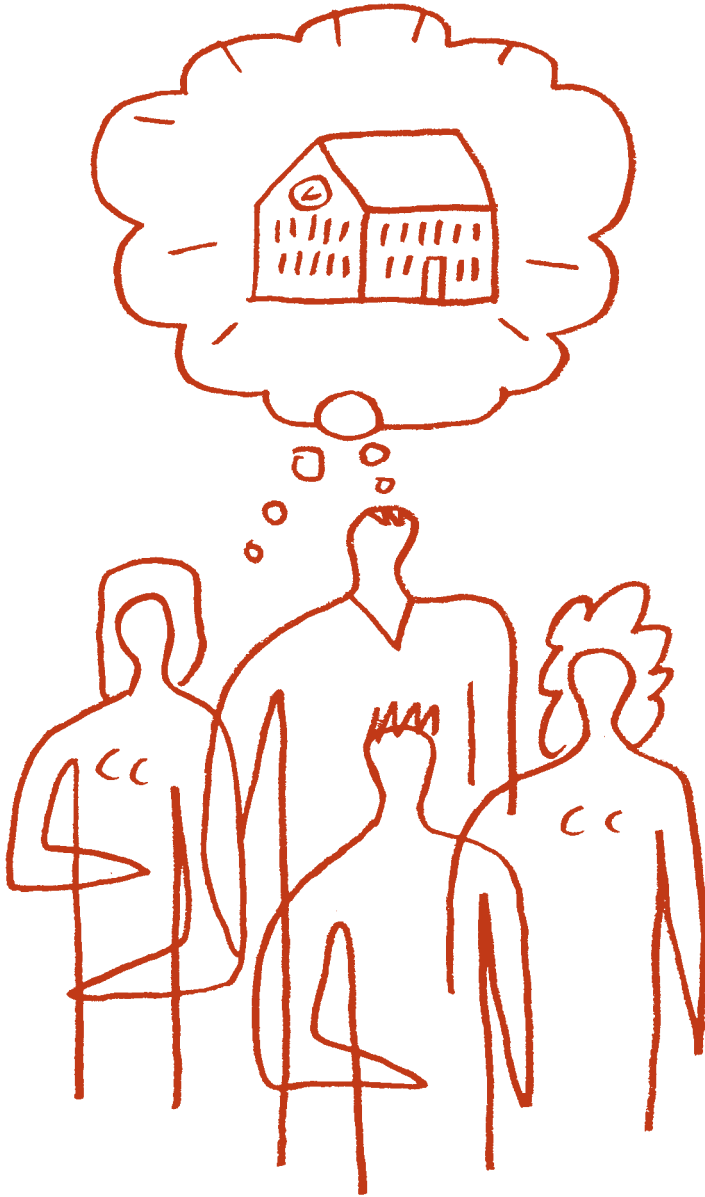
The following is a summary of the National Agency for Education's report no. 197, "Attitudes to school 2000". The report presents the results of the National Agency for Education's third survey of the attitudes of students, parents, teachers and the general public towards the Swedish compulsory school and upper secondary school. In the complete report you can find a more in-depth and comprehensive description of the views of these groups.

The report provides a picture of Swedish schools - those you attend, work in, or send your children to, and school as a social institution. The attitude survey 2000 provides insight into the ways in which the views of different groups have changed since the first survey was conducted in 1993-94, and for the first time compares these views to those of people in other Nordic countries.

The complete report can be ordered from Liber's distribution service (see under the heading "Additional information").

Offprint of report no. 197

Subject headings: Attitude survey, compulsory school,
upper secondary school



The present summary discusses attitudes to school with respect to different topics, such as democracy, school governance and success in meeting objectives, the right of children and young people to succeed at school, life-long learning, the social environment at school, and school as an integrated part of society. It is important to shed light on these topics with respect to the demands of both individuals and society at large as to how the Swedish school system should function. The results of the survey are discussed in light of Swedish national school governance statutes, school-related legislation, curricula and other regulations.

Schools and education play a part in the lives of practically all members of society, which is why knowledge regarding how schools function is important. This is so not only for those who work in a school, attend school or participate at various levels at school-related decision making, but also for many other people, such as parents and the general public.

Today, Swedish schools are governed by objectives set at different levels. Acquiring knowledge of how schools function also allows us to evaluate whether these objectives are being met. The views of those who use schools and of other people thus constitute an important contribution to such evaluative efforts. People's views cannot provide any objective picture of reality, but they are worth taking seriously. We know that people's attitudes are reflected in the positions they take and the way they behave.

Like other follow-up and evaluative information, attitude surveys must provide a basis for in-depth political debate regarding the school system and contribute to their further development, as well as indicating areas in which more in-depth analysis and special evaluation

are needed. The measurement tools and results of the survey can also serve as a basis and point of reference for studies carried out at the municipal and school levels.

Are Swedish schools democratic?

Swedish school legislation requires schools to be run in accordance with basic democratic values. The following section summarises some of the survey results that address the democracy-related aspects of Swedish schools. Specific areas covered include basic values, contact between home and school, responsibility and influence and freedom of choice.

Basic values

Swedish schools are charged with the task of instilling basic democratic values in students and furthering their learning, so as to prepare them to live and participate in society as citizens of a democracy. Approximately half of the teachers surveyed believe that they have succeeded in communicating basic democratic values and traditions, and teachers, students and parents generally feel that the schools have succeeded in developing the ability of students to work together in groups.

Moreover, schools must actively and consciously promote equal rights and opportunities for men and women, and actively work to counteract traditional gender roles. The survey indicates that a large proportion of students - eight out of ten girls and boys - feel that teachers treat girls and boys equally.

Equality is something that the general public, parents and teachers largely feel the schools have succeeded in promoting. Six out of ten teachers, four out of ten members of the general public and nearly half of parents with children in school think that schools have been very successful or quite successful in promoting

equality. However, this applies less to women than to men - especially in the case of women teachers. Compared with other Nordic countries, the general public in Sweden is the least convinced that the schools have succeeded in the area of equality.

Contact between home and school

The schools and the families of school students are jointly responsible for ensuring that going to school provides the best possible basis for a student's learning and development. In order to achieve this, however, schools must inform families about their educational goals, their expectations and the rights and obligations of students and their guardians. That individual schools clearly communicate their goals, educational content and pedagogical methods is a basic condition that must be met in order for students and parents to be able to have influence and make a difference.

The majority of parents of students in compulsory school feel that their schools provide adequate information about their children. Swedish parents are amongst the most satisfied of Nordic parents with the information provided to them regarding how their children function socially and develop their skills at school. Students are also satisfied with the information they receive regarding their performance at school.

In compulsory school, teachers are required to discuss students' progress to help further the students' academic and social development. A considerable share of both students and parents indicate that they are satisfied with the discussions in which they have participated. The positive attitude towards progress discussions is something that Swedish parents have in common with those in other Nordic countries. While parents are satisfied with the progress discussions, many of them express a wish that marks be given in earlier years. In 2000, a majority of parents indicated a desire to see marks introduced earlier at school.

Parents also express a desire to see more homework and tests at school - a view that neither teachers nor students express to an equally great extent. More than two out of ten parents deem that the amount of homework and tests ought to be increased. However, the survey does not indicate whether parents who would like to see more homework and testing also express a need for even more information about, insight into or control over their child's schooling.

Responsibility and influence

In addition to communicating knowledge regarding fundamental democratic values, teaching is also to be carried out in accordance with democratic principles and must prepare students to participate actively in society. The democratic principles of influence, responsibility and participation are to apply to all students. Schools are to provide students with the opportunity to have genuine influence regarding the content and form of their education.

By participating in planning, evaluating day-to-day instruction, and having the freedom to choose courses, subjects, themes and activities, students are able to develop their ability to exert influence and take responsibility. Students indicate that they are generally satisfied with the choices available to them in compulsory school, and with their options for choosing courses in upper secondary school.

In general, students, teachers and parents are positive regarding their mutual influence. Teachers have a positive view of the influence of both students and parents in the majority of areas. In spite of this, more than half of teachers feel that students are not prepared to bear the responsibility required to exert even greater influence - which constitutes an increase compared to 1997. This view is also common among parents. Slightly more than one third of parents do not agree that students are able to take responsibility, although there is some

uncertainty here, as a quarter of the parents responded "don't know".

It is not possible to explain the reasons for this evaluation of the students' ability to accept responsibility based on the survey. However, the results do raise questions about the demands placed on students and the framework within which they are asked to exert influence and take responsibility. Which forms of student influence work well, and which do not?

The proportion of students who feel that they have influence increased in several areas between 1993-94 and 1997. Between 1997 and 2000, however, no clear change can be seen, other than that students now feel to a greater extent that they have a say in matters relating to homework and tests. It will not be possible to determine whether we see only a temporary stagnation in this area or not, until after the next attitude survey.

The areas in which students *do* wish to have influence are primarily work methods, homework and tests, and what they are to learn within different subjects. Students also feel better *able* to decide in these matters than in others. The results also show that the desire for student influence has decreased in a number of areas since 1997. These areas include teaching-aids, norms and rules, the school environment and food. It could be interesting to look in more detail at the reasons behind the decrease in interest in exerting influence in these areas.

There are differences in the ways in which girls and boys view the influence they have at school. The proportion of girls who indicate that they *wish* to take part in decision making is larger than that of boys in nearly all areas. In some areas, girls also feel that they *can* take part in decision making to a greater extent than boys feel able to do so.

Two out of ten students experience a lack of influence, so far as they feel that only a few or no teachers care about their views or take them seriously. Fourteen per cent feel that they cannot speak out against what they think is wrong, without having to suffer for it themselves.

In terms of the teachers' views of their own influence, they continue to feel that they have considerable influence over what has traditionally been considered their domain - actual teaching. By contrast, they experience a lack of influence in matters of special support for students in need of it, class and group sizes, the school environment and the usage of school resources, i.e. important factors in their ability to teach. Teachers are less satisfied than in 1997 and 1993-94 with their say in matters pertaining to the use of school resources. In addition, one quarter of the teachers feel that they are not free to criticise conditions at their schools without having to pay a price for it.

Parents are also entitled to influence in school-related matters, with respect to both the well-being of their own children and the development of Swedish schools in general. The school curricula state that schools and the families of schoolchildren are to work together. A majority of parents are inclined to be personally involved in their children's school. The survey also shows that the desire of parents to participate in decision making in various areas has increased in most areas since 1997. The number of parents indicating a desire to participate in deciding what their children learn at school doubled in 2000 as compared to 1997. Even though the survey question was formulated differently in 1997, the results do indicate that parents are interested and wish to participate in influencing the content of their children's education.

At the same time, the survey indicates an increasing gap between what parents *wish for* and what they believe they *can* exert influence over, compared to 1997. In the long

run, problems can arise if the growing desire of parents to influence schools is not met by greater opportunities for them to take responsibility for and participate in school activities.

At present, compulsory schools are experimenting with a new way of giving parents greater formal influence through local school boards on which parents are in the majority. This initiative is discussed in the section entitled *Is school governance working, and are schools achieving their objectives?*

Freedom of choice

At the beginning of the 1990s, the "freedom of choice reform" was introduced, ensuring the right to choose schools - either a municipal school or an independent school.

As mentioned above, parents *wish* to influence the schools more than they feel they *can*. The only area in which a small positive development can be detected as compared with earlier surveys is the parents' perception of their opportunity to choose a school for their children. Could it be that parents who *wish* to influence their children's schooling but do not feel *able* to do so view the right to choose a school as the only way to exert such influence? During the past five years, the number of students attending independent schools has more than doubled.

In 2000, a larger proportion of the general public and of parents of schoolchildren voiced an opinion regarding the issue of whether it is good to have independent schools as an alternative to municipal schools. A smaller proportion of parents answered "don't know" in this survey than in 1997. The survey results reveal a tendency to view independent schools more positively than in 1997. The majority also indicate a positive opinion of the different varieties of independent schools, with the schools with a religious profile viewed less favourably than the other types.



Half of the teachers and six out of ten parents believe that freedom of choice in the form of the right to choose schools results in competition that promotes school quality. At the same time, six out of ten teachers and half of the parents believe that the right to choose schools leads to increased segregation.

By way of conclusion, the survey results do not provide an unambiguous picture of how the schools are functioning in terms of democratic principles. Some of the results suggest that Swedish schools are democratic and that, over time, they are developing in a positive direction. Other results point to a lack of democracy and negative developments. Democracy is a process that must be pursued constantly, and that cannot be simply taken for granted.

One area that deserves special attention is the development of student influence, which is considered to have stagnated within certain areas since 1997. At the same time, there is an increase in the share of teachers who feel that students are not prepared to bear the responsibility required to exert greater influence. Another noteworthy area is that of parent influence, where the growing desire for influence on the part of parents does not appear to have been answered with greater opportunities for them to take part in decision making.

The support among many parents for giving marks earlier at school is also striking. The results also show a trend involving a more positive attitude towards independent schools, and there also appears to be greater pressure from parents to be allowed to choose schools. Even though half of all teachers and more than half of all parents believe that the right to choose schools promotes quality, a group of nearly the same size feels that the right to choose schools leads to increased segregation.

Is school governance working, and are schools achieving their objectives?

Swedish schools are governed in accordance with targets and results, and responsibility is decentralised. This means that a number of different agents at different levels influence the operation of the schools. The system is based on national targets, with each agent having a clear area of responsibility, where the Swedish state has the overall responsibility for formulating the targets and following up on the results. The municipalities and the schools themselves are responsible for ensuring that the nationally set targets are met, interpreted, supported and followed up at the local level in school strategy plans, working strategy plans and quality reports.

This section presents the survey results concerning confidence in schools, local school governance, the meeting of targets and changes in the school system.

Confidence

Among people living in the Nordic countries, Swedes show the lowest level of confidence in their schools as an institution, and are in general the most critical of their schools. At the same time, Sweden and the other Nordic countries have fared well in comparison with other countries in numerous international comparative studies of academic performance. In spite of this, Swedes are more critical of their schools than are people living in neighbouring countries.

Although confidence in the schools can be described as relatively high in comparison with confidence in many other social institutions, it can hardly be considered satisfactory that a large proportion of the Swedish population and of parents do not have confidence in the school system.

The results of this survey cannot provide the basis for

an explanation of the causes of this low level of confidence - whether it be that Swedes have been raised to think more critically, that debate in the media is rather critical, that current school policies and their effects do not measure up to expectations or some other factor.

A significant finding of this survey, and one that is consistent with earlier attitude surveys, is that the more involved people are in schools, the greater their confidence in them. People with direct, personal experience with schools consistently show greater confidence in them than those who have to rely on second-hand information.

Local governance

Responsibility for schools is divided between a number of agents - centrally among the Swedish parliament, the government and the National Agency for Education, and locally among the municipalities or other responsible authorities and schools, including school leaders and professional bodies within schools.

As regards central governance, teachers express dissatisfaction with national education policy makers, and with the National Agency for Education. As regards local responsibility, the survey indicates a continuing trend involving a lack of confidence on the part of teachers in the municipal governance of schools. Already in 1997, only a small proportion of teachers - just under two out of ten - felt that it would be a good idea if more decisions relating to schools were made by local politicians. In the 2000 survey, an even smaller proportion, 14 per cent, felt that it would be a good idea if more school-related decisions were made by local politicians.

Other studies conducted by the National Agency for Education have shown that municipal responsibility for the schools is divided among different groups of responsible agents and levels of responsibility, which

has had a negative impact on the ability to achieve an overall perspective. It is possible to distinguish an educational sphere and a political sphere, each lacking knowledge regarding the other's responsibility and work. The negative trend of a lack of confidence in the municipalities having responsibility for schools indicates a need for increased communication between politicians and education professionals, in order to create a common view of the tasks of schools.

Many teachers also express scepticism with respect to the educational leadership abilities of school leaders - nearly half of the teachers are dissatisfied with this. However, the majority of teachers feel that their options for trying out new ways of working have increased, which might be the result of increased opportunities for education professionals to govern their own activities.

A greater proportion of teachers feel that national tests and marking criteria have very considerable or quite considerable significance for their work, as compared to 1997. On the contrary, a somewhat smaller proportion of teachers than 1997 indicate that the curricula are of considerable importance for their work.

Parents indicate that they have a high level of confidence in the teaching staff, less in the headmasters and even less in education policy makers at the local and national levels.

In general, parents are satisfied with the information they receive from the schools, with the exception of information pertaining to the use and distribution of resources. However, as mentioned in the discussion of parental influence under the heading *Responsibility and influence* above, the survey indicates a larger gap between the parents' desire to exert influence and their actual possibilities for doing so.

The ongoing experiments with local compulsory school boards with parents in the majority constitute one way of expanding and formalising the influence of parents. Opinions are divided in the parent group about the extent to which such parent boards should make decisions regarding issues pertaining to actual teaching - which teachers should be employed and what the students are to learn and how. On the other hand, most parents feel that this type of board ought to be able to make decisions regarding external factors such as the school environment, class size, norms and rules, for example. Headmasters are also responsible for educational activities even at schools with parent boards, but can consult with the parents.

Thus, despite their desire to participate in decision making in most areas, many parents seem hesitant to let other parents make decisions pertaining to the internal activities of the schools.

Meeting targets

The general public in Sweden is more critical than that in other Nordic countries with respect to the success of schools, in terms of both the meeting of targets in various subjects and the fulfilment of more general objectives, such as ensuring educational equality and promoting equality in general.

The general public, parents and teachers consider schools to have done better at meeting more socially oriented targets in 2000 than in 1997. The present level is about the same as when the National Agency for Education conducted its first attitude survey in 1993-94. However, the general public shows a generally low and reduced level of confidence in the ability of schools to provide adequate knowledge and skills in the majority of subjects, which is a negative development compared to 1997.

It is important to note that the subjects considered important by an increasing share of both the general

public and students, such as Swedish, were also considered important in the 1997 survey, and that the natural sciences and foreign languages, which were given relatively low ratings in 1997, are considered even less important in 2000. The subjects that have been considered most important over time are, not surprisingly, Swedish, English and maths, as these subjects are required for entrance to further studies.

The proportion of the general public which thinks that today's schools are better than the schools they went to has also decreased over time. Parents of schoolchildren who have experienced today's schools through their children are more positive. A majority of teachers and parents do *not* feel that the academic requirements at school are too low. However, many teachers feel that students are poorly grounded with respect to carrying out school work, and the proportion of teachers who are satisfied with students' previous knowledge becomes smaller the higher up in the school the students are.

Changes

School constitutes a social institution that is under constant scrutiny and discussion. During the 1990s, a number of reforms were carried out, including the decentralisation of the schools, new curricula and syllabi, new systems for giving marks and testing and the reform of the upper secondary school. Schools must develop and change on a continual basis in order to keep pace with changing social conditions. Sometimes, however, the opinion is voiced that there have been far too many changes and that they have been too radical, making it difficult for those involved in the schools to accommodate them and make the best of the intentions behind them.

However, a large share of students (seven out of ten) do not think that school is a social institution that has undergone far too many and too great changes. Parents do not feel that there have been too many

changes either. Teachers and the general public, however, are divided in their views, with approximately the same number of respondents who feel that there has been too much change as respondents who do not feel this way. Teachers and parents involved in the upper secondary school indicate to a greater extent that there have been too many changes in the schools and that they have been too radical.

The Swedish picture of divided opinion is not seen to as great an extent in the other Nordic countries, where the majority of respondents indicate that they do not feel that there have been too many and too radical changes in the schools.

By way of conclusion, the survey reveals that the general public, parents and, not least, teachers have a very low level of confidence in those responsible for running the schools. The fact that people working in the schools have such little confidence in local school policy makers at the municipal level indicates a serious crisis in confidence. The survey cannot explain the causes of this, but the results do point out the necessity of greater communication between the municipal politicians, who serve as school authorities, and education professionals working at schools.

The general public in Sweden is more critical than that in other Nordic countries with respect to the success of schools, in terms of both the more general tasks of schools and the meeting of targets in various subjects. However, Swedes do have a more positive view of the success of schools in carrying out general tasks and objectives as compared to 1997, and are now at the same level in this regard as in the survey of 1993-94.

Other international studies of academic performance have shown that Swedish schools produce good results in comparison with most other countries.

Do schools provide all children and young people with a basis for success?

The schools are charged with the task of providing equivalent education to children and young people, irrespective of gender, place of residence and social and economic status. This education is to provide students with knowledge and skills, and consideration is to be taken of students needing extra support.

Teachers' skills and access to teachers are important factors in the ability of schools to provide equivalent education and to recognise the need for and provide extra support for students having difficulty in carrying out school work. This section deals with the questions of equivalence and the students' right to support, teachers' skills and basic school conditions.

Equivalence and the students' right to support

A considerable number of teachers and the general public do not feel that the schools have succeeded in providing equivalent education and extra support for children and young people having difficulty in carrying out school work. The most significant negative changes in the views of teachers, observed in all three surveys, involve the areas of equivalence and extra support.

Opinions are divided as regards equivalence - four out of ten teachers in 2000 feel that schools have succeeded to a great extent in this area, while four out of ten feel that schools have succeeded to only a small extent. The number of critical teachers has been on the rise in each consecutive survey since 1993-94.

Schools are obliged to help students needing extra support and to base their efforts on the needs, basic circumstances, experience and thinking of individual students. The compulsory school curricula state that "at school, each student has the right to develop, feel the joys of personal growth and experience the satisfaction derived from making progress and overcoming difficulties."

Various types of basic conditions are required in order for schools to succeed in this - including financial and human resources, adequate knowledge and skills among teachers, access to suitable teaching aids and suitable premises. The amount of available resources is important, but so is the way in which resources are utilised.

The survey clearly indicates serious doubts among teachers, parents and the general public regarding the ability of schools in general to provide extra support for those students who need it. To a certain extent, this can be interpreted as a question of resources. Teachers as mentioned before also desire greater participation in decision making regarding extra support and the usage of resources in schools.

Another important gauge of the ability of schools to provide extra support is the students' own views regarding the matter. The number of students who feel that the possibilities for receiving extra support are quite good or very good has increased compared with earlier surveys, although there continues to be a large proportion - more than one out of eight - that answers "don't know". The likely reason for this is that these students have not required extra support themselves.

There are considerable differences in opinion regarding extra support between students attending compulsory schools and those in the upper secondary school, as well as between students in different upper secondary programmes. Students in compulsory schools view the opportunities for receiving extra support more positively than do upper secondary school students. There are no noticeable changes in the views regarding this area among compulsory-school students or among upper secondary school students in natural science and social science programmes. There is a significant increase, however, in the share of upper secondary school students on vocational training programmes who feel that opportunities for extra support are good or very good.

Among teachers, the proportion of those who feel that schools are succeeding to only a small extent in providing extra support to students who need it has grown since 1993-94. In 2000, six out of ten teachers feel that schools are succeeding to only a small extent, as compared to only two out of ten who feel that schools are succeeding to a great extent. It can be concluded that this is the area in which the largest number of teachers feel that schools have shown the least success.

Teachers' skills and basic school conditions

Educational leadership and the professional skills of teachers are important requirements for the ability of schools to develop. Four out of ten teachers do not feel they have sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to work with students having different social and cultural backgrounds. Teachers of students in years seven to nine and in independent schools indicate to a greater extent than others that their knowledge is sufficient. In addition, four out of ten teachers feel that they are not sufficiently competent to recognise and help students needing extra support. Compared to the 1997 survey, there is a larger share of teachers who do not feel sufficiently competent to recognise and support these students. The 1997 survey indicated that a considerably smaller share of upper secondary school teachers felt sufficiently competent in this area than teachers in compulsory schools. This difference does not seem to be present in the 2000 survey.

The results of the National Agency for Education's supervision reports regarding the right of students to receive support indicate that there are lack of strategies for identifying students who need extra support in carrying out school work, and to bring the measures into line with the needs of the students.

Other factors which are important for ensuring an effective learning environment include student-teacher ratios and class size. A considerable difference can be

seen between the views of parents of upper secondary school students and those of compulsory-school students regarding the question of whether the present numbers of teachers are sufficient. Nearly six out of ten parents of compulsory-school students feel that the number of teachers is insufficient, as compared to four out of ten parents of upper secondary school students. More than a third of all parents and four out of ten teachers indicate that classes and tuition groups are currently too large. More than four out of ten parents of compulsory-school students feel that class and group sizes are appropriate, while just over half of all parents of upper secondary school students feel this way.

The students themselves are more satisfied - more than seven out of ten are - but the share that feels that classes and groups are too large has increased successively since 1993-94. Upper secondary school students are more satisfied than students in compulsory school.

Parents of schoolchildren in Sweden are the least satisfied with student-teacher ratios, compared with parents in other Nordic countries. Just over half of all Swedish parents feel that teacher resources are insufficient. There is a considerable difference between the views of parents of upper secondary school students and parents of compulsory-school students with respect to this issue. Four out of ten parents of upper secondary school students feel that the number of teachers is insufficient, as compared to six out of ten parents of compulsory-school students. In addition, a large proportion of parents of schoolchildren - nearly nine out of ten - feel that there should be more adults at school. Teachers are also in agreement regarding the need for more adults at school - nine out of ten indicate that there is a need for this. However, a considerably smaller proportion of students agree that there is a need for more adults at school.

With respect to the issue of access to appropriate tea-

ching aids and technical equipment, the number of compulsory-school teachers who feel that such access is quite poor or very poor is double that of upper secondary school teachers.

There is also a difference between compulsory schools and the upper secondary schools on the question of views regarding school buildings (access to classrooms, school libraries, etc.). Teachers, parents and students feel that the physical environment provided by the upper secondary schools is better than that found at compulsory schools.

By way of conclusion, the survey indicates a clear need for initiatives in the area of students requiring extra support. This includes initiatives that address both school strategies for dealing with such students and the need to develop the teachers' skills in being able to recognise students needing extra support and in adapting working methods so as to benefit these students.

A considerable share of teachers indicate that they do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to deal with students who come from different social and cultural backgrounds. There also seems to be a lack of resources in terms of the number of teachers, which can be linked to a limited ability (in terms of time and skills) to take care of students with different requirements.

The results indicate that, in several areas, the basic conditions present in compulsory schools are felt to be worse than those in upper secondary schools. This should be noted in connection with the fact that compulsory schools are also considered to have the greatest problems in terms of social environment (see the section entitled *How well does the social environment at school function?*).

Do schools promote life-long learning?

Schools are charged with the task of promoting learning, where learning is a social process between students and teachers that is of fundamental importance for the ability of individuals to make use of their knowledge and skills. Schools should provide students with a basis for life-long learning.

Knowledge acquisition is dependent upon the desire, motivation and attitudes to education of the individual. With respect to the issue of life-long learning, schools are charged with the important task of motivating students and instilling in them a desire for continued learning, both within the formal education system and in their professional and private lives.

This section deals with the quality of teaching, the ability of schools to inspire a desire to continue learning and studying, student involvement, demands placed by schools and the question of stress at school.

The quality of teaching

A look at the picture of today's school as provided by students would suggest that a considerable amount of work still needs to be done with respect to the teaching carried out at school and the interaction of teachers and students. Only half of the students surveyed feel that all or most of their teachers manage to engage them and inspire interest. There are clear differences in this area between compulsory-school students and upper secondary school students. Students attending upper secondary school are more critical of their teachers' attitudes and the quality of teaching they receive.

This may, of course, be due to a tendency for older students to take a more critical attitude towards and place greater demands on the way in which they are taught. However, it might also indicate that compulsory-school teachers are better able to live up to

the expectations of their students with respect to teaching.

Although students feel that there are problems in the way in which teaching is carried out, their views also contain positive elements. Teachers and students alike feel that their schools are successful in developing self-confidence among students. Students and teachers are also positive regarding changes in a number of areas, and they wish for increased coordination between subjects and greater opportunities for students to learn about things themselves, as well as efforts to improve the students' ability to work in groups.

In addition, six out of ten teachers feel that opportunities to try out new ways of working have increased in recent years. There seems to be a desire for this among teachers as well as more room for experimentation, which provides a good basis for further development.

The desire to continue learning and studying

Almost six out of ten students state that school is instilling in them a desire to learn more. About two out of ten - feel that their schools are not particularly successful at instilling in them a desire to learn more. There is no indication of any improvement in this area compared to previous surveys. In spite of this, a very large share of upper secondary school students, more than seven out of ten, indicate that they are likely to continue studying at a college or university. However, views regarding this issue differ considerably between different programmes at the upper secondary school. Among those who study natural science and social science programmes, nine out of ten indicate that they are likely to continue their studies at an institution of higher learning, as compared to slightly more than half of the students studying on other programmes.

However, the percentage of students who actually do continue their studies at college or university (within

three years of completing their studies at the upper secondary school) is considerably smaller - not quite four out of ten. The percentage of students completing an upper secondary school programme has decreased in recent years, which also means a decrease in the percentage of students qualified to pursue studies at an institution of higher education. However, one might also ask how the present system of admission to colleges and universities deals with those students who indicate that they are likely to continue their studies at an institution of higher education. The aim of the upper secondary school reform was to make it possible for all students to continue their studies at college or university level. Have the dimensioning and existing admissions system of Swedish universities and colleges been adapted in accordance with the aims of the upper secondary school reform and the subsequent increase in demand for higher education?

Involvement, demands and stress

The survey results indicate that students now feel to a greater extent than previously that they find school work engaging - more than seven out of ten students indicate that they care about and are very involved in their school work. However, teachers do not seem to share this view. A quarter of the teachers surveyed feel that student involvement has decreased over the past three years.

The proportion of students in both compulsory and upper secondary school that feel stressed have risen considerably since 1997. In particular, women students on the natural science and the social science programmes at the upper secondary school indicate a high level of stress. As many as two thirds of these young women report that they always or frequently feel under stress at school. Student stress appears to be related to a sense that demands are too high and that the pace of work is not suitable. A larger share of those students who frequently or always feel under stress also indicate

that demands placed by the schools are too high and that the pace of work is not suitable, as compared to students who seldom or never feel under stress.

By way of conclusion, the results indicate a need for changes to help promote a desire for life-long learning. Schools need to develop forms of teaching in which students themselves participate as meaningful agents, and school work should be planned and structured so that it is experienced as meaningful, fun and less stressful.

It is not acceptable that many students have a working environment that is most often experienced as stressful. This seems to be the case especially within natural science and social science programmes at the upper secondary school. The survey results are supported by evaluations of the upper secondary school carried out by the National Agency for Education in recent years.

How well does the social environment at school function?

Swedish school legislation and the curricula require schools to be run in accordance with basic democratic values. No-one should be subjected to bullying at school, and conscious efforts must be made to combat harassment.

Thus, Swedish schools have a clear responsibility to create a positive social climate in which relationships between students, between students and adults and between adults are distinguished by mutual respect. This section deals with the social environment at school, well-being and the way in which people are treated, abuse and efforts on the part of schools to combat it.



Well-being and trust

A growing number of students feel comfortable with their teachers and express trust in them, compared to earlier surveys. However, there is a slightly declining trend with respect to the students' overall feeling of well-being at school since the first survey was conducted in 1993-94. By contrast, teacher well-being has increased since 1997.

When the quality of relationships is not good, it has a negative impact on the ability of students and adults to carry out their work at school. It can be concluded that students who are not happy at school are more critical towards their teachers' attitudes and teaching methods. Such students also indicate to a lesser extent than others that they care about their school work and find it engaging.

Treatment and relationships

It is important to view many of the questions raised in connection with schools from an ethical perspective. A positive development is that a greater share of both teachers and students feel that their schools have succeeded in improving the ability of students to take a stance on ethical and moral issues, compared to earlier surveys.

Relationships at school must be built on mutual respect and mutual trust. Teachers feel that they are often treated with respect by students - over nine out of ten agree with this. The students' views regarding the way in which they are treated is less positive, with seven out of ten students indicating that students and teachers treat each other with respect in their school.

However, a large number of teachers feel that the way in which students treat each other has worsened. This is especially true of compulsory-school teachers of year seven-nine students. Four out of ten of these teachers feel that their students do not treat each other respectfully.

Students are less inclined than teachers to feel that there is peace and quiet in the classroom. A larger share of students than of teachers notice a use of foul language. Also in this respect, the social climate among year seven-nine students is viewed as worse than that in the upper secondary school.

Abuse and efforts on the part of schools to combat it

The most serious form of poor relationships is when people feel bullied and harassed by others. It is even worse when the bullying is carried out by adults on whom children and young people must depend. A teacher's use of his or her power such that students experience it as bullying must be considered highly alarming.

As in the 1997 survey, the present survey indicates that the share of students who indicate that they feel bullied by their teachers is larger than the share of those who feel bullied by fellow students. Since 1997, there has been an increase in the share of students who feel bullied by their teachers and in the share of students who feel bullied by other students. In both cases, the share has increased by two percentage points, as compared to 1997. In the 2000 survey, six per cent of the students indicate that they feel bullied by teachers, and four per cent indicate that they feel bullied by other students.

As regards bullying among students, a larger share of students in years seven to nine than in the upper secondary school report that they have been bullied by other students. As regards students who report that they have been bullied by teachers, there is no difference between compulsory-school students and upper secondary school students.

The share of students who indicate that they either feel bullied by other students or by teachers amounts to eight per cent. Among these, there are students who

indicate that they feel bullied both by other students and by their teachers. All in all, this amounts to some 50,000 students in years seven to nine and in upper secondary school who feel bullied, according to the present survey.

It seems to be the case that the problem of bullying is now more visible than previously. At the same time that a greater share of students feel that bullying is a serious problem at school, a larger share of students also think that the schools do a lot to combat bullying. Fourteen per cent of the students feel that bullying is a serious problem at school in 2000, which is an increase compared to 1993-94, and six out of ten feel that the schools do a lot to combat bullying and other abusive treatment, which is also an increase compared to 1993-94.

As regards teachers and parents of schoolchildren, thirteen per cent of the parents surveyed and nearly seven per cent of the teachers feel that bullying is a serious problem at school. There is no change in these figures compared to earlier surveys. However, a greater share of teachers now agree with the statement that the schools do a lot to combat bullying, as compared to previous years. It is also striking that a considerable share of parents respond "don't know" to the question regarding the schools' efforts to combat bullying.

At two out of ten, the percentage of compulsory-school students who feel that bullying is a serious problem is more than double that of upper secondary school students. There are also differences between the views of compulsory-school students and upper secondary school students regarding efforts to combat the problem. Seven out of ten compulsory-school students, compared to almost half of the upper secondary school students, feel that the schools do a lot to combat bullying and other abuse. At the same time, it is worth noting that a large share of students, teachers and parents of students in the upper secondary school

respond that they do not know whether the schools are doing much to combat bullying - between twenty and thirty per cent of the respondents in these groups.

Among students and teachers, approximately two out of ten agree with the statement that violence and racism occur at school. A higher percentage of parents of schoolchildren in years seven to nine agree with this statement than do other parents. Among parents, nearly three out of ten indicate that they do not know whether violence and racism occur at school. The share of those who do not know increases with the age of the child.

Many teachers also indicate that they feel poorly treated, subjected to threats or harassment by both students and their colleagues. Nearly two out of ten indicate that they have been subjected to threats or harassment during the past year. This finding is in agreement with those of other studies of the working environment of teachers.

By way of conclusion, the survey indicates that there are differences between the views of students and teachers regarding social conditions at school, with students most often having a more negative view of relationships and treatment than the teachers have. Most groups feel that the social environment provided by the upper secondary school is better than that found in compulsory schools. Like early attitude surveys conducted by the National Agency for Education, the results of this survey indicate that the social climate is most problematic in years seven to nine at the compulsory schools. Attention should be drawn to improper treatment such as the use of foul language, violence and racism and bullying.

There seems to be a greater awareness of the issue of abusive treatment and bullying, and there appears to be less tolerance of bullying. However, the results

do indicate a need for improvements in the social environment at school, the way in which students treat each other and the way in which teachers and students treat each other.

Are Swedish schools an integrated part of society?

Students should receive a quality education, and in order to achieve this schools must continuously develop, in order to meet new targets and demands from society. This developmental work requires cooperation with students' future employers and with the rest of society. This section deals with the place of schools in Swedish society as viewed from four perspectives: schools and the surrounding world, schools and the job market, the information society and internationalisation.

Schools and the surrounding world

The survey results indicate that Swedish schools are *not* viewed as a closed world free of influence from their surroundings - which was already noted in the attitude survey of 1997. Anyway teachers, students and parents all feel that greater contact with organisations outside school is needed. Similar views also prevail in other Nordic countries, in terms of both the relationship with the world outside schools and the desire for greater contact with other organisations.

Schools and the job market

The number of teachers who feel that schools are succeeding in providing skills relating to the job market has increased, compared to the 1997 survey. Yet it appears as though schools are viewed as not particularly good at providing skills needed on the job market. Both teachers and the general public are critical of the ability of schools to succeed in this respect. However,

these groups do feel that the schools are better at providing skills needed for continuing education.

Among students and the general public, languages (except for Swedish and English) and the natural sciences are rated lower than in previous attitude surveys. Smaller percentages of both groups feel that these subjects are important, as compared to previous surveys. The same pattern can be seen in the views that parents of schoolchildren have regarding language study, although not in their views regarding the natural sciences.

In view of the current state of the job market - with its high demand for natural scientists and technicians, membership in the European Union and an open European job market - these results are unexpected and deserving of attention.

The information society

New forms of information technology (IT) are becoming increasingly important, involving new ways of working at school that will place greater responsibility for acquiring knowledge on the students themselves, more individualised teaching, more teacher guidance, and so on. An important task of schools is to compensate for differences in the backgrounds of individual students, not least in the area of information technology. Adequate IT skills are now an essential part of a student's preparation for entering the job market, and they allow for a generally stronger position in society.

A considerable number of teachers, students and parents would like to see greater use of computers in teaching, a view shared by parents in other Nordic countries. Even though the percentage of teachers who feel they have sufficient knowledge and skill in the use of computers has risen since 1997, approximately half of them in 2000 still feel they lack skills.

Internationalisation

Today, it is more important than ever that schooling be viewed from an international perspective, as this promotes a global mindset and prepares students for a society distinguished by close contacts across cultural and national boundaries. A majority of the general public, teachers and students are interested in seeing an increase in the international dimension of schooling, through initiatives such as contacts with schools in other countries.

This perspective also involves efforts to improve the students' understanding of cultural diversity in their own country. The internationalisation of Swedish society and growing mobility across national borders places high demands of our ability to live with and understand the values that are implicit in cultural diversity.

Many students feel that their schools have not managed to teach them how people with different backgrounds and views can live together - two out of ten students feel that their schools have not done well in this area. Many teachers - four out of ten - do not feel they have sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to work with students who have different social and cultural backgrounds.

By way of conclusion, the survey results indicate that schools are not viewed as a closed world, but that more could be asked for in terms of the relationship between schools and their surroundings. Parents, teachers and students would like greater contact with organisations outside the schools. Teachers and students are also positive regarding changes at school, such as an increase in the use of computers and a greater emphasis on international themes in teaching. However, students do not feel that their schools have managed to teach them how people with different backgrounds and views can live together. A considerable proportion of teachers indicate that they themselves do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to work with students who have different social and cultural backgrounds.

There appears to be a desire for increased contact with society outside schools, an increase in the use of IT and for schools to address the values implicit in cultural diversity. However, teachers are found to be lacking in certain skills, and resources are felt to be lacking as well.

Important observations and areas in which change is needed

Let us discern some of the important general results of the National Agency for Education's attitude survey for 2000.

- People with direct personal experience of schools also have a more positive view of the performance of schools.
- The importance of surveying the views of students is clear, as the views of students are in many cases different from those of other groups. As regards actual teaching, it appears as though teachers have a more positive view of their way of teaching than students have. As regards the success of schools within different subjects, however, students have a more positive view than do the general public and parents of schoolchildren. In terms of the social environment at school, students have a more negative view than their teachers.
- Both the physical and social environments at compulsory schools appear to be worse than those found at the upper secondary school.
- Looking back over time, the attitude survey of 1997 appears in many respects to constitute a "low point" compared to the surveys of 1993-94 and 2000.
- In comparisons with other Nordic countries, the Swedes appear to be the most critical of their schools.

The results of the National Agency for Education's third attitude survey and other observations made by the Agency within the context of national follow-up studies, evaluations, development efforts and assessments and quality-control work indicate a number of areas to which attention should be drawn.

BUILD CONFIDENCE IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AMONG THE SWEDISH PEOPLE!

There is a lack of confidence in the school system among the general public. In the long term, this could become a serious problem. It is important to promote awareness of the school's particular tasks and objectives. Ultimately, of course, if the level of confidence is to increase, an improvement in the quality of schools and their ability to meet objectives is necessary.

IMPROVE THE ACCEPTANCE AND LEGITIMACY OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE!

The survey results indicate a serious legitimacy crisis as far as attitudes expressed by education professionals at schools towards the school leadership and local politicians are concerned. Local responsibility must be shouldered in a better way, and greater communication between those who govern schools and education professionals seems to be necessary if local governance is to work.

IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR PROVIDING EXTRA SUPPORT TO STUDENTS WHO NEED IT!

There is a need for authorities and schools to implement carefully developed strategies to provide children and young people with support in the best manner possible. It is very important that municipalities and schools have carefully thought-out systems for distributing resources. There is also a need for training among teachers and other school personnel in how to accom-

moderate students with different needs and backgrounds.

IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR STUDENT AND PARENT INFLUENCE!

New ways of working are needed to ensure that the views and experience of students are taken seriously, and to provide more room for participation and influence. Various forums need to be developed to enable parents to participate in and share responsibility for the development of schools.

PROMOTE MEANINGFULNESS AND DESIRE TO LEARN!

There is a clear need to develop forms of working and teaching which involve and respect the students' own experiences. In particular, the critical views of students on natural science and social science programmes should be noted.

COMBAT STRESS!

An important task at all levels, both national and in schools, is to identify factors that create stress, and measures that should be taken to create the best possible conditions for learning. The way in which schools organise teaching is also an important factor in the students' ability to manage their own workloads.

PROMOTE GOOD SOCIAL RELATIONS!

Initiatives are needed to improve the social environment at school, especially in years seven to nine at compulsory schools. There is a need for initiatives to improve the skills of school personnel with respect to working with questions relating to values, and to create room for meetings and dialogue at school. Schools must develop democratic skills among children and young people, and their attitudes towards and efforts

to combat abusive treatment need to be consistent, clear and visible.

CREATE CONDITIONS FOR INCREASED INTEGRATION OF SCHOOLS IN SOCIETY!

There is need for increased use of Information Technology and increased competence of the teachers to utilize Information Technology in teaching. Initiatives are needed to generate interest among young people in foreign languages and the natural sciences. Greater skills and forms of integrating and dealing with cultural diversity within schools and in society at large are needed.



How the survey was conducted

The survey was designed to address four different groups: the general public, parents of schoolchildren, students and teachers. Data was collected between February and May 2000. A random sample of people belonging to the four groups were asked to answer questions concerning school, either by means of a written questionnaire or in a telephone interview.

Group	Number of people selected	Number of those who responded	Response rate	Survey period
General public	2,704	1,884	70 per cent	February-April 2000
Parents of school-children	2,029	1,480	73 per cent	February-April 2000
Students	1,985	1,465	74 per cent	March-May 2000
Teachers	1,975	1,581	80 per cent	March-April 2000

The general public and parents of schoolchildren survey

The survey addressed the general public, defined as people between the ages of 18 and 74, and parents of schoolchildren, defined as people with children attending compulsory schools or the upper secondary school. Members of the general public and parents of schoolchildren responded to questionnaires sent by post, and two written reminders with enclosed questionnaires. Those who had not responded were then contacted by telephone, so that a telephone interview could be conducted. In the case of the general public and parents of schoolchildren, a sample was taken from the population records consisting of four strata: 675 people between the ages of 18 and 74 who did not have children in school (not parents of schoolchildren), 835 parents of children attending compulsory school, 860 parents of children attending the upper

secondary school and 335 people who were parents of both students attending compulsory schools and upper secondary schools.

The student survey

The survey addressed students in years seven to nine in compulsory school and upper secondary school students. Students were interviewed by telephone, and those who could not be reached by telephone were sent questionnaires in the post. For compulsory-school students, a random selection of 717 people was made among students born between 1984 and 1986. In the case of upper secondary school students, a random selection was made of 649 students following natural science and social science programmes, and 648 following other programmes.

The teacher survey

The survey addressed teachers of students in years one to nine in compulsory schools and upper secondary school teachers. The teachers responded to a questionnaire sent by post and two reminders with the questionnaire enclosed in second of these. In cases where no response was received, the teachers were called and asked to participate in a telephone interview. The sample of 2,000 teachers was selected randomly from Statistics Sweden's register of teachers. In the case of compulsory-school teachers, eight strata were used in order to achieve a good balance between teachers of different age groups. A total of 1,000 compulsory-school teachers and 1,000 upper secondary school teachers were included in the sample.

Additional information

The report "Attitudes to school 2000", report no. 197, can be downloaded from the Web site of the National Agency for Education (www.skolverket.se) under the heading "Publications". It can also be ordered from Liber Distribution, Publikationstjänst 162 89 Stockholm, Sweden, tel: +46 8 690 95 76, fax: +46 8 690 95 50, or by e-mail: skolverket.lds@liber.se. The Nordic report "Nordisk skolbarometer. Attityder till skolan år 2000" can be ordered from C E Fritzes AB, Kundtjänst, 106 47 Stockholm, Sweden, tel: +46 8 690 9190, fax: +46 8 690 9191 or by e-mail: fritzes.order@liber.se.

