Skolverket



education for all

the swedish education system

the fundamental values on which Swedish society is built:
the sanctity of human life, the freedom and integrity of the
individual, the equal value of all – irrespective of gender,
race, religion or social background – equality between
women and men and solidarity with the weak and
vulnerable.

the swedish education system



In Sweden the state governs education through a series of statutes, government orders, curricula and syllabuses. These contain aims and guidelines for all aspects of education.

The municipalities are responsible for compulsory basic school, upper secondary school and municipal adult education.



The National Agency for Education is the national body responsible for follow-up activity, evaluation, development and supervision of the school system.

Everyone working in the school system is obliged to work towards common goals and objectives, thereby guaranteeing education of uniform value.



Education in Sweden is generally publicly financed and exempt from fees. 3.5 per cent of pupils attend independent schools which are also financed from public funds.

Everyone in Sweden is obliged to attend basic school for nine years.



All children and young people aged between seven and sixteen are obliged to attend school,

Six-year olds are entitled to start in the first class of compulsory basic school, but few of them actually do so – most of them attend the voluntary pre-school class instead.



Pupils in Sweden are awarded grades in school from year eight onwards. Grades are awarded in accordance with an achievement-related model.

After compulsory basic school virtually all pupils go on to study at upper secondary school. Attendance is for three years and is voluntary.



Upper secondary school provides educational programmes which prepare students for working life and others which prepare them for further studies. All programmes offer students the necessary qualifications to study further at higher education establishments.



Sweden has a strong tradition of adult education provision. Each municipality provides compulsory basic school and upper secondary school education for adults.

There are 31 Swedish schools overseas, 16 of which are in Europe. Education is provided in accordance with the Swedish curriculum for Swedish pupils whose parents work overseas.



Education in Sweden is of a high international standard. Pupil literacy levels are among the highest in the world. Attainments in mathematics and natural science are at an average international level.

types of schools



THE SWEDISH SCHOOL SYSTEM comprises organised activities for children from the age of one onwards. Before starting school, children have the opportunity to attend pre-school, which has its own independent curriculum. Virtually all children start their first year of compulsory basic school during the year in which they reach their seventh birthday. It is possible to start at the age of six, yet most parents opt to send their children to the voluntary preschool class instead.

Teaching in the pre-school class is governed by the same curriculum as the compulsory basic school. Teaching methods used in pre-school, after-school centres and compulsory basic school are designed to stimulate children's development and their desire to learn. The pre-school class may be regarded as a preparatory year for children before they begin their first year of compulsory basic school.

All children and young people in Sweden are obliged to attend school between the ages of seven and sixteen. Irrespective of the level at which a pupil is studying – compulsory basic school, upper secondary school or municipal adult education – the academic year is divided into one autumn and one spring term. The summer vacation starts in the beginning of June and extends to the middle of August. In addition to the summer vacation, pupils



are free for one week during autumn, for around two weeks over Christmas and New Year, one week in February or March and around one week over Easter.

In the nine years of compulsory basic school all pupils are guaranteed a certain number of teaching hours in each subject. All pupils study Swedish, English, mathematics, geography, history, religious knowledge, civics, biology, physics, chemistry, technology, art, home economics, sport and health, music, textiles, wood and metalwork, and one other foreign language. A special

All children and young people in

Sweden have to attend compulsory

basic school for nine years. Most

of them start in the first class at

the age of seven.

The national programmes at upper secondary school offer students the necessary qualifications for higher education studies.



"pupil option" also allows them to choose which subject/s they wish to specialise in. The "pupil option" hours are accorded a amount of time in the syllabus roughly equal English or sport and health.

After compulsory basic school the majority of pupils continue on to the voluntary three-year upper secondary school where they can choose between seventeen national programmes. In order to start on one of the programmes pupils need to have attained pass grades in Swedish, English and mathematics. All national programmes offer students the necessary qualifications for further study at higher education establishments. There are also individual and specially designed programmes, and, in some municipalities, local variations linked to the national programmes.

Fifteen of the seventeen national programmes are primarily intended to prepare students for working life, including the Industrial, the Arts, and the Health Care programmes, whereas the Social Science and Natural Science programmes prepare students for further studies.

The school subjects at upper secondary school are divided into courses which provide a certain number of points. Grades are set at the end of each course and all courses have a syllabus. If students so wish, they can study courses which are outside the programme they have chosen.

All students, irrespective of the programme they have selected, study the "A" course in eight core subjects (Swedish, English, mathematics, natural science, civics, the arts, sport and health and religious knowledge). In turn, the different programmes offer more in-depth studies in various subjects. As part of the Natural Science programme, for example, students study mathematics up to the "E" course level.



The programme-specific subjects define the nature of each programme. A programme-specific subject, for example, might be vehicle technology as part of the Vehicle Engineering programme, or chemistry and biology on the Natural Science programme.

During the second year most of the programmes divide into various specialisations. On the Food programme, for example,

Those studying on the Handicraft programme can opt to train as hairdressers.



Many upper secondary schools have local specialisations.

students can choose between bakery and patisserie or meat and delicatessen. There may also be local specialisations at individual schools. These may be the result of local or regional needs, or a request on the part of the students for a certain type of course.

Despite the wide variety of upper secondary school programmes and specialisations on offer, there are certain students who are unable to find a course of study which suits them. In these cases it is possible for the municipality and school to customise a programme specially for them. All the core subjects must be included, yet courses from all the different national programmes may otherwise be incorporated.

Those students who do not qualify to take part in a national programme or those unable to select a programme are offered the chance to pursue an individual programme. Individual programmes are based on the needs of the individuals in question and may therefore be vastly different in format. The long-term aim is that the student in question should be able to transfer to a national programme.

For children with learning disabilities there is a special school (Sw. särskolan) which is compulsory for those aged between seven and sixteen. Upper secondary school for those with learning disabilities, which is voluntary, provides four-year national, special format, or individual programmes.

The ethnic Saami peoples can opt to send their children to specialist Saami schools for the first six

years, after which they can continue their school career at the ordinary compulsory basic school.

Sweden has a long and strong tradition in the provision of adult education. Each municipality provides municipal adult education, known in Swedish as Komvux, at compulsory basic and upper secondary school level.

Adult students study the same subjects and courses as pupils and students at compulsory basic school and upper secondary school, yet the rate at which they study is higher. Special municipal adult education is available for those with learning disabilities.

All newly-arrived immigrants aged sixteen and above have the right to receive Swedish language tuition. This type of education is known as Swedish for Immigrants (sfi). The aim is to provide immigrants with basic skills in Swedish. All pupils with overseas backgrounds also have a right to tuition in their native language as a school subject. Pupils also have the opportunity to work from study materials written in their first language.









legislation, etc

THE STATE GOVERNS THE SCHOOL system via aims and guidelines. The Education Act, introduced by the Swedish parliament, provides frameworks for all kinds of educational activity. The government decides on curricula which, together with the Education Act, govern the school system. Everyone working within the system is obliged to comply with the curricula. The government also issues special regulations, such as those for the various types of schools.

The Education Act contains the principle aims and guidelines which govern educational establishments. The Act stipulates that education must be of equal value throughout the country. All pupils have the right to an education of the same standard, irrespective of where they happen to live.

The government has established three curricula. The pre-school has its own curriculum. There is also one curriculum which governs compulsory basic school, the pre-school class and after-school centres. Institutions at which attendance is voluntary — the upper secondary school, adult education and special upper secondary school for those with learning disabilities, also have their own curriculum.

Among the major issues covered in the curricula are norms and values, levels of attainment, pupil influence and responsibilities, assessment and grades plus the responsibilities of head teachers. For each of these major issues there are objectives and guidelines.

Syllabuses stipulate the purpose and objectives for teaching in each subject. There are two types of objectives: aspiration objectives and objectives which must be achieved. Objectives which must be achieved are those objectives which all pupils must be provided with the opportunity to attain. Yet the aspiration objectives are the ones which should govern the directions which teaching takes: they describe the qualities of pupil attainment which the schools must seek to develop. The aspiration objectives are extensive, since schools should not set limits for pupil attainment. Certain objectives can be achieved whilst this wider aim remains in focus. The syllabuses do not prescribe how teaching should be organised or the working methods which should be used. Yet they do touch upon the qualities of learning and attainment which should be developed in the pupils. This provides a framework for teaching and its content. In the upper secondary school, in addition to syllabuses, there are also programme objectives for each of the national programmes.

Time schedules regulate the amount of teachersupervised instruction to which pupils are entitled in each subject. It is the total amount of time in each subject which is regulated, not the number of hours a pupil must have in each subject in a given year. It is up to the municipalities and schools themselves to decide, for example, which year English should be introduced as a subject in compulsory basic school and the number of lessons needed in any academic year.

"all children and young people shall, irrespective of gender, place of residence or

their social or financial conditions, have equal access to education in the state school system for children and young people. Education in all types of schools shall be of equal value, irrespective of where in Sweden it is provided.

Education should provide pupils with knowledge and skills, and, in partnership with their homes, promote their harmonious development towards becoming responsible human beings and members of society. Consideration should also be afforded to pupils with special needs.

Educational activity should be devised in accordance with fundamental democratic values.

Everyone working in schools should promote consideration for the intrinsic value of each human being and respect for our shared environment. Those working in schools must pay special attention towards promoting equality between the sexes and actively opposing all forms of abusive behaviour, such as bullying and racism."

The Swedish Education Act, chapter 1, section 2

a mirror of society



THE CHANGES TAKING PLACE in society affect the way in which the school system is organised, the teaching content and the format of education itself.

We live in a rapidly changing world in which schools no longer have a monopoly over learning. Sweden has one of the highest levels of Internet use in the world: children and young people are used to surfing the Net and searching for information. There is a vast array easily-accessible information from a full range of media.

Sweden has moved closer to the rest of the world. Swedes are travelling more and more and an increasing number of young people are opting to work or study overseas. At the same time, the rest of the world has moved closer to Sweden – currently one pupil in every six has an overseas background. Internationalisation is making new demands on the school system.

Working life has undergone, and is currently undergoing, major changes. Old hierarchies are crumbling and new demands are being made of the workforce. It is important to have a sound learning base since most jobs today require further education in various forms. Yet social skills are also becoming increasingly im-



Schools must make pupils aware of the fundamental values on which Swedish society is built.

portant in the labour market, irrespective of the type of work people carry out.

The Swedish school system should provide pupils with a sound basis on which to stand, both socially and in terms of learning. Pupils must learn to work together with respect for other people.

The period of people's lives they spend at school should not be limited to a time in which they learn a limited number of facts to reproduce for assessment. Schools need to provide far more knowledge and wisdom than that. They should prepare pupils for the complex world which awaits them outside the classroom.

Schools should work together with parents to ensure that pupils become responsible human beings and members of society. Parents have the main burden of responsibility for their children's upbringing and development, yet the schools also have a responsibility and should provide support for the parents.

Teachers in schools should encourage pupils to seek for knowledge, not simply to receive information in a passive and uncritical way. Teachers should provide their pupils with guidance. Only when information is processed does it become knowledge. Children and young people should be encouraged to sift through information, to interpret it, draw conclusions and subsequently be able to explain and provide arguments for their findings. Knowledge is not a clear-cut term, since it exists in many forms: facts, understanding, competence and familiarity, none of which is more important than the other. Schools should provide pupils with the opportunity to learn things in which there is an interplay of different types of knowledge.

One important duty of the schools is to make pupils aware of the fundamental values on which Swedish society is built: the sanctity of human life, the freedom and integrity of the individual, the equal value of all, irrespective of gender, race, religion or social background, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable. It is not sufficient for teachers to teach about democracy, since it is through practical application that pupils learn what it actually involves. Pupils should be encouraged to form opinions and to argue their case, whilst at the same time showing tolerance and respect for the opinions of others.

All work in schools should be based on our Christian tradition and western humanism, but teaching must be non-denominational, objective and balanced.



It is important for pupils to understand their cultural heritage. This provides them with an identity which in turn makes it easier to understand and to empathise with other people's circumstances and values. Schools should actively oppose harassment such as bullying and xenophobia. Intolerance should be countered with knowledge, open discussion and active measures of various kinds on the part of the school.

Women and men have the same rights and obligations in society: sex discrimination is forbidden by law in Sweden. As part of that society, the same laws and rules apply to schools. There is a heavy burden of responsibility on schools to work actively in order to promote equal rights and opportunities for women and men. Schools should oppose traditional and restricting gender stereotypes. Boys and girls should be treated in such a way that these stereotypes are not reinforced. Pupils should be given the opportunity to develop their own talents and interests without their gender having any bearing on their capacity to do so.

Just as pupils should learn to show respect for other people, they should also find out about and learn to respect our shared environment.

local responsibility



ALL SCHOOLS ARE DIFFERENT: their circumstances vary depending on the nature of the pupils and teachers and their geographical location in the country. Schools in Sweden are the responsibility of the municipalities. Municipal politicians must plan how schools should be organised and carry out follow-ups and evaluations of their work. Each school in turn is free to organise practical school issues as it sees fit. Schools also have the opportunity to choose their own special profiles. The time schedules set aside a certain number of hours for this purpose.

There is a wide variety of profiles among the

compulsory basic schools and upper secondary schools around the country. A profile may be based on the tradition of an individual school, on where the school is located in the country or on the special interests of the teachers and pupils. One school may opt, say, to build its profile around the environment, another may choose the arts and music, whilst a third might decide on an international theme.

Each municipality has the right to decide on the forms of upper secondary school education which should be provided. The municipality can start up



School lunches are free for all pupils in compulsory basic school.

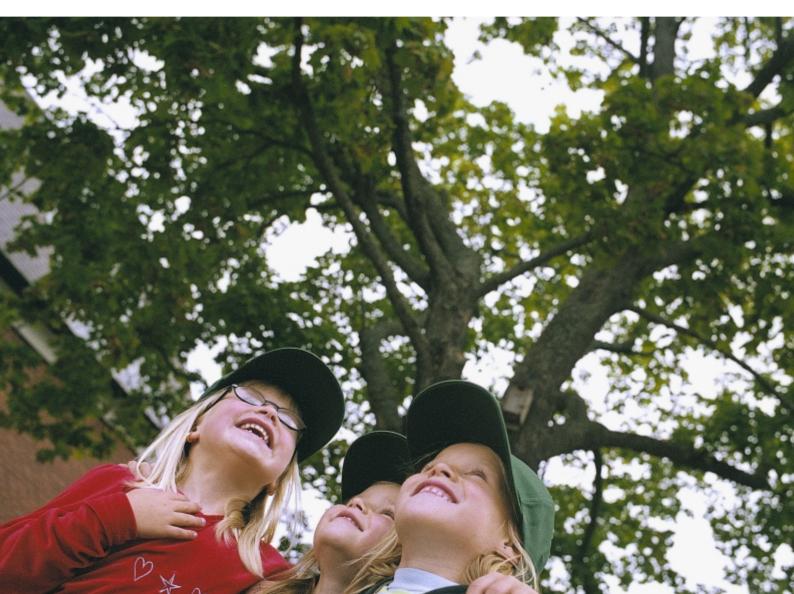
a local specialisation based around one of the national programmes, thus creating a special profile for itself. The local business community might have a pressing need for certain types of skills, in which case the municipality might choose to start a specialisation based around the Industrial programme which will meet those needs. There is a wide variation between the local specialisations, which encompass everything from snow-boarding to scientific research.

All pupils in compulsory basic school and upper secondary school have the right to choose which particular school they wish to attend. A pupil may, for example, have a special interest in music, in which case he or she should be able to select a school with a special music profile. Pupils at compulsory basic school and upper secondary school also have the opportunity to opt to attend an independent school run by a body other than the municipality. Independent schools must be open to all and must also be approved by the National Agency for Education. They are obliged to abide by the Education Act, yet are governed by their own special rules. They are financed from public funds, receiving a grant from the municipality for each pupil, and at upper secondary school level they also have the right to charge modest fees. Independent schools are often run along special educational lines, such as Montessori or Waldorf teaching methods. Around 3.5 per cent of all pupils in compulsory basic school and upper secondary school attend an independent school.

Independent schools are open
to all and must be approved by the
National Agency for Education.



the right to succeed



ALTHOUGH THE RESPONSIBILITY for schools is de-centralised, the same national objectives apply to municipal and independent schools alike. All pupils have the right to an education of equal value wherever they happen to live, irrespective of which school they choose to attend. These overriding objectives affect all forms of activity within the school system.

All pupils, irrespective of gender, social or ethnic background, have the right to achieve the learning objectives of the school system. Those children and young people who experience difficulties for various reasons have a right to receive the help and support they need. The schools have a special responsibility to ensure that all pupils achieve the objectives. For this reason, teaching must be adapted to suit the needs of each individual pupil. Nobody should need to feel they have failed: instead, everyone has the right to leave school with their head held high, self-assured as individuals and secure in the knowledge that they have a sound knowledge base on which to build. Schools should show all pupils respect for their work and for who they are.

The national objectives and guidelines documents do not specify how teaching should be carried out in practice or what teaching aids should be used. It is up to the teachers themselves to decide exactly how objectives should be fulfilled. Each municipality has to devise its own school curriculum, and it is the duty of the head teacher together with the teachers themselves to agree upon a local working plan.

Each individual is unique.

Teaching must therefore be adapted to pupils' individual needs. Everyone has the right to succeed in school.

participation and influence

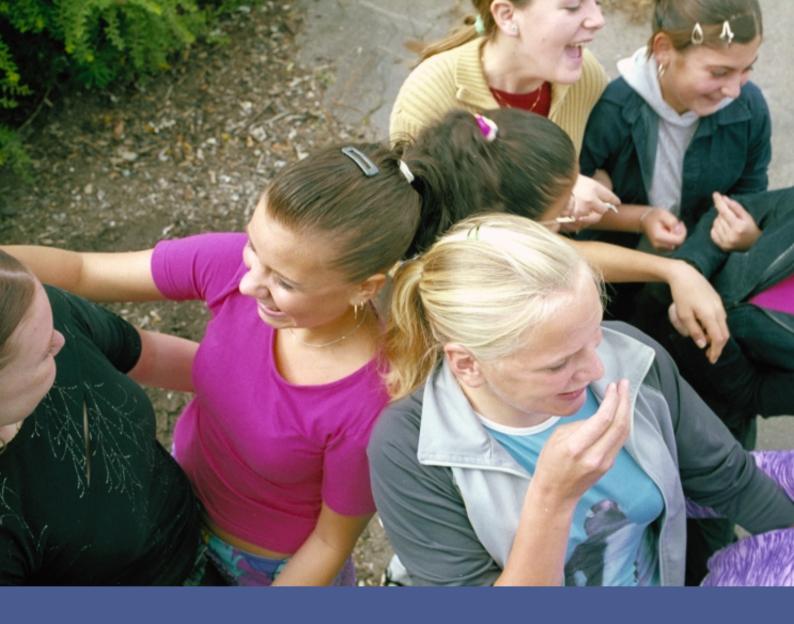
IT IS NOT SOLELY UP TO TEACHERS to work together to plan how teaching should be carried out, pupils also have a right to take part. Pupils should be able to influence what and how they intend to learn, the way in which they intend to acquire knowledge and how they propose to account for it. These rights also confer obligations. Pupils are expected to take responsibility for their education, and the older they are, the more responsibility they are expected to take. This is part of their training in the democratic process.

Openness should prevail throughout the Swedish school system. Schools should inform pupils and their parents about the contents of curricula, syllabuses and local working plans. Pupils and parents have the right to be told the objectives of their education, the demands which the school makes of pupils and parents, and their rights and obligations with regard to the school.

The teacher should arrange for a progress meeting at least once per term. At this meeting, the teacher, parents and the pupil should discuss the pupil's academic and social achievements. The experience and opinions of all three parties at the meeting are of equal importance. Teachers should explain why the pupil's academic achievements and progress have been assessed in a certain way. Pupils are entitled to talk about their impressions of the school, the teaching and their own work. They should be encouraged to speak their minds, to exercise influence over their own education and to take responsibility for it. Such a meeting might, for example, result in individual pupils being given extra support teaching in a certain subject, or it may result in pupils being granted greater liberty in their school work.



Pupils and teachers plan their teaching together. Pupils have the right to influence what and how they intend to learn. The older the pupils, the greater the responsibility they should take for their own education. This is part of their training in the democratic process.



All pupils in Sweden have the right to an education of equal value



grades

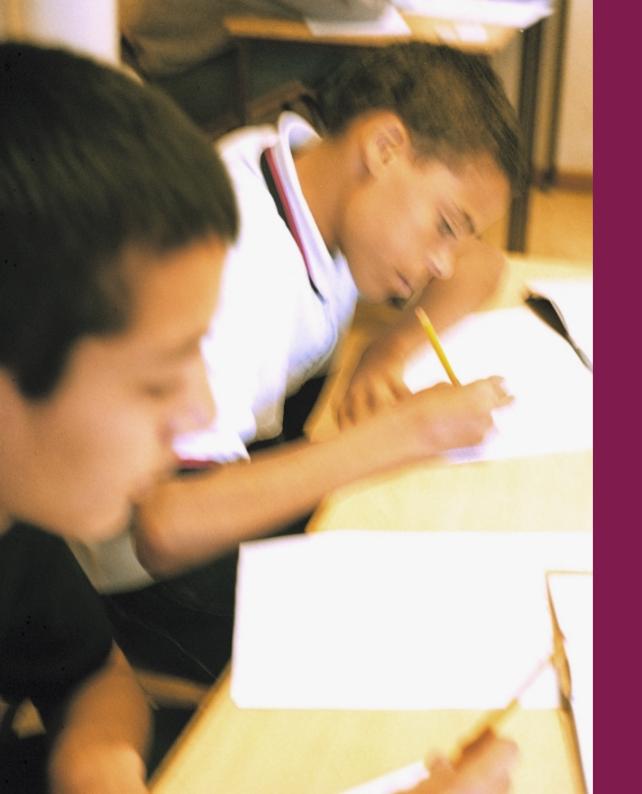
FROM YEAR EIGHT ONWARDS in compulsory basic school pupils are awarded grades. Final grades are awarded when the pupil graduates from year nine. Grades in Sweden are objective-related, showing the extent to which pupils have achieved the objectives set down for each subject. Grades awarded in the compulsory basic school are Pass, Pass with Distinction, and Pass with Special Distinction. Those pupils who do not qualify for the Pass grade have the right to a written testimonial which describes their attainments in the subject. In upper secondary school, students are awarded grades upon completion of each course. Final grades are a compilation of grades in the individual courses. Grades awarded by upper secondary school are Fail, Pass, Pass with Distinction and Pass with Special Distinction. If a student is given a Fail grade for a particular course, he or she is entitled to re-sit the course.

Pupil grades are set by the teachers. In order to assist them in this task there are national grades criteria which apply to the Pass and Pass with Distinction grades in the national courses.

All pupils have the right to achieve the Pass grade in compulsory basic school. If any pupil runs the risk of failing to achieve this grade, the school must provide him or her with the necessary help to succeed.

In order to assess learning standards on a national scale there are various types of national tests. In the ninth year of compulsory basic school all pupils undergo national tests in Swedish, mathematics and English. In year five there are special subject tests. There are also diagnostic tests for years two and seven. For the national programmes at upper secondary school there are course related tests.

Swedish pupils are high achievers in international comparisons. Compulsory basic school pupils come out top in native language literacy. In the natural science subjects and in mathematics, Swedish pupils are just above the international average.



life long learning

compulsory basic school and upper secondary school should provide pupils with a sound start in life. Yet schooling for children and young people should not be regarded as an isolated occurrence, but rather as a part of life-long learning. Progress made in any country is dependent on the skills of its people. Nowadays, more than ever before, knowledge is a transient phenomenon. Everyone, regardless of their work, will at some time or times in their life need further training, whether in their existing job or when they change to a new one.

Lifelong-learning requires everyone – the individual, the state, municipality and the business community – to take responsibility for knowledge and competence development. Raising the levels of edu-

cation in any country increases the potential for economic growth. Adult education is also a way to plug knowledge gaps and open up new opportunities for adults who want to educate themselves. Life-long learning requires a flexible range of courses, and persons wanting to take part should be aware of the opportunities available and the requirements for different courses. A will to learn is also required, along with a sense of inquisitiveness about the new things which lie ahead. Qualified supervision before, during and after the course increases each student's chances of success.

Swedish society provides a wide rage of adult education opportunities. Within the municipal adult school system students have the right to receive



Schooling for children and young people should not be regarded as an isolated occurrence, but rather as a part of life-long learning.

education which confers compulsory basic school qualifications as a minimum. At upper secondary level adults can study theoretical and vocational subjects in accordance with the national programme syllabuses. Adults with developmental disabilities can study in special adult upper secondary schools. Municipal adult education also provides supplementary courses in vocational subjects. There is also upper secondary level education at the National Schools for Adults and courses organised by folk high-schools, adult educational associations, county councils, labour market organisations and private education and training companies.

The Adult Education Initiative, the largest project of its kind ever undertaken in Sweden, was

launched on I July 1997. All the municipalities in Sweden are taking part in this five year project which is aimed primarily at adults who are unemployed or who lack the full three year upper secondary qualifications. The Initiative provides opportunities to study at upper secondary level, and the municipalities have commissioned a wide variety of private education and training companies to assist them in the task. All those taking part study according to an individual plan based on their individual wishes, needs and capacities. It is estimated that approximately one million people will benefit from education at upper secondary level over the five years during which the project is taking place.

Mr. Johnson: Good morris Whatwould you like Smith: Good morning, a pound of

history

GRAMMAR SCHOOLS, WHICH FIRST APPEARED IN SWEDEN in medieval times, were originally institutions in which the Church trained its priests. As the universities developed in the 16th and 17th centuries, the education the grammar schools provided became broader in scope and was intended to prepare students for higher studies. They also passed from the Church into state control. But for many centuries the grammar schools remained the preserve of the few - the sons of the cultural elite. Education for the remainder of the population was confined to the Catechism and the Ten Commandments

Compulsory elementary schooling was introduced in Sweden in 1842. All children were obliged to acquire certain knowledge and skills. The state and the municipalities assumed responsibility for teacher training and school premises. In turn, each parish was obliged to supply its schools with teachers. The Church still maintained a strong influence over the schools: Christian doctrine and catechism studies were an important part of the syllabus. Many children only attended elementary school, and then only erratically. There was considerable absenteeism when children were needed for the labour force. The children of those who were well-educated did not go to the elementary schools: instead, they were educated at home until it was time to enter grammar school.

With the introduction of the elementary school, the Swedish school system became a parallel system. The elementary schools were municipal, whereas the grammar schools were run by the state. In 1861 the state set up the Elementary

School Inspectorate and appointed 20 school inspectors. This laid the foundations for equality between schools throughout the country. But education remained a resource which was unevenly divided. Around 1880, eight children out of ten attended elementary school, whereas only 1.7 per cent of all pupils went on to grammar schools or other higher educational establishments.

At the beginning of the 20th century the first steps were taken towards the uniform school system which exists today. In 1905 grammar school education was divided into two parts. The first six years became junior secondary school in which the emphasis was on general education and citizenship, at the end of which was an examination. The following four years became upper secondary school at the end of which was the higher school certificate examination and where the academic emphasis was on preparation for higher studies.

A further step away from the parallel school system resulted from a reform in 1927. Those attending elementary school could go on to junior secondary school or its equivalent for girls according to various alternatives. What was important was the fact that the elementary school and junior secondary school were now regarded in the same context.

Almost twenty five years later, in 1950, parliament passed a resolution in principle for a compulsory school period of nine years. Elementary school, compulsory at that time, was supplemented by junior secondary school or its equivalent for girls. The upper secondary school focussed on preparation for higher stud-

ies and comprised two courses of study – a classical course and a natural sciences course. Vocational upper secondary school provided education for technology and commerce. In addition, there were a number of other vocational schools. During the 1950s trials were carried out on a uniform school system, the purpose of which was to integrate elementary school and junior secondary school, thus creating one common type of school.

The parallel school system was finally abandoned in 1962 when parliament introduced nine years of basic schooling for all. The first curriculum for the compulsory basic school was introduced at the same time. Two years later came the introduction of reforms to the upper secondary school. New study courses were introduced and the higher school certificate examination was abolished. In 1968 the various vocational upper secondary schools were incorporated into the upper secondary school, and the school system as we know it today was created. The state also assumed collective responsibility for education from the first class through to adult education.

During the 1970s and 80s the school system was reformed from within. New ways of working emerged and an increasing burden of responsibility was placed on local institutions. Certain elements of state control were gradually reduced. Following a decade of intensive debate, parliament voted in 1990 to hand over control of the compulsory basic school and upper secondary school to the municipalities.



TEXT: Annika Rydman, Kombinera

PHOTO: Jörgen Hildebrandt, Johan Gunséus (page 10) and Karl Hernried (pages 34 and 37)

DESIGN: Ninni Oljemark, Kombinera

PRINTED BY: Lenanders Tryckeri AB, Kalmar, September 2000 • 8018

PAPER: cover: Linné 250 g, insert: Linné 120 g



ISBN 91-89313-97-6

ORDER NUMBER: 00:575

ORDER FROM:

Liber Distribution, Publikationstjänst, 162 89 Stockholm

PHONE: + 46 (0)8-690 95 76

FAX: +46 (0)8-690 95 50

E-MAIL: skolverket.ldi@liber.se

www.skolverket.se